

WHAT DO YOU  
— MEAN —  
BY THIS SERVICE?



Paul F Bradshaw

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WHAT DO YOU  
— MEAN —  
BY THIS SERVICE?



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# Abbreviations

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AIR: Yarnold, E. *The awe-inspiring rites of initiation* (St Paul, Slough, England 1971).

AT: Apostolic Tradition attributed to Hippolytus; page numbers are to the English translation by G J Cuming, *Hippolytus: a text for students* (Grove Books, Nottingham 1976).

DBL: Whitaker, E C. *Documents of the baptismal liturgy*, 2nd edition (SPCK, London 1970).

PEER: Jasper, R C D & Cuming, G J (eds). *Prayers of the eucharist: early and reformed*, 3rd edition (Pueblo, New York 1987).

# INTRODUCTION

This book aims not merely to describe what rites Christians performed during the first few centuries of the Church's existence, but also to explain why they did them. What caused them to choose those particular liturgical forms instead of others? What did they understand themselves to be doing in their worship? What effect did that have on the development of Christian doctrine? And how did new doctrinal formulations in turn affect the character of the rites? If readers keep these questions in mind as they go through each chapter, they should have little difficulty in finding the answers in the text.

In such a small volume it has not been possible to deal with the subject in great detail. Nevertheless, even though it has been necessary to tell the story in simple terms, the account has tried to remain faithful to the most recent historical scholarship, and nearly all the chapters conclude with some suggestions for further reading. More extensive background to the sources and methods used in the study of early Christian liturgy can also be found in my book *The search for the origins of Christian worship* (SPCK, London, & Oxford University Press, New York 1992).

Paul F Bradshaw  
Christmas, 1994



# CHRISTIAN INITIATION

In this section, we shall first examine the roots of Christian baptismal thought and practice in New Testament times, and then see how different elements of this were picked up and developed in various early Christian traditions, concentrating principally on the contrasts between Syria and North Africa, before going on to look at the movement towards a more common baptismal theology and liturgy in the fourth century. We shall end our survey by considering the effects that the later spread of infant baptism had on both the practice and understanding of Christian initiation.

# 1 | BEGINNINGS

Jesus apparently did not leave his followers with a fixed set of doctrines but rather with an experience that changed their lives, which they then tried to articulate in their own ways. As a result, what we find in the New Testament is not one standard theology of baptism or a systematised explanation of what it means to become a Christian, but a variety of ways of speaking about that experience, quite different images and metaphors being employed by different writers in their attempts to communicate it to others.

## Antecedents

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The New Testament implies that the custom of baptising those who were converted to the Christian faith was derived from John the Baptist (see, for example, Matthew 3:1–12), but the source of his own practice is uncertain. Some scholars have argued that it was based on the ablutions of the Jewish Essene community at Qumran, but these were

repeated washings related to the need for constant ritual purity and do not seem to have included an initiatory baptism. Others have suggested that John was influenced by the practice of baptising new converts to Judaism, but there is some doubt whether this was being done in his time or whether it was adopted only at a later date. A third possibility is that it arose out of the Israelite traditions of ritual purification (see, for example, Leviticus 15:5–13) and/or of prophetic symbolism, which had spoken of God's people being cleansed with pure water in preparation for the advent of the messianic age (see, for example, Ezekiel 36:2–8).

Whether the Christian adoption of baptism began with Jesus himself or only in the Church after his resurrection cannot easily be resolved. All three synoptic gospels record Jesus' own baptism by John but say nothing of him baptising his followers. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, does not mention Jesus being baptised but does speak of him baptising others (John 3:22, 26; 4:1; but cf 4:2). Matthew 28:19–20 contains a command to baptise all nations, but there are difficulties in accepting this as an authentic saying of the risen Lord.

### Baptismal practice

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Whatever its origins, however, it appears that at least in certain Christian communities from early times it became the custom to initiate new converts into the Church through a process which included baptism in water. Unfortunately, the New Testament offers very few clues as to the manner in which the baptisms might have been carried out. The preference for the use of 'living' (that is, naturally flowing) water that is found in some later sources (see also John 7:38) suggests that they may at first have usually been performed in a river or pool, where possible, rather than in a domestic bath-house. The image of baptism as participation in the death and resurrection of Christ used by Paul (see Romans 6:3ff) seems naturally to imply that candidates would have been totally submerged in the water, but such a practice would certainly not have been easily possible in domestic baths, and the custom found later in some places of candidates standing in a shallow font and having water poured all over them may also have existed in the earliest times. Both methods involved total immersion in water – it was only the way of achieving it that differed.

What else might have been involved besides the actual immersion is not made explicit in the New Testament. We would expect there to have been a preliminary period of instruction in the faith, at least in the case of Gentile candidates who lacked the religious background possessed by Jewish converts, but this need not have been the extensive formal catechumenate (from the Greek word *catechumen*, 'learner') found in later centuries. Several New Testament passages speak of baptism being 'in the name of Jesus' (see, for example, Acts 2:38), which suggests that his name was invoked in some way during the ceremony. This could have been in the form of a statement made over the candidate (for example, 'I baptise you in the name of...'), such as we find in later Syrian usage, but it need not necessarily have been restricted to that. It could also have referred to some confession of faith in Jesus made by the candidate at the moment of baptism, such as we find in later Western sources. At the very least, it seems probable that some sort of ritual dialogue would have preceded the immersion. Acts 2:38 refers to the necessity for repentance to accompany baptism, and this would surely have needed to have been expressed verbally. Similarly, Acts 8:37, although found only in certain manuscripts of the text, seems to embody the sort of profession of faith that candidates in some places would have made prior to baptism: 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'

### 'Confirmation' in the New Testament?

---

Some scholars have argued that in New Testament times the immersion in water was regularly followed within the same ceremony by a separate ritual gesture expressing the gift of the Holy Spirit, either in the form of the imposition of hands on the newly baptised or by an anointing with oil, and that this constitutes the biblical foundation of the later practice of 'confirmation'. They point to such passages as Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, and Luke 3:22, where Jesus receives the Holy Spirit immediately after his baptism; to Acts 8:14–17, where Peter and John lay their hands on the Samaritans baptised by Philip and they receive the Holy Spirit; to Acts 19:1–7, where baptism is followed by the imposition of Paul's hands and the reception of the Holy Spirit; to Hebrews 6:2, which mentions 'the laying on of hands' directly after 'ablutions'; to 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30, where Christians are spoken of as having

been sealed with the Holy Spirit; to Revelation 7:3, which speaks of the servants of God being sealed upon their foreheads; and to 1 John 2:20 and 27, which refer to an anointing by the Holy One that the readers have received.

Other scholars, however, have contested this interpretation of the passages. They argue that the descriptions of Jesus' baptism do not necessarily mirror the ritual structure of early Christian baptism, and the two narratives in Acts may not describe the regular form of Christian initiation but may instead be accounts of unusual situations: the mission of the Hellenists in Samaria had to be endorsed by the Jerusalem apostles, and the disciples of John needed baptism in the name of Jesus in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> We need to remember that Acts also describes the gift of the Spirit as preceding the act of immersion in the case of the baptism of the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:44–48). Since this episode is usually interpreted as being an exceptional situation, symbolising a Gentile equivalent of the Pentecost experience (Acts 2:1–4), rather than a description of standard initiatory practice, why should the same not be true of the other baptismal accounts?

As for the other New Testament references cited above, that in Hebrews is too vague to allow any firm conclusions to be drawn about baptismal practice, and the various allusions to 'sealing' and 'anointing' may not be reflections of actual liturgical ceremonies but merely vivid metaphors for what was thought to have happened inwardly to those who became Christians.

Thus, at best, the New Testament evidence is inconclusive with regard to any post-baptismal ceremonies. Moreover, the theory that the imposition of hands was a standard element in first-century practice becomes still less credible when we take into account the testimony of the later liturgical tradition. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, while North African and Roman sources certainly do seem to have known a post-baptismal anointing and imposition of hands, the early Syrian practice apparently did not include any post-baptismal ceremonies at all, although it was familiar with a pre-baptismal anointing. This later diversity suggests that the whole idea of the existence of a uniform baptismal ritual in primitive Christianity is misconceived. While it is possible that some communities may have practised an anointing

and/or imposition of hands from early times, it does not look as if all followed that custom, still less that there was some apostolic directive to do so – or else we would be at a loss to explain the subsequent Syrian departure from that norm.

We cannot even say with total certainty that immersion in water was the one universal element in Christian initiation rites from the beginning. Again, it is possible that immersion was originally limited only to certain groups, with others perhaps having different practices, some of which – such as anointing or foot washing – may have survived as ancillary rites to water baptism in the standardised initiation process of later centuries.

### Baptismal images and metaphors

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The language and images used about baptism by the New Testament writers further support the idea that there were variations in liturgical practice from place to place. For what we find here is not a standardised baptismal theology shared by all Christians but a range of different ways of interpreting and expressing what was thought to happen when a person became a Christian. Hebrews 6:4 and 10:32, for instance, speak of the baptised as having been 'enlightened'. The same image underlies the statement in 1 Peter 2:9 that God has 'called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'; and it recurs, as we shall see in later chapter, in the description of baptism in the second-century writer Justin Martyr. John 3, on the other hand, uses instead the metaphor of rebirth by water and Spirit; a similar concept appears in Titus 3:5, which speaks of 'the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit'; and once again this idea is picked up by Justin Martyr. In the Acts of the Apostles, the emphasis falls instead on the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, as, for example, in Acts 2:38: 'And Peter said to them. "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."'

By contrast to these ways of speaking, in Paul's baptismal theology the primary image seems to have been union with Christ through participation in his death and resurrection (see especially Romans 6:2ff; Colossians 2:12). But he also makes use of other metaphors. As we have

mentioned earlier, he speaks of Christians as having been sealed as God's people: '[God] has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee' (2 Corinthians 1:22). The same image recurs in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the readers are said to have been 'sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance...' (1:13–14; see also 4:30); and a similar theme is found in Revelation 7:30, which speaks of the servants of God being sealed upon their foreheads. This metaphor seems to be derived from commerce, where a seal authenticated a change of ownership: Christians were once slaves to sin, but now they have been marked as belonging instead to God (see Romans 6:16–23), and the Holy Spirit constitutes, as it were, the 'deposit' which guarantees that the transaction will be brought to completion when Christ returns.

Galatians 3:27 offers what seems to be yet another metaphorical image, that of baptism as being clothed in a new garment, since it describes the baptised as having 'put on Christ'; and Colossians 3:9–10 and Ephesians 4:22–24 speak of putting off the old nature and putting on the new. There is also a similar eschatological picture in 2 Corinthians 5:1–5, which talks of the longing 'to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that ... we may not be found naked'. Such language may well have arisen as a result of baptismal candidates stripping off their clothes and going down naked into the water and then dressing again when they emerged from it. Although we have no first-century testimony that this was then the usual practice, it is well attested in later sources. To these citations we may perhaps add the references in Mark's gospel to the young man at the arrest of Jesus who left the linen cloth he was wearing and ran away naked (14:51–52) and of the young man sitting on the right side of the empty tomb, dressed in a white robe (16:5). Robin Scroggs and Kent Goff have suggested that this pair of stories was intended as a baptismal image,<sup>2</sup> and this is certainly an attractive interpretation of passages which have often puzzled commentators. It is interesting to observe that fourth-century sources speak of the newly baptised not just putting back on their former garments, but being clothed in white robes. Could this practice possibly go back to New Testament times, or is it – as seems more likely – a much later development that was encouraged by such texts as Revelation 7:9–14, which describes the countless multitude wearing robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb?

Finally, we should note that the image of being 'anointed' with the Holy Spirit found in 1 John 2:20 and 27 arose out of a different concept from that of being 'sealed' with the Spirit used in the Pauline writings. In Israelite tradition both kings and priest had been anointed when they were appointed, as a sign that they had been chosen by God. For example, in 1 Samuel 16:1–13 the prophet Samuel anoints David as king 'and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward'. The term 'Messiah' itself means in Hebrew 'the anointed one', which was translated into Greek as *Christos*, Christ; and so it is hardly surprising that early Christian writers thought of Jesus as having been anointed by God with the Holy Spirit (see Luke 4:16; Acts 4:27; Acts 10:38) or at least as having received God's spirit at his baptism (Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22). Since they believed that Christians at their baptism received the same Holy Spirit, it was but a small step to think that they, too, were being anointed as Jesus had been. The ideas that Christians constituted a 'royal priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9; see also 2:5) or a 'kingdom of priests' (Revelations 1:6; see also 5:10), which was derived from Exodus 19:6, would also have contributed to seeing baptism as anointing. Both these images led quite naturally to the adoption of a literal anointing with oil as a baptismal ceremony, such as we find in later sources.

## NOTES

- 1 See Geoffrey Lampe, *The seal of the Spirit*, 2nd ed (SPCK, London 1967), pp 64ff; Gerd Luudemann, *Early Christianity according to the traditions in Acts* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1989), pp 96–97, 210–211.
- 2 Robin Scroggs & Kent I Goff, 'Baptism in Mark: dying and rising with Christ', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973), pp 531–548.

## FOR FURTHER READING

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# 2 | SYRIA AND EGYPT

## SYRIA

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Our sources of information for baptismal practice in the early Syrian tradition are rather sparse, but enough to enable us to piece together a rough outline of how Christian initiation was performed and understood there in the second and third centuries.

### The Didache

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Chapter 7 of the ancient church order known as the Didache, or 'Teaching of the Twelve Apostles', paints a very simple picture:

Concerning baptism, baptise thus: having first recounted all these things, baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living water; if you do not have living water, baptise in other water; if you cannot in cold, then in warm; if you do not have

either, pour water three times on the head in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Before the baptism let the baptiser and the one to be baptised and any others who are able first fast; you shall instruct the one to be baptised to fast one or two [days] before.

Scholars have found it difficult to date the *Didache* precisely, but usually place its compilation somewhere between the second half of the first century and the first half of the second century. These instructions suggest that the normal pattern of Christian initiation consisted of a period of instruction and fasting, by both the candidate and at least some members of the Christian community, followed by immersion in running water accompanied by the recitation of the name of the Trinity. The scholar Arthur Vououbus, however, believes that this trinitarian formula is a later addition to the text, and that the original version was simply baptism in the name of the Lord.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the formula is reminiscent of Matthew 28:19–20 ('Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you ...'); and, whenever they were written, both passages imply that the earliest custom of invoking the name of Jesus in baptism was eventually expanded in this way, as the Church began to define its faith more fully. Other sources confirm that what was intended by these references was that the one baptising should say over the candidate: 'I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

The main concern of the baptismal instructions in the *Didache*, however, is to make provision for occasions when it was impossible to perform the ritual in what was seen as the normal way: immersion in cold, running water. Again, this suggests the Church was undergoing a transition from an outdoor, missionary context to a more domestic situation that required some modification of its earlier practices.

## The Didascalia

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When we compare these simple directions with other early Syrian sources, however, the most striking feature is the important place that the others give to a pre-baptismal anointing with oil. The third-century Syrian church order known as the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, for example, requires female deacons to be appointed in order to carry

out this ministry for women candidates, and it instructs the bishop as follows:

In the first place, when women go down into the baptismal water: those who go down into the water ought to be anointed by a deaconess with the oil of anointing; and where there is no woman to hand, and especially no deaconess, he who baptises must of necessity anoint the woman who is being baptised. But where there is a woman present, and especially a deaconess, it is not fitting that women should be seen by men, but with the imposition of the hand you should anoint the head only. As of old, priests and kings were anointed in Israel, so do you likewise, with the imposition of the hand, anoint the head of those who receive baptism, whether it be of men or of women; and afterwards, whether you yourself baptise, or you tell the deacons or presbyters to baptise, let a woman, a deaconess, anoint the women, as we have already said. But let a man pronounce over them the invocation of the divine names in the water.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that the Didascalia regards the unction of the candidates' heads performed by the bishop as an expression of their entry into the royal priesthood of the Church (see 1 Peter 2:5 and 9; Revelation 5:10). But it also seems that it was expected that their whole bodies would be anointed as well: otherwise, there would have been no necessity for the female deacons.

## The Acts of Thomas

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We come across this same twofold unction in other Syrian texts from the same period. The third-century apocryphal Acts of Thomas contains several descriptions of baptisms. Two refer to an anointing of the head alone before the immersion and associate this with the Messiah (chapters 27 and 132). Two others include a prayer for the blessing of the oil, mention the anointing of both the head and the whole body, and associate the action instead with healing (chapters 121 and 157). A fifth account speaks explicitly only of the immersion in water, at least in the Syriac version of the text, although an allusion to the 'seal' here could be an oblique reference to anointing (chapter 49).

While it is possible to harmonise these various accounts of anointing by surmising that an unction of both head and body was presumed in

every case, but only explicitly mentioned in two of them, the scholar Gabriele Winkler has put forward the theory that they represent two different stages of development in the baptismal rite: the earlier practice was to anoint the head alone, as continued to be the custom in the later Armenian rite, and the anointing of the whole body was a later addition to the ritual. She argues that, in the earliest tradition:

Christian baptism is shaped after Christ's baptism in the Jordan. As Jesus had received the anointing through the divine presence in the appearance of a dove, and was invested as the Messiah, so in Christian baptism every candidate is anointed and, in connection with this anointing, the gift of the Spirit is conferred. Therefore the main theme of this prebaptismal anointing is the entry into the eschatological kingship of the Messiah, being in the true sense of the word assimilated to the Messiah-King through this anointing.<sup>3</sup>

Winkler believes that this explains why at first oil was poured over the head alone (this was the custom at the anointing of the kings of Israel), why the coming of the Spirit was associated with it (the Spirit of the Lord came over the newly nominated king), and why it was the anointing and not the immersion in water that seemed to be regarded as the central feature of baptism in the early Syrian sources (this was the only visible gesture for what was held to be the central event at Christ's baptism — his revelation as the Messiah-King through the descent of the Spirit). The later introduction of the anointing of the whole body would thus have led to a reinterpretation of the significance of the oil in terms of a healing of the whole person, and hence to the addition of prayers that sanctified the oil and invested it with healing power.

Of course, it is equally possible that what we have here may be not so much a later addition to the earlier rite as the beginning of a fusion into a more composite form of what had originally been separate traditions. While some early Christian communities in Syria may have done as Winkler suggests and adopted an anointing of the head as a symbol of participation in the spirit of the Messiah, others may have practised instead an anointing of the whole body as a symbol of protection and healing, perhaps influenced by pagan religions; others who included an unction of the head may have related it directly to the Old Testament custom of anointing kings and priests (as is the case in the Didascalia) rather than to Jesus' anointing with the Spirit at his baptism; and still

other groups may have known only a simple immersion in water, as seems to be the case in the *Didache*. It is even possible that at least some of those for whom the anointing was the central feature of initiation may not at first have included a water baptism at all in their practice. Thus, only gradually would these Syrian Christians have appropriated elements and concepts from one another's traditions into their own. This might help to explain why the anointing with the Spirit precedes rather than follows the water bath, in contrast to the sequence of the gospel accounts of Jesus' own baptism.

### Faith and baptism

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The Syrian sources also reveal another distinctive feature in their initiation practice, a two-stage ritual. The *Didascalia* offers the first sign of this in its statement that 'when the heathen desire and promise to repent, saying "We believe", we receive them into the congregation so that they may hear the word, but do not receive them into communion until they receive the seal and are fully initiated'.<sup>4</sup> It may seem odd that converts were expected to express their repentance and faith before they were allowed to hear the word, but probably what is meant here is that, while there would have been some preliminary instruction designed to bring them to repentance and faith, certain teachings were reserved until after they had made an expression of commitment to Christ. Although the teaching had apparently disappeared from this interval by the fourth century, John Chrysostom seems to have known in Antioch both a formula of renunciation of evil and an act of adherence to Christ ('I pledge myself to you, O Christ') still occurring on the day before the baptism. A similar pattern can also be found in the rite of Constantinople in the fifth century; and the testimony of Theodore of Mopsuestia (fourth century) and of the later Syrian rites show traces of this twofold structure, even though both parts now take place on the same occasion.

### Conclusions

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If we can generalise at all from this early Syrian evidence – and that may be a dangerous thing to do – we could perhaps describe the understanding of initiation here as being primarily Christological in

character. The act of commitment to Christ seems to mark the key turning-point in the process, and what followed after articulated ritually the positive consequences of that act: the candidate was admitted to receive Christ's teaching, anointed with the priestly/kingly/messianic spirit which Christ had received at his baptism in the Jordan, and immersed in the water in the name of the Lord (later of the Trinity). Because the gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism link it with the affirmation of Christ's divine sonship ('You are my beloved Son'), fourth-century Syrian writers also portray Christian baptism as a birth to new life, and speak of the baptismal font both as the Jordan and as a womb.

## EGYPT

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The complete pattern of the earliest baptismal practice in Egypt is not easy to discern because of a lack of evidence, but certain features can be made out. In some respects there are resemblances to Syrian practice. In particular, like the Syrian rites, the Egyptian tradition seems at first to have known only a pre-baptismal anointing and no post-baptismal ceremonies. The meaning attached to this anointing is not very fully spelled out, but it is clearly considered integral to the baptism, is certainly not exorcistic in character, and appears to have been accompanied by a trinitarian formula, which we also find in fourth-century Syrian sources. A prayer over the oil in the fourth-century Sacramentary of Sarapion speaks of its function in terms of healing and re-creation; Cyril of Alexandria (d 444) termed it the 'chrism of catechesis'; and the later Coptic rites call it 'the oil of gladness' – a designation also used by John Chrysostom in Antioch. On the other hand, in at least two respects Egyptian practice was different from the Syrian.

### The baptismal season

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As in other parts of the world, baptism was usually preceded by a period of fasting by both candidates and community. As it had become the custom in Egypt from early times – we do not know exactly when – for Christians to observe a forty-day season of fasting in imitation of Jesus' fast in the wilderness immediately after their celebration of his baptism on 6 January (see below, p 108), the end of this fast was adopted

as the preferred time of year for Christian baptisms to take place, and the forty days then constituted the period of the catechumenate. The candidates were apparently enrolled as catechumens at the beginning of that season, received instruction and fasted together with the Christian community during it, and underwent a final scrutiny as to their readiness for admission to baptism two days before the end of it and the time for the administration of the baptismal rite.

### The profession of faith

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In another respect, Egyptian baptismal practice seems to have resembled Western rather than Eastern custom. It appears from third-century sources that the immersion in water was accompanied or preceded by credal interrogation similar to that found in North Africa and in Rome (in which the candidates responded to questions about their belief in the Trinity — see below, pp 18–19) rather than by an affirmation of faith of the kind revealed in Syrian sources, where prior to the baptismal event the candidates themselves made a statement professing their adherence to Christ. However, there are some signs that the fivefold confession of faith found instead of this in later Coptic liturgical rites may have also existed in early times, perhaps as an alternative to the interrogatory form in some places.

### NOTES

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- 1 Liturgical traditions in the *Didache* (ETSE, Stockholm 1968), pp 35–39. There is also a passage in the apocryphal Acts of Paul where Thecla immerses herself in water, saying 'In the name of Jesus Christ I baptise myself ...', which seems to point to a formula something like 'I baptise you in the name of Jesus Christ' as having been usual in early times. See J K Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Clarendon, Oxford 1993), p 370.
- 2 *Didascalia* 3:12; English translation from Sebastian Brock and Michael Vasey, *The liturgical portions of the Didascalia* (Grove Books, Nottingham 1982), p 22.
- 3 'The original meaning of the prebaptismal anointing and its implications', *Worship* 52 (1978), p 36.
- 4 2:39 (Brock & Vasey, *The liturgical portions of the Didascalia*, p 12).

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# 3 | ROME AND NORTH AFRICA

## ROME

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### Justin Martyr

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Our earliest evidence comes from Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century. He describes baptism thus:

As many as are persuaded and believe that these things which we describe and teach are true, and undertake to live accordingly, are taught to pray and ask God, while fasting, for the forgiveness of their sins; and we pray and fast with them. Then they are led by us to a place where there is water, and they are reborn after the manner of rebirth by which we also were reborn: for they are then washed in the water in the name of the Father and Lord God of all things, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit . . .

... over him that now chooses to be reborn and repents of his sins is named the Father and Lord God of all things. This name only is called upon by him that leads to the washing him that is to be washed: for no one can speak the Name of God, who is ineffable; and anyone who might boldly claim to do so is quite mad. This washing is called enlightenment, because those who are experiencing these things have their minds enlightened. And he that is being enlightened is washed in the Name of Jesus Christ who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, which through the prophets foretold all things concerning Jesus.

After we have thus washed him that is persuaded and declares his assent, we lead him to those who are called brethren, where they are assembled, and make common prayer fervently for ourselves, for him that has been enlightened, and for all men everywhere... When we have ended the prayers, we greet one another with a kiss. Then bread and a cup of water and of mixed wine are brought to him that presides over the brethren...<sup>1</sup>

The process thus appears relatively simple, consisting of a period (of unspecified duration) of instruction, fasting, and prayer, by both candidate and community before the baptism; then immersion itself, accompanied in some way by the assent of the candidate and the naming of the Trinity; and finally the entry into the assembly of other Christians to share in common prayer, the kiss, and the celebration of the eucharist with them. Apart from the absence of any reference to an anointing, therefore, this description sounds very similar to what we have seen in Syria.

On the other hand, it is necessary to remember that here Justin Martyr was writing a defence of Christianity to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, and so may not have included full details of everything that went on, or indeed have been referring specifically to practice in Rome but instead providing a generic outline of Christian baptismal customs. A small number of scholars have tried to argue that if one reads between the lines of Justin's writings, it is possible to discern there evidence suggesting that Justin did not regard water baptism as the whole of Christian initiation, but also knew of a post-baptismal ceremony that effected the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Their arguments have, however, failed to convince many.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note the images used by Justin to describe the meaning of the ritual: the New Testament ideas of rebirth, washing, and enlightenment predominate; but there is no hint of the Pauline notion of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. One might easily suppose that Justin omitted this simply because it would not have been easily intelligible to a pagan audience, but in fact hardly any Christian writer before the fourth century draws on that Pauline concept in connection with baptism. Hence, it seems as if it was not yet used as the central interpretation of the meaning of baptism that it was to become in later times.

### The Apostolic Tradition

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Many scholars would add to the apparent Roman evidence provided by Justin Martyr the baptismal instructions contained in an enigmatic church order, usually identified as being the Apostolic Tradition written by Hippolytus of Rome in the early third century. However, some scholars believe that this attribution may be mistaken, and so the church order may not reflect Roman practice, nor may its contents necessarily date from the early third century. Instead, it could well be a composite document made up of a number of different elements originating in different time periods, some perhaps as old as the second century, others no older than the early fourth century. For this reason, we shall not use it here to try to establish what baptismal customs might have been in Rome in the century after Justin Martyr. But since some – though by no means all – of what it prescribes is similar to what we learn from our principal North African witness from this period, Tertullian, we shall note those parallels as we examine his testimony.

## NORTH AFRICA

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Tertullian, writing around the beginning of the third century, does not offer a single continuous account of the baptismal ritual, but from the various references to it that are scattered throughout his writings, we can reconstruct the process known to him as follows:<sup>4</sup>

## The preferred baptismal season

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The Passover [Easter] provides the day of most solemnity for baptism, for then was accomplished our Lord's passion, and into it we are baptised . . . After that, Pentecost is a most auspicious period for arranging baptisms, for during it our Lord's resurrection was several times made known among the disciples, and the grace of the Holy Spirit first given . . . For all that, every day is a Lord's day: any hour, any season is suitable for baptism (De baptismo 19).

This was not just an idiosyncratic idea of Tertullian's, for we find the same preference for Easter expressed in one of the genuine writings of Hippolytus of Rome, and a possible hint of it in the Apostolic Tradition.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that in North Africa and in Rome there were the beginnings of a recovery of Paul's theology of baptism as participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

## Preparation

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Those who are at the point of entering upon baptism ought to pray, with frequent prayers, fastings, bendings of the knee, and all-night vigils, along with the confession of all their sins, so as to make a copy of the baptism of John (De baptismo 20).

Like the Syrian sources, Tertullian does not indicate whether there was a formally structured catechumenate lasting for an extended length of time, but there was no doubt some period of instruction, and this quotation implies the existence of a final stage of preparation that was particularly expressive of repentance. Vestiges of older practices in a number of later sources from various parts of the world suggest that at one time this final stage lasted for three weeks,<sup>6</sup> which may well have been the custom known to Tertullian.

Apostolic Tradition 15–20, on the other hand, contains much more extensive directions for the period of preparation, including the expectation that the catechumenate will normally last three years, a list of occupations deemed incompatible with being a Christian (most of which can be paralleled in Tertullian's works), the careful examination of the conduct of the candidates during their catechumenate to ensure that a real change in their way of life had taken place, and frequent exor-

cism during the final stage before baptism. Some of this material may originate from a later period than that of Tertullian, or to a region of the world where the catechumenal process had developed further by this time.

### Prayer over the water

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All waters, when God is invoked, acquire the sacred significance of conveying sanctity: for at once the Spirit comes down from heaven and stays upon the waters, sanctifying them from within himself, and when thus sanctified they absorb the power of sanctifying... Thus when the waters have in some sense acquired healing power by an angel's intervention, the spirit is in those waters corporally washed, while the flesh is in those same waters spiritually cleansed (De baptismo 4).

Tertullian is the very first person to mention the invocation of the Holy Spirit over the water, and it probably arose as a result of the change in the location of baptisms, from rivers and lakes to indoor baths or tanks, to which we earlier saw the *Didache* allude. While the naturally flowing character of the former could enable them to be seen as 'living' and already imbued with God's spirit, the water in the latter would have seemed deficient in this respect, and hence in need of investing with the power that they lacked.<sup>7</sup> We have already seen this happening with regard to the oil used in Syria, and it is interesting to note that Tertullian describes the power bestowed on the sanctified water as that of healing, as is also the case with Syrian oil.

### The renunciation of evil

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When on the point of coming to the water we then and there, as also somewhat earlier in church under the bishop's control, affirm that we renounce the devil and his pomp and his angels (De corona 3).

Tertullian's description suggests that the renunciation happened more than once during the period of preparation for baptism as well as immediately before the immersion. Elsewhere he speaks of renouncing 'the devil, his retinue, and his works'.<sup>8</sup> It may have been in the form of a

direct address to the devil by the candidate, such as is attested in the Apostolic Tradition, 'I renounce you, Satan, and all your service and all your works'; or it may have been in the form of a response to a question put to the candidate ('Do you renounce . . .'), such as we find in later sources, often divided into three parts (Satan, works, pomps), in order to parallel the threefold profession of faith.<sup>9</sup>

### The triple profession of faith and triple immersion

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When we have entered the water, we make profession of the Christian faith in the words of its rule (*De spectaculis* 4).

We are thrice immersed, while we answer interrogations rather more extensive than our Lord has prescribed in the gospel (*De corona* 3).

For not once only, but thrice are we baptised into each of the three persons at each of the several names (*Adversus Praxean* 26).

The flesh is washed that the soul may be made spotless (*De resurrectione carnis* 8).

Tertullian's brief references do not supply a very clear picture of the practice, but we can fill out what is probably in mind by means of the more detailed directions in the Apostolic Tradition. Although its text is not entirely clear at this particular point, it appears that the original directed:

As he who is to be baptised is descending into the water, let him who baptises him say thus: 'Do you believe in God the Father omnipotent?' And let the one being baptised say, 'I believe.' And the giver, having his hand placed on his head, shall baptise him once. And then he shall say: 'Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born from the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose again on the third day alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?' And when he has said, 'I believe', he shall be baptised again. And he shall say again: 'Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy Church and the resurrection of the flesh? Then he who is being baptised shall say, 'I believe', and thus he shall be baptised a third time.<sup>10</sup>

The particular formulation of the statement of belief known to Tertullian may not have developed quite as fully as this one, but one can easily see that it was out of baptismal professions of faith of this kind that the so-called Apostles' Creed evolved,<sup>11</sup> and it was doubtless the transition from a simple declaration of faith in Jesus to a trinitarian affirmation that caused the immersion also to assume a triple character.

This element constitutes one of the most striking differences from Syrian practice. While in Syria the candidates' expression of belief had taken place before they approached the water, and the immersion was accompanied by a trinitarian formula spoken over the candidate, here the trinitarian profession of faith itself in effect constitutes the baptismal formula. It thus offered a vivid visual representation of the intimate connection that was understood to exist between faith and baptism. For there was no suggestion for Tertullian or other early Christian theologians that baptism could somehow 'work' without the presence of faith in the candidate. Tertullian himself affirmed that 'that washing is a sealing of faith, which faith is begun and is commended by the faith of repentance. We are not washed in order that we may cease sinning, but because we have ceased, since in heart we have been bathed already' (*De penitentia* 6). Similarly, Origen in Alexandria maintained that 'if someone who is still sinning comes to the bath, he does not receive the forgiveness of sins' (*Hom in Luc* 21). Naturally, the requirement of faith presented something of a problem in the case of infant baptism, as we shall see in a later chapter.

### Post-baptismal anointing

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After that we come up from the washing and are anointed with the blessed unction, following that ancient practice by which, ever since Aaron was anointed by Moses, there was a custom of anointing them for priesthood with oil out of a horn. That is why [the high priest] is called a christ, from 'chrism' which is [the Greek for] 'anointing'; and from this also our Lord obtained his title, though it had become a spiritual anointing, in that he was anointed with the Spirit of God the Father (*De baptismo* 7).

The flesh is anointed that the soul may be consecrated (*De resurrectione carnis* 8).

Here we encounter a close parallel to the anointing and its interpretation found in the Syrian Didascalia — but in a quite different position, following rather than preceding the immersion.

### Sign of the cross

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The flesh is signed [with the cross] that the soul too may be protected (De resurrectione carnis 8).

Tertullian apparently understands this post-baptismal ceremony to have a protective function, God's mark on a person being able to ward off evil powers.

### Imposition of hands with prayer

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Next follows the imposition of the hand in benediction, inviting and welcoming the Holy Spirit (De baptismo 8).

The flesh is overshadowed by the imposition of the hand that the soul may be illumined by the Spirit (De resurrectione carnis 8).

Here is another major difference from Syrian practice, not merely in the presence of a post-baptismal imposition of hands, but in Tertullian's association of that particular gesture with the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is a similar imposition of hands with prayer in Apostolic Tradition 21, and some versions of the text of that prayer associate the action with the bestowal of the Spirit, while others speak of the baptised having already received the Spirit through their immersion in the water.

### Eucharist, including milk and honey

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Made welcome then [into the assembly] we partake of a compound of milk and honey (De corona 3).

The flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ so that the soul as well may be replete with God (De resurrectione carnis 8).

The same custom, of offering the newly baptised milk and honey together with the bread and wine in the celebration of the eucharist that concluded their initiation rite, is also attested in Apostolic Tradition 21,

which explicitly relates its symbolism to the fulfilment of the Old Testament promise that God's people would inherit a land flowing with milk and honey.

## Conclusion

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All this is very different in a number of respects from what we encountered in Syria. In contrast to the Christological character that we ascribed to initiation there, this might perhaps be described as soteriological: the biblical model is not Christ's baptism in the Jordan, but rather his passage from death to resurrection, in which the candidates symbolically share, by renouncing this evil world and going down into the water, where they proclaim their faith and come up again to be anointed as God's priestly people, to be marked as his own with the sign of the cross, to receive the Spirit of the risen Lord, and to enter the promised land.

## NOTES

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- 1 I Apol 61, 65; English translation from DBL, p 2 (with minor additions).
- 2 See especially Gregory Dix, 'The seal in the second century', *Theology* 51 (1948), pp 7–12; E C Ratcliff, 'Justin Martyr and confirmation', *Theology* 51 (1948), pp 133–139 = A H Couratin & David Tripp (eds), E C Ratcliff. *Liturgical studies* (SPCK, London 1976), pp 110–117; A H Couratin, 'Justin Martyr and confirmation — a note', *Theology* 55 (1952), pp 458–460; L S Thornton, *Confirmation: its place in the baptismal mystery* (SPCK, London 1954), pp. 34–51. See also J D C Fisher, *Confirmation then and now* (SPCK, London 1978), pp 11–21.
- 3 See, for example, Lampe, *The seal of the spirit*, pp. 109–11; L L Mitchell, *Baptismal anointing* (SPCK, London 1966), pp 13–15.
- 4 All texts cited are taken from DBL, pp 7–10.
- 5 Hippolytus, Commentary on Daniel 13:15; AT 20 (p 17).
- 6 See Maxwell Johnson, 'From three weeks to forty days: baptismal preparation and the origins of Lent', *Studia Liturgica* 20 (1990), pp 185–200.
- 7 See J D C Fisher, 'The consecration of water in the early rites of baptism', *Studia Patristica* 2 (1957), pp 41–46.
- 8 De spectaculis 4 (DBL, p 9).
- 9 See DBL, p 183, for the later Roman form. In Milan, at least from the time of Ambrose onwards, the question was in two parts (devil and his works; the world and its pleasures — later, his world and his pomps): *ibid* pp 128, 131, 137, 143, 148.

- 10 AT 21 (p 19). The first two sentences, however, have been reconstructed on the basis of the version of the document found in the later church order known as the *Testamentum Domini*.
- 11 See J N D Kelly, *Early Christian creeds* (Longmans, Green, & Co, London 1950), pp 30ff.

## 4 | THE FOURTH-CENTURY SYNTHESIS

The cessation of persecution against the Church in the early fourth century brought a major change in the practice of Christian initiation. Because it was now safe and respectable to become a Christian, there was a considerable increase in the number of people wanting to join the Church. However, not all of these took the step because they had experienced an inner conversion: some did so from less worthy motives, such as the desire to marry a Christian or to please a master or friend, or because it promised to be advantageous to their career or political ambitions. Moreover, once having become catechumens, many people were in no hurry to complete the process of initiation. Since they were already regarded as Christians, they saw no need to proceed to baptism itself, especially as that would leave no second chance to obtain the forgiveness of sins that baptism was believed to convey: it seemed preferable to delay the actual baptism as long as possible so as to be sure of having all one's sins forgiven and so of gaining salvation. Consequently, many parents enrolled their children as catechumens early in their life but delayed presenting them for baptism at least until

after the passions of youth had subsided and there was less chance of them succumbing to temptation; and many adults deferred their own baptism until they became seriously ill and feared that they might die unbaptised.

All of this had a profound effect on the nature of the baptismal process itself. Whereas in primitive Christianity it had functioned as a ritual expression of a genuine conversion experience that candidates were already undergoing in their lives, now in the fourth century the baptismal process became instead the means of conveying a profound experience to the candidates in the hope of bringing about their conversion. In order to accomplish this new role, the process became much more dramatic – one might even say theatrical – in character. Taking their cue from contemporary pagan mystery religions, the ceremonies surrounding baptism became highly elaborate and cloaked in such great secrecy that candidates would have no idea in advance what was going to happen to them, with the aim of producing a powerful emotional and psychological impression upon them. Only after they had experienced the celebration of baptism and the eucharist was an explanation of the meaning of the sacred mysteries in which they had partaken then given to them in what was called *mystagogy* – post-baptismal instruction, usually during the week following their initiation.

The frequent lack of obvious signs of conversion in the behaviour of the newly baptised also had a significant impact on baptismal theology in another way. On the one hand, fourth-century preachers continued to insist on the need for real faith and amendment of life if baptism was to be efficacious, just as their predecessors in the third century had done, and engaged in substantial pre-baptismal instruction in order to impress upon the candidates the great importance of the step that they were taking. On the other hand, there was at the same time a growing tendency in theological discussion to focus on the invisible transformation that was believed to take place in baptism rather than look for visible changes in the conduct of the newly baptised. For example, theologians increasingly understood the term 'seal' from the New Testament not as a vivid metaphor but as a metaphysical reality: as the invisible imprint of the divine image upon the human soul.<sup>1</sup>

Another major characteristic of Christian initiation in the fourth century was a tendency for the varied baptismal practices in the

different regions of early Christianity to coalesce into a more homogeneous pattern. The primary sources of our information about this are the baptismal homilies delivered by four leading bishops of the period: in the West, Ambrose of Milan; in the East, John Chrysostom (at Antioch), Cyril of Jerusalem, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.<sup>2</sup> The table at the end of this chapter gives a schematic view of their evidence. Not surprisingly, Jerusalem (to which pilgrims were now flocking from both East and West) appears to have been the first Eastern centre of Christianity to incorporate into its liturgical practice certain elements that were similar to Western customs.

### The baptismal season

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The choice of a preferred season for baptisms serves as a good example of this development. As we have seen, in Egypt the conclusion of the forty-day post-Epiphany fast was the normal occasion for the celebration of baptism, and Rome and North Africa had a preference for Easter, while the Syrian tradition does not appear to have known of any preferential time. By the middle of the fourth century, however, we find an almost universal custom of Easter as the preferred season for all baptisms, and along with that – not surprisingly – the gradual adoption of the Pauline theology of baptism as participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus Cyril, while retaining elements of the older baptismal imagery of the Syrian tradition, adds to it the understanding of the whole process as a symbolic imitation of the passion of Christ. He says to the newly baptised:

stripped naked . . . you were imitating Christ naked upon the cross . . . You were conducted by the hand to the holy pool of sacred baptism, just as Christ was conveyed from the cross to the sepulchre . . . and submerged yourselves three times in the water and emerged: by this symbolic gesture you were secretly re-enacting the burial of Christ three days in the tomb.<sup>3</sup>

### The catechumenate

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We also find that by the second half of the fourth century the Egyptian custom of a forty-day period of fasting prior to baptism had been taken

up by every other church throughout the world, creating the season of Lent (see below, pp 89–90). Those who wished to be baptised at Easter had their names recorded at the beginning of the season (after being admitted as catechumens, if this had not previously happened); and during this time of preparation there occurred not only the instruction and fasting of which earlier sources had spoken, but also the exorcism of the candidates, the frequency of which varied from place to place: while in North Africa it seems to have happened only once, in Rome it occurred on three successive Sundays, and in Antioch and Jerusalem it was repeated daily.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from Apostolic Tradition 18 (where it is prescribed on a daily basis), this regular exorcism of all baptismal candidates is clearly attested for the first time only in fourth-century sources, but it is probably a much older custom, and has its roots in the New Testament practice of driving out evil spirits from those thought to be possessed. At some unknown point in the history of the Church, this action was extended from particular individuals to every convert, reflecting the early Christian belief that all pagans were in the possession of the devil and needed to be liberated in order to become Christians and receive the Holy Spirit. As a second-century source affirms, 'Before we believed in God, the dwelling-place of our heart was corrupt and weak . . . because it was full of idolatry and was the home of demons, since we did everything that was opposed to God.'<sup>5</sup> The same attitude is reflected in the prohibition in Apostolic Tradition 18 against catechumens either praying with or exchanging a ritual kiss with baptised Christians, because they were still impure.

Both Apostolic Tradition 18 and Ambrose describe a final preparatory ceremony in which the bishop touches the ears and noses of the candidates (and the forehead, too, in the Apostolic Tradition). In the Apostolic Tradition this action follows an exorcism, involves the sign of the cross, and is clearly intended as a 'sealing', to protect the candidates against the return of evil spirits. Ambrose, however, describes it as an 'opening', and interprets it in the light of Jesus' opening of the ears and mouth of man who was deaf and dumb (Mark 7:32–37), but he has some difficulty in explaining why it is the nose and not the mouth that is touched by the bishop, and he has to resort to saying that it is so that candidates may be 'the aroma of Christ to God' (2 Corinthians 2:15).<sup>6</sup> It looks as

though what was originally an act symbolising protection has been not very successfully reinterpreted here.

## The pre-baptismal anointing

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As we can see from the table, both Eastern and Western rites now have a pre-baptismal anointing. We do not know when the practice was introduced in the West. Although it appears in the Apostolic Tradition, we cannot be sure how ancient this part of the text is. Its role there is described as exorcistic and it is applied with the words, 'Let every evil spirit depart from you.' Ambrose, however, describes the practice in slightly different terms: he speaks of the candidates being 'rubbed with oil like an athlete, Christ's athlete, as though in preparation for an earthly wrestling-match'.<sup>7</sup> In spite of these differences, both sources agree that it functioned in some way against the power of evil, whether as a protective shield or as preparatory for combat with the devil.

It is to be noted that what is being described in both cases is an anointing of the whole body – just as we found in some of the third-century Syrian examples alongside what appeared to be a separate anointing of the head. It looks, therefore, as though this development may possibly have spread from East to West, or alternatively both regions may have been influenced by similar uses of oil in contemporary pagan traditions.

On the other hand, when we turn to the Syrian sources, we find that the interpretation of the pre-baptismal unction there has changed. Both Chrysostom and Theodore continue to distinguish the anointing of the forehead from the anointing of the whole body that follows it (and according to Chrysostom, a different, perfumed oil – chrism – is used for the former). Theodore states that the first of these is accompanied by the recitation of the trinitarian formula and constitutes a 'seal' that 'marks you out for ever as the sheep of Christ, the soldier of the King of Heaven': just as a sheep is branded to indicate its owner and a soldier is given a tattoo to indicate the Emperor to whom he owes his allegiance, so too the Christian can be identified as 'a soldier of the true king and a citizen of heaven'.<sup>8</sup> Chrysostom, too, compares this anointing to the branding of a sheep,<sup>9</sup> and also uses the images of both

soldier and athlete at this point, but he focuses more on its protective character, which will 'make the devil turn away his eyes'.<sup>10</sup>

Theodore tells us that the same trinitarian formula is used for the anointing of the whole body, but he views this ceremony as symbolic of clothing, 'a sign of the garment of immortality you will receive through baptism'.<sup>11</sup> Chrysostom, on the other hand, describes it in protective terms again, like the previous anointing, intended to 'armour all your limbs and make them invulnerable to any weapons the Enemy may hurl'.<sup>12</sup> Cyril speaks of only one anointing before baptism, that of the whole body, and interprets it both as exorcistic in nature, 'able to pursue all the invisible powers of the wicked one out of our persons', and also as a symbol of the share that the candidate will have in the richness of Christ the true olive tree.<sup>13</sup>

While these explanations of pre-baptismal anointing differ to some extent from one another, what they have in common is that none of them views it in the same way as the earlier Syrian sources had done – as a priestly anointing or as the conferral of the Holy Spirit. Clearly the understanding of the ceremonies of initiation in this region has undergone something of a transformation, and so we now need to look elsewhere in the rite for the themes that were earlier associated with the pre-baptismal anointing.

### The profession of faith and immersion

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The Eastern and Western traditions retain some of their former characteristics here. The acts of renunciation and adherence to Christ remain at the beginning of the Eastern rites, while Ambrose attests that in his region the triple immersion in water was still accompanied by a three-fold profession of faith in interrogatory form, similar to that evidenced earlier by Tertullian and the Apostolic Tradition.<sup>14</sup> (We should note, however, that some Christian groups that rejected trinitarian orthodoxy reverted to just a single immersion at baptism in order to give liturgical expression to their doctrinal position, and some orthodox Christians revised the Eastern act of adherence so that it was made to the Trinity, in order to reflect their position.) On the other hand, in Jerusalem a Western-style interrogatory form of profession of faith has been added at the time of the immersion;<sup>15</sup> and the Syrian baptismal formula

('I baptise you in the name...') had already begun to be adopted in Egypt, and would gradually spread westwards during the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>16</sup> Its introduction there would separate the profession of faith from its original close connection with the immersion and force it into a preliminary position just before it. Because of this change in the rite, it would be easier for later theologians to disregard the vital part that the candidate's own faith had once played in the process of becoming a Christian and to emphasise instead the action of divine grace.

Meanwhile, in Syria itself, Chrysostom reveals that the baptismal formula there had undergone a significant change in wording. Because the active form ('I baptise...') had seemed to lay too great an emphasis on the role of the minister, a passive form ('N is baptised...') was now being used instead, and this later became standard in all Eastern rites. Chrysostom also claims that 'by the words of the bishop and by his hand the presence of the Holy Spirit flies down upon you'. The 'words' were the baptismal formula, and the hand was placed on the candidate's head in order to push him or her down under the water. Thus Chrysostom appears to envisage the Holy Spirit being bestowed in the act of immersion itself and not through any ancillary ceremonies, although in line with the new orthodoxy of the period he is also careful to insist that it is 'the indivisible Trinity who bring the whole rite to completion'.<sup>17</sup>

### Post-baptismal ceremonies

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Ambrose refers to an unction of the head with chrism after baptism, during which the bishop simply speaks of God anointing the newly baptised 'into eternal life'. The brevity of his comments on this ceremony suggest that Ambrose himself did not attach much importance to it. He interprets it as a pouring of grace upon the faculties of wisdom in the head, but elsewhere he does allude to the royal and priestly symbolism that Tertullian had earlier emphasised.<sup>18</sup> Ambrose devotes more time instead to defending the appropriateness of the ceremony of the washing of the feet of the newly baptised that immediately follows. He interprets it as providing protection against the liability to sin inherited from Adam.<sup>19</sup> Although none of our other principal sources include it in their rites, there are signs that it was also practised

in a number of other places, and it may even at one time have sufficed instead of full immersion in some communities.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Ambrose refers to a 'spiritual sealing' concluding the rite, during which the Holy Spirit was infused at the invocation of the bishop,<sup>21</sup> but he is not explicit as to what this 'sealing' was. It may have been an imposition of hands with prayer (as in Tertullian), a second post-baptismal anointing (as also in Apostolic Tradition 21 and later Roman evidence), a simple concluding prayer (as in the later Milanese rites), a sign of the cross, or even a kiss.

Although Chrysostom's rite continued the older Syrian tradition of passing directly from the immersion to the exchange of a kiss and then to the celebration of the eucharist and reception of communion by the newly baptised, Theodore's description includes a reference to a 'sealing' on the forehead at the end of the rite. This apparently involved the use of oil and was accompanied by a trinitarian formula. Theodore understands it as a sign that the Holy Spirit had been bestowed upon the baptised.<sup>22</sup> While some scholars have rejected this passage as a later interpolation into the text, others see it as evidence for the emergence of a post-baptismal unction associated with the gift of the Spirit in the Syrian tradition.

In Jerusalem, something similar to the Western post-baptismal anointing has certainly emerged by this time. However, what Cyril describes is not just an anointing of the head, as in Tertullian and Ambrose, but one that also encompassed ears, nose, and chest. Although acknowledging that this anointing (which was done with chrism) was foreshadowed in priestly and kingly anointings in the Old Testament, Cyril likens it to the anointing with the Spirit that Christ received after his baptism. He explains that the anointing of the forehead is done so that the newly baptised may lose the shame of Adam, the ears so that they may hear divine mysteries, the nose so that it may become 'the aroma of Christ to God', and the chest to arm it against the devil.<sup>23</sup> All this suggests that what we have is a conflation of the older Syrian pre-baptismal unction with something similar to the pre-baptismal 'opening' described by Ambrose, but now located instead after the baptism.

All three Eastern bishops – Chrysostom, Cyril and Theodore – say that the newly baptised do not simply put on their own clothes again but dress in special white garments as a symbol of the purity of the new

life they have begun (Cyril), of Christ whom they have 'put on' internally (Chrysostom), of their future resurrection (Theodore). Ambrose alludes only indirectly to this practice, which reminds him of the shining garments of the transfigured Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, although there are certainly still significant differences in the structure of the rites between East and West (and within each of those regions, too), and different emphases in their interpretation, yet by the close of the fourth century a more homogeneous initiation rite is beginning to emerge, and a rich mixture of images and symbols drawn both from the New Testament and other sources is being used to explain its meaning.

Ambrose	Cyril	Chrysostom/Theodore
	Renunciation	Renunciation
	Act of adherence	Act of adherence
'Opening		Anointing of head
Entry to baptistery	Entry to baptistery	[Ch: 'at night']
[Removal of clothes]	Removal of clothes	Removal of clothes
Anointing of body	Anointing of body	Anointing of body
Renunciation		
Blessing of water	[Blessing of water]	Blessing of water
Immersion with profession of faith	Immersion with profession of faith	Immersion with trinitarian formula
Anointing of head	Anointing of head, ears, nose, chest	
Washing of feet		
[White garment]	White garment	White garment
'Sealing'		[Th: seal on forehead] [Ch: kiss]
Eucharist	Eucharist	Eucharist

## NOTES

- 1 See Lampe, *The seal of the spirit, especially pp 247ff*.
- 2 English translations in AIR.
- 3 Mystagogical Catechesis 2:2,4 (AIR, pp 74, 76).
- 4 DBL, pp 102, 108, 166–167; AIR, pp 4–11.
- 5 Epistle of Barnabas 16:7, cited from AIR, p 6.
- 6 De sacramentis 1:2–3 (AIR, p 100).
- 7 De sacramentis 1:4 (AIR, p 101).
- 8 Baptismal Homily 2:17–19 (AIR, pp 186–188).
- 9 See Paul W Harkins, *St John Chrysostom: baptismal instructions* (Longmans, Green & Co, London 1963), p 155.
- 10 Baptismal Homily 2:22–3 (AIR, pp 166–167).
- 11 Baptismal Homily 3:8 (AIR, p 194).
- 12 Baptismal Homily 2:24 (AIR, p 167).
- 13 Mystagogical Catechesis 2:3 (AIR, p 75).
- 14 De sacramentis 2:20 (AIR, pp 117–118).
- 15 Mystagogical Catechesis 2:4 (AIR, p 76).
- 16 See Paul De Clerck, 'Les origines de la formule baptismale', in Paul De Clerck & Eric Palazzo (eds), *Rituels: mélanges offerts au Père Gy* (Editions du Cerf, Paris 1990), pp 199–213.
- 17 Baptismal Homily 2:25–6 (AIR, pp 168–169).
- 18 De sacramentis 2:24; 3:1; 4:3 (AIR, 119–120, 128–129).
- 19 De sacramentis 3:4–7 (AIR, pp 121–124; see also pp 27–28).
- 20 See Pier Franco Beatrice, *La lavanda dei piedi* (CLV, Rome 1983).
- 21 De sacramentis 3:8–10 (AIR, pp 124–125).
- 22 Baptismal Homily 3:27 (AIR, pp 207–209).
- 23 Mystagogical Catechesis 3 (AIR, pp 79–83).
- 24 AIR, pp 28–29, 86–87, 207.

## FOR FURTHER READING

- Dujarier, M. *A history of the catechumenate: the first six centuries* (Sadlier, New York 1979).
- Mazza, E. *Mystagogy: a theology of liturgy in the patristic age* (Pueblo Publishing Company, New York 1989).
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- Yarnold, E. 'Baptism and the pagan mysteries in the fourth century', *Heythrop Journal* 13 (1972), pp 247–267.