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PETER J A ROBINSON

BAPTISM IN RITUAL PERSPECTIVE

Myth, Symbol and Metaphor as Anthropological Foundations for a
Baptismal Theology

Abstract

This thesis argues that Christian baptism is most profitably understood from the perspective of anthropological studies of ritual. A dialogue with its categories establishes that baptismal theology has often implicitly assumed social anthropology's findings on ritual in general. It also suggests that the primary ritual categories of myth, symbol and metaphor are foundational to baptism's theological development.

The anthropology of myth is deployed to locate the narrative basis for baptism. The proposal is made that the story of Jesus' Baptism, which is understood as the revelation of the eschatological new creation, provides baptismal ritual with its imitative source and legitimates its symbols and metaphors. An analysis of iconography is an important part of this justification.

This proposal is developed by exploring the properties of baptismal symbols. The concepts of symbolic elusiveness, deep structure and natural symbolism are exploited to give an account of symbols based on water and oil. The sensual experience of olfaction and the flow of human blood are found to be important interpretative concepts which lead naturally to a consideration of the corporeality of baptismal symbolism.

Recognising that symbols promote a shared ritual experience, the properties of ritual metaphors are then considered as the primary means for facilitating a baptismal identity. Criteria for an evaluation of the three major metaphors - birth, death and washing - are derived from anthropology and applied. It is concluded that the metaphor of childbirth has a strong claim to be regarded as the appropriate primary metaphor for organising baptism's ritual context.

Baptism thus understood offers fresh contours for baptismal theology today and overcomes some of the difficulties presented by more traditional methodologies. Especially, it allows contemporary concerns about baptism to be effectively addressed. Among these are questions about the intelligibility of its liturgical symbols and the relationships between its key metaphors.

BAPTISM IN RITUAL PERSPECTIVE

**Myth, Symbol and Metaphor as Anthropological Foundations for a
Baptismal Theology**

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Submitted for the Degree of PhD

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

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Abbreviations

ABBREVIATIONS

- AIRI Yarnold, Edward SJ. The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press. 1994 (Second Edition) [1971]
- AT Hippolytus. Apostolic Tradition. In Cumming, Geoffrey J (ed.). Hippolytus: A Text For Students. Grove Liturgical Study No. 8. Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books Ltd. 1987 (Second Edition) [1976]
- Bapt. Evans, Ernest (ed.). Tertullian's Homily on Baptism. The Text edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary. London: SPCK. 1964
- BCP The Book of Common Prayer. 1662
- CD Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics. Volumes I-IV. Translated by Bromiley, Geoffrey W. Edinburgh: T & T Clark. 1936-75
- CI Riley, Hugh M. Christian Initiation: A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ambrose of Milan. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press. 1974
- CIRP Fisher, John D C. Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period. Some Early Reformed Rites of Baptism and Confirmation and other Contemporary Documents. Alcuin Club Collections No. 51. London: SPCK. 1970
- DACL Cabrol, F (ed.). Dictionnaire D'Archeologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie. Paris: 1907
- DBL E C Whitaker. The Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy. London: SPCK. 1970 (Second Edition) [1960]
- ECBC Finn, Thomas M (ed.) Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate. Message of the Fathers of the Church, Volumes 5 and 6. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press. 1992
- ER Eliade, Mircea (editor-in-chief). Encyclopedia of Religion. 16 Volumes. New York/London: Macmillan. 1987
- ERE Hastings, James (ed.). Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. 13 Volumes. Edinburgh; T & T Clark. 1908
- ESS Seligman, Edwin R A (ed.). Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences. 15 Volumes. New York: Macmillan. 1930

Abbreviations

- IESS Sills, David L (ed.). International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. 18 Volumes. Macmillan Co. & The Free Press. 1968
- Inst. J Calvin. Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1559 Edition in Two Volumes. McNeill, John T (ed.). Translated and indexed by Battles, Ford L. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1960
- LWSS Johnson, Maxwell E (ed.). Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press. 1995
- RCIA Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. London: Geoffrey Chapman. 1987
- ST St Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologiae. 60 Volumes. Blackfriars. London: Eyre & Spottiswode/New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. 1964-1966
- TDNT Kittel, Gerhard (ed.). Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. 10 Volumes. Translated and edited by Bromiley, Geoffrey W. London/Grand Rapids, Michigan: W B Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1964-76

Unless otherwise stated biblical references are cited in the Revised Standard Version.

DECLARATIONS

I confirm that no part of the material offered has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or any other University. If material has been generated through joint work, my independent contribution has been clearly indicated. In all other cases material from the work of others has been acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases suitably indicated.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Academic research in the area of baptism is as active perhaps as it ever has been. This is a desirable situation to be in for a research student, with no shortage of material with which to engage. There are, however, very particular reasons why this thesis has been written, which require a brief adumbration here.

First of all, in my reading of baptismal theology, aside from the contributions from biblical studies, I have thought it possible to discern three distinct approaches to the subject, each of which raises specific problems. Exponents of one approach have treated baptism within the framework of a pre-existent and often highly theoretical structure which asserts certain themes and has expectations of theological harmony. In Roman Catholic sacramental theology it is frequently the case that a general theory or model of sacrament is expounded into which the individual sacraments are then subsequently arranged. A recent example is to be found in the work of K B Osborne.¹ Osborne's writing on baptism applies directly the genre of sacramental theology that was brought to prominence by Schillebeeckx and Rahner, which roots sacramentality in the notion of Christ as the 'primordial' sacrament and the Church as the 'basic' sacrament. However, baptism is

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also sited in a framework that unites it with the other sacraments of initiation - confirmation and the eucharist. Osborne's work is enormously suggestive and will be examined in greater detail later in the thesis, but it illustrates how baptismal theology can be restricted to one chapter or section among others which are devoted to either the whole spectrum of the sacraments or an especially selected few. The theology of baptism of this kind is subject to constraints not only of space but from theoretical models which have been deduced at a more general level prior to their specific application to baptism.

Perhaps the clearest expression of this first approach is found where centrality is given to the eucharist. In the Roman Catholic tradition, even though together they form what may be termed the two primary 'dominical sacraments', the doctrine that the eucharist is pre-eminently the sacrament of the Church tends to ensure that although baptism is regarded as the 'foundation' it is the eucharist which is seen as the 'pinnacle'.² Consequently, whereas the eucharist has often been the subject of separate monographs baptism has comparatively rarely been given individual attention as a sacrament in its own right. This reflects a practice which came to prominence in the ninth century; from this point baptism began to lose its paradigmatic place as the key to sacramental reflection. The process was complete in scholastic theology where the eucharist provided a heuristic model for elucidating the essence of baptism, its theology constrained through the theological hegemony of the 'premier' sacrament.³

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Whereas this first approach allows prior presuppositions to control the direction of the theological argument a second approach is characterised by noting the polemical context in which much baptismal theology is found. The exercise of polemic has a distorting effect on the balance of the argument; emphasis is given to certain features while others, which may be of greater importance are relatively neglected. Probably the most prominent example of the polemical approach is that of Barth, whose theology of baptism is expounded initially against the background of his fears concerning the relationship between church and state and located within an argument against the baptism of infants. Later, Barth's stance was re-focused with an 'anti-sacramental' exposition of baptism in the final fragment of the Church Dogmatics. While this latter work must be reckoned among the most influential of contemporary writings on baptism there is strong evidence to show that the polemical concern against any form of 'sacramental theology' and the practice of infant baptism are in particular at the forefront of Barth's concern, controlling his exegesis and producing the occasional, and revealing, vituperative comment.⁴

A great deal of recent baptismal theology is shaped by the concern over whether infants can legitimately be baptised, but this is not the only recent polemical context. Baptism has also come under examination in the controversies over its relationship to confirmation. The most enduring work from this episode has been G W H Lampe's The Seal of the Spirit which was a response to the understanding of confirmation as the principal initiatory rite which conveyed the Spirit subsequent to baptism, which was itself perceived as a form of preparatory rite that symbolised repentance.⁵ Thus Lampe's overriding objective was to

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demonstrate the completeness of Christian initiation in baptism alone; like the work of Osborne and Barth, Lampe's baptismal theology will be the subject of a later examination.

Meanwhile, a third approach results from the increasing availability of textual material from the patristic, medieval and Reformation eras. This historical interest has focused especially intensely on patristic material. The rediscovery of the baptismal rites of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, described in the catechetical homilies of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem has been accompanied by the danger of over-reliance on such research for contemporary liturgical applications. In some circles they have come to be regarded as the representation of a 'golden age' in liturgical development. Warnings of the danger of a certain historical fundamentalism in liturgical studies have been forthcoming: P F Bradshaw, for example, has noted the irony that, at the very time in which the Western Church is returning to its pre-Constantinian form in terms of attendance levels and links with the state, a post-Constantinian form of liturgy designed to ensure the identity of the Church in the face of mass enrolment has been adopted.⁶

Yet the dominance of material from the fourth and fifth centuries is rivalled by Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition, which as an extant liturgical prayer dated to the second and third centuries has also carried a somewhat unjustified normative status for liturgical reform. Its appropriation has been undeterred by its debatable provenance and uncertain textual history.⁷ Problematic here however is the argument which suggests that, instead of one or two liturgical texts being

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regarded as the norm by which all others were measured, there was in fact a wide variety of initiation patterns and theologies. It may therefore be that an historical theology of baptism has been tempted to concentrate on what was common and to ignore what was distinctive, and has resulted in the setting up of unhelpful normative standards even on a less than conscious basis.⁸

The point that is being argued from this threefold typology is not that a theology of baptism can be treated in isolation from theological presuppositions, polemical interests or historical investigation, and no pretence will be made in regard to this thesis. It is the sense that such structures act as restrictions to theological inquiry into questions that are uppermost in the contemporary treatment of baptism. I have perceived two areas of questioning to be of immediate concern.

One area of questioning is in regard to symbolism. This is focused by recent liturgical reform, the impetus for which was created by the RCIA which both gave a new clarity to some of the ancient Church's symbols and allowed for the introduction of symbols at a local level, if felt to be culturally appropriate.⁹ In Protestant circles new symbolism is being introduced after the minimalism of the Reformation liturgies and this is a process that claims a degree of ecumenical consensus.¹⁰ So, in the Church of England's rite of baptism the symbols of light, oil and clothing either have been or are being encouraged back into use. Yet there is an ambivalence about their usage that is conveyed in a mis-match between the liturgical rubrics and the accompanying texts. For instance, in the provision for the practice of anointing, the rubrics permit its use at certain points yet there is a

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paucity of anointing metaphors in the liturgical text. This is a situation which questions the theoretical basis of the reintroduction of oil, despite its biblical imperative.¹¹ This imperative might also be at work in the reintroduction of a baptismal garment, usually as an act of clothing after the baptism itself and either before or after any postbaptismal anointing. The biblical background is an effective one as is the precedent of a good deal of Christian tradition. Yet current usage separates the use of the symbol from its historically related rite of stripping and the state of nakedness, potentially leaving an act of (re)clothing somewhat stranded both theologically and ritually.

It is evident, then, that even if a decision is taken to deploy a symbol liturgically, searching questions remain. There is a legitimate desire to eschew a minimalist approach to liturgical symbolism.¹² However, more symbol does not necessarily mean better symbol, especially if the materiality of the ritual is not integrated into the liturgical text that interprets and encases its use. If what has been lacking is an appreciation of symbols in their ritual context, this was expressed in the early years of liturgical reform by N Mitchell, who located a cluster of problems to do with initiatory symbolism. Mitchell suggested that there is a limit to the quantity of symbols that may be accumulated in a rite before there is a ritual collapse; this is true especially if sight is lost of the theological axis around which they pivot. He also spoke of a dangerous loss of 'symbolic intelligibility'. The only remedy is constant vigilance in the matter of correspondence between a culture and the use of its everyday techniques in the Church's liturgy. Mitchell also remarked on 'the loss of the tactile dimension'; in his analysis, this relates to

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a propensity to replace the sacramental action with verbal and visual dimensions, which begin then to lose contact with actual human ritual experience.¹³ Two decades on from Mitchell's work his points still seem to be relevant.

The second cluster of questions lies in the use of particular baptismal metaphors. Most noticeable here has been the deployment of motifs concerning the washing away of sin. Until very recent times, for Anglicans, 'the mystical washing away of sin' in the BCP formed the rationale for the rite itself; yet in the Alternative Services there is no suggestion that the infant has inherited a flawed existence and that baptism delivers it from the guilt of original sin. In the Roman Catholic Church, where perhaps the linkage between infant baptism and original sin was more strongly entrenched, the new Rite of Baptism for Children mentions the doctrine only in two prayers of exorcism in the preparatory rites.¹⁴

In addition, there is a growing appreciation of the range of baptismal metaphors available from the Christian tradition.¹⁵ Among them the metaphor of baptismal birth is one which still carries with it a certain ambiguity and uncertainty. How do baptismal metaphors relate to each other and may any be said to be more basic or desirable theologically than others? If this might be the case then what are the criteria that are to be used to make such an assessment? What is the relationship between the symbols of the baptismal liturgy and the metaphors of the accompanying text? If there is to be a new symbolic intelligibility discovered then steps are required to build the connections between the symbols of baptism and their associated metaphors.

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The questions that arise from both theological writing and liturgical reform are by no means straightforward ones either in their formulation or in the shape of any adequate response. What is required is a means of addressing questions concerning the symbols and metaphors found in the liturgies of baptism which is truly adequate to the issues being presented. Assistance, however, was not slow in presenting itself. Especially in Catholic sacramental theology there has always been a profound interest in the concept of symbol. A proportion of the recent theology of baptism I encountered sought to exploit this insight with its insistence on the Christian liturgy as symbolic action. The most convincing were those which endeavoured to situate symbols in the framework of human sign-making, illumined by disciplines from the human and social sciences. Above all they offered a means of addressing the relationship between culture and liturgy and contributing to a discovery of the symbolic intelligibility referred to earlier.¹⁶

In another direction, understanding of the character of religion has been developing. There has been a growing emphasis on religion as a cultural and linguistic framework which has the capacity to shape the whole of life and belief. The emphasis is on inward religiosity as something derivative from the external features of a religion, rather than the latter being simply expressive of spiritual experience. Among other cultural artifacts, ritual is seen as a basic pattern of religion through which spirituality is publicly presented, transmitted and interiorised.¹⁷ This has been an advance welcomed by studies in liturgical theology which have pursued the understanding that Christian ritual, in various cultural forms, embodies the symbols of

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the Gospel and transmits them in an immediate form to the Christian community.¹⁸

As I came to realise that an understanding of a sacrament as symbolic action was the direction required by the questions that were being raised, I also discovered through a reading of the social anthropology of ritual that ritual behaviour is comparable to an unknown language which has its own grammar and syntax¹⁹ and is a category that is prior to that of symbol itself. It is, in some respects, a category of the moment. According to an Enlightenment perspective, ritual is often caricatured as something which would naturally become eradicated from modern life.²⁰ To espouse such an outlook is to fail to see the potential significance of personal ritual engagement and to be subject to what has been labelled 'ritual misapprehension'.²¹ Yet contrary to this outlook the literature of the past decade supports the view that the variety of ritual forms are burgeoning.²² Equally, academic interest in the theory of ritual is developing, not least because in situations of cultural pluralism ritual is perceived to be a component of a tradition's articulation of its own reality in dialogue with others.²³ No exploration of sacrament from the perspective of the human sciences can afford to neglect the growing anthropological writing on the subject of ritual, a category in contemporary life that persists and yet continues to require explication.

It is my hope that this focus on ritual will provide a theoretical framework which will enable an adequate exploration of some of the questions regarding the symbols and metaphors of baptism which are being raised. This thesis is then essentially a proposal that a fresh

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description of the theology of baptism is available which overcomes the disadvantages of the three types described earlier and which offers distinct benefits of its own.

The point of departure will be the study of ritual and the conclusions reached by social anthropologists rather than a particular sacramental framework, an overt polemical concern or a sustained examination of one period in the history of baptism. The first main chapter adumbrates a broadly based understanding of ritual in concepts introduced by social anthropology. An argument is then presented which contends for the plausibility of approaching baptismal theology through the empirical category of ritual. This appreciation of the characteristics of ritual will be carried forward into the subsequent argument.

The following chapter, chapter three, recognises that in any account of ritual, a vital question concerns its relation with myth. An anthropology of myth indicates that one possible function of a myth is its chartering property and this characteristic is used to assert the story of Jesus' Baptism as the narrative basis of Christian baptism. It will be discovered that this is an insight which has been held consciously at strategic points in the Christian tradition and that it could form the basis for a powerful contemporary theology of baptism based on the notion of imitation. Finally in chapter three, it will be shown how the narrative of Jesus' Baptism charters the symbols and metaphors of Christian baptism. It is this insight which forms the basis and agenda for chapters four and five. Chapter four investigates the notion of a 'natural symbol' and attempts to give a firmer basis to the dominant symbol of water and the dependent symbolism of oil. A

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search for the deep structure of these two important liturgical symbols leads to a suggestion that a more profound emphasis on the bodiliness of the baptismal liturgy is required. Chapter five, taking the notion of 'symbolic words', explores their importance as metaphor for the creation of human identity and especially takes up the anthropological theme of an organising metaphor, initiating a comparison of the three main baptismal metaphors to see whether this might be a valid concept.

It has already been noted that one of the key issues is the relationship between baptism and original sin. As the thesis progresses it will become apparent that a theological realignment is being proposed which effects the weight of traditional understanding. It will be particularly acute in chapter three as a narrative interpretation is given of Jesus' Baptism which emphasises it as a sign of the messianic inbreaking of the new creation of God's kingdom. It is this hermeneutical move which motivates the alignment and it is one of the tasks of this thesis to explore its implications. My approach to the questions involving original sin and the theme of new creation will be a cumulative one, the threads of which will be tied in the conclusion.

To summarise: the intention of this thesis is to offer a baptismal theology from the perspective of ritual in which the notions of myth, symbol and metaphor will play crucial, and indeed foundational, roles

Endnotes

1. The Christian Sacraments of Initiation

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2. Aquinas. ST: Volume 57, pp.151-155 (3a. qu.65, art.3) and P Béguerie & C Duchesneau. How to Understand the Sacraments, p.77
3. See J Pelikan. The Growth of Medieval Theology, p.30, 204-208 and R F King. "The Origin and Evolution of a Sacramental Formula".
4. Barth. The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism and CD IV/4.
5. pp.vii-xxvi
6. "The Liturgical Use and Abuse of Patristics"
7. Ibid, pp.136-139
8. Bradshaw. The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship, pp.161-184
9. RCIA, p.11 (33.5)
10. World Council of Churches. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, p.6 (19)
11. B D Spinks. "Vivid Signs of the Gift of the Spirit?", p.315
12. P May. "Reflections on Baptismal Symbolism and Baptismal Identity"
13. N Mitchell. "Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation"
14. Rite of Baptism for Children, pp.20-21 and P Turner. "Baptism and Original Sin"
15. World Council of Churches. Op.cit., pp.2f
16. E.g. G S Worgul. From Magic to Metaphor, R Williams. "The Nature of a Sacrament" and R L Browning and R A Reed. The Sacraments in Religious Education and Liturgy
17. G A Lindbeck. The Nature of Doctrine, pp.32-41
18. D W Fagerberg. What is Liturgical Theology?
19. E R Leach. "Ritual", p.524
20. D Cheal. "Ritual"
21. The Magic of Ritual, p.7
22. R L Grimes. Reading, Writing and Ritualizing, pp.5-22 and M S Northcott. "New Age Rites"
23. R A Delattre. "Ritual Resourcefulness and Cultural Pluralism"

The Social Anthropology of Ritual and Baptismal Theology

Here the starting point will be an understanding of ritual from the perspective of social anthropology. Once this model is established it will be demonstrated that theologians throughout the tradition betray a common interest with social anthropologists in approaches to particular issues of baptismal theology. Initially, so that a theoretical baseline may be drawn, it is necessary to outline the assumptions about ritual that have been taken up into the sacramental theology that has anticipated the direction this thesis will follow.

1 Ritual, Human Nature and Theology: Anticipation of a New Direction in Sacramental Theology

In the introduction it was noted that a new direction in sacramental theology has been signalled by those theologians who advocate the importance of understanding sacraments as symbolic action. The apology for this approach has rightly pleaded that sacramental theology had for too long been dominated by metaphysical and existential thought and that to commend themselves in the contemporary setting sacraments have to be shown to embrace a human mode of communication as well as a divine one.¹ Human ritual practice is a universal phenomenon and sacraments, as rituals, can only be

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validly comprehended through the behavioural sciences. The theological appropriation of symbolic action, however, has certain conceptual boundaries, each of which has wide support within social anthropological reflection. There are four such concepts which may be taken to act as boundary markers to the forthcoming discussion.

In the first place, ritual has not been conceived in its clinical and Freudian sense as the obsessive and repetitive behaviour of a psychotic individual, symptomatic of neurosis and with a highly idiosyncratic meaning.² On this view ritual behaviour is about isolation, a fragmentation of the world and the disintegration of the human personality. Conversely, after the philosophy, anthropology and psychology of recent years ritual is now understood to be the 'guarantor of mental health', a social practice and an engagement with a world that includes materiality.³

Secondly, the ontogenetic basis of ritual is assumed. For E H Erikson, ritual arises from the biological development of the human being. This pre-empts a misunderstanding of ritual as an exclusively adult affair, a potential danger of the anthropological approach to ritual practice. In this regard, Erikson observes:

beginningsare apt to be both dim in contour and lasting in consequences. Ritualization in man seems to be grounded in the pre-verbal experience of infants while reaching its full elaboration in grand public ceremonies.⁴

In this light, Erikson analyses the ritual component of the relationship between the mother and her newly born. The infant's experience of affirmation contributes to the sense of the numinous in which feelings of separateness are transcended and personal distinctiveness is confirmed. At the same time ritualisation brings

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simplicity to a relationship which is characterised by dangerous complexity and for the mother 'protects her against the danger of instinctual excess and arbitrariness and against the burden of having to systematize a thousand small decisions'.⁵ This carries through into the ritual of the adult community as a vital element, as do other components of ritual that emerge from subsequent stages of growth - early childhood, play age, school age and adolescence.

Thirdly, if human ritual is not to be conceived as an activity belonging exclusively to the adult, neither is it to be conceived ethologically, despite the fact that its origins are now understood to be in the displays and formalised interactions between animals. This is the mode of behaviour available to beings without language for social communication. To take an evolutionary perspective on human ritual is to acknowledge that the development of language took place within the framework of such ritualisation. Hence such old behaviours still remain in, for instance, interactions of greeting between human beings where a physical signal can suffice to communicate an intention. Ritual on the ceremonial scale can be seen as an intensification of this basic component. This, however, does not require the position that human ritual is little more than a developed form of animal ritualisation. The point is made that humanity's ability for self-transcendence has allowed reflection on human rituals such that they have been modified according to their particular functions. Language as a sophisticated cultural tool brings a level of intricacy to human ritual that other species cannot enjoy. Human ritual is about conscious, voluntaristic behaviour made possible by the ability to conceptualise and employ symbols in the service of communication. Whereas animals engage in expression on the basis of

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instinct, human beings possess the capacity to be both expressive and to control such expression intelligently.⁶

The final boundary marker is that ritual is conceived as a distinct category from non-ritual. This has not been without controversy within anthropology itself, and there have been arguments put forward which have taken ritual to indicate simply the symbolic aspect of any behavioural pattern. In recent writing, however, there has been a reassertion of the ritual/non-ritual distinction. Thus it has been maintained that human life is a temporal sequencing between periods of ritual and ordinary time, and also that ritual cannot be regarded as an aspect of everyday life since ritual itself employs non-ritual experience which it transforms into ceremonial form.⁷ Ritual/non-ritual is seen as a universal 'indissoluble pair'⁸; although its precise demarcation varies from one culture to another the tension between the two sides of the pair is the key to understanding the capacity of ritual to draw many aspects of human life into itself.⁹

This comprehension of human ritual - symbolic action which is an all-age activity, contributing to psychological maturity, based on but differentiated from an evolutionary heritage and distinct from mundane non-ritual activities - has a particular theological location in the understanding of sacrament and salvation. This location eschews both the sense that the Christian sacraments are isolated and arbitrary peaks dislocated from the rest of human life and the idea that they must be seen within a world 'charged with glory'. Rather, it seeks to give expression to the tension between sacrament and non-sacrament as a heuristic device¹⁰ while recognising that the uniqueness of the Christian sacraments lies in what the Church signifies by performing

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them - that is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This location also recognises salvation as something in which the whole person - body, soul, mind and spirit - is involved. For St Paul, the resurrection of the body did not simply belong to the realm beyond death but commenced at baptism.¹¹ It was the Eastern Church that captured the importance of this strand of theology, in that it was Irenaeus rather than Augustine who developed a theology of deification which regarded baptism and subsequent reception of the eucharistic elements as contributing to the process of divinisation whereby the whole person participates in the life of God.¹² In contemporary theology, any understanding of the personhood of Jesus Christ cannot proceed without acknowledging that humanity participates in the contingency of the natural order; the incarnation 'informs' all levels of existence and, if redemption is seen to be essentially about the life of Christ in humanity and the life of humanity in Christ, then salvation cannot but be understood holistically.¹³ Increasingly divinisation is being seen from the perspective of humanisation¹⁴ in that redemption brings harmony not just with God but with all dimensions of humanity, both personal, inter-personal and social, and is necessarily holistic in scope.¹⁵

This is the anthropological and theological basis from which a theology of baptism in ritual perspective will be constructed. The first stage of construction is to provide a perspective on ritual from the discipline of social anthropology.

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2 Ritual from the Perspective of Social Anthropology

Throughout the Christian tradition the central feature of the sacrament of baptism has been the conscious linking of an action carried out with water upon a human being and a particular verbal formula. Given that baptism may be characterised as basically something that is done accompanied by something that is said, the contribution which a social anthropology of ritual might make to a theology of baptism will be considered under the two theoretical areas of ritual achievement and communication. That this is, anthropologically speaking, an appropriate starting point is confirmed by G Lewis:

ritual is not done solely to be interpreted: it is also done (and from the point of view of the performers this may be more important) to resolve, alter or demonstrate a situation.¹⁶

Initially, therefore, ritual may be said to be something done, a way of acting, a practice, which has the primary characteristics of being 'assertive' and 'purposive'. To assist the clarity of the discussion the latter category will be taken first of all.

2.1 Ritual as 'Purposive'

Exactly what it is that ritual achieves in human experience will be considered under four headings: the change to the person, the nature of the change from the perspective of ritual classification, the control that ritual exerts on individuals and groups, and the concept of communitas in ritual efficacy.

2.1.1 Ontological Change

Anthropologists are affirmative of a universal belief in the potency of ritual action.¹⁷ At first glance, this is most self-evident in societies that mark the body either extremely through circumcision

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or by leaving gentler scars; a sign of a permanent alteration remains on the body, symbolising the change in social status achieved, often through severe physical testing. It is axiomatic that the sign from thence acts as a guarantee of the ritual's efficacy.¹⁸

Any permanent physical change may be related to natural physiology. The monograph by A I Richards on the puberty initiation of girls in Bemba society testifies to this. Making a distinction between the 'expressed purposes' of the rite which are those that the participants explained and the 'deduced attitudes' that the anthropologist elucidates, Richards found that in the eyes of the Bemba:

it is because the girl has been 'danced' and is magically changed; because she has been 'taught' and has assumed a position in a hierarchy of women and has the protection of the [midwife] of her district that she is no longer a weed, a piece of rubbish or an unfired pot.¹⁹

Not only does the female initiate experience a conversion in social status but it is believed that her whole being undergoes a fundamental change. Whether the ritual actions of separating from the community and then rejoining it are felt to cause the change from unproductive girlhood to fertile womanhood, or whether they demonstrate that the candidate is ready for it or even whether they are signs that it has already occurred, for the anthropologist this is a matter for debate. Richards herself concluded that elements of each were present.²⁰

Yet questions over any correspondence with physical change are in one sense irrelevant. Those who exercised maternal oversight understood themselves to be 'making the girls grow as well as teaching them'. V W Turner, speaking of the more intangible qualities that are imparted during an initiation rite, clarifies this. He argues:

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the wisdom (mana) that is impartedis not just an aggregation of words and sentences; it has ontological value, it refashions the very being of the neophyte.²¹

In the view of participants, therefore, an ontological change occurs regardless of whether the rite produces a physical mark or accompanies a physiological transition.

2.1.2 Classification of Ritual

Questions regarding what is achieved in a ritual are closely intertwined with its classification. Since baptism has been understood so often as a 'rite of passage' and as 'initiation', it is from the perspective of these categories that the second feature of the purposive dimension to ritual will be approached.

In an analysis of what he labelled rites des passages, A Van Gennep saw that rituals were purposive. He scrutinised rituals that were associated with the movement of people between geographical locations, social groupings, calendrical seasons and different statuses within a particular society on occasions such as birth, initiation and ordination. Each movement it seemed to Van Gennep was constituted by three phases characterised as separation from the old condition, liminality which was a transitional or marginal period and aggregation or re-aggregation dependent upon whether the individuals entered a new condition or returned to their previous one. Depending on the exact nature of the ritual Van Gennep observed that the three phases would receive different emphases. Some rituals would naturally emphasise the rite of separation, while in others the liminal phase would be more prominent.

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Van Gennep's work has not been without criticism. In particular, M Gluckman has quarrelled with his underdeveloped view of society. Van Gennep's model of society was that of 'a house divided into rooms and corridors'²² between which individuals and groups made transitions in a parallel manner to which territorial passages were made. Gluckman therefore argued that Van Gennep's thesis could not explain why rites des passages appeared to be incompatible with modern industrial life.²³ Leaving aside for the moment the accuracy of the latter statement, it may be noted that Gluckman contended that an understanding of the contrast between primitive and modern social structures answers this problem. In his view, the type of society which ritualises transition is pre-modern and is characterised such that the activities of living are carried out 'in the same place with the same set of fellows'.²⁴ Rituals, and especially rites of passage, ameliorate and handle the disagreements and conflicts that arise in such a network of 'multiplex' relations. In contrast, modern life is segregated in terms of basic human activities and therefore the inevitable conflicts which arise are dispersed and dealt with through alternative networks of social relationship; social changes are said to be less disruptive and therefore do not require ritual attention.

During his argument Gluckman made the unfair observation that 'all Van Gennep demonstrated was that everything has a beginning, a middle and an end'.²⁵ J S La Fontaine, in her important writing on initiation, has contended that Gluckman's assumption that rites des passages have lost their relevance in contemporary society is ill-founded, since secret organisations such as the Freemasons or the Triads - multiplex groups with a complex social milieu - have initiation rites of tripartite form.²⁶ She has successfully sought to re-establish the

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importance of Van Gennep's work and applauds his achievement in 'having related symbolic meaning to wider social significance, a feat which few before or since have emulated'.²⁷

La Fontaine's work also introduces two further observations of importance. First, she deals with initiation in two distinct circumstances - initiation into secret societies and the initiation of age-sets into adult status. The former has a primarily social dimension, whereas the latter, which is closely related to the physical and emotional development of the initiate, has implications for both the natural and the social dimensions of human beings. However, La Fontaine also demonstrates how these two modes of initiation may be combined; in some societies the initiation for an age-set is at once the entry into esoteric mysteries and into a cohesive social grouping.

Secondly, she raises sharp questions about heuristic categories. Van Gennep's original (and wide-ranging) categorisation has gradually been narrowed down by those who have adopted it; rites des passages has come to denote rituals associated with the life-cycle crises of the individual and 'initiation' has come to indicate adolescent maturity rituals.²⁸ As has been shown, La Fontaine herself employs the heading of 'initiation' to denote both maturation rites that are undertaken in groups and rites of entry into secret societies. The former, however, excludes rituals that take place for individuals and the latter includes them, forcing the observation that the category of initiation may not in fact be an appropriate classification to carry forward into a study of baptism.

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When these findings are put into juxtaposition with the axiom that there are many instances where what is typically associated with one particular category of ritual crosses over into a second²⁹, something 'due to the integrative thrust and multi-levelled nature of ritual'³⁰, there is a strong case for recognising the provisionality of the label attached to specific rituals. Since rituals are rooted in specific cultural environments, beyond a certain stage of the argument labelling a ritual as a 'sacrifice' or 'initiation' becomes an arbitrary procedure. If the provisional nature of the label is acknowledged, it is preferable to speak of a ritual having 'sacrificial' or 'initiatory' aspects rather than as itself encompassing all that might be thought to be characteristic of the type.

Accepting this point however, does not acknowledge the fact that Van Gennep's original and encompassing definition of a rite of passage has been obscured. La Fontaine, in dealing with the issue that initiation, as she defines it, may not be universal remarks that nonetheless, 'almost all societies ritualise the beginning and end of life, celebrating birth and mourning death'.³¹ La Fontaine's work therefore distinguishes between what is in fact universal, the ritual marking of the moments of birth and death, and initiation which is more limited.

Rituals that mark the beginning and end of human life by their very nature are rituals of transition - celebrating and effecting the passage of an individual from one phase of existence to another. The merit of Van Gennep's work is that he saw the universality of the pattern of ritual which underlay the logically subsequent idea of

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initiation. It is this point which is decisive. For a study of baptism from the perspective of ritual, the universal category of a rite of passage is to be preferred to the more restrictive and contentious category of 'initiation'. Not only does this ensure a more accurate heuristic tool, but it prevents presuppositions associated with 'initiation' being inadvertently assumed into theological reflection.

Van Gennep's formulation has been adeptly re-worked in the light of subsequent scholarship by E. M. Zuesse who has suggested that rituals which serve to clarify and sanctify the distinctions which structure the universe may be termed confirmatory whereas those which have the intent of 'bridging divisions' and 'regenerating structures' are labelled transformatory.³² Typical of the former classification are rituals associated with taboo which 'pivot' the sacred, act as framing devices for quotidian activity and bring the transcendent into relationship with the ordinary. In contrast, transformatory rituals are concerned with bridging domains of life which can otherwise be regarded as separate and producing a unified view of the world. For Zuesse, the essential dynamic of a transformatory ritual is re-centring:

they all accomplish this in basically the same way, in accordance with a sacrificial logic: (1) the disturbing element is disconnected from its surroundings, by literal spatial dislocation, if possible; (2) it is brought directly into contact with the transcendental source or master in the sacred, which dissolves it and reforms it - this is the time of flux, outside of ordinary structures; and (3) the reshaped element is relocated in the divine order.³³

Zuesse proceeds to distinguish 'loosely' between transformatory rituals that are 'transitional' such as initiation or funeral rites where the 'disturbing element' is placed into a fresh location in

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respect of the divine order, and 'restorative' rituals which relocate the already regenerated element into the divine order following a disturbance subsequent to the original transition. Recognising that this distinguishes 'general emphases' within the broader category of the transformatory ritual Zuesse's formulation can be taken as an appropriate refinement of Van Gennep's foundational ideas.

2.1.3 Control through Ritual

The question of a more appropriate labelling is not the only refinement necessary to Van Gennep's work; Gluckman's comments about the lack of social theory must still be addressed. Prior to that, however, a further advantage to labelling a rite of passage 'transformatory' facilitates some comments on the notion of ritual control. The anthropologist C Turnbull has remarked on the preferability of understanding ritual as transformation rather than as transition; the latter does not describe the process as experienced by all participants. As the nature and destiny of the human body is altered an ontological and irrevocable change is effected on the whole person undergoing the transition. However, there is an aspect of this ritual effect which concerns itself with all the ritual participants; the terminology of transformation includes the existential experience of all those who enable the transition to take place.³⁴

However, anthropologists have been less interested in the changes in the individual in terms of their needs and emotions than in the social aspects of transformation.³⁵ Nevertheless, they are clear that what is achieved for the social dimension is related to what the individual undergoes during the ritual. This was expounded by A R Radcliffe-Brown in his theory of the part religion played in the

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cohesion of society which depended on common sentiments that controlled the behaviour of individuals. Symbols in ritual express the necessary sentiments and:

rites can therefore be shown to have a specific social function when, and to the extent that, they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on which the constitution of the society depends.³⁶

To assume Radcliffe-Brown's line is to think of ritual as the means for indoctrination, the inculcation of key moral values or behaviour types through repetition. Yet ritual as social control of individuals and groups is conceived in various forms.

In her analysis of the anthropology of ritual C Bell has evaluated four versions of the idea: 'the social solidarity thesis, the channelling of conflict thesis, the repression thesis, and the definition of reality thesis'.³⁷ In a convincing argument, Bell severely criticises the first three notions. That ritual creates social solidarity carries an element of truth, but ultimately it is too simplistic an idea since it can be shown that political rituals serve primarily to strengthen the dominant social group, forcing subordination of those who are dominated, rather than producing effective solidarity. Theories that ritual channels human conflict have been popularised by V W Turner. Here the disruption of social unity through inter-personal strife is pre-empted by a ritual resolution of differences which produces social equilibrium; however, the individual is regarded as someone who is controlled by the processes of the social group and this analysis owes much to an understanding which sees the subject struggling to come to terms with the social and psychological forces that impinge on them. The repression thesis is one that has not been developed

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anthropologically, but through a Freudian understanding of ritual which redirects by 'controlled displacement' and hence represses violent human tendencies.

Bell has most sympathy for the notion that ritual controls by defining reality. This is because it does not concentrate on how control is effected but on how ritual defines the real. Ritual has an 'imaging or iconic quality' which is the key to its efficacy. She summarises the position well:

in the main, proponents of the definition of reality thesis seek to find in ritual a single central mechanism for the communication of culture, the internalization of values, and the individual's cognitive perception of a universe that generally fits with these values.³⁸

Bell's quarrel with this position is simply that societies with differing social structures employ ritual in different ways and that its proponents do not pay enough attention to the problem of specific ritual context. She supports M Douglas in her argument in Natural Symbols that social control through ritual is a highly complex affair and only occurs effectively under particular types of social arrangements. Bell also draws attention to a misplaced desire to find the instruments of ritual control in symbols; Bell cites their inherent ambiguity of meaning as reason for their inability to convey clear, communal understanding.³⁹

That any process of ritual 'control', 'indoctrination' or 'inculcation' is complex does not in any sense deny the fundamental insight that ritual has important social implications.⁴⁰ Indeed the argument that ritual transmits and reaffirms social values is still widely held, particularly with regard to the question of inheritance

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and descent.⁴¹ To refer to prior arguments concerning the universality of some basic features of ritual: if ritual is transformatory in respect of the individual, then this brief introduction into the question raised by Radcliffe-Brown at least demonstrates that ritual in some sense has a social transformatory dimension, and that the most convincing way of understanding how this takes place is through ritual's ability to define reality. This is a significant conclusion since the imaging or iconic understanding of ritual as the patterning of relationships, showing what should ideally be the case in the sphere of the inter-personal, is the approach that lies behind Van Gennep's theory of 'rites of passage'. Hence the fourth quality of ritual in its 'purposive' dimension considers this in more detail.

2.1.4 Efficacy through 'Communitas'

To argue that ritual is iconic in relation to reality requires that the structure of the ritual mirrors the social transitions which are mediated through the ritual itself; so, for instance, the rites of separation are emphasised in funeral rituals, and the rites of liminality are emphasised in the catechumenate. The theme of iconicity has been taken up by the anthropologist T S Turner who has produced a theoretical model of a rite of passage which clarifies the insights of V W Turner, who in turn has extended the work of Van Gennep.

In his assessment of the purposive nature of ritual V W Turner's attention was occupied by ritual's liminal qualities. Liminal entities are sharply differentiated from the state from which they have emerged and to that which they will progress; they are 'betwixt and between' the usual ordered status systems that are brought about by everyday legal or conventional processes. V W Turner drew up a list of binary

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oppositions to express the contrast between the structure of society and liminality - heterogeneity/homogeneity, inequality/equality, distinctions between clothing/nakedness and uniform clothing, between kinship rights and obligations and their suspension. The ambiguity of liminality is expressed in a rich variety of symbols; thus it is compared to being in the maternal womb, death or even bisexuality.⁴² For V W Turner what emerges in liminality, the anti-structural, is the phenomenon of communitas, a way of human relating:

what is interesting about liminal phenomenais the blend they offer of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship. We are presented, in such rites, with a 'moment in and out of time', and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties.⁴³

The term communitas was self-consciously selected in preference to community to distinguish it from the sociality of mundane living. Communitas was associated with spontaneity and immediacy in the interpersonal sphere in comparison to what was for V W Turner, the 'norm-governed, institutionalized, abstract nature of social structure'. Communitas had an existential quality about it in contrast to the cognitive quality of structured society, which he conceived as a set of classifications that conferred order.⁴⁴

For T S Turner the key insight that V W Turner supplied, and one that lay underdeveloped, was that the characteristics of liminality constituted a higher level of the same system of relations found in the quotidian order. This is iconic of the structure of the social relations which are mediated by specific operations. Transformatory operations which invert the social status of someone passing through a

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ritual process and which are located in the upper levels are distinguished from classificatory operations which determine relations at a lower level.⁴⁵ Categories which are mutually exclusive at the lower levels of social structure and apparently contradictory may be linked by transformatory operations which are more powerful than classificatory operations.

The argument is clinched when T S Turner considers the case of a boy who has been initiated into adulthood. While he has become transformed into manhood, the boy nevertheless does not have his immediate pattern of relationships totally transformed. While the categories of boy and man are indeed mutually exclusive, the initiate will retain boyish relationships towards those with whom he previously related:

the point is that his new set of relationships is a transformation of the old; the integration of the two sets within the same actor's overall field of relations therefore implies a higher level of structure than the level represented by either set of relations considered separately. This higher level is comprised of two states of the basic matrix connected by a transformation.⁴⁶

For T S Turner, ritual is defined in terms of 'formulaic patterns of symbolic action' and deals with ambiguous situations, controlling social relationships by mediating between opposing classifications on the same level; such mediation involves controlling the hierarchical relationship between the lower and upper levels. Rituals do this since they are able:

to serve as mechanisms for exercising such control because they directly model, in their own structures, the hierarchical mechanism of control that forms an intrinsic part of the structure of the situations in question. The structure of the ritual action embodies its own principles of effectiveness.⁴⁷

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In the ritual action two different states of the same level or social matrix are related by a transformation. The subject shifts from one matrix of rôle categories to another; this involves an inversion of relationships, 'playing the same rôles towards others as were played to him by others when he occupied the first set of rôles'. A participant's identity must therefore take into account three factors:

the classificatory matrix in terms of which the relationships in question are defined in relation to one another; the transformational operations by which the different states of the matrix called for by the society are generated; and finally the socially prescribed pattern of coordination of the various transformational operations in question.⁴⁸

To link the theory of ritual adumbrated by T S Turner with the typology of initiation given by La Fontaine and V W Turner's theory of liminality, it may be noted that the latter commented on how what in primitive society is a ritual phase becomes a permanently institutionalised state in more advanced ones.⁴⁹ This throws into relief a distinction between the permanent liminality of the enclosed order and initiation into a secret society. In the latter the prior framework of an individual's relations continues to exist in the post-initiation phase whereas in the former they can be totally negated. Between the two extremes lie a range of possible configurations. This is why T S Turner's analysis of social structure in terms of levels is a necessary extension of both Van Gennep's and V W Turner's theories; it can accommodate the interlocking nature of relationships brought about by rites of passage and distinguish between them through the notion of a transformatory operation.

To summarise this section: when the purposive aspect of ritual is considered, Van Gennep's notion of a rite of passage, mediated by the notion of transformation, may be accounted for in terms of ritual

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understood as symbolic action which exhibits iconicity with the social structure. What is achieved by the practice of a ritual is, from the perspective of the participants, a permanent and ontological change, and in terms of the social framework there is a transformation or inversion of rôle categories. As this transformation comes about, all participants are affected on an existential basis as they inculcate attitudes from a pattern of reality which is presented to them.

2.2 Ritual as 'Assertive'

An explication of ritual's assertive dimension requires focusing in three areas: the nature of the communication involved in ritual, the intentions of the ritual participants and the function of the human body.

2.2.1 Communication and Expression

At one level of argument it is axiomatic that actions assert meaning. However, in attempting to elucidate the relationship more succinctly, it is instructive to consider the proposition that ritual is best described as linguistic communication. Such a stance informs, for instance, Douglas who states that ritual is, 'pre-eminently a form of communication'⁵⁰ built up from normal actions that achieve distinction by being put to a particular use and acquire a magical efficacy.⁵¹

In response to this position, Lewis accepts that the language simile produces a certain amount of insight, but argues that it cannot be developed without serious distortion. To speak of ritual as communication implies that there is an intent by an emitter to impart

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certain information to a recipient.⁵² This may be true to an extent, but overlooks the symbolic qualities of ritual:

to seek to explain ritual as though it were a language or code, with methods appropriated (or misappropriated) from the disciplines that deal with them, carries the risk that we shall miss some of what is distinctive to ritual. Ritual is not exactly like a language; it is not exactly like communication nor can it be decoded like one. The complexity and uncertainty about a ritual's meaning is not to be seen just as a defect - a code too obscure, too hard to decipher, too easily garbled. It can also be a source of strength, evocative power, resilience and mutability which may sometimes sustain and preserve ritual performance.⁵³

Ritual for Lewis is like a drama to which response may be made in a variety of ways. Indeed, there is an element of intentional communication, but equally there is a less determinate, unintentional and expressive component. Ritual actions therefore inevitably assert a range of meanings, both communicative and expressive. What is important in ensuring that rituals remain powerful is the maintenance of tension between them without allowing one to dominate to the exclusion of the other.

However, ritual does not just communicate or express meaning about belief, it also contains information about the social environment in which it takes place. E R Leach suggested that 'ritual action and belief are alike to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order'.⁵⁴ Similarly, Douglas has reflected on the anti-ritualist trend within twentieth century western Christianity, a mood rather than a movement, which has demonstrated a contempt for ritual forms, regarding them as a symptom of conformity to the external features of religion in contra-distinction to what is said to really matter, the internalisation of religious experience. Her intellectual commitments produce a reading of the ritual experience of groups with

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different types of social structures; an anti-ritualist cannot be said to be exhibiting an inferior understanding to the committed ritualist, but each reflects a certain type of social environment. She referred to rituals as expressions of 'society's awareness of its own configurations and necessities'.⁵⁵ Like speech forms, ritual forms are:

transmitters of culture, which are generated in social relations and which by their selections and emphases, exercise a constraining effect on social behaviour.⁵⁶

If ritual communicates messages concerning culture, it must also replicate that social order through symbolic forms; the relationship between the categories of ritual and society is a metaphorical one.

The anthropologist M Wilson expressed this succinctly:

I hold that rituals reveal values at the deepest level.... Surely men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalised and obligatory, it is the values of the group which are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies.⁵⁷

These remarks, and therefore the theoretical framework from which they emerged, were challenged by the anthropologist J Goody. He contended that the implicit notion of society was a static, equilibrated one that does not allow for temporal development. He pointed out that it could equally well be that the present group of participants do not understand the ritual in the way that their forebears did; a 'culture lag' might exist that necessarily negates the idea that a ritual automatically expresses a society's deepest values. He proceeded to argue that coerced participation in ritual also serves to separate ritual from personal meaning.⁵⁸ Goody's arguments serve as cautionary warnings, rather than being decisive in themselves; he fails to make Lewis' distinction between communication

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and expression and neglects the value of symbolism. Such an emphasis would soften his criticisms whilst allowing his general points to be heard.

Ritual therefore can be understood to communicate and express something about individual and corporate belief and patterns of social configuration. However, to suggest that a purposive ritual action asserts meaning in both an intentional and an unintentional manner implies the necessity for a further understanding of the relationship between the two facets of purpose and assertion.

The first thing to observe in attempting a deeper characterisation of this relationship is that they exist in a necessary tension. D Parkin has expressed this by stating that ritual is, 'neither fully a statement nor fully an action', a position that steers around the 'teleological pitfall of claiming that repetitive, formalised activities without words are ritual while words without action are myth'.⁵⁹ Parkin has introduced the notion of formulaic spatiality to account for this tension and the resulting ambiguity within ritual.

Formulaic spatiality is:

the capacity to create and act through idioms of passage, movement, including exchange, journey, axis, concentricism, and up-and-down directions.⁶⁰

Two significant points derive from Parkin's notion of a ritual's formulaic spatiality and together they clarify the complexities concerning an understanding of the assertive dimension. The first relates to the notion of ritual contestability and the second to the place of the human body in ritual.

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2.2.2 Contestability

First, formulaic spatiality implies a factor of contestation in ritual practice which illumines the intention behind its assertiveness. This arises from the general understanding that, for a ritual to be effective it must be performed in a certain way. The problem is that, contrary to the positivist notion of a blueprint or ideal form of a ritual that can be discovered in any society, there are always conflicting opinions as to how a particular rite should be performed. In fact no ritual is ever performed identically twice. As Parkin comments, 'the formulaic evokes its opposite' and there is slippage from the ideals of position, direction or space that are prescribed by authority.⁶¹ Formulaic spatiality therefore provokes a certain contestability which indicates a collusion on the part of the participants in their own transformation. Corporately they inform:

the actual places and directions taken by ritual performance, the metaphorical drama of journey and passage in the performance, and the way in which bodies and minds of participants will be allocated and distributed physically as well as metaphorically.⁶²

The concept of contestable ritual suggests that a potentially wide variety of meanings are produced, since the intentions of participants are subject to fluctuation; how the ritual is felt to be purposive will produce a diversity of asserted meaning. It also militates against the definition of ritual as 'invariant repetition'.⁶³ It introduces a diachronic perspective to an understanding of ritual and, because contestability is by its very nature about existential engagement with the ritual process, it means that 'culture lag' is replaced with the notion of development and meaning. It must also be associated, by the same argument, with decline and ultimate decay;

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lack of engagement and disinterest will produce ritual practice that does not express peoples' values and may be extinguished altogether.

If contestability implies a negotiated participation then a further implication is that ritual has to do with strategies of power. It is Bell who has developed this side of ritual theory with her concept of 'ritualisation' which she understands as a strategic mode of acting in the production and negotiation of human power relationships. It is formulated as a direct alternative to the view that the function of ritual is to effect social control and is a refinement of the definition of reality thesis described earlier. Ritual for Bell is about domination, consent and resistance. She agrees that ritual empowers those who may be said to control the rite, but there is also a constraining factor to this; ritual is limited because each participant brings a 'patchwork of compliance, resistance, misunderstanding and a redemptive personal appropriation of the hegemonic order'.⁶⁴ Ritual is the interaction between the social body of the participant and a structured and structuring environment; as such it empowers the incipient resistance that is brought to the ritual and constrains the actuality of any domination. The locus of power is felt by Bell to be the human body and it is the function of the body in the ritual's assertive dimension which leads to a second deduction from the concept of formulaic spatiality.

2.2.3 Bodily Assertion

The bodiliness of ritual engagement is fundamental. It is a key to any attempted definition; in Zuesse's words ritual is:

intentional bodily engagement in the paradigmatic forms and relationships of reality. As such ritual brings not only the body but also that body's social and cultural identity to the encounter with the transcendental realm.⁶⁵

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Ritual as something which involves human actions that may be gestural or related to the manipulation of physical objects, is at once paradoxical: gestures may be interpreted from a frame of reference which an observer applies to the ritual actor and they are also by virtue of being incorporated into the ritual both stylised and therefore repetitive. Herein lies the paradox involved in the interpretation of ritual: 'although ritual involves human gestures and actions (the prime medium of expression) it is conventionalised'.⁶⁶ Thus the possibility exists for disjunction between the intention of the actor, the liturgical component and what is actually communicated.

Nevertheless, given that the primary interest is in ritual as a corporate activity and not the private obsessive actions of the individual, the ritual bodily gesture is open to interpretation, particularly in the context of the earlier point that there may well be unconscious expression involved. As Lewis puts it: 'in the social case we learn and understand about the performance and the culture rather than the mental state of the individual performing it'.⁶⁷ To proceed with an interpretation of the bodily gesture Lewis makes the point that intuition, that is an understanding based on a sense of common humanity, is limited and that the observer cannot invariably understand human bodily expression on this basis. Part of what is required is a knowledge of the alternatives from which the choice of expressive gesture is made. Thus the interpretation of expression lies in the realm of learning rather than intuition; the more that is known about the range of expression in a given society and in which contexts (ritual and non-ritual) a gesture is employed the greater the chance of an accurate understanding.⁶⁸

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But how gesture might be understood as symbol is dealt with more effectively by R A Rappaport. He draws upon the notion of an index, a physical sign which directly expresses what is signified and to which it is intrinsically related. Physical activities can transmit indexical information with greater clarity than language; whereas language hints, connotes and implies, gesture works on a simply binary system. Gesture is a means of defining the performer's self for themselves and for others. For example, by kneeling the ritual participant does not just give a message using ephemeral words, but identifies their 'inseparable, indispensable, and enduring body' with their subordination. The present event of gesturing is connected to the past and the future by the words of the liturgy. Thus the physical and the verbal aspects of liturgy are regarded as complementing or even completing each other:

by drawing himself into a posture to which canonical words give symbolic value, the performer incarnates a symbol. He gives substance to the symbol as that symbol gives him form. The canonical and the indexical come together in the substance of the formal posture or gesture.⁶⁹

Through his proposal of the indexical symbol Rappaport is able to combine existential participation in ritual with the fact that the ritual itself was not encoded by those who perform it. In other terms, the indexical, that is, the outward gesture in which the participant conveys information concerning their current state - physical, psychic or social - is integrated with the canonical, that is the component of the ritual performance - word, movement and gesture - which is characterised as possessing 'regularity, propriety, and apparent durability and immutability'.⁷⁰

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In ritual gesture the concept of the indexical symbol therefore conveys the key idea of human intention interpenetrating with the ritual form. It describes how an individual takes part in ritual and allows for the enhancement of the existential state through ritual participation. Most valuably however, Rappaport provides a means for understanding how ritual both communicates and expresses meaning; no one individual is going to be able to have a consciousness of the full complexity of the symbolic value of the canonical, uniting as it does the past with the present; the possibility of disjunction between the intention of the actor and the meaning of any gesture ensures the presence of ambiguity in what is conveyed. What is certain though is that without the interaction of the indexical, the canonical itself lacks purposive force. Rappaport's symbolic understanding of gesture emphasises what Lewis' does not, that the mental state of the participant is an important building block for ritual analysis, even if it cannot always be ascertained with certainty.

It is possible now to summarise the characteristics of ritual from the perspective of social anthropology which will be carried forward. In ritual human beings both accomplish something and convey information. The purpose of ritual is to bring about a permanent and irrevocable change in the being of the individual both in a personal sense and in a relational one. Exactly how such a change is characterised is related to the category given to the particular ritual; in the instance of a ritual of transition, the label transformatory is preferred. In addition to individual persons, there is a transformation of society in ritual, as it ensures the transmission of its beliefs and values. One way in which ritual does this is through its ability to image reality, and this is the key to

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understanding the social theory that is implicit in the idea of a rite of passage, through the concepts of liminality and classificatory operations. The manner in which ritual is assertive is complex. It can convey meaning intentionally or meaning can be expressed that is additional or even contradictory to this intent; the complexity of the process is due to the quality of ritual that has been labelled its formulaic spatiality. Such a quality results in a variance of meaning in repeated rituals as participants at all levels contest the ritual's performance. It also draws attention to the rôle of the human body in gesture which contributes meaning and gives purposive force to the otherwise vacuous canon or form of the ritual.

3 Baptism as Ritual: A Preliminary Theological Reading

A model of ritual has now been explicated, which will inform the whole argument of the thesis. With what confidence may this be allowed? This question makes necessary an elucidation of the relationship between the social anthropology of ritual and baptism. Here I shall attempt to demonstrate the plausibility of understanding the Christian sacrament of baptism in the terms that have been mediated through a discipline other than theology. This section will argue that within the Christian tradition there are theological concerns to do with baptism which are directly parallel to the concerns of the social anthropologists already outlined. Four strategic areas have been selected to test this out: the efficacy of the rite considered under the recipient's spiritual and social dimensions, the trans-generational transmission of the Christian faith and the relation of baptism to human history.

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3.1 Efficacy: The Personal Dimension

It was noted that anthropologists perceive the acceptance of an ambiguous relationship between the ritual act and the effect on a person who was the object of change. A similar situation can be found in the theological endeavour to elucidate what baptism achieves. God through the agency of the Church does something to persons, and the nature of the divine action has two formal dimensions since it is related at once to personal spirituality and to their ecclesial relationship. The personal dimension may be illustrated by the baptismal theologies of the Reformation, and the social by theological opinion on the notion of a sacramental character.

At the Council of Trent Roman Catholic theology reasserted the ritual effectiveness of baptism as the remission of original guilt under the principle of ex opere operato. It was a response to the mainstream Reformers who were understood to have developed the significance of baptism, almost without regard to its causal effect. Baptismal efficacy, however, was not an insignificant matter for the Reformers.⁷¹ By emphasising signification, they contended that space was created for an higher emphasis on God's free, sovereign action in ritual practice. Thus, Luther demonstrated a sacramental realism in his theology of baptism. God himself is joined to the water, is made present to the baptisand in the action of baptism and reveals himself in it. But Luther did not regard baptism as a punctiliar beginning followed by a life of progress. Rather, baptism determines the being of the Christian and is never left behind; the requirement for new birth is always held before the believer in the concept of the 'present tense' of baptism.⁷²

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Similar theology is found in Cranmer and Calvin. Cranmer's liturgy for infant baptism referred to 'the mystical washing away of sins'.⁷³ However, in terms that were used by Lutheran theologians who espoused the doctrine of justification by faith alone, purification for Cranmer was the gift of faith which is counted as a person's righteousness; it is purification by non-imputation of sins rather than the actual cleansing of sins. Cranmer clearly perceived an effect at the time of baptism, but like Luther's understanding it continued through a person's life until eschatological completion.

In Calvin's theology, there is equivocation concerning the effect of baptism.⁷⁴ On the one hand in a general discussion on baptism Calvin asserted that God washes away sins, effects a sharing in Christ's death and unites the individual with Christ through baptism; washing with water is not mere appearance, but imparts 'the present reality and effectively performs what it signifies'.⁷⁵ On the other hand, when discussing the baptism of infants, in his anxiety to stress the place of faith and promise in baptism, Calvin seems to suggest that little else is conveyed than a confirmation and ratification of the covenant which already exists between the infant and God by virtue of childbirth.⁷⁶ Yet there are also moments at which he suggests that the 'seed' of future repentance is imparted, even though it is concealed at the time of baptism and that there is nothing to prevent God from giving 'some part of that grace which in a little they shall enjoy to the full'⁷⁷; God is understood to convey a divine spark at baptism which would develop with the passing years into the full illumination of faith.

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Luther, Cranmer and Calvin therefore can be said to have developed the signification of baptism but to have maintained this in tension with a stress on ritual efficacy; a greater self-consciousness of the tension is apparent in Calvin's equivocation, but nevertheless it is still maintained. However, in Zwingli's theology the presence of the tension between ritual efficacy and signification is consciously resolved. While remaining firmly paedobaptist Zwingli eschewed any sense of God acting on the baptisand in the ritual moment, since Spirit baptism, divine action in respect of salvation, was sharply distinguished from water baptism, the human action made in response to the logically prior action of God. Baptism was therefore initiation into the covenant people of God, a pledge by which the baptisand was bound in a public manner to pursue the obligations of being a Christian, and the donning of a badge identifying the new Christian with the social dimension of the Church. Baptism as a ritual act bore at best 'an adiaphorous rôle' in his soteriology and in fact for Zwingli was more for the benefit of the congregation who witnessed the result of the prior, inward action of the Holy Spirit than for the recipient.⁷⁸

That the Reformers desired a lessening of an emphasis on baptismal efficacy and moved towards a greater consideration of baptismal meaning is consonant with a recognition of the ambiguity in the Old and New Testaments between the liturgical rite - sacrifice, baptism and the eucharist - and the interior reality. On water baptism for instance St Paul spoke in terms of ritual efficacy, but also give warnings to the Corinthians against assumptions that sought to take advantage of this fact.⁷⁹ But whilst the relation between rite and efficacy scripturally may be ambiguous, the inherent tension between

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the fact that a rite does something and communicates something is never subjected to any radical redirection of the type advocated by Zwingli.

3.2 Efficacy: The Social Dimension

Social anthropologists, although they have discussed the notion of personal efficacy, have emphasised the social dimension of ritual efficacy. Similarly, the Christian tradition has never restricted the efficacy of baptism to the individual's relation with God. Instead an accompanying theological strategy has been to give an account of an efficacy with respect to the social configuration of the Church in terms of a 'sacramental character'.

Historically, this term was used to argue that re-baptism was an impossibility. Its logic suggested that the Christian had been indelibly marked with the 'symbolic reality' of baptism, provided that the ritual was performed in a valid manner.⁸⁰ From the twelfth century onwards the Church was engaged in a sophisticated discussion over its nature. One prominent view held that the character was merely a matter of 'logical relation' without requiring an objective reality located within the human being. This position was rejected since it did not give due consideration to the patristic view of the idea of the 'seal' or character which was felt to refer to an actual change in the human soul.⁸¹

Various formulations of the idea of sacramental character were expounded, but of most interest is that of Aquinas. In his discussion of sacramental efficacy he perceived a difference between the principal effect of the sacrament which was 'grace' and the secondary

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effect which was a 'character'. They were distinguished from each other with reference to what was called the two ends for which human beings were destined. The first was the 'enjoyment of glory' and for this end the sacrament effected the 'seal of grace'. The second end was a rôle in the worshipping community whereby the individual 'is deputed to receive or to hand on to others the things pertaining to the worship of God'. The sacramental character for Aquinas was the character of Christ and each of the sacraments which conferred an indelible character effected a participation in different aspects of Christ's priesthood.⁸²

A Ganoczy has summed up the underlying logic of the intuitive link Aquinas made between the sacramental character of baptism and participation in the universal priesthood:

the 'sign' is not merely a seal on the individual soul that one is known by and belongs to God; neither is it the certainty that the human individual becomes conformed to the image of the heavenly high priest in the divine ritual. Primarily it indicates one's membership in the great priestly collective of God's people and so an 'ordination' and commitment to the task of service for God and man.⁸³

Ganoczy argues that there is a coherence between the scholasticism of Aquinas and contemporary Roman Catholic baptismal teaching which understands baptism as the beginning of 'a personal faith-history' which is supported by the community into which the individual is incorporated.⁸⁴ The notion of baptismal character implies an inevitable tension in the Christian experience between existential faith and participation in the ecclesial body⁸⁵, something that was well expressed by Duns Scotus who referred to the character as an 'extrinsic relation to Christ and his Church'.⁸⁶ The notion of a

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baptismal character became indicative of a desire to account for a personal transformation that includes a corporate dimension.⁸⁷

3.3 Transmission and Survival of the Faith

Social anthropology has established that ritual reaffirms social values and contributes to the activity of transmitting beliefs to subsequent generations. In a parallel manner, baptism has implications for the continuity of the Church. This was a self-consciousness which the Church enjoyed from its inception, something that the patristic baptismal rites of traditio and symboli, which passed on the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, indicate.⁸⁸

What this entailed from the social perspective, both for the continuity of the Church and its relationship with the overall social milieu has been drawn out by two studies. G S Worgul summarised what ritual supplies to the Church as 'the means for indoctrination, position, and correct relations within the ritual community'.⁸⁹ What Worgul does not emphasise is ritual's function in the transmission of values and beliefs from one generation to another. T M Finn has developed this with his understanding of ritual practice as a means of ensuring the very survival of Christianity in late second century Rome.⁹⁰ He argued that Christianity only survived in the harsh social climate of the Graeco-Roman world through the development of the catechumenate, 'a dynamic ritual process' for the socialisation of new Christians. Christianity was a liminal phenomenon inhabiting 'a shadow world between citizen and transient alien' and had subnormal legal status due to its refusal to acknowledge the Roman religious system. Finn suggested that it is unsurprising to find in such a liminal group a fertile source of myth, symbol and ritual. The ritualistic

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catechumenate served to socialise and refashion the initiates at the same time as renewing the community's values and regenerating its internal social structures.

It is noticeable, however, that in their application of Van Gennep's model, neither Worgul nor Finn provide a full account of the individual's post-initiation social network. Finn for instance speaks of a journey from Roman society to Christian community. But it has to be noticed that many initiated Christians still retained their secular occupations. It would thus be more accurate, in the light of the account of ritual given above, to speak of a journey in the sense of a 're-centring' of the individual in the Christian community and of Roman society as a social matrix at the lower level. At a higher level, by virtue of the transformatory operation of baptism, the neophytes became part of the liminal Christian community.

3.4 Relation to the Human Life-Cycle

Earlier, two forms of initiation were identified; one that was determined by purely social factors and another than related both to the physiological and the social. Baptism has been divorced from physiological factors and conceived solely as the entrance to the Church; equally, it has been perceived as having a close connection with biological factors. Hence the fourth parallel concern between the anthropology of ritual and the theology of baptism.

Historically some of the Christian sacraments have demonstrated a tendency to appropriate occasions in the human life-cycle to the point that they become the sole preserve of the Church. Ritually this is to be expected since anthropologists have clearly pointed out that ritual

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enables humanity to respond appropriately to particular life-crisis situations such as birth, puberty, marriage and death. However, a key theological issue at stake here is one that has been identified by D N Power. It is whether:

the special character of Christian worship which emphasises personal conversion, faith and 'eschaton' can properly emerge in celebrations of the life-cycle, or whether such celebration is not more properly the province of civil institutions.⁹¹

In his analysis Power stressed the problems of a solution based on the sevenfold sacramental system, since there is no intrinsic relationship between the sacramental rite and the fixed moment. Free, personal choice and conversion is what is said to determine the sacramental, and if sacraments have rites of passage aspects intrinsic to them then it has to do with a phase in the individual life, rather than a precise event. He concludes:

if there are to be rituals for the key-moments of the life-cycle they have a form and a meaning distinct from the traditional sacraments. They are rather rites to mark the occasions on which the question of personal passage symbolized in the sacraments is raised within the context of crisis moments belonging to the life-cycle as such.⁹²

For Power, then, a sacrament symbolises personal transformation, and responds to the vital questions of life raised in the historical order, provoked by feelings of vulnerability and a sense of the seriousness of the moment. Christian sacraments serve to interpret such moments showing how in the incarnation God in Jesus Christ passed through such weakness, transforming it and opening up humanity's future.

Power's emphasis on conversion means an underplaying of infant baptism and is probably determined by a pastoral approach seeking to guard against a prevalent use of sacraments which undermines their meanings. Whilst his comments can be generally accepted, the

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relationship between the order of history and the order of grace may in fact be clarified more precisely by the distinction between an initiation which has solely social aspects and one which combines both natural and social components. This is possible because when baptism has been linked to the human being's history, it has been to the two life-cycle events of birth and death.

That baptism has been linked to birth has been a universal Christian phenomenon since at least 200AD. However, what is often overlooked is the link that has been made between baptism and death. The case of Constantine who was baptised shortly before his death is the premier example of delaying baptism until the end of life, a practice which developed in the light of a fourth century understanding of penance as something performed once only in a lifetime.⁹³ However, in the third century baptism was also associated with death through the practice of baptising catechumens who faced the possibility of death prior to the Easter baptismal rites.⁹⁴

In addition, there is a reading of the history of infant baptism, expounded recently by M Searle, which suggests that the practice of the quamprimum is related to emergency clinical baptism.⁹⁵ In patristic times it seems as though infants would normally be kept for baptism at the Easter following their birth, but like the seriously ill catechumen, any risk of an earlier death would have meant baptism without delay. Searle's reading is supported by the particular liturgy eventually chosen for the occasion which was in fact the rite for baptising those who were dying, and also by an edict of the Council of Florence in 1442 which spoke of the imminent danger of death as the rationale for the practice of quamprimum.⁹⁶

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Historically, therefore, the timing of baptism was determined by impending death in the same way as it was by the moment of birth. In the twentieth century, with low infant mortality, the question is now whether baptism should be determined - in its timing and in its theology - by its relationship to the birth event. Nevertheless, the human instinct for linking sacraments to life-cycle events is a significant one for baptism understood from the perspective of ritual. The observation that the universal rituals are those which ritualise birth and death can be taken with the accepted view among anthropologists that ritual is a response to the fragility and transience of human life. If this is demonstrated most clearly in birth and death it is to be expected that the sacrament that has most to do with human redemption should show a tension between being a social transformation and having a physiological determinant; this is something that is reflected in the way baptism shares in the universal characteristic of a rite of passage to appropriate to itself the symbols and metaphors of birth and death.⁹⁷ By employing these images baptism engages in an act of mutual interpretation with the two most poignant events in human history; the physiological events of birth and death come to explicate baptism, and baptism in turn as a sacrament which represents Jesus Christ explicates them in the light of Christian faith. It is this act of dialectical interpretation, one that potentially overcomes the dualism between grace and history, which is lacking from Power's account. While it would be highly inappropriate to suggest a re-linking of baptism and death, the propensity for theology to link birth with baptism reflects an instinct that is well-known to the anthropologist and has the

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potential to produce an interpretation of birth which an adult baptism intrinsically fails to provide.

The argument of this chapter may now be summarised. Commencing with some foundational suppositions about ritual which have been assumed within recent sacramental theology, four issues from the history of baptism have now been shown to parallel the concerns of the social anthropologists in their adumbration of human ritual. The theoretical direction in which this points is that there is something implicit in the way in which baptism has been treated by theologians that indicates an understanding based on the principles of human ritual. It is therefore with confidence that Christian baptism may be understood in anthropological terms: it has a purposive dimension as a ritual of transformation, one that brings decisive change to the being of the individual, his or her social relationships and the meanings of life-cycle events: it also has an assertive dimension which interprets both the key events of birth and death and the fundamental change effected within the recipient.

The method for establishing this confidence - adumbrating a model of ritual in anthropological categories - contains important implications for a methodology for outlining a baptismal theology. One implication lies in the assumed distinction between the interpretative viewpoint of the inquirer and that of the participant. The former view is centred upon explanation and pursues an analysis that attempts to place what the ritual participants are doing within the wider framework of the social, and often involves working with unconscious motivations and symbolic connections. The latter perspective places the emphasis on what the ritual actor thinks that they are doing.⁹⁸ In

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addressing this distinction, C Geertz has refined the dichotomy in terms of diagnosis and thick description respectively and warned against the danger of emphasising the former to the detriment of the latter; this could lead to a 'sociological aestheticism' whereby contact is lost with 'the hard surfaces of life'.⁹⁹ It is for this reason that the ritual perspective will involve not simply diagnostic analysis but also the derivation of insight from iconographic artifacts in an attempt to understand what it was thought was happening in baptism by the participants themselves.

Another implication lies in the distinction provided by Geertz. One question that is the preserve of the observer is that concerning the relationship between myth and ritual. Another anthropologist has rightly observed that there is a certain priority given in Christianity to the 'myth' that is associated with its key rituals.¹⁰⁰ Following this instinct, chapter three will introduce the subject of myth from the anthropological viewpoint with a view to proposing a model that can more closely define the relationship and give a prescription for how in baptism, 'myth' might be appropriated. This will provide the necessary context for an appreciation of the symbolic action of baptism focused in the concepts of symbol itself in chapter four and symbolic words, or metaphors, in chapter five.

Endnotes

1. Worgul. From Magic to Metaphor, pp.1-21
2. S Freud. "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices".
3. E M Zuesse. "Meditation on Ritual".(1975), p.524
4. E H Erikson. "Ontogeny of Ritualization in Man", p.337; see also J Scharfenberg. "Human Maturation and Christian Symbols".

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5. Ibid, p.341
6. W J Smith. "Ritual and the Ethology of Communicating", pp.73-76
7. M Bloch. From Prey into Hunter, pp.20-21
8. D de Coppet. "Introduction", pp.2-3
9. Zuesse. "Ritual".(1986), p.406
10. E.g. Rahner. "The Person in the Sacramental Event" and Tillich. "Nature and Sacrament"
11. J A T Robinson. The Body, p.79
12. Y de Andia. Homo Vivians, pp.209-221
13. A R Peacocke. Theology for a Scientific Age, p.314
14. Osborne. The Christian Sacraments of Initiation, p.94 who cites Francis de Sales: 'the more grace divinizes us, the more it humanizes us'.
15. E Farley. Good and Evil; chapters 4 and 12 deal with the biological basis of humanity, its corruption and the possibilities for redemption.
16. Day of Shining Red, p.35
17. E.g. E R Leach. "Ritual", p.526.
18. J S La Fontaine. Initiation, p.113f
19. A I Richards. Chisingu, p.132
20. Ibid, pp.122-123
21. V W Turner. The Ritual Process.(1969), p.103
22. The Rites of Passage, p.26
23. "Les Rites des Passages", p.37
24. Ibid, pp.39-40
25. Ibid, p.9
26. Op.cit., p.36
27. Ibid, p.26
28. Gluckman. Op.cit. and V W Turner. "Rites of Passage".(1986).
29. Bloch. Op.cit., p.2
30. Zuesse. Op.cit.(1986), p.414

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31. Op.cit., p.29
32. Op.cit.(1986), pp.413-419
33. Ibid, p.416
34. "Liminality", p.77
35. Richards. Op.cit., p.116
36. "Religion and Society", p.157. M Wilson. "Nyakyusa Ritual and Symbolism", p.238 summarises Radcliffe-Brown's view: 'rituals both arouse and canalize emotion; they teach men to feel and teach them what to feel'.
37. Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice, p.171
38. Ibid, p.176
39. Ibid, pp.182-187
40. J Beattie. Other Cultures, p.217
41. Refer to La Fontaine. Op.cit., final chapter; cf. Bloch. Op.cit., chapters 1-2 who regards the problem of descent as one of the fundamental motivating factors in the universal practice of ritual.
42. V W Turner. Op.cit.(1969), pp.95-96, 106
43. Ibid, p.96
44. Ibid, p.127
45. T S Turner. "Transformation, Hierarchy and Transcendence", p.57. A level is 'a type of relationship between classes generated by a specific type of operation, that is by a transformatory operation or a classificatory operation such as binary opposition'.
46. Ibid, p.56
47. Ibid, p.62
48. Ibid, p.56
49. V W Turner. Op.cit.(1969), p.103
50. Natural Symbols.(1996), p.21
51. Ibid, p.150
52. Lewis. Op.cit., pp.18-19
53. Ibid, pp.8-9
54. Cited by J Skorupski. Symbol and Theory, p.19
55. Implicit Meanings, p.54

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56. Op.cit.(1996), p.22
57. Op.cit., p.240
58. "Against 'Ritual'".(1977), pp.32ff
59. D Parkin. "Ritual as Spatial Direction and Bodily Division", p.18
60. Parkin. Op.cit., p.18 for whom ritual is: 'formulaic spatiality carried out by groups of people who are conscious of its imperative or compulsory nature and who may or may not further inform this spatiality with spoken words'.
61. Ibid, p.19
62. Ibid, p.23
63. R A Rappaport. "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual", p.175 where ritual is 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers'.
64. Op.cit., p.208; see pp.197-223 for Bell's full argument which draws on M Foucault's analysis of power.
65. Op.cit.(1986), p.406
66. Lewis. Op.cit., p.26
67. Ibid, pp.26-27
68. Ibid, pp.27-28; for heuristic purposes, Lewis prefers the analogy of ritual as drama or performance. Whilst his exposition is nuanced, drama has its shortcomings when applied to ritual generally since all the components of the theatrical performance are not present. However, other models - text (Ricoeur. "The Model of the Text"), art (S A Ross. "The Aesthetic and the Sacramental") or play (K Flanagan. Sociology and Liturgy and B Krondorfer. "The Whole Gamut of Experience") - are also available.
69. Rappaport. Op.cit., p.200
70. Ibid, p.179
71. G W Bromiley. Baptism and the Anglican Reformers, pp.16-17 and R Latham. "Baptism in the Writings of the Reformers"
72. J D Trigg. Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther
73. The 1662 rite reiterated this phrase in the prayer over the water immediately prior to baptism, thus strengthening the notion that the washing away of original sin was the prime purpose of the rite.
74. The work of B A Gerrish; J Raitt and J W Rigg have informed an understanding of Calvin's baptismal theology.
75. Inst., p.1314 (IV.xv.14)
76. Ibid, p.1345 (IV.xvi.21)

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77. Ibid, pp.1341-1344 (IV.xvi.20 and IV.xvi.19 respectively)
78. T George. "The Presuppositions of Zwingli's Baptismal Theology", p.82.
79. S W Sykes. The Identity of Christianity, p.40ff. D E H Whiteley. The Theology of St Paul, pp.170-173 remarks: 'for St Paul there was an unchallenged harmony between the outward and the inward in Christian Baptism'.
80. B Leaming. Principles of Sacramental Theology, pp.129ff
81. Ibid, pp.226-229
82. ST: Volume 56, pp.85-89 (3a. qu.63. art.3)
83. An Introduction to Catholic Sacramental Theology, p.73
84. Ibid, pp.71-72
85. Others have seen the inseparability of the personal and the social in the act of baptism. E.g. O C Quick. The Christian Sacraments, p.179
86. Cited by Schillebeeckx. Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God, p.158
87. Skorupski. Op.cit., pp.113-114 reflects on the inseparability between personal and social change in traditional religions, making reference to the sacramental character.
88. T F Torrance. The Trinitarian Faith, pp.289ff
89. Op.cit., p.148
90. "Ritual Process and the Survival of Christianity"
91. D N Power. "The Odyssey of Man in Christ", p.100
92. Ibid, pp.101-102
93. E J Yarnold. "The Baptism of Constantine"
94. The case of Novation is cited by M Searle. "Infant Baptism Reconsidered", pp.17-18.
95. Ibid, pp.18-20
96. Refer to J D C Fisher. Christian Initiation, pp.109-119
97. M Eliade. Rites and Symbols of Initiation
98. Skorupski. Op.cit., pp.108-114 discusses this distinction in respect of the sacraments of baptism, eucharist and penance.
99. The Interpretation of Cultures, pp.27-30
100. C Kluckhohn. "Myths and Rituals"

Chapter Three

Myth, Ritual and the Story of Jesus' Baptism

1 Anthropological Perspectives on Myth and its Relationship with Ritual

A watershed in modern understanding of myth has been located around 1920. Prior to this myth was perceived in categories such as 'fiction', 'invention' and 'fable'; in the scientific rationalism of the nineteenth century mythos became contrasted with both logos and historia signifying something false and unreal. From the 1920s, however, the concept of myth has deepened, something brought about by a heightened appreciation of what might be labelled archaic or primitive societies. In this context myth is understood as a true story, one which is at once sacred and exemplary. Beyond this, contemporary usage of the word myth carries with it an ambiguity which depends on whether its illusory or its value-giving properties are emphasised.¹ It is now the case that, within academic discourse at least, a consensual approach to myth cannot be found. One recent

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writer who has examined the critical theory of myth in four twentieth century thinkers asserts that in each case myth is an 'artifact', creatively constructed from the intellectual concerns of the theorists and their interaction with their social and academic milieu.²

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of definitions it is possible to identify a fruitful contribution to the subject of myth from the work of social anthropologists. First of all, through the writings of two anthropologists a particular perspective on myth will be developed. Secondly, through reference to particular ethnographic examples, it will be shown how a relationship between myth and ritual might be characterised.

1.1 Two Perspectives on Myth

The emergence of the deeper understanding of myth has been facilitated by two formative contributions from the discipline of social anthropology. Each has centred around an influential figure, B Malinowski and C Lévi-Strauss respectively.

Malinowski's thinking about myth was rooted in carefully drawn distinctions between categories of stories. The term 'myth' isolates one class of human stories from a range of possible classifications including legends, heroic stories and history. Indeed, in one important work he regards his most important statement as the assertion of the very existence of the category of myth.³ In his fieldwork Malinowski discriminated between categories of what are loosely called folktales, and he described how he did this by focusing more on cultural setting than on actual content. 'Fairy tales' are told purely for entertainment and consist of 'tribal fiction' which is

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devoid of moral, ritual or any other truthful import. 'Historical legends' are told to assert a particular family's lineage; they contain heroic episodes, but rarely ones based on miracles or the supernatural realm. 'Myths' on the other hand are related for profound purposes and are intimately connected with religious belief, ethics, the social order or ritual. Myths are sacred, containing references to:

a miracle which is firmly believed in, a miracle, moreover, which as likely as not, will be re-enacted in a partial and modified form through the ritual of native magic and religion.⁴

Myth relates the religious truth about how things were created⁵ and, here is the essence of myth, in its 'affirmation of primeval miracles'.⁶ Although myth is regarded as truth, the Trobriand islanders, according to Malinowski, clearly distinguished between the world of supernatural myth and everyday reality. There is a cleavage between the two since it is believed that mythical events do not actually happen in the present.⁷

The category of myth for Malinowski contained the stories which he saw as the most important of all that were told by the Islanders. As such, myth is 'an indispensable ingredient of all culture' and located in the context of the 'three dimensional reality of full life'.⁸ Hence Malinowski was also concerned to disabuse alternative, and in his view inadequate, understandings of myth by European anthropologists. He argued that myth was not a 'rhapsodic rendering of natural phenomena', nor the result of contemplation on nature which attempted a symbolic representation of its laws. Neither was it a primitive science, an explanatory speculation on contemporary phenomena borne from philosophical enquiry, and nor was it an historical chronology of past events.⁹ All three characterisations could not be established as

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dominant themes from Malinowski's observations of primitive culture and could be regarded as uni-dimensional and as dispassionate verbal phenomena.

Thus context was vital to Malinowski's understanding of myth. Whilst advantage is gained from an academic study of myth which enables a certain abstraction, and therefore independence from the society under observation, a myth is a narrative with a concrete location in a living culture. As a myth is recited it effects both teller and audience, producing a deeper level of meaning than that which may be derived from the study of the text. The exact effect will vary according to context, but the important point is that myth is 'not an idle rhapsody, not an aimless outpouring of vain imaginings, but a hard-working extremely important cultural force'¹⁰, which is activated at those cultural moments when 'rite, ceremony, or a social or moral rule demands justification, warrant or authority, reality, and sanctity'.¹¹

Myth has a function in society and empirical knowledge of this through fieldwork makes a vital contribution to an evaluation of its meaning. It is the fieldwork context which leads Malinowski to the notion of a myth as a 'sociological charter'. Only when this is made the primary reference for any study of myth can alternative definitions assume their appropriate theoretical positions, as subsidiary considerations.¹² There is no denial that the content of a myth may reflect a kernel of historical truth, have an element of nature symbolism and fulfil an explanatory rôle. However, they become coherent characterisations only when their paradigmatic status is re-aligned behind that of a legitimating and charter-giving function, one

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that is closely related to mythology's concern with origins and their sacredness.

The sociological charter contains within it, for Malinowski, an underlying structure of human behaviour; it is the 'simple empirical truth' that a 'norm of general conduct' is followed, particularly if it is that of a primeval and supernatural ancestor. In one sense then myth is a presentation of the real in the terms of the ideal. A myth will present the possibilities for success, in say a fishing expedition, and feed the imagination with the elaboration of 'an ideal towards which their desires must go out'.¹³

Much of Malinowski's thinking on myth is summed up when he portrays myth as:

a story which is told [either] in order to establish a belief, to serve as a precedent in ceremony or ritual, or to rank as a pattern of moral or religious conduct. Mythology, therefore, or the sacred tradition of a society, is a body of narratives woven into their culture, dictating their belief, defining their ritual, acting as the charter of their social order and the pattern of their moral behaviour. Every myth has naturally a literary content, since it is always a narrative, but this narrative is not merely a piece of entertaining fiction or explanatory statement to the believer. It is a true account of sensational events which have shaped the constitution of the world, the essence of moral conduct, and determines the ritual conduct between man and his maker, or other powers that be.¹⁴

Malinowski's understanding of myth, therefore, is a multidimensional one: myth is distinguished from other literary components in culture by their charter conferring status, by their sacred and venerated content which presents the real in terms of the ideal and also by their concern with origins. Above all, though, the observation that myth is narrative is a central one. Myth's narrative form is not accidental and differentiates it from a set of ideas such

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as a cosmology; it is a specific ordering of events in time, even though that time is primeval, unspecified and beyond the contemporary memory, which 'anchors the present in the past'.¹⁵ In ordering specific events the narrative presents a point of origin that is a creation or transformation; from this the chartering function derives, providing a potential tracing of social action to a primeval but temporal source-event. This may be said to be the final key to Malinowski's theory of mythology: 'myth does not argue, but presents' in narrative form.¹⁶ As the anthropologist P S Cohen has helpfully expressed it:

to locate things in time, even if the exact time is unspecified, creates a far more effective device for legitimationthan simply creating a set of abstract ideas which are timeless.¹⁷

There is wide acceptance in anthropological circles of Malinowski's views on myth, even if only as an initial working assumption. A cautionary use of the label 'functionalist' may be adopted to characterise the theoretical position they represent, expressing the concern to locate their role within a social framework. Continuity with the transformatory view of ritual taken in chapter two is found in V W Turner's writings. He has perceptively remarked: 'myths treat of origins but derive from transitions'. However, not only does Turner observe that myths are phenomena often narrated in times or places that are liminally situated, he also argues that they describe transitions. In their description of origins they assert the transformation of one state of affairs to another; for instance, an unpopulated world becomes a populated one, human immortality is lost and mortality assumed and androgynous beings become male and female.¹⁸

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The second formative approach to myth may be said to have arisen out of the difficulties associated with the functionalist position. A central criticism has been that the very strength of Malinowski's theory - his overriding emphasis on sociological context - is also a weakness, since it was achieved at the expense of any detailed examination of the narrative content.¹⁹ To overcome this a stress was brought to bear on an analysis of a myth's narrative character. Regarded as a 'structuralist' perspective, a primary influence was a conviction shared with folklorists that myth was a particular form of the folktale, the latter conceived as a 'traditional, dramatic, oral narrative'.²⁰ It was suggested that a folktale had a 'morphology', which was 'the description of the folktale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to the whole'.²¹

It was in the notion of morphology that Lévi-Strauss found an anticipation of his own proposals for a structural analysis, although he argued that its methodology was inadequate on account of its formalistic emphasis which opposed the form of the narrative to its content and made the assumption that only the latter is intelligible. For the structuralist anthropologist, however, both form and content are of the same nature, intelligible and open to the same type of analysis.²² There is no outright rejection of the essential insights offered by the functionalist; the function of myth as a charter for social structures is accepted as valid.²³ Ultimately, however, the functionalist perspective is perceived as a limiting one and the structuralist method seeks to move beyond its frame of reference.

Most importantly, and Lévi-Strauss adds this to an acknowledgement of the sociological charter, it is argued that myths:

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make it possible to discover the operational modes of the human mind, which have remained so constant over the centuries, and are so widespread over geographical distances, that we can assume them to be fundamental and can seek to find them in other societies and in other areas of mental life, where their presence was not suspected, and whose nature is thereby illuminated.²⁴

In Lévi-Strauss' investigation of myth, the objective was to locate the structure that gives 'access to the mechanism of thought'²⁵ and allows an investigation into the universal workings of the human mind. This is framed in terms of distinctions and binary oppositions which provide the logic of the associations made in mythology. In the words of I Strenski, myth for Lévi-Strauss is a 'strongly structured, important story'.²⁶ What is being said by the myth is inferred by the discovery of its underlying mental structures. That is the object of what may be called the semiotic-structuralist study of myth.

Like the functionalist theory the structuralist method has its weaknesses when it is deployed in its extreme form. So the emphasis on the search for the structure of the human mind can elide the very narrative quality which gave rise to that inquiry. Also, the chartering function can be disregarded as the sociological context diminishes in importance. Nevertheless, this alternative approach to myth is not incompatible with the first and it brings some key emphases. Not least it stresses the nature of myth as a human response to the 'insoluble' condition in which humanity finds itself immersed, namely the vicissitudes of nature. M Bloch summarises this view by noting that myths are 'speculations' which tackle the problems of the world and that in mythology human beings 'bruise themselves on the contradictions of existence'.²⁷ Alternatively, it may be said that myth operates as a 'socially imposed hermeneutic for experience' in as much as it encapsulates humanity's response to the 'zone of uncertainty',

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namely 'the set of events' which produce 'significant effects for which there exist no readily perceivable causes for a large number of a society's members'.²⁸

Another valued emphasis comes with the weight the structuralist method gives to a diachronic understanding of myth. The permanence of the structures of the human mind allows Lévi-Strauss to assert that one myth may have a number of alternative versions; a valid analysis of the myth must therefore include all variants, since 'there is no single "true" version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth'.²⁹ Thus, every re-telling of a myth, with all the contrasts with its antecedent narrations, becomes part of that myth and has an effect on its identity, its future perception and appropriation. The re-telling of a myth is something that has an historical dimension, since the teller is related to previous generations who have told and re-told the myth. Whilst Lévi-Strauss can treat the narrative aspect of myth as somewhat secondary to the structure of human thought his drawing attention to the diachronic construction of myth through re-telling in different contexts is an important contribution to the theory of myth.

Hitherto, the characteristics of myth have been treated on a general level. Most importantly it has emerged that myth, taking the form of a narrative that concerns itself with origins, and therefore by implication, transformations, has a capacity to exercise a sociological charter on human life. The aspect of human life that is relevant to this essay is ritual practice, and so now the relationship between myth and ritual requires further exploration.

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1.2 Myth and its Relationship with Ritual

Questions investigating the relationship between myth and ritual may be introduced by some observations from Turner which both reflect his thinking on the concept of transformations and are apposite to an application of ritual categories to a Christian sacrament. He commented that in the genesis of a religious movement there is a quality which shares much with the liminal moments experienced within a traditional ritual. There is a liminality, 'spontaneously generated in a situation of radical structural change' which corresponds to the communitas of a transitional rite. He argues that in the decline of the 'primal impetus' charisma becomes routinised: the activity of the prophet and his followers becomes 'a behavioural model to be represented in stereotyped and selected liturgical form'. A ritual structure then emerges which has two aspects:

on the one hand, the historical deeds of the prophet and his closest companions become a sacred history.....; on the other hand, both the deeds of the founder and his visions and messages achieve crystallization in the symbolic objects and activities of cyclical and repetitive rituals.³⁰

Therefore, not only is liminality conditional for the emergence of myth but it is also the occasion for inspirational forms which are routinised in a 'symbolic mimesis' in subsequent social contexts. In the terminology introduced above, the sacred history charters subsequent social action; in Turner's own words, a 'creative deed becomes an ethical or ritual paradigm'.³¹ This, however, leads on to a further question. Might the nature of the relationship between a myth and its ritual be characterised more specifically, and especially in its particular function as a sociological charter?

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At an initial level, each of the anthropological approaches to myth contributes to the relationship's characterisation in the broadest sense. The functionalist theory contends that myth cannot be studied other than within the social context with which it is associated. Myth studied out of context is in danger of being perceived as fantasy; taking into account its relation to its social context, including any ritual for which it acts as a charter, precludes this type of judgement. In contrast to this, a sharp presentation of the structuralist view can reject any causal link between a myth and a pattern of social action. Lévi-Strauss could characterise the functionalist position as one in which 'the myth and the rite reproduce each other, the one at the level of action the other at the level of ideas'.³² Actually, he argued, this is demonstrable in only a very small number of cases, and even then it is to be regarded as a particular example of the more generalised case in which myth and ritual exist together in a dialectical relationship within the same context. The implications of this for the structuralist method are that a comparison of myth and ritual is to be undertaken within the society in question and in neighbouring ones; no automatic and orderly correspondence may be presumed.³³

At a further level the assumptions made by social anthropologists may not be isolated from the long-standing debate over the relationship between myth and ritual which received a major focus in the search for the origins of Greek religion and drama by the 'Cambridge Ritualists' in the early years of the twentieth century.³⁴ Interest in this group's achievements continues. It is of significance because it links questions about myth and ritual with literary

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criticism. For the moment, two issues arise from an engagement with their thought.

The first issue addresses questions of universality and particularly and whether it is arguable that there is an a priori relationship between myth and ritual. One of the foundational influences on the School was W R Robertson Smith who asserted that a myth developed as an elaborate explanation of a ritual, which was the primary epistemological category. The only way to understand a myth therefore was to locate the ritual with which it was associated. However, if the ritual was no longer accessible the observer's task was to penetrate beyond the myth in order to reconstruct the ritual. The problem however is simply that Robertson Smith's case cannot be empirically substantiated; anomalies of rituals with no associated myth and of myths that are antecedent to ritual do not suggest that the proposed a priori relationship exists, at least on a chronological basis.³⁵

Secondly, questions arise over the accuracy of terminological definition. The myth and ritual theorists embraced the conception that a rite consists of the 'thing done' accompanied by the 'thing said'. The former is the ritual and the latter is the myth; according to one theorist, myth in the classical world was the 'spoken correlative of the acted rite, the thing done'. However, this does not make clear what is often the case empirically, that there is a distinction to be made between a 'verbal formula' which is recited in the ritual context and the myth which is narratively more complex than could be included.³⁶ The level of coincidence between the verbal formula and the

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myth may vary but any attempt to conceal the distinction becomes problematic.

Thus, although there is no genuine consensus over the relationship between myth and ritual, a cluster of theoretical principles have been found to be pertinent: namely, that there is a necessary tension between a contextual analysis and one which emphasises the search for structures that inform the narratives; also, that there are dangers in the tendency to universalise their relationship, and that there is a requirement for clearly distinguished technical categories.

These principles, representing the relationship between myth and ritual in its broadest sense, are preliminary to the more particular understanding of the relationship in its chartering dimension. The notion that myth is a chartering narrative for ritual may now be developed in two directions.

The first direction recognises the tendency to assume that chartering is the sole function of a myth and disputes this presupposition. If this is a weakness in Malinowski's case it probably represented a disillusionment with the a priori assumptions of alternative approaches to myth and an empirical and pragmatic reaction away from such positions. It seems, however, that an approach which stresses that all myths serve only one function is limited and it may be argued that the charter function is only one possible dimension of the overall function that a myth might have within a particular social context. For instance, in his dialogue with social anthropology the classicist G S Kirk has suggested that it is possible to speak of a 'typology of mythical functions' in which myth might first of all be

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'narrative and entertaining', secondly 'operative, iterative and validatory' and thirdly 'speculative and explanatory'.³⁷ Implicit in Kirk's account is that the myth's potential multiplicity of function is a source of its appeal to humanity, its power and its sacred qualities. Cohen has expressed this well:

because myths perform several linked functions, and because they contain levels of meaning which achieve an intuitively experienced correspondence, because myths are narratives with a time-anchored structure, because they deal simultaneously with the socially and psychologically significant, because they make use of what is perceived and available and link it to the primordial sense of a deeper level of reality, they have had the power which we rightly attribute to them in some societies.³⁸

Equally, it is when the different functions of a myth become separated from each other that a proportion of its power is lost. In the contextual analysis of any myth, therefore, an expectation should exist to find the performance of a number of functions simultaneously. A focus upon what has been called the chartering function neither presumes that it is always present, nor precludes the simultaneous operation of other functions.

The second direction recognises, and accepts at the outset, the broad nature of the category of 'charter' when applied to myth. Again it is Kirk who has criticised any simple acceptance of this 'ambiguous and confusing' concept which he finds 'misleadingly loose'. For instance, he claims, a myth which legitimates a tribe's inheritance operates differently to one which affirms the validity of an institution such as kingship. One may take the form of a dogmatic account of a mythical founder and the other may be argumentative in style, suggesting the consequences of society's non-compliance. Equally, a myth which charters an abstract belief is, almost by definition, likely to be different in kind to one which legitimates an

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existing institution; in contrast, it will typically involve a more abstract approach, including narrative but with an extension of its symbolic dimensions, which attempts to solve some intractable problem like humanity's loss of immortality. In brief, Kirk's case is that the concept of charter must be employed carefully, acknowledging that there are different types of charter. Moreover, Kirk draws attention to the overlap between a chartering function and an aetiological one. The latter, which gives an account of the origin or cause of a contemporary phenomenon, may be explanatory or even speculative and may not be clearly distinguished from the former. A myth which charters by referring to a past event is likely to have an aetiological dimension. Kirk's most important contribution, however, is simply his assertion that the chartering (and aetiological) function occurs in specific ways which it is prudent to specify.³⁹

The principles of the relationship between myth and ritual and the two directions in which the chartering dimension of that relationship may be developed combine to give a theoretical background against which it may now be shown how myths have been understood to yield up their sociological force in the chartering of ritual practice. The anthropological literature suggests that there are three principal means. To summarise in advance: through its chartering myth, a ritual may be given an appropriate historical foundation, it may provide an imitative impulse which provokes particular ritual behaviour and its symbols and metaphors may be validated. Each means requires a brief elaboration.

First of all, the charter myth can provide the historical dimension to contemporary ritual, anchoring the present in past

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practice. In the mythological chartering of a ritual it is characteristic for its inauguration to be described, either in mythical time or time which is acknowledged to be historical. Such myths vary in their complexity. In Turner's account of the Ndembu circumcision ritual the myth simply relates the first circumcision of a Ndembu boy and how this was transferred to other boys until there developed the first festival that was celebrated with the drinking of beer.⁴⁰ In the case of the circumcision ritual of the Merina in Madagascar, studied by Bloch, the myth is related about how a particular historical king instituted the ceremony and how certain ritual procedures were developed to prevent infants from dying as a result of the operation.⁴¹

It may therefore be claimed that a chartering myth provides a ritual's link with the past. According to Bloch, myth 'links the dramatic argument to an image of the past'. Myth links ritual practice to an accepted history; in the case of the Merina it is to the history of the Merina in general and the royal dynasty more specifically. The ritual performance is said to create an image which is given a greater reality by the evocation of that which it is made to refer. At the same time as the ritual is made more concrete, the mythological characters and events are perceived in the light of the ritual.⁴² Additionally, it may be argued that the link between the past and the present is a question of the link between the actors and the previous communities who have performed the same ritual.⁴³

Secondly, there is an imitative component in the relationship between a charter myth and its ritual. According to Malinowski a myth's chartering function is derived from the simple empirical truth

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that human beings have a propensity to repeat the actions of others and especially to imitate the formative actions of their ancestors in the primeval past.⁴⁴ Referring to the Arunta, Malinowski deduced that their rituals were nothing less than repetitions of the ancient miracles described in their mythology which have been preserved, not just in memory, but also in performance.⁴⁵ Turner appreciated this type of imitative impulse when he appropriated Freud's notion of 'repetition compulsion' to describe the developmental process of routinised rituals referred to previously.⁴⁶ The same imitative relation has been developed into an ontology by Eliade whose premise was that every ritual has a 'divine model' or archetype mediated to the present through myth.⁴⁷ He argued for an 'archaic ontology' which he perceived to be located in the concept of imitation:

an object or an act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Thus reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is "meaningless", i.e., it lacks reality.⁴⁸

Archaic human ontology is therefore to be found in the tendency for persons to become archetypal through repetition of the exemplary event; they are real only in so far as there is an apparently paradoxical movement away from the self.

Finally, a charter myth may legitimate the symbolism and metaphorical content of its associated ritual. Although there are instances of rituals where their associated myths do not go beyond a description of the founding event⁴⁹, it is common to find that ritual symbolism is legitimated by relating its use back to the original event. In the Ndembu circumcision ritual, one piece of symbolism is clearly related to the origin of the rite; the hide of a cow is cut into strips and stands as a symbol of the sharp, tough grass that was

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the accidental cause of its first instance. In the Merina circumcision rite the charter myth's characteristics are more pronounced and, in addition to symbolic objects, actual ritual actions are prescribed as the condition of a successful outcome. Thus, it was precisely because a particular gourd was not used correctly with the holy water, and because the house had not been prepared, and because the shield and the lance were absent that the first circumcision had failed. Whilst the Ndembu myth is narratively sparse, barely elaborating the sources of the ritual's symbolism and its use, the Merina charter myth supplies quite complex details for ritual procedures.

However, it is not only ritual symbolism that is validated by the charter myth. The narrative of the ritual's origin can often provide the key metaphors for the contemporary performance. In the Merina ritual, the verbal designation of certain lake water as 'powerful', a metaphor which connotes wildness and strength, is derived directly from the myth; the myth even supplies the words for several of the ritual songs.⁵⁰

Ritual symbolism and metaphor often feeds off a body of mythology that does not have to be fully recited to legitimate a performance. Often one episode can be recalled, even in an allusive manner, to provide a reason to carry out a ritual action. Such an instance was found by Lewis in his research of Gnaou puberty rites, where the treatment and tearing of a leaf, and the thumping of the foot upon the ground have their charter in a primeval action that is found within the body of peoples' mythological consciousness.⁵¹ Also, there are cases, notably in East and Central Africa, where there is a paucity of mythology associated with ritual; in compensation, however, there may

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be 'piecemeal' exegesis of particular symbols.⁵² In the view of Lévi-Strauss, this is best characterised as 'implicit' mythology of a fragmentary form, remaining as a gloss on ritual practice rather than being brought into the overarching and explicit form of myth.⁵³

It is unnecessary to regard these three patterns of relationship as a subscription to a universalising model of the myth and ritual relationship.⁵⁴ Rather each is an attempt to understand the means by which a myth might well yield up its chartering force to its associated ritual within the context of a transformatory rite. They may be regarded, not as a prescriptive imposition, but as an offering of three heuristic devices for the understanding and explanation of rituals in cultural situations other than those from which they have been derived. Each of the three means have been understood to occur where myth acts to confer social status on a ritual by embedding it within contemporary sociality, illustrating Malinowski's insight that myth functions to shape 'the constitution of the world'.

2 A Theological Appropriation of the Relation between Myth and Ritual

At this stage a straightforward parallel may be drawn between the 'sacredness' of the anthropological myth and the centrality of the Christian story. The implicit suggestion is that the Christian story charters the rituals of the Church in a manner similar to the manner in which a myth charters a ritual in a traditional society. Yet prior to the development of the implications of this parallel for a theology of baptism two questions must be pressed. First of all, is the coordination assumed between the category of myth utilised by social anthropologists and the more recognisably theological category of

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narrative a plausible one? And secondly, does the understanding of the relationship between myth and ritual outlined in the previous section, offer any immediate application for the theology of baptism?

2.1 Coordinating Myth in Anthropology with Narrative in Theology

First of all, the anthropological understanding of myth requires coordination with theological discourse and especially its understanding of narrative. In the light of the exposition of myth offered above, there appear to be three areas of insight which coordinate in a compelling way with parallel insights in theology.

The first area of coordination occurs in the anthropological recognition that the most basic property of myth is its narrative character. This correlates with the theological recognition that narrative has an essential connection with human experience. In an essay, influential in the way in which it has informed the development of what might be labelled 'Narrative Theology', S Crites argued that 'the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative'.⁵⁵ Personal identity is dependent upon experience through time and it is only narrative that 'can contain the full temporality of experience in a unity of form'.⁵⁶ The human sense of self at any particular moment, even when it is implicit in self-consciousness, is always integrated into one story. The tensed unity of the modalities of past, present and future has an incipient narrative form; memory instinctively chronicles the past in terms of before and after whereas anticipation of the future is a question of 'framing little stories about how things may fall out'.⁵⁷ Thus Crites argues that there is a 'primitiveness'⁵⁸ about narrative in the sense that it is an undeniable, constitutive part of human experience. In this case, myth

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in so far as it is understood to be a significant narrative, correlates with theology's desire to recognise the central, indeed ontological place of story in its methodology.

Another area of coordination is found in the structuralist emphasis that myth addresses issues of uncertainty which are common to the social grouping. Although the language that is employed to characterise this experience varies, there is a coordination with the sense that theological reflection is, in Tillich's words, engagement with 'what concerns us ultimately'. Just as a myth is regarded as the response to effects for which there is no immediately comprehensible cause, so theological discourse has its object in matters of ultimate concern. For mythical thinking the cause of the event, and not the event itself, is the dilemma which is addressed because in this lies the uncertainty of human existence. Equally, for the theologian nothing is really of ultimate concern unless it has the power to threaten or to save the very being of humanity. Although that which is of finite concern is able to be a vehicle of ultimate concern it cannot demand the same passion and attention without becoming idolatrous. As Tillich states, a human being is 'ultimately concerned about that which determines his ultimate destiny beyond all preliminary necessities and accidents'.⁵⁹ For Tillich, 'nothing less than symbols and myths can bring to expression what concerns us ultimately'⁶⁰ and therefore he is able to assert this as one function of the Gospel narratives.⁶¹

Thirdly, there is an area of coordination in the way that both disciplines have a difficulty in the identification of the ultimate nature of myth or narrative respectively. For Malinowski the mythology

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of the primitive society studied by the social anthropologist was equivalent to the sacred texts of Christianity.⁶² However, the structuralist view is more nuanced and in fact suggests a more profound way of viewing the parallel. As has already been noted, Lévi-Strauss implies that myth is something that transcends a particular telling or a written account; each re-telling or re-writing is in fact part of the history of the myth which in itself is greater than its actual enactments. This distinction between the myth and its enactment may be coordinated with one made by Crites between a 'sacred story' and a 'mundane story'.⁶³ The term 'sacred story' may be taken to express the fact that there is always more to be narrated; it contributes to the formation of consciousness rather than 'being among the objects of which it is directly aware'. Alternatively, mundane stories, narrated in the context of a world of meaning, are 'the stories which are told, all stories directly seen or heard'. In a sense, sacred stories are stories which cannot be narrated but which necessarily provide the context in which all related mundane stories are told. The overarching sacred story provides the criteria of theological legitimacy for the assessment of the overlapping multiplicity of mundane narrations.

Myth as it is understood by social anthropologists, therefore, has strong parallels with how narrative is understood by theologians, but how far may the coordination be taken? An obstacle lies within narrative theology itself. To put it succinctly, the anthropological notion of myth as an important narrative which shapes the institutions and beliefs of a particular society has been elided by the assumption that a myth is above all a story about the gods, something untrue and certainly ahistorical.

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The writings of H Frei, perhaps the principal theoretician of narrative theology to date, contain this assumption. Frei's overall argument was that post-Enlightenment hermeneutics neglected the narrative shape of the biblical text by placing the emphasis on reference. This separation of narrative and meaning betrayed for Frei the essential character of the biblical stories as 'realistic' or 'history-like' narratives, especially when the issue became transposed into the question of the narrative's historical reference. Frei sharply distinguished this notion of a realistic narrative from myth, but in doing so he followed the understanding of myth articulated by D F Strauss. Frei described this not only as being the expression of a childlike consciousness but also as being:

in the form of a sensuous or history-like account of divine and human miraculous actions, in which the gods appear without mediation directly in the finite world as agents. Like allegory, its meaning - what it represents - is obviously different from the representation of it.Myths refer not to specific events but to general cultural conditions and kinds of group consciousness.⁶⁴

Frei's primary objection to myth, therefore, was the presupposition that as an interpretive device it focuses attention upon 'a profound, buried substratum underneath which constitutes or determines the subject matter'.⁶⁵ A preferable model for Frei was the realistic novel which came to prominence in Europe during the nineteenth century. Its primary characteristic lay in the indispensability of the narrative in which meaning is said not to be illustrated or symbolised but enacted and embodied. The human subject and its social context is portrayed literally and interactively, in the manner of 'ordinary and credible individuals'.⁶⁶ Overall, a realistic narrative has a history-like character.

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There are problems, however, with Frei's position. On the one hand the category of 'realistic narrative' may not prove to be the final verdict on how the biblical narratives are to be characterised. As has been pointed out, the term 'realistic' implies that the events described are consonant with everyday experience of contemporary humanity. This can hardly be uniformly the case, since many of the events portrayed have a uniquely strange, even mysterious, quality about them. Equally, to accept in the first place a view that a myth divulges significance at levels which lie below its surface structure is contrary to the view which traditional societies would have of their own myths; the notion that a myth provides an exemplary model for human activity implies that such narratives enact their own meaning, exactly what Frei is searching for.⁶⁷

Given the inconsistencies in Frei's position his one-sided appropriation of myth should not therefore stand in the way of the threefold coordination with narrative which has now been argued. Also, given this coordination, it is not unreasonable to expect that the biblical narratives would show signs, both in themselves and in their interpretation, of being able to fulfil the sociological functions emphasised by functionalist theories. In other words, the functions of myth as they are expressed in anthropological discourse may be expected to be characteristic of its narrative counterpart in theology. Further, if myth may be coordinated to narrative then an anthropologist's understanding of mythology may be coordinated to the overarching story which is made up of many narratives. Leach stated that the bible 'is a corpus of mythology which provides a justification for the religious performances of believers'.⁶⁸ When

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'religious performances' is understood to include ritual acts as well as ethical ones the insights implicit in this statement may now be appreciated and confidently embraced.

The process of coordination may be completed by noting that there are points in recent theology where the insights of social anthropology have been accepted and some of their implications expounded. To begin with, the notion that a myth has a sociological chartering function is well known. Thus, Pannenberg argues, in a discussion on the history of religions, that myth 'legitimizes and propagates' the meaning of the cult.⁶⁹ Later in an argument that supports the close linking of myth and ritual and accepts the character of myth as something centred on an archetype, he suggests that the person of Jesus functioned for the Christian Church in a way that is 'reminiscent of the archetypal elements of myth'.⁷⁰ There are, of course, two distinctions to be made. The first is to qualify the notion that the Christian narratives are to be understood as true stories. At their inception, all myths would have been regarded as fully historical; even though now this cannot be sustained in every aspect, the origin they portray is historical in basis, if not in every detail. The second is that there is a distinction between the myths of the religions and the myths of the Judeo-Christian faiths; whereas the former are said to be closed to the future the latter exhibit an eschatological dimension.⁷¹ The reason for this is the perception of Jesus as the event in which the presence of God, that is the coming of the future kingdom, was revealed. Salvation for the early Church was concerned with being associated with the events of his earthly life. Such was the guarantee of participation in the coming of the Kingdom of God.⁷²

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S W Sykes also values the insights of social anthropology, and particularly in an appreciation of narrative which is regarded as 'raw material' for theology. Sykes helpfully distinguishes between the synthetic and analytic manifestations of narrative. Synthetically, in the liturgy of the Church and principally in the two sacraments of baptism and eucharist, the sacred history of Jesus Christ is recalled in a narrative sense. However, the sacraments show a 'highly abbreviated form' in which the principal narratives are summarised. That is, the flowing narratives of scripture are routinised, especially in the rituals of baptism, to facilitate memorisation and recall for the candidate. The same principle may be applied to the rest of the liturgy; the narratives of the Gospels are routinised for ease of presentation and rely on a certain 'recollected amplification' on the part of the congregation. In a similar vein, the analytical style of theological discourse appropriates the Gospel narratives in an attempt to ascertain the questions the enquirer must address to the narratives. Over time, new questions arise from identical narratives in the hands of new readers and fresh analytical appropriations of the narratives are required.⁷³

The coordination of myth with a theological understanding of narrative may therefore be now approached confidently. Even though no unanimity exists among theologians as to how this is done, the proposal that the perspective of anthropology brings to this coordination is one that has claim to some degree of plausibility.⁷⁴ The question perhaps now arises as to how this might be applied to the theology of baptism, and in particular to its origin.

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2.2 The Provenance of Christian Baptism

The search for the origin of Christian baptism may be addressed by recognising that on this question the Fathers are difficult to assess accurately. However, there is one approach that sought to maximise the significance of water in the scriptures and attempted a cohesive response to the question, 'what is it in the foundation of Christianity which provides the authority to baptise?' Tertullian was an early instance of this approach; after outlining the use of water in the Old Testament, he remarked:

see how great is the grace that water has in the presence of God and his Christ for the corroboration of baptism. Wherever Christ is, there is water....⁷⁵

Tertullian then cites a whole range of water-events from the Gospels, commencing with Jesus' Baptism, as authorisation for the Church's practice. Later, the theological principle upon which he was working was expressed by Cyprian when he remarked, 'every time that water is named by itself in the Holy Scriptures, there is a prophetic allusion to baptism'.⁷⁶

The strategy of connecting baptism with the water events of scripture was adopted in the Western baptismal liturgies which were used up until the eve of the Reformation and indeed in the liturgical settings in which they were used. This is evident in the paintings of the catacombs, the art which decorated baptisteries and the iconography of font design.⁷⁷

Frequently, though, water images were juxtaposed with a wider selection of narrative art. Thus, in the early third century baptistery at Dura Europos, there were images of the Samaritan woman and Jesus walking on the water alongside the women at the tomb of

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Christ, the Good Shepherd and the primordial couple.⁷⁸ The iconography of Medieval font panels demonstrates well this narrative enrichment of baptism; episodes from the infancy and passion narratives, the story of Lazarus' resurrection and even the last judgement are often shown.⁷⁹

Whilst this proliferation of narrative justification continued in the Church's iconography, perpetuating the patristic desire to assert the unity of the incarnation, another approach was gaining ground. This was a Scholastic analysis that developed the formal notion of 'institution'. The impetus for greater specificity in the definition of the sacraments probably owed much to the questions raised from controversies over the objectivity of Christ's presence at the eucharist. Among the categories introduced was that of 'institution by Christ' which was adopted formally in the twelfth century.⁸⁰ If Christ 'instituted' a sacrament then there was a requirement to locate a particular moment in his ministry which demonstrated the divine will to inaugurate the ritual in question. The institution of the eucharist was self-evident but the institution of the other sacraments was more problematic. This applied not least to baptism and so, unsurprisingly, there were a range of opinions offered by scholastic theologians. Thus, Jesus was argued to have instituted baptism in his injunction to Nicodemus or with his instructions to the disciples at the Ascension. The majority of medieval theologians, however, held the opinion that Jesus instituted baptism at his own Baptism. For instance, Peter Lombard held the Baptism was the first occasion of the invocation of the name of the Trinity which was henceforth employed in baptism.⁸¹

However, there was precedent for a more nuanced approach which focused on more than one narrative moment. Thus, the East Syrian,

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Aphrahat, regarded the washing of the disciples' feet as the origin of Christian baptism; until this moment, baptism performed by the disciples was 'for the repentance of sins', whereas from thence the mystery of burial and resurrection with Christ was disclosed to them. Prior to this though, the pattern for Christian baptism had been established by Christ in his own Baptism.⁸² Following this type of argumentation, a later Scholastic like Bonaventure, who had at his disposal an increasingly sophisticated technical vocabulary, attempted to unite the various opinions of his predecessors; according to the 'matter' of the sacrament, baptism was instituted when Christ was baptised in water; according its 'form', when 'he rose from the dead and pronounced its trinitarian formula; according to the effect, when he suffered, for it received its power from the passion; and according to its purpose when, to Nicodemus, he described both its necessity and its benefit.⁸³

This median position of the later scholastics demonstrates the tension between two theological strategies. One endeavours to show the perfection of the incarnation as a fulfilment of Old Testament typology in every mention of water in the New Testament. The other strategy underlines the Christian's participation in one particular moment of the incarnation. This sort of tension has contributed to a questioning of the category of institution within contemporary theology. For instance, it has been characterised as a product of a 'false rationality', a juridical notion which has produced a 'doctrinaire domination' over the Church's rites.⁸⁴ This may be understandable from some perspectives but it may also be argued that what is required is re-interpretation rather than complete demise.

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This is because, first of all, the category of institution does have a reputable theological content. Institution is about securing the boundaries of certain modes of divine action; it may be seen as the rejection of a type of 'pansacramentalism' where if every ritual the Church performs is a sacrament then effectively none of them is.⁸⁵ If God may be demonstrated as the author of a sacrament, then it may not be regarded as arbitrary human invention and the central and necessary place accorded to it by the Church in the economy of salvation is securely grounded. An affirmation of divine guidance for the Church in the selection of a sacrament is, however, more far-reaching than this. For the Scholastic, divine institution was intimately linked with the efficacy of the sacrament in question. The institutor is the one who gives the sacrament strength and power. Conversely, since the power of a sacrament comes from God, only He can institute a sacrament and not the Church.⁸⁶ In the case of Aquinas, the logic of this position led directly to the case for Christian baptism being instituted at Christ's own Baptism. If the efficacy of a sacrament is derived from its institution then the institution of a sacrament occurs when it receives the necessary power enabling it to produce its effect. Following Augustine, Aquinas asserts that it was at Christ's Baptism that the waters were sanctified and received their power to wash away the sins of humanity.⁸⁷

Secondly, it is because a plausible re-interpretation of 'institution' has occurred in contemporary theology. This has emerged following a post-Reformation emphasis on the search for the verbal institution of a sacrament. The impetus behind this depended on the theologian's perspective. For the Reformer, the certainties of the scriptural text were the criteria against which to judge the

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legitimacy of the Catholic Church's sacramental system. For the Roman Catholic, this same criticism heightened the need for a defence of its self-understanding as a divinely sanctioned organisation which was appointed to mediate salvation; this could be achieved if the entirety of its sacramental life could be proven from scripture.⁸⁸ A typical pre-critical understanding of the institution of baptism was therefore based on the actual words of Jesus assumed to be faithfully reported by scripture. The texts that bore the weight of necessary evidence were Jesus' injunction to Nicodemus and the 'dominical command' given at the Ascension.

Soon however, textual criticism disallowed such a straight-forward appeal⁸⁹ and gave an impetus to a re-interpretation. In Protestant circles the dominical authority to baptise began to be found in an 'intention' rather than in the written words of a 'command'.⁹⁰ In Roman Catholic circles, the questions were addressed less towards individual rites and more towards the general concept of sacrament. Schillebeeckx argued that sacraments derive from Christ 'the primordial sacrament' and discussion of their nature must take place in the context of his sacramental relationship with the Church based on the incarnation; he concluded that although Christ specified the meaning of each sacrament, the manner in which his will was expressed varied and in fact may not actually be accessible for some.⁹¹ In contrast, Rahner commenced his theology of the sacraments from the phenomenology of the Church. Individual sacraments were the self-expression of the Church which is the 'primal and fundamental sacrament' and therefore the 'well-spring' of the individual sacraments. Sacraments are instituted by reflection on the paschal mystery; this includes the immediate institution by Christ himself but also the Church's discernment of

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which rites especially reflect Christ's will in the institution of the Church.⁹²

The work of modern Roman Catholic theology has therefore brought a re-orientation to the notion of institution. It is no longer the search for an historical event, intention or verbal formula which is necessary for the efficacy of the sacrament. Rather, the question of a sacrament's meaning and reflective reception by the Church is given priority. L G Walsh expressed the importance of this:

contemporary theology sees the question of divine origin as bearing on the signification of the rite before it bears on the ritual words and elements.Christ is seen to institute a sacrament as much by what he was and did, and by the imagery and historical tradition in which his life was expressed, as by commands he gave to perform certain rites.⁹³

This re-orientation of 'institution', one that accepts it as a reputable theological concept and re-interprets it in the light of the modern sacramental categories, is congenial to baptism perceived from the perspective of ritual. The hinge is the importance of narrative, simply because it is in the four Gospels that the being and acts of Jesus Christ are expressed in a particular historical tradition and genre of imagery. The Gospel narratives are not reports of an historical event, but constitute diverse receptions of that event, and therefore a breadth of meanings, by the Church.⁹⁴ The meaning of an event in the incarnation is determined by its narrative setting, something that was instinctive to the North African theologians, the iconographers of the medieval Church, and the later Scholastics, all cited earlier. Part of that instinct was that the story of Jesus, interpreted in a certain way, provided the authority for the Church's continuing baptismal practice. In the phraseology of F Schüssler

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Fiorenza, 'divine institution is a hermeneutical concept'; a sacrament is instituted when it 'mirrors the relation between Jesus and the Church as normatively described in the New Testament'.⁹⁵

How it is that the story of Jesus institutes baptism, yielding up its chartering force in Christian ritual, is the task for the remainder of the chapter. Prior to that, it has been noted already that the notion of institution often led to a focus on one particular narrative episode from the Gospels - the Baptism of Jesus. Eminent theologians since have also attributed it a prominent place in the origin of Christian baptism.⁹⁶ The question requires addressing, however, whether this is a plausible instinct: is there anything intrinsic to this particular moment in Jesus' life which suggests baptismal 'institution' in the way that others do not?

In addition to the strong theological precedent, there are two reasons for accepting the Baptism of Jesus as the origin of Christian baptism. The first reason is an historical one. Attempts to find the origin of Christian baptism in the ritual of Jewish proselyte baptism have faltered on the recognition that the clearest and earliest references to an initiatory, immersion ceremony are to be found in the last decade of the first century.⁹⁷ Equally, attempts to find its origin in the Hellenistic mystery religions have been less than conclusive.⁹⁸ In contrast the baptism of John is increasingly regarded as the locus for the origin of Christian baptism.⁹⁹ The Baptism of Jesus is an intersection of John's baptism and the incarnation and it therefore was an identification by Jesus with the Baptist's movement and theological outlook.

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John's baptism probably had its own twofold origin: in the practice of Levitical ablutions which were growing in popularity during the first century, particularly amongst groups like the pharisees and the Qumran community; and also in the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition which looked forward to a future divine intervention and understood cleansing from defilement in ethical terms. The most convincing scenario of development is that of 'an unbroken continuity from the baptism of John through the baptism associated with the activity of Jesus, to the baptism practised by the early Christians'.¹⁰⁰ This explains the apparent lack of a specifically Christian rite at Pentecost and also the Apostles' explanation of baptism which, although it adds new elements, shows the same basic structure of the forgiveness of sins as does John's baptism.¹⁰¹ The developmental process continues through the New Testament and beyond, an important point to which attention will be directed later.

The second reason is of an intuitive nature. It aligns the propensity of myth to give a narrative account of origins with the understanding that baptism also is concerned with origins. In due course I shall suggest that the story of Jesus' Baptism is read as an eschatological new creation in continuity with the Genesis creation narratives. Understood thus, the narrative of the ritual enactment of Jesus' Baptism might then be expected to be the narrative that describes the origin of the sacrament which transforms humanity.

This intuition is one which is mediated by the work of Eliade who has exploited the connection between myth and its ritual performance, especially in his advocacy of an intrinsic connection between myths of origin and cosmogonic myths.¹⁰² A typical mythological pattern would be

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that the origin myth of a rite commences with or is preceded by an outline of the cosmogony which it completes or continues. The dependence of an origin myth on a cosmogonic one is explained by the fact that they both deal with beginnings. The origin myth deals with the origin of a particular ritual or institution, but the cosmogony is the 'absolute beginning'; in other words, it is a re-establishment of the creation of the world, the event that is presupposed in any subsequent beginning.¹⁰³

Appreciation of Eliade's ontology of archaic humanity takes this further. The traditional society has a desire to recover the primeval time since only this can guarantee the renewal of the cosmos which is portrayed in any origin myth. It is in the suggestion that the myth of the original creation functions as a model for subsequent creations which are the subject of further myths that Eliade assists the argument. To show how this suggestion is relevant it is necessary to note Eliade's characterisation of the Christian liturgy:

the religious experience of the Christian is based upon an imitation of the Christ as exemplary pattern, upon the liturgical repetition of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord and upon the contemporaneity of the Christian with illud tempus which begins with the Nativity at Bethlehem and ends, provisionally, with the Ascension.¹⁰⁴

Distinguishing between the notion of the primordial 'Great Time' of the archaic world and that of Christianity - the historical events of the incarnation, which become the sacred time emerging out of the profane time in the liturgy - allows Eliade to say that Christianity maintains a 'spiritual horizon' in common with archaic societies. To address the origin of Christian baptism within the parameters of Eliade's horizon focuses attention on the search for a possible

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exemplary pattern. If the criterion is that Christian liturgy is the imitation of a divine model or archetype then it is reasonable to suppose that this lies in an original ritual action.

Although the lines of contact can at this point only be indicated, Eliade's mediation suggests that baptism has its exemplary pattern in the ritual act of a divine personage which is itself rooted in cosmogonic mythology. Therefore the suggestion is that in Jesus' Baptism, something that indicates a renewal of the origin of the world, is found the origin of Christian Baptism.

3 Recent Theological Deployment of Jesus' Baptism

Theological precedent, historical-critical studies and the nature of myth therefore converge in their suggestion that the story Jesus' Baptism merits further attention as a sociological charter for the ritual of Christian baptism. In modern and contemporary theology there has been some recognition of the story of Jesus' Baptism as the origin of Christian baptism. Three contributions in particular, those from Lampe, Barth and Osborne, stand out. An evaluation of each will enable the advantages of the ritual perspective on baptism to be indicated by revealing difficulties with each theological appropriation of the Gospel narratives. This section, therefore, will not only continue the justification of a ritual approach but it will also prepare the ground for the following section's narrative reading of the Baptism.

3.1 Suffering Servant Christology: Lampe

Lampe argued that Christian baptism is the 're-presentation' of Jesus' Baptism. Within the range of his argument, he employs it to

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assert that through the ceremony of Christian baptism, and not through any subsidiary rite such as a physical anointing, the believer receives the Spirit of Christ and membership of his body. Recognising that the Baptism of Jesus was a neglected feature in baptismal theology he sums up its import:

the Baptism of Jesus was proleptic, signifying and summing up in a single action the entire mission and saving work of the Servant-Messiah, which was to be unfolded and revealed gradually in the course of His life, death, resurrection and ascension.¹⁰⁵

Just as Jesus' Baptism proleptically embraced his entire ministry, so the baptism of the Christian is proleptic in its signification and summing up in one action 'all the consequences of their faith-union with Christ'. Such consequences are 'gradually unfolded' during human life and only fully realised at the Parousia.

Lampe addressed the theological relationship between baptism and confirmation, and especially the role of the Holy Spirit in initiation. His deployment of Jesus' Baptism was part of his argument to secure the doctrine of pneumatic sealing within baptism itself. Speaking of a second century identification of the ritual of baptism with the sealing of the Spirit, he commented on the natural equation that was made:

the seal was received by the believer in baptism because his baptism re-enacted Christ's own Baptism, so that he was enabled to participate symbolically in the Spirit's descent at the Jordan, and, through the mediation of the Son of God, to hear, as it were, the divine declaration of his own adoptive sonship.¹⁰⁶

In the ritual perspective it is Lampe's emphasis on the proleptic nature of baptism which is open to criticism. To put this sharply, when pursued too far, a proleptic emphasis can denigrate the reality

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of the Baptismal event. There is evidence of this in Lampe's treatment of the so-called Marcan and Lukan baptisma sayings, where Jesus describes his death in terms of a baptism.¹⁰⁷ Lampe takes these to mean that Jesus looks forward to his death which will be a fulfilment of that which was symbolised in his Baptism. The Baptism of the Servant has been undertaken in a figurative sense, but requires manifestation and fulfilment in the greater event at Calvary.¹⁰⁸ This stands in contrast to Lampe's claim that the Baptism of Jesus is a summing up of the whole of the incarnation. If Christ's baptism is to be seen as an embrace of the complete divine re-creative and redemptive work, then baptisma may preferably be regarded as a metaphorical means of understanding the death of Christ rather than a concept which is from now on to be understood in terms of death only. In this way the Baptism of Jesus remains a real, concrete, decisive and central ritual event with its own significance, rather than being merely illustrative of a future event and the reality of the ritual moment is safeguarded.

Closely related to this ritual point is one which concerns Lampe's interpretation of the Gospel narratives, particularly the dominance he gives to the concept of the Isaianic suffering servant. It is through the concept of suffering servanthood that Jesus' divine Sonship and vocation to Messiahship is worked out. Thus the Matthean justification for the Baptism is interpreted as an allusion to a vicarious, sin-bearing function which the Son-Messiah will fulfil. Since this took place not at the Jordan but at the crucifixion, it is therefore again apparent that the Baptism becomes essentially a prefiguration of Calvary.

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Formative to Lampe's argument is Cullmann's influential exegesis of Christ's Baptism, which eschewed any relationship between the declaration from heaven and the theme of messianic kingship and therefore gave a theological hegemony to the Isaianic servant songs.¹⁰⁹ Other exegetical decisions follow this. The baptisma sayings are regarded as an exclusive link between the ritual Baptism and Jesus' death. Problems therefore arise because the Baptism becomes solely a matter of Jesus' own dedication to his death, and is eventually elided as Christian baptism becomes regarded as a sharing in Jesus 'general' baptism, that is his death. Also, the Matthean reason for Jesus' Baptism, 'to fulfil all righteousness', was interpreted in terms of the Servant's achievement of the forgiveness of sins.¹¹⁰ The strictures of Cullmann's, and therefore Lampe's, exegesis will be apparent in the narrative reading proposed below.

3.2 The Unique Sacramentality of Christ: Barth

In his assertion of the basis of Christian baptism, Barth both extends and eschews the Matthean dominical command. It does not stand alone, but refers back to the history of Jesus Christ; it is an 'explication and proclamation' of the institution of baptism effected in Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan, from which the command to baptise itself derived.¹¹¹ A central theme of the Baptism is the essential freedom of an obedient action: in freedom Jesus submitted himself to the will of God, to an identification with a humanity which was under the judgement of God, and to a divine service which he alone could achieve as representative of both God and humanity.¹¹²

In one of his most incisive comments on Jesus' Baptism Barth links word and action together, and gives expression to the idea, following

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suggestions of Augustine and Luther, of the unique sacramentality of Jesus Christ:

the baptism of Jesus was, in a typical and decisive way for His whole history, the first and basic act of His self-proclamation as the Mediator between God and men. In it the ministry of reconciling the world to God began to take place, and to do so indeed as His own history. In it he came forward as the One in whose person and work all that John had announced - the kingdom, judgement and forgiveness of God. - was now to take place. In it, it began to do so.¹¹³

In his Baptism therefore, there is both an action and a proclamation by Jesus. However, Barth also speaks, in a somewhat uncomfortable vein, of the Baptism as an 'aetiological "cult-legend" which creatively indicates the origin of Christian baptism'.¹¹⁴ The act of Jesus' baptism has a force; it is the 'exemplary and imperative baptismal event'¹¹⁵ that provides 'a motivation as a command' for all Christians to be baptised.¹¹⁶

Barth does not appear to use the phrase imitatio Christi and there is a sense in which Christian baptism finds its basis in Jesus' Baptism, but only to a certain degree. Christian baptism finds its model in Christ's baptism only in the sense that it is the first step of free obedience in the Christian life, the human response to God's initial, prior act of salvation, and a response that provides within itself the model for subsequent Christian life which is lived under this sign.¹¹⁷ The action of God and the action of the individual in baptism, are to be maintained in a differentiated unity, but there is no equivocation that even though the human response is 'absolutely indispensable' it is a secondary work to the 'primary divine foundation'.¹¹⁸ Hence, the baptism with Spirit is separate from the baptism with water, in a way in which differs from Christ's Baptism:

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for here baptism with the Holy Ghost, which may be regarded as the epitome of the divine change effected on a man, meets baptism with water, which represents here the first concrete step of the human decision which follows and corresponds to the divine change.¹¹⁹

As influential as Barth's theology of baptism has been there are two lines of criticism to be made. First of all, there is a ritual point. In the final fragment of the Church Dogmatics there is the culmination of an increasing rejection of 'sacramentalism', which leads Barth to an understanding of baptism which does not fit easily with his ecclesiology. On the one hand Barth can speak of the Church as the 'earthly-historical form of Christ's presence' between the events of the incarnation and the parousia, yet there is a reduction of the Church's activity in the sacraments to the human ethical one of obedience to the divine command.¹²⁰ Baptism in ritual perspective, which is at once purposive and assertive, and which is coupled with an understanding of divine agency through human action, renders Barth's conception of the baptismal act problematic.

Secondly, there is an issue concerning Barth's use of the Baptism narratives, symptomatic of which is his understanding of the symbol of water in Christian baptism. Water is employed only because of its formal connection with the human action of bodily washing. To attempt to see connections between the baptismal water and themes of the creation is said to be 'an unpromising and far too arbitrary enterprise from the stand-point of the New Testament'.¹²¹ Barth does not entirely eschew creation or rebirth imagery though: the bifurcation between water and Spirit baptism allows it to cluster around the latter. It is hardly surprising, then, that the exposition of Jesus' Baptism in Barth's account is devoid of any mention of the

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theme of divine creation, such is the controlling hermeneutic from his doctrine of Christian baptism. Again, the short-comings here will become apparent in the exegesis offered below.

3.3 The Primordial Sacramentality of Christ: Osborne

Osborne's presentation of Christian baptism is one of the most fruitful of recent years and will repay close attention. What needs to be noted first of all are his methodological steps and then the actual content of his theology.

Osborne's initial proposition is the acceptance of the primordial sacramentality of Jesus in his 'humanness' and the derived sacramentality of the Church and its sacraments; Christian baptism is only a sacrament because Jesus and the Church are sacraments. Also, Osborne reinterprets the suggestion that in studies of Christian initiation Spirit data should take precedence, in a governing sense, over water data; since the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, then Jesus as the baptised one is primary in baptismal theology and must govern whatever is said about Christian baptism.

A reading of scriptural references from the Gospels to the New Testament's latest writings demonstrates the centrality of Jesus for baptismal reflection. In the Gospels, the narratives of Jesus' Baptism are concerned with His identity. The post-resurrection viewpoint of the writers makes this understandable:

the baptism of Jesus by John is not portrayed as a baptism of John applied to Jesus, hence remission of sins, but as a baptism of Jesus, the main focus, which profoundly transforms the very meaning of baptism into the acceptance by God through the Spirit.¹²²

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Osborne then proposes his theology of baptism which commences with the Baptism of Christ and particularly with its Marcan version. The first sentence of the Gospel is juxtaposed with the opening of the Fourth Gospel and the first verse of Genesis. 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ' connotes an absolute beginning and therefore a creation. In Mark the address from heaven is directed personally towards Jesus: 'You are my Son, the Beloved' provides an existential moment in which humanity is confronted with the 'shock of non-being'. In terms of beginnings, it is the presence of the divine in Jesus which 'establishes the very beginning of what Jesus is about'.¹²³ Therefore Mark is suggesting that at the origin of Jesus is the presence of God, and in this presence of God in Christ is the origin of salvation, and beyond this source there is no other.

Christian baptism, at the heart of which is 'the presence of God to an individual', is modelled on Jesus' Baptism:

of all men and women, no one, and so we believe in our Christian faith, has ever been more intimately united to the presence of God than the humanness of Jesus, and it is this anointing of God's presence in and through the humanness of Jesus, it is this thorough washing of the humanness of Jesus, that symbolically in his own baptism on the one hand, but in the reality of his being, on the other, indicates the presence of God so immensely in the humanness of Jesus.¹²⁴

As 'baptism' into God's own self, Jesus' Baptism has an 'unreasonableness' and cannot be rationalised since it is an absolute beginning; primordially, Jesus' Baptism is the communication of the Spirit in order that Jesus can begin to be. Thus from this perspective baptism is revolutionised. To be in the presence of Jesus is to be in the presence of the baptised. Jesus is the original sacrament, the one from whom Christian baptism is derived; the creedal statement 'we

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believe in one baptism' thus indicates that 'there is radically only one baptism, the Lord himself as the baptized'.

Osborne elaborates further. Baptism is to be regarded as a prayer event which responds to the self-Gift of God through Christ. A contemporary stress on baptism as initiation requires correction and key to this realignment is the doctrine of creation. The doctrine of continuing creation establishes the relationship that God has with an individual from birth through the events of conception and delivery. Baptism makes explicit the reasons for God's creative activity, the basic predestination of humanity to eternal life. Baptism celebrates what God has done and continues to do, the eschatological 'now and not yet' dimensions of God's salvific activity. However, if baptism celebrates it also transforms, and this has two aspects - the corporate and the individual. There is a joining together of the baptisand and the visible community of the Church, and God makes himself more present to the initiate.

Like the evaluations of Lampe and Barth, the difficulties with Osborne's account may be focused in two areas. In the first place, the criticism which comes from the ritual perspective is evident in his presupposition of the sacramentality of Jesus in his humanness. Although the notion of Jesus Christ as primordial sacrament has been well developed and encapsulates within it something intrinsic to sacramental theology, it is by no means universally accepted. Even in Roman Catholic theology there remains an objection to the label of 'sacrament' being employed in this context. Ganoczy, for instance, is decisive when he remarks that the designation of Christ as the 'original sacrament' is a confusion of the cultic with 'supra-cultic



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reality' and runs the risk of approaching the cultic with a proximity that prevents the very establishment of the cult; the danger is that, 'the glorified Christ be falsely stylized according to the model of the rite'.¹²⁵ In Protestant theology, there is acceptance of the underlying sacramental structure of the incarnation but an unwillingness to follow the terminological lead set by Roman Catholics. For instance, there is a strong preference for continuing to regard Christ as the 'author' of the sacraments and the Church as the 'bearer' of the sacraments¹²⁶, and this is related to the potential danger of a uniform labelling of Christ and the Church as sacraments obscuring the vital distinction between Christ as head of his body and the members of the body.¹²⁷

Such a criticism is serious because it results in an awkwardness to Osborne's Christology. This comes about in the way that Jesus' Baptism is presented as a 'sacrament' of the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father. Symptomatic of this are phrases such as 'absolute beginning' and 'it is the presence of the divine in Jesus, that establishes the very beginning of what Jesus is all about'. Comments that Jesus' Baptism is fundamentally unreasonable emerges from the notion that 'we must not ask questions behind a beginning; rather, we begin with the beginning'. What is lacking in Osborne's treatment is a proper relationship and distinction between the different beginnings in the trajectory of the eternally begotten Logos. A ritual perspective avoids this confusion of Christological motifs by maintaining the analogical tension between the person of Christ and the notion of sacrament.

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The second criticism is a narrative one. Although Osborne convincingly introduces creation imagery, it lies underdeveloped and ultimately unintegrated with what he regards as the climax of the Pauline development, baptism into the death of Christ. This is a consequence of attempting a re-styling of baptismal theology within the paschally oriented liturgical framework of the sacraments of initiation. It is perhaps his insistence that Spirit-data be given priority over water-data which leads him to neglect the symbolic qualities of water, particularly in the Johannine literature, which is dealt with only on a cursory basis. The weakness which this represents is potentially overcome not only in the next section but also in the ritual perspective's attention to both symbol and metaphor.

The theologies of Lampe, Barth and Osborne contain elements which cohere with the ritual approach to Christian baptism being developed here. Particularly, in Lampe there is the profound sense that Jesus' Baptism is re-presented in Christian baptism and encapsulates within it the full scope of the incarnation. There is appreciation, especially in Barth, of the chartering characteristics of the Baptism story; and, in Osborne, there is a recognition of the importance of a baptismal doctrine of creation. Nevertheless, each theology carries with it a difficulty which becomes apparent from the ritual perspective that is being developed: respectively, there is a tendency to remove the focus from the ritual moment, an evasion of the inevitable ritual structure of baptism and a confusion of Christological and cultic categories. Equally, in each treatment there were weaknesses in the appropriation of the biblical narratives: again respectively, there is an over-emphasis on suffering servanthood to the exclusion of other Christological motifs, a neglect of creation

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imagery in the interpretation of Jesus' Baptism and a tendency to leave the doctrine of creation stranded from other baptismal metaphors.

The agenda for the remainder of this chapter is therefore set. What is the perspective on the Baptism of Jesus as the foundation for Christian baptism that the ritual approach offers? Given the coordination that has been demonstrated between the anthropological category of myth and the more recognisably theological category of narrative the suggestion is simply that the story of Jesus' Baptism may be understood as chartering Christian baptism. It was shown that a myth may yield up its chartering force in three particular ways. In turn, each of these will be used to expound this suggestion in some detail.

4 The Story of Jesus' Baptism as the Charter for Christian Baptism.

The first way in which a myth might yield up its chartering force towards its associated ritual is by providing a link with the past. This suggests that the story of Jesus' Baptism provides the link between Christian baptism and its archetypal predecessor. The task of this section is to explore the most appropriate understanding of the story of Jesus' Baptism. However, there is a prior question that arises from the inherently ambiguous proposition found in the notion of the 'story of Jesus'. There is ambiguity because it may refer either to the events of the incarnation, conceived of as independent of their narrative structure, or to the narration of those events. It turns out, however, that the indeterminacy of the term 'story' has an important implication, which is related to soteriology.

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In an helpful essay, M Root has described the implications of what he terms 'the narrative structures of soteriology'. He argues that the presupposition of Christian soteriology is the story of Jesus which is decisive in the movement of the human condition from deprivation to redemption. The ambiguity contained within the term 'the story of Jesus' is crucial for soteriology since:

neither simply the events nor simply their narrations redeems. The events are redemptive as they grasp peoples and individuals through their depiction in narrative and ritual, Word and Sacrament.¹²⁸

Root's reflections enable the notion of 'the story of Jesus' to be clarified and for a distinction to be made between the historical event which is the subject of the Gospel narratives and the narratives in which the archetypal event is narrated. Thus, to assert that the story of Jesus' Baptism charters Christian baptism because it provides a link with the past involves a demarcation between the event and its narrative depiction. The ambiguity allows both for the inseparability of the event and the narrative and for them to be treated distinctly.

4.1 The Archetypal Event which is Narrated

The Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, as an historical occurrence, is secure. The difficulties that its interpretation has brought to the Church's understandings of Jesus' sinlessness, uniqueness and pre-existence indicates the extent to which the event was embedded in Christianity's origins. The historical matrix into which Jesus presented himself may be understood in the ritual terms developed in the previous chapter with the assistance of the recent monograph on John the Baptist by R L Webb who draws on the full range of biblical and non-biblical sources.¹²⁹

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John's baptism was purposive. It was primarily a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. The close relationship between the water rite and forgiveness of sins and the parallel with the operation of the Jewish sacrificial system indicates that baptism was the channel through which God forgave the recipient's sins. Sin in Jewish culture produced impurity and, given the background of purificatory water-rites from which John's baptism emerged, the evidence suggests that the recipient received purification from uncleanness originating in moral contagion. John's baptism also was initiation into the true Israel. It served to distinguish the repentant from the unrepentant and, since repentance for a Jew was associated with the renewal of the covenant and the formation of a remnant faithful to Yahweh, the former had a corporate identity.

John's baptism was also assertive. It expressed the personal attitude of 'conversionary repentance' understood as a turning from sin and towards God, as opposed to what might be typified as a 'penitential repentance' which focused on the feelings of remorse associated with personal contrition; as Webb puts it, John's baptism was a 'baptismally-expressed repentance'. Integral to it was the announcement of an expected figure who would exercise a superior Spirit-baptising ministry¹³⁰; as a transformation it therefore foreshadowed and prepared for the completion of the process which had already begun. There were implications for the established religion; by offering the forgiveness of sins John offered an alternative means of reconciliation with God and, it is possible, a protest against the centrality of the Israelite cult. Lastly, there was a symbolic dimension. The living waters of the Jordan river indicated the

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severity of personal uncleanness and would have produced expectations of a revelational event.¹³¹ The wilderness location of John's baptism would have evoked for the recipients the possibility of the New Exodus and conquest of the promised land of the end-times.¹³²

This was the historical ritual context in which the Evangelists located Jesus' encounter with, and baptism by, John. As a ritual event it may also be elucidated by employing the categories of purpose and assertion. The Baptism of Jesus was an irreversible step, marking the beginning of his 'public history'.¹³³ Like all those who received John's baptism, Jesus underwent a transformatory ritual which altered his social status. He became a member of the New Israel, an identification with those who understood themselves to be subject to the judgement of God and saw the need for a conversionary repentance in the light of an expected figure who would baptise with the Spirit. The baptism of John was a transformatory operation which permanently altered Jesus' classificatory matrix of social relations and therefore the rôle categories in society which he would be expected to fulfil. In this lies the tension between Jesus' assimilation to John and his ministry and his distinction from it, and yet it is the Baptism of Jesus that is the decisive factor in the difference between Jesus and John in terms of their proclamation.¹³⁴

Like all others baptised by John, Jesus had a pattern of reality presented to him through the ritual which acted as a determining factor throughout his subsequent life. Unlike other baptisands Jesus was presented with a particular intensity of experience; he may have shared with other baptisands in social terms, but he was presented with his own identity into which he was to develop. To penetrate the

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existential aspect of the Baptism, recourse must be made to its assertive dimension. At this point, attention is directed towards its narration.

4.2 The Narration of the Archetypal Event

In its assertive dimension the Baptism of Jesus becomes a unique event. As such it had a diverse reception among the communities of the first century Church. Later Gregory of Nyssa argued that the narrations of the Baptism in the synoptic Gospels each signified something particular about Christian baptism.¹³⁵ This is an emphasis which is consonant with the re-interpretation of 'institution' offered earlier which was concerned to emphasise its hermeneutical aspects and one which will be maintained in the following exposition of the assertive dimension of the Baptism. An interpretation will be suggested which works from the unifying features of the Baptismal narratives; later, their diversity, and that of the fourth Gospel, will be an important part of the legitimation of the symbols and metaphors of Christian baptism.

In this interpretation a foundational priority will be given to the Marcan account of the Baptism. This is because both Matthew and Luke show signs of a more considered, and therefore later, theological stance. Matthew demonstrates embarrassment with the conflict between Jesus' sinlessness and his submission to a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Luke may also show a reserve and he appears to have objectified Mark's account by describing the descent of the Spirit 'in bodily form, like a dove'.¹³⁶ It is Mark which has the most claim to preserve the original narrative which Matthew and Luke later modified. It is sustainable that at his Baptism Jesus experienced a decisive

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vision - even if it is accepted that the characterisation of its exact nature is problematic - and it is therefore probable that the personal form of the divine address found in Mark is indicative of this.¹³⁷ The narratives of the synoptic Gospels demonstrate a unanimity in their depiction of the three divine actions that occurred at the Baptism: the opening of the heavens, the descent of the Spirit and the voice from heaven.¹³⁸ These three divine actions will be used as an expository framework.

First of all, the splitting of the heavens indicates a background in apocalyptic dualism. The Marcan description of the tearing of the heavens as a violent event is rooted in the apocalyptic imagery found in Deutero-Isaiah.¹³⁹ The heavens and the earth are closed to each other; the people of Israel cannot experience God in an unmediated manner as they once did, and their rending is a sign of unusual grace. The Baptism is therefore portrayed as an 'apocalyptic theophany', the 'eschatological occurrence of the Spirit's advent'¹⁴⁰, a sign that God is answering the Isaian prayer that he would 'tear open the heavens and come down'. It is the breaking through of the heavenly into the earthly.¹⁴¹

The Isaian passage that Mark draws on is a plea for the gift of the Spirit¹⁴², and it is this, secondly, which is signified by the image of the dove in all three Synoptic Gospels. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was thought that there was no explanation for any symbolism it contained. In mid-century it was noted that the Rabbinic literature could regard the dove as a sign of the Spirit and, where it does, it does so in a highly suggestive manner by constructing links with the creation narrative. The Spirit of God was

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said to brood over the waters of creation in a way that could be compared to a dove brooding over her young.¹⁴³ Recently, the connection between the descent of the dove over Jesus and the creation narratives has been reaffirmed as the most likely interpretation out of a number of alternatives.¹⁴⁴

The interpretation of the descent of the Spirit cannot be separated from the third of the divine actions, the heavenly voice. Since the demise of the prophets, the Spirit had been denied to Israel who had to be content with the indirect communication of God in the bath qol, something often compared to the cry of a bird.¹⁴⁵ Thus Jesus, as the recipient not only of the Spirit in the form of a dove but also of the directly spoken word of God, was elevated into the category of a prophet. Equally, the symbolism of an intervening heavenly voice may follow the literary device employed in the Targum and indicate the divine solution to what was seen as a problematic event. Just as a heavenly voice provided the solution to Patriarchal dilemmas and mysteries, Jesus' submission to a baptism for repentance required justification.¹⁴⁶

The content of the voice from heaven - 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased' - conveys two primary allusions to the Old Testament. The one which Cullmann and his followers have made the dominant motif of the Baptism is certainly apparent, that of the elect, suffering servant. This is clinched by the way the Isaianic servant songs refer to God's chosen one, the one who delights God's soul and the one on whom the divine Spirit will be placed.¹⁴⁷ The second is that of a royal psalm: the opening words of the heavenly voice, 'You are my Son' would have referred the reader to Psalm 2

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which in inter-testamental Judaism was understood to be a prophecy of eschatological events. The psalm was interpreted in terms of a rebellion against God and his anointed one, the divine instrument, and defeat of the conspiring nations. There is great emphasis on the scale of the opposition to God and his Messiah, one that takes it beyond the human realm into a cosmic battle between divine and demonic powers. Amidst this, the theme of kinship is central. The earthly king represents the heavenly king, and their authority is inseparable. The context of the quotation is important: 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you' refers to an act of adoption by God of his representative on earth. But probably more than adoption is implied with the birthing metaphor suggesting a change of essence not merely of office.¹⁴⁸

When this evidence is placed alongside Jewish literature's close association of the Messiah with the gift of the Spirit the resources which Mark had to work with are now clear. However, in supplying the key opening phrase employed by the divine voice, J Marcus rightly observes that Psalm 2 is given a 'climactic' position in the Baptism narrative¹⁴⁹; its position is a prior one to the allusion to the suffering servant and this moderates its elision by Cullmann and his followers. For Marcus, the context of Psalm 2 in the Jewish inter-testamental period gives the key to Mark's appropriation of it. The way in which it was understood to have nuances of a cosmic battle implies that effective opposition to evil forces could only be brought about through the 'Son of God' whose sonship had more than adoptive or juridical credentials. Jesus was Son of God then in a way that transcended the Old Testament concept of royal sonship. Jesus shared God's power and being and yet was distinct from God in the way that

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heavenly and earthly kings are separate in Psalm 2.¹⁵⁰ Marcus sums up his findings by noting that in his narrative, Mark has brought together primordial time and eschatological time:

the heavens that have been shut up since the youth of humanity are reopened; the Spirit that hovered over the primeval waters once more descends to liberate the earth from the stranglehold of chaos; and a voice unheard for age upon age sounds forth, announcing a decision made long ago in the eternal counsel.the good pleasure of God, his delight in his creation, his life-giving conviction that 'it is very good', is reborn in the baptismal waters, rises from them in the person of Jesus, and goes out with him to embrace the world and do battle against the forces of negation that crush the hopes of humanity.¹⁵¹

Marcus' conclusions from the voice from heaven cohere with those of other biblical scholars¹⁵² and when coupled with the remaining allusions to the Old Testament - the representation of the Sonship of Israel called out of slavery in Egypt¹⁵³ and the echoing of the sacrifice of Isaac¹⁵⁴ - the reality of the Baptismal images which would have had an existential impact on Jesus, either at the moment of baptism or later, have been established.

As an 'overarching sacred story' this appropriation of the Gospel narratives brings an emphasis to Jesus' Baptism as an eschatological event whereby the Spirit calls into being the new creation. In comparison to the appropriations examined in the previous sections, it is exegetically advantageous because it resolves some of the theological difficulties which cluster around the Baptism. For instance, the questions about the sinlessness of Jesus are ameliorated by the fact that the narrative demonstrates a recognition of the difficulty through its introduction of the divine voice. The messianic qualities of Psalm 2 prevent the Christological difficulties so often associated with interpretations of the Baptism. In the Matthean reason

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for the Baptism, the righteousness of God comes to be regarded as the commencement of the Kingdom of God. As regards the recent tendency to confine the Baptism of Jesus to a prefiguration of his death and resurrection, there is now a broader picture in which to locate the sin-bearing death of Christ.

Thus, to summarise this section: the suggestion that the story of Jesus' Baptism charters Christian baptism by linking contemporary ritual practice with the past is plausible. The story of Jesus' Baptism contains within it both the event itself and the narratives of that event. It allows the 'mundane' narratives to be read as contributing to an overarching 'sacred' story. In Christian baptism the story of Jesus is appropriated in summary form and establishes links between the Baptism itself, its narratives and contemporary liturgical practice. While this has been established, how the story of Jesus' Baptism is heard and internalised by the ritual participants has been a primary occupation. The ritual perspective being pursued here suggests that Jesus' Baptism is heard as a ritual action which presents a definition of reality, one that is best perceived as an eschatological new creation.

From this point onwards, the distinction that does not separate the event and the narrative of Jesus' Baptism remains of importance. This is because the argument so far suggests that the story of Jesus' Baptism yields up its chartering force in respect of Christian baptism in two further ways. In Christian baptism there is an imitation of the archetypal event of Jesus' Baptism which is narrated in the Gospels; equally, the symbols and metaphors of baptism find their legitimation in the Gospel's narration of the same archetypal event.

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5 The Imitative-Repetition of Jesus' Baptism in Christian Baptism

The second of the anthropological means by which a myth might charter a ritual is through the provision of an imitative impulse. This suggests that the event of the Baptism of Jesus which is narrated in the Gospels provides an imitative impulse for Christian baptism.

The potential fruitfulness of such an approach is evident from the iconography of Jesus' Baptism which contains an expression of the imitative relationship. Portrayals of baptism in the early Church display the features of the Gospel narratives - the descent of the dove, the figure of the baptisand and that of a baptiser. The baptiser is inevitably of larger proportions than the recipient, normally portrayed naked, whose age and relative height varied widely.¹⁵⁵ Where it is clear that the Baptism of Jesus is intended, the relationship with the baptism of the Christian was often presumed to be such that motifs from the Church's liturgy could become part of the iconography.¹⁵⁶ The existence of this type of feedback into the depiction of the model is a consequence of an imitative relationship which draws together the original event and the liturgical rite. Support for this observation may indeed come from the Gospel narratives themselves; Bultmann claimed that they demonstrated an influence from the rite of baptism already practised by the emergent Church. Such a phenomenon, if correct, is only feasible if the imitative relationship is understood to be present in the first place.¹⁵⁷

However, understandings of the imitative relationship have not always contributed towards its clarification. An instance is found in

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the mystagogical lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem. He spoke of the nakedness of the baptismal candidate as an imitation of Christ naked on the cross and of the threefold immersion as a re-enactment of Christ's entombment. Cyril's emphasis is on the imitation of Christ by the individual baptismal candidate, an imitation that is said to be 'symbolic' or 'through the medium of an image'. This is where the difficulties begin for two interpreters of late fourth century mystagogy.¹⁵⁸

For H M Riley there is a problem in the transition that is being made from mystagogy to theology. Cyril wants to preserve the reality of the participation by the baptisand in the sufferings of Christ, but by insisting on their representation in the images of the baptism liturgy he begins to force the correlation between what is portrayed in symbol and a theological understanding. According to Riley, the logic of Cyril's approach ultimately led to the creation of subsidiary symbols which attempted to represent more accurately the historical event of the crucifixion.¹⁵⁹ A further difficulty is articulated by E Mazza. He draws attention to the limitations of theories of imitation or likeness which can 'over-emphasize otherness and difference'. He has concluded that imitation became incompatible with a sacramental theology that was concerning itself 'more with the immanence of the event in relation to the rite than with the transcendence of the event over the rite'.¹⁶⁰ This was in the interests of a sacramental realism, which was perceived to be required by faith, especially in the case of eucharistic theology.

Such critical comments enable a clarification of what the notion of imitation might suggest when it is used ritually. The imitative

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component of the rite cannot be coherently regarded as a symbolic representation of the mysteries of Christ, since this removes the primacy of the ministry of the word and therefore the emphasis on divine action through the rite.¹⁶¹ Although imitation in the patristic era was mostly applied to matters of interior spirituality, there was a strong sense that ritual imitation still had an important function. In the ritual sense the limitation of the theory of imitation becomes a positive benefit. In baptismal terms, it emphasises both the difference between the Baptism of Jesus and Christian baptism and, as a Platonic category, their ontological relationship.

The theological concept of imitation is most often found discussed within the framework of Christian mysticism or ethics. It is rarer to find it elaborated within the context of liturgical studies. Therefore in an exploration of this suggestion two tasks are necessary. First, to enquire further into the way the tradition has exploited the sense that Jesus' Baptism is imitated in Christian baptism, and secondly to suggest a contemporary appropriation of ritual imitation.

5.1 Ritual Imitation in Patristic and Medieval Baptism

It has already been noted that there was an inescapable, even if problematic, recognition that baptism is a ritual imitation of Jesus' Baptism. The suggestion that in baptism there is a ritual imitation of the Baptism of Jesus is facilitated if there is wider evidence that this has been either explicitly envisaged or implicitly assumed in the ritual context. This section will review the evidence from both patristic and medieval periods.

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In the Eastern Church there is evidence of a generous theological acceptance of the Baptism as the source of Christian baptism, one which shares in the confidence demonstrated by the Marcan narrative. Research by G Winkler, widely accepted as authoritative, has argued that the earliest Eastern liturgies took the Jordan event as their model for Christian baptism. Through an investigation of the terminology of the oil used for anointing, she concludes that the decisive evidence lies in the messianic character of the pre-baptismal anointings in the oldest Syriac documents. In the liturgies of the Greek-speaking Mediterranean this anointing gradually developed a cathartic and apotropaic nature. However, even when this evolution was taking place and baptism was becoming estranged from its original theological grounding, the more dominant purificatory tone did not entirely obscure the older imitative understanding.¹⁶² So in the fourth century, Chrysostom could still understand the dove at the Baptism to teach the Church of the pneumatic characteristics of baptism. Theodore could argue that Jesus' Baptism presented a figure of the baptism which the Christian undergoes by means of grace;¹⁶³ and Gregory of Nyssa could suggest that a Christian receives baptism from the Church, 'in imitation of our Lord and teacher and guide'.¹⁶⁴

In contrast, the Western Church has demonstrated a greater reserve over the deployment of Jesus' Baptism; the Matthean tradition of responding primarily to the theological difficulties it presents has normally been emphasised. Therefore, Augustine suggested that Jesus was baptised in order to demonstrate his exemplary humility, and stressed that, 'baptism found nothing in him to wash away, just as death found nothing to punish'.¹⁶⁵ Hence Jesus took on his Baptism not out of any necessity, but as a merciful action which was part of a

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preordained strategy to solve the problems of sin in the world. Although Augustine found no necessity for the Baptism he does give two tentative reasons why it is a pattern for Christian baptism. Firstly, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the inner connection between the Baptism of Jesus and the baptism of the believer who, believing in Christ 'is reborn by that same Spirit, of whom Christ was born, needing not to be reborn'.¹⁶⁶ In this case the heavenly voice, 'today have I begotten you' refers to an eternal 'today' and points back to the eternal generation of the Son. Secondly, the Baptism declares the unity of water and word to the Church: the Baptism of Jesus is 'the bath of water in the Word. Take away the water, there is no baptism. Take away the Word; there is no baptism'.¹⁶⁷

Thus, if Augustine stressed the ethical imitation of Christ's humility, he still accepted the Baptism as the pattern for Christian baptism but was uneasy at developing the notion too far. However, there are signs that the Western Church did accept the imitative dimension aspect of Christ's baptism at a ritual level. The evidence for this is found in the early Church's iconography. Not only did this iconography presume the imitative relation but there were points where it was made explicit.

One of these points has been investigated by A J Wharton who has given a telling exposition of the iconography of the late fourth and fifth century Baptistries at Ravenna. She argues that the link with the church at Milan was strong and that of all the baptismal liturgies available, none was better known than the rites used by Ambrose who asserted that the Baptism of Jesus was the pattern for Christian baptism.¹⁶⁸

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Wharton concludes that upon entry to the Neonian baptistry the congregation would have been confronted with a 'triple-zoned' mosaic covering the domed ceiling. The central roundel portrays John baptising Jesus by affusion, oriented towards the body of the congregation and therefore the initiates, indicating the model for baptism. The second zone is decorated with a procession of Apostles, each bearing a crown and led by St Peter and St Paul; the crowns signify the divine gifts which are mediated through the ministry of the Apostles and their successors, commissioned by the risen Christ to fulfil such a rôle. The third zone has alternating thrones and altars, the signs of the authority of the bishop and a representation of the Church into which the neophyte would have been entering. The ordering of the images conveys what detailed exegesis could not; they were 'images that intervened through the action they represented'¹⁶⁹, decisively presenting the origin, the transmission and the effect of baptism to the initiate.

In northern Italy during the post-Constantinian era, when the bishop enjoyed political significance as the representative of his congregation, the ritual of baptism mediated the tension inherent in the bishop's power which was derived from the worshipping congregation which was also the recipient of its benefits. The 'participatory potency' of the image of the Baptism of Christ would have expressed the bishop's authority to incorporate new members of the Church. In Wharton's words:

the central third of the roundel is shared by Christ and John, who are rendered not as unchanging emblems, but as figures interacting within a space created for them by subsidiary elements. Illusionistic devices complement the intention: the audience is visually engaged not by one or the other figure,

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but by their synergy. The formal organisation of the representation directs the baptizand's attention to the liturgical performance. The initiate must acknowledge the importance of the role of the initiator, that is, the bishop.the bishop is identified with the Baptist in the prototypical enactment of the ritual.¹⁷⁰

Later iconography of the Baptism in the West gradually lost its mimetic dimension and became the depiction of the revelation of the Trinity.¹⁷¹ This was indicative of a preferred emphasis on the interior, spiritual and non-ritual aspects of the 'imitatio Christi'. It is interesting that although Ambrose shared this preference, the ritual setting provides the evidence that the exterior and liturgical dimensions to imitation were also at work even if it was communicated iconographically rather than verbally articulated.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries a significant change occurred in the doctrine of the imitation of Christ, with a growing emphasis on the imitation of his humanity. As G Constable has argued, this is the context for an emerging desire to imitate Christ's body, an emphasis which produced an increasingly ardent concentration on the earthly life of Jesus. In what is termed the 'mysticism of the historical event', attempts were made to personalise the full scope of Christ's human nature in a movement towards assimilation or identification with the incarnation. Out of systematic meditation on Jesus' earthly life emerged a devotion to the child-Christ which by the mid-twelfth century had become widespread.¹⁷² Theologians of the thirteenth century who nevertheless maintained an overall framework of divinisation continued to stressed the ideal of the imitation of the Christ's humanity. For Aquinas, this included not only the appropriation of the inner qualities of Jesus but also the external actions, including of course his sufferings. The Pauline injunction,

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'be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' indicated the incarnation as the norm for all human beings, through successive imitation, as those who imitated Christ became the examples for others. Thus, Aquinas could argue, in his Baptism Christ 'was set before men as an example to all'.¹⁷³

There is evidence to suppose that this injunction was taken seriously in its ritual aspect, at least in regard to the imitative nature of the baptism of adults. Hence the iconography of Jesus' Baptism on medieval fonts could depict Christ in the form of a contemporary male and the baptiser wearing the ritual dress of the medieval priest.¹⁷⁴ Equally, where the figure of Jesus is a diminutive, even childlike figure, this shows the imitative interplay between Christ and the newly-born status of the neophyte.¹⁷⁵

However, there is also evidence that this new emphasis on the imitation of Christ's humanity, producing an increased devotion to the child-Christ, allowed the baptism of infants to be understood more explicitly as a ritual imitation of Christ's exemplary Baptism, something mediated by the iconography of the bath of the infant Jesus.

Evidence for this emerges from a medieval iconographical representation. A recently discovered capital in a late twelfth century Spanish cloister not only portrays Jesus as a beardless youth but also situates his Baptism in a 'footed' font which is being filled from the side by an urn of water. In order to explain the deviation of this depiction from the more traditional formula of an adult Jesus being baptised in the Jordan river P A Patton has argued the plausible

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solution that the iconography depends upon a dialogical relationship between images of the bath of the infant Jesus and his Baptism.¹⁷⁶

The exact origin of the first bath of Jesus is open to discussion, although it is clear that the earliest artistic depictions date back to the seventh century.¹⁷⁷ In the East it became a standard component of the Nativity Icon and in the West it was found in a quarter of all nativity scenes by the twelfth century. Its components include a young-looking Jesus, the pouring of an urn of water and a font-like basin, and in the Spanish image all these have been incorporated. Patton proposes that the interaction with images of the Baptism took place independently in three distinct geographical families of bath/Baptism iconography - based around the Spanish peninsular, Anglo-Saxon territory and Sweden. It is a dialogical interaction because not only is the depiction of the Baptism influenced by the bath image, but the latter can on occasion incorporate themes from the Baptism such as the dove. According to Patton's arguments, and they are persuasive, the three independent developments of the dialectical relationship testifies to the essence of the inspiration that lay behind the new designs. Such inspiration derived, she suggests, from both a pictorial typology based on the visual similarity between the bath in traditional iconography and the conventional form of baptism, and an ideological typology that bound them together in both popular and theological traditions.

However, the ideological typology involved in the relationship is more complex than Patton acknowledges since it actually includes three poles and not two: the bath, the Baptism of Jesus and the ritual context - the baptism of infants. On one hand, as Patton points out,

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there was a reluctance in the patristic era to develop a comparison between the bath of the infant Jesus and his Baptism. It is not hard to locate the reason since the purificatory overtones of the bath are not easily assimilated to the Baptism. Yet as infant baptism increased in its popularity and the purificatory theme came to be its primary rationale, the bath of the newly-born Jesus, which seems to suggest - at the level of the visual image at any rate - a foreshadowing of the later Baptism, at the ideological level now emerged as a type of the baptism of infants who required purification also. Even though the type of purification differs the tradition that employed this instinct found a means of enabling the Baptism of the adult Jesus to be the archetype for the baptism of an infant which participates in it. Yet the iconographic symbolism does not finish here; it can also incorporate the foreshadowing of the crucifixion. In the Scandinavian development, in one portrayal of the bath, on the side of a font and alongside a depiction of the Baptism, the infant Jesus has his hands out-stretched in a cruciform manner. Add to this the simple observation that the font has the form of a chalice then suddenly the birth, baptism and crucifixion are linked, as Jesus is born in order to suffer for the sins of the world.¹⁷⁸

Recognition of the ritual context of the image answers the issue that Patton leaves unsolved: the question of any specific motivation for its invention. It is perhaps the case that this is confirmed by the appearance of the bathing scene on the Scandinavian font to which reference has just been made.¹⁷⁹ Not only does this juxtaposition imply a close typological relationship between the two events but their common location on a font may well suggest that the impulse for the

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construction of the image arose from the very desire to show how the Baptism of Jesus could provide a model for the baptism of infants.

There are other iconographic indications that the baptism of infants was held to be an imitation of the baptism of Christ. In her study of the 'seven sacrament fonts' which became widespread in East Anglia during the fifteenth century A E Nichols notes the frequent inclusion of the Baptism of Christ as the eighth subject around the octagon. She observes that whereas in Byzantine iconography of the Baptism the angels hold not only Christ's robe but also anointing cloths, in English art the two are often conflated. Nichols draws attention to one font where the Baptism of Christ is juxtaposed with a relief depicting the sacrament of baptism. The two baptism scenes are framed by two figures; one is an angel who holds a cloth draped over its arms ready for Christ after his Baptism and the second is the godmother who stands ready with the crism in which the infant will be wrapped.¹⁸⁰ The post-baptismal robing of Christ and the infant therefore are parallel ritual actions and imply that the infant receives the same robe as Christ did, in imitation of his Baptism.

Thus there are points in the tradition, especially in the East, where the imitative impulse of the baptism of Jesus is articulated clearly. In the West it is at least under-developed theologically, but as has been shown it did implicitly inform baptismal theology. It is less than surprising that a ritual notion of imitation is affirmed by observations related to the iconography of the ritual context.

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5.2 Ritual Imitation in Contemporary Sacramental Theology

It is difficult to locate in mainstream Reformation theology the sense that Christian baptism was an imitation of Jesus' Baptism. It seems that the concern to refute the Anabaptist argument that Jesus' Baptism was a prototype for the baptism of adults, hindered its theological development.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, the theme is not absent from contemporary theology. For instance, Pannenberg has stated that just as the eucharist is an imitation of the Lord's Supper so is baptism an imitation of Jesus' Baptism, a remark that remains tantalisingly undeveloped.¹⁸²

Assistance may, however, be obtained from two recent developments in eucharistic theology which have appropriated the notion of ritual imitation. It is significant that both N Wolterstorff and D F Ford have appreciated the need to begin with the work of social anthropologists.

In the case of Wolterstorff, he has, in dialogue with Eliade who mediates the anthropology of ritual¹⁸³, advocated a 'reality interpretation' of ritual in relation to divine historical acts which are imitated or subject to repetition. He argues, rightly, that scripture stresses that only certain events of salvation are unique; for instance, the incarnation is imitated year by year as Christians celebrate the decisive event two thousand years ago.¹⁸⁴ Wolterstorff proposes an understanding of the eucharist as a liturgical event whereby the acts of Christ and his disciples at the Last Supper are imitated by the celebrant and the communicants respectively. The imitative actions are accompanied by prayers and declarations making

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the totality into a commemoration of Christ himself. Through the Church's action, God acts:

to participate in the liturgy is to enter the sphere of God's action - not just the sphere of God's presence but the sphere of God's action, and not just God's past action but God's present action. And God acts by way of our acting. By way of our commemorating God's prior actions, God now acts. The one whom we commemorate is active by way of our commemoration.¹⁸⁵

In the case of Ford, the departure point is the work of the anthropologist P Bourdieu through whose categories Ford aims 'to do justice to everyday life, temporal, embodied and multilevelled'¹⁸⁶; an 'inquiry into actual practice' therefore becomes the framework for a theology. The eucharist is a social practice which amounts to a 'necessary improvisation' generated by a set of dispositions shaped by previous ritual performances; it is a ritual response to the present on the basis of what has been learned in the past, and one which both organises and transforms the Church. In the eucharist, from a ritual perspective, there is a 'deep connection with ordinary patterns of repetitive behaviour'¹⁸⁷; also, there is continuity with the Passover, likewise an exercise in 'community building repetition'. Eucharist offers a superabundance of meaning and emanates from Jesus' imperative which enacted the dynamic of incorporation at the Last Supper. Giving recognition to the context of postmodernity, Ford argues that:

the eucharist at its best has been a non-identical repetition which is the characteristically Christian form of universality with particularity..... it is a habitus performed with improvisation.In gratitude the past is repeated in such a way that it is fruitful in a new way for the present and the future.¹⁸⁸

A brief dialogue with these understandings of ritual imitation can suggest how imitation may be most appropriately understood for baptism. First of all, it may be noted that whereas Wolterstorff

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employs 'imitation' in direct continuity with Eliade, Ford eschews it in favour of 'repetition', establishing a continuity with Kierkegaard. For Ford, there may well be concern for the implications which are imported by 'imitation'. J Milbank has expressed such a concern well:

as Kierkegaard best understood, Christianity is not Platonism. It is not founded upon the vision of a transcendent original which we must imitate. Instead it makes its affirmations about the real, and about 'meaning', through the constant repetition of a historically emergent practice which has no real point of origination, but only acquires identity and relative stability through this repetition. And what is repeated is not an insight, not an idea (which is properly imitated) but a formal becoming, a structured transformation.¹⁸⁹

Although there is a legitimate concern expressed here it needs to be noted that the concept of imitation in Platonic thought stands alongside the notions of 'participation', 'association' and 'presence' as a means of characterising the relationship between the sensible and the intelligible.¹⁹⁰ The observation that such vocabulary is prominent in theology to articulate the ontological dimension of Christianity prompts a hesitation with Milbank's argument. It could be that styling the concept of imitation as 'imitative-repetition' better serves the ritual perspective. At once it draws attention both to the participation in Christ through incorporation and to the historically emergent practice through which Christian baptism has arisen. The baptism of Jesus is not simply repeated but as it is imitated the baptisand is united with Christ.

Secondly, if the term 'imitative-repetition' is preferred, it enables the nature of the ritual imitation to be clarified. Examination of baptismal iconography has revealed that, although theological reflection has been reticent, there has been a Western acceptance of the imitation of Jesus' Baptism. In it not only does the

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baptisand imitate the action of Jesus by receiving baptism but, in the act of baptising, there is also an imitation of the action of John the Baptist. In regard to the latter, it was shown that there was an understanding that bishops and priests have repeated the actions of the Baptist. Through them the Church performs an imitative-repetition of the Baptism of Jesus. As the two subjects imitate the actions of the Baptist and Jesus, the Church may be said to imitate the event of Jesus' Baptism. In the imitative-repetition of Jesus' Baptism the participants enter the sphere of divine action mediated through the actions of the Church in which the creative activity of God is brought about, the type of which occurs at the very commencement of the scriptures. It is a repetition in that it becomes a link in an infinite series of repetitions, all of which repeat Jesus' Baptism and, to use Ford's language, it is repeated in a non-identical way. Further, it is an imitative-repetition in that through imitation of the archetypal event the baptisand is incorporated into Christ.

A comparison with the eucharist brings out these themes further. Just as in Wolterstorff's understanding of the eucharist the subjects of imitation have their object in the actants of the Last Supper, so in baptism the active subjects have their object in the event of the Baptism of Christ. Just as the Passover meal was transformed for the early Christians through the actions and words of Jesus, the baptism of John was transformed through the actions of Jesus and the words of God into Christian baptism. The eucharist is constituted a commemoration of Christ through the imitation of the acts of Christ and his disciples at the Last Supper together with the recital of the liturgical text.¹⁹¹ Equally, Christian baptism is an imitation of the actions of John and Jesus accompanied by the prayers and declarations

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of the Church which make it also a commemoration of Christ. Just as for Ford the eucharist is a repetition of the everyday actions of eating and drinking, baptism may be said to be a repetition of its corresponding mundane actions.

Finally, a notion of imitative-repetition places the emphasis on 'act-types' which are repeated, and also clarifies the secondary nature of any 'dramatic-representation' involved in the liturgy. If the liturgy of the Church is scrutinised carefully enough it is apparent that 'dramatic-representation' or rôle-playing is a theme which in reality cannot be said to be primary. The recitation of the words of Christ in the celebration of the eucharist is not to be equated with playing out his rôle since the overall context is one of thanksgiving and blessing. As Wolterstorff says in relation to the eucharist, the primary emphasis is on the giving of the elements, not on any playing of the rôle of Christ who did this previously.¹⁹² Emphasis on rôle-playing diverts attention away from the crucial actions, the act-types. If in baptism the Church imitates the Baptism of Jesus, the acts of John the Baptist and Jesus himself are imitated; they are repetitions of the act-types of applying water to the body and being a willing recipient of this action. Thus, in baptism the crucial 'act-types' are the actions of baptising and of receiving baptism in the context of a 'prayer event' performed by the Church.

The suggestion that the story of Jesus might provide an imitative model for Christian baptism now begins to look both plausible and concrete. As the complex of actions that constitute an imitative-repetition of Jesus Baptism occurs, the baptisand becomes incorporated into the body of Christ. As Jesus' Baptism by the John the Baptist

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was, Christian baptism is purposive as an irrevocable step into the ecclesial community, in continuity with the New Israel brought into being at the Jordan. Jesus' Baptism was also assertive and so is Christian baptism; how this assertive aspect operates is the question addressed by the third means by which a myth yields up its chartering force.

6 Jesus' Baptism as the Legitimation of the Symbols and Metaphors of Christian Baptism

The third means by which a myth may yield up its chartering force is by legitimating the symbols and metaphors of a ritual. This suggests that the Baptism of Jesus provides the legitimation of the symbols and metaphors of Christian baptism. It may be argued that this is done first of all by legitimating a soteriological framework and secondly through the legitimation of specific symbols and metaphors.

6.1 The Image of Salvation

In baptism the Church is presented with an image of the reality of salvation. The Baptism of Jesus legitimates the symbols and metaphors involved by informing their assertiveness. The general question, therefore, is the relationship between the Baptism of Jesus and salvation. The competing tendencies to ground baptism either in the baptismal quality of the whole incarnation or in one specific event demonstrate a wide equivocation on this. However, a resolution may be obtained in the narrative approach to the institution of a sacrament outlined above; as in the previous section it is an appreciation of the soteriological function of the biblical narratives which contains the key.

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The central task for soteriology may be said to be establishing the story of Jesus as the story of redemption. Root has argued that this is done by the construction of 'augmented forms' of this central story. This produces a 'reconstitution of the narrative by soteriological interpretation' presenting a new version of the Christian story. A vital part of this recasting is the recognition that the overall story is held together by interlocking patterns and internal connections. It is this underlying, and often hidden, structure which contains the seeds for the required soteriological reconstitution. Through an elucidation of these patterns, in existence prior to the act of interpretation, Root makes clear the redemptive character of the Christian story:

soteriology carries out its task by an interpretation of the story of Jesus that highlights those patterns which bring together Jesus and the Christian in a single story within which is realized the redemption of the Christian.¹⁹³

Root could not have conveyed the task of the theology of baptism more succinctly. It is in the practice of Christian baptism that Jesus and the Christian converge and in which human redemption becomes a concrete reality; constitutive of this process is the reconstitution of the story of the incarnation which explicates its internal linkages. Therefore the story of Jesus' Baptism may be the charter for Christian baptism if its connections with the story of the incarnation are seen as an integral part of its appropriation as a soteriology. There have been two prominent examples of this which may be profitably compared in this regard. One comes from the East Syrian patristic tradition and the other from Barth.

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First of all, East Syrian theology viewed the Baptism of Jesus as one of several interlocking points of narrative intensity in the story of the incarnation. The writings of Jacob of Serugh, who straddled the fifth and sixth centuries, illustrate this. He followed the Syrian tradition that the descent of Jesus into the Jordan effected the consecration, purification or sanctification of all earthly water.¹⁹⁴ In the performance of Christian baptism the notion that the waters of the Jordan river are reactivated in the font is a central one. The Holy Spirit comes at the epiclesis, consecrating the baptismal waters as the 'Jordan' and enabling the baptisand to receive baptism 'in fire and in the Spirit'. Principally the gifts of baptism are the Holy Spirit and sonship. The former allows the Christian, as a fellow sibling of Christ, to embrace the 'Pater Noster'.

The context of Jacob's theology of baptism is, however, much broader, given that he understood the incarnation to have three 'wombs' - those of Mary, the Jordan and Sheol. S P Brock has expounded the significance of these 'three staging' posts for Jacob's theology:

the total effects of the incarnation can be localized in any of these wombs, regardless of the fact that (for example) Christ's dwelling in Mary's womb precedes in historical time, his dwelling in that of the Jordan or Sheol. Because of this we shall find many parallels between the rôle of Mary and the rôle of the Jordan (representing the baptismal font), and between the purpose of Christ's baptism and the purpose of his descent into Sheol.¹⁹⁵

Therefore Jacob does not regard the Baptism of Jesus in narrative isolation, but as one of a series of events in the biblical story which mutually interlock and interpret one another. Therefore, the Baptism is the descent of Christ into Sheol to effect the rescue of the Old Adam - indeed, it is this reason that Jacob places on the lips of Jesus as the answer to the Baptist's reluctance to baptise him:

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Jesus' mission in being baptised is to find the 'fair image' or the 'pearl' of humanity.

The connections between the Baptism and Mary are made through the typology and imagery associated with the piercing of Christ's side and the 'fountain', 'well' or 'rivers' that flow from it.¹⁹⁶ The birth of Eve from the incision in Adam's side is its most important Old Testament type, which is also a type of the Virgin Birth. The connections are clinched with descriptions of Mary, the New Eve, as the 'new well from whom living water flowed'¹⁹⁷ and the anticipation of the birth event on the cross from which the sacraments came. The cross itself becomes the mother of life for the world.¹⁹⁸ So profound are the internal narrative connections between the Baptism and the piercing of Christ's side that it is again Brock's judgement that for Jacob of Serugh the effect of both events is identical and that their theological import can equally well be located in either.¹⁹⁹

Barth's soteriological appropriation of the narrative of Christ's Baptism has a different atmosphere and is not confined to his explicit baptismal theology. Christ's Baptism is one of a series of events in the overarching narrative of the incarnation that belong together dogmatically. Among these events Barth includes the Virgin Birth, the Transfiguration and the Resurrection.

At one point Barth links the narratives of the Transfiguration, the Infancy and the Baptism as events which demonstrate that Jesus is unswervingly the 'Lord of Time', who 'as the one who never was "not yet", he cannot possibly be "no longer", but is the same yesterday and to-day'.²⁰⁰ Together they persuade the Gospel reader that they are in

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the presence of a mystery, which 'embraces and motivates the whole story'.²⁰¹ These events in the life of Jesus do not add anything to his being, but reveal a mystery, the same mystery, to the believer. Therefore, Jesus' Baptism anticipates the Resurrection; they share the common underlying structure that, 'he is already the Son of God, the begotten and beloved of God, the object of his good pleasure'.²⁰²

Elsewhere the Baptism is related both to the Virgin Birth and to the eternal generation of the Son:

the sign of the baptism in Jordan, like the sign of the Virgin Birth, points back to the mystery of this Man's being which was real in itself apart from this sign, and like the Virgin Birth the baptism in the Jordan also means that the Holy Spirit is the mystery of this being.²⁰³

The Baptism of Jesus is therefore related by Barth to other significant events in the story of the incarnation, and can only be understood, it seems, in their light. The significance of this emerges in view of the Christian doctrine of incorporation into Christ through baptism. Barth himself argued that the history of Jesus Christ is the foundation for Christian existence, since the Christian is given an actual share in his existence. The particular history of Christ is recapitulated in the particular history of the individual Christian. The Resurrection was the means by which Jesus Christ's personal history was revealed as the salvation history for all, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit which opens up specific individuals and discloses this revelation. Thus, in commenting on the passages that relate to the baptismal rebirth, applied in Barth's anti-sacramental framework to the baptism in the Spirit, he is able to argue:

it is true exegesis, not eisegesis, to say that the nativity of the Christ is the nativity of the Christian man; Christmas Day is the birthday of every Christian.²⁰⁴

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Equally, for Barth, the Christian is someone who shares in the 'life-saving and life-winning' death of Jesus. In this way the history of Jesus Christ is the 'origin and beginning of the Christian life, the divine change in which the impossible thing...., is not only possible but actual'.²⁰⁵

There is both convergence and divergence between Barth's and the East Syrian appropriation of the narratives of Christ's Baptism for a soteriology. In respect of their convergence, not only is there an understanding of Jesus' Baptism as the origin of Christian baptism but there is furthermore an instinct that it shares common patterns with other incarnational events and can only be understood through their explication. The Baptism is an event that encapsulates the overall movement of the incarnation, narratively portrayed as commencing at the eternal generation of the Son and climaxing at the Ascension into heaven. A fifth century Armenian text expresses this insight well when it speaks of the Baptism as 'the divine image of salvation' which is set forward for all to imitate.²⁰⁶ Even though Western theology has usually been constrained in its appreciation of this, in the fourth century Hilary of Poitiers wrote perceptively that in Jesus' Baptism, 'the order of the heavenly hidden mystery is expressed'; that is, the economy of salvation is revealed, what was realised in Christ is realised in humanity and the Baptism of Jesus may be characterised as a 'divine icon' of human salvation.²⁰⁷ Significantly, this particular reception of the Baptism may well be the Johannine one, where it is linked to the heavenly origin of Jesus, his crucifixion and the Spirit's out-pouring.²⁰⁸

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In respect of their divergence there is a contrast between the poetic reflection of patristic East Syria and the reticence of the Western usage of Jesus' Baptism. Key to this, is the recognition that East Syrian theology developed in close collaboration with the Church's liturgy. Not only do many of its works exhibit a poetical character and a 'mythic' or 'symbolic' style of thinking which shuns the 'logic and precision of Greek thought'²⁰⁹ but Brock's analyses of the Syrian baptismal rites testify to their intimate and dynamic relationship with theology. Particularly apparent is the understanding of time which underlies both their liturgical and theological texts. Brock has described this phenomenon in terms, reminiscent of Eliade, of 'profane' and 'sacred' time.²¹⁰ Unlike profane time, sacred or liturgical time is not concerned with the linear sequence of events in history; it is primarily to do with the meaning of either primordial or historical events for salvation in the present. Therefore past events in the liturgical context are spoken about in the present tense; through the action of the Holy Spirit the water of the font becomes both the Jordan river and the water which flowed from the wound in Christ's side, and the Christian enters into the kingdom of God in anticipation of the eschatological resurrection of the body.²¹¹

Yet it is precisely here that a danger is found. If the patterns that interlock the events of the Gospel narratives into a soteriology are taken so that their theological contribution may be located equally well in either then there is a loss as the individual content of each and its contribution to the overarching story is minimised. In this way Barth's analytical exegesis acts as a critique of the East Syrian emphasis on narrative indwelling. The Baptism stands in relation to the other incarnational events; they are mutually

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interpretive but not theologically exchangeable. Above all else, the interlocking narrative patterns in which the Baptism is found prevents it being understood in the terms of an adoptionist Christology.²¹² It is in this way that the story of the Baptism may be understood to legitimate Christian baptism; it provides an image of salvation which then informs the soteriological context experienced in the actions of the Church. The interlocking narrative patterns also facilitate why it is that the Baptism of Jesus can legitimate, more particularly, baptism's symbols and metaphors.

6.2 Aqueous and Oleaginous Symbols of Baptism

The two most significant symbols of Christian baptism may be labelled 'aqueous' and 'oleaginous'²¹³ and their use is derived from their association with the story of Jesus' Baptism.

That the Baptism of Jesus legitimates the use of water is deeply rooted within the understanding of both Eastern and Western theologians. The East Syrian understanding that in his Baptism Jesus' descent into the Jordan consecrated all water for its future ritual purpose is widespread. In patristic theology its origin may be traced to the second century²¹⁴ and whether the consecration was Christological or Pneumatological in emphasis the idea is essentially the same. It is also something which proved tenacious in western Medieval thinking. Not only was it accepted by Aquinas, but also the literature and the drama of the period agreed that 'the waters of baptism [were] made holy by Christ to free people from their original sin'.²¹⁵ At the Reformation, notwithstanding objections from continental theologians, the notion that the waters of baptism were sanctified by the Baptism of Jesus for the work of salvation was

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preserved throughout the revision of the BCP.²¹⁶ The essential idea involved in the consecration of water has involved more than the language of sanctification or cleansing. For instance, early Christian 'midrash' on the Baptism contains the imagery of a purifying fire descending upon the Jordan²¹⁷, the Byzantine rite links it with the crushing of the serpents who dwelt in the water²¹⁸ and there is a motif which portrays the waters of the Jordan in retreat at the entrance of the divine Son of God.²¹⁹

Implicit in the consecration of water at the Baptism is an important theological instinct which suggests that it cannot be isolated from a perspective of redemption that embraces the cosmic dimension. The fact that Jesus' descent into the Jordan consecrates all earthly waters for the task of baptism is proleptic of the restoration, through Jesus Christ himself, of a material creation that was 'fouled by the sins of mankind' at the fall of Adam.²²⁰ In other words, there is a perspective brought to Jesus' Baptism, and its connection with Christian baptism, that penetrates beyond baptism as an event of personal salvation to a vision that brings into view its many connections with the incarnation and the cosmos. This has been well captured by the early Eastern theologians. Gregory of Nyssa suggested that, as Jesus ascended from the water he 'sees the heaven opened which Adam had shut against himself and all his prosperity, as the gates of Paradise by the flaming sword'.²²¹ Cyril of Alexandria, focusing on why it was that Jesus received the Spirit at his Baptism, calls Jesus 'the second Adam', the new creature, who recapitulates in himself human nature and through whom the Spirit is given to humanity after the resurrection.²²²

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The story of the Baptism of Jesus has also legitimated the use of oleaginous symbols, notwithstanding the absence of oil at the event itself. The Baptism is portrayed in scripture as a metaphorical anointing and this has authorised the use of oil in liturgy that effected the Christian's participation in the anointed status of the Messiah.²²³ In Winkler's words, the Syrian baptismal anointing is 'the ritualization of the entry into the messianic kingship of Christ..., which is made known through the coming of the Spirit'.²²⁴ So important was this aspect that the anointing, of the whole body, took place prior to the water rite, and its technical terms, gathered around the Aramaic term rushma, could provide the designation for the complete baptismal ritual.²²⁵

6.3 Birth, Death and Cleansing as Metaphors of Baptism

The sense that Jesus' Baptism legitimates a range of metaphors which may be applied to Christian baptism is illustrated by Clement of Alexandria who gave the first recorded statement that Jesus' Baptism is a model for Christian baptism. He argued that Jesus was not baptised due to any personal defect; his Baptism was an event of rebirth, but only in the sense that any perfection gained was through the hygienic sense of washing and in his consecration by the descent of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, perfectly born of the Father, 'was perfectly reborn, as a prefigurement of the divine plan'. He goes on to suggest that, after the example of Jesus' Baptism, Christian baptism was characterised by the diverse themes of enlightenment, adoption, perfection, divinisation and cleansing.²²⁶

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Notwithstanding Clement's longer list, it is sufficient at this stage to recognise the acceptance of three major baptismal metaphors: birth, death and the washing away of sins. There can be no question that, throughout the Christian tradition, each of the three major metaphorical understandings have been deployed without reference to Jesus' Baptism. Therefore any understanding that the Baptism gives authority for the deployment of these metaphors must do at least two things. First of all, it must show that the Baptism contains within itself the appropriate metaphor, and secondly, it must show that this connection has been appreciated at some significant points within the tradition. It may then be argued that even where there has been no explicit articulation, the Baptism of Jesus nonetheless has continued to act as a legitimating metaphorical structure. In this sense the tradition's treatment of the relationship between the Baptism of Jesus and Christian baptism is parallel to that found in the New Testament; even though the links are often not articulated explicitly, they may be taken to be assumed, an assumption made possible by the interlocking nature of the Baptism narratives with the soteriological context.

That the metaphor of birth in Christian baptism is legitimated by the Baptism of Jesus is evident in the way in which the latter is understood as a metaphorical birth. It may be that this stems from a variant reading of the Lucan rendering of the divine voice at the Baptism. Whereas most Greek manuscripts prefer the version 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased' there are Occidental texts which render the text, 'You are my beloved Son; today I have begotten you'.²²⁷ Most recently, D Vigne has presented a convincing case for accepting the variant Lucan reading as the most primitive

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one. His argument relies upon an impressive range of Fathers who were familiar with the text prior to the great recensions of the biblical texts in the fourth and fifth centuries.²²⁸ There is something to be said for Vigne's hypothesis for the change within the Lucan text; not only was a harmonising law in operation, seeking to bring the Gospel texts into line with each other, but also greater doctrinal concerns became paramount. Not least, heterodox Christian groupings such as the Ebionites, obviated the metaphor and produced an adoptionist Christology, on the basis of a non-metaphorical birth.²²⁹

Although Vigne has concentrated on texts from Judeo-Christianity, it has already been observed that Syrian theology accepted the birth metaphor in their notion of the Jordan as one of three 'wombs' from which Christ was born. Another womb was Mary's and the relationship this implies between the Nativity and the Baptism has been a significant factor in perpetuating the understanding of Jesus' Baptism as a metaphorical birth well beyond Syria. This has shown its effect in the iconographical association of the Baptism with particular images from the Nativity. This may be traced back to the artwork of the late fourth century²³⁰, through the early middle ages²³¹ and into the iconography found on European fonts of the medieval period.²³²

Aside from textual and iconographic analysis there is a further reason for the metaphorical correlation which lies in the structure of the evolution of Christmas and Epiphany. It is now recognised that the festival of Epiphany, which may revert to the close of the second century, was the most ancient celebration of the Nativity and that it was a unitive festival which also embraced the celebration of the Baptism. As the unitive nature of Epiphany was disrupted during the

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Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, Epiphany became a significant baptismal day, not just in Syria and Constantinople but also in Spain and parts of Italy.²³³ Epiphany's provenance in a unitive festival marking both the Nativity and the Baptism ensured a juxtaposition of incarnational events in which a mutual and metaphorical relationship could be developed; the Baptism becomes more clearly a birth event and the Nativity becomes more clearly a revelatory occurrence. This link is perpetuated liturgically in the Armenian Church which continues to celebrate the Nativity and the Baptism on 6th January and also in the Byzantine Christmas liturgy which contains vestiges of a baptismal text.²³⁴ The development of the Christian calendar, therefore, brings out the significance of the birth metaphor as structural underpinning of the connection between Jesus' Baptism and Christian baptism.

The second metaphor to be legitimated by the Baptism of Jesus is that of death. Even though the argument has been for a narrative reading which has given precedence to the messianic allusions in the divine voice, there has been no denial of a reference to the Servant whose mission was to be achieved through suffering and death. Important here are the baptisma sayings in which Jesus anticipates his death in baptismal language. There is little agreement over whether they refer to Jesus' own Baptism or to Christian baptism, but the arguments of W J Dalton are helpful in bringing clarification here. Strictly speaking, Dalton argues, there is no immediate reference to either since baptisma is a reference to being overwhelmed with calamity or death. Yet the connotations evident to the readers in all periods of Christian tradition include Christian baptism. Thus, if there is an imitation of the Baptism, it would follow that there was a sharing in

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'both the baptisms of Christ, that of water and that of death'.²³⁵ Although the sayings describe Jesus' death in terms of baptisma, and do not begin to speak of the Baptism in terms of death there is an inevitable linguistic transference resulting from the structure of the metaphor.

There is enough here, however, both to suggest that Jesus' Baptism was soon regarded as a metaphorical death and that Christian baptism had the same structure. There is no doubt that, in some way the shadow of his death hung over his Baptism; the metaphor of death was appropriate because in his Baptism Jesus was 'initiated' into his passion and death and therefore he was 'baptised' into his own death.²³⁶ Thus the synoptic Gospels provided a base from which St Paul's notion of sharing in the death of Christ in Christian baptism could emerge.²³⁷ Although Cullmann's exegesis suffers from over-emphasis at this point, he does express the thinking here well:

the parallelism between 'being baptised' and 'dying with Christ', whose origin goes back to the life of Jesus at his own baptism by John in the Jordan, is traceable through the whole of the New Testament.²³⁸

When it comes to the third metaphor of Christian baptism its legitimation has required a different style of reasoning. That the washing away of sin is a feature of both the Baptism of John and Christian baptism is indisputable, yet the question of Jesus' sinlessness and therefore the propriety of his reception of a baptism instigated for the forgiveness of sins interrupts a smooth theological transition from one to another.

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The early Church demonstrated an unequivocal acceptance of Jesus' sinlessness in respect of his Baptism, following the insistence of the Gospel narratives of his innocence. Yet they did adopt a number of strategies which indicated their concern to preserve the notion of Jesus' Baptism as a purification or washing. In broad principle, they defended the idea that the purification was humanity's and that the Baptism had the same structure as the crucifixion: namely, that Jesus was baptised on others' behalf and not for any impurity of his own. One expression of this involved the aforementioned purification of water for baptismal purposes. Another expression emerged in quite a sophisticated way which spoke of the purification of Christ's human nature. Ambrose is a good example of this:

Why then did Christ go down into the water?, if it was not that his flesh might be purified - the flesh he took of our human kind? Christ had no need to be purified from sin, because 'he committed no sin'; but we need it, because we are liable to sin.²³⁹

Vigne's comments on Ambrose's theology assists in locating the issues. First of all, Ambrose transfers the idea of purification to the whole of the incarnation; the body washed in the River Jordan was assumed human nature. In the Baptism, purification of the flesh takes place in so far as it was representative flesh. Secondly, Vigne has detected a 'physical' approach to the Baptism of Jesus in a number of difficult texts associated with Judeo-Christianity which ascribe a contribution to his flesh through purification. The cited text from Ambrose demonstrates the limits which orthodoxy allowed, permitting the sense that the Baptism was a 'regenerative purification' without condoning it in any moral sense.²⁴⁰

More recently, the legitimation of the cleansing metaphor has been approached from another angle. The Lutheran G W Lathrop begins with

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the Marcan text and a consideration of the religious-historical milieu of John the Baptist. He finds John's water-rite emerging out of a background of washing for purification, especially in an eschatological perspective. When Jesus comes for baptism he is the 'washed one' who is made unclean, 'both by his associations and by his utterly unclean death'. By his Baptism, baptism is 'utterly changed', becoming the 'very presence of God'. In this sense, baptism is now a 'refusal' of the washing rite, because it criticises and even destroys the former language of the washing rite, yet is now used to speak of the 'presence of God's all-washing mercy in Jesus'.²⁴¹

So baptismal symbols derived from water and oil and the metaphors of birth, death and cleansing have all found their legitimation from the story of the Baptism of Jesus. This sets the agenda for the remainder of the thesis as the questions which arise from the anthropological treatment of symbols and metaphors are applied to the ritual of baptism.

Meanwhile, the conclusion from this chapter is that the story of Jesus' Baptism may be said to charter the ritual of Christian baptism in three ways. First, it provides an historical origin for contemporary baptism, one which preserves the integrity of the historical event and its narrative reading as a new creation which has some claim to primacy. Secondly, it provides an archetype of which baptism is an imitative-repetition; in Christian baptism the actions which involved the historical Jesus are imitated and therefore the act-types of baptising and receiving baptism are repeated. Finally, it legitimates the most prominent symbols and metaphors of baptism, in that the tradition regards them as coherent with the image of

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salvation presented in the Baptism and also as being explicitly present in both the archetypal and the contemporary ritual. A study of myth, stimulated by social anthropology, has yielded a particular relationship between narrative and ritual. It is their interplay in the context of a theology of salvation which incorporates the Christian into Christ himself. This means that there is not simply a sharing in the Baptismal Event but a sharing in the whole movement of the incarnation.

Endnotes

1. M Eliade. "Myth in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries".(1973)
2. I Strenski. Four Theories of Myth.(1987), p.198
3. "Myth in Primitive Psychology".(1926), p.87
4. "The Foundations of Faith and Morals".(1936), p.141
5. Ibid, p.159
6. Ibid, p.164
7. Argonauts of the Western Pacific.(1922), p.303
8. Op.cit.(1926), p.115
9. "Myth as a Dramatic Development of Dogma".(n.d)
10. Op.cit.(1926), p.79
11. Ibid, p.86
12. Ibid, p.113
13. Op.cit.(1922), pp.326-328
14. Op.cit.(n.d.), p.121
15. P S Cohen. "Theories of Myth", p.349
16. K W Bolle. "Myth", p.262
17. Op.cit., p.350
18. "Myth and Symbol", p.576

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19. Criticism may be found in B N Colby et al. "Narrative", Leach. "Lévi-Strauss in the Garden of Eden".(1965), Cohen. Op.cit. and most robustly of all in Strenski. Op.cit.(1987), pp.42-69.
20. Eliade. Op.cit.(1973), p.316
21. V Propp, the folklorist, cited by Colby et al. Op.cit., p.620
22. Structural Anthropology: Volume 2.(1976), pp.115-145
23. E.g. Leach. "The Structure of Symbolism", p.240
24. The Naked Man.(1981), p.639; cf. Leach (ed.). The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism.(1967) for a critique of the structuralist position, especially the introduction by Leach which outlines the continuity of structuralist thought with Malinowski. Other important evaluations are Douglas. Implicit Meanings, pp.153-172 and G S Kirk. Myth.(1971), pp.42-83.
25. Totemism, p.104
26. Op.cit.(1987), p.130
27. From Blessing to Violence, p.111
28. M L Foster et al. Symbol as Sense, pp.335-337; see also Eliade. The Myth of the Eternal Return.(1954), p.92 who speaks of 'elements central to the human condition' and the traditional person's 'terror of "losing" himself by letting himself be overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of profane existence'.
29. Structural Anthropology: Volume 1.(1963), p.218
30. Drama, Fields and Metaphors, pp.248-249
31. Ibid, p.249
32. Cited by Leach. Op.cit.(1965), p.575
33. Op.cit.(1963), pp.232-241
34. See R Ackerman. The Myth and Ritual School and the essays in T A Sebeok (ed.). Myth, for the debate's location in intellectual history. J W Rogerson. Myth in Old Testament Interpretation, pp.66ff gives a summary of its impact on Old Testament studies.
35. Examples are cited by Kluckhohn. "Myths and Rituals".
36. K Ruthven. Myth, pp.35-38 and Kirk. Op.cit.(1971), p.25.
37. Op.cit.(1971), pp. 252-261
38. Cohen. Op.cit., p.351. J Ellul. The New Demons, pp.88ff makes the same point before discussing 'modern' mythology.
39. "Aetiology, Ritual, Charter".(1972), pp.97-101
40. The Forest of Symbols, pp.152-153

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41. Op.cit., pp.107-108
42. Ibid, p.110
43. See Worgul. From Magic to Metaphor, p.89
44. Strenski. Op.cit.(1987), p.52
45. Op.cit.(1936), pp.156-158
46. Op.cit.(1974), p.249
47. Op.cit.(1954), p.21
48. Ibid, p.34
49. Kluckhohn. Op.cit., p.62
50. Bloch. Op.cit., pp.84-104, 111
51. The Day of Shining Red, pp.52-57
52. Turner. "Symbols in African Ritual"
53. Op.cit.(1981), pp.668-669
54. Kirk. Op.cit.(1972), pp.90-97 comments on the typology of rituals and the impossibility of universalising particular relationships with myth.
55. "The Narrative Quality of Experience", p.66; G Loughlin. Telling God's Story, pp.64-66 expounds Crites' thesis and critiques it in terms of its use of universal categories. Other guides to Narrative Theology have been G W Stroup. The Promise of Narrative Theology and G Fackre. "Narrative Theology".
56. Op.cit., p.78
57. Ibid, p.77
58. Ibid, p.82
59. Systematic Theology: Volume 1, pp.14-18
60. Cited by R Modras. "Catholic Substance and the Catholic Church Today", p.37; on symbols in Tillich and their 'enclosure' by myth see K Rosenthal. "Myth and Symbol".
61. The New Being, pp.152-160 on Luke 10:38-42
62. Op.cit.(n.d.), p.121
63. Op.cit.
64. The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, p.239
65. Ibid, p.280

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66. Ibid, pp.13-15
67. For these arguments see J E Zuck. "Tales of Wonder", p.305; Zuck attempts to overcome the opposition between biblical narrative and fairy tales, establishing the seriousness of the latter as a potential hermeneutic category.
68. "Fishing for Men on the Edge of the Wilderness", p.580
69. "Towards a Theology of the History of Religions".(1971), p.107
70. "Myth in Biblical and Christian Tradition".(1973), pp.7, 68.
71. Op.cit.(1971), p.107
72. Op.cit.(1973), pp.69-70; see also Tillich. "Myth and Mythology", p.345.
73. "The Rôle of Story in the Christian Religion"
74. Not all attempts to coordinate myth and ritual have been successful; Power. Unsearchable Riches, pp.114-124 does not acknowledge the contribution of anthropology; this is ironic since one of his influences is N Frye in whose work the sociological perspective is clearly evident (e.g. The Great Code, pp.31-52).
75. Bapt., p.21 (9)
76. "Letter 63", p.101 (8.1)
77. DBL, pp.186-187 (blessing of the font) and J Jungman. The Early Liturgy, pp.85-86 (catacombs)
78. A Grabar. Christian Iconography, pp.19-20 (and associated plates)
79. F Nordström. Mediaeval Baptismal Fonts
80. Pelikan. The Growth of Medieval Theology, p.209 suggests that Hugh of St Victor was the first to adopt the technical term 'institution'.
81. M L Colish. Peter Lombard, Volume 2, p.544 surveys other scholastic views; see Osborne's summary in The Christian Sacraments of Initiation, p.13.
82. ECBC: Volume 5, pp.148-149 (Demonstrations 6:12); see Brock. The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition.(1979), p.79 for widespread Syrian acceptance of this view.
83. From M Tanner. "Concordia in Piero Della Francesca's Baptism of Christ", p.16 (fn.18). On the introduction of the terminology of 'matter' and 'form' into scholastic sacramental theology and especially the change in meaning of 'form' to rite or formula, see D Van den Eynde. "The Theory of the Composition of the Sacraments in Early Scholasticism".
84. Power. "Unripe Grapes", p.395

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85. G C Berkouwer. The Sacraments, p.31
86. Aquinas. ST: Volume 56, pp.105-109 (3a. qu.64 art.2)
87. ST: Volume 57, pp.9-11 (3a. qu.66 art.2)
88. See E J Kilmartin. Christian Liturgy, p.266
89. N P Williams. "The Origins of the Sacraments" exemplifies the impact of biblical criticism on the notion of institution.
90. E.g. W F Flemington. The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism, p.128 and Berkouwer. Op.cit., p.103
91. Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God, pp.112-127
92. The Church and the Sacraments, pp.41-75
93. The Sacraments of Initiation, pp.58-59
94. F Schüssler Fiorenza. Foundational Theology, pp.122-3 and pp.165-170
95. Ibid, pp.165-170
96. In addition to Aquinas, Calvin. Inst., pp.1351-2 (IV.xvi.29) and Barth.
97. J J Collins. "To See Ourselves as Others See Us", p.171
98. E.g. A D Nock. "Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background", pp.112-120.
99. A Y Collins. "The Origin of Christian Baptism" and H Vorgrimler. Sacramental Theology, pp.102-103
100. A Y Collins. Op.cit., p.49
101. Ibid, p.50f; Acts 1-2; the new elements are baptism 'into the name of Jesus' and the baptismal gift of the Spirit.
102. Myth and Reality.(1964), pp.21-38 and Myth of the Eternal Return.(1954), pp.75-85.
103. Op.cit.(1964), pp.37-38
104. Myths, Dreams and Mysteries.(1960), p.30
105. The Seal of the Spirit, p.45
106. Ibid, p.307
107. Mark 10:38-39 and Luke 12:50 (see Mark 11:30, where Jesus links his authority with his Baptism).
108. Op.cit., p.39

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109. Baptism in the New Testament, pp.16f; see G R Beasley-Murray. Baptism in the New Testament, pp.49-55 for a full critique of Cullmann's views.
110. Op.cit., pp.18f; cf. Lampe. Op.cit, pp.37f
111. CD IV/4, pp.50-53
112. Ibid, p.54
113. Ibid, p.61
114. Ibid, p.52
115. Ibid, p.53
116. Ibid, p.67
117. Ibid, pp.201-202
118. Ibid, pp.41-42
119. Ibid, p.53
120. A I C Heron. Table and Tradition, p.157. J B Webster. Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation, pp.170ff discusses the rejection of 'sacramentalism'.
121. Op.cit., p.45
122. The Christian Sacraments of Initiation, p.32
123. Ibid, p.84
124. Ibid, p.85
125. An Introduction to Catholic Sacramental Theology, p.152
126. J Macquarrie. The Faith of the People of God, pp.76-77
127. Heron. Op.cit., p.157; see E Jungel. "The Church as Sacrament" where the notion of Church as 'basic' sacrament is reformulated to 'sacramental sign'.
128. M Root. "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology", p.265
129. John the Baptizer and the Prophet; for what follows see pp.183-205.
130. Mark 7:1-8
131. Leviticus 14, Ezekiel 1:1, Daniel 8:2.
132. Isaiah 40:3
133. J Moltmann. The Way of Jesus Christ, p.87
134. Ibid, p.89

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135. R L Wilkin. "The Baptism of Jesus in the Later Fathers", p.274
136. C F Evans. St Luke, pp.245ff
137. This argument follows C Rowland. The Open Heaven, pp.358-360; J Marcus. "Jesus' Baptismal Vision".(1995) also advocates the Baptism's visionary nature.
138. Marcus. The Way of the Lord.(1992), pp.48-79 whose outline exegesis I am following.
139. Isaiah 63:11 and 64:1
140. Marcus. Op.cit.(1992), pp.56-57
141. Isaiah 64:1
142. Isaiah 63:11
143. Genesis 1:2; see C K Barrett. The Holy Spirit in the Gospel Tradition, pp.35-39
144. W D Davies & D C Allison. The Gospel According to St Matthew, Volume 1, pp.331-334. Allison. "The Baptism of Jesus and a New Dead Sea Scroll", cites evidence that first century Judaism was familiar with the notion of the Spirit hovering over the poor and the saints during the messianic future; the messianic future was described in creation terms and this is the only instance where the Spirit hovers over individuals rather than materiality.
145. Barrett. Op.cit., pp.39-40
146. Genesis 22:10, 28:12; see B J Malina & R L Rohrbaugh. Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, p.40.
147. Isaiah 42:1
148. Marcus. Op.cit.(1992), pp.59-66
149. Ibid, p.56
150. Ibid, pp.69-72
151. Ibid, p.75
152. Davies and Allison. Op.cit., p.328 link the Baptism with Genesis 1:3 and Isaiah 43:16-20. See Barrett. Op.cit., p.44; although he has not drawn so much on apocalyptic sources, Barrett has also argued that the notion of Messiahship underlies Jesus' Baptism.
153. P G Bretscher. "Exodus 4:22-23 and the Voice from Heaven"
154. G Vermes. "Redemption and Genesis XXII", pp.221-223
155. H Leclercq. "Baptême de Jésus" and E Dassmann. "Baptism II"

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156. G Schiller. Iconography of Christian Art, Volume 1, p.132; Jesus is often shown receiving baptism by aspersion, being baptised naked, being anointed with a flask of olive oil or being presented with anointing cloths. This is also observed in medieval drama; see R Woolf. The English Mystery Plays, p.218.
157. R Bultmann. The History of the Symoptic Tradition, pp.251-253. For other commentators who accept Bultmann's ideas see F W Beare. The Gospel According to St Matthew, p.99. For the acceptance of the Baptism narratives as a 'cult-legend' see G Barth. Die Taufe in frühchristlicher Zeit, pp.17-18
158. AIRI, pp.76-80 (Sermon 2:1-8); for the interpretative remark see CI, pp.234-241
159. CI, loc.cit.
160. E Mazza. Mystagogy, p.168; note that Mazza (p.155) reads Cyril differently from E Yarnold (in AIRI, pp.95-96) and Riley, placing his notion of imitation on the side of an internal and spiritual effect. Here I follow the latter two interpreters.
161. Power. Op.cit.(1984), pp.114ff
162. G Winkler. "The Original Meaning of the Prebaptismal Anointing and its Implications".(1995); see "A Remarkable Shift in the 4th Century Creeds" where she shows the Baptism to be a creedal statement of the early Armenian Church. R Williams. "Baptism and the Arian Controversy", pp.178ff rightly cautions against an overdrawing of the distinction between a Western 'Todes-Mystik' and a Syrian 'Genesis-Mystik'.
163. Wilkin. Op.cit.(1972), pp.273-274.
164. In ECBC: Volume 5, p.65 (On the Baptism of Christ)
165. In ECBC: Volume 6, pp.153-154 (Enchiridion 8.49); W Harmless. Augustine and the Catechuminate, pp.229, 253 stresses this aspect of Augustine's theology.
166. Loc.cit.
167. Cited by Harmless. Op.cit., p.318 (Joh. Ev. Tract 15.4)
168. "Ritual and Reconstructed Meaning" (for Ambrose see AIRI, p.106)
169. Ibid, p.375
170. Ibid, pp.371-372
171. Grabar. Op.cit., p.115
172. "The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ", pp.203-208
173. Ibid, pp.237-238
174. Nordström. Op.cit., p.96 (fig.57)

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175. Christ portrayed as an infant resonates with the notion of imitation and, according to L Ousprensky and V Lossky. The Meaning of Icons, pp.164-65, metaphorical birth into new life.

176. "Et Partu Fontis Exceptum"

177. N Ozoline. "Theology in Colour", pp.138-139 where the origin is held to be from Roman biographical cycles. Contrast P J Nordhagen. "The Origin of the Washing of the Child in the Nativity Scence" who argues that the Nativity Icon, including the washing motif, is derived from depictions of Dionyus' birth. D Vigne. Christ au Jordain, pp.290-291 concludes that, in a sixth century text, the first bath of Jesus pointed towards his future Baptism because of the miracles associated with the bath's pure water.

178. Suggested by Nordström. Op.cit., p.102

179. Loc.cit., fn.102 for details; in fn.101 (p.162) E Mâle is cited: 'il est remarquable, en effet, que le vase où les sages-femmes lavent l'enfant Jésus soit toujours une cuve baptismale. Le bain de Jésus serait comme une figure de son baptême futur'.

180. Seeable Signs, pp.317-319

181. Calvin. Inst., pp.1351-2 (IV.xvi.29)

182. Op.cit.(1973), p.68

183. "The Remembrance of Things (Not) Past". Wolterstorff distinguishes between interpretations of the mentality of the archaic person in relation to ritual - the 'imitation/repetition' and the 'actualisation' interpretations. While there are remnants of the latter in Christian liturgy (for example in the hymnic present tense) it is on the whole unintelligible, since 'to participate in the liturgy is not to climb into a time machine' (p.129). Wolterstorff argues that even though Eliade himself inclines to the actualisation theory, both are 'reality' interpretations of rituals.

184. Ibid, pp.129-130

185. Ibid, p.153

186. "What Happens in the Eucharist?", p.365

187. Ibid, p.371

188. Ibid, p.375

189. "The Name of Jesus", p.319

190. Mazza. Op.cit., p.168ff

191. Op.cit., pp.151-152

192. Ibid, p.146

193. Op.cit., p.275-276

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194. Brock. "Baptismal Themes in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh".(1978), p.327
195. Ibid, p.326
196. Syrian theology tended to alter the text to 'water and blood', reflecting the order of the Christian sacraments; also, 'flow' was used instead of 'came forth' to make the links with John 7:37-38; see Brock. Op.cit.(1979), p.88
197. Brock. Op.cit.(1978), p.330 (n.34)
198. Brock. Op.cit.(1979), p.92
199. Op.cit.(1978), p.326. A similar account could be given of Ephrem; see ECBC: Volume 5, pp.158-160 (Hymns on the Church 36) and Brock. "St Ephrem on Christ as Light in Mary".(1975).
200. CD III/2, p.477
201. Ibid, p.480
202. Ibid, p.479
203. CD I/2, p.199
204. CD IV/4, p.15
205. Ibid, p.17
206. Cited by K McDonnell. "Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan", p.214 (from The Teaching of St Gregory)
207. Ibid, pp.213-214; McDonnell concludes that for Hilary, 'the baptism of Jesus is both order and image of our baptism, and of the full Christian life'.
208. John 1:29-34
209. Brock. Op.cit.(1978), p.325
210. Patterns in Comparative Religion, pp.391ff
211. See Brock. Op.cit.(1979), pp.8-9
212. G D Badock. "The Anointing of Christ and the Filioque Doctrine" discusses the difficulties here.
213. The reason for this labelling is given below, p.177
214. Brock. Op.cit. (1978), p.326 (Ignatius. Ep. Ephesians. xviii.2)
215. A Henry. Biblia Pauperum, p.66. J R Elliott & G A Runnalls (eds.). The Baptism and Temptation of Christ, p.73 where, in a mystery play Jesus says, 'I wish to sanctify and cleanse the waters, that they may be as a sweet foundation of all good and grace'.

3: Myth and the Story of Jesus' Baptism: Endnotes

216. See CIRP, p.90 (1549), p.107 (1552) and the BCP. For Bucer's objections see CIRP, p.100. Note that, in contrast to the Christological emphasis of the BCP, the separate blessing of the water in 1549 is pneumatic in emphasis.

217. E.g. Brock. Op.cit.(1978), p.327 (Jacob of Serugh) and Vigne. Op.cit., pp.72-75 (Justin)

218. DBL, p.80, alluding to Psalm 74:13b and H A Kelly. The Devil at Baptism, pp.71-72

219. Psalm 114:3, linking the Baptism to both the Exodus and entering the promised land. For a review of the history of this motif see T N Hall. "The Reversal of the Jordan in Vercelli Homily 16" and M A Levin. Piero Della Francesca's Baptism of Christ, pp.39-57. For texts see Vigne. Op.cit., pp.281-283 and Kelly. Op.cit., pp.176 (West Syria) & 199 (Armenia).

220. ECBC: Volume 5, p.200 (The Teaching of St Gregory)

221. Gregory Nazianzen. "Oration 39", p.358

222. Wilkin. Judaism and the Early Christian Mind, pp.127-141 for an outline of Cyril's theology of the Baptism.

223. Luke 4:18, Acts 10:38, 1 John 2:20, 27. On the biblical texts see J John. "Anointing in the New Testament".

224. Op.cit.(1995), p.79

225. ECBC: Volume 5, p.153 and Murray. Symbols of Church and Kingdom, p.21

226. ECBC: Volume 6, pp.185-188 (Christ the Tutor. 6:25-28)

227. Luke 3:22 and its marginal reading (NRSV)

228. Vigne. Op.cit., pp.22-23; the list includes Origen and the Apostolic Constitutions (Greek MSS), Hilary and Augustine (Latin MSS); for a list of theologians who accept the variant reading as the most primitive see McDonnell. Op.cit., p.228.

229. Vigne. Op.cit., pp.107-132

230. Schiller. Op.cit., fig.148 which depicts a Roman stone relief from the end of the fourth century with the Nativity and the raising of the Widow's son at Nain.

231. Ibid, figs.162 and 286: respectively, an ivory relief, dating from c.900 with the shepherds, the Nativity and John the Baptist, and an early thirteenth century Embossed Gold with the Magi.

232. Nordström. Op.cit., pp.84-114. One outstanding example is found on an elaborate octagonal basin found in Verona where the Birth, the Annunciation, the Shepherds and the Magi are shown (pp.85, 113). Another is Swedish where the birth of Christ, the Magi and the infant Jesus' first bath are juxtaposed (pp.86, 95 & 101).

3: Myth and the Story of Jesus' Baptism: Endnotes

233. T J Talley. The Origins of the Liturgical Year, pp.126-129
234. R H Bainton. "The Origins of Epiphany", p.343 (fn.17) and Talley. Op.cit., pp.127-9
235. W J Dalton. Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits, pp.253-255
236. S L Johnson. "The Baptism of Christ". The descent into hell became a minor motif associated with the Baptism, adding to the evidence here; see the articles by McDonnell and J H Bernard.
237. Dalton. Op.cit., pp.255-6; M Hooker. The Gospel According to St Mark, p.45 acknowledges the link, although on the questionable grounds of an 'obviousness' in the baptismal imagery.
238. Op.cit., p.15
239. AIRI, p.106 (Sermons on the Sacraments I:16)
240. Vigne. Op.cit., p.158
241. G W Lathrop. "Baptism in the New Testament and its Cultural Settings", pp.33-34

Chapter Four

Ritual Symbols, their Elusive Structure and the Bodiliness of Baptism

1 Characteristics of Ritual Symbols

Symbols are the breath that gives religious practice its very life, and yet their structure contributes to its complexity. In common with the approaches of other disciplines, anthropologists presuppose the ideas implied by the etymology of symbol. In the ancient world, sumbolon was a technical term related to remembrance, identification and hospitality. A host would halve an object, present one half to his guest and retain the other for himself. If at a future date a descendant of the guest were to offer his sumbolon to the household, and it was found to match the other half, then this would constitute a concrete act of recognition. Technically, the sumbolon was a 'pass': it was 'something in and through which we recognize someone already known to us', and therefore provokes reflection on the theme of encounter and the coming together of two things that are not coincidental to each other but inwardly related. The presumption is that one particular has an ability to represent a greater whole with which it is intrinsically associated.¹

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How this representative function is understood by social anthropologists will be outlined in three sections. First, questions involving the identification, interpretation and effectiveness of symbols will be surveyed. Secondly, recognition will be given to an unavoidable elusivity in the process of symbolic understanding. Thirdly, the value of a search for structures that lie beneath the surface of empirical symbolic observation will be evaluated.

1.1 Symbolic Identity, Interpretation and Effectiveness

In terms of the identity, interpretation and effectiveness of symbols it is widely recognised that V W Turner has proved to be a formative influence on the thinking of many social anthropologists. Even if his ideas have not always been followed, it will be helpful to set out his thinking, since recognition of its limitations will serve as a catalyst for further investigation.

Fundamentally, Turner identified a ritual symbol in terms of a 'unit of action'. It is:

a molecule, or smallest portion to which a ritual sequence or dynamic total can be reduced by subdivision without losing its semantic structural identity.²

The symbols Turner observed in his experience of African religion consisted of 'objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures, and spatial units'³ and required observation in the 'the widest action-field context'⁴ which includes not just the ritual itself but the social processes of which the ritual is but one phase. At a theoretical level anything may fulfil a symbolic function; the empirical facts however demonstrate that cultural circumstances determine what is employed symbolically.

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The interpretation of a ritual symbol is closely linked with its identification since, due to Turner, there is wide acceptance that typical of a symbol's identity is its ability to convey multiple meaning. Said to be multivocal a symbol unifies and condenses disparate and often contradictory significata. The spectrum of meaning requires careful elucidation, and there are three dimensions of significance which must be taken into account: the exegetical, the operational and the positional.⁵

The exegetical significance is determined by an analysis of meanings offered by informants. Often the information will be obtained in the form of mythological narrative. Equally, it may be a piecemeal account where the meaning of one symbol is given without being interwoven into an overarching story, or it may be delivered doctrinally, perhaps as a form of instruction. In the operational dimension, symbolic meaning is determined by its use; it is observed how ritual participants handle the symbol - who uses it and towards whom, and the 'affective quality' of the action is noted. Finally, the positional analysis results from a symbol's relationships with other symbols both in the same ritual complex and beyond; this dimension to symbolic interpretation is an important theoretical point for this chapter and requires further explication.

Assistance here comes from the anthropologist R Firth who articulated one of its implications:

strictly speaking there are no symbolic objects - there are only symbolic relationships.it is the conceptualization of the object in a given relationship that is significant.⁶

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Such symbolic relationships are located in both the immediate ritual context and the wider non-ritual context. Within the ritual context a measure of the relationship between symbols reveals a varying prominence. In an attempt to clarify this point, Turner has called the senior symbols which preside over whole rites or their phases, dominant symbols, and they are contrasted with dependent symbols. The latter, as their characterisation suggests, function to keep the ritual action fluent and may even be univocal; they are numerous and regarded as instrumental in that they are a means to achieving the goals of the ritual. Dominant symbols in contrast serve also as symbols of the axiomatic social values by which the ritual is judged. Typically, they have a more pronounced multivocality and a pivotal position in the ritual; they provide fixed points in the entire ritual system and recur frequently in specific rituals.⁷

The relationship that a dominant symbol has with other ritual symbols has a further interpretative impact. Even though the same dominant symbol might be present in a variety of ritual contexts it is common to find that alternative referents, or combinations of referents, are drawn to the attention of the participants in each case. Thus a range of referents associated with a dominant symbol may be latent. Equally, it is found that a dominant symbol may project meanings, which in a particular ritual context may not be evident, onto other symbols in the action-field. As Turner has commented:

a symbol must always be regarded as 'dense with meaning', even when only a portion of this richness is situationally emphasized or 'visible' through the symbol's structural relations with another symbol or other symbols.⁸

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The relationship between the intra-ritual environment and its non-ritual context implies that a symbol has an interpretative context, separated in space and time from its ritual operation, that is located in everyday existence. Symbolic meaning therefore cannot be determined from the ritual context alone, but is a dialectic between two semantic processes. The symbol, derived from its own particular semantic field is brought into the 'action-field' of ritual. It represents to participants the greater whole from which it emanates and in dialectical interaction it creates new meaning, both for adjacent symbols and for itself. It is this parallelism⁹ which is the originator of semantic innovation in ritual as meaning is imported into the ritual context and interacts with the meaning presupposed by the myth-ritual complex itself.

A further insight is that within a field of social action a symbol carries with it a certain force, implying a measure of symbolic effectiveness.¹⁰ A symbol is not merely an object: in Turner's words, ritual symbols are a 'mobilization of energies as well as messages'.¹¹ This is demonstrated by a number of classic studies on the rôle of symbols in healing rituals where their power to bring about change is part of the cultural expectations of those who practise them.¹² Symbolic power may be said to operate at the level of individual psychology where symbols have an 'inductive property', as well as at the level of sociality. In the words of one anthropologist symbols are 'instruments for transforming subjective experience'.¹³

Turner himself has offered an account of the effectiveness of a ritual symbol with reference to its internal structure. Normally, a symbol has a threefold constitution: there is a 'symbol vehicle' which

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shares a 'sensory perceptible characteristic' with a minimum of one of its denotations; an array of denotations or primary meanings, and a set of connotations which are implied beyond the meanings that are denoted.¹⁴ In addition, however, Turner speaks of a 'polarization of reference' within the symbol itself. He suggests that the meanings attributed to symbols, both those which are denoted and connoted, may be divided between:

those which refer frankly to physiological objects and processes and those which refer to ideas, notions conceived by mind, ideals, rules, conceptions of reason... in short to cognitive, moral and ideological factors and influences... I have called these 'poles' respectively the 'physiological' (or 'orectic') and 'ideological' (or 'normative') symbolic poles or terminals.¹⁵

Thus for Turner symbols relate both sensually and cognitively. Within the symbol is juxtaposed the 'grossly physical' and the 'structurally normative' and therefore ritual action causes the interpenetration of qualities between the two poles. In ritual what is normative becomes saturated with the emotional, and what is construed as basic and gross becomes honourable by being brought into contact with social values. Ideas and emotion, thought and feeling therefore are related and the obligatory is converted into the desirable.¹⁶

Thus, using Turner's theoretical categories as a theoretical basis, ritual symbols may be identified, interpreted and their effectiveness articulated. However, the discussion so far is characterised by a sense of incompleteness which may be located in two areas. First, in order to explicate how ritual symbols are effective there is recourse to psychoanalytic terminology and assumptions; a symbol demonstrates for instance condensation which produces an energy that requires release. Secondly, there is a sense of indeterminacy in

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the interpretative processes outlined, that is brought about by the recognition that the assertive dimension of ritual practice is more complex than the activity of articulation; certain things defy the exegetical dimension, and may only be deduced from the anthropologist's handling of the operational and positional dimensions. Therefore, whilst from an empirical point of view symbolic interpretation may proceed accurately along semantic lines and symbols in the ritual context may be confidently argued to demonstrate effectiveness, there is more to be clarified. Two qualifications will be elaborated, drawing on anthropologists who have engaged in a creative dialogue Turner's work. Neither qualification serves as a negation to what has been outlined, but enhances its credibility by accepting its limitations and adding a sense of realism to what may actually be achieved through symbolic analysis.

1.2 Elusiveness of Symbols

The first qualification is to state the elusiveness of the information being sought. It is not possible with current knowledge to offer the definitive interpretative account, the precise explanation of efficacy or the final answer to the problem of particularity and universality. It has to be accepted, as the anthropologist I M Lewis recognises, that symbols:

both reveal and conceal, pointing towards, if not fully disclosing, a different order of reality and experience. Symbols are thus by definition mysterious.¹⁷

Here Lewis expresses the widespread feeling amongst social anthropologists that a semantic approach to ritual symbols can never fully explain their profundity. A simple empirical observation of symbols is not adequate to establish a symbol's full interpretative scheme or a complete explanation of its effectiveness; in both areas

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there is an elusiveness to understanding. Consequently, anthropologists have made recourse to either psychoanalytic theories of symbolism which have sought to explore 'the nexus which binds together the cognitive and the affectual meaning of symbols'¹⁸, or to the search for a cognitive understanding of epistemological processes which allows for a certain amount of inexplicability in the essential character of a symbol.

Incorporation of psychoanalytic understandings of symbolism has been a matter of debate, and even resistance, in British anthropological circles. Some have been suspicious of the methods employed and unsure about how to incorporate a psychoanalytic result into their findings.¹⁹ Others, including Turner, have been more persuaded that symbolic efficacy is essentially a psychological issue. The interaction between the two disciplines was not facilitated by a statement by the influential psychoanalyst E Jones. He asserted that 'true symbolism', something to be distinguished from symbolism in the wider sense, was only to be encountered in the representation of repressed, unconscious material in dreams and neurotic symptoms.²⁰ Notwithstanding this background, there has been a recent acceptance and regularisation of the necessary mutuality of social anthropology and psychoanalysis.

At one level the widely held assumption that Freudian symbolism requires that most objects are seen as sexual symbols has been satisfactorily modified. It is recognised that Jones actually stated that 'all true symbols represent ideas of the self and the immediate blood relatives or of the phenomena of birth, love and death'.²¹ Freudian symbols therefore are most properly to be regarded as

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relating to human life in its biological dimension, and whilst they include the aspect of psychosexual representation they are by no means restricted to this. At another level Freudian psychoanalysis itself has progressed to the point where the limited definition of symbol can no longer be sustained. Thus, it is possible for a psychoanalyst to propose that the barriers between the two disciplines are lowered by recognising that symbolisation is a property belonging not only to the non-discursive mode of thought in the process of dreaming, but also may be employed by the discursive and rational style of thinking associated with daytime intellectual activity.²²

Such developments have enabled the interface between the two disciplines to be the subject of a more fruitful dialogue. One expression of this has been given by Cohen. He argues that the orthodox explanation of cultural symbols - that they 'seep through from the dynamic unconscious into social activity' - is unsatisfactory²³; it explains neither whether the unconscious processes at work are affected by social influences or not, nor the mechanism of mediation between the two spheres. In its place Cohen suggests that the reverse is the case: the relatively autonomous process of cultural symbolisation 'mobilizes or activates certain processes of the dynamic unconscious and uses them as a resource in the fashioning of cultural symbols'.²⁴ Thus, rather than the contents of the dynamic unconscious erupting out into social life, they are 'subliminally selected' depending on the contingencies of cultural processes. Societies therefore cannot be treated as individuals 'writ large', and it cannot be said that all forms of symbolism are affected to the same extent. Although the relationship between sociological and psychological factors, and hence the efficacy of symbolic action, may always be

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elusive Cohen it seems has at least provided a framework for an account which avoids some of the potential pitfalls.

The leadership in rethinking the epistemological processes in symbolic interpretation came from the French anthropologist, D Sperber.²⁵ He argued against the cryptological fallacy or the assumption in the study of symbolism that ideas or objects are merely substitutes for further ideas or objects. For Sperber the very notion that a symbol may be reduced to a signifier and what it signifies, or a sign and its interpretation, is highly problematic.²⁶ Sperber's criticises Turner's interpretation of symbols which cannot account for symbols that are genuinely unexplainable. They are still symbols, as are those which are manipulated in ignorance by the majority and have interpretations that are known only to the specialised minority. Also, Sperber asserts that often a symbolic interpretation is itself symbolic. This issues in a process of infinite regress or the hermeneutical circle which, whilst in some ways inevitable, also challenges the exclusivity of the linguistic assumptions behind most approaches to symbolic interpretation.

In the light of such arguments Sperber proposes that the essence of symbolism is the description of the human mind's treatment of the mental representation. Symbolic processing occurs when rational processing breaks down. The latter is a conceptual device which operates when new information is presented by searching the short-term working memory in order to make sense of the input. It may be however, that the new information cannot be made relevant by this process; either the input has not been sufficiently analysed or its relevance cannot be ascertained. Thus an inassimilable conceptual representation

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remains to be handled and this is carried out by the symbolic device which engages in a process of focalization followed by one of evocation. The symbolic device focuses on the unfulfilled condition and then considers this against the passive or long-term memory, engaging in a process of evocation whereby the information contained there is reviewed and tested for its suitability. Symbolism therefore provides 'a second mode of access to memory: evocation, appropriate when invocation fails'.²⁷

One simple analogy, that of aroma, illustrates the issues that both the psychological and the cognitive approaches to symbolism are attempting to articulate. Although the olfactory domain is one of the least explored aspects of human experience, and has suffered from devaluation in recent Western life, it offers some compelling suggestions to help probe the way in which symbols might be interpreted and understood to be efficacious. An aroma is a physical phenomenon which has an innate capacity to evoke powerful emotional responses; aromas are cultural and therefore, by definition, historical and social entities imbued with value. Most appropriately the olfactory domain is characterised by its elusiveness; aromas cannot be directly named, and an understanding and description of them must proceed by 'groping to express our olfactory experience by means of metaphors'.²⁸

One reflection on the link between symbolic efficacy and olfaction has been pursued by A Gell in connection with the odour of a particular perfume used by the Umeda in New Guinea. The adult male will sleep with his bag which contains a sachet of perfume. Its aroma is understood both to stimulate dreams which portend good hunting and

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to attract wild pigs during the hunt. The following day with his magical perfume around his neck, he will be stimulated both by the success indicated in the dream and by the wafting of the perfume. Since the Umeda word for dream is almost identical to their word for smell it is reasonable to perceive an extremely close connection between dream-experiences and smell-experiences which may be regarded as two aspects of one human faculty, 'having cognizance of things at a remove'. Thus the perfume, with its properties of attraction and dream stimulation, is regarded as providing access to the ideal state; that is, in dream or reality as the hunt is proved to be successful. Perfumes, as symbols, are therefore efficacious in that their 'disembodiedness and typicality serve as the vehicles for symbolic awareness of an ideal order'.²⁹

Sperber himself employs olfaction to illustrate his proposals for a symbolic processing device. He argues that even though the human mind can distinguish between thousands of smells, in no language is there a classification of smells, as for instance for colours. Consequently, smells are expressed in terms of either their origins or effects: for instance a smell is that of coffee, or it is a nauseating smell. Smells cannot be directly recollected, and can only be recalled by recourse to a visual image of their cause; on the other hand they may be effectively recognised, even after a prolonged interval. Such properties of the olfactory sense in Sperber's view must be related; when a smell is encountered that cannot be explained, the symbolic device after focalization reviews the range of recollections which 'are likely to corroborate the feeling of recognition'.³⁰ As Sperber remarks, the example of smells 'confirms the independence of symbolism from verbalization and its dependence on conceptualization'.³¹ Since

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the evocational field includes all information that might be susceptible of providing the recognition:

in trying to identify a smell, one may revive memories that are more captivating than the smell itself, more insistent than the original desire one had to identify it. This relative freedom of evocation is at the very base of the social use of this psychological mechanism, symbolism.³²

The analogy of aroma, therefore, offers potential for understanding the elements of elusiveness and mystery in symbolic interpretation and efficacy. The analogy is a powerful one since odours are characteristically incomplete until they are traced to their source where they are so concentrated that they merge with their related substances. The olfactory dimension is both part of the world and a reference to it and, as Gell comments, the use of the olfactory domain in understanding symbolism has the advantage over a linguistic model:

somewhere in between the stimulus and the sign a place must be found for the restricted language of smells, traces which unlike words only partially detach themselves from the world of objects to which they refer.³³

The argument is only reinforced when it is noted that smells, particularly pleasant aromas, can have a prominent function in a transformatory ritual. Along these lines D Howes has suggested that there is an underlying logic to this because in everyday living odours are most noticeable at threshold situations. Equally, there is a psychological dimension since the recognition of a smell has the effect of transporting participants to an event or source, and furthermore, a pleasant odour has a corporate unifying function at the inter-subjective level.³⁴

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An account of the elusiveness of ritual symbols, then, requires an appropriation of Freudian insights to understand the way in which the unconscious is dynamically integrated, not only into dreams but also into social action. It also requires recognition that a sufficient interpretation of symbolism in the ritual context cannot be limited to a consideration of the chain of signifiers. In other terms, symbolic exegesis employs that which is already known; application of cryptological methodology cannot account for all the emotional and cognitive significances demanded by the task of symbolic interpretation. This is why the implication of symbolic elusivity is far-reaching; it confirms that the effectiveness of symbols in ritual does not lie in their ability to communicate a clarity of shared meanings. This aspect of symbolic efficacy has been summed up well:

symbols are more effective less because they communicate meaning (though this is also important) than because, through performance, meanings are formulated in a social rather than cognitive space, and the participants are engaged with the symbols in the interactional creation of a performance reality, rather than merely being informed by them as knowers.³⁵

1.3 Searching for Deep Structure

In the discussion on interpretation the relationship between the symbolic vehicle and the unconscious meaning was illuminated, but remained unclear. The necessity exists for a more concrete means for expressing the underlying categories and principles which are being sought. The second qualification to the framework of symbolic identification, interpretation and effectiveness is therefore the concept of deep structure, appropriated by social anthropology from linguistics, for the purposes of expressing patterns of belief and behaviour that are not consciously perceived.

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The search for deep structure through an understanding of symbolism is one that has occupied a group of social anthropologists. Of these, E Ardener has sought to extend the structuralist use of the categories of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships.³⁶ In a similar way to previous structuralists, Ardener has seen the necessity for distinguishing between levels of structural analysis. In his understanding there are two: a level that involves template structures and one that contains structures of realisation. The latter are conceptually straight-forward: they appear in the 'normal flux of experience' and may be studied by the usual observational devices outlined above. It is the template structures, which are of most interest because they have a greater complexity. They are 'posited before identified'; they are reflected in the structures of realisation and can only be constructed from this data. Their impressions and contents may be sensed, but what emerges is said to be 'the hollow shape of its shadow in language'. In the ritual context the realisation structures are contingent, and therefore will demonstrate inconsistency when one ritual is compared to another in the same cultural context. What remain constant within a particular culture are the template structures; they provide a patterning which constrains the well-formed ritual performance.³⁷

The well-formed ritual performance, however, does not randomly materialise in cultural form; it is subject to careful determination that has both conscious and unconscious components. In this process, deep structures operate and are revealed in the two important principles of selectivity and directionality which both relate to questions concerning the appropriateness of particular symbols for specific ritual purposes. Selectivity indicates that a society has an

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almost infinite range of potential symbolic media, but from this abundance selects a restricted set to serve its ritual purposes. It is reasonable to assume that behind such a selection lies an unarticulated, but cogent reason. In Sperber's terms, the restricted set are chosen due to their 'greater likelihood to trigger a rich evocation'. Directionality conveys the sense that for each ritual specific symbols are chosen dependent upon the stimulus that is felt to be appropriate to the elaborated purposes of the ritual. Thus for each ritual within a culture there is a field of evocation within the long-term memory, something that is linked to the culture's selection of the symbolic stimulus.³⁸

If particular aspects of materiality are preferred on account of the stimulus they evoke, this draws attention to what Turner termed the 'substantial basis' of the symbol, its physical properties perceived by the senses as they are recognised by a specific culture. The recognition that some key dominant symbols may have a substantial basis further focuses the exegetical method related to symbols. Not only is there a translation of the symbol into its component meanings, but there may also be a motivation for that translation; that is, there may be something fundamental to the physicality of the symbol which supports and encourages particular interpretations.

This seems an elementary statement, but within the bounds of social anthropology it has been vigorously debated. The argument is focused in the disputed notion of the natural symbol, one whose meaning is transcultural and not specific to one culture.³⁹ Most generally, it has been conceived as a symbol chosen from the natural order to represent divinities or, in a more sophisticated manner, as a

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symbol which has an observable correspondence between the vehicle of its meaning and its referents. Jung has been influential here. He found natural symbols in the unconscious psyche and its experience of the human body; in his scheme, archetypal expressions reveal the structure of the unconscious and the materiality of the body on a universal scale.⁴⁰

The notion of a natural symbol highlights a dilemma for social anthropology. Its methodology follows universal principles but its instinct is to emphasise the distinctiveness of the culture which is being observed. Consequently, in anthropological theory the conventionality or arbitrariness of the link between the symbol's vehicle and its meanings is stressed.⁴¹ Rather than a dismissal of a motivational factor in the character of the symbol, terminology along these lines is to be understood as a measure of the complexity rather than the inexplicability of the linkages being sought.⁴² In the case of natural symbols which arise from the human body, arbitrariness may be read as a means of expressing and emphasising relativity between cultures and the sentiment that actually the state of affairs could be otherwise.⁴³ Overall, there is recognition that symbols do gather towards themselves similar meanings in unconnected cultures. The move towards the conventionality of the link between a symbol and its referents is essentially a warning against the facile acceptance of a literal, definitive meaning for one symbol in all cultures.

Given that the anthropologists' agenda may thus be appreciated and that the concept of natural symbol is a possibility, endorsement for its existence may be adduced from other disciplines. It is a central task for historians of religions to plot the meanings of symbols.

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Although often they deal with the transcultural migration of symbols the ability of certain symbols to contain particular meanings independent of specific cultures is an important conclusion. Thus, E R Goodenough has maintained that his evidence demonstrates that there is a 'basic' or 'emotional' value intrinsic to a symbol. The transfer of symbols between cultures may be explained in terms of this essential value, recognising that this is an intrinsic property which remains constant and which, in the receiving culture, enables the attachment of fresh semantic content through new explanations or mythological background.⁴⁴ As Eliade says, the progression of history does not destroy the basic structure of a symbol; specific cultural narratives have the capacity to actualise meanings that otherwise would lie dormant and continually to add new meanings.⁴⁵

In philosophical reflection, both Ricoeur and M Midgely have made important contributions to the balance between the universality and particularity of symbolic meaning. For Ricoeur, a symbol has a plenitude that distinguishes it from the emptiness of a sign; its fulness arises from a remaining 'trace of a natural relationship' between the signifier and the signified.⁴⁶ Midgely, wanting to place humanity in the context of the evolutionary order, argues that the power to interpret expressive movements must be understood in terms of the human context of animality. Such gestures are not the direct communication of emotion but their symbolisation; they are arrived at not by convention but may be described as natural symbols. The likeness between peoples of differing cultures in this respect Midgely remarks to be astonishing.⁴⁷

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Other disciplines therefore strengthen the case for a necessary dialectic between universal and particular interpretative strategies. However, naming the concepts of deep structure and symbolic value, enables the articulation of the sense that unconscious processes are at work in the structuring of ritual procedures and that the symbols they employ may have intrinsic properties that are both universal and suitable for a particular ritual application. The conversation between a universal understanding of a symbol and its cultural appropriation may be regarded as a device to open up specific and even unique cultural meanings and to pursue the possibility of a universal frame of reference.

2 Dominant and Dependent Symbols in Christian Baptism

Thus it has proved possible to establish an analytical framework for ritual symbolism which may be brought to the process of understanding the symbols of Christian baptism. In the case of the broad category of Christian ritual and its symbolic content, it would be an exhaustive task to list its selectivity. Even in the case of one Christian ritual its directionality may be indicated rather than conveyed succinctly. Nevertheless, if there is one baptismal symbol which is central it is evidently water. Therefore, the symbolism of water is the requisite starting point for the investigation which follows. The objective will be to appropriate the anthropological model of interpretation, while recognising the importance of the themes of an inbuilt elusivity and of a search for deep structure.

One anthropological principle that has been established is the heuristic importance of the relationships between ritual symbols. For

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reasons that will become apparent, the symbolism of oil has been chosen as one which will particularly enhance the theological understanding of the symbolism of water.

It is at this point that the nomenclature for symbols resulting from water and oil introduced towards the end of the previous chapter will be used. This is a deliberate shift in vocabulary; the descriptors aqueous and oleaginous embody the recognition that the symbol is more comprehensive than simply the material element on its own, reflecting the relational understanding of symbol which has been expounded. It is an acknowledgement that through the use of oil and water, by means of the agency of the Church, God interacts with human beings. At such symbolic moments, attention is focused on the interface between the human body and the symbolic elements; this, the interaction between components of materiality, is what constitutes the primary symbolism of baptism. However, that is to anticipate the argument of the chapter. First of all, the task of interpreting aqueous and oleaginous symbols must be undertaken.

2.1 Aqueous Symbolism

Application of water to the human body, with a liturgical formula, has been the essential ritual action of Christian baptism throughout the tradition. Its realisation has occurred through a variety of techniques, characterised as submersion, immersion, affusion or aspersion, normally carried out in a threefold manner.⁴⁸ In addition, there is a cluster of aqueous symbols that have occasionally followed the central water rite; thus water 'has been employed to wash neophytes' feet⁴⁹ and new Christians have drunk a cup of water after an episcopal blessing.⁵⁰

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As a religious symbol water has a certain claim to universality which arises from the immediacy of its requirement for the sustenance of human living. An important survey of the meanings and functions of water summarises the ambiguity and wide-ranging nature of its symbolism:

as a fluid, it can symbolize a pure absence or as yet still amorphous material that will be used by the gods. It may fulfil a positive function. It bathes, dissolves, and purifies. Essential to human life and necessary for the growth of plants, it symbolizes a generative or life-giving quality, very similar to creative power. It is thus divine and sacralizing. Yet it is also capable of playing a negative rôle. The gods can utilize the destructive power of its waves. Active in itself, whether divine or monstrous, water erodes everything that takes form and tends to annihilate all distinction in its own inconsistency. Finally, just as rivers and seas contribute to defining the contours of a country, so the dividing of the waters helps to define the cosmic order.⁵¹

The semantics of water symbolism in ritual is actualised from such a universal grid of meaning by its associated mythology. While particular referents are brought to prominence, others will be elided or remain latent and unactivated.

Two examples from the Reformation will illustrate how this has operated. In Luther's 1519 sermon on baptism he stressed that the etymology of 'baptism', both in Greek and German, indicates that 'what is baptised is sunk deeply into the water'. Baptism was about being dipped into water, but it was a fatal dipping since full submersion signified 'that the old man and the sinful birth of flesh and blood are to be wholly drowned by the grace of God'. Although the existential force meant that his thinking about baptism was determined primarily by the negativity of water, he could still assert that emersion signified new life. However, the weight of the balance

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between the positive and negative meanings tended to lie in the direction of destruction.⁵²

In contrast, Calvin placed his emphasis on washing, indicated by the regular occurrence of the threefold effects of baptism - the washing away of sins, mortification with Christ and a sharing in the abundance of God's blessing.⁵³ On each occasion the metaphor of washing heads the list, and is informed by Pauline theology. In baptism the Christian was instructed to perceive 'spiritual things in the physical, as if set before our very eyes'.⁵⁴ Primarily, the spiritual washing away of sins is to be discerned beneath the physical washing. When Calvin addresses the mode of baptism, the recognition that the etymology connotes dipping and immersion in water is noted as the most widespread practice of the early Church, yet he argues that the matter is open to local interpretation. This is because, for Calvin, any mode of baptism can signify the activity of washing and hence the washing away of sins.⁵⁵

In Luther and Calvin's theologies, respectively, the destructive and cleansing meanings of water are emphasised. Is it possible to adjudicate between the two approaches in relation to their deployment of the negative and positive sides of aqueous symbolism?

An initial step towards an adjudication is to inquire whether the New Testament itself presents one referent of water symbolism as prominent. There is no point at which the link between baptism and aqueous symbolism is indicated more strongly than during Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel. The question then

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becomes an investigation of the link between the various references to water in the Gospel.

When Nicodemus is urged of the need to be 'born anew' and then to be 'born of water and the Spirit' it is probable that the primary intention is to present a soteriology based on spiritual birth but this does not negate a reference to Christian baptism.⁵⁶ Interestingly, in terms of New Testament scholarship, it has been a non-sacramental interpretation which has enabled a fresh understanding of Jesus' use of water symbolism. It was Barrett who suggested that being born of water may refer to the physiology of human birth.⁵⁷ More recent studies have stressed the probability of this, noting that in both a Jewish and a wider Near Eastern milieu there would have been a suggestion of the breaking of the waters of the womb at childbirth.⁵⁸ Jesus' injunction may be seen to respond to Nicodemus' incredulity at the requirement of a second birth. Water refers to physical birth and Spirit to the need for rebirth; as Jesus then explains in a parallel statement, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit'. The theological strategy here is well summarised:

as always in the Fourth Gospel, the experience of natural existence is interpreted in terms of a doctrine of creation: the creator God creates and sustains his creation, and natural birth points beyond itself to the life which comes from God.⁵⁹

In Johannine water symbolism, therefore, human birth is connoted as a means to understand the new birth of the Christian. Baptism itself cannot be avoided, not least because the second scene of the chapter indicates that Jesus himself had a ministry of baptism which is contrasted with the baptism of John; the latter is located where there was 'much water' whereas the former is implied to give the Spirit.⁶⁰

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Later in the Gospel 'living water' appears twice. In Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman the person who drinks of the living water that Jesus gives will never thirst and experience a 'spring of water welling up to eternal life'.⁶¹ In his proclamation at the Feast of Tabernacles, the invitation is also to those who thirst and who will fulfil the scripture, 'out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'; here at least, water is a symbol of the Spirit.⁶² The interpretation of living water is increasingly regarded as deriving from the prophetic vision of the new Jerusalem, conceived eschatologically, with its fountain of living waters which flow out of the city.⁶³ The background to this image is found in the connection that living water has with the 'water in the wilderness' motif, typified by the provision of water by Moses from the rock for the people of Israel during their desert wanderings.⁶⁴ In an exposition of the motif's development in the Old Testament, W H Propp has concluded that it was expounded with three levels of association.⁶⁵ Firstly, there is the level which operates mythically, referring to the creation, and in which the entire world is irrigated. Secondly, there is an historical level, referring to the post-Exodus wilderness experience of Israel and the satisfaction of their thirst. Finally, there is the contemporary reference in which the promised land is foreseen as fertilised by divine action. Each of the biblical texts which Propp considers appropriates the story in a different manner; significantly with reference to the exilic period, the prophets perceived the return from Babylon as a new journey in which Yahweh sustains his people in the Syrian desert, recreating the nation of Israel and leading them to the holy mountain which itself is the source of the eschatological waters which convey the life of God to

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its surroundings. God himself becomes the fountain of life.⁶⁶ The 'water in the wilderness' motif speaks of Yahweh's 'power to sustain human, animal and vegetable life in the most inhospitable climes by the gift of his water'. The meaning of living water, therefore, comes from a narrative complex which includes the themes of creation, redemption and the nurturing of the abundance of the promised land. In the Fourth Gospel, the living water of eschatological expectation has become a present reality in Jesus. Especially, this is the case at his death where from his pierced side blood and water flow.⁶⁷ Jesus is the new temple, the fountain which issues forth the rivers of life, the Spirit which flows into the new creation.

Examination of the Fourth Gospel's use of aqueous symbolism has revealed two principal referents. First, water indicates the physiology of human birth which becomes a means of speaking about the life of the Spirit. Secondly, living water is the antitype of the water flowing from the rock in the wilderness; mythologically this encapsulates the primordial act of creation which in turn is a type of the expectation of the recreation of the promised land. They both convey water as fulfilling a positive function; respectively, water is creative and restorative. They are linked theologically; the result of being born anew by the Spirit is to experience the internal welling up of living water which eternally quenches thirst. However, they are also linked through the symbolism of water; the Gospel stands in the Old Testament tradition in which waters of birth were transposable into fountains of living water.⁶⁸

This symbolic complex - birth, living water and the rock in the wilderness - is consonant with the East Syrian emphasis on the font as

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the womb of the Jordan. In the West, it is an emphasis that reaches from the patristic period through to the liturgy and literature of the medieval period.⁶⁹ It is probable, however, that it also informed popular consciousness through iconographic media in which it is, significantly, linked to Jesus' Baptism.

An example is found in the twelfth century St Albans Psalter. The central part of the icon shows Jesus standing naked in an envelope of water covering his body up to his shoulders. He is being anointed by John the Baptist with oil from a small bowl, the Spirit is descending in the form of a dove and with his right hand he is blessing the Jordan river.⁷⁰ It is the overall shaping of this scene which is important because it has been suggested that the form of a rock is represented.⁷¹ This is apparent from the history of iconographic representations of the Baptism. In one account it is demonstrated that between the fifth and tenth centuries there are three identifiable types. In the eleventh century a Western iconographic tradition, of which the St Albans example is part, began to imitate what is called the 'Cappodocian' type. In this representation:

Jesus does not descend into the river, but the water mounts towards him and reaches his shoulders, forming around the body an egg-shaped dome with rigid contours, a simple line traced on the bottom or sometimes framed by a light border of rocks.⁷²

The St Albans example is part of this tradition and only lacks the mountainous background which was integral to its Cappodocian predecessor. The significance of the mountainous terrain is evident in later Orthodox icons composed within this tradition. Jesus stands encased in an envelope of water which is pouring from the rocks in the background, split by the downwards flow.⁷³ In one iconic representation there is explicit testimony to the symbolism of the water with a

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citation of the Isaianic invitation for 'every one who thirsts, [to] come to the waters'.⁷⁴ That this symbolism has not been elided in the transmission from East to West is evident in Queen Mary's Psalter, which dates from the beginning of the fourteenth century. There Psalm 80 is prefaced with a version of the icon in which the waters are heaped, reaching half-way up Jesus' body.⁷⁵ The Psalm acts as a commentary on the icon; 'I tested you at the waters of Meribah' and 'with honey from the rock I would satisfy you'.⁷⁶ In other words, Jesus' Baptism is portrayed in living water. Although the ideological background of the St Albans icon has been traced from its Eastern provenance, it is probable that it reflected a tradition that had already found expression in the West. Ivories from Italy, France and Germany dating from the fifth and sixth centuries show the Baptism taking place in water which gushes from a rock-like source above the image of Jesus, conveying succinctly the notion that Jesus' Baptismal water, and therefore all baptismal water, was the antitype to the water which flowed from the rock in the wilderness.⁷⁷

In the argument so far the negative aspect of aqueous symbolism has remained dormant. However, just as the theology of Jesus' Baptism requires an understanding of the kingdom of God which is brought about through the Passion, so the Johannine perception of water as a positive influence requires supplementing with its negative role. This appears to remain latent within the Fourth Gospel, yet it emerges elsewhere in the New Testament.

At this point Luther's approach to aqueous symbolism again becomes relevant. Although, from what has been argued, it is possible to suggest that Calvin's symbolic emphasis is preferable to Luther's, it

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would be wrong to dismiss the latter's theology of baptism on this basis. Luther's emphasis on baptismal death will be more fully explored in chapter five: the present criticism of Luther is one which is based on his tendency to over-emphasise the negative at the expense of the positive. Nevertheless, it may be maintained that it was Luther who explicitly recognised the double signification of water, even though his overall emphasis moved in the wrong direction. In the Flood Prayer from his first baptismal liturgy this is clearly articulated and, very significantly, related explicitly to Jesus' Baptism. The liturgy portrays the Great Flood as destructive of the unfaithful, yet a vehicle of salvation for Noah's family; also, the waters of the Red Sea drowned the Egyptians yet brought life to Israel.⁷⁸ Moreover, these baptismal types are then linked with the Baptism of Jesus:

and through the baptism of thy dear child, our Lord Jesus Christ, [thou] hast sanctified and set apart the Jordan and all water for a saving flood, and an ample washing away of sins.⁷⁹

It is intriguing to note that when the Flood and the Exodus are brought into conjunction with the Baptism Luther's balance of the two aspects of water symbolism becomes acceptable. The weight is on the positive, but within that is included the negative. The narrative context of the Baptism of Jesus brings an emphasis on the water of Christian baptism as life-giving, yet there is a lesser emphasis on its destructive meaning. The two poles of meaning, positive and negative, are part of water's natural symbolism. When the story of Jesus' Baptism is brought to bear, the negative is not elided but subsumed under the positive.

2.2 Oleaginous Symbolism

In the interpretation of aqueous symbolism just offered the issues of elusiveness and deep structure remain unexplored. A comparison with

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oleaginous symbolism will yield an insight into these two areas. Although both are legitimated by the Baptism of Jesus, it will be possible to delineate more clearly than is usual the relationship between the two types of baptismal symbol.

Baptismal oil is a dependent ritual symbol in relationship with water; it can never assume the dominance of the latter since for orthodox Christianity baptismal validity is independent of its use. Unlike water, which requires no cultural input, oil is a 'manufactured' symbol.⁸⁰ Also, they do not share the same degree of universality. Although olive oil has dominated, where the olive does not grow alternatives have been used⁸¹ and there are instances when oil for baptism has been unavailable for cultural or economic reasons.⁸² Perhaps it is the greater particularity of oleaginous symbolism, the complexity of the history of baptismal anointing and the diversity of significance which has led to the confusion in its contemporary appropriation. A brief historical survey and a review of some prominent interpretations will illustrate the difficulties.

Although it cannot be stated precisely when anointing became established within baptism, there are some concrete reference points. It is known, for instance, that a single post-baptismal anointing was commonplace in Northern Africa by the beginning of the second century.⁸³ At about same time in Rome, there were two additional anointings; there was a pre-baptismal anointing whereby the naked body of the candidate was smeared with oil, and after baptism, the whole body again was anointed, followed by the forehead.⁸⁴

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The earliest Syrian tradition, however, demonstrates a distinctly different ritual pattern. According to Winkler the original pattern was a single, prebaptismal anointing in which oil was applied to the head. By the mid-third century, a second prebaptismal anointing is evident, applied over the whole of the baptisand's body. A fifth century development, possibly under the influence of the Jerusalem Church, led to the introduction of a post-baptismal anointing and consequently a good deal of ambiguity of the symbolism of the different anointings.⁸⁵ The action of anointing could be given such ritual emphasis that it was understood to encompass the complete effect of Christian baptism; in the most extreme, and heterodox, cases the anointing rite completely overshadowed the use of water.⁸⁶ The Syrian Churches specify the use of olive oil in their liturgies. In East Syria, pure olive oil is demanded. Elsewhere, olive oil was perfumed with balsam, an oleoresin, or later with other fragrant ingredients. Such oil was labelled myron, equivalent to chrism in Western Christianity, and in the West Syrian tradition it eventually became exclusively reserved for post-baptismal anointing.

The Church developed in a Mediterranean milieu. Here, among the possibilities, olive oil was the most abundant.⁸⁷ In economic terms it was a significant component of the commodity market; expensive to transport, it was also expensive to produce and control of olive groves and their associated productive processes engendered wealth and power. Olive oil was therefore a precious item, signifying abundance and general well-being.

This was directly related to its quotidian usage. Olive oil was associated with the bathing process, acting both as a soap and as a

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means of physical refreshment afterwards. The glossing effect which remained on the surface of the body after bathing was valued for its aesthetic appearance and could be enhanced by the addition of carefully chosen pigment. In the athletic context, olive oil partially suppressed perspiration by closing the pores of the skin, and thus contributed to the feeling of well-being and suppleness valued by performers. In the cuisinary context, olive oil was a medium for preserving, boiling, frying and dressing foodstuff. Pharmaceutically, olive oil was employed to cure upset stomachs and to tend wounds and burns. In pagan religions it was employed not only to light shrines and anoint sacred objects but also sacrificially, being poured over the victim to enhance a more ready combustion.⁸⁸

The theology of the early Church presupposed the widespread cultural usage of olive oil. However, the specific interpretative inheritance of Hebraic anointing was also influential. The Old Testament knew at least three types of oil, all produced from an olive oil basis, and drew many of their functions together under the theological heading 'the oil of gladness'.⁸⁹ At the root of such a concept may well have been the image of Yahweh's festal banquet, the honouring of the favoured guests and the creation of a special bond between God and Israel or her representatives, the anointer and the anointed.⁹⁰ Among these ritual usages, the anointing of the king at his coronation had a particular prominence, followed by anointing of both high-priests and ordinary priests at their ordination; it is also recorded that the installation of some prophets took place by an informal anointing ceremony.

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Therefore, in addition to the story of Jesus' Baptism, parallel everyday activities and the Hebraic theological inheritance were the principal components which informed the early Church's reflection on the symbolism of baptismal anointing. The major theological development was directed towards recognition of the anointing oil as a vehicle or conductor for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Reception of the Spirit prior to immersion in water could be regarded as having authentic Apostolic authority⁹¹ and therefore the pre-baptismal anointing in the earliest Syriac tradition included within it the significance of the neophytes' perfection as priests, kings and prophets.⁹² Equally the gift of sonship, also intimately connected with the gift of the Spirit, received a strong emphasis.⁹³

Theological themes were also developed from the remedial, cleansing, lubrication and protective properties of oil. The practice of bathing has often been seen to lie behind both pre- and postbaptismal anointing.⁹⁴ Oil heals the soul from its infirmities and diseases and it wipes out every trace of iniquity and sin.⁹⁵ Like an athlete, the candidate's body was strengthened prior to baptism both for future struggles with Satan and also for the episode of baptism.⁹⁶ The effect of the oil was also protective; the mark was felt to have an apotropaic function in the future warding off of evil spirits.⁹⁷

Such diversity of meaning is absent in contemporary oleaginous liturgical symbolism. Indeed, in the face of a dominant petroleum industry its development has been discouraged. Yet Western society is re-discovering the benefits of natural, harvested oils for industrial and personal consumption, not least in the fields of aesthetics and health. There are good grounds for attempting to reclaim its symbolic

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contribution, yet the question remains concerning its deep structure. Why in particular is the symbolism connected with oil drawn in the direction of the Spirit?

It is suggested that the answer to this lies in one of the themes of olfaction, understood in analogous terms, which focuses attention on the issue of source. This is something found in the imagery of paradise which informed liturgical anointing with olive oil well into the middle ages. Aquinas reflected this influence when, in a defence of the particular use of olive oil in the chrism of confirmation against possible alternatives, he pointed to the significance of the olive tree. The evergreen nature of the oil's source, 'signifies the newness and mercy of the Holy Spirit'.⁹⁸ Roman Catholic liturgy, until very recently, preserved this theme in its description of the oil as brought 'forth from the green tree for refreshment of mind and body'.⁹⁹

This theological attention, directed towards the olive, finds its most explicit development in the East Syrian Church which maintained the use of pure olive oil rather than introducing myron. There, the symbolism of the olive emerges through the concept of paradise which is not just the eschatological goal of the Church but also its type.¹⁰⁰ In the paradisaical context the Tree of Life is the type of Christ who is the source of the Church's life. The Tree of Life alternates between the vine and the olive-tree; Christ, the antitype, is the 'primordial sacrament' from which the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist flow, antitypes of the fruits of the Tree of Life, wine and olive oil.

In Ephrem's writings olive symbolism is developed luxuriously. The rivers of paradise are types of the flowing streams of the olive oil

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in the pre-baptismal anointing. Christ himself hangs on the tree of the cross, and from his pierced side flow the fruits of sacramental nourishment and healing. Furthermore, Christ not only is the antitype of the Tree of Life, but is also symbolised in its fruit and its produce. This is stimulated by the common etymology of oil, meshcha, and the one who is anointed, meshicha, and leads to Ephrem's remark, 'from whatever angle I look at the oil, Christ looks out at me from it'.¹⁰¹ This symbolism was retained by the Jerusalem Church, where Cyril explained to the baptisands that, upon anointing, they were now grafted into 'Jesus Christ who is the cultivated olive tree' and were partaking of 'the richness of the true olive'.¹⁰²

The deep structure of East Syrian theological reflection may be indicated by taking a universal perspective. Baptismal anointing, in this view, is recognised in terms of the widespread application of fats and oils from both animal and vegetable sources to the human person for the facilitation of practical, everyday living. The exact material was culturally variable and perhaps finds its most elementary expression in crude animal fats combined with other basic substances and its most developed form in vegetable oils with added perfumed ingredients. Magical-religious functions of unguents from the natural sphere developed along the lines of a primitive psychology which regarded organic matter as infused with 'a divine force or vital essence' which is transmissible through physical contact.¹⁰³

To bring this into a Mediterranean context is to recognise the perception of an ontological connection between the human body and the organisms of the natural world. In its Greek manifestation a kinship between humanity and plants was identified. The liquid of life, the

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liquifiable element within the body had its counterpart in the liquid or the sap of plants. Retention of liquid in the plant world meant the continuation of life; dehydration of the plant's liquid meant withering and ultimately death. The equation of the vital sap of human beings with those of the plant world implied that one could be replenished by the other. Thus olive oil, the sap of the olive tree, could be infused into humanity by anointing; like the human fluids that were daily in danger of drying up, it was the 'the stock of life, vitality, strength'.¹⁰⁴

The literary critic, N Frye, has expressed another dimension of this relationship with the natural order. The olive, he explains, is 'a provider of food, that is symbolically, of life itself, and of healing'. The underlying structures behind this symbolism may be understood by reference to the parallel between the blood of an animal which was characterised as its life and resins, gums or oils which would seem to represent the 'life or inner essence' of the tree. For instance, in the Israelite world the 'balm of Gilead' used for healing or the ointments of frankincense and myrrh would fall under this category. Therefore anointing with olive oil, or its derivatives, evokes the correspondence between the body of Christ and the Tree of Life. Appreciating this, the early Church observed in the Book of Revelation's treatment of living water and the Tree of Life the two sacraments.¹⁰⁵

2.3 Elusiveness of Aqueous and Oleaginous Symbolism

So far, the emphasis has been placed on an interpretation of the universality of aqueous symbolism and the more particular cultural quality of oleaginous symbols. It is the relationship between aqueous

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and oleaginous symbolism which is now of interest, since it is this which enables an appreciation of symbolic elusiveness.

The preceding argument suggested that the key to the symbolism of baptismal anointing is found in the oil's relationship to the organisms of the natural world. Olive oil is the vitality of its source, the olive, released so that it may be conveyed to humanity. This is an important conclusion because the theme of source may now be understood to be central to both aqueous and oleaginous symbolism, indicating that the concept of olfaction may be a means of expressing the elusiveness of a full, cryptological explication of the two groups of symbols.

Baptisands have water and oil applied to them; olfaction as an analogy carries the suggestion that they thereby become related to the 'source' of the two symbols. The use of water and oil therefore carries with it the theological instinct that in baptism the Christian is brought into a connection with the source of eternal life. This was particularly clear in the Syrian development of olive oil symbolism. Christ is both the tree and its produce; anointing with the fruit is identification with the source, Christ himself. However, Johannine water symbolism also conveys this notion. In the conversation with Nicodemus Jesus defends the notion of being born from above with an account of his heavenly origin. Only the one who has originated from heaven can bear witness to such a concept; as has been rightly suggested 'the quality of the new birth is therefore rooted in the "sent-ness" of Jesus'.¹⁰⁶ Those who share this spiritual birth come to share the origin of Jesus and have the source of their spiritual lives in God. In Samaria, at the Feast of Tabernacles and from his crucified

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body, living water comes from Jesus himself. Jesus' origin, his authority and water symbolism seem therefore to be narratively linked; through water and its meanings the believer comes to share in eternal life.¹⁰⁷

Further reflection on the elusiveness of aqueous and oleaginous symbols is stimulated by olfaction itself and by the anthropological suggestion that attention is paid to relationships between symbols and the way that particular significata may be emphasised through their interaction. Here, one particular interaction is significant: the 'anointing' of baptismal water, usually carried out during the prayer for its blessing, which is found in both Eastern and Western liturgies. In the Syrian rites the ritual action is typically linked with the descent of the dove at Christ's Baptism; just as the myron descends visibly, the Holy Spirit descends invisibly, thereby sanctifying the baptismal water. The action is also linked to the effect that baptism will have: thus, typically, the priest declares; 'this water is marked, sanctified, and mingled with the holy oil so that it may become a new womb giving birth spiritually in baptism'.¹⁰⁸ Equally, oil is poured on the baptismal water 'for the gift of sonship' and for the preservation of the souls and bodies of those who will be baptised.¹⁰⁹

In some medieval Western rites chrism is poured onto the surface of the water in a cruciform manner followed by a stirring action.¹¹⁰ Its theological interpretation is sparse, although an eighth century Gallican text describes the mixing as:

the infusion of the saving chrism of our Lord Jesus Christ, that to all who descend therein it may be a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.¹¹¹

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The same practice was known in Visigothic Spain. Although no explicit interpretation is provided there are some intriguing indications of an implicit one. T C Akeley has suggested that the cruciform nature of the admixture was a descendant of a theological sentiment bequeathed by Hildefontus who argued that there was a parallel with the striking of the water in the wilderness by Moses. Just as there could be no salvation from Egypt without the supply of fresh water so there could be no salvation for the Christian unless the water was touched 'with the name and cross of wood of Christ'.¹¹² Therefore, with the information available, when oil and water were brought into the closest of physical relationships the positive meanings of water, as living water in the wilderness, were brought into the foreground of meaning and reinforced.

This interpretation of the anointing of water with oil has been at the cryptological level. Yet, it is a movement towards understanding the more elusive dimensions of the two symbols. This is indicated by another dimension to the symbolism of the Spanish rite. After the admixture there is a prayer of blessing in which the human condition is said to be 'foul with the squalor of our offences, stirred by the consciousness of sin'.¹¹³ As the prayer proceeds, it seems as though the water is a type of sinful humanity which is mixed with the oil of sanctification; God breathes on the water with 'the grace of holiness' enabling it to fulfil its ritual function. The infusion of chrism into the baptismal water may therefore be regarded as an analogy of the cleansing of the baptisand though anointing, a symbol of human participation in the Baptism of Jesus.

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That water could be a symbol of fallen humanity in the Spanish rite is initially surprising, at least until it is recalled that the medieval experience of water differed sharply from the modern one. There was a widespread experience of water as a threat to healthy living; this included the stagnant water of swamps, the polluted water of rivers and the water that gathered in the interstices between urban paving-stones. The fouler the stench the more the associated danger.¹¹⁴ Hence the possibility of ambiguous feelings towards medieval baptismal water. Not only could it be less than pure at its blessing but, although it would be regarded as holy, it could also become somewhat polluted after a number of baptisms.¹¹⁵ The addition of perfumed oil, in the Western rites may therefore be regarded as a correction of any negative olfactory symbolism.

This corrective dimension to the admixture highlights the significance of the oil's fragrance, something that is developed theologically in other baptismal anointings. In the Spanish instance of the prebaptismal effeta rite where a combination of the senses are anointed before baptism, the bishop signed the candidate on the mouth and ears, saying, 'effeta with the Holy Spirit unto an odour of sweetness'.¹¹⁶ At Milan, Ambrose described the post-baptismal anointing with perfumed oil as a symbol of the resurrected Christ with whom the neophyte is intimately associated.¹¹⁷ In the Gelasian texts baptismal anointing is said to remove the corruption of the first birth, and its aroma is a signal of 'the innocent savour of an acceptable life'.¹¹⁸ In the Maronite tradition of West Syria, at the postbaptismal sealing on the neophyte's forehead, the odour of myron is a symbol of true faith.¹¹⁹ In the Syrian Jacobite tradition the postbaptismal anointing serves an apotropaic function; it is in being filled with 'every odour

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of spiritual sweetness' that the candidate receives protection from 'adverse powers'.¹²⁰

The olfactory properties of baptismal oils therefore were of high importance to early theologians. It is of interest that in the developing anthropology of smell, one of the significant points that has emerged is the universal categorisation of smells into those which are pleasant and enhancing of human life, and those which are unpleasant and in some way dangerous or degenerative.¹²¹ The olfactory properties of baptismal symbols fall into the category of pleasantness¹²² and therefore, in the light of the account of symbolic elusivity offered earlier, contribute to the understanding of baptism as a transformatory ritual, enabling the baptisand to become 'the aroma of Christ to God'.¹²³ In the examples adduced, the theological interest is in the transcendent state of the neophyte who is in the process of crossing the threshold of the Church. The use of aroma may involve a psychological transportation which evokes the divine but it may also be said to establish the unity of the participants. The neophytes themselves, marked by the particular odour of the myron, a symbol of their new unity with God, are differentiated from those unmarked.

These sorts of points on olfaction may be difficult to comprehend in 'deodorized modern life', which in contrast to the ancient world does not have a highly developed sense of olfactory aesthetics in either private or public spheres.¹²⁴ Yet this represents a loss. It is a loss of a biblical metaphor and also a loss of a symbol which evokes the baptismal relationship with the transcendent; in the words of Von

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Balthasar regarding the Song of Songs, 'the most intimate things are alluded to with special delight in the language of scents'.¹²⁵

This section has shown how perfumed oil came to enhance the ritual properties of water and enabled the transformation of the neophyte through participation in the life of God and the Church. An affirmation of olfaction in baptism is an affirmation of the importance of the evocative, and therefore psychological nature, of its symbolism. In this direction the argument now turns.

3 Baptismal Symbols, Sanguineity and Deep Structure

That an element of the 'field of evocation' in Christian baptism is sanguineity has already been inferred by the recognition that olive oil, understood through paradisaic imagery, is analogous to the life-giving liquid within the human body. Oil is the produce of trees; either it is the 'blood' of the tree which when shed requires replenishment, or it is the 'wine' processed from the fruit of the tree. That this semantic connection between oil and blood might lie behind baptismal symbolism is readily confirmed by the apotropaic development of oleaginous symbolism in Syrian Orthodoxy which linked the Passover narratives with the rushma. Just as the door-posts were anointed with the blood of the sacrificial lamb repulsing the destroyer, so the signing of the neophyte on the forehead ensured that demons are repelled.¹²⁶

With this connection of oil with sanguineity in mind the deep structure of aqueous symbolism may now be explored. Like that of

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oleaginous symbolism, it lies in the intuitive connection between water and blood.

3.1 Blood and Baptismal Symbols

Christian self-consciousness of the relationship between baptismal water and blood reaches back at least to the notion that martyrdom of the catechumen was 'baptism by blood'. Whilst the terminology itself embodied the principle that there is no salvation without baptism, salvific ideas could more specifically be inferred. For Tertullian martyrdom was a second baptism, as Christ perceived his own death. In a mystical way, within a framework of imitatio Christi, the blood of the martyr became the cleansing blood of Christ.

'To the blood!' Such is the devise of God's soldier ready to undergo a second christening in the packed antechambers of the Kingdom, spurred on by Tertullian. But when the faith remains intact, the body is flooded with grace; spurts of blood, like purple flares yet more blinding than those of the sun, wash off sin, drowning horror in the miracle and the promise of appeasement, Paradise and its eternal peace.¹²⁷

A couple of centuries later, when martyrdom was celebrated rather than experienced, Augustine gave an interpretation of aqueous symbolism based on an allegorical treatment of the Exodus through the Red Sea. In an often exploited interpretation he described the baptismal waters as red, because they had been consecrated by the cross and the blood of Christ.¹²⁸

Augustine's insight into the symbolism of the blood of Christ was preserved into the medieval period¹²⁹, yet it was at the Reformation that the links between Christ's blood and Christian baptism were explicated more fully. An early exposition of this theme is found in Tyndale's work, where the sacrament of baptism represented to the

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believer that they are washed in Christ's blood; it is not the outward washing that brings salvation but it is the inward washing with the blood of Christ that cleanses and forgives sins.¹³⁰ For Calvin, the cleansing which the baptisand receives in representation and promise, is 'the sprinkling of Christ's blood'.¹³¹ Luther related this to the piercing of Jesus' side and argued that the Fourth Gospel implores us to 'open our inward and spiritual eyes of faith and see not only the water but the blood'. So evocative is the symbolism for Luther that the reality of baptism is, alongside the visible washing, an invisible cleansing of sin with the blood of Christ.¹³²

These examples are enough to demonstrate the interchange of water language with blood language in baptismal discourse. Parallel examples of linguistic interchange are to be found in contemporary ethnography and the historical evaluation of Semitic sacrifice. Thus the anthropologist N Munn, in her study of Murngin rite and myth, noted that a menstruating woman was referred to as a 'spring woman', which connotes the equation of flowing blood with the flowing streams of spring water. Blood inside the body is equivalent to water in nature; both have the innate capacity to escape from and overflow their boundaries.¹³³ The theologian F C N Hicks worked out a theory of animal sacrifice in the Semitic context. They were acts of fellowship between the clan and its god; animal blood is said to be 'life released in order to be communicated', and this connection of blood with life is observed to be related to water.

In a largely waterless country perennial springs and streams were parts of the divine manifestation due to divine agency, and the life-giving character of the water was ascribed in many cases to the blood of the god having mingled with it. Thus the familiar idea of 'living water' in the bible has a subconscious connection from the first with the idea of community life, both divine and human, as blood: it is part of the circle of ideas

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out of which, from its ultimate beginnings, the later religion grew, with its characteristic principle of the communication of a single life to the whole community.¹³⁴

What is significant in these ethnographic and historical insights into water symbolism is a recognition of an analogous structure between the human body and the earth, that is, the microcosm and the macrocosm. Water and blood may be said to form a set of alloformic homologies, one which arises from the human instinct to affirm the unity of humanity with the cosmos.¹³⁵ Blood circulates around the body as its life-force in the same way that spring water gives life to the earth. Water and blood share the common property whereby if the substance should become unbounded and uncontrollable, then what is an agent of life becomes an agent of destruction. Blood, the carrier of oxygen, released from the human body connotes an act of violence and death. Equally, water beyond its natural habitat becomes associated with flood and the suffocation of life. This universal perspective is immediately applicable to the cultural contexts of both the patristic and medieval periods when water and blood were intimately related. It also draws into its orbit the understanding of oil derived from the vegetable kingdom.

The structural homology of microcosm and macrocosm was known in medieval Europe and rose to a height of popularity between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.¹³⁶ The theology of Luther, and of the antecedent mystical tradition, which regarded the fluid flowing from Christ's side as a fountain may well have been sustained by this theoretical framework. In medical circles the human heart was the fountain of the whole body; blood flowing from a deep wound in the

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chest could be compared to the 'water of the fountain brought by a lead pipe'.¹³⁷

Yet the human body, and especially the female body, could also provide the interpretative key to the shedding of blood. Female blood was the fluid which was the fundamental support of human life. Medieval medicine saw female blood as the embryo's nourishment, which also, when transmuted into breast milk, nourished outside the womb. As C Walker Bynum explains, not only did Christ receive his flesh from a woman but 'his own flesh did womanly things'.¹³⁸ Coupled with a typical medieval fluidity of gender, the body of Christ which was the source of blood which cleansed and nourished the Christian, was wounded flesh giving birth to flesh, imparting life to those who partook of his blood.

However, the medieval analogy between microcosm and macrocosm may not be isolated from the related appreciation of the vegetable kingdom as an analogue for medical knowledge. The journey of human blood through the body is explicitly analogous to the dissipation of sap through the trunk, branches and leaves of the tree.¹³⁹ Together these parallels indicate a medieval perception that the secret of life lay in the supply of juices and liquids which led to a far more extensive interchange of fluids and their properties. Especially within the female body this is noticeable. The rôle of water in the origin of all existence led to a view that female milk was an aqueous variant and its rôle as not just the fertiliser, but also as the very source of fertilisation led to a comparison with semen.¹⁴⁰ Yet menstrual blood could also be perceived as the source of breast milk.¹⁴¹ So, within the human body medical understanding attributed a metamorphosis between

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its fluids. However, blood itself was the very 'juice of life' and one of its perceived properties in medieval times was its medicinal capability, employed either internally or externally. Specially obtained blood was known as 'living oil'. One of the methods by which this 'noble liquid' mediated health was in a heterogeneous composition, termed 'an oil called elemental', which was ingested and had the power to restore 'life after life'.¹⁴²

In medieval thought water, oil, blood, semen, milk - each with its own bodily associations - converge in a semantic field which emphasises their importance for human life and its enhancement. Yet this is not restricted to medieval Europe. It is well-known that diverse cultures have come to similar conclusions, something that F Héritier-Augé has argued may only be attributed to the 'constraint of a purely physical order'.¹⁴³ Most importantly, there is a continuity with antiquity and with what Goodenough has described as 'the symbols of fluid'. In the ancient world a basic human desire for the life-giving fluids of the gods, both for agricultural usage and for human immortality, may be located. The most logically elemental of these fluids, in Goodenough's account, were the flowing waters of rivers and the light streaming from the sun.¹⁴⁴ It was felt that the gods themselves released these fluids: the male god released it as blood or semen and the goddess supplied her milk. In more developed ancient thought, it was thought that the god offered his fluid to humanity in a ritual of wine-drinking, at one and the same time the blood of the grape and of the god himself.¹⁴⁵ Fluids, especially those associated with divine or human bodies evoked the transcendent.

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The affinity between the concepts of sanguineity and the baptismal symbols of water and oil suggests that it is here that the search for deep structure may be profitably located. There is something fundamental about the directionality of aqueous and oleaginous media which centres around the human experience of flowing blood. In pre-modern thought, the instinct to relate the human body to the cosmos and to the natural world enabled the ritual of baptism to assert, through its fluid symbols, the theological understanding that the Christian is united to the life and death of Jesus Christ. However, it went further than this. The relational dynamics between baptism, cosmos and nature suggest that a baptismal theology which recognises a commonality of deep structure to the symbols of water and oil moves counter to a theology that advocates a radical disjunction between the life principle and the physical world, between the effect on the soul and the part that the human body has in salvation.

Here is the thrust of locating a search for deep structure in the evocation of blood by aqueous and oleaginous symbols. These symbols are brought about by the interaction of water and oil, through ecclesiastical agency, with the human body. How aqueous and oleaginous symbols might relate to human bodiliness is the direction this section will follow. To progress further, an understanding of the rich evocation of blood is necessary.

3.2 Sanguineous Symbolism

If a universal dimension to the symbolism of blood may be discerned then it is found in its identification as 'soul substance' or the 'life-stream par excellence'.¹⁴⁶ Not only is blood essential to human and animal life but, when blood leaves the body it carries the

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life with it. Hence in the classical world it could be observed that both the soul and the blood passed through the inflicted wound.¹⁴⁷ However, the symbolic force of blood may only be understood within the ritual field, where its semantic range is subject to more precise cultural construction. Particularly relevant to a consideration of the underlying blood symbolism in baptism is the nature of sacrificial blood.

In the history of religions, blood is pre-eminently related to sacrifice, both animal and human. In Greek religion the flow of blood from the sacrificial animal was indispensable; it aroused fear in the presence of the gods, it enabled purification, it could revive the dead and spoke of divine blood which imparted life.¹⁴⁸ Outside the classical world similar themes are found. In Mayan and Aztec culture human blood-letting was the 'mortar' of ritual practice, fecundating agricultural soil in imitation of the gods whose own blood-letting upheld the cosmos.¹⁴⁹ Similarly in African religion, sacrificial blood is able to expiate guilt, to cleanse and to engender the renewal of life.¹⁵⁰

The Judeo-Christian tradition shares in this emphasis of sacrificial blood that represents life: as the book of Leviticus asserts 'the life of the flesh is in the blood' and the Hebrew understanding of sacrifice relates this to the covenant. This covenant was ratified and celebrated by sacrifice involving the shedding of blood, its libation at the altar and its sprinkling over the people. Thence, sacrificial blood functioned in restoration of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Blood in the context of Jewish

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sacrifice symbolises divine and human life, and represents order and the covenant.¹⁵¹

These notions of sacrificial blood provide the background to both Christian and Jewish developments in the understanding of blood in the first century. Early Christian theology perceived the death of Jesus as a sacrifice and recognised the significance of his blood. The interpretation of Jesus' blood has been the subject of debate according to whether blood had primary reference to a 'life violently ended' or whether it signified a life offered up and which therefore brought life.¹⁵² What is decisive is that the New Testament passages which refer to the blood of Christ cannot simply be referring to his death: as has been commented, 'it stresses the close links between the death of Jesus and both his life and his triumph in his resurrection and ascension'.¹⁵³ Through the sprinkling of his blood the Christian is said to receive in the present the benefits of Jesus' past sacrificial action.¹⁵⁴

In Judaism from the first century onwards Targumic writings began to give expression to the sacrificial dimension of male circumcision. Attention has been drawn to this by G Vermes, who notes the importance accorded to ritual bloodshed; known as the 'blood of the covenant' or the 'blood of salvation' its drawing became indispensable. Even if there was no foreskin to remove, blood still had to be seen to flow. The blood of circumcision was redemptive, something that is brought out in the obscure episode of the 'bloody husband' in Exodus, where the presentation of the foreskin and the resultant blood were a token of sacrifice for the whole person. Like the blood of the Passover lamb, the blood shed in circumcision rendered the operation effective;

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Rabbinic exegesis on the key saying from Leviticus commented, 'life is in the blood of Passover; life is in the blood of circumcision'.¹⁵⁵

Discussion of the theological development of Jewish circumcision draws attention to the capacity of blood to exhibit a gender value. In Judaism, it seems that the engagement of the ideas of sacrifice and male circumcision, something that probably commenced during the exile, was also part of a sanguineous encoding of gender status. In short the shedding of male blood was controlled and salvifically efficacious in contrast to female menstruation which flowed uncontrollably and produced an impure state that demanded ritual redress.¹⁵⁶ This extended beyond the Jewish world, and it has recently been demonstrated that gynaecological imagery in the context of Greek sacrifice was employed to portray women as sacrificial victims in contrast to men who instigated and performed effective sacrifice.¹⁵⁷

This may be tempered by the growing recognition that the semantics of female blood are culturally constructed. As Munn's example illustrates, female blood can assume a positive valence as well as the negative ones found in ancient Jewish and Greek cultures: when menstrual blood is viewed positively it is a sign of fertility and reproductive respect.¹⁵⁸ Correlating the dominant meaning of blood with social structure allows the recognition that although in certain social environments a negative meaning may be uppermost the positive meaning is still present, even if it is unconsciously held. The possibility is held out that, under a reordering of sociality, the ideological pole of the symbol of blood is variable. The symbol of blood therefore is one that may be reconstructed within a gender conscious milieu.

3.3 Salvific Blood and the 'Fruitful Cut'

The rituals of Christian baptism and the circumcision of Jewish males are linked in the New Testament. Given that the blood of circumcision has now been identified as the blood of sacrifice and given that the gendered nature of blood is open to the possibility of reconstruction it will prove profitable to investigate the link further.

It is probable that the ritual of circumcision was too controversial in Paul's immediate era to be developed as did the author of the deuterio-Pauline epistle of Colossians. He connected baptism with participation in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ, portrayed as union with the 'circumcision of Christ'. The relationship therefore was a sacrificial one.¹⁵⁹ In the early Church the imagery of circumcision faded as the importance of the links with Old Testament Judaism faded.¹⁶⁰ It was however in the Reformation defence against the Anabaptist onslaught that circumcision was recovered as a means of understanding baptism. It is the theological deployment of circumcision by Zwingli that makes the sanguineous connection explicit. He argued that in the Old Testament purification always involved the use of blood, as did the two Jewish sacraments - circumcision and the paschal lamb. In the New Testament the physical shedding of blood has been abrogated by the blood of Christ, and replaced by the 'more gentle sacraments'; as Zwingli remarks on the blood of circumcision, 'this he has now changed to water, another element which is agreeable and common to all men'.¹⁶¹

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The relationship between circumcision and baptism is a complex one and has been subject to controversy in more recent years.¹⁶² It is accurate to assert that for many patristic authors baptism was the fulfilment of the Old Testament ritual of circumcision¹⁶³, but it is equally true to say that making sense of the relationship between biblical statements and patristic thought is difficult. However, a convincing clarification of the conjunction between the two rituals is available from E F Ferguson. His argument builds on the observation that patristic readings of baptism as the equivalent of circumcision are later than those which equate circumcision figuratively as the gift of the Spirit. This brings some precision to the progression of patristic thought. In the first stage the analogy was drawn between the seal of the Spirit in the New Covenant and the physical rite of circumcision in the Old Covenant. The second stage related the gift of the Spirit in baptism to this, something which was reinforced by the notion that baptism applies to the Christian the New Covenant which was inaugurated in the death of Jesus, itself regarded as a circumcision. Finally, baptism itself was perceived as the counterpart to circumcision. These exegetical moves lead Ferguson to assert that baptism becomes the occasion for the 'spiritual circumcision'.¹⁶⁴ However, what Ferguson does not reflect upon is that the correlation between circumcision and baptism did not progress solely by following the Old Testament's tendency to 'spiritualise' the physical ritual.¹⁶⁵

There is a strand of baptismal theology that capitalises on the physical imagery of the notion of sealing. In the scriptures God seals his people with a visible sign which marks them out as his own possession, gives personal assurance that final judgement will be overcome and protects from the power of evil.¹⁶⁶ It is at its

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conceptually simplest as a 'recognition-symbol'¹⁶⁷ something which denotes divine ownership. The essential idea from which its use in baptismal discourse was derived is that the human body, usually the forehead, was physically marked in some way. Two illustrations make this point evident.

First of all, the baptismal sphragis was regarded as permanent. Cyril of Jerusalem, who develops directly the parallels between Jewish circumcision and baptism, speaks of the latter as the 'holy and indelible sphragis' and prays over the neophytes, 'may God give you the ineffaceable seal of the Holy Spirit for eternal life'.¹⁶⁸ While this image is interpreted as a spiritual marking on the soul, it is nevertheless a material metaphor in which the male Jewish body and its irreversible scarification becomes the source.

Secondly, the most common patristic meaning of the sphragis was the signing of the baptisand with the sign of the cross. The seal of the cross was a sign of the inviolability of the Christian sharing in the potency of Jesus' death. In the baptismal context it came to be associated with the believer's appropriation of the benefits of Christ's death of which it became the outward sign. Beyond the ritual context, authors such as Cyril encouraged the practice of Christians signing themselves in every circumstance of life.¹⁶⁹ It is only a small step between this practice and the logical (and literalistic) instinct for the Christian to be permanently and physically branded at baptism.¹⁷⁰

Therefore, although the idea of sealing in baptism was developed along figurative or spiritual lines - and to Ferguson's concentration

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on the gift of the Spirit, themes such as the restoration of the image of God and the invisible, potent imprint of the divine name may be added - the physicality of the concept was not entirely elided. The ritual of circumcision marked the human body and distinguished the Jew from the Gentile. In an analogous way the ritual of Christian baptism was perceived to distinguish Christian from non-Christian, but orthodox Christian thinkers searched for means of expressing this without endorsing the need for either a revival of the Jewish practice of circumcision or resort to another means of marking the body.

The discussion so far highlights the necessity to attend to circumcision as a symbol, that is to prevent the distinction between the signifier and the signified developing into a polarity in which the latter is set free from the former. The assumption has been too quickly made that the reality of circumcision lies in its metaphorical appropriation to spiritual inwardness rather than in the symbolic qualities of the physical reality.

The problems with the interpretation of the ritual of circumcision commence with its foundational narrative. The point is sometimes made that while the Priestly writer made circumcision the sign of Abraham's election he did not proceed very far in his elaboration of the question, 'why this particular sign and no other?'¹⁷¹ Although some validity of this sentiment can be acknowledged, a symbolic exegesis of the Priestly writings and their juxtaposition with contemporary ethnographical literature on circumcision may provide the way forward.

This type of hermeneutical manoeuvre has recently been attempted by H Eilberg-Schwartz.¹⁷² His starting point is the rejection of

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circumcision as an arbitrary or 'unmotivated' sign. The Priestly writer does not employ the notion of sign in this way; there is, characteristically, an intimate connection between the physical reality and what is signified. Therefore there is an intimate or motivated link between the symbol of circumcision and the content of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. The link is found by Eilberg-Schwartz to be in the thematic area of fertility. This is initially suggested by the strong link between circumcision and fertility discerned by the ethnography of African initiation rites. The notion of fertility is found in the divine promises to Abraham which contain the guarantee of a vast array of descendants.¹⁷³ Fertility becomes a central issue of the covenant promise, and betrays the concern of the Priestly writer with effective human reproduction and descent. The male reproductive organ therefore becomes the 'appropriate symbol for a covenant made with the generations and dealing with offspring'.¹⁷⁴ Circumcision is the symbol that Yahweh will ensure the fruitfulness of Abraham and the multiplication of his offspring.

The argument, however, is clinched when Eilberg-Schwartz notes that the Priestly writings employ the metaphor of circumcision in a way which is, at first glance, quite different. He concentrates on the conceptualisation of other parts of the human body which are styled as uncircumcised. For instance, the person who walks contrary to the covenant is the one with an 'uncircumcised heart', and Moses is said to have the impediment of 'uncircumcised lips'.¹⁷⁵ Uncircumcision is therefore a metaphor for the improper functioning of any human organ; the former's hearts require humbling before Yahweh, and Moses' speech is inadequate for the task given.

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This leads Eilberg-Schwartz to a reflection on an equation made between a juvenile fruit tree and an uncircumcised Jewish male. There is a prohibition against eating the fruit of such trees during their first three years of life, which is parallel to the male foreskin.¹⁷⁶ A juvenile fruit tree is to be regarded as a male infant would be in the eight days prior to his circumcision - outside the covenant and therefore unconsecrated and proscribed. Something of the parallel drawn lies in the basic physiology of Near Eastern fruit trees. Their initial years are generally unproductive, with little fruit grown; that fruit which does develop is often found to be defective. Like the uncircumcised male the juvenile fruit tree is 'not yet rooted in the covenant'¹⁷⁷, is immature and infertile. The parallelism between proscription, immaturity and infertility may also be extended to the idea of pruning:

cutting away the foreskin is like pruning a fruit tree. Both acts of cutting remove unwanted excess and both increase the desired yield. One might say that when the Israelites circumcise their male children they are pruning the fruit trees of God.¹⁷⁸

For Eilberg-Schwartz, therefore, Jewish male circumcision is unavoidably a symbol of the propagation of new human life. His analysis derives from an initial intuition given by a reading of contemporary ethnography. Israelite culture is convincingly shown to have a certain continuity with diverse cultures in the 'inner structures' of its understanding of circumcision.¹⁷⁹ Eilberg-Schwartz has demonstrated that in Israelite culture there is a compelling set of intertwining notions between fruit trees, fertility and the covenant. Circumcision is the 'fruitful cut' which is a symbol of the promise of the covenant between God and Abraham which would be fulfilled in the multiplication of descendants.

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It may be suggested, therefore, that this is the intrinsic value of the symbol of circumcision that has been transformed into the symbolism of baptism. In both rituals blood, actual in one and evocatively in the other is sacrificial in its connotations. Baptism is the Christian's sharing in the sacrifice of Christ which brings a new creation into being. In its sanguineous evocation, water speaks of life that is communicated by means of a death. That is exactly the structure of circumcision. Fruitful, but only by means of cutting; life-giving in terms of ensuring descent, but only achieved by a removal, a suffering or a death.

This may be the key to the connection between baptism and circumcision which has been so often sought; a symbolic one, but one which relies on the evocation of a deeper structure than that of typology. In the Syrian tradition, anointing has also been connected with circumcision. Brock has suggested that in its Jewish-Christian milieu, the modelling of baptism upon the Jewish initiation of proselytes allowed this connection to emerge. Thus oil could be regarded as having properties of incision and sharpness to cut away sin, like iron sharpened by the word of God.¹⁸⁰ The above analysis explains at a deeper level why this connection could flourish. The pruning of fruit trees, releasing the 'blood' of the tree, stood in parallel to the ritual of human circumcision with its own effusion of blood.

Water, oil and blood each signify, at their deepest value, the source of life, a universal theme which makes them in the broadest sense 'natural symbols' with meanings that are transcultural. They are

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a paradigmatic set, overlapping with each other and mutually interpreting. At the transcendent level, in the narratives of the Christian tradition associated with baptism, and centred around the Baptism of Jesus, they signify the trinitarian, creator God who imparts eternal life to human beings.

At an anthropological level, however, the symbols of water and oil disturb. In that they evoke the physiological experience of the flow of blood they both evoke the tragic element in the Christian religion, that is, the centrality given to human death. This includes the death of the early martyr and the death which soon became thought of as a unique sacrifice; it also includes within it the 'death' involved in Jewish male circumcision. Moreover, the image of blood indicates a primitive view of nature in which people saw sanguineity as a means of participating in the natural processes of death and life.

Can baptism be left to disturb in this way? Assistance is available on two sides, first of all through Wittgenstein's remarks on J G Frazer's anthropological endeavours, the objective of which Wittgenstein has read as an insulation of modern humanity from the life of the primitive. Instead, Wittgenstein stresses the deep continuities between the primitive person and all humanity. The real point of an anthropological study is not the historical explanation but the immediate effect on the observer, who imputes on it an experience from within themselves. Baptism evokes the shedding of human blood, sacrificial practices that too easily are regarded as objects of academic study rather than being reflective of all religious experience. This is disturbing when recognised; nevertheless it is indicative of what Wittgenstein called 'the deep and sinister'

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side of religion, the savagery of human nature that is often denied.¹⁸¹ Assistance also comes from L Gilkey who has argued that an archaic religion's understanding of nature as both power and life might not be irrelevant. Unless modernity's attitude to the earth's exploitation is moderated then the powers of nature will be lost to humanity; 'we live on nature's powers and bounties, or we do not live at all'.¹⁸² A renewed recognition of the deep structure of sacramental symbols might contribute both to the reality of religious experience and to a renewed integration of the doctrine of creation.

4 Baptismal Bodies

It has already been suggested that the human body acts as a source for the symbols of baptism and I now want to suggest that corporeality should play a central part in the organisation of baptism's ritual symbols. In order for further elaboration to occur some preliminary remarks will indicate an anthropological approach to the human body.

Among the human sciences anthropology is the discipline that has taken the lead in drawing attention to humanity's embodied condition. Among the reasons for this is the preoccupation with the search for a theory of humanity, something which potentially might be indicated by the universal phenomenon of embodiment.¹⁸³ Douglas, despite her rejection of natural symbolism, has been credited with leading theoretical reflection in this area, especially in the link she posits between the individual body and the body of society.

Early in her work she observed the power of the image of society. It is something that stirs human beings to action, it has internal

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structure and external boundaries and exudes energy at its marginal and unstructured points. Out of all living organisms able to represent society the human body is the most powerful. Particularly in contrast to animal bodies, 'the more personal and intimate the source of the ritual symbolism, the more telling the message' and the higher level of symbolic directness.¹⁸⁴ Later she expounded her argument further:

the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other.

For Douglas, this means that the human body is an expressive medium that has restrictions on the forms that it may take. She delineates two principles to enable its comprehension in practice. Firstly, there is a drive at all levels to experience consonance, and this implies that in the expression of a message, a certain appropriate style will bring together all the channels by means of which it is conveyed. Secondly, the options of the body in an act of communication are restricted by the social system which is expressed in some form in the message. Ultimately, Douglas' concept of the two bodies functions as a hermeneutical device. It is the tension between them which allows 'the elaboration of meanings'.¹⁸⁵

Douglas' theories rely on an emotive component that is integral to body symbolism. This coheres with the understanding of baptism as a transformatory ritual, since one of the features of liminality is the way that the human body becomes the anchorage site for a cluster of symbols.¹⁸⁶ Particularly in pre-modern societies, liminal persons characteristically exhibit a certain style of dress, go naked and

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indulge in particular types of bodily behaviour. Where a society lives close to nature and its processes, and thus to their own bodies, then there will be a marked tendency for the cultural symbolism to draw upon the resources of the dynamic unconscious.¹⁸⁷ The human body therefore is not merely something to think about, it is a means of expression:

highly visible to others, the body is something social as well as material, something that does not simply exist but acts and speaks as well. Displayed, viewed, commented upon, criticized and interpreted, bodies provide powerful vehicles for discussion of cultural norms and values.¹⁸⁸

The body is, potentially, the most universal and powerful of all baptismal symbols. Space does not permit a full survey, but two instances are selected. Respectively they involve the appearance of the body and what might be called a natural gesture. Each illustrates the interaction between the individual body and the communal body through which theological meaning is generated.

4.1 Symbolism of Bodily Appearance: Nakedness and Clothing

The first instance is the ritual sequence of stripping, nakedness and re-clothing. The practice of naked baptism, according to artistic portrayals from the catacombs, reverts at least to the beginning of the third century and it is found in both Eastern and Western rites. However, its interpretation involves unravelling a puzzle of some complexity, to determine the precise interaction between the early Church's Hebraic theology and the values of its Greek cultural milieu. Essentially, two metaphysical systems found themselves in dialogue. In Jewish thought nakedness was perceived as a negative state; cultic nakedness was forbidden and in post-biblical Judaism detailed prohibitions are found against the performance of religious acts whilst naked. Instead, in terms of bodily appearance, the emphasis was

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given to the significance of clothing. This is particularly evident in discussions of priestly garments which reflect the glory, splendour and honour of Yahweh. In contrast, Greek thought gave metaphysical pre-eminence to nakedness. Nudity was linked to the pursuit of truth; the image of searching for truth along the path which moved from the perception of shadows to the contemplation of reality ensured that truth had a 'visual precision'¹⁸⁹ and involved clarity of vision. Thus the naked human form embodied in athletics and art presented the ideal of which the phenomenal body was a replica.

In the encounter between the two metaphysics there is widespread evidence of a Christian revulsion against the nakedness of the public baths and the gladiatorial displays of the coliseum, and this would seem to indicate a discontinuity between baptismal nakedness and Greco-Roman public nudity. Yet the possibility that Christianity merely followed the Jewish practice of proselyte immersion, which according to Rabbinic legal formulations was to be undertaken naked, founders on the grounds that Christian baptism was a public ceremony in contrast to the privacy of the Jewish rite.¹⁹⁰ The puzzle remains that while the early Church demonstrated a horror of nakedness it nevertheless insisted on naked baptism.

Any resolution will need to give an account of the symbolic understanding that the early Church attributed to nakedness. The negativity of nakedness is evident: it suggested the condition of slavery¹⁹¹; it evoked the pitiful image of a defendant naked and helpless before the Judge¹⁹²; in Cyril it evoked the candidate's imitation of Christ who hung naked on the cross; especially in the Syrian tradition, nakedness could connote participation in the

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shameful disgrace of Adam and Eve.¹⁹³ The significance of nakedness, however, that gained most agreement was positive, based on its link with paradise. Nakedness represented the unashamed, primordial innocence of the first couple. Openness with God and with each other is the promise held out to candidates at baptism, and the baptistry itself could become paradise.¹⁹⁴

Patristic symbolism, however, went further when it recognised the universality of the human life-cycle. Ambrose remarked that the candidates' descent into the waters of baptism recalled their naked entrance into life at birth and their naked departure from life at death.¹⁹⁵ Cyril also captured this sentiment when he typified the font as both tomb and womb:

there is a time to be born and a time to die, but the opposite is true in your case - there is a time to die and a time to be born. A single moment achieves both ends, and your begetting was simultaneous with your death.¹⁹⁶

To the fourth and fifth century Church, a naked baptism will have suggested an event in continuity with the passage of life from birth to death, and it may have suggested more. J Z Smith, interpreting early Christian art, has argued convincingly that nakedness is also associated with resurrection.¹⁹⁷ Apart from Adam and Eve, the only Old Testament figures that are depicted naked are those in scenes such as Jonah emerging from the belly of the whale and those resurrected in Ezekiel's vision. The widespread depiction of naked baptism in early Christianity¹⁹⁸, when placed alongside Smith's evidence and the Gospel tradition that Jesus' grave clothes were found in the empty tomb¹⁹⁹ indicates that nakedness symbolised the assumption and promise of new life in resurrection.

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The practice of naked baptism in the Oriental Churches has persisted, but in the West its frequency began to diminish from the Middle Ages onwards. In medieval baptism, the naked infant would still have conveyed something of the symbolic force that earlier theologians expounded, accentuated by the liturgy's strong emphasis on the images of creation and childbirth as types of baptism. In addition, it is far from unreasonable to assume that other depictions of nakedness would have informed the meaning of the symbol; in particular the widespread practice of engraving naked humans on tombs indicates the idea of resurrection.²⁰⁰ Nakedness in baptism would have maintained its principal symbolic reference to birth, death and resurrection through to the Reformation.

Part of the solution to the cultural puzzle of nakedness, from the perspective of ritual, may therefore lie in the psychological dynamics of the instinct for liminal expression and in the power of the symbol to reference reality and express shared religious ideology. In this sense the Greek ideal emerged, although the discontinuity with the public nudity of the Greco-Roman world would have asserted the difference, and therefore the assertive power, of the ritual moment. Treated with propriety, the naked human form was a symbol, which conveyed aspects of the meaning of baptism as an act of new creation - the return to a paradisaal state, birth, death and resurrection.

However, it is undeniable that in baptismal nakedness there were other forces at work. Nudity carried connotations of sexuality and sometimes these came to bear force in baptism. It is the relationship

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with virginity and the ordering of the Christian society which are the most problematic to a contemporary interpretation.

In the case of virginity, the most extreme examples are the second century Encratites. They derived their arguments for celibacy from a theology of baptism which understood it to convey an ability for men and women to live with each other through an empowering by the Holy Spirit who discharged the 'treacherous spark' of sexuality.²⁰¹ In fifth century Syria there is evidence that many ordinary Christians chose to postpone baptism until their sexually active years had passed; equally, those who opted for the ascetic life in discipleship of leaders such as Aphrahat and Ephrem took their vows at baptism.²⁰²

How the connection between baptism and virginity could be developed may be illustrated by Ambrose. As interpreted by P Brown, Ambrose related the ritual of baptism to the social environment through his views on human sexuality. For Ambrose, to bathe in the 'cool waters' of baptism and to 'put on Christ' was to exchange human flesh which was flawed and sickly for flesh which had been decisively reformed in the incarnation. The ugly scar which humanity bore was that of sexuality; the body of Christ was that perfect body, unscarred both by the taint of an origin from sexual intercourse and by the presence of any defective sexual impulses.²⁰³ It was an ideal that the Christian would attain at the resurrection yet the earthly ideal of virginity, the closed human body which was untainted by the world, presented an eschatological foretaste of what was to come. It also provided a means of thinking about the social construction of the Church. Ambrose's notion of virginity 'made concrete the integrity of

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the Catholic Church in a hostile society while it endowed the Church with a sense of momentum over against the outside world'.²⁰⁴

Therefore Ambrose, in Brown's eyes, encouraged his congregations to think of themselves as a society with closed, inflexible boundaries. However, the baptismal pool and 'the cooled bodies of the continent' also signified a transformation. Just as the body of the virgin was for Ambrose, 'an intact body endowed with a miraculous capacity for growth and nurture', so the Church exhibited the potential towards which the Roman world could be transformed through Christian mission.²⁰⁵ Paradoxically in situations where Christian leaders began to exalt virginity and asceticism, and linked this to baptism, this was countered with a theological argument that had baptism as a central category. Baptism could be its own critic; it was the efficacy of baptismal regeneration that determined the Christian's reward in heaven, and not any merit from ascetical practices.²⁰⁶

In the case of the ordering of the Christian society, the interplay between the individual and the corporate has been illuminated recently by a study of the North African catechumenate by M R Miles. She has suggested that the link lies in Augustine's understanding of the eucharist. In baptism, the neophytes become Christ's body and in the eucharistic elements they ought to perceive themselves. As Augustine says, 'you are what you have received', and as Miles comments, 'the initiate was at once food and eater, eating the body of Christ and, by eating, becoming that body'. Such bodily imagery suggests to Miles an emphasis on preparing the physical body for baptism, and hence the complex regime of fasting and other ascetic practices whereby the body of the baptismal candidate assumed the

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position as 'locus of the conscious choice to become Christian'. It was in the event of naked baptism that the conversion of the body reached its climax and that the 'stripping of secular socialization' became complete. Without physical involvement conversion could only remain incomplete, and the naked body represented 'religious subjectivity, aspiration, and commitment'.²⁰⁷

Behind Miles' exposition is the notion borrowed from M Foucault of 'techniques of the self', communal techniques for the creation of what might be termed 'self-in-community'. The bodily techniques of the catechuminate are therefore to be regarded as the transfer of individual allegiances to the social body which regulated the mechanisms employed; the individual body, in intimate and mutual partnership with the soul, was caught up in the process of salvation. Consequently, the values of the social body were imprinted on the individual body.²⁰⁸

Miles observes that an individual body, and especially a naked one, is a gendered body, and argues for a difference between the female and male experiences of baptism. She claims that a number of liturgical texts describe how women were baptised only after men and children; she notes that women were instructed to loosen their hair and to remove items of jewellery. She then goes on to make the surprising assertion that a number of indications exist that male officiants may have anointed and baptised naked females.²⁰⁹ In these ways Miles argues that the structure of the social body implanted itself on the individual body and created a religious subject that had a particular position in the social order and who was oriented to fulfil certain moral and social expectations. Although full weight

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cannot be given to her arguments, like Brown, Miles draws out the potentially manipulative possibilities of the baptismal ritual in gendered terms. The linkage between naked baptism and sexuality could lead to a view that the reason for its persistence lay in its 'interweaving of intellectual, psychological, and physical experience in the extended preparation for baptism'.²¹⁰

Truth there may be in this position, yet baptismal nakedness, treated as a bodily symbol requires evaluation within the juxtaposed symbolism of stripping and re-clothing. This found its scriptural justification in the ethical terminology of 'taking off' the old human nature and 'putting on' the new nature of Christ himself.²¹¹ Whether or not the original reference was to Christian baptism, the symbolism of clothing provided an embodied means of confronting baptisands with the need for conversion from previous vices and the practice of new virtues. Stripping off the old nature and the passions of the former life, however, was the fundamental idea from which others were developed.²¹² The old clothes were the covering of sins²¹³; they were reminiscent of the clothes Adam adorned himself with after the fall, and therefore are evidence for the sentence passed over mankind and 'proof of mortality'.²¹⁴ In contrast, adornment with the invariably white baptismal garment symbolised union with the risen Christ, the forgiveness of sins and the necessity for a subsequent life of purity.²¹⁵ In addition to its whiteness, the robe had a radiance which evoked the eschatological wedding banquet and the garments of the transfigured Christ.

Now, the material and colour of the baptismal garments become significant. In terms of the materials, Jerome described how the

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baptisands would divest themselves of woollen 'tunics of skin' and be clothed with a 'garment of linen'. The latter, in contrast to the former is said to contain 'nothing of death in itself', a contrast founded on a distinction made between the sources of the two materials.²¹⁶ Wool was the secreted product of mortal animal bodies and received a negative moral valuation, an idea which may be traced back to Aristotle. In contrast, linen was derived from the earth's vegetative life, and carried with it all the associations of something unchanging and immortal.²¹⁷ Thus death and uncleanness were associated with tunics of skin while immortality and purity were evoked by garments of linen.

In terms of colour, Jerome also remarked that the garment of linen was dazzling white, connoting radiance.²¹⁸ It is possible here to detect a doctrine of colour that reverts to Plato's notion that all colours are derived from white and black. In Middle Platonism the conception developed that black is dyed by nature and that white is superior to all other colours. White was the source of all other colours which had lesser moral value; white garments therefore became the symbol of the 'One' whilst variegated garments symbolised the changing material world.²¹⁹ As a symbol of immortality and moral purity the unmixed character of whiteness rendered the wearing of white robes suitable for those in mourning and for the dead themselves whose souls had achieved perfect release from the body.²²⁰ Yet in Jerome's understanding the colour white is connected with light. In one sense this is explicable from the etymology of the Latin and Greek words for 'whiteness' which also imply light. More profoundly, though, in Greek thought light is associated with apprehension of the truth. In Old Testament thought, light is the characteristic of the garment with

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which Yahweh himself is clothed.²²¹ In subsequent Jewish tradition, angels and the righteous share in the celestial clothing which humanity lost at the fall; in fact, in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition the very light of creation was kindled from the divine light.²²²

Social anthropology has recognised the universal usage of clothing to serve not just practical purposes, but also to be the vehicle of both personal and social information.²²³ In adornment through clothing the natural world is employed and through its appropriation occurs both a distinction from nature and also a possible rejection of it: 'the use of adornment has something to do with man's image of himself in relation to the world he experiences'.²²⁴ Clothing can indicate social or religious status, but it can also serve to channel emotion and sentiment. All these themes are present in the early Church's use of baptismal clothing which allowed the Hebraic ideal to emerge; the meaning of salvation in sharing the divine life, the adoption of a new religious status, the assumption of ethical demands and a rejection of animality. Thus the early Church had the cultural resources from the social body to use clothing to convey a variety of cognitive, emotional and expressive impulses. All this goes some way towards answering the puzzle of baptismal nakedness; it was not something done for its own sake, but lay within the sequence of stripping and re-clothing. After all, the evidence is that among the Fathers' the act of stripping could be dealt with very circumspectly indeed from a sense of decorum.²²⁵

The question now remains whether baptismal clothing is an genuine liturgical option in a contemporary world. Over time, a reductive

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dynamic operated and the symbolic sequence was modified. By the ninth century some Carolingian rites had forsaken nudity, opted for a token removal of clothing and given the emphasis to the symbolism of the baptismal robe worn throughout the Easter octave.²²⁶ Later, there is a severe curtailment of the robe's symbolism; for instance, Aquinas noted only the signification of the resurrection and the designation of a pure life.²²⁷ Then Cranmer, in his first liturgical reform only, specified that the baptismal garment is a 'token of innocence' and admonishes the neophyte to conduct a pure life.²²⁸

From what has been argued, the use of a baptismal garment is justifiable from the perspective of scripture. Yet the nature of that justification needs to be given a more profound basis. This may come from the notion, to which allusion has already been made, of glory in the Old Testament. As Von Balthasar argues, in the etymology of glory is a reference to what gives a human being 'an external force or impetus that makes it appear imposing'.²²⁹ Applied to the biblical revelation, the glory of God is involved in a dialectic of sensory manifestation. The divine is clothed with terrible majesty and with light.²³⁰ Yet at the same time with a revelation there is a 'not seeing', alongside form there is 'non-form' and in the light of divine glory there is a 'dazzling darkness'.²³¹ God's glory is shared with humanity which then reflects the divine character.²³² In the New Testament perspective, Christ is the definitive image of God; it is his glory that provides the impetus for a doctrine of salvation which is about being 'changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another'.²³³

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Clothing design shows a comprehension of the capacity for both revelation and concealment. In a parallel manner, the baptismal garment may take its theological direction from the divine light which both reveals and conceals God. To be clothed in the divine light at baptism is both revealing and concealing with respect to the image of God which is undergoing restoration in the social context of the sacraments. The transition from nakedness to clothing is an image of the dialectic of sensory manifestation. Equally, the symbol of the white garment indicates the dimension of Christian reality that in baptism there is identification with Christ, yet one that is 'in suspension' awaiting a final fulfilment.

This understanding is far from absent in the baptismal tradition. It has been expressed, for instance, by Cyril and Leidrad of Lyons. For Cyril, dressed in white, the neophyte became an icon of Christ himself, and a liturgical means of holding up the ideal nature of Christ as the archetype of humanity. As he linked this with the Baptism of Jesus in a mystagogy of anointing, he expounded from the Johannine epistles:

having been baptised into Christ, and put on Christ, you have been shaped to the likeness of the Son of God; for Godmade us share in the fashion of Christ's most glorious body. Being madepartakers of Christ, you are properly called 'Christs', and of you God said 'Touch not my Christs', or anointed. Now you were made Christs by receiving the mark of the Holy Spirit. And all this was accomplished in you in a figure [eikonikos] because you are figures of Christ.²³⁴

Leidrad demonstrated the same concept in the ninth century when he also reflected on the identity with Christ that is brought about in baptism.²³⁵ This was conveyed by the baptismal garment and its connection with the body of Christ. The ritual action of clothing the

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child in white indicated the cleansing of the inward nature, but it was also perceived as a sharing in the body of Christ. In Leidrad's exegesis of baptism, Christ himself had to exchange the 'vile rags' associated with his rôle as representative sin-bearer for 'new garments' when he stood before the angels during the paschal mystery. In continuity with the medieval liturgical instinct to bring forth meaning from materiality the unification of the neophyte with Christ originates from a sensation in the flesh or adornment of the body in white. P Cramer argues that whilst whiteness, evoking both the angelic state and 'the untouchable pallor of death', is perhaps a symbol of lesser fulness than either the water or oil, it is the human body which is central to the ritual symbolism:

with bodyLeidrad is able to make us feel how 'things', or bodies generally, are at once palpable, tangible, present, available and satisfying, and yet impenetrable, inexplicable, distant and unsatisfying. This double experience of matter is not only sensation or perception, but theology: the body of Christ in which the little neophyte now participates - and which he thus possesses and possesses him - is more pitifully distant than any body.The ritual act of covering the child's body in white clothes is exquisitely poised between the respectful distance of imitation, and the uninhibited fulness of identity.²³⁶

Thus, in a hermeneutic offered by an anthropological perspective on the human body, there may be a symbolic understanding of the baptismal garment that presents theological coherence in the light of scripture, the tradition and salvation in terms of the restoration of divine likeness, christologically understood.

4.2 Symbolism of Gesture: Offering and Receiving of Infants by Godparents

The second instance is the ritual gestures of godparents and their interplay with the priest and the social body. Here, the recent work

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of J H Lynch has been formative. In an analysis of the vocabulary that attached itself to the function of the godparent he has identified that it included the ritual action of offering the infant for baptism and receiving it from the font afterwards.²³⁷ This ritual sequence is illuminated by Augustine, whose correspondence with Boniface dealt with uncertainties the latter had over the baptism of infants. One question to which Augustine responded concerned the motivation and intent of the parents who brought their children to baptism. He argued that the efficacy of baptism is hardly dependent upon the agency of those who might be unworthy or ignorant. This is the case because the offering is made 'by all who consent to the offering', that is 'the whole company of saints and believers'. The Church both offers infants in baptism and brings them forth in new birth.²³⁸

Augustine's sacrificial language is highly theological, as may be understood from his discussion in the City of God. Sacrifice is due only to God who in the Old Testament context regarded the physical sacrifice as a symbol of the 'inner' sacrifice, that of a contrite and humble heart. In the New Testament context the true sacrifice is transformed into giving to others and carrying out what is good, so long as it is directed towards God. Augustine then alludes to baptism: a man consecrated in the name of God, and vowed to God, is in himself a sacrifice in as much as he 'dies to the world' so that he may 'live for God'. Then there is a direct reference to the 'sacrament of the altar' which demonstrates that in the liturgical offering to God, Christ offers the Church.²³⁹ The notion of 'compassion', the sacrifice of the self that can be directed both inwards and outwards to others is at the centre of Augustine's thought, and both baptism and the eucharist are therefore 'true and perfect sacrifices of the self'. The

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eucharist is a continual celebration of the sacrifice of the self first made at baptism; both sacraments demonstrate the act of self-offering that is at once the offering of the Church and the self-offering of Christ.

Cramer has drawn attention to the tension that developed in Augustine's baptismal theology between the idea of baptism as part of the cultus, the movement of moral, willful self-offering and the notion of the washing away of original sin, making the infant 'a vessel, an involuntary being, a theatre of good and evil'.²⁴⁰ In this light there is indeed a theological tension in Augustine's response to Boniface, where Augustine attributed to the Holy Spirit the rôle of 'loosing the bond of guilt' and 'restoring good to his nature'; however, the resolution for Augustine lay in this very action:

the regenerating Spirit is, then, equally present in the elders offering and in the child offered and reborn; therefore, through this sharing of one and the same Spirit, the will of those offering is beneficial to the child offered for baptism.²⁴¹

Whether Augustine's attempt to reconcile the incapacity of the infant with regard to moral will and faith with his doctrine of original sin succeeds is a separate question. However, the background to the language of offering shows the affinity that baptism had in Augustine's mind with the eucharist: baptism effected the bond with the Christian society and the eucharist celebrated it. Both were self-offerings linked to Christ's and the Church's self-offerings. In baptism the will and faith of the parents who offered their children and the faith of the Church coincided; indeed, the faith of the whole Church dominated that of the individuals who acted ritually as signs of its presence.²⁴²

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Later references to the offering of a child in baptism require this Augustinian background.²⁴³ Yet the language of offering is comparatively rare in medieval baptismal liturgies and was often eclipsed by the language of receiving. Evidence is found in the terminology relating to both infant and godparent where derivatives of suscipere were commonly employed as synonyms; the former being labelled susceptus and the latter as susceptor.²⁴⁴ Receiving the wet infant from the font became the key moment in which the spiritual relationship with the godparent was forged.²⁴⁵ What ritual action was implied here varied. In the Sarum rite, those who were 'to receive at baptism' carried the infant to the font and held it over the water whilst the interrogations were performed; then, after the baptism, the rubrics state that the godparents 'receiving the infant from the hands of the priest raise him from the font'.²⁴⁶ In some areas it seems as though one godparent firmly held the infant as it was lifted from the font and the others placed their hands on the child, solving the practical difficulty of identifying with the ritual action.²⁴⁷

Whatever the exact ritual practice, it is accepted that behind the gesture lay the Roman and Greek practice of setting the new-born child on the ground before it was raised by the natural father, who thereby acknowledged it as his own and declared his intent to rear it rather than leaving it exposed to die, as was the practice if it was undesired. A similar practice existed in pre-Christian Germany. Over time as the ancient custom died out suscipere, originally lifting, or receiving the child from the ground came to mean begetting or bearing a child. In being taken up into the baptism liturgy it lost any direct

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relationship with the pagan ceremony, and came again to have its original sense of raising, but from the font.²⁴⁸

The contrast now stands between Augustine's emphasis on the Church's offering in baptism and the language of medieval liturgy which emphasised the ritual act of receiving the infant from the font. Yet the interaction between the two bodies remained; so, when Aquinas asserted that in spiritual generation a person is born as son of God the Father and of the Church as Mother, he also stated:

he who confers the sacrament stands in place of God, whose instrument and minister he is, he who raises a baptised person from the sacred font,stands in the place of the Church.²⁴⁹

Thus gestures of offering and receiving made by godparents fulfil the same representative function. In the interpretation of each gesture there is an interplay between the bodies of the godparent, the infant and the social body of the Church. Yet the liturgies of the Reformation varied in their appreciation of this, indicated by whether the rubrics of receiving were retained. In general there was a move away from them, as was the case with Cranmer's reforms. In 1549 the rubrics stated that the 'godfathers and godmothers shall take and lay their hands upon the child' after baptism and while the priest puts on the baptismal robes. However, in 1552 there is no mention of them receiving or raising the infant from the font.²⁵⁰

The significance of the godparental ritual acts of offering and receiving may be extended with reference to the controversy in recent years over the exclusion of the traditional Gospel reading, which describes Jesus receiving and blessing infants, from the Church of England's liturgy. It has been contended that the decision was correct since it does not refer to baptism and furthermore was not used before

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the Reformation in the liturgy of baptism.²⁵¹ However, this view does not take account of the ritual context and especially the ritual sequence of actions between godparents and priest. One investigator of this controversy, Sykes, has argued that the traditional reading is appropriate as it becomes dramatised by the liturgical action:

when the priest at the height of the drama takes the child in his arms he is doing what Christ himself did. The congregation witnesses Christ's own embrace. The sacrament is God's own act ('thy holy Baptisme'.....).²⁵²

That this understanding is right is not confirmed though by the method that Sykes chooses, which is to highlight the frequency of the word 'receive' in the liturgy' without reflecting on the different ways in which it is used.²⁵³ In view of the equivocal way in which 'receive' is used, it is preferable to interpret the Gospel reading in the light of the exhortation to the godparents and in the choreography of the ritual performance. It is more likely that it was the liturgical action of bringing the child to the priest that was meant to resonate with the Gospel reading, and which would in turn evoke the ritual image of Christ embracing the infants.²⁵⁴

To take this perspective on Cranmer's final baptismal liturgy is to draw attention to the Augustinian background of the offering of the child to God by the Church, with the sponsor as its symbolic representative. In broad terms, the infant is offered to God who receives it as His own child; the infant receives grace, remission of sins and the kingdom of God, being received by the Church into its midst. Cranmer desired to highlight the doctrine of the undeserved grace of God in baptism, signified by the passivity of the infant. Liturgically though, the idea of offering cannot be avoided if the

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ritual actions are noted. That there are no references to godparents as those who receive the infant from the font is consistent with the general rejection of birth imagery by Cranmer; it would have been anachronistic to have such a rubric that reflected closely the birthing metaphors when its elaboration had been excised and pared down to the four uses of the word 'regenerate'. Exactly how the child was transferred to the godparents is not known, but again it is difficult to see how the notion of the godparents as those who receive the child from the font could be avoided, even if Cranmer would have recoiled from its symbolic implications. In the enacted liturgy of infant baptism it is impossible to escape the notion of offering and reception from the font. They are natural ritual gestures and what is expressed in them is simply there in the gestures themselves. An argument that simply states that the inclusion of the Gospel reading was a late development and illegitimate does not take account of the 'indexical symbolism' of infant baptism.²⁵⁵ It embodies the essence of the ritual movement in baptism and the interaction between the body of the baptisand and the social body. Furthermore, it counter-balances the negative view of the infant as conceived in the state of original sin with a positive one, an observation that is important for the argument to be outlined in the following chapter.

For the moment the contribution of baptismal symbols may be summarised. The essential insight that has been developed through anthropology is that symbols mediate cultural value through their ability to draw dimensions of everyday living into ritual. The concept of natural symbolism has been found to be indispensable, although this is derived from the universal experience of the constraints of the human body. Most fundamentally, it is the property of sanguineity

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which has provided the deep structure for the directionality of baptism. This proved to be a conclusion that disturbed. This is unavoidable for a baptismal theology that takes seriously the perspective of ritual, since its contours were formed in milieus that espoused a pre-modern view of the relations between the human body, nature and cosmos. Also, it was recognised that a symbol's ability to inculcate clarity of belief, and personal identity, was subordinate to their engagement of the ritual participants in a social space. It is in the deployment of ritual metaphors, that is, action with 'symbolic words', that this clarity needs to be sought.

Endnotes

1. H -G Gadamer. "The Relevance of the Beautiful", p.31; cf. also L -M Chauvet. Symbol and Sacrament, pp.111-128
2. The Forest of Symbols.(1967), p.36
3. Ibid, p.19
4. Ibid, p.45
5. Ibid, pp.50ff
6. Symbols, pp.243ff
7. Ibid, pp.30-32
8. "Forms of Symbolic Action".(1969), p.13
9. Firth. Op.cit., pp.174ff
10. Ibid, pp.44-45
11. "Symbols in African Ritual".(1977), p.189
12. For a discussion of two classic studies see M Douglas. Purity and Danger.(1966), pp.58-72
13. N Munn. "The Effectiveness of Symbols in Murngin Rite and Myth", p.178.
14. Op.cit.(1969), pp.9-10

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15. Ibid, p.9
16. Turner draws here on E Sapir. "Symbolism", p.493.
17. "Introduction", p.1
18. Ibid, p.2
19. For reasons for this estrangement see Lewis. Op.cit., pp.4-13.
20. E Jones. "The Theory of Symbolism". 1948, pp.93ff
21. Ibid, p.102
22. C Rycroft. "Is Freudian Symbolism a Myth?"
23. Cohen. "Psychoanalysis and Cultural Symbolization", p.55
24. Ibid, p.57
25. Rethinking Symbolism.(1975) and "Is Symbolic thought Prerational".(1980). For expositions of Sperber see P Boyer. "Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism" and D J Davies. Studies in Pastoral Theology and Social Anthropology.(1990), p.23
26. Op.cit.(1975), p.85
27. Ibid, p.121
28. C Classen et al (eds.). Aroma, pp.5-10
29. "Magic, Perfume, Dream....", p.33
30. Op.cit.(1975), p.121
31. Ibid, p.118
32. Ibid, p.122
33. Op.cit., p.26
34. D Howes. "Olfaction and Transition"
35. E L Schieffelin. "Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality", p.707. See above. p.27
36. Respectively they are alignments of contiguity and similarity.
37. "Some Outstanding Problems in the Analysis of Events"; the theologian J Ball. "Anthropology as a Theological Tool" has applied Ardener's work.
38. Op.cit.(1980), pp.32-33
39. Firth. Op.cit., pp.58ff is the most helpful discussion on natural symbolism, although he mischaracterises Douglas' work.
40. Man and His Symbols

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41. Leach. Culture and Communication and Douglas. Natural Symbols.(1996).
42. Firth. Op.cit., p.60
43. T Polhemous. "Social Bodies", pp.19-23
44. The Problem of Method.(1953), p.36
45. Images and Symbols.(1961), p.161
46. The Conflict of Interpretations, p.319
47. Beast and Man, pp.310ff & 321ff
48. J G Davies. The Architectural Setting of Baptism, pp.23ff
49. AIRI, pp.121ff (Ambrose. Sermons on the Sacraments III:4), DBL, p.212 (Bobbio Missal) and DBL, p.221 (Stowe Missal)
50. AT, p.21 (21)
51. J Rudhardt. "Water", pp.357-358. Other statements are Eliade. Patterns in Comparative Religion. 1958, pp.188-215 and Op.cit.(1961), pp.151-160; E O James et al. "Water, Water-gods" and for a biblical perspective see L Goppelt. "Water".
52. "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism", pp.29-30 (1-3) and J Tonkin. "Luther's Understanding of Baptism", pp.205ff; on the question of balance see Trigg. Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther, pp.94 (n.150) & 137-138
53. Inst., pp.1303-8, 1314-6 & 1325 (IV.xv.1-6, 14, 16 & xvi.2 respectively) and also p.1298 (IV.xiv.22): 'for baptism attests to us that we have been cleansed and washed... In water washing is represented'.
54. Ibid, p.1314 (IV.xv.14)
55. Ibid, pp.1319-20 (IV.xv.19); see H O Old. The Shaping of the Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century, pp.274-276
56. R E Brown. The Gospel according to St John: Volume 1, p.141
57. The Gospel according to John, p.209
58. B Witherington. "The Waters of Birth", p.158; S M Schneiders. "Born Anew", p.192 and D G Spriggs. "Meaning of 'Water' in John 3:5".
59. M Pamment. "Short Note on John 3:5", p.190
60. John 3:27, 34; on the birth metaphor throughout John 3 see D A Lee. The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel, pp.43-48
61. John 4:14
62. John 7:37-39; see B Lindars. The Gospel of John, pp.299-301.

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63. Zechariah 13:1; cf. D C Allison. "The Living Water"; Brown. Op.cit, pp.322ff; R Schnackenburg. The Gospel According to St John: Volume 2, pp.152-157. On the Feast of Tabernacles see Goodenough. Op.cit.(1953), pp.148-156 including Rabbinic statements that the waters of creation flowed from the rock in the wilderness.
64. There are four basic versions of this narrative - Exodus 15:22-26; Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:10-12; Deuteronomy 32:51.
65. Water in the Wilderness, p.125
66. Jeremiah 2:13. On living water symbolism see Danielou. Primitive Christian Symbols.(1964), pp.42-57, R A Culpepper. The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, pp.192-195 and from a Lutheran perspective, C R Koester. Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, pp.155-184.
67. John 19:34; see E Malatesta. "Blood and Water from the Pierced Side of Christ" for an overview of patristic interpretations.
68. Proverbs 5:15-18, Song of Songs 4:12-15 and their exegesis in Witherington. Op.cit., pp.155-156
69. M M Walsh. "The Baptismal Flood in the Old English 'Andreas'", pp.141ff gives a series of references beginning with Cyprian.
70. O Pächt et al. The St Albans Psalter, see pl.22 (p.32) and p.86.
71. Cited by Leach. "Fishing for Men on the Edge of the Wilderness", p.598 (fn.10); Leach counter-suggests that the envelope surrounding Christ is fish-shaped. This is unlikely, not only because it is difficult to see any resemblance to a fish but also because in many of its predecessors there are other factors to be taken into account, as will become apparent.
72. G Millet. Recherches sur L'Iconographie de L'Evangile, p.172
73. L Ousprensky & V Lossky. The Meaning of Icons. pp.164-167 gives a sixteenth century Russian version.
74. Isaiah 55:1; see The Hellenic Centre. The Survival of Byzantine Sacred Art, pl.43
75. G Warner. Queen Mary's Psalter, p.211 (pl.1); F Harrison. English Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century, pl.7.
76. Psalm 81: 7, 16 (modern numbering)
77. H Leclercq. "Baptême de Jésus", col.365-368 (figs.1297-1301)
78. 1 Peter 3:20-21 & 1 Corinthians 10:1-4
79. In CIRP, p.11; this prayer formed the basis for the Flood Prayers of the English Prayer Books of 1649 and 1552 (pp.89-90 & pp.106-107). In the Institutes Calvin did not bring the story of Jesus' Baptism into full relationship with Christian baptism; it was treated in the context of Jesus' messianic anointing, and his obedience; Inst., pp.500, 507 (II.xv.5, II.xvi.5).

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80. K W Irwin. Context and Text, pp.157ff. See Lathrop. Holy Things, p.94: water is not a 'domestic symbol' because it contains no 'admixture of human culture'.
81. E.g. the Armenians who used sesame oil; see Brock. "Anointing in the Syriac Tradition".(1993), p.92
82. E.g. M Pepperdene. "Baptism in the Early British and Irish Churches", p.117
83. Bapt., p.17 (7)
84. AT, pp.18ff (21); L L Mitchell. Baptismal Anointing gives a thorough historical account of the origins of anointing in the Western tradition.
85. Winkler. "The Original Meaning of the Prebaptismal Anointing and its Implications" and E C Ratcliff. "The Old Syrian Baptismal Tradition".
86. Mitchell. Op.cit., pp.33ff; for an example of a heterodox group which regarded anointing as superior to the water rite see E Segelberg. "The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel according to Philip", pp.193f.
87. M Toussaint-Samat. A History of Food, pp.205-216
88. See Mitchell. Op.cit., pp.25-29 for the bathing aspects; A E Crawley et al. "Anointing" and M-C Amouretti & G Comet. "L'Olivier et Son Histoire", pp.52-53
89. Psalm 45:7
90. J R Porter. "Oil in the Old Testament", p.42. See Mitchell. Op.cit., pp.20-25 and C W Gusmer. And You Visited Me, pp.5-6 for biblical references.
91. Acts 10:44-48; Acts 9:17-18; see Ratcliff. Op.cit., p.141 and T W Manson. "Entry into Membership of the Early Church".
92. Brock. The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition.(1979), p.58
93. Ibid, p.39
94. Mitchell. Op.cit., pp.25ff; but see the critique of this view by Kretschmar. "Recent Research on Christian Initiation", pp.25ff.
95. Danielou. The Bible and the Liturgy.(1956), pp.40-42; Brock. Op.cit.(1979), pp.103ff
96. H A Kelly. The Devil at Baptism, pp.120-121, 195-196 & 274; Brock, Op.cit.(1979), pp.100ff
97. Ibid, p.191
98. ST: Volume 57, p.211 (3a. qu.72, art.2)

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99. Gusmer. Op.cit., p.13
100. R Murray. Symbols of Church and Kingdom, pp.112-130 & 320-324
101. ECBC: Volume 5, pp.153-157 and Brock. Op.cit.(1979), pp.16f
102. AIRI, p.77, alluding to Romans 11:17-24.
103. Crawley et al. Op.cit., pp.550
104. R B Onians. The Origins of European Thought about the Soul, pp.200-228. See E Rees. Christian Symbols, p.67 for a more recent expression of this perception.
105. The Great Code, pp.148-149; for further references see I S Gilhus. "The Tree of Life and the Tree of Death".
106. John 3:11-13; R W Paschal. "Sacramental Symbolism and Physical Imagery in the Gospel of St John", p.160.
107. John 4:12, 25-26 and 7:14-31
108. Brock. Op.cit.(1993), p.95
109. Brock. Op.cit.(1979), pp.40, 24f and 74f
110. E.g. DBL, p.203 (Ordo Romanus XI) and p.220 (Stowe Missal).
111. DBL, pp.161-162 (Missale Gothicum); cf. DBL, p.210 (Bobbio Missal).
112. Christian Initiation in Spain, pp.173ff
113. DBL, p.120 (my italics)
114. A Corbin. The Foul and the Fragrant, pp.22-34
115. H A Hannawelt. The Ties that Bound, p.173 and E Duffy. The Stripping of the Altars. 1992, pp.280-281.
116. Cited by Mitchell. Op.cit., p.136; 'effeta' means 'be opened' (Mark 7:32).
117. "Concerning the Mysteries", p.321 (29)
118. DBL, p.179 (Gelasian Sacramentary), p.34 (Apostolic Constitutions, 44) & 156 (John the Deacon). See also Brock. "A Baptismal Address Attributed to Athanasius".(1977), pp.101-102: 'receive the sweet scent of the myron, leaving nothing that smells foul in yourself'; and R Hillier. Arator on the Acts of the Apostles, pp.53-72 for an exposition of the divinus odor which descends from heaven at the oil's consecration and effects participation in Christ's ascension.
119. Kelly. Op.cit., p.180
120. Ibid, p.184

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121. Classen et al. Op.cit., pp.99ff, 113; this was an ancient philosophical classification (p.48ff).
122. Sometimes attention is drawn to olfaction's negative properties; see Kelly. Op.cit., p.132. Anthropologists recognise the repellent characteristics of olfaction, especially to unwanted spiritual beings; see Classen et al. Op.cit., pp.123-158
123. 2 Corinthians 2:14-17
124. Classen et al, pp.13-50 and A Synnott. The Body Social, pp.182-205
125. The Glory of the Lord, p.132
126. Brock. Op.cit.(1979), p.100 and Mitchell. Op.cit., p.78
127. N Tazi. "Celestial Bodies", p.545; cf. Bapt., p.35 (16). P Cramer. Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, pp.73-86 gives a suggestive interpretation of Perpetua's baptism as a ritual pre-enactment of her martyrdom. G P Jeanes. "Baptism Portrayed as Martyrdom in the Early Church", suggests ways in which the experience of the martyrs was embodied in baptismal liturgies during the Fourth century.
128. Sermon 213.8; for this and other references see W Harmless. Augustine and the Catechumenate, pp.232f & 282f
129. A Henry. Biblia Pauperum, p.135 (fn.15)
130. R S Werrell. "Tyndale's use of the Blood of Christ in the Meaning of Baptism"
131. Inst., pp.1303-1307 (IV.xv.1-4) and pp.1328-1329 (II.xvi.6)
132. Cited by Tonkin. Op.cit., p.106; see K Barth. CD IV/4, p.104 and Romans 5:9.
133. Munn. Op.cit., p.185
134. The Fulness of Sacrifice, pp.34-35
135. B Lincoln. "Human Body", p.501
136. L Barkan. Nature's Work of Art
137. M -C Pouchelle. The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages, pp.162-164; Bonaventure. "The Tree of Life", pp.154-155 wrote of water 'gushing from the secret fountain of the heart'.
138. C Walker Bynumm. "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages", p.185; this explains the widespread female mystical experience of becoming the flesh of Christ, 'because their flesh could do what his could do: bleed, feed, die and give life to others'. (p.188)
139. Pouchelle. Op.cit., pp.164-167

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140. P Camporesi. The Anatomy of the Senses, pp.37, 43 & 46f
141. Pouchelle. Op.cit., pp.154-158
142. Camporesi. The Incorruptible Flesh, pp.16-17, 177-178
143. F Héritier-Augé. "Semen and Blood", p.160; ethnography is juxtaposed with examples from Aristotle, Hindu thought, the ancient near east and China.
144. Goodenough. Fish, Bread and Wine.(1956), pp.61-71
145. Ibid, pp.126-128
146. E O James. The Origins of Sacrifice, p.22
147. H Wheeler Robinson. "Blood", p.715 and D Cole. "Blood"
148. M Detienne and J-P Vernant (eds.). The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks, pp.5, 127-128 and 190; W Burkert. Greek Religion, pp.59-60, 80-82
149. L Schele et al. The Blood of Kings, pp.14, 181-182 and C Duverger. "The Meaning of Sacrifice"
150. M Y Nabofa. "Blood Symbolism in African Religion"
151. Leviticus 17:11; Davies. "An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus", p.39 and G W Ashby. Sacrifice, pp.20f, 39ff
152. See articles by L Morris, L Dewar and D J McCarthy.
153. F Laubach. "Blood", p.224. An opposite view is taken by J Behm. "aima", p.174. On the blood of Christ see F M Young. Sacrifice and the Death of Christ, pp.64-82
154. Hebrews 9:13-14; 12:24
155. "Circumcision and Exodus IV.24-26", pp.190ff; among the many articles on this episode see Ashby. "The Bloody Bridegroom", pp.203-205.
156. Hoffman. Op.cit., pp.91ff; L Archer. "Bound by Blood".
157. H King. "Sacrificial Blood"
158. T Buckley & A Gottlieb (eds.). Blood Magic
159. Colossions 2:11-12
160. Brock. Op.cit.(1979), p.98
161. Zwingli. "Of Baptism", p.132
162. See Lampe. The Seal of the Spirit, pp.82-91 who refutes the contention that confirmation is the counterpart to circumcision.
163. Ibid, pp.245-246

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164. E F Ferguson. "Spiritual Circumcision in Early Christianity", pp.496-497
165. Lampe. Op.cit., p.261; see Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4
166. Ibid, p.16
167. Ibid, p.236
168. Danielou. Op.cit.(1956), p.68
169. Ibid, p.61
170. Ibid, p.60; Lampe. Op.cit., pp.274-280 reviews the evidence that early Christians desired to be physically marked in their baptism, demonstrating the importance of the seal in the popular Christian mind.
171. G Von Rad. Old Testament Theology, Volume 1, p.243
172. H Eilberg-Schwartz. The Savage in Judaism, pp.141-176
173. Genesis 17:2, 4-6
174. Eilberg-Schwartz. Op.cit., p.148, citing E Isaac. "Circumcision as a Covenant Rite", p.453
175. Ibid, pp.148-149 (Leviticus 26:41 and Exodus 6:12, 30)
176. Leviticus 19:23-25
177. Op.cit., p.150
178. Ibid, p.152
179. Ibid, p.153; the association in ethnography between fruit and human sexuality, and between fruit trees and the male sexual organ is the key.
180. "The Transition to a Post-baptismal Anointing in the Antiochene Rite".(1981), pp.217-219
181. See F Kerr. Theology after Wittgenstein, pp.160-162 and J Churchill. "Something Deep and Sinister".
182. L Gilkey. Nature, Reality and the Sacred, p.141
183. B S Turner. "Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body".
184. Purity and Danger, pp.114-115
185. Natural Symbols, pp.69-87
186. Turner. "Myth and Symbol", p.580
187. Cohen. Op.cit., pp.65-66

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188. Lincoln. Op.cit., pp.501-502
189. M Perniola. "Between Clothing and Nudity", p.278
190. Against the view of J Z Smith. "The Garments of Shame", p.3
191. CI, p.71 (fn.152) (Theodore. Homily I:23-24)
192. DBL, p.51 (Narsai. Homily 22)
193. Brock. "Clothing Metaphors".(1982) indicates the view that Adam and Eve are robed with glory in Paradise and that their fall meant a stripping of these garments.
194. CI, pp.159-189 (Cyril, Theodore and Chrysostom); Danielou. Op.cit.(1956), p.39; Smith. Op.cit., p.4 gives a list of references to baptismal nakedness.
195. AIRI, p.20 (In Ps.61 Enarr:32)
196. AIRI, p.76 (Sermon 2:4)
197. Smith. Op.cit., pp.4-6
198. Leclerq. "Nudité Baptismale".
199. Luke 24:12 (margin) and John 20:5-6
200. A Sharma. "Nudity", p.9 hints at this as does Walker Bynum. The Resurrection of the Body; cf. the iconography (e.g. plate 5 and detail) which shows the dead rising naked, and also the blessed dressed in their garments of glory in paradise.
201. P Brown. The Body and Society, pp.83-102
202. Murray. "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism", p.80
203. P Brown. Op.cit., pp.349ff
204. Ibid, p.363
205. Ibid, pp.363-364
206. D G Hunter. "Resistance to the Virginal Ideal in Late-Fourth-Century Rome"
207. M R Miles. Carnal Knowledge, pp.40-45
208. Ibid, pp.30-31
209. Ibid, pp.45-48, 204 (fn.110). Miles' argument is problematic, building as it does on very slender evidence. It is essentially an argument from silence - that lack of mention of female deaconesses in the Western Church implies the baptism of naked females by male priests. The evidence against her position is considerable. Deaconesses ordinarily anointed and baptised the women (DBL, pp.12-13)

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and 30-31; Didascalia Apostolorum, 16 and Apostolic Constitutions, 3:16). Miles overlooks the fact that such a practice would have occasioned a major sense of scandal amongst pagan writers and also archaeological evidence which suggests separate baptismal chambers (Wharton. "Ritual and Reconstructed Meaning", p.362 has some references concerning this). Miles is probably over-influenced by Smith. Op.cit., p.6 who first mentioned the possibility.

210. Ibid, p.36

211. Galatians 3:28; Colossions 2:11; 3:9, 10; Ephesians 4:22; see W A Meeks. "The Image of the Androgyne", p.183ff

212. AIRI, p.74 (Cyril. Sermon 2:2)

213. Ambrose. "Concerning the Mysteries", p.321 (34)

214. AIRI, p.194 (Theodore. Homily 3:8)

215. CI, pp.413-415

216. J Quasten. "A Pythagorean Idea in Jerome"

217. W Schwarz. "A Study in Pre-Christian Symbolism" and M P McHugh. "Linen, Wool and Colour".

218. Jerome uses the word 'candidus', meaning dazzling white; it conveys the idea of shining or the radiance that is emitted from a hot object. J Gage. Colour and Culture, p.58 supports this insight by suggesting that the colour of divine light may vary, but what is important is 'not hue but liminosity'.

219. W Schwarz. Op.cit., pp.107-109

220. Goodenough. Symbolism in the Dura Synagogue.(1964), p.166

221. Psalm 104:2; Daniel 7:9

222. Goodenough. Op.cit.(1964), pp.168-169; on the metaphysics of light see Pelikan. Imago Dei, pp.113-115

223. E M Maurer. "Symbol and Indentification in North American Indian Clothing", pp.119-142

224. R A Schwarz. "Uncovering the Secret Vice"

225. AIRI, p.21

226. O B Hardison. Christian Rite and Drama in the Middle Ages, pp.155-157

227. ST: Volume 57, p.47 (3a. qu.66. art.10)

228. CIRP, p.95

229. Op.cit., p.33

230. Ibid, pp.81f (Job 37:22 and Psalm 104:1-2)

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231. Ibid, pp.31-50
232. Ibid, pp.93ff
233. Colossions 1:15 and 2 Corinthians 3:18
234. "Catechetical Lecture III", p.267; adapted with reference to CI, pp.364ff and ECBC: Volume 5, pp.49ff
235. Cramer. Op.cit., pp.159-167
236. Ibid, pp.164-165
237. Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe, pp.124-125, 158
238. "Letter 98".
239. pp.376-379 (X.4-6)
240. Cramer. Op.cit., pp.109-114
241. "Letter 98", p.130
242. R De Latte. "S. Augustin et le Baptême", p.54 gives further references.
243. D S Bailey. Sponsors at Baptism and Confirmation, p.143
244. Ibid, p.144; Lynch. Op.cit., p.158
245. Nichols. Seeable Signs, p.201
246. DBL, pp.245-247
247. Nichols. Op.cit., p.202
248. Bailey. Op.cit., p.5; Lynch. Op.cit., p.126; for Greek birth rites see L B Zaidman et al. Religion in the Ancient Greek City, pp.64f
249. Cited by S Gudeman. "The Compadrazgo as a Reflection of the Natural and Spiritual Person", p.49 (Summa Supplement: qu.56, art.3).
250. CIRP, pp.89-95, 106-111
251. C E Pocknee. "The Gospel Lection in the Rite of Infant Baptism"
252. S W Sykes. "Baptisme doth Represente", p.132
253. The word 'receive' in the Gospel reading has as its subjects the children who receive from Christ the kingdom of God. In the liturgy 'receive' is used for the Church admitting the child and for the child itself as subject: twice the subject of receiving is Christ and once it is God. For details of this Gospel reading's baptismal use in Luther's theology see Jeanes. "Liturgy and Ceremonial", pp.19-27.

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254. Words from the Gospel are strategically repeated in the subsequent exhortation ('he commanded the children to be brought to him....') and then at the beginning of the exhortation to the godparents, ('ye have brought these children here to be baptised'). The godparents' gesture is also closely associated with the Gospel reading.

255. See above, pp.37-40

Chapter Five

Ritual Metaphors and the Organising Potential of Baptismal Birth

1. Metaphor and Ritual

The study of metaphor in anthropology has suffered from relative neglect in comparison to the study of symbolism. Increasingly, however, its importance is recognised due to its prevalence in non-industrialised societies where it is often preferred to symbolic representation. The anthropological understanding of metaphor is self-consciously interdisciplinary, although there is a concern to differentiate its approach particularly from philosophy. Thus, one anthropologist has stated that the primary concern is about 'being there' and not about questions of ultimate being¹; as another has remarked, metaphors are 'means of doing things and not merely ways of saying things'.² Notwithstanding the different emphasis, the philosophical influence is evident in a defining statement, one which

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would represent something of a consensus opinion amongst social anthropologists:

metaphor juxtaposes two apparently distinct domains, sometimes called the tenor and vehicle or target and source, to effect a transfer of meaning from the former to the latter, enriching, transforming, or constituting and creating our understanding of the target domain.³

This section will investigate the implications of this understanding, with an emphasis on the function of metaphor in the ritual context. Three specific areas will require explication: the contribution metaphorical predication makes to human identity and social movement, the mechanism by which metaphor expresses cultural understanding and the relationship between a metaphor and its source domain. Following the methodology of previous chapters this will lay the foundation for a theological evaluation of the three baptismal metaphors legitimated by the story of Jesus' Baptism.

1.1 Human Identity and Social Movement through Metaphor

J W Fernandez is the anthropologist who has been most influential in advocating the advantages of a metaphorical analysis. His work is continuous with an historical strand of anthropological thought that has understood metaphor to have a pragmatic goal which impinges on human existence. This thinking suggested that metaphor's rôle was to personalise the forces of the natural world, enabling traditional societies to exercise control over the environment. What was unyielding and relentless in human experience could be reduced to manageable proportions through the predication of metaphors to the forces of creation.⁴

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Fernandez's own starting point is the notion that to be human is to have a problem with identity. Human beings are engaged, through their capacity for transcendence, in the continual process of constructing identity. The problem arises because of the common experience of 'inchoateness' or 'a gnawing sense of uncertainty' which stimulates the search for identity through metaphorical predication.⁵ In the collective nature of human experience the inchoate is the 'familiarily dangerous' and often something that is 'implicitly known but explicitly denied'.⁶ In contrast, the 'choate' is the source for discussion of the inchoate. It is the cultural complex of rhetorical terms and allusions in which it is possible to characterise the unknown. Fernandez characterises a metaphor as 'a strategic predication upon an inchoate pronoun (an I, a you, a we, they) which makes a movement and leads to performance'.⁷ Metaphorical predication is a means by which a person comes to comprehend their existential situation. In metaphor the inchoate subject, its tenor, is brought into interaction with the choate, its vehicle, which serves the process of personal redefinition. The provision of identity is said to be the primary 'mission of metaphor'⁸, as its predication:

takes an inchoate frame and incorporates into it a domain of objects and actions whose identity and action requirements we more clearly understand.⁹

Placing metaphors in the social context emphasises what underlies the prior category of tropology. A trope, a figure of speech, has an etymology which conveys the notion of turning. Identity formation always involves movement, something again indicated by choice of the term 'vehicle' to characterise the dynamic mechanism of a metaphor.¹⁰ For Fernandez, another mission of metaphor is to enable the movement of human beings, who organise themselves into social worlds which may

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be characterised as 'domains of belonging'. Much of human life is concerned with the maintenance of these domains, maintenance which includes their arrangement and rearrangement. In other words, culture is conceived as a quality space with a contextually specific number of dimensions and a society concerns itself with the movement of persons through this quality space. Metaphoric predication achieves this movement, and society is itself constituted by this motion of pronouns through social space. Indeed, the very motivation to employ metaphor lies in the basic human requirement 'to concretize the inchoateness of subjects within frames and to obtain a more satisfactory occupancy of quality space'.¹¹ At the heart of this practice is human engagement through which movement occurs, a movement which entails:

a process whereby the semantico-referential categories of the tenor and the vehicle move closer together as a result of the actors enactment.¹²

Significantly, the movement achieved through metaphor is not automatically unidirectional but may be evaluated according to the quality of the space into which the pronoun is moved. In other words, rhetoric has a definite strategy within the social frame. This is apparent when it is noted that the social movement may be characterised as either positive and desirable or negative and derogatory according to the underlying strategic intent of the metaphor which is predicated upon the inchoate subject. With this qualification Fernandez legitimately asserts that a further mission of metaphor is to ensure the optimum positioning of the human subject in quality space.

Ritual is a key area of human life where metaphors assume performative qualities and, in the terminology of chapter two, in

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addition to being assertive, they become purposive. Fernandez understands a ritual to be a juxtaposition of ceremonial moments in which metaphors are applied to the participating pronouns. Each moment is a scene which contributes to an overall transformation of the experience of the participant who emerges in a preferential social and existential location. In ritual a further mission of metaphor is to function as a plan for ritual movement and the ritual context is the means by which metaphoric predications are acted out either by individual inchoate pronouns or upon others who are perceived to share the anxiety of inchoateness. This praxis oriented understanding of metaphor coheres with the theory of a ritual of transformation which suggests that an individual emerges from the ritual context through a stage of incorporation. This can only mean that there has been a shift in quality space and that an individual emerges from the ritual 'better located in respect to his goodness and his sense of potency'.¹³

1.2 Cultural Understanding and its Organising Metaphors

The processes of metaphorical predication may be approached through the concept of a 'root metaphor', a term which was introduced by V W Turner. He argued that root metaphors must be employed consciously and selected in terms of their 'appropriateness and potential fruitfulness'.¹⁴ He did not argue that all social metaphors may be reduced to one particular metaphor, but that there may be a number of root metaphors that together inform sociality. Root metaphors originate in the anti-structural moments of liminality; they emerge because in the mutuality of human relationships is an inventiveness of conceptual systems. There is 'a depth world of prophetic, half glimpsed images' which finds itself juxtaposed with the active subject which 'acquires new and surprising contours and

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valances from its dark companion'. In this way what Turner labels 'imageless thought' in various degrees of abstraction is 'brought fully into the light'.¹⁵

What however is not entirely clear in Turner's discussion on metaphor is the distinction between metaphor and cultural understanding. This seems to be due to his reliance on the work of S C Pepper who developed the notion of a root metaphor as a basic analogy in the realm of ideas and categories. Root metaphors, for Pepper, arise out of the human desire to comprehend the world, encountered through an experience of 'common sense' from which arise a series of categories through which one is enabled to examine other areas of experience.

However, as the anthropological study of metaphor has progressed so the desire to demarcate metaphor's linguistic nature has also developed. One reason has been the growing influence of a theory of metaphor which suggests that not only does metaphor play a role in shaping human understanding but it also plays a foundational role by actually constituting that understanding. N Quinn has provided some clarity on this issue from the anthropological perspective by suggesting that it is possible to distinguish between the sweeping claim that all comprehension is constituted by metaphor and the narrower one that asserts that metaphor partially constitutes understanding. The majority of metaphors are selected because they give expression to a 'preexisting and culturally shared model' although this does not preclude the innovative metaphorical task of the generation of new inferences. The latter, in comparison to the former, are exceptional cases and Quinn concludes that:

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metaphors do not typically give rise to new, previously unrecognized entailments, although they may well help the reasoner to follow out entailments of the preexisting cultural model and thereby arrive at complex inferences.¹⁶

The mistake that is made by the 'cognitive semanticist' is to rely on examples that have been idealised through abstraction from the context of human discourse. This strategy emerges from their assertion, at one level, that metaphor is a matter that relates to more than language and also, at higher level, a desire to refute an 'objectivist' account of the world. As Quinn remarks on this second level strategy, metaphor becomes the 'quintessential challenge' to a propositional view of the relationship between language and the world.

Quinn's arguments contribute to a rejection of an extreme position which draws metaphor wholly into the conceptual domain and establishes a central ground whereby there is no premature commitment to a theory that would inhibit the anthropological heuristic enterprise. Fernandez asserts a similar stance with his discussion on latent 'factors' and 'intentions' that have a role in mediating the process of metaphor formation. They both undergird and constrain the selection and use of a metaphor and emphasise that understanding remains distinct from its expression in metaphor. Only a close examination of the metaphorical structure of a culture will reveal such latent factors, a statement of which can provide evidence that the human mind endeavours to construct a unified schema of its overall experience.¹⁷

It is probably for the reason given in criticism of Turner that Fernandez introduces the term 'organising metaphor' into the effort to demonstrate that different metaphors relate to each other in a less than random manner. For Fernandez, organising metaphors (and there may

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be more than one) are empirically detected through observation; they are the ones which both act strategically on inchoate subjects and set a dominant tone for the ritual.¹⁸ In Fernandez's field experience the ritual leader has a clarity of perspective on the 'general nuclei of associationaround which ceremonies are organised'.¹⁹

An organising metaphor brings structure to a ritual which may be conceived as a sequence of organising metaphors, each put into effect by a series of ceremonial scenes. Alternatively, one organising metaphor can function as an element that acts to bind diverse parts of one ritual together. Fernandez's own analysis of the eucharist illustrates his point. He regards the basic organising metaphor of the eucharist as 'we are the living body of Christ'; ritually, each component of the eucharist acts as a step in making this a reality. For instance, metaphors such as 'I am the stained body', 'He is the sacrificial lamb' and 'He is the bread and wine' each contribute to achieving the objective of the living body of Christ. The challenge for the anthropologist, both in this case and in others, is the elucidation of the relationships between different metaphors and also the transformations between them during the course of the ritual.²⁰ It is to this that attention must now be turned.

1.3 Evaluation of Metaphors and Implications for Baptism

The corollary to the concept of an organising metaphor is that metaphors may be evaluated and the criteria against which anthropologists have suggested are various.

One criterion has already been noted: the assessment of the quality space into which the metaphor moves the inchoate subject. In

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addition, J C Crocker has argued that the 'truth' or 'goodness' of a metaphor may be judged on how well the metaphor fills out its context. In this case the more one may do with a metaphor might be assessed in terms of its ability to integrate wide areas of human relationships.²¹ This means that the success of a metaphor depends on the extent to which it 'integrates a figurative truth with the complexities of a social situation'. Essential to this success is the recognition that metaphor occurs in a social context and therefore requires both thought and feeling to be effective.²² Alternatively, it may be said that, by this criterion, certain metaphors demonstrate an 'aptness' that others do not.²³

Further evaluative criteria are found by considering the nature of the relationship between the two domains which metaphor juxtaposes. Earlier, metaphor was defined in terminology of 'source' and 'target' domains, which expresses the process of metaphor formation. Ideas from the source domain are employed in a certain way to illuminate the target domain. This is a mapping process in which the target domain is mapped by means of the imposition of the structure of the source domain. Mapping, itself a metaphor, implies that the source domain is one that has its own structure and hierarchy. Ideas are rarely randomly ordered and find an orientation through contrast and other associations. A source domain is not 'an undifferentiated lump of meaning' but contains a system which is employed to bring order to something less well differentiated.²⁴ In contrast to the opacity of the target domain, the source domain is well-known and easy to think with in the sense that the thinker can easily conceptualise the relationships between its elements.

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This juxtaposition of source and target domains results in two further criteria, the first of which is centred around the 'power' of a metaphor. This derives from the tension that is established between the two domains, tension between what is regarded to be either similar or dissimilar. Geertz expresses the question of metaphorical power succinctly. It derives:

precisely from the interplay between the discordant meanings it symbolically coerces into a unitary conceptual framework and from the degree to which that coercion is successful in overcoming the psychic resistance such semantic tension inevitably generates in anyone in a position to perceive it. When it works, a metaphor transforms a false identification ...into an apt analogy; when it misfires, it is a mere extravagance.²⁵

Psychic resistance occurs since similarity and dissimilarity are both at work within the metaphor. Usually, it has been the case that what has been recognised as most significant is the presence of 'similarity in dissimilars'.²⁶ Yet rather than remain with a discussion of the similarities produced by a metaphor, social anthropologists have also recognised that some metaphors may gain their power through the maintenance of a tension between the dissimilarities and what is perceived to be similar. In other words, even though a similarity might be perceived this may exist only on one point, leaving the two domains separate except for this one feature.²⁷ The tension generated may be uneasy, yet it may also be the reason why it is that a particular metaphor has an affectivity and is sustained in linguistic usage. Add to this anthropological recognition that the social use of metaphor creates new meanings, enabling speech about things for which non-metaphorical speech does not exist then the power of a metaphor (in the sense advocated) is an indicator of the quality of a metaphor.²⁸ Where that power, the tension resulting from discordance,

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does not exist a metaphor becomes problematic and decorative rather than genuinely heuristic.

A second criterion that derives from the relationship between the source and the target domains is approached through the concept of metonymy. In metonymy, terms which are related to each other in a syntagmatic chain may substitute for one another. It is possible, for instance, for a cause to substitute for an effect, a container for what is contained or an agent for an act. Whatever the exact relationship the tendency is for the complete entity to be suggested and therefore brought into the foreground. Furthermore, as a metaphor is constructed and two domains are brought into juxtaposition, a process of metonymic extension may take place. This happens when the metaphor itself becomes part of a syntagmatic chain, taking on fresh associations. This has been described as 'colouration' and J D Sapir gives the example of the slogan 'put a tiger in your tank'. Tiger is a metaphor for fuel, but in the slogan there is a metonymic extension to the elements of the domain indicated by 'tank' such as the driver and the car itself which are now perceived differently.²⁹ Thus metonyms are said to have a 'volatility', but nevertheless, 'practically every metaphor that works effectively to associate domainscarries metonymic implications'.³⁰ To investigate whether or not these implications are desirable is an important facet of the evaluative procedure for any ritual metaphor.

The implications of a sociologically informed understanding of metaphor for a study of baptism may now be described, suggesting a framework for evaluating baptismal metaphors. Baptismal metaphors may be regarded as an attempt to make sense of the ritual experience of

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being established in the Christian community in terms which reach for something undescribable in non-theological language; they mediate to the Church and to the baptisand an identity that would be otherwise incommunicable. The linguistic presentation of baptism in metaphor is related to a perceived understanding of baptism in terms of the source domain which constitutes the metaphor. What baptism is regarded in terms of is a significant factor in the relative success of the ritual metaphor; anthropology has suggested that this success may be measured through an evaluation of four features. They are, first of all, the quality of space into which a particular metaphor moves an individual; secondly, the degree of mediation a metaphor supplies between a central doctrine and its social context; thirdly, the tension maintained between the source and target domains, and finally the interplay between the metaphor and any associated metonymy. Through these criteria the search for an organising metaphor for baptism may occur. This is one which conveys an overall structure to the baptismal ritual and integrates its diversity.

Central to this methodological framework is the appreciation that each of the three baptismal metaphors relates to a source domain in human life. Baptism is regarded in terms that relate not simply to the historical life of Jesus Christ but also, respectively, to human activity in the event and processes of human death, the circumstances of birth and the procedures of everyday hygiene. In other words the analysis of baptismal metaphors may only be done in recognition that they relate not only to a history of theological reflection but also to the contemporary perception of certain human practices. This is to recognise the anthropological fact that the ritual of baptism, at any moment in the history of the Christian tradition, has syntagmatic

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associations with all other events in the human life-cycle. Baptismal theology employs the human events of death, birth and hygiene, to each of which it enjoys a syntagmatic relation, in a paradigmatic relationship in order to generate an understanding of an inchoate experience.

From this theoretical basis, it is my intention to argue that baptismal birth has a strong claim to be regarded as the organising metaphor of baptism. To establish this argument it will be necessary to evaluate each of the three baptismal metaphors giving first an account of its theological location and then a brief analysis of its source domain. Thus it will be possible to offer a critique of each metaphor taking account of the cultural perceptions of its related mundane practice. In this way the shortcomings of baptismal death and washing will be demonstrated, the potential advantages of baptismal birth advocated and an account of relationships between the three metaphors offered.

2 The Metaphor of Death

The metaphor of baptismal death was first introduced in textual form by Paul in his epistle to the Romans. Drawing on an earlier ecclesial tradition, the Christian is said to have been baptised into, and therefore united with, Christ's death and by baptism to have been buried with him. Here a strategic metaphorical predication takes place as the individual enters into Christ's death and participates in the newness of life guaranteed by his resurrection and, in a social movement, into the body of the Church.³¹ However, the Pauline notion of baptismal death has had a capacity to dominate other baptismal

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metaphors. It is this difficulty that informs an account of its location in baptismal theology.

2.1 The Dominance of Baptismal Death

Although contemporary theology stresses the canonical prominence of baptismal death, it cannot be overlooked that during the earliest period of the Church's history it was far from dominant as a baptismal motif; indeed it is notable by its absence in second century baptismal theology.³² When the metaphor did emerge, through the writings of Origen, its influence developed rapidly, reaching a strategic point in Cyril's mystagogical sermons at Jerusalem in the mid-fourth century. Now, the transition in Western Syrian liturgy from one baptismal paradigm to another had reached a significant moment. Jesus' Baptism had ceased to be the primary model of Christian baptism and was substituted by the model of Jesus' death and resurrection. The notion that the baptisand imitated Christ in his or her descent into the tomb of the baptismal font was powerfully emotive and during the fourth and fifth centuries it gained an ascendancy. It has been rightly observed that, here Jordan has given way to Calvary and that death has swallowed up birth; although not extinguishing the metaphor of birth, the emergence of the baptismal metaphor framed around the model of death exerted over it a severe hegemony.³³

This dominance is later found in Luther, whose heavy weighting towards Pauline theology functions as a powerful explanatory vehicle of a daily encounter with God. The constant recalling of baptism and its promises is part of a process which reaches its goal in actual death; the Christian's ultimate sanctification is the fulfilment of

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the prior ritual action. A summary of Luther's theology of baptism offered by P Althaus clarifies this:

the sooner we die the sooner the meaning of baptism becomes an actuality. The more we must suffer, the more properly we conform to our baptism. Baptism and death, baptism and suffering, baptism and martyrdom, belong together.³⁴

Captured here is the intensity of the link between baptism and the metaphor of death. Luther was able to speak of baptism simply as death and observed an interchangeability of the words in scripture. Just as Luther's treatment of water symbolism was weighted towards the negative, so he frequently allowed the metaphor of death to elide the positive aspect of baptismal resurrection and to bear the whole weight of the meaning of baptism.³⁵

A further instance is evident in contemporary liturgical development in which the Roman Catholic rites of baptism have given a dominant position to paschal themes. Not only is the preferred season of adult baptism Easter, but the theology behind the liturgy of the blessing of the water has been given an overwhelming paschal texture with the metaphor of death and resurrection taking precedence over those of rebirth. As one commentator has observed, the prayer on which the revision was based - from the eighth century Gelasian Sacramentary - was based on the metaphor of birth whereas the reformed version was constructed around the metaphor of death and resurrection with the birth imagery suppressed.³⁶ The trend has not been restricted to the Roman Catholic Church; a recent essay by a Lutheran theologian appears to be pointing in the same direction when it is contended that 'people must be helped to understand that baptism is connected with Easter, not with the birth of babies'.³⁷

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Therefore, at various points in the history of baptismal theology, the metaphor of death has dominated other metaphors. Although the hegemony of metaphorical death and resurrection is less than universal³⁸ its capacity to dominate alternative metaphors reflects properties of 'weight' and assertiveness. Reflecting on this, one commentary suggests that, when it is compared with the Baptism of Jesus and therefore with the metaphor of birth, the death and resurrection of Jesus as a baptismal paradigm has a profundity that causes the former to be theologically overridden. This is something based on the fact that death is:

a heavier universal experience, more threatening, rooted deep in the archaeology of dread, more primary in human consciousness, tapping unconscious forces of great power. In symbol, drama, and imagination, its relentless crudity makes the baptism of Jesus, important as it is, to seem almost decorative.³⁹

Such comments focus an important characteristic of the metaphor of baptismal death. It means that into its evaluation are taken questions concerning this dominance, its desirability and legitimacy.

2.2 Human Death as the Source Domain for Baptismal Death

The specific contribution that social anthropology makes to an analysis of the source domain of death is that death is subject to particular cultural constructions. Whereas there is a tendency in popular modern thinking to conceive of death as something instantaneous and the funeral as a necessary addendum, in many cultures death is something that is perceived more clearly as a process. It can extend from the imminence of death through the funerary ritual and until the final stages of mourning. If death is a temporal process the corollary is that death is not something private and a matter purely for the deceased; death has multiple social

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dimensions and is defined by the living. Funerary rituals orchestrate the emotions of the mourners and allow the recognition that the deceased was a 'social being grafted upon the physical individual' whose death destroys the social order; society requires a process of recuperation from its effort in attributing what it did to the deceased and to regraft this onto others in the reconstruction of the disrupted social order.⁴⁰ The social understanding of death explains how 'the moment of death' can be anticipated or postponed relative to the actual expiration of life.⁴¹ Moreover, the definition of biological death has become increasingly problematic and it is difficult to say categorically when a body becomes a corpse. The efficacy of current medical recovery techniques means that it is now possible to make distinctions between 'apparent' death and 'true' death, and also between clinical, absolute and physiological death depending on the evaluation of life which remains in the individual.⁴²

This definitional uncertainty has been accompanied by the growth of a Western perception of death as something 'shameful and forbidden'; it is a process that has been institutionalised, embraced by technology and with the predominance of cremation death has assumed a nullifying finality.⁴³ However, this may not remain the case, and neither has it always been so. Over the past few decades publications in the sociology, psychiatry and psychology of death indicate a recognition that death has become intolerably impersonalised and requires rescuing from technology and social isolation. Equally, there has been an expansion of interest in the social history of death. In the transition to the increasing taboo-status of death one of the points that has been underlined is the comparatively recent refocusing of death to an internal affair of the nuclear family from a public

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event that engaged the whole community.⁴⁴ When death was a phenomenon both near and familiar to everyone, it was expected; it was an event for which there would be forewarning of some kind and a goal for which preparation was made. The simple rituals of death were organised by the dying individual from the deathbed which became the site of a public ceremony accessible by the community; in reaction to the individual's death there was a resignation towards the corporate destiny of humanity.⁴⁵ Yet, although the public nature of death remained, it is argued that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries an awareness of 'one's own death' developed which brought with it a horror at death's physical aspects.⁴⁶ Gradually this horror of death combined with the increasing longevity of human life, the values of the Enlightenment and the social patterns of urbanisation and bureaucratisation to achieve the current alienation of death from the familiar.

It was observed that, anthropologically speaking, death may be regarded as processual. The explication of this is often through other ritual experiences. The French anthropologist R Hertz was the first to articulate that the rituals of death were analogous in character to rituals of initiation, birth and marriage. For instance, death is analogous to an initiation. In death the transformation that the deceased is felt to undergo is 'the passage from the visible society to the invisible' and one that is comparable to the profound experience by the initiate of a personality change and holistic conversion. Just as initiation gives an initiate the moral and spiritual resources for his or her forthcoming adult life, so a funeral performs the same function for the deceased.⁴⁷ Death has a similar relationship to marriage, something that is observed in the

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way each ritual gives prominence to separation and incorporation. The separation between the bride and her family and her incorporation into the social group of her newly acquired family provides a parallel to the separation associated with death and the incorporation of the deceased's soul into the afterlife.⁴⁸ Equally, birth is perceived to have a type of reverse analogy to death. An infant leaves the mysterious invisible darkness of the womb and makes a transition to the world of the living, experiencing rites of incorporation that correspond to a renewal of its existence. Therefore as the deceased's body decomposes after burial, a rebirthing process occurs in which a new body takes place and with the soul enters a new existence.⁴⁹ Thus, in the case of initiation, marriage and birth, similar feelings of anxiety and elation are experienced to those in the experience of death; in all four life-cycle events humanity has to deal with inherent potential mystical dangers involved in the change of status. In the words of Hertz, death is 'not originally conceived as a unique event without any analogue'; it is 'a particular instance of a general phenomenon', one which is now termed a 'rite of passage'.⁵⁰ This fact allows the psychology of death to become familiar to those who observe it.

It is this psychological impact of death which has stimulated anthropological interest in funerary rituals. The supposition is that sociality itself cannot be understood without the phenomenon of mortality which both reflects and shapes social values. This is to recognise that death and religion are intimately connected. As Malinowski asserted: 'of all the sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of lifeis of the greatest importance'.⁵¹ For Malinowski, the cradle of religion was found within the interplay of

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the emotional forces of human psychology in the face of the dilemma between life and death. Religion provided the culturally essential and comforting belief in the form of immortality which is the denial of the fact of death and the prevention of human disintegration in the face of mortality. Malinowski's anthropological enterprise was, in part, informed by the discipline of psychoanalysis⁵² and therefore anticipates the more contemporary Freudian psychology of E Becker who argued that consciousness of death is the primary repression and that 'this is what is creaturely about man, this is the repression on which culture is built'.⁵³ The denial of the core human anxiety of impending death is the root cause of neurosis, and the only path to mental health is the adoption of a life-enhancing and ideal illusion that has the capacity to sustain the individual in a state of reality. This adoption is the pre-emptive insight that Kierkegaard gave to the solution of dread and terror in the consciousness of decay and ultimately death.

2.3 A Critique of Baptismal Death

This analysis of the source domain of death is the necessary background from which to pursue further the problems raised by the dominance of baptismal death. This is because it is far from certain how Paul's cultural perception of death contributed to his doctrine of baptism. Two endeavours to uncover the influence of a first century cultural understanding of death have been undertaken recently. N R Petersen has suggested that the Jewish practice of a double burial lies behind the eschatological reserve and that baptism for Paul 'is a rite celebrating both the separation of believers from their former social states and their commencement of a transitional process of bodily transformation that will be completed at a given moment in the

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future'.⁵⁴ In contrast, R E DeMaris has argued that Paul's burial imagery is derived from the funerary practice of vicarious baptism for the dead practised by the Corinthian Christians which functioned to assist the deceased to depart from the world of the living and enter the world of the dead.⁵⁵ Each of these attempts, both with their particular weaknesses, remains an exploration that awaits further specialist research. They are, however, the type of investigation which a focus on metaphor demands.

Nevertheless, understanding how Paul's baptismal theology is appropriated in the fourth century, in Luther and in contemporary liturgical reform enables a thorough critique of the metaphor of death.

Although other fourth century interpreters did not, in contrast to Cyril, enjoy the proximity of the Holy Sepulchre, they could succeed in giving the death metaphors of baptism a wider perspective than had been done at Jerusalem. A good instance is Ambrose, who paid greater attention to the link with Genesis and portrayed baptism in the context of the parallel between Christ and Adam. Death was the penalty for human sin, yet that which once served as a sentence of condemnation now also serves as a gift.⁵⁶

This condemnation to death and burial was fulfilled in baptism when death to sin occurred and God's gift of original righteousness was restored through resurrection; baptism was invented 'to prevent the deceit and tricks of the devil prevailing in this world'.⁵⁷ The font, in a rectangular coffin-like form, symbolised a tomb⁵⁸, yet Ambrose seemed conscious of an expectation on him to explain how it

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was that an immersion in water enabled 'a living man to die and a living man to rise again'. He made recourse to imagery from the natural world; water's source is the earth and through baptism humanity's sentence, the return to original dust in death, is served. It was not practicable to enact this through actual burial in soil, since this would involve physical death; 'the conditions of human life did not permit us to be covered by the earth and then rise again from it'. In comparison to soil, water in addition signified purification, thus fulfilling two symbolic functions.⁵⁹

A comparison between Ambrose and Paul demonstrates the complexities of the cultural model upon which the metaphor of death is based and the implications for its reception. In first century Rome cremation followed by burial of the ashes was the core of the funeral ritual. Only in the second century did inhumation begin to become fashionable and by its end cremation had become a thing of the past.⁶⁰ In the Roman world the simplest types of tombs were holes in the ground into which the ashes, or later the skeleton, would be placed. For the rich, sarcophagi could be placed in a chamber tomb either above or below the ground⁶¹; for the poor however, the skeleton would have been lowered directly into the ground with a simple covering around them. Thus Ambrose was able to develop the metaphor of burial in a way that Paul, writing in the middle of the first century to a predominantly Gentile Church familiar primarily with cremation and not inhumation of the skeleton, could not have done without extensive metaphorical extension and even breakdown.⁶² Equally, the recipients of Paul's epistle would have faced an interpretative problem as burial in first century Palestine, at least in the case of Jesus, meant laying out the body in a tomb hewn from rock. In contrast, Ambrose safely

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appealed to the experience of burial with which most of his congregation would have been familiar and was able to develop the metaphor of death accordingly.

It is perhaps because of the ambiguity over what constitutes burial that there has been the search for the decisive moment of death in baptism. In Pauline studies, it has been argued that any burial is dependent upon a prior death, although as such the death is not complete without the performance of the subsequent ritual.⁶³ Such a view leads to a discussion on the nature of the prior death; did it occur in the death of Jesus Christ or at a prior point in the life of the baptisand? A J M Wedderburn rightly accepts that there is a sense in which the Christian is buried with Christ after his crucifixion but wants to say that part of the Christian's 'death' is its representation in the ritual context. However, here may lie another motivation for the sequence of stripping, nakedness and reclothing examined in the previous chapter. As W A Meeks has argued, since descent into the water of baptism was related not to Jesus' death itself but his burial, the symbolism of baptismal garments were employed to indicate the Christian's subjective death.⁶⁴

The comparisons between Paul and Luther take the critique further. First of all there is a contrast in the relationship that is envisaged between the ritual action of baptism and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Luther, although he leaned heavily towards an emphasis on baptismal death, there is a tendency in his work to exploit a symmetry of relationship from his understanding of the etymology of 'baptism'. Luther is capable of stating how the ritual action of baptism has a double signification: 'sins are drowned in

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baptism, and in place of sin, righteousness comes forth'.⁶⁵ A later exposition gives a yet sharper sense that the metaphors of baptism interpret its two ritual aspects:

these two parts, being dipped under the water and emerging from it, indicate the power and effect of Baptism, which is simply the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man, both of which actions must continue in us our whole life long.⁶⁶

In contrast, Paul's construction of the relationship is an asymmetrical one and not the symmetrical one that might be implied by the ritual plunging of a human body into water and its immediate withdrawal. For Paul, the Christian dies with Christ and shares only proleptically in Christ's resurrection which is held in eschatological reserve even though the walking in newness of life commences. It must be noted that Luther was aware of the eschatological reserve, and in his 1519 sermon, instead of speaking of the resurrection of the new man he spoke of 'the spiritual birth and the increase in grace and righteousness' in his exposition of the drawing out from the water.⁶⁷ Resurrection becomes birth and notwithstanding this the two parts of the baptismal ritual remain distinct.

Secondly, Luther shares what may in fact have been Paul's singular contribution to the theology of the cross - the intersection of the consecutive relation between death and resurrection with a dialectical relation.⁶⁸ In other words, it is not merely a question of life after death but life in death. At baptism, in Luther's theology, a Christian is thrust into death, commencing a process of dying which finds its completion in physical death itself. The Christian life is lived under the sentence of death; the godly aim of a continual dying is a training for the final death in which sin will be fully eradicated.⁶⁹

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To begin the Christian life is a pledge to 'slay your sin more and more as long as you live even until your dying day'.⁷⁰ In a similar way to Paul, death becomes a metaphor for the daily experience of the Christian, although, in contrast to Paul, Luther is less inclined to link it to the death of Christ in a relationship of imitation.⁷¹ Where Luther differs from Paul is in his emphasis in speaking of death with Christ in baptism. For Pauline theology the emphasis is on dying with Christ as a past event but for Luther the emphasis is placed on a continuing, daily, death and resurrection, commencing and signified in baptism, which must happen until death.⁷²

This contrast between Luther and Paul now enables an evaluation. Initially, it may be observed that in his treatment of baptism as drowning Luther reduces the tension between the source and the target domains of the metaphor. Paul linked baptism with the ritual of burial, but Luther then links baptism with death, bringing to the foreground in a metonymy the wholeness in which burial is situated. Another metonymical enrichment takes place when drowning is substituted for death; in other words, the cause is highlighted instead of its effect. In this way the baptismal action preferred by Luther, of submersion followed by emersion, comes to speak of death followed by resurrection. Here the model for baptism has become the ritual action itself, rather than the processual character of the Pauline source domain. Thus the power of the metaphor is significantly reduced as the similarity between domains substantially overshadows the dissimilarity. Once immersion into water is baptismal death and emergence is resurrection the capacity of the metaphor to sustain its affectivity and heuristic potentiality is brought into question. Maintenance of the Pauline notion of baptism as burial prevents

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Luther's equation of death with immersion and resurrection with emergence which serve to divide baptism into two ritual halves.

Of further concern is Luther's existential relationship with, and his theology of, death. Luther discussed his ideas on fear, and particularly a fear which 'falls down from above', a basic fear before God which guilty humanity experienced at the thought of the wrath of God on judgement day. Such fear, resulting from sin, cannot be overcome except with the confidence that is gained through and with Christ; it cannot be conquered 'except through baptism and the Gospel. This gives great courage that we cannot find in ourselves but only in Christ'.⁷³ To appreciate Luther's view of death the character of Christian faith as a constant re-appropriation of the Gospel from the standpoint of the Law has to be re-emphasised. Thus although, under the Gospel, death for the Christian has lost its sting and is to be desired with happiness this is not the full picture. Under the Gospel the Christian knows about the wrath of God in death as a penalty for sin; thus at the pole of the Law, from which the Christian must constantly move towards the Gospel, death and the prospect of divine judgement remain a terrifying goal, a view temporally coincident with its passive acceptance in faith. Luther, it seems, never escaped from anxiety of the uncertainty of death and the resultant judgement of a vengeful God which overshadowed the close of the middle ages.⁷⁴ It is not too much to suppose that the final terror of his self-consciousness, his own death, both informed his wider theology and his thinking on baptism, giving the latter a focus on the death metaphor at the point where Luther regarded baptismal theology to be of most importance - daily human existence between baptism and death in the face of an uncertain future. Could it be that the violent image of

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drowning somehow reveals an attempt by Luther to project the terror of death and judgement onto the ritual act of baptism? Was it in fact a denial of death itself? If it was, then it was an attempt which in Luther's own case did not fully ameliorate the intrinsic human fear of annihilation.

When it comes to the RCIA's development of the metaphor of death an enquiry begins with the title of the rite and the inclusion of the metaphor of 'initiation'. As already noted, Hertz observed that one way of comprehending the inchoate experience of death is through the analogous human experience of initiation. When this is brought together with the recognition encountered in chapter two that in anthropological terms initiation is understood primarily as a maturation rite and may not in fact be an appropriate metaphor for understanding baptism⁷⁵, questions may be raised against the RCIA's usage of metaphors.

To indicate the scope of this question it is necessary to recall the debate that has occurred since the RCIA's publication in 1972 over the normative status of adult baptism as against the baptism of infants. The issue was raised sharply by A Kavanagh who holds that by bringing the Roman Catholic rites of baptism, confirmation and eucharist into juxtaposition with each other to form a composite scheme of initiation the document re-asserts adult initiation as the Church's 'normative' practice. In setting the 'norm' for Christian initiation the RCIA holds out a standard to which something is done. A 'norm' is not an ideal because its objective is, to some extent, achieved; instead, it enables a community to form a consensus for distinguishing the normal from the abnormal. Thus infant baptism

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becomes abnormal, and although abnormality does not equate with illegitimacy, it becomes 'an unavoidable pastoral necessity' as when the parents of Catholic Christians request it for their children.⁷⁶ Overall, the assertions of the RCIA have cast a shadow over the status of infant baptism in a pastoral situation.⁷⁷

If, however, it is true that metaphors not only give expression to concepts but they also shape cultural understanding, then here is a situation where it is conceivable that the content of the metaphor of initiation has been assisting the understanding of baptism as a death experience. By using the metaphor of initiation the RCIA has brought into discussions of baptism the notion of a maturity rite for adolescents or adult entry into a secret society. Unconscious though this process may have been, it has been widely accepted in recent years that baptism is best characterised by the metaphor of initiation. With the connotations of an anthropological understanding of initiation and with the open recognition that the baptism of an infant cannot be easily accommodated with this metaphor, it is less than surprising that the baptism of infants has been brought into question. The identification of the patristic rites of the fourth and fifth centuries as 'initiation' rites has contributed to this process, as has the acceptance of the metaphor as an umbrella term to describe the components of initiation which instantly confers a commonality of direction to baptism and its related rite, confirmation, which is oriented to adolescent or adult experience. Despite recognition that its adoption for the three sacraments of initiation may only be traced back to the latter half of the nineteenth century and that its introduction may be owed to the study of the mystery religions⁷⁸ it continues to be employed as an encompassing term inclusive of baptism

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without explicit recognition of its ideological heritage. The metaphor of initiation, interpreting the metaphorical death of baptism, has begun to operate with its own hegemony in the discussion of baptism.

3 The Metaphor of Birth

The recent theological history of baptismal death has therefore been one of increasing importance, yet an importance that may legitimately be questioned. The fate of the metaphor of birth contrasts starkly, having as it does a negative perception. Although the argument will eventually establish an alternative understanding, it is important to discern where the weaknesses of baptismal birth have been perceived. For the moment four may be identified.

3.1 Reluctant Development of Baptismal Birth

In the first place, the metaphor of birth is perceived to be less authentic than that of death. In terms of the canon, it is a comparatively late idea, belonging as it does to Johannine, Petrine and deutero-Pauline literature.⁷⁹ Twentieth century scholarship has woven a web around rebirth that makes it difficult to perceive as a theme that is distinctive to Christianity. It is acknowledged that rebirth is an ancient, widespread and originally primitive notion, which 'indicates each new beginning in the life of mankind'.⁸⁰ Its lack of prominence in the Old Testament has given rise to the suggestion that it filtered through to Christianity from Gnosticism, Philo, the Hermetic Corpus or the mystery religions which all employed regeneration in one form or another.⁸¹ Even where a direct Christian appropriation is ruled out and the development of the doctrine is

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sought in a parallel, but independent, growth to surrounding cults and their theologies, the sense is still one of belonging more properly to the Hellenistic milieu of early Christianity.⁸² Baptismal rebirth, therefore, has suffered because of the perception that, in contrast to the Pauline notion of being buried with Christ, it is not distinctively Christian.

Secondly, the metaphor of birth is felt to be deficient in terms of its relationship to history. This has been argued in recent years by Ganoczy for whom baptism is 'the sacrament of human historicity'.⁸³ Historically considered human beings have two significant dimensions: the 'temporal' by which an individual relates to the past, present and future, and the 'relational' which indicates the totality of relationships a person has with both individuals and social groupings. Ganoczy gives prominence to Pauline theology which locates baptism as the beginning of a process that takes place in both the temporal and relational dimensions of history. Baptism is 'a break with the past and an opening to the future'; it is 'into Christ' which suggests the idea of a goal rather than a location as the Christian appropriates Christ's own journey and begins to conform their own life to it.⁸⁴ Ganoczy argues that historicity is eclipsed by the scriptural images of rebirth because their primary concern is to deepen the experiential event of baptism rather than 'concentrating on a future to be created'. Although he qualifies his remarks by saying that the notion of rebirth does in fact maintain one aspect of a relational historicity - that with Christ as the 'source and origin of Christian belief' - the argument is one that downgrades birth imagery into a secondary position.⁸⁵ Ganoczy's insistence on the essential historicity of Christian baptism is an important point, and relates to Paul's

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avoidance of a realised eschatology that is adopted later by the deutero-Pauline Epistles.⁸⁶ The fear to which Ganoczy gives eloquent expression is one that envisages rebirth as a eclipse of history by realised eschatology.

Thirdly, birthing imagery is felt to emphasise to such an extent the passive reception of divine grace by the baptismal candidate that it cannot embrace the proactive baptismal elements of renouncing the world and confessing allegiance to Jesus Christ. For instance, attention has recently been brought to the treatment of the birth metaphor by Zeno of Verona. He was stimulated by the contrast between baptismal birth and childbirth; human birth is about pain, wailing and being in a state of surrender to the world, whereas baptismal birth is about abundant joy, freedom from sin and feeding at the holy altar. Zeno thus communicated his belief that in the celebration of the paschal mystery the new Christian received the fruits of the passion and resurrection of Christ. However, the font as a life-giving womb was not adequate to convey all that he required of it; hence, he employed Pauline theology to demonstrate how prior to immersion in water, the moment of rebirth, the baptismal candidate died before being figuratively buried. What Zeno was not able to do, however, was to integrate his dominant rebirthing motif with that of dying and rising with Christ; the two remained essentially separate, with the metaphor of birth apparently unable to supply the proactive element to baptism.⁸⁷ A passive entrance into a birth event 'uncontaminated by fear of death' in antiquity would have had a considerable psychological appeal, yet in a contemporary milieu that lacks the immediacy of the death experience, the passivity of the birth metaphor

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is regarded as a negative feature, especially in the light of recent emphasis on the liturgies for adult initiation.⁸⁸

Finally, there is a suspicion that the New Testament's use of the birth metaphor attributes a power to the baptismal ritual.⁸⁹ Concerns over passivity therefore revert to the concern registered in chapter two over the relationship between the outward sign and the inward effect. One crystallisation of this has been around the terminology 'baptismal regeneration' and in the distinction between the beginning of Christian life being found at the point of individual conversion and its commencement at the moment of baptism when a person was transferred from the sinful world into the ark of salvation, the Church.⁹⁰ Inevitably, Barth has been at the centre of this concern. He recognised that the Catholic traditions, in their insistence that something definite occurs at baptism, have avoided attributing to baptism magical properties, but nevertheless he contended for the sharp differentiation between the cause of salvation and its assurance. In avoidance of any attribution of regeneration in the ritual action, Barth assimilated baptism to the latter. Baptismal birth, in its ritual perspective, has therefore born the brunt of an anti-sacramental attitude.⁹¹

These reservations constitute a formidable indictment against deployment of baptismal birth. However, the ritual approach to baptism being developed offers the opportunity for a fresh perspective and at the end of this section there will be an incentive to pursue the birth metaphor. To achieve this it is necessary to consider, as was done in the case of death, the model presented by the human birth event.

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3.2 Human Birth as the Source Domain for Baptismal Birth

In view of the remarks made concerning the cultural construction of death, it comes as no surprise to find that the life-crisis of birth is perceived to be 'not only a universal biological event but a culturally patterned process'.⁹² Even though in comparison to death, the analysis of birth has been neglected in social anthropology, a great deal may be gained through the contrast between birth in non-industrialised small-scale societies and the contemporary western situation.

In many societies pregnancy and childbirth form part of the rites of passage that transform a young woman from the state of childlessness into the social status of motherhood. However, the ritual focus is not always on the mother, and the infant is subject to its own rituals of maternal separation and incorporation into society.⁹³ The particular social actualisation of birth rituals demonstrates a wide variability, both in terms of specific practices undertaken and the balance of the attention given to the range of participants, which can include the wider society. Where this balance lies depends on the perception of the infant's identity both at the moment of birth and in the subsequent period of development. Wherever it is struck, one of the key points to be derived from the recent ethnography of human birth is that:

birth is not just birth, but a long process of reception of and for the newcomer, his or her identification and continuous creation by symbolic designations, a process which in some cases may last a lifetime.⁹⁴

If birth may be established as a process over an often extended duration it can now be more fully comprehended why the idiom of birth

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is employed metaphorically in other life-cycle rituals. G Aijmer summarises the rituals in the process of human birth as having a concern with the cultural themes of creation and identification, and suggests that they are essentially 'ceremonies of designation'. This does not dispute the fact that some of the rituals overtly have alternative objectives - for example, the protection and the purification of both mother and her newborn - but is to understand them as 'designating procedures' which employ symbols from the local environment.⁹⁵ Given the universal nature of the birth event, its bodiliness and its ultimate character as a bringing into existence of a human being which is 'a system of events, a given repetitive system', it is evident that birth has a metaphorical potential for the conveyance of creation and continuity. As Aijmer says:

birth is continuity and a primary moving force to make history progress. It is to be expected that the idiom of birth with all its potential for representation would be employed in contexts which concern the continuity of communities; this is especially so whenever it is felt that the given social order is under threat.⁹⁶

Therefore, the metaphor of birth is to be found in situations of death, male initiation rituals where fertility is in question and marriage. Hence the interchangeability and mutuality between the life-cycle events is intelligible. This supports an observation which Van Gennep himself made: since the objective of the rites, the achievement of a stable social outcome in the face of social disruption, is the same, 'it follows of necessity that the ways of attaining it should be at least analogous'.⁹⁷ It is this essential analogy that allows the metaphoric transformation of a ritual which achieves a social transition to occur. However, it may be the case that there is a particular affinity between the metaphorical transformations of birth and death. Van Gennep himself noted that 'the earth is the home of

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children before they are born - not symbolically as a mother, but physically as it is the home of the dead'.⁹⁸

It is such an affinity which forms the basis of an early medieval construction of birth. In a study which traces the history of childbirth in early modern Europe, J Gélis concludes that the understanding of birth which predominated before the emergence of towns in the thirteenth century, was formed around the movement between putrefaction and germination in the agricultural world. From this arose a movement which was 'the vital source of energy for the world'.⁹⁹ Gélis argues that it was the urbanisation which coincided with the Reformation that contributed to a decisive severing of the link of dependency between childbirth and the rhythms of the natural world. In brief, the desire to break away from subjection to the contingencies of the cosmos and to achieve a mastery over death and ill-fortune had far-reaching implications for the childbirth event.

Not untypical of the accounts of the development of the contemporary approach to childbirth is one given by J W Leavitt of changes in North America during the post-Enlightenment period to the mid-twentieth century. She argues that it is the history of a transition 'from being brought to bed by their friends to being alone among strangers in the hospital'.¹⁰⁰ In the eighteenth century childbirth was an experience managed by the expectant mother who arranged to be attended by an exclusively female group of midwives, relations and friends whose combined, cross-generational composition provided both expertise and security. The possibility of death in childbirth and infant mortality only began to be alleviated when physicians, with medical resources for pain relief and the assistance

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of birth, began to be invited to attend the confinement at home. The advent of the bacteriological revolution meant that by the third decade of the twentieth century the birth event had been transferred to medical institutions. Childbirth had become determined by hospital authorities and with pregnancy it was treated as a disease to be overcome. It is reaction from this state of affairs which is now leading to the rediscovery of home birth and greater control in parturition by the expectant mother.

In what is otherwise a balanced account by Leavitt the impression emerges that there has been a movement from a birth event controlled by the women of the community to a medicalised system of birth in which male-dominated physicians exercise control. A more realistic analysis, perhaps, is offered by H Callaway who recognises that there are exceptions in the ethnography to the all-female model of birth. She argues that while it is generally the case that in the past and in contemporary small-scale societies childbirth is directly managed by woman, it is more important to observe the overall control structures in the society that assert authority over the reproductive process. Often these have been male-dominated and serve the end of promoting social structures that support this. Apart from this, what Callaway highlights is a contemporary fascination with birth and an increasing desire amongst men to challenge the social division of labour which has contributed to a desire to overcome the perception of male alienation from the birth event.¹⁰¹

3.3 Critique of Baptismal Birth

The four areas of reservation with regard to the development of the metaphor of birth may now be approached from a fresh direction in

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the light of the model of human birth outlined. To achieve this, examples of baptismal theologies which have positively exploited baptismal birth will be examined and each will yield a response to the objections. Cumulatively they will offer a case for a sustained appreciation of the contribution the metaphor of birth might offer to a theology of baptism.

A first example comes from Theodore. It has already been seen how Zeno developed the metaphor of birth and how his attempt appears, to contemporary thought, as a denial of death. Theodore also saw in the biblical metaphor of birth the potential to develop a theology of baptism. Like Zeno, his overall theological framework was a paschal one, yet the primary symbolism of the font in his homilies was that of 'a womb to the sacramental rebirth'. The source domain of human birth became the basis for a baptismal metaphor, informed by Jesus' injunction to Nicodemus:

he shows in this that as in carnal birth the womb of the mother receives the human seed, and the Divine hand fashions it according to an ancient decree, so also in baptism, the water of which becomes a womb to the one who is being born, and the grace of the Spirit fashions in it, into the second birth the one who is being baptised, and changes him completely into a new man.¹⁰²

Theodore developed the parallel between the male seed and the neophyte: just as the seed 'has neither life, nor soul nor feeling' but is fashioned by God into the fullness of human nature, so the neophyte in their mortality is transformed by divine grace, receiving immortal humanity which is unrecognisable in comparison to their prior state. If in this exposition Theodore has erred on the side of a realised eschatology he added that the newly baptised possessed immortality only in potential and will perform the acts of incorruptibility at the resurrection from the dead.

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It is evident that Theodore has employed the contemporary model of birth, one based on the dominant classical construction of the biology of human reproduction. At one level, this implies a certain passivity on the part of the female. The human male was thought to possess a surplus amount of heat which manifested itself in the supply of seed. Women were felt, in contrast, to be less than fully developed humanity and to be formless, composed of more liquid and colder than the male. The womb was the receptacle designed to receive the seed and Theodore gives the impression that the biological contribution of the woman to the reproductive process is essentially a passive one, simply providing an environment for the embryo to be fashioned from the component supplied by the male.¹⁰³ Such an image, for Theodore, lent itself perfectly to the ritual of baptism; the same creative agent who shapes the male seed within the womb shapes the neophyte within the baptismal waters.

Theodore's perception of the source domain of human birth relies on the presupposition that women are imperfect males and within his own cultural framework it allowed an exposition of the divine action in baptism. In contrast, a critical reading suggests that a contemporary development of baptismal birth requires founding in a framework that takes account of the mutuality and partnership now understood to occur in human reproduction. Nevertheless, Theodore did appreciate the processual nature of childbirth. He attempted, in his own cultural terms, to extend the baptismal use of the source domain from the moment of conception to life beyond the womb. He speaks, for example, of the potentiality of the newly born to assume the full set of human faculties; an infant performs the actions of a mature adult

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only weakly and a neophyte receives the gifts of baptism in the sense that they proleptically share in what is promised for the future. It may be argued that juxtaposition of the fashioning that takes place during pregnancy with the sacramental occurrence of baptismal rebirth enhanced, for Theodore, an understanding both of the ritual experience and baptism as an historical process.

A second example comes from the medieval Church's liturgy in which the metaphor of birth held a central theological position in the prayer for the consecration of the water. For instance, in the Gelasian Sacramentary, after an invocation for the divine presence and gift of the Spirit of adoption to enable 'the creation of the new people which the fount of baptism brings forth to thee', and an appeal to the past action of God in creation and the Great Flood, there is a epiclectic prayer speaking of the fecundity and regenerating power imparted to the water by the Spirit and the 'unspotted womb of the divine font'.¹⁰⁴ In the Sarum liturgy, the birth metaphor is further enhanced by the ritual action. A rubric directs the priest to divide the water with the candle in the form of a cross; this is a rite with an obscure origin which emerged in the ninth century, yet one that undoubtedly has connotations of human fertility and reproduction.¹⁰⁵

The theology which the liturgy represents needs to be viewed both in terms of the cultural model of childbirth and in the context of an undifferentiated relationship between Church and society in everyday social life. Childbirth posed the immediate threat of death which then jeopardised the stability and continuity of social existence. Therefore, not only was baptism the transition of the infant from the sphere of evil to the sphere of godliness, the resolution of the

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sinful condition into which he or she was born, it also became a means of renewing both the social order and the natural world. Just as human birth was understood in the context of the movement between putrefaction and germination, so Christian baptism came to reflect the connection between the social and the celestial, between an agrarian society and its natural environment. As Cramer points out, the link between cultus, with its agricultural imagery of tilling the soil, and the liturgy contributed to a view of baptismal rebirth in a milieu where death and life were intimately intertwined and in which 'birth of the new is the death of the old, death is a rebirth, [and] death is within life not outside it'.¹⁰⁶

It is now possible to see a further reason why in modern theology the notion of rebirth has become problematic. In a cross-cultural examination of the frequent presence of the birth metaphor within funerary ritual Bloch and J Parry have argued that the metaphor of rebirth is closely connected with unpredictable life-cycle situations which threaten the stability of the cosmos and the social order. They argue that the presence of rebirth is an assertion of the eternal value exemplified in a repetitive cyclic order. In death the challenge to the social order is located in the stark fact of death's irreversibility and therefore the unrepeatability of the individual's life; this is a problem which is denied if death is represented as a component of the cycle of renewal, primarily modelled in the natural world. However, when the emphasis is on the very unrepeatability of the individual's unique contribution to human society and when the unswerving stability of the social order is not revered, images of rebirth in funerary ritual understandably diminish.¹⁰⁷ The social effectiveness of baptismal rebirth in the middle ages is evident if

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baptism is seen as a ritual performed against the background of human birth in the midst of a culture of death which challenged the community's survival. Equally, the demise of rebirth in contemporary baptismal theology and liturgy may be understood in terms of the growing differentiation between Church and society and the absence of commitment to a perpetually maintained social structure. This might indicate that rebirth is less than appropriate in the contemporary world where the threat of death is marginal to everyday life. It is preferable however to suggest that if the metaphor of birth is to be a meaningful one in present circumstances it must be developed in a manner that does not simply resurrect its medieval predecessor.

It may be that the theological background to the medieval liturgy provides the beginnings of such a rehabilitation. This background is found in a christological framework which had its origins in the sermons of Leo the Great. In a remarkable essay, P A Underwood has decisively argued for the theological coherence of Leo's sermons with the Gelasian blessing of the font. He also suggests that their theology coheres with the inscription on the fifth century Lateran baptistry which makes explicit the connection that baptism has with the Virgin Birth.¹⁰⁸ Like Christ, the neophyte is regarded as 'virgin progeny', fruit of a virgin birth as he or she emerges from the waters of birth. In addition the water of baptism is the fountain of life which washed the whole world at creation and had its origin in the blood and water that flowed from Christ's wounded side. In the evocation of Eden, Christ himself becomes the fount of life which, watering creation, purifies it; the cross becomes not just the site of death but also of re-creation. The baptismal water symbolises the Virgin's womb in which the same Holy Spirit who acts at baptism acted

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in the conception and birth of Christ. In the womb of the Church the baptised shares in the origin to which Jesus Christ was subject in the incarnation. Just as the Holy Spirit, who in filling the Virgin, drove out sin, so in baptism there is a mystical washing away of sin.

In contrast to Theodore who emphasised a model of childbirth derived from his cultural milieu, Leo's theology of baptismal regeneration is one which emphasises participation in the birth of Jesus Christ. This contrast, between a theology which relates primarily to the cultural model of birth and one which seeks to relate baptism birth exclusively to the life of Christ, is important. The former is deficient through its lack of Christological grounding and the latter in its sense that the historical event which is really significant is that of Jesus Christ rather than the baptism itself.

These concerns are focused by a third example, one found in the work of T F Torrance whose baptismal theology may be situated in a tradition which is rooted in Irenaeus. The characteristic emphasis in Irenaeus' theology is on the incarnation which in its entirety is the ground of human salvation, perceived as a participation in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ. The sign of this is the Virgin Birth, the sign of the presence of the divine in human form which overcomes the effects of the Fall. The Christian is already regenerated in the act of incarnation and receives the benefits of this through the sacramental action of baptism, which is an imitation of and a participation in the Virgin Birth. In the incarnation every stage of human life was sanctified and, as a continuous processual action from birth through to adult maturity, it provided the basis for the inseparability of infant baptism and faith.¹⁰⁹ It may be that

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Irenaeus' theology of baptism influenced Torrance through Calvin, who employed the same argument to assert the legitimacy of infant baptism against the Anabaptists.¹¹⁰

Torrance, like Irenaeus, wants to ground baptism in the fulness of the incarnation. Essential to Torrance's thinking is the link between the ritual of baptism and the language employed to describe the whole movement of the incarnation. Its description in terms of the descent of the Son of Man into human flesh and his subsequent ascent into heaven is derived from the pattern of baptism which was perceived as a descent into water followed by an ascent into new life.¹¹¹ Torrance's key hermeneutical move is to juxtapose the descent and ascent experienced by Jesus at his death with the overarching motif of the descent and ascent of the incarnation. Baptism is the sacrament which incorporates into Christ but it is based on the incorporation of the eternal Son into humanity. Christian baptism has a 'dimension of depth' which includes not only the Baptism of Jesus, the crucifixion and Pentecost but also the Nativity. It is the sacrament of the incarnation itself.¹¹² If it is an emphasis on Johannine birth that Torrance expounds, he contends that the Pauline theme of adoption by the Spirit for a participation in the New Adam is its parallel idea.¹¹³

Central concerns for Torrance are to avoid any misconception over baptismal regeneration and maintain a faithfulness to what he regards as a New Testament emphasis. Nowhere in the New Testament, he argues, is the ritual of baptism described. Rather primary interest is in the event behind the ritual which itself becomes 'like a window through which we look to something beyond'.¹¹⁴ The deeper concern over baptismal regeneration is revealed in Torrance's criticism of an

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instrumentalist conception of sacramental grace in which the sacraments formed a bridge between the intelligible and sensible worlds. This is a serious issue since such a framework of thought 'holds God himself apart from us in his eternal immutability and impassibility' and means that humanity only participates in the divine indirectly.¹¹⁵ The desire to overcome the evident weaknesses of this position leads to an emphasis on the objectivity of the one saving act of the incarnation, 'the corporate baptismal event', which makes baptism the sacrament of God's act of vicarious obedience in Jesus Christ in which the Christian shares through the Spirit. To be baptised is to share in the work which is finished and to participate in a righteousness which is only received and not inherent.

Such is Torrance's concentration on the incarnation that the event of Christian baptism itself falls into the shade. It is not that Torrance would deny the historicity of Christian baptism, but rather that the impression is given that the only historical event of concern is the incarnation of the eternal Son. Torrance illustrates how an over-concentration on the difficulties of baptismal regeneration, and indeed a neglect of the cultural model of childbirth, can lead to a baptismal event which lacks ritual reality due to a retraction of Christian baptism into the incarnation itself. Notwithstanding this, Torrance's positive contribution is that, like Irenaeus and the theology of the middle ages, he exploits the sense that in baptism the Christian participates in the Virgin Birth. In doing this Torrance makes explicit the Fourth Gospel's understanding of salvation as a birth event, a theme set out in its prologue in which children of God are seen to be born 'not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God'.¹¹⁶ In the patristic era this phrase was

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often understood as the predicate of a singular verb and therefore with an obvious reference to the Virgin Birth. As one exegete reasonably postulates, the birth event of the Christian 'being bloodless and rooted in God's will alone, followed the pattern of the birth of Christ himself'.¹¹⁷ In other words, what may be said of Jesus Christ in his human birth may be said of the Christian in their divine begetting and, in addition to the model of childbirth, this informs the birth metaphor in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Torrance's use of the birth metaphor seeks to recover this emphasis. Just as the Pauline use of the death metaphor is one that stands in distinction from any ideas of dying and rising in the contemporary religious milieu through the idiom of death with Christ, so the baptism of the Christian as a birth event is distinctive by being birth with Christ, rather than simply rebirth in an abstract sense. If Torrance is followed here, there can be no supposition that the birth metaphor is less biblically authentic than the Pauline metaphor of death.

4 The Metaphor of Washing

Prior to a comparison of the metaphors of death and birth, an evaluation of the baptismal washing motif is required. Baptismal washing is the means by which the early New Testament writers articulated the connection between baptism and the forgiveness of sins.¹¹⁸ Later writers, however, qualified this understanding as a purification in the context of a marriage between Christ and the Church, by defining the washing as one which related to regeneration or by bringing it into conjunction with the purifying power of the blood of Jesus.¹¹⁹

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4.1 Baptism, Human Sinfulness and the Washing Away of Sins

The relationship between the ritual action of baptism and questions concerning human sinfulness received its profile during the patristic era. Three particular issues focus this profile: the deferment of baptism until late in life, the link between the baptism of infants and original sin and the influence of ancient philosophical thought.

First of all, there was a period in the early centuries when the intensity of the connection between baptism and the forgiveness of sins led to the postponement of baptism beyond the point of any subjective experience of conversion and towards death. The reason for this is exemplified by the account Augustine gave of his experience as a boy when, in the midst of a serious fever, his mother made arrangements for his baptism. After a sudden recovery his baptism was postponed:

on the assumption that, if I lived, I would be sure to soil myself; and after that solemn washing the guilt would be greater and more dangerous if I then defiled myself with sins.¹²⁰

Herein lies an essential problem with the washing motif. The close relationship between baptism and the forgiveness of sins has allowed the notion of remission to control the ritual action.

The connection between the remission of sins and baptism developed over five centuries, reaching its summit with the ratification of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed which enshrined the clause 'one baptism for the remission of sins' into Christian consciousness in both East and West.¹²¹ At the time of Augustine's childhood the Church was still a century away from this official affirmation but the

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essential idea had by then been firmly established. It is probable that even by the middle of the second century there was a heightening of the experience of baptism as deliverance from the burden of sin. Certainly by the time of Tertullian the phrase 'the remission of sins' had become closely associated with baptism¹²² and had commenced its journey into the more significant creedal statements. Around the same time, Hippolytus summarised the essence of baptism as the 'remission of sins through the laver of regeneration'.¹²³ However, it is clear that the temporal reference of the remission was retrospective, an emphasis that is evident in Justin's discussions: what was obtained in the water of baptism was 'the remission of sins formerly committed'.¹²⁴ It was this interior logic of the idiom of washing which led Constantine and Augustine, among others, to postpone baptism.

If D F Wright is correct in his argument that the meaning and reference of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed involves an assertion that 'the washing away of sins in baptism may be received only once'¹²⁵, then the metaphor's dynamic was actively working against the desired pastoral practice. For instance, Chrysostom firmly argued that 'there is no second cross, nor a second remission by the bath of regeneration'.¹²⁶ Sins committed before baptism were forgiven through the grace of the crucified Christ; after baptism more personal energy is required and remission of sin takes place through 'tears, repentance, confession, alms-giving, prayer and every kind of reverence'.¹²⁷ Yet in contrast to prebaptismal sin, there is a conceptual vagueness concerning their postbaptismal remission. Nevertheless, Chrysostom persisted in challenging those who followed the impulse to delay baptism indefinitely; it was not only an abuse which flirted with the risk of never receiving the sacrament, but also

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the benefits of baptism were such that reception outweighed the problems associated with lapses afterwards. Equally, in Chrysostom's sights were pagan accusations, against catechumens who balked at the commitment of baptism, that such a practice demonstrated the powerlessness of the Christian philosophy.¹²⁸

Thus, as the logic of baptismal washing was explicated, a retrospective reference emerged that was difficult to counteract on a pastoral level. It was inevitable, in the words of one recent interpreter, that baptism became, in spite of all theological protestations, 'like an ace in a no-trump hand - a vital card which it is dangerous to play too soon!'¹²⁹ Without the formalisation of a sacrament of penance at this stage the question of the formal remission of sins committed beyond the moment of baptism lay unresolved and only fuelled such an impulse. This is not least because the clear theological relationship between baptism and penance meant that they both shared the quality of unrepeatability.¹³⁰ It would be the development of such a system and the growth in the practice of infant baptism that meant that the issue of postponement receded in significance and that further questions emerged.

The second issue concerns the close association of the metaphor of baptismal washing with the rationale for the baptism of infants. It is apparent that liturgical practice and doctrine, in this instance, were mutually interactive; there is little doubt that the widespread introduction of infant baptism stimulated the growth of the doctrine of original sin.¹³¹ It is Augustine's theological programme, forged in the controversy with the Pelagians, which serves to focus the theological parameters of the increasingly inexorable relation between

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original sin and infant baptism. It is probable that a theology of baptism assumed a central position within Pelagius' theological system¹³² and Pelagius himself regarded baptism as the 'sacrament of justification by faith'¹³³. Normal baptismal practice, in his view, was coincident with the experience of personal conversion and established a radical discontinuity between the natural person outside the Church and the Christian within. The force of habit which the unconverted experienced was something external and not integral to the human personality; it therefore could be removed in baptism, 'it was a rust, a rust that could be rubbed off'¹³⁴, instigating an existence which held out the realistic hope of innocence through the practice of good habits. When it came to infant baptism Pelagius' followers, on the one hand, vigorously defended the practice, anathematising those who denied its necessity. Yet, on the other hand, the combined logic of a voluntaristic conception of human sinfulness and of a postbaptismal innocence produced a denial of original sin in the newly born. Hence the argument emerged that baptism was composed of both positive and negative effects; amongst the former were adoption, illumination and possession of the kingdom, while the latter was the remission of sins. Only adults participated in baptism as a positive and negative experience; infants, with no sin to be remitted, received only its positive virtues. Any sense in which an infant received the remission of sins could only be accommodated in a proleptic manner which anticipated the future reality at an age of discretion.¹³⁵

Augustine's repost to the voluntaristic notion of freewill, informing an idea of sin as a matter of free choice, was to assert the corrupted nature of humanity and its inbuilt bias towards evil, something which was both logically prior to any decision to act and

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shaped it in a sinful way. Whereas Pelagius expounded a Christian life of discontinuity with the pre-conversion state, Augustine spoke of 'the life-long convalescence of the converted Christian'.¹³⁶ Behind this lay the notion of the affection of all humanity, through human generation and not simply by means of imitation, by the wound which resulted from the sin of Adam. More formally, what was inherited in Augustine's view were the two components of original sin: the vitium and the reatus. The latter was the juridical component of original sin, the guilt that derived from violation of God's law; it was this which was cancelled in baptism. The former, which by contrast remained after baptism, was the consequence of the Fall on human nature, its perpetual penalty and weakness, and could be identified largely with the distorted desire that incapacitated all human actions and was revealed in them. The problem, however, arose in the quest for an intelligible understanding of reatus for a newly born infant, unable to commit a voluntary sin. Orthodox Christianity had decreed that baptism was for the remission of sins and it was on this basis that infants were baptised. Therefore, baptism washed away the sins that the infant inherited from Adam through its conception and birth in the context of concupiscence; logically, dying without baptism, an infant was consigned to the punishment of the damned. The most generous that Augustine could be was to assign them to the fringe of hell.¹³⁷ The Church, following Augustine, consequently alienated any who were prepared to advocate that the baptismal formula be accepted in a 'fictitious' manner as it appeared did the Pelagians.

The third issue, the contribution particular philosophies made to the framing of baptismal washing, is one perhaps that underlies the sense that the internal logic of the washing metaphor is both

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retrospective and potentially 'pelagian' in its theological anthropology. It may be illustrated by reference to patristic theology in North Africa and Syria.

Tertullian, in the opening words of his baptismal homily rejoices in the sacrament which washes away human sin and sets the Christian free into eternal life.¹³⁸ Water was consecrated as the vehicle of human sanctification by virtue of its involvement in the creation of the cosmos. In addition, however, it contained the properties required for the act of baptism; it is logical that, 'since we are defiled by sins, as it were by dirt, we should be washed from those stains in water'. Tertullian carefully works with the analogy, noting the disjunction that particular sins do not display themselves visibly and that the result of sin is a foulness of the spirit. Yet the outward is indicted, since the flesh is subservient to the spirit and the guilt of sin is therefore mutually shared. He concluded that in baptism 'the spirit is in those waters corporeally washed in the waters, while the flesh is in those same waters spiritually cleansed'.¹³⁹ Tertullian's anthropology was influenced by the Stoic conception of the soul as a material entity which, although distinct from the physical body, occupied the same space and was united intimately with it.¹⁴⁰ The notion that the soul could be 'corporeally washed' in a manner directly analogous to the washing of the physical body was therefore a straightforward conclusion to reach.

In Syrian theology human washing also appeared as a prominent motif, although Chrysostom, in an exposition of the 'bath of regeneration', is less indebted to a Stoic anthropology than to a Platonic view of the material world. He makes a connection with the

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baths that are commonly taken by all peoples to achieve personal cleanliness, the removal of 'the filth of the body'. Among these, however, there is the solemn washing peculiar to the Jews which removes not only bodily filth but also the uncleanness 'which clings to a weak conscience'. In contrast to Jewish ritual baths, the goal of the bath of grace is a superior one. It removes:

the real uncleanness of the body and the stain which has been put upon the soul. It makes clean not those who have touched dead bodies but those who have touched the deeds of death.¹⁴¹

Similar thinking is evident in the Apostolic Constitutions when the author addresses questions about the necessity of the baptismal formula accompanying the ritual action. Without such a formula the Christian is less than adequately baptised: he 'does only descend into water as do the Jews, and he only puts off the filth of the body, not the filth of the soul'.¹⁴² Chrysostom himself clarified the framework in which this strand of Syrian theology was working, relying as it does on the distinction between physical and spiritual eyes: 'the eyes of the flesh see the flesh being washed; the eyes of the spirit see the soul being cleansed'.¹⁴³

Contemporary baptismal theology is therefore confronted with a metaphor that has a scriptural basis, but which, in the hands of the early Church, has become problematic. It had an interior logic which produced an understanding of baptism oriented to the remission of past sins and resulted in a chaotic pastoral situation. It had potentially disastrous consequences for a theological anthropology, and through Augustine's influence the basic metaphor was transformed into the washing away of the guilt of original sin. Also, it was susceptible to philosophically based interpretations which suggested a corporeal view

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of the soul and a certain dualism between the spiritual and the material components of humanity.

Contemporary theologies have been preoccupied the resolution of these questions, especially in relation to the washing away of the original sin of infants. This has been because, whereas Augustine employed the practice of infant baptism as a proof of the universality of the infection of original sin, in the ninth century a reversal of logic occurred whereby original sin became the justification for infant baptism.¹⁴⁴ It is possible at one level that medieval theology brought conceptual clarity to Augustine's position by making clear that concupiscence was the consequence of original sin and therefore remained after the latter was removed in baptism.¹⁴⁵ At another level the consequences of such a position remained open to debate. Up until the twelfth century medieval theologians reiterated Augustine's teaching on unbaptised infants. Aquinas however was more merciful, if not less logical, when he consigned unbaptised infants to the 'limbo of children'¹⁴⁶ in which the infant was denied only the beatific vision. In the words of Dante they were 'only insofar afflicted, that without hope we live in desire' and this was the view which prevailed at the Council of Trent.¹⁴⁷ Only the minority persisted with Augustine's view, but this debate has continued through into the middle years of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁸

It has been accompanied by theological strategies in both Anglican and Roman Catholic theology which have both contributed to, and reflected on, the change in liturgical emphasis noted in the introduction. In the Anglican Church, O C Quick articulated the view that, notwithstanding the formal understanding of the removal of

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original sin through baptism, the empirical evidence from the comparison of the sinful tendencies in baptised and unbaptised infants does not verify the inward cause of sin as 'actual sin' or 'original sin' respectively. In Quick's case such observations lead him to suggest a mainly symbolic understanding of infant baptism whereby its signification is towards the ultimate end of salvation and the many purifications that will contribute to this goal.¹⁴⁹

Among Roman Catholic theologians M G Lawler has argued that the metaphors derived from the cleansing aspects of aqueous symbolism only make sense in a communitarian setting where human connectedness is such that 'the shame of one is the shame of the other'.¹⁵⁰ In a similar manoeuvre, M Searle, in his suggestion that infant baptism makes sense in the context of the family as the domestic church, argues that original sin is simply the contrasting state to new life in Christ. Therefore, just as the Church needs to emphasise the mystery of its redemption by Christ, so the forgiveness of sins in an infant's baptism points to the 'intentionality of the family in its specific role as a community of Christ's holiness and grace in the world'.¹⁵¹

Overall, however, there is theological uncertainty over the antiquity of the link between the baptism of infants and the forgiveness of original sin and there is equivocation over the nature of original sin itself.¹⁵² This uncertainty extends to the application of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed's assertion that there is 'one baptism for the remission of sins'. It has already been accepted that its interpretation must take seriously its patristic context. Yet in recent theology there are a variety of positions taken. It has been argued that the doctrinal development it represented was an unhelpful

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one and attempts have been made to argue that the phrase can be applied only to the baptism of an adult.¹⁵³ Equally, there is a desire to explicate the clause in terms of a unified baptismal theology for both infants and adults, doing justice to the washing away of sins in each case.¹⁵⁴

The question of baptism's relationship to sin therefore has its complexities. Not least it seems that the catholic doctrines which traditionally have provided the linkages have become the subject of intellectual embarrassment as the formal and subtle distinctions of the patristic and scholastic periods have been found wanting. What has been lacking, however, is an evaluation of the metaphor of baptismal washing from a ritual perspective. As with the two other metaphors under evaluation, the washing motif in baptism is dependent upon its relationship with its cultural model. In the synchronic perspective the cultural model to which baptismal washing relates is the hygienic one. Only if this is understood may it be possible to suggest a more precise theological positioning of sin in relationship to baptism than has been possible up until now.

4.2 Human Cleanliness as the Source Domain for Baptismal Washing

The cultural history of hygiene is acknowledged to be complex. One reason is that physical cleanliness has not always been construed in the way that would be taken for granted in the West today. Cleanliness has not always been achieved using water. For instance, a late eighteenth century manual of etiquette advised that the face should be cleaned only with a piece of white linen since water would make the face susceptible to sunburn and cold. Even in the latter half of the

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nineteenth century daily washing was remarkable enough to be commented on.¹⁵⁵

Attitudes to cleanliness have been analysed by G Vigarello in his study of the cultural history of cleanliness in post-medieval France. He shows how in the middle ages personal cleanliness was perceived in terms of the visible areas of the body, namely the hands and the face; 'water did not reach the intimate'.¹⁵⁶ By the sixteenth century the notion of cleanliness had progressed but this was not related to an increase in the use of water, which was beginning to be perceived as harmful to the body. Water was felt to open and infiltrate the pores of the body and to be too similar to those poisons which invaded the bodies of the infected. What became significant was the whiteness of linen and therefore its regular renewal.

Even though such attitudes still existed during the late eighteenth century, other considerations had begun to emerge. Instead of an harmful penetrant water began, among the upper classes, to be regarded as something which strengthened the body; the continual renewal of linen was no longer sufficient on its own and the cleanliness of what lay beneath the exterior clothing became important. This change of perception found its justification in arguments from health. Dirt in contact with the skin began to be regarded as debilitating; removing dirt made the skin function better, straightening and reinvigorating it.¹⁵⁷ The movement away from cleanliness understood as something to do with etiquette progressed during the nineteenth century under the impulse of modern science. In particular the discovery of the microbe inaugurated the concept of 'invisible cleanliness'.¹⁵⁸ Cleanliness, therefore, in Vigarello's

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account, had undergone a radical change from being associated with the protruding parts of the body to now being something also to do with the most secret. In terms of its contribution to human cleanliness, water had progressed from something which threatened by its penetrative powers, to something that invigorated and strengthened the skin and finally to something that regulated the presence of the invisible and therefore protected the skin.

It is evident, however, that conceptions of dirt and washing vary synchronically. In Britain attitudes to the intimate application of water began to change from the seventeenth century onwards, but the attitudes of the poor often lagged far behind. Although in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe the poor were dirty more from circumstance rather than by choice, they could continue to regard the new notions of cleanliness with contempt and even perpetuate a positive notion of dirt. Dirt, as the protective armour of the skin, could imply health, hygiene and warmth.¹⁵⁹ Equally, whilst the elite may well have enjoyed privacy in washing, for the poor the use of water remained a collective experience; when washing did take place, albeit infrequently, it was a public act and for rural populations it might even prove to be a dip in the local river.¹⁶⁰

Civil manners and health considerations were not the only impulse towards a contemporary Western understanding of cleanliness. Among other factors K Thomas has argued that religion was significant with its insistence that the human body was sacred and that it should be guarded from pollution by hygienic practices. He draws attention to the growing links in the eighteenth century between cleanliness and 'good order and virtue'; the connection between dirtiness and idleness

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was often made in Calvinist circles and shared by religious leaders such as John Wesley. Physical cleanliness became an indicator of how well bodily functions and passions were placed under control; 'immorality was seen as rooted in physical pollution'.¹⁶¹ It was here, according to Vigarello, that lay the motivation for the improvement of urban hygienic technology by the bourgeoisie. If 'smells and sweat, then, came to amalgamate with doubtful morals' a removal of the filthiness of the urban living conditions of the popular classes would improve the management of the social order and personal virtue.¹⁶² Also, as Freud has suggested, there is a visceral dimension to human interaction with dirt. An over-concern for cleanliness may therefore reflect a disgust for bodily excretions and their smells; the greater the concern for cleanliness the greater this hatred of bodily functions becomes. At an extreme, bodily life could even be conceived as a series of repulsive processes which a strict code of cleanliness could be part of an effort to transcend.¹⁶³

4.3 A Critique of Baptismal Washing

This cultural understanding of human cleanliness from the early modern period onwards stimulates a fourfold challenge to the metaphor of baptismal washing, the first of which is brought by the distinction in human cleanliness between hygiene that is perceived in terms of what is visible and hygiene understood as concerning the invisible.¹⁶⁴ The latter is born of a technological approach to health but evokes a distinction, made in the history of religions, between the procedures employed to achieve physical cleanliness and those designed for purposes of religious purification.

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This is important because the system of ritual purity which came into being in the Second Temple period was influential on the development of the washing metaphor in early Christianity. Describing the interpretations that became linked with ritual purification J Neusner has asserted that the classifications of purity and impurity found in the Hebrew scriptures 'are not hygienic categories and do not refer to observable cleanliness or dirtiness'. Rather they denote a personal status in respect of the community following contact with a source of impurity and a subsequent act of purification from it.¹⁶⁵

The distinction between purification and hygiene suggests that the thought of Tertullian and the Syrian theologians blurs the two categories because it is supposed that rituals of Jewish purification act both hygienically and religiously. Once that supposition is absorbed into a baptismal framework the soul, in a mirror-like or parallel action with the physical body, becomes something that may be also washed. Following the guidance of Neusner's distinction the metaphors of purification, primarily to do with the themes of relationship and status, are obscured to the detriment of a theological anthropology with dualist characteristics.

The second challenge, however, explains why it is that the distinction between purification and hygiene is so difficult to maintain. It comes from an appreciation of the provenance of purificatory practice which has been argued by Ricoeur in his account of the representation of 'the experience of fault'. Ricoeur commences with the subjective notion of defilement which he then links with ritual cleansing. He regards defilement as the earliest, most

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primitive and therefore the most enduring of all the symbols of the fundamental human experience of imperfection. It is defined as:

an act that involves an evil, an impurity, a fluid, a mysterious and harmful something that acts dynamically - that is to say magically.¹⁶⁶

The solution, and annulment, to this evil contagion or stain that comes upon a person from without and infects, harming by invisible properties, is a purification. Although there is no suggestion that impurity is something visible, the essential idea behind the notion of defilement is of a 'quasi-material something that infects as a sort of filth'.¹⁶⁷

Recognising the quasi-material nature of defilement brings with it two implications, the first of which lies in the area of contemporary intelligibility. It may be asserted, as Ricoeur does, that if the infection from outside the human body constitutes an objective pole, there is also a subjective pole. This subjective pole becomes the experience of dread resulting from the primordial relationship between vengeance and the notion of defilement. Such a relationship was forged in a worldview which made little distinction between the physical world and the ethical, and it was characterised by a rationalised schema of punishment for sin in terms of illness, suffering and ultimately death. This dread, or ethical terror, encouraged the preventative use of purification and a conception of the human entry into the ethical world through terror and not through love.¹⁶⁸

The second implication, one which is in tension with the first, is the recognition that the relationship between defilement and dread is not something that may be restricted to primordial history. Neusner shows how, in Rabbinic Judaism, the cultic framework constituted by

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purity and impurity came to serve as a sinister device to produce obedience to God. He particularly draws attention to an understanding of leprosy as a consequence of sin. In his analysis the thought patterns behind the imputation of illness as a punishment for sin begin precisely with the biblical use of impurity as a metaphor for immoral behaviour. What happened was that the metaphorical relationship between impurity and sin was shattered. Instead of maintaining that sin is like impurity sin comes to produce impurity. Impurity becomes the result of and punishment for sin.¹⁶⁹

Ricoeur's account of the provenance of defilement demonstrates an underlying structure that cannot completely obviate, in psychological terms, a connection between the categories of purity and hygiene. It also demonstrates how the notion of defilement implies the existence of an ethical terror which has the potential to emerge even in sophisticated societies. Ricoeur appropriately articulates the ambiguity resulting from these two implications. On the one hand he contends for the incomprehensible nature of the mind-set that can conceptualise the metaphorical complex of defilement and especially its quasi-material dimension.¹⁷⁰ Equally, he rightly recognises that the 'ethical terror' instigated by the metaphors can lead to 'a diminution of existence, a loss of the personal core of one's being'.¹⁷¹ On the other hand he notes that the language and thought patterns of defilement will persist. This is because of the deep-rooted nature of the metaphorical complex within human psychology. For Ricoeur, defilement is a symbol of the servile will; in its pure form it preserves the notion of evil as something that cannot be reduced to a lack of being and which in its externality is engaged in humanity's seduction. It indicates the important point that evil does not

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ultimately dehumanise; infection from without is not defection and personal humanity cannot be undone.¹⁷²

Ricoeur's thinking obfuscates the universality of the clear cut distinction set out by Neusner between hygiene and purity because it seems that it is impossible to wrench purification completely free from the root metaphor of a surface area being contaminated and the associated image of a decontamination by a type of washing. Hence the now understandable, if confusing, combination of hygienic and purificatory categories in patristic theology. If, however, it is accepted that the notion of defilement does have a reputable theological contribution to make, then a subsequent question concerns the typification of human sinfulness which has resulted from it.

Therefore, a third challenge comes to baptismal washing from the characterisation of human sin that the metaphor implies. This is focused on an evaluation of the language of 'dirt', 'filth' and 'stain' which formed part of the metaphor's patristic outworking, one which has endured since then and which may be illustrated with reference to a branch of post-Reformation theology.

A suitable point of departure is the work of Calvin. It has already been shown that Calvin gave a certain priority to the washing away of sins as a metaphor of baptism, indicated by its regular occurrence at the head of a threefold list of the effects of baptism.¹⁷³ Calvin relates the washing that the Christian receives to the Jewish purificatory rites which foreshadowed the reality which is inaugurated by Christ:

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baptisms and purifications disclose to them their own uncleanness, foulness, and pollution, with which they were defiled in their own nature; but these rites promised another cleansing by which all their filth would be removed and washed away. And this cleansing was Christ. Washed by his blood, we bring his purity before God's sight to cover all our defilements.¹⁷⁴

Calvin's theology the influenced subsequent remarks on baptismal washing. The Scottish Reformer John Knox understood the sacrament of baptism to be administered in order that the Christian might be taught that 'as water cleans outward filth, so the blood of Christ purges the soul from inward corruption'.¹⁷⁵ There is no doubt that everyday washing informed the parallel to the ritual action in the exposition of baptism given by the Elizabethan Philip Stubbes in which he proposed that:

as the filthiness and pollution of my bodie is washed and made clean by the element of water; so is my bodie and soule purified and washed from the spots and blemishes of sin, by the precious blood of Jesus Christ... this washing putteth me in remembrance of my baptism.¹⁷⁶

These two instances illustrate a theology based upon a particular relationship between a metaphor and its source domain. Given that blood evokes water, human sin becomes expressible in terms of substance or stain and the inward part of the body becomes a surface upon which sin can adhere. When this happens the ritual action coincides with the ritual effect and the power of the metaphor is curtailed as the similarity between the source and target domains eclipses the dissimilarity. The washing metaphor then loses its ability to provide genuine metaphorical insight to the extent that a principal metaphor must be expected to have.

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This is illustrated by noting how unsatisfactory the theological anthropology becomes if the metaphor of baptismal washing is over-emphasised. The description of the human condition in terms of defilement was widespread in post-Reformation English theology and R M Frye has situated the writings of the eighteenth century author and clergyman Jonathan Swift in this context. In *Gulliver's travels* the Yahoo were the epitome of humanity and amidst frequent descriptions of them as deformed, brutish and corrupt are found the images of filth and defilement. Frye concluded that such metaphors for sin were widespread in the work of leading theologians both prior to and contemporary with Swift.¹⁷⁷ Against the disgust felt by later commentators Frye cautions against seeing a misanthropist in Swift's characterisation of the Yahoo. Rather, Swift's portrayal of the Yahoo was indicative of an intellectual background which saw the human body as a representation of human depravity and that, at least for the purposes of instruction, saw the human spirit as the only redeemable element.

This combination of the metaphors of dirt with ideas relating to bodily processes in the human psyche leaves the characterisation of sin in terms of dirt and filth deeply problematic. The problems range from the hiddenness of the moral agenda, the bodily hatred that may be promoted or the implicit transcendence of the human condition. It may be possible that in an era when society had a more robust attitude towards human bodily processes, and also towards dirt on the human body, there was a degree of acceptability about employing the metaphors of dirt and filth as a characterisation of human sin. Nevertheless, baptism can become, as one (literary) commentator has

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expressed it, the 'physical image of spiritual cleanliness, the separating of the true individual from the excreta of original sin'.¹⁷⁸

Exactly why this characterisation of sinfulness is problematic is the subject of the final challenge to baptismal washing which emerges from the contemporary view of the human condition and especially its reformulation of original sin. Calls for the label 'original sin' to be abandoned are accompanied by pleas for a meaningful re-statement of the meaning of sin. There is a general awareness that, although analogical, the doctrine of original sin contains some 'fundamental elements'¹⁷⁹ that cannot be abandoned and may be stated quite simply. 'Original sin' indicates that human beings do not become sinners by the imitation of others, but they are sinners prior to any personal action. It asserts the radical nature of sin which finds its location in humanity at a deeper level than that of an individual action or a conscious intention. Also, it protects an understanding of sin as a universal phenomenon. Within the recognition of the continuing importance for the content of 'original sin', the contours of a contemporary doctrinal formulation have been shaped by philosophy, psychology, the social sciences and scientific discovery.

Philosophical theology has sought to understand the biblical myth of the Fall in terms of the experience of anxiety. The human quality of self-transcendence, an integral part of human freedom, coupled with finitude gives birth to anxiety. An awareness both of the possibilities open to human life and of the limitations of any existent gives rise to the phenomenon of dread founded on an ontological insecurity; it is this to which original sin, philosophically understood, points. Analytical psychology produces a

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perspective on human sinfulness that places desire and the struggles within the human psyche in the context of the maturing personality and not in the framework of an inherited personal flaw. The myth of an historical Fall becomes a universal story of the development of self-awareness and the accompanying trauma. Original sin is disconnectedness from the state of union with, or total participation in, the cosmic system; it is 'the inability of choice to actualize the undifferentiated union with the whole that we yet crave for'.¹⁸⁰ An application of the social sciences has enabled a rationale of the heredity nature of sin. The transmission of original sin by generation may be interpreted by the understanding that it is through procreation that a person is situated in the world. 'Being-situated' in the world is to be in the condition of original sin, understood as the 'sin of the world'; the 'sin of the world' consists of the innumerable sins of the human race in their collectivity, and this situates the individual and determines their supposedly 'free' response to the good or evil which confronts them.¹⁸¹ The physical sciences introduced an evolutionary perspective. The focus now begins to be given, not to a past event, but to a future goal; the new Adam rather than the old Adam becomes the centre of theological reflection. The result is a change in emphasis from 'an historical antecedence' to an 'eschatological dynamism' and an awareness that the reality of the human situation is in radical conflict with the Christian calling found in Christ.¹⁸²

Fundamental to this reformulation has been a recognition that even a renewed comprehension of original sin is a 'partial and not a total truth' when held in isolation from other doctrines. Essentially, the doctrine of original sin is the 'shadow side' of the universal human

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requirement for salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Any understanding of original sin is in need of correction by the doctrinal framework within which it stands¹⁸³ or by an acknowledgement of the far deeper existential situation of an effectual offer of salvation through Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁴

In the face of contemporary understanding, any notion that original sin may be literally washed away in baptism in a manner suggested by everyday washing appears very fragile. On one hand, it is problematic to talk of baptism as the removal of original sin when sin is now primarily understood as, for instance, the difference between the reality and goal of humanity. A mode of being in the world cannot be washed off; the baptised remain within the world and the doctrine of original sin expresses the innate difficulty of living the Christian life by the grace of Christ. On the other hand, through its demythologisation, it is no longer possible to give original sin a chronological priority to the grace of Christ. Sin does not assume a power over an infant before God does in the contingent act of baptism. The language of original sin in relation to an infant says something about the history of humanity only in so much as it can be spoken of without Christ, and does not have an encompassing function as it might have done in traditional formulations of baptismal washing.

It may be argued that the contemporary understanding of human sinfulness suggests that baptismal washing may have the opportunity to rediscover its true character as a ritual metaphor. If it is possible to reject as profoundly unhelpful any concept of the adherence of sin to a human soul, then it is true that the way is clear for the underlying model to regain its power as the tension between the source

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domain and the meaning of baptism is restored. Equally, the notion of defilement is one which conveys the important message of the objectivity of human sinfulness. At a profound level, however, the problem remains; metonymic extension in the ritual context is not something that may be controlled and so the perception of sin as dirt is endemic as its reliance on concepts of purification demonstrate. This is the dilemma which needs to be confronted in the use of the washing metaphor.

5 The Organising Potential of Baptismal Birth

Each of the three baptismal metaphors has been subject to an evaluation which has emphasised the anthropological understanding that there is a relationship between the ritual action and the human practices concerned with death, birth and hygiene. Now, in the search for an organising metaphor, a comparison is required.

5.1 Comparison between the Metaphors of Death, Birth and Washing

The metaphor of death, despite its dominance at various points in the tradition, was shown to have weaknesses. In the interplay between the source domain of human death and the target domain of baptism, death can become replaced by its metonym of drowning. When this occurs the liturgical action of submersion and emersion can become assimilated to an enactment of death and resurrection. Metaphorically this means that there is a reduction of power, a loss of heuristic value and a dissonance with Pauline theology which brings baptism into a relation of similarity with burial after a prior 'death'. Approaching this from another angle, in New Testament thought death itself was a descent.¹⁸⁵ If this is the case then the Pauline notion of

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burial in baptism does not require a ritual descent. Paul's use of the death metaphor is one which maintains the tension between the source and target domains and reflects an optimum potential for theological understanding. The problem is that the psychology of death has a tendency to move the emphasis from metaphor to metonym and therefore away from its biblical basis.

In the instance of birth, it has been demonstrated that there are compelling reasons to suggest that birth has the potential to be an acceptable baptismal metaphor. There is a patristic appreciation of the processual nature of childbirth through from conception to the development of the newly born infant. It was argued that baptismal birth in the medieval period need not deter a contemporary application since the social environment is radically different. Rather, medieval baptismal theology may be seen as a resource to recapture the notion that baptismal rebirth is birth with Christ. Also, there is a strand of contemporary theology which contends for the notion of metaphorical birth as authentically biblical. Overall, the ritual perspective allows the concern over baptismal regeneration to be dissipated in an acceptance of the ambiguity between the objective and subjective aspects of ritual practice.

The handling of the washing metaphor by the early church contains severe theological weaknesses. Washing produced a retrospective outlook on baptism and also had implications which contributed to a Pelagian theological anthropology. Furthermore, from a cultural perspective, four challenges have been brought to its contemporary applicability. The first challenge highlighted the difficulties involved when the distinction could not be maintained between hygienic

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and purificatory categories and this was coupled with a second which suggested that, when psychology is recognised to be a factor, this distinction is subject to collapse. This led to an analysis of the nature of sin as dirt, an inevitable implication from the notion of baptismal washing and one which cannot be sustained in a contemporary reformulation of human sin. This reformulation was the final challenge which ultimately suggests that the dilemmas facing the washing metaphor can only be solved by reordering its content. Add to this the fact that washing now is a private and regular practice; this contrasts to its public and less frequent nature up until the beginning of modernity, meaning that its significance is more difficult to locate. The difficulty is clear when washing is compared with the cultural events of death and birth, each of which is perceived as a transition and an unique life-cycle event for the individual. The challenges posed to the washing metaphor, therefore, are of such weight that it becomes an unacceptable candidate for an organising baptismal metaphor.

In respect, then, of death and birth the analysis may be extended by deploying the two further anthropological criteria for metaphorical evaluation. The first examines the nature of the quality space into which a metaphor moves ritual participants. It may be argued that baptismal rebirth predicates of the inchoate subject the source domain that 'I am a foetus in a state of transition to being a newly born infant who is beginning the process of forming family relationships'. In metaphorical form the Christian is the person who is born into the body of Christ which is the sphere of redeemed sociality. In contrast, baptismal death evokes 'I am a person who has died and who is being buried and facing the uncertainty of what lies beyond death';

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relationships are terminated at death as the human being moves from a relational state to one in which any suggestion of relationship is analogical. A source domain which conveys the sense that the post-baptismal state is a relational one has a greater degree of correspondence with an approach to ecclesiology in which the notion of koinonia is central than does a source domain which places the emphasis on relational dysfunction.

Then arises the question of a metaphor's 'aptness'. Which metaphor relates most appropriately to the complexities of the contemporary social situation? A number of points have been already made which support claims for the primacy of baptismal birth. In contrast to the middle ages there is now an acceptance of constant social change and therefore the anthropological descriptions of birth as a social process are not isolated observations. Rather they are informed by a background of scientific discourse which is concerned not simply with the question of being but focuses on the dynamic processes of becoming. Also, in the current social milieu of the Western world approaches to human death are surrounded by denial and taboo; in contrast, interest in childbirth is growing both as an academic concern and also as an issue which effects across gender boundaries. Theologically there is a recognition that intelligible discourse concerning death requires a profound understanding of life¹⁸⁶, something that is a theological expression of the anthropological discovery that metaphors derived from different rites of passage are employed to make sense of the human experience of death. A metaphor which takes birth as its source domain has the potential to contribute greatly to contemporary life and its understanding of death.

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Add to this the observation that the ritual action of baptism cannot be readily assimilated to the source domain of birth in the manner which has been observed for those of washing and death, then it is making sense to give preference to baptismal birth as an organising metaphor. In this case, how do the three metaphors inter-relate? Given that a strong sense was obtained of the limitations of the washing metaphor, the next question must be, how does baptismal birth relate to baptismal death?

5.2 Metaphors of Death, Birth and Washing in Relationship

It is the recognition that life itself becomes the source of understanding about death that offers a means of characterising this relationship. The place where elucidation is found is the Fourth Gospel, where the metaphor of birth explicates the death and resurrection of Jesus. Birth is employed as a metaphor for the crucifixion and its focal point is the role which the Gospel assigns to the Mother of Jesus. The exegetical arguments are not well known and so it is necessary to outline the steps involved in making this claim.

Mary has long been regarded by a prominent theological tradition in both East and West as a type of the Church, and contemporary theologians from across confessional boundaries have re-presented the case for this.¹⁸⁷ The attraction lies in the exemplary nature of Mary's obedient response in faith to divine grace. As Pannenberg puts it, she is the model of 'believing humanity, the Church' and because, in distinction from Jesus, she 'is not one with God, she can be understood in a particular way as the prototype of man under the free grace of God'.¹⁸⁸ Central to recent discussion has been the narrative

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relationship of the crucifixion to the parable of the woman about to give birth in the farewell discourses:

when a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of her child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being is born into the world.¹⁸⁹

The exegesis of this parable may be treated in three steps. First of all, strong verbal parallels between Jesus' words and the Isaianic description of the Daughter of Zion indicate an authorial intention to make a reference to Jesus' impending death by crucifixion. For Isaiah, the Daughter of Zion will be the mother of a multitude of children in the forthcoming renewal of the nation. Israel's suffering is metaphorically one of childbirth which, although mysterious, will eventually yield to joy; similarly, Jesus advises his disciples in the throes of their own suffering, 'I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice'. The parable announces the coming hour of Jesus' crucifixion, and in particular, as the context makes clear, the suffering of the disciples who will give birth in grief.¹⁹⁰

The second exegetical step is to recall that Jesus' hour is his death. Primarily the birth imagery relates to the experience of the disciples who grieve over Jesus' death, suffering like women in childbirth, and whose sorrow will eventually turn into joy. As the exemplar and representative of discipleship Jesus' mother is addressed by her Son at the hour of his death:

when Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.¹⁹¹

This is the second encounter of Jesus with his mother in the Fourth Gospel and, similarly to their conversation at the Wedding of Cana,

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she is addressed as 'woman'. Thus, as a representative figure, there is a resonance with the image of the Daughter of Zion and she becomes the New Israel, the Church, who gives birth to the people of God in the new era. Mary shares in the suffering of Jesus; as she consoles her new 'son', she sees hope die, but as the representative of discipleship she gives birth to new hope in the resurrection. She represents the childbearing of the new Israel, which is glimpsed in the innovative relationship Jesus effects between Mary and the Beloved Disciple who represents the 'faithfulness of all believers'.¹⁹²

The third step considers the possibility of an allusion to Eve, who is told by God that she will bring forth children with 'sorrow', and who later exclaims, 'I have gotten a man....'.¹⁹³ The occurrence of 'sorrow' in the parable, where pain would more naturally have been expected, and the birth of a human being instead of child indicates a probable connection between Johannine thought and the Genesis narratives.¹⁹⁴ The parable becomes a narrative strategy to illuminate the scene at the crucifixion where Jesus addresses his mother. Mary at that point is also 'the New Eve bringing forth the New Adam into the world of the Resurrection'.¹⁹⁵

Even though exegetically the notion of Mary as the New Eve may only be held as a possibility,¹⁹⁶ its plausibility is strengthened by the symbolism of the blood and water that flow from Jesus' wound. As chapter four made evident, blood and water are symbols of life in the Fourth Gospel and physical birth involves the discharge of both fluids. The analysis may be extended by noting that there is a secondary symbolic reference to the death of Jesus itself as childbirth, a suffering that brings forth new life. An association

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through the Johannine treatment of symbols may also be extended to Jesus' prophecy at the feast of Tabernacles concerning the discharge of living waters from his heart. It is accepted that the piercing of Jesus' side is an allusion to this prior prediction and the birth symbolism is only strengthened when it is noticed that the semantic field of the word for 'heart' is previously employed by the Evangelist to signify the female womb.¹⁹⁷ In crucifixion Jesus gives up the Spirit and this is the new life born of the child-bearing-like sufferings of Jesus, the unambiguous reference of the earlier prophecy.¹⁹⁸ The Spirit is bestowed upon the newly formed Church signified by the coming together of Mary and the Beloved Disciple.

Plausibly, therefore, the imagery of Jesus' mother as the fulfilment of the Daughter of Zion bringing forth the messianic people of God and as the New Eve, through whose suffering at the foot of the cross a new creation emerges, is consonant with the piercing of Jesus' side and is hardly out of place within the Johannine narrative. In the Fourth Gospel birth becomes a metaphor for death and resurrection together, as one movement through which Jesus passes. Therefore the birth metaphor, at a theological level, has an inclusivity about it: the Christian, in the birth from above by water and Spirit, participates both in the Virgin Birth and in Jesus' death and resurrection. To capture the future reserve of the Pauline metaphors it is necessary to go beyond the Fourth Gospel where the metaphor of birth has an eschatological direction with a cosmic reference to the establishment of the new creation. Regeneration is a process which begins in baptism and only finds its fulfilment or completion in the apocalyptic transformation that involves the whole created order.¹⁹⁹

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So, if the contours of a relationship between the metaphors of birth and death have been delineated, it is now possible to suggest how the metaphor of baptismal washing may be perceived. For reasons already given, it cannot assume a primary role as a baptismal metaphor, but it may be regarded as a less adequate attempt to express what the metaphor of baptismal re-birth does more elegantly - the over-coming of the Fall or the solution to the human need for salvation. In the Fourth Gospel itself washing is a metaphor that indicates participation in the servant nature of Jesus' death and resurrection, the supreme birth event of the Gospel.²⁰⁰ In the patristic period, the contrast between the belief of Mary and the disobedience of Eve conveyed the transformation of the baptised. One of the consequences of the Fall was the introduction of suffering to childbirth, a sign of human disobedience. The painless nature of birth into the Church, in contrast, was a metaphor for the obedience and belief of true discipleship. For Augustine, birth from the union of God the Father and Mother Church was something of joy, happiness and ultimately life; childbirth involving human parents was the experience of weeping, woe and eternal death.²⁰¹ Baptism was the overcoming of the effects of the fall; most succinctly it was concerned with human salvation from the state of sin.²⁰²

The metaphor of baptismal birth has therefore been regarded as carrying within it the 'washing away of sin' and this is possible even though it is no longer acceptable to place any emphasis on a genetic model for the transmission of sin. Indeed, the understanding of baptism through ritual metaphor explains how this latter connection may have come into theological expression. As the ritual of baptism becomes a re-birth then it begins to influence through a metonymic

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extension of the birth metaphor the human birth upon which it is juxtaposed. The source domain for an understanding of baptism is human generation; instead of regeneration being understood by human generation, the latter began to be understood in terms of the former. In the terms of ritual metaphor, there occurred a reversal of domains as the target domain of baptism became the source domain for metaphors to understand the original source domain of human birth, producing a genetic understanding of the transmission of human sinfulness. Displacing the genetic link, however, does not reduce original sin to an environmental influence; a situationist position requires that there is something inherent within the individual themselves which will respond sinfully to the external.²⁰³

If washing can only claim to be a ritual metaphor of the second order then its sense may be preserved by recognising that it explicates a transition that is properly expressed by the notion of childbirth, its organising metaphor. In the perspective which gives emphasis to the christological encasement of any statement about sinfulness, washing may be thought of as a movement from a positive state to a more positive one. In the case of an infant this does justice to the contemporary perception of childhood, it does not disregard sin but accepts the doctrine of original sin as a shadow and partial statement of reality and it allows the metaphor of washing to function at a second order level. In baptism there is a sharing in the birth of Jesus which contains within itself the over-coming of the effects of sin. At baptism participation in the birth of 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'²⁰⁴ begins and comes to completion in the eschatological new creation.

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Anthropology now facilitates further theological insight through its perception of the social nature of the birth process which is concerned with the creation of a new member of human society; birth is a social and historical event that involves kindred relationships. The model of human birth offers an understanding of the social dynamics of baptism as incorporation into the Church as a sphere of new relationships. In the ritual context kinship metaphors have expressed these new relationships, especially as they are embodied in the ritual symbolism of godparents; baptism has been, and is, 'bathed in the atmosphere of kinship'.²⁰⁵ It will be argued that the fresh perspective on the processes of childbirth enables the notion of godparenthood to consolidate the organising potential of baptismal birth. It is necessary, before that, to take note of one further objection to baptismal birth which has been articulated by both theologians and anthropologists: the argument that the metaphor of birth has been symptomatic of a denial of childbirth.

5.3 Denial of Childbirth through the Supremacy of Culture

Central to this critique is the concern that the metaphor of baptismal re-birth can swallow up childbirth. It is asserted that this occurs through a male-dominated ordained ministry, attempting to replicate the female reproductive function and thereby asserting a form of spiritual birth which is superior to the physical event.²⁰⁶ Baptism is seen to represent a higher and more potent form of fertility than that associated with natural birthing.²⁰⁷ Also, it is argued that in the history of the synthesis between folk religion and the Catholic faith, symbols of life were replaced by those of death as the veneration of martyrs grew into a 'cult of the dead'. Birth was

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demoted in favour of the supreme importance of the rebirth of the soul.²⁰⁸

An appropriate response is to note that such criticisms have their locus in the theological concern to overcome relationships which are constructed around the dualism between male and female. This dualism is seen to facilitate others - between body and soul, humanity and nature, God and creation - and also a hierarchical conception of society. R Radford Ruether finds support for her analysis from the anthropologist S Ortner who has argued that the earliest of social structures suggest a universal devaluation of women based on the dualism of culture and nature. Culture is demarcated from nature at the sphere of the symbol and human creation which dominates the uncontrollable processes of the latter. It is the realm of control which is aligned with male hierarchy over the dangerous, polluting, inferior and natural female realm.²⁰⁹

The nature-culture dichotomy is significant because it has permeated the anthropological discussion of the godparenthood complex. Often it undergoes a transformation, producing a distinction between the natural and the spiritual which is then applied as a heuristic framework to the data. It has influenced both the historical analysis of the institution²¹⁰ and the attempt to find a theological grounding for contemporary practice. One well-considered example of the anthropological analysis of ritual kinship which accepts this framework enables a platform from which to overcome the objection of childbirth denial.

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S Gudeman has sought to give the anthropology of ritual kinship a basis in the Virgin Birth. Having observed the institution of godparenthood in a variety of locations he views it as 'a temporal series of solutions to the problem inherent in man's existence as both a natural and spiritual being'.²¹¹ It is evident that the dichotomy between nature and culture, assumed to be universal, informs his argument that the godparenthood complex has always been based on the notion of spiritual rebirth combined with spiritual paternity and resulting spiritual relationships. Marriage prohibitions between spiritual kindred serve to distinguish the spiritual and the natural; if marriage were to be permitted between those related through baptismal kinship then the social edifice would collapse.

Working with the remarks of Aquinas on the contraction of spiritual relationships in baptism and confirmation, Gudeman postulates a transformation of the relations belonging to natural birth into a 'baptismal rebirth set'. Thus just as Father and Mother produce a child through intercourse, conception and birth, in baptismal rebirth God the Father or the Holy Spirit, represented by the priest, in conjunction with the Church as Mother, represented by the sponsor and the font, bring forth the new spiritual being. Such an understanding was heightened, in Gudeman's view, in the seventh and eighth centuries with the introduction of one male and one female sponsor. Thus the baptismal set of minister, sponsor and the baptised was again subject to a transformation; this time to godfather, godmother and godchild, further emphasising the dichotomy of the spiritual over the natural. This provokes Gudeman to a comparison with the birth of Christ, since the baptismal set is seen to be in metaphorical relationship with the Virgin Birth. Utilising an essay

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by Leach in which it is asserted that the necessity of the Virgin Birth lies in the separation of Christ's legal and divine relationships²¹², Gudeman sees the baptismal relationships ultimately as a transformation of Christ's divine birth. Just as the marriage prohibitions of the godparenthood complex ensure the separation of the natural and the spiritual, so does the doctrine of the Virgin Birth.

The feminist criticism of baptismal birth therefore broadens into a wider critique of an anthropologically informed method which deploys the analytical categories of nature and culture. It is interesting to note that in the case of Christian feminist theologians the arguments are less about the use of the metaphor of baptismal birth than its misuse within a particular hierarchical ordering of the Church. Indeed feminist critics of dominant models of sacramental theology have argued for a closer connection of baptism with the human experience of childbirth as a means of overcoming their criticism.²¹³ This insight encourages some responses to the assertion that in baptism human childbirth is effectively negated.

5.4 Baptismal Godparents and the Historicity of Human Birth

There are three responses, each of which allows ritual kinship to emerge as an outworking of the organising potential of baptismal birth. The first involves a questioning of the nature-culture distinction, the second an elaboration of the kinship structure of birth and the third the provision of a theological context for godparenthood which has distinct advantages over the Virgin Birth.

The first response to the charge that baptism denies the reality of childbirth is to note the uncertainty of the nature-culture

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distinction. Within the social sciences themselves it is increasingly felt that it is of limited heuristic value, not least because it does not serve the universal, timeless and value-free function that is sometimes assumed. One discussion argues that the opposition between culture and nature has been employed as an attempt to legitimate the social sciences by demarcating an area of investigation that depends upon the use of symbols, especially those of language, and therefore sets apart humanity from the remainder of nature. The opposition can display an ignorance of both humanity and animal species and can become 'not the product of enquiry.... but the condition of enquiry', a metaphysical presupposition to supposedly empirical investigation.²¹⁴

Another rebuttal has come from the sociologist B S Turner who has observed that the distinction between nature and culture is itself a cultural product and that it has inherent weaknesses when applied to the question of gender rôles. The universality of patriarchy is often attributed to females' reproductive function, which firmly associates them with nature, an unbreakable link with animality which men are able to transcend in the realm of culture. Turner argues that it is impossible to separate the domination of patriarchy from gerontocracy; many younger men are dominated by elder males, and although some might therefore exhibit certain female characteristics, it would not be accurate to assign them to the realm of nature. Turner also rightly argues that not every society thinks in these terms; for instance, Aristotle regarded women as an aberration of nature, and they have not always been seen as vital in the processes of reproduction of the male species, as was the case in some medieval accounts. Also, in a secularised and industrialised modern environment it is becoming arbitrary in deciding where nature ends and culture begins; one

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relevant instance would be that of contraception which makes the phrase 'natural reproduction' a meaningless one.²¹⁵

Therefore caution is required in any application of the analyses of baptismal kinship which have been obtained through the use of the nature-culture distinction. This does not deny that there are occasions in history and situations in contemporary societies where the physical and spiritual births were opposed and where the distinction may be employed to identify that case. For instance, it might be argued that exclusion of parents from being godparents to their own children brought about an illegitimate opposition between the natural and the spiritual.²¹⁶ The logic which asserted that the existence of a spiritual bond created between husband and wife, if either acted as godparent, would prohibit conjugal relations falls into the trap that opposes nature to culture. In practice such logic led to the non-attendance of the parents at their own infant's baptism since it was reinforced by the practice of quamprimam from the tenth and eleventh centuries onwards.²¹⁷ This left the baptism in the hands of the parish priest and the godparents, speaking eloquently of the genetic inheritance of original sin through the biological parents. Such opposition between natural and spiritual generation only began to be reversed following the Reformation when parents were gradually allowed to be godparents to their own children.²¹⁸

However, it is also the case that the presupposition of a cultural realm in hierarchical relationship to a natural realm can determine the conclusions reached from empirical evidence. This stance seems to determine those reached by Gudeman who overlooks the fact that the Virgin birth of Jesus Christ is such that it cannot be assigned to

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culture rather than nature since it has components of both intricately intertwined with each other. It can be argued that the Virgin Birth is a special case and therefore, as the paradigm of the baptismal birth, it would yield no opposition between nature and culture.

What the criticism of the nature-culture construction provides is the confidence that the kinship formed within the godparenthood complex is not something irretrievably connected with the 'spiritual' and therefore working in opposition to the kinship that belongs to 'nature'. Although there have been points in the Christian tradition where such an analysis seems to be valid, it is not required that the creation of baptismal kin is necessarily part of a system which denies the reality of childbirth.

The second response takes up the reality of childbirth and suggests how kinship in the context of human birth might provide the metaphoric basis for ritual godparenthood. Aijmer described the pseudo-kinship relationships established at birth as 'cultural-semantic markers' which both define the authentic universe of the birth and ensure that the infant is received into the 'time-space of a certain kinship order'. Time is a presupposition of kinship, and kinship itself is 'a way of talking about time'; tracing the biological links between kinship generations is essentially a communication about time in connection with birth and an articulation of the community's history. The institution of kinship provides personal links which transcend generations; the infant is born into a universe of kinship and therefore those who are present at that moment embody the bonds which are constitutive of the community and serve to articulate its history and continuity.²¹⁹

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This analysis empowers an understanding of baptismal godparenthood. The event of childbirth is marked in space and time by a universe of kinship. Ritual kinship marks the baptismal birth as an historical event in the life of the Church. Like a human society, the Church society has a concern with its own history and continuity across generational boundaries; it is this aspect of ecclesiology towards which metaphors of kinship contribute. The fact that godparents are usually selected from the universe of kinship which surrounds childbirth means that baptismal birth affirms, and does not deny, the reality of human birth. Also, the fact that godparents are normally located in a different generation to the infant contributes to the continuity of Church as it progresses into the future.

This is a significant point because it captures the prominence, since the fifth century, of the post-baptismal rôle of the sponsor or godparent.²²⁰ For instance, in the early sixth century the godparent's postbaptismal function was that of moral educator and teacher of the core Christian beliefs.²²¹ Ritually, this found appropriate expression in the godparental responses of the Bobbio Missal where the godparents replied to the question about renunciation, 'May he renounce them', and to the interrogation about belief, 'May he believe'.²²² In the Reformation the emphasis on the future rôle of godparents towards the infant was heightened; it was embodied in the Church of England's liturgy when the godparents were charged with their duty to teach their godchildren 'what a solemn vow, promise and profession' they had made in baptism and to 'call on them to hear sermons'.²²³

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The future orientation of the institution of godparenthood has been elaborated by the anthropologist J Pitt-Rivers who has understood the godparent as concerned with governing the passage an individual makes from the 'family of origin' to the 'family of orientation'. This is a generational cycle which occurs at birth when one nuclear family is destroyed and another is constructed. The godparent is the 'anti-parent' who substitutes for the parents at the points where the infant's individual destiny is at stake, rather than the conservation of the familial unit.²²⁴ This is in accord with the theory of a rite of passage during which a person has to be separated from their social environment before being returned to it with a different status. The transition is made with the assistance of the godparent, someone who stands outside the familial structure with regard to which the neophyte's status will change. The godparent:

as guardian of his destiny, looks into the future to the day when his charge will become an adult; the parents, who bear responsibility for him in the present, attach him to the past and to the social structure in which his place is granted to him by virtue of his membership of the unit they have allied themselves to create.²²⁵

Thus although the metaphors of baptismal kinship might find their basis in the processual nature of childbirth the very nature of that process which, according to Pitt-Rivers, is orientated towards the future, means that godparenthood supplies and embodies the tension between individual destiny and the destiny of the social unit into which the infant is born. The metaphor of ritual kinship therefore both affirms the reality and significance of natural birth and embodies the tension inherent in the baptism of infants between the human family and the individual's incorporation into the Church.

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The third response seeks to provide a theological context in which baptismal kinship may be located. The following suggestion, that an understanding of the cross as a birth event in which the new family of God is established, provides this context and builds on what has been discussed previously about the narratives of the Fourth Gospel. Although the Virgin Birth is by no means absent in Johannine thinking the primary birth event is that which occurs through the flesh of the crucified one. Rather than basing baptismal kinship on the Virgin Birth its context may be found in the scene at the feet of the crucified where the Mother of Jesus is entrusted to the Beloved Disciple.

The interpretation of this scene is assisted by the reflections of J McHugh and the linkages he perceives between the beginning and end of the Gospel. At the Cana wedding, Mary is the prototype of faith as she commands the servants to obey her son.²²⁶ As she stands at the feet of the crucified and encounters the Beloved Disciple, almost universally now regarded as the type of all who come to faith in Jesus, McHugh, makes some poignant comments on the words of Jesus, 'Woman, behold, your Son'.

In these words a new truth is revealed. By addressing Mary not as "Mother" but as "Woman", Jesus draws attention away from his own blood-relationship with Mary to focus attention on the fact that henceforward she is to be the mother of the disciple, and he is to be her son. That is, Mary is henceforth to find her children not in those closest to her by blood, but in those who share her boundless faith and remain steadfast by Jesus to the very end. For the disciple who stood beside the Cross is a type of all the disciples whom Jesus loves: all these in turn are summoned to look upon Mary as their mother, because her faith, completely independent of signs and wonders, is to be a pattern for their own.²²⁷

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The emphasis here is not on the separation of Mary and Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel and their subsequent encounter at the end to constitute a new family of God. At the feet of the crucified bonds are indeed established between the Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple that transcend blood, but there is no indication that kinship ties were previously negated nor are they negated at this point. Mary is just as much Jesus' mother at the end of the Gospel as at the beginning. If Mary is seen as the exemplar of discipleship then this suggests that kinship ties are not overlooked; the natural family in the Fourth Gospel becomes a metaphor for the spiritual family. Intriguingly, in contrast to the synoptic Gospels, the material family is not the subject of downgrading: there is no account of leaving the biological family, rather, as a minimalist understanding of the words from the cross indicate, it is the subject of concern and nurture.²²⁸ In McHugh's account the attention that Jesus draws to non-familial bonds is counter-balanced by the intra-familial character of the Gospel's model for discipleship.

If this is correct it is unsurprising that the crucifixion in the Fourth Gospel has been so closely connected to baptism. The hour of Jesus' death and resurrection is the moment of birth when kinship bonds are formed and 'a new family is brought into being'.²²⁹ In the baptismal liturgy of the Church, new Christians experience birth and participate in the continual coming into being of the family of God. If Mary represents the Church and the Beloved Disciple symbolises the individual coming to faith, then the crucifixion scene presents a picture of baptism. In particular, as an examination of the history and ethnography of ritual kinship demonstrates, godparenthood is concerned with the forging of bonds which involve both familial and

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non-familial kinship at the moment of baptism. Godparenthood ensures that baptism constitutes the Church; indeed to follow St John's Gospel, it is the foundational event that brought the Church into being and continues to do so in the celebration of baptismal liturgy. By making provision for Mary, Jesus was reinforcing the natural filial bond with his mother and by saying what he did he was creating a new and extra-familial bond that is evocative of the creation of the Church. This embodies the tension between literal kinship and ritual kinship that the 'anti-parent' brings to baptism.

Thus the range of baptismal birth as an organising metaphor may be accepted. There are grounds for confidence that birth is an instance of human life which is now accessible and interesting to contemporary thought and the baptismal metaphor which it informs is one with a multitude of dimensions. It contains within itself both the passage through death towards resurrection and the overcoming of the sinful human state. In terms of its christological basis it is a metaphor that finds a response in the breadth of the incarnation - the Virgin birth, the Baptism of Jesus and his death and resurrection. In its ecclesiological dimension it is a metaphor which recognises the mutuality and partnership of baptism - in an act of baptism there may be passivity but beyond this the whole Church is involved in giving birth to the neophyte. Pneumatologically, the themes of anointing and the new creation from the narrative of Jesus' Baptism become part of the metaphor of birth. The Johannine theme of new life entered through baptism becomes intelligible when birth is understood as a passage to a preferable instance of human life.

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Baptismal birth therefore has claim to organise the ritual context. As the Pauline appropriation of burial leaves death itself to elucidate baptism's subjective and spiritual dimensions, so baptismal birth allows the invisible mystery of conception to fulfil an equivalent function, and this may explain the tenacity of the prebaptismal anointing in some traditions. The theme of enlightenment is understood as the emergence of the newly born into a world of light where it is clothed for the first time, in garments which reveal the gift of God's grace. Most significantly, however, the very character of ritual metaphor means that in baptismal birth childbirth may both be celebrated and transcended. Metaphor affirms the natural world because it is about relationship and not hierarchy; the possibilities of experiencing divine love in baptism are not dependent upon the juxtaposition with human birth but neither is it denied. Infant baptism may be seen to be about both the affirmation of existing familial relationships and the establishment of fresh relationships within the new family of God. Godparenthood ensures that this tension is maintained through baptism's future reference and the source domain of childbirth ensures that the emphasis in baptism is focused upon the relationship between godparent and godchild and not on the kinship relations that might be formed between parents and godparents.

Endnotes

1. J W Fernandez. Persuasions and Performances.(1986), p.ix
2. Cited by F de Boeck. "Of Trees and Kings", p.469
3. D Durham & Fernandez. "Tropical Dominions".(1991), pp.191-192
4. Cohen. "Theories of Myth", pp.339f
5. Op.cit.(1986), pp.ix-x

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6. J C Crocker. "The Social Functions of Rhetorical Forms", p.47
7. Op.cit.(1986), p.8
8. Ibid, pp.28-70 where Fernandez identifies seven missions of metaphor.
9. Ibid, p.45
10. Ibid, p.37
11. Ibid, p.52
12. E Ohnuki-Tierny. "Embedding and Transforming Polytrope", pp.183-184
13. Op.cit.(1986), p.43.
14. Dramas, Fields and Metaphors, p.25
15. Ibid, pp.50-51
16. "The Cultural Basis of Metaphor", p.60
17. Fernandez. Op.cit.(1986), pp.52-57
18. Ibid, pp.20-23
19. Ibid, p.53
20. Ibid, p.43
21. Op.cit., p.39
22. Ibid, p.46
23. Fernandez. Op.cit.(1986), pp.19-22
24. Durham and Fernandez. Op.cit.(1991), p.192
25. The Interpretation of Cultures, p.211
26. Ohnuki-Tierney. Op.cit., p.175 (a citation from Aristotle)
27. Ibid, pp.175-177
28. K H Basso. "'Wise Words' of the Western Apache", pp.107-111
29. "The Anatomy of Metaphor"; for other metonymic relationships see index in G Lakoff & M Turner. More than Cool Reason, p.228
30. Durham & Fernandez. Op.cit.(1991), pp.192-195
31. Romans 6:3-4; A J M Wedderburn. Baptism and Resurrection, pp.344f argues that the Jewish concept of a present participation, through corporate solidarity, in a past salvific event is secure here.

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32. Finn. "Baptismal Death and Resurrection", p.175
33. K McDonnell & G T Montague. Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit, pp.226-248
34. The Theology of Martin Luther, p.355
35. Trigg. Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther, p.94 (fn.150)
36. D Serra. "The Blessing of Baptismal Water at the Paschal Vigil"
37. E L Brand. "New Rites of Initiation and their Implications", p.308
38. Winkler. "Confirmation or Chrismation", p.207 notes liturgies that did not cite Romans 6; Eastern Syrian rites have retained the paradigm of Jesus' Baptism.
39. McDonnell & Montague. Op.cit., p.277
40. R Hertz. "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death", pp.77-78 and Bloch and J Parry. "Introduction", pp.2ff.
41. Parry. "Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic" (the Hindu ascetic who holds his own funeral), J Middleton. "Lugbara Death" (the practice of announcing a male's death upon the utterance of his final words) and R Huntington & P Metcalf. Celebrations of Death, pp.133ff on the phenomenon of the dead king whose death is not given public recognition until well after the event. See Hertz. Op.cit, p.49.
42. E Jünger. Death, p.24
43. P Ariès. Western Attitudes towards Death, pp.85-103 and G Gorer. "The Pornography of Death"
44. J McManners. Death and the Enlightenment, pp.438-465
45. Ariès. Op.cit., pp.1-25
46. J Huizinga. The Waning of the Middle Ages, pp.124-135
47. Hertz. Op.cit., p.80
48. L M Danforth. The Death Rituals of Rural Greece, pp.71-115, Hertz. Op.cit., p.81 and Van Gennep. Rites of Passage, pp.151f.
49. Hertz. Op.cit., p.48 and Danforth. Op.cit., p.99
50. Op.cit., pp.79-81
51. "Magic, Science and Religion", p.46
52. For the 'social-psychological' approach to religion typified by Malinowski see Geertz. The Interpretation of Cultures, pp.142f
53. The Denial of Death, p.96

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54. "Pauline Baptism and 'Secondary Burial'", p.226; the weakness here lies in the absence of any reference to a secondary burial by Paul himself.
55. "Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead"; DeMaris builds on one reference to an obscure ritual, unfortunately the nature of which lacks a consensus.
56. AIRI, p.116 (Sermons on the Sacraments II:17) and CI, pp.242-255
57. AIRI, p.117 (II:18)
58. AIRI, p.120 (III:1); '....the font which has the shape and appearance of a tomb'; cf. p.118 (II.20); '....you were immersed; which means that you were buried with Christ'. On the baptistery at Milan which was modelled on a mausoleum see S A Stauffer. On Baptismal Fonts, pp.22-25; on the influence of mausolea in baptistery design and fontal death symbolism see Davies. The Architectural Setting of Baptism, pp.13-23 & 32f, R Krautheimer. "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture'", pp.20ff.
59. AIRI, pp.116-117 (II:19)
60. A D Nock. "Cremation and Burial in the Roman Empire" who attributes the change to an ostentitious taste for elaborate sarcophagi. J M C Toynbee. Death and Burial in the Roman World, pp.39-42 attributes the change to a reflection of 'a significant strengthening of emphasis on the individual's enjoyment of a blissful hereafter'.
61. Toynbee. Op.cit., pp.48-50
62. On the composition of the Roman Church see J C Beker. Paul the Apostle, pp.74-76. Toynbee. Op.cit., pp.234-244 asserts that Roman Christians did not follow Jewish burial practices until the late second century when they adopted the use of the catacombs.
63. Wedderburn. Op.cit., pp.369-370
64. The First Urban Christians, pp.154-155
65. "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism", pp.29-30 (1-3). On the 'double significatio' of baptism see Trigg. Op.cit., pp.92-99
66. "Large Catechism", pp.444-445
67. "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism", p.31 (5)
68. Beker. Op.cit., pp.196-198; see 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 6:3-10.
69. Trigg. Op.cit., pp.94 & 138
70. "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism", p.33 (9)
71. See D E Aune. "Human Nature and Ethics", pp.309ff
72. Althaus. Op.cit., pp.356-359

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73. Cited by idem, p.451

74. E H Erikson. Young Man Luther, pp.74-75; Becker. Op.cit., pp.67-92 (cf. p.88) makes the link between Luther, Kierkegaard and Lutheran thought using W James' observation that 'this is salvation through self-despair, the dying to be truly born of Lutheran theology...'. The passivity of Luther in the face of death is reflected in Jüngel's insistence on the utter priority of God's action in bringing human life to a passive end (Op.cit., p.91); this is in contrast to the Roman Catholic insistence that death is both active and passive. In the linking of baptism with death Luther may well be following Augustine. D Jonte-Pace. "Augustine on the Couch", p.77 observes the close relation between baptism and death in the Confessions where death follows baptism with 'an inexorable logic' in the case of Victorinus, Nebridius, Patricius and the friend of Tagaste. Augustine's own baptism is followed by Monica's death: 'Monica's death can be viewed as the structural and rhetorical consequence of Augustine's baptism, her death functioning as a substitute for his. All the deaths in the Confessions...., are happy endings - the willing deaths of souls assured of their salvation; deaths which enact the imitatio Christi'.

75. See above, pp.20-25

76. The Shape of Baptism, pp.102-125

77. The seriousness of the threat to the integrity of infant baptism is indicated by an instruction on infant baptism re-emphasising that is a 'general rule' and a 'serious duty'; see M Dalby. "Initiation", p.23

78. P -M Gy. "La notion Chrétienne d'initiation", pp.48f and 33; Gy does not consider the anthropological background to initiation and therefore does not give weight to the line of argument pursued here (see chapter two above, pp.20ff). D M Thompson. "The Theology of Adult Initiation", pp.20-21 refers briefly to the use of 'initiation' in Anglican vocabulary.

79. John 3:3-8; 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1-18 (genno); 1 Peter 3:23 (anagenno); Titus 3:5 (palingenesia).

80. H Wagenvoort. "'Rebirth' in Antique Profane Literature", p.132

81. For a concise review of the evidence see W L Knox. Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity, pp.90-94; F C Burkitt. Christian Beginnings, p.108 accepts regeneration as derivative from the Hellenistic mystery religions.

82. For instance W L Knox. Op.cit., p.94 and L Goppelt cited in K H Ringwald. "Birth, Begat, Bear....", p.180

83. Becoming Christian, p.23

84. Ibid, pp.40-45

85. Ibid, pp.48-50

86. Beker. Op.cit., pp.213-234

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87. Jeanes. "Paschal Baptism and Rebirth"
88. L Bregman. "Baptism as Death and Birth", p.38
89. R E Brown. "We Profess One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins", pp.270
90. S C Neill. "Conversion", p.352
91. J Baillie. Baptism and Conversion, pp.11-28 situates the debate within a Reformation framework.
92. S Cosminsky. "Childbirth and Change", p.205
93. Sources here include Van Genep. Op.cit., pp.41-50, R M Gross. "Birth", M N Fried & M H Fried. Transitions, pp.28-57 and the essays in G Aijmer (ed.). Coming into Existence.
94. Aijmer. "Introduction", p.2
95. Ibid, pp.15-16 (fn.6)
96. Ibid, p.17
97. Op.cit., p.3
98. Ibid, p.52
99. History of Childbirth, p.270
100. Brought to Bed, p.197
101. "'The Most Essentially Female Function of All'"
102. CI, p.333 (Homily III.9-10)
103. P Brown. The Body and Society, p.10. See Callaway. Op.cit., pp.150-151 who characterises this view as a 'denial of maternity' and M Nolan. "Passive and Deformed?" who expounds Aristotle's biology and suggests that there is a greater component of mutuality than is often understood.
104. DBL, pp.186-187
105. DBL, p.244, notwithstanding H Rahner. Greek Myths and Christian Mystery, pp.82-83 who gives an alternative, but unconvincing view. See Serra, Op.cit, pp.155-156 who argues that there is an irony in the retention of the ritual involving the paschal candle. The associated birth imagery has been rejected with the overt desire to avoid any suggestion of pagan fertility. Serra suggests that the birth metaphors should have been retained and the ritual involving the paschal candle rejected.
106. Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, p.114; for background see Gélis. Op.cit., p.5
107. Bloch & Parry. Op.cit., pp.9-15

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108. "The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels"; the text may also be found in F Van der Meer & C Mohrmann. Atlas of the Early Christian World, p.129.
109. Church of Scotland. Interim Report of the Commission on Baptism, pp.13-15 has a helpful summary of Irenaeus' baptismal theology. Augustine argues similarly for infant baptism; see Torrance. "One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins".(1975), p.97 (Predestination of the Saints, 15:31).
110. Inst., p.1341 (IV.xvi.18)
111. "Aspects of Baptism in the New Testament".(1958), p.244. For Torrance's exposition of Irenaeus see "Ein vernachlässigter Gesichtspunkt der Tauflehre".(1956), pp.481-492; for the influence of Irenaeus see Op.cit.(1975), pp.94-95
112. Op.cit.(1975), pp.88-81 and Op.cit.(1958), p.253
113. Op.cit.(1958), p.255
114. Ibid, pp.245-246
115. Op.cit.(1975), pp.95-99
116. John 1:13; see C E B Cranfield. "The Virgin Birth", p.179 for allusions to the Virgin Birth in 6:41f and 8:41.
117. Barrett. The Gospel According to St John, p.164; Barrett rejects the singular reading as the original text; Torrance. Op.cit.(1958), p.254 accepts its originality; he also shows the persistence of the birth theme throughout the Johannine corpus (e.g. 1 John 5:18).
118. Acts 2:38, 22:16, 1 Corinthians 6:11
119. Ephesians 5:26, Titus 3:5 and Hebrews 10:22; Brown. The Gospel according to St John. Volume 2, pp.566-67 points to the relationship between these references and the cleansing blood of Jesus in Johannine theology (1 John 1:7, Revelation 7:14).
120. Confessions I.xi(17). In St Augustine, pp.13-14
121. For this process' history see J N D Kelly. Early Christian Creeds, pp.160-163
122. Bapt., pp.24-25 (11)
123. AT, p.20 (21)
124. "The First Apology of Justin Martyr", pp.59-60 (1 Apology 61)
125. "The Meaning and Reference of 'One Baptism for the Remission of Sins'"
126. Baptismal Instructions, p.63 (III:23)

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127. Cited in *Ibid*, p.240 (De Pentecoste, 1); for other references to post-baptismal sin see J N D Kelly. *Op.cit.*, p.161 (fn.7) and F X Murphy. "Penitential Controversy".
128. *Op.cit.*, pp.132-135 (9:4-11); see also p.291 (fns.17, 20)
129. M Wiles. "One Baptism for the Remission of Sins", p.81; Cf. also C F D Moule. Worship in the New Testament, pp.47-60 who argues that 'keep yourself clean' stands in contrast to the more authentically Christian exhortation 'become what you are'.
130. Osborne. Reconciliation and Justification, pp.56f discusses the example of Tertullian.
131. N P Williams. The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin, pp.222-223.
132. Brown. "Pelagius and his Supporters", pp.103ff argues that the Christian for Pelagius is above all 'the baptized Christian'.
133. Wright. "Pelagius the Twice Born", p.11
134. Brown. *Op.cit.*, p.104
135. Williams. *Op.cit.*, pp.344-345
136. Brown. *Op.cit.*, p.107
137. On Augustine's notion of original sin see Williams. *Op.cit.*, pp.360-380 (noting Augustine's emotional unease with the logic of his position), S J Duffy. "Our Hearts of Darkness", pp.597-604 and G Daly. Creation and Redemption, pp.117-125. For the alternative Eastern perception, and theological references, see J Baun. "The Fate of Babies Dying before Baptism in Byzantium".
138. *Bapt.*, p.5 (1)
139. *Ibid*, p.11 (4)
140. Kelly. Early Christian Doctrines, pp.174-175
141. *Op.cit.*, pp.135f (IX:12-16): the uncleanness of the Jew came not from the nature of things but from the weakness of the conscience.
142. In *DBL*, p.34 (44.3)
143. *Op.cit.*, p.164 (XI:12); additional references to baptismal washing may be found on pp.68-69 (IV:7) & p.159 (X:29).
144. G Austin. "Appendix 3". In *ST: Volume 57*, p.237
145. Rahner. "Original Sin"
146. Cited by D Herlihy. "Medieval Children", pp.237-238 (but see Walsh. The Sacraments of Initiation, p.105 for a cautionary comment).
147. *Ibid*, p.238; from Divine Comedy: Inferno. (Canto IV)

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148. G G Coulton. Infant Perdition in the Middle Ages is a thorough discussion; contributions to recent discussion are summarised by P Gumpel. "Unbaptized Infants".
149. The Christian Sacraments, pp.170-174
150. Symbol and Sacrament, pp.68-69
151. "Infant Baptism Reconsidered", pp.37-38
152. Ganoczy. Op.cit., p.61; Osborne. The Christian Sacraments of Initiation, p.18
153. Williams. Op.cit., pp.550-554
154. J Burnaby. The Belief of Christendom, p.164
155. J -P Goubert. The Conquest of Water, pp.240-243
156. Ibid, p.227
157. G Vigarello. Concepts of Cleanliness, pp.140-141 & 170-172 and K Thomas. "Cleanliness and Godliness in Early Modern England", p.76; on the dangers of bodily dirt see Corbin. The Foul and the Fragrant, pp.71-72
158. Vigarello. Op.cit., p. 214
159. Thomas. Op.cit., pp.77-78 and Corbin. Op.cit., pp.217-218 on 'the virtues of filth'.
160. Corbin. Op.cit, pp.72, 181
161. Thomas. Op.cit., pp.78-81
162. Vigarello. Op.cit., pp.192-201 (citation p.194)
163. Thomas. Op.cit., pp.81-83
164. Goubert. Op.cit., p.51
165. J Neusner. The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism, p.1
166. P Ricoeur. The Symbolism of Evil, p.25
167. Ibid, p.25
168. Ibid, pp.29-34
169. Ibid, p.117
170. Ibid, p.26
171. Ibid, p.41
172. Ibid, pp.155-157
173. See above, p.179

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174. Inst., 2, p.1297 (IV.xiv.21)
175. R G Kyle. "The Major Concepts in John Knox's Baptismal Thought", p.23
176. Cited by Thomas. Op.cit., pp.61-63
177. R M Frye. "Swift's Yahoo and the Christian Symbols for Sin"; Frye cites John Donne, Jeremie Taylor and Isaac Watts. Watts self-consciously spells out the metaphor: 'The Defilement therefore appears evidently to be nothing but a Figure of Speech borrowed from material things, whereby either the Guilt or the Disorder of Sin, the relative or real Evil of it are represented' (p.214). The Yahoo were used by Wesley to describe human depravity (p.204); note also the comments made by Thomas that for Wesley dirt was associated with laziness and cleanliness with frugality and self-discipline (Op.cit., p.79).
178. N Frye. Words with Power, p.263
179. This is Pannenberg's term, cf. Anthropology in Theological Perspective.(1985), pp.119ff
180. S Moore. "Original Sin, Sex, Resurrection and Trinity", p.87 and B O McDermott. "The Theology of Original Sin", pp.490-492
181. P Schoonenberg. Man and Sin, pp.177-191; for a critique of the notion of 'being-situated' see Pannenberg. Op.cit.(1985), pp.127ff
182. S J Duffy. "Our Hearts of Darkness", pp.617-618
183. Whiteley. "The Use and Abuse of Original Sin", p.78
184. McDermott. Op.cit., pp.508-512 where he speaks of original sin's 'Christological containment'.
185. Acts 2:27, Romans 10:7 and Ephesians 4:9-10
186. Jüngel. Op.cit., pp.15-16
187. M Thurian. Mary, Mother of the Lord, pp.146-148, 171-173
188. Jesus-God and Man.(1968), p.145
189. John 16:21; human being (marginal reading, and a better translation of anthropos) has been inserted for 'child'.
190. John 16:20; cf. Isaiah 26:17-21 and 66:8-14; the parallel context is John 16:19-22. J McHugh. The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament, pp.384-385 outlines the parallels.
191. John 19:26-27
192. Thurian. Op.cit., pp.159-166
193. Genesis 3:16(LXX) and 4:1
194. McHugh. Op.cit., p.383

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195. Ibid, p.385
196. Ibid, p.387; McHugh himself is doubtful. Also, an ecumenical task-force, which united round the primary meaning of the new eschatological family of God brought into being through discipleship, differed on Mary as the Daughter of Zion or the New Eve; Brown et al. Mary in the New Testament, p.218
197. John 3:4; koilia primarily means 'belly' and 'womb'. John 7:38 uses it metaphorically as 'heart'.
198. John 19:30
199. Matthew 19:28 and Moltmann. The Spirit of Life, pp.144-160. Origen uses the birth metaphor with this eschatological orientation; in his platonic framework, baptism is a rebirth 'in speculo'; see Danielou. Origen, p.60
200. S M Schneiders. "The Foot Washing", pp.138ff
201. "Sermon 216" and "Sermon 57"
202. On baptism as the overcoming of the Fall see E Pagels. Adam, Eve, and the Serpent, pp.131, 168 (fn.19)
203. Daly. "Creation and Original Sin"; Daly has an extended discussion on the model of human generation in "Theological Models in the Doctrine of Original Sin".
204. John 1:29
205. Lynch. Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe, p.100
206. C M Gudorf. "The Power to Create"; an anthropological expression of this critique may be found in Bloch and Guggenheim. "'Compadrazgo', Baptism and the Symbolism of a Second Birth".
207. M Condren. The Serpent and the Goddess, p.179
208. Ibid, p.178
209. Sexism and God-Talk, pp.72-92, drawing from S Ortner. "Is Male to Female as Nature is to Culture?"; on dualism see S A Ross. "Then Honour God in Your Body", pp.21-26
210. Goody. The Development of Marriage and the Family in Europe, 194ff speaks of the 'full acceptance of the two forms of parenthood, "blood" and "spiritual", separate but equal'; godparenthood acts towards a materialist end, marriage restrictions separating the biological from the spiritual which operate as parallel and opposed systems. Lynch. Op.cit., pp.258-281 has similarly argued that this separation is a specific out-working of the generality that the sexual and the holy were to be kept at a distance from each other.
211. S Gudeman. "The 'Compadrazgo' as a Reflection of the Natural and Spiritual Person"

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212. "Virgin Birth"
213. Gudorf. Op.cit., pp.304-305 and Ross. "God's Embodiment and Women", pp.199-200.
214. S Horigan. Nature and Culture in Western Discourses, p.6
215. The Body and Society, p.115-117; C P MacCormack. "Nature, Culture and Gender" summarises the debate amongst anthropologists.
216. Lynch. Op.cit., p.279 (Council of Mainz 813)
217. Gy. "Quamprimam"
218. Bailey. Sponsors at Baptism and Confirmation, pp.98ff
219. Op.cit., pp.3ff
220. Lynch. Op.cit., p.134
221. Ibid, pp.143-162
222. DBL, pp.204-213; see Whitaker. "The Baptismal Interrogations".
223. CIRP, p.111 (BCP, 1552; the final exhortation to the godparents).
224. "Ritual Kinship in the Mediterranean", p.319
225. Ibid, p.320
226. Op.cit., pp.361-378
227. Ibid, p.402
228. Augustine emphasises Jesus' filial concern; for other patristic interpretations see H Langkammer. "Christ's 'Last Will and Testament'".
229. E C Hoskyns. The Fourth Gospel, p.530

Chapter Six

Baptism in Ritual Perspective

In ritual perspective there is always more to be said. There is always more to add to a 'thick description', there are always more examples which could have been selected and inevitably there are periods of the tradition that have not received as much emphasis as they might have done. Nevertheless, a summary of where this thesis has travelled is now overdue.

The argument began by expressing a general dissatisfaction with the theological frameworks which govern current writing on baptism. A more adequate framework was sought in the category of ritual and propositions from the discipline of social anthropology were gathered to illuminate this category. An understanding was developed of ritual as both purposive and assertive. In this light a preliminary theological reading was given of baptism, establishing the plausibility of perceiving sacramental action through this framework. Baptism was understood as a ritual of transformation, conveying the

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sense that all ritual participants share in the purposiveness of the rite.

The dialogue with social anthropology produced three significant ritual terms - myth, symbol and metaphor - which acted as foundations on which a theology of baptism could be constructed. The importance in Christian theology of the partnership between word and sacrament, together with an acknowledgement of an important theoretical relationship between myth and ritual, stimulated an investigation of myth. A correlation was sought, and obtained, between myth in anthropological discourse and narrative in theology. An understanding of myth as a narrative form that concerned itself with questions of origin and exercised a sociological charter upon institutional life was central and led to the proposal that the story of the Baptism of Jesus charters the ritual of Christian baptism. It was suggested that this occurred in a threefold manner: by linking contemporary baptismal ritual practice with the past, by providing an imitative archetypal event and by legitimating baptism's symbols and metaphors. The vision of baptism that is offered is informed by the story of Jesus' Baptism which is summarised in abbreviated liturgical form and repeated by the Church's action of baptising. This amounts to a commemoration of Jesus' Baptism in Christian baptism. As the ritual participants imitate baptism's archetypal counterpart they are presented with, and internalise, a definition of reality which is informed by the narratives of the Baptism.

Explicit support for this proposal was found in the tradition. It was also found implicitly in the design of some ritual environments and baptismal artifacts, forming the religious consciousness of

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ordinary churchgoers. However, even where Jesus' Baptism did not receive this recognition it can still be argued that it functioned in this manner on the basis that something outside the immediate theological consciousness may still be present and exercising an active force through presuppositions deposited within the overall tradition. Opaqueness does not equate with absence, and this is especially the case when the symbols and metaphors of Christian baptism that are legitimated by Jesus' Baptism are examined.

Exploration was made of the anthropological insight that there is both an elusiveness to explicating the full meaning of a symbol and a justifiable search for the deep structure of a ritual through its symbols. Key to both these concepts was the notion of a natural symbol, one which carries its intrinsic meanings across cultural boundaries.

In the case of the dominant baptismal symbol, water, its natural symbolism is expressed in both its positive life-giving qualities and its capacity to bring death and destruction. It was found that the New Testament orders water's natural symbolism by placing the emphasis on its life-giving facility. By commencing with Johannine theological insights it was argued that the life-giving significance of aqueous symbols finds expression in connection with childbirth and in terms of living water, both of which have their biblical source in the Old Testament motif of the water flowing from the rock in the wilderness. Although the Fourth Gospel does not develop the negative side of aqueous natural symbolism it is found in other New Testament writings, but always in subordination to the positive aspects. Water becomes

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that which conveys life, yet within that frame it speaks also of death.

A comparison with the dependent baptismal symbol of oil was exploited to bring further understanding. It was found that the sensual properties of human olfaction were a means, in both reality and analogy, to understand symbolic elusivity. It is apparent that, for sacramental worship, a loss has occurred in the deodourisation of modern Western life; prior to modernity, pleasant aromas in the ritual setting were used to signify and enable participation in the divine. Also, appreciation of the structure of olfaction is fruitful. A smell is often defined by its source from which it is partially detached and to which it is traceable. Thus, the notion that a symbol unites its recipient to its 'source' is a resonant one. In baptism, through aqueous and oleaginous 'olfactory' traces, the baptisand is united with the source of life, and comes to share the eternal origin of the Word of God. Through the Spirit's uniting activity, on the basis of the new creation wrought through the suffering of the Son, the baptisand shares in the Father's life. Sacramentally, both the objectivity of the source and the subjectivity of the experience with symbol are linked in a trinitarian baptismal action.

A search for the deep structure of baptism was provoked by the intuition that water and oil may be treated as symbols with similar relational structures. They relate, respectively, to the cosmos and to the natural world and each evokes the experience of the flowing of blood. Blood, itself a natural symbol, indicates at once the giving and taking of life, not just animal but primarily, in the Christian context, human. The conclusion that the deep structure of aqueous and

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oleaginous symbols may be found in the flow of blood is a disturbing one. Aside from confronting liturgical beings with the 'deep and sinister' side of Christian worship, it indicates an archaic view of nature, in which the components of the cosmos communicate the power of the transcendent.

The deep structure of aqueous and oleaginous symbols brings the bodiliness of baptismal ritual into the foreground. The body is a symbolic template upon which the symbolism of baptism is forged, providing a means of thought and expression at a personal and social level. To investigate this further, the baptismal gestures of stripping, nakedness and re-clothing were explored in order to survey the potential of this symbolic sequence for today's baptismal practice. In addition to its ethical significance, it was found that the baptismal garment may be appropriated most intelligibly through the notion that the image of God is in the process of restoration in the context of sacramental worship; ritual clothing participates in the mystery of bodiliness which symbolically both reveals and conceals the transcendent. Also, the 'natural gestures' of the godparents in offering and receiving their charges were argued to be an inevitable part of the ritual structure of the liturgy. They are ritual movements that give rise to thought. There is the notion that there is a significant interaction between the bodies of infants offered for baptism and the social body, but there is also the thought that this is a gesture that has its background in the potential rejection of a child and in the Augustinian perspective of an infant existing in the state of original sin. If this evokes a negative view of infancy, at the English Reformation this was counter-balanced with a Gospel

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reading which presented infants positively. This was one impetus which directed the argument towards a study of baptismal metaphors.

In their regard, it is an axiom of the ritual understanding outlined that there is an interplay between identity and status. A transformatory ritual prepares the initiate for the growth of personal identity which takes place either, before, during or after the rite. Baptism imparts a status which prepares the baptisand for the development of his or her identity. Whilst material symbols promote identity - that in fact is deeply rooted in the concept - they do this primarily by promoting a social solidarity and only in a secondary way by producing common belief. Symbols are concerned with mystery and the experience of revelation and it becomes the function of metaphor to clarify the social movement towards personal identity.

Metaphors both arise from and structure the experience of ritual symbols. A metaphor presents linguistically what is perceived to be asserted by the ritual and is based on its parallel, non-ritual equivalent. It was the relationship between the metaphor and its source domain which formed the basis for an evaluation of the three major baptismal metaphors - birth, death and washing - and an organising metaphor was sought which does overarching justice to baptism, to which the other metaphors might relate and which might contribute towards the achievement of the desired symbolic intelligibility.

The proposal was made that baptismal birth fulfils this role and that the Fourth Gospel's understanding of birth, focused at the kinship scene that unfolds at the feet of the crucified one, is

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consistent with this perspective. When applied to the baptism of infants the notion of godparenthood as 'anti-parent' was argued to establish the nature of baptismal birth as an historical event in the Church's life, to orient the infant towards its future identity and to embody the tension between the human family and incorporation into the Church.

Whilst this development of the birth metaphor includes within it the notion of death-resurrection, the metaphor of baptismal washing was found to have characteristics which indicated a second order metaphor, one which takes its theological cue from those of the first order. This is consistent with the narrative reading of Jesus' Baptism that is presented which, following contemporary biblical scholarship, brings a messianic understanding of the Baptism into priority over interpretations which emphasise suffering servanthood categories. The narrative of Jesus' Baptism is understood as the assertion of the eschatological new creation, something that would involve the passion of the Son of Man, but which includes within it the full dimension of the establishment of the kingdom of God. However, questions arise regarding the reconciliation of this theology with the dominant baptismal tradition which has persisted with the understanding of baptism as the washing away of sins.

An initial answer may be found in an argument that accepts the statement of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed as dependent upon its context and emphasises the Eastern non-attribution of the guilt of original sin to the newly born, yet progresses further. One implication of the proposed understanding of Jesus' Baptism is that its interpretation turns on metaphors to do with the human experiences

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of birth and death. The metaphor of birth, transformed into the beginning of the new creation, has precedence over that of death. In his Baptism, Jesus is revealed; he himself is portrayed as the new creation, his future death and resurrection are anticipated and there is the embodiment of the forgiveness of sins, the fulfilment of Israel's covenant expectation. His Baptism, therefore, as a ritual event in which there is a symbolic presentation of reality, exhibits the well-known symbolic phenomenon in which one or more referents may lie latent. Jesus was not baptised for his personal forgiveness of sins, yet his baptism represented a conferral of social status and a definite movement in his personal identity.

In the case of direct references to the baptism of adults, the washing metaphor requires handling with care, avoiding any suggestion of a theological anthropology that involves sinfulness understood in terms of dirt and always in the context of its related first order metaphors. In the case of the baptism of infants it is possible to envisage that the whole symbolic spectrum of referents may not be active at the same time. Contemporary thought has a positive evaluation of an infant which makes it inappropriate to speak of the washing away of original sin in the immediate ritual context. In this the baptism of an infant may be said to follow the pattern of Jesus' Baptism where the metaphors of birth and death are prominent. Yet the metaphor of washing still has been understood to be legitimated by the Jordan event. In this case the metaphor of washing needs to be aligned with that of birth which has legitimate claim to organise the metaphorical structure of the liturgy. Therefore, it is possible to speak of the infant being washed 'whiter than snow'. Birth is a movement from life in the womb to an existence that is infinitely

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preferable. In the same way the baptismal washing of an infant, the passage into Church membership, is an infinitely preferable state to that of being unbaptised. This does justice to the second order metaphor of washing, but it also coheres with the notion of original sin as a partial doctrine and one which is the shadow side of the universal human need for salvation.

The path towards these conclusions has also embraced some meta-baptismal issues, of which three may be mentioned. First of all, in the analysis of ritual it was argued that establishing the nature of its purposive dimension involved the characterisation of the ritual event itself. One characterisation that has emerged into Christian discourse has been the language of initiation. It was shown that this is a concept that brings with it notions of adolescent maturity rituals, rather than communicating the broader category of a rite of passage which connotes rituals at any stage within the life-cycle. This brings a difficulty to any alignment of 'initiation' with a baptismal framework which seeks to embrace both adult and infant baptism. It suggests that baptism is subject to another overarching framework that may be less than helpful to the outworking of its theology.

Secondly, the exploration of baptismal symbols meant that attention was paid to the phenomenon of baptismal nakedness and space was given to the view that baptism has been deployed manipulatively to direct sexuality and to order Christian society to the disadvantage of the non-adult male. Suspicion of manipulation is a characteristic of contemporary thought and when this charge is made attention is drawn to one of the characteristics of ritual that relates to its

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assertiveness - the notion that ritual is now understood to be a strategic way of acting in the negotiation of power relationships. Thus, baptismal ritual may be regarded as a negotiation between the forging of a personal identity and the vision of reality presented by the Church, between individuality and conformity in the processes of socialisation into the community of faith.

Thirdly, this thesis has sought to be sensitive to feminist contributions to sacramental theology. In one case there was the concern that human blood is facilely supposed to be male blood, a positive symbol of the acceptance of sacrifice and subordination of the female. Implied here is the concern over salvation coming through a male saviour. The ritual perspective, drawing on anthropological methods, recognises that the symbolism of blood is determined by the social environment. Blood is intrinsically positive and negative, although within the Christian tradition its life-giving properties have precedence over its suggestion of death. In a milieu where women were socially subordinate but where gender categories had a fluidity, it was possible to relate to the blood of Christ as life-giving. This is just one resource in the tradition which may contribute to the rehabilitation of a consciousness of the deep structure of baptism. In another case, the concern was addressed that baptismal birth implied a negation of childbirth and therefore of female experience. Through an examination of the nature-culture debate it was recognised that human bodily experience belies their separation, which has been a premise of this assertion. Re-discovering the bodiliness of baptism, a key insight of the ritual approach, and appropriating the concept of metaphor as an affirmation of non-ritual experience mean that this is overcome. Baptism may be, among others things, a celebration of

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childbirth, a recognition of the positive nature of infant life and the experience of the universe of kinship at birth. The development of the innateness of the processual character of the birth metaphor only enhances this response to the concern, as does the ritual function of godparents.

Each of these meta-issues presupposes the methodology of this thesis, one which has sought a correlation between the disciplines of theology and social anthropology. The latter has been deployed in a number of ways. The category of ritual has received enrichment and without resort to this it has a tendency to remain rather thin and empty. In the dialogue between the two disciplines three important categories emerged - myth, symbol and metaphor - without which the enrichment brought by ritual could not be enfolded. One of their functions was to suggest. This occurred in elucidating a model for a possible relationship between a myth and its associated ritual. It also occurred in the search for the deep structure of Jewish circumcision where a cross-cultural comparison of African circumcision rites was a key hermeneutical resource. It may be objected that social anthropology is a complex discipline and cannot provide the intellectual coherence of, say, philosophical engagement. Yet this neglects one feature of the thesis - its self-authenticating quality. The justification for deploying the social anthropology of ritual lay first of all in a theological instinct, but in retrospect the results of the engagement are its primary vindication. What began perhaps as an ad hoc methodology has proved its own worth in the correlation that has been achieved.

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This is baptism in ritual perspective: baptism commemorates the story of the Baptism of Jesus, using the ritual symbols and metaphors which it legitimates. The objective has not been to write a systematic theology of baptism, but to set the necessary framework for one. The ritual perspective proposes fresh contours for baptismal theology to follow. It suggests that progress lies outside the strictures of the more traditional approaches and occurs when attention is paid to the ritual basis of baptism. It bequeaths a tension in its methodology: that between an analysis of what is the case and potentially what might be the case. Baptismal theology as ritual theology lives in the confines of such a tension. That indeed is the nature of baptism, between reality and potential, between the present ritual moment and its future fulfilment, and between the action of God and humanity's response in faith.

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