

JESUS' BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN

KILIAN McDONNELL, O.S.B.

Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, Collegeville, Minnesota

THE BAPTISM of Jesus is recorded in some detail by the Synoptics (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21,22). Though there is no direct report in John, he does record the tradition (John 1:29–34). Some importance must have been placed on the baptism very early. For Mark it is the beginning of the gospel. Luke has Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth at the start of his ministry recall his anointing with the Spirit at the Jordan (Luke 4:16–21). No replacement for Judas was considered if he had not been with the disciples from the time of Jesus' baptism (Acts 1:22). In a very short summary of the good news, Peter includes Jesus' baptism (Acts 10:38). The persistence of this embarrassing event in the biblical tradition led Johannes Bornemann in the last century and Fritzleo Lentzen-Deis in this century, along with other scholars, to contend that it belongs to the earliest strata of New Testament witness.¹ Hans Conzelmann and Ernst Käsemann, among others, hold that it belongs to the undoubted events of the historical Jesus.² In spite of the small scandal which Jesus' baptism must have created—what was the Sinless One doing having himself baptized?—it belonged to the earliest tradition.³

Mark's interest is obviously not biographical because he tells us nothing about Jesus' origins.⁴ Jean Daniélou has shown that the Synoptics in general and Mark in particular arrange the ensemble of Christ's life according to the liturgical cycle of the year. This began with the preaching of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. In conformity with the ancient sacerdotal calendar, the Jewish year, which the earliest Jewish Christians followed liturgically, the Synoptics began the year at the end of September. John, in contrast, follows not the Jewish liturgical calendar, but the Jewish legal calendar, so that the baptism of Jesus, which began the liturgical year, came immediately after Easter.⁵ In the calendars followed both by the Synop-

¹ Johannes Bornemann, *Die Taufe Christi durch Johannes in der dogmatischen Beurteilung der christlichen Theologen der vier ersten Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1896) 4; Fritzleo Lentzen-Deis, *Die Taufe Jesu nach den Synoptikern: Literarkritische und gattungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Knecht, 1970) 27.

² Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 31; Ernst Käsemann, "Zum Thema der urchristlichen Apokalypstik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 59 (1962) 260. The fact is historical but the form is legendary.

³ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1966) 158, 159.

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *An Adult at Christmas* (Collegeville: Liturgical, no date) 8.

⁵ Jean Daniélou, "Les Quatre-Temps de Septembre et la Fête des Tabernacles," *Mai-*

tics and John the baptism of Jesus opened the liturgical year. Both among orthodox and heterodox groups the year begins with the Jordan.⁶

I want to look at how the early postbiblical period appropriated this biblical evidence by making it an article of the Creed, the image of God's plan of salvation, touching the created order, and constituting a boundary. I will look at the meaning of the Spirit resting on Jesus as manifesting Father, Son and Spirit, opening up Christian baptism, bringing forth children, divinizing those who follow Jesus down into the waters. I hope to demonstrate that the baptism of Jesus is a major mystery in the eyes of the early Church. I am especially indebted to Sebastian Brock and Gabriele Winkler.

ARTICLE OF THE CREED

The centrality of Jesus' baptism is evidenced already in the *regula fidei* of Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35–ca. 107) in two of his letters, constituting an important early witness.⁷ Also Melito of Sardis (died ca. 190) mentions the Jordan event in a context which did not demand it.⁸ The baptism of Jesus has priority in the sense that from the beginning it was the dominant model for Christian baptism. At this very earliest stage there was little evidence that Romans 6:4 (“we have been buried with him by baptism into death”) played a role. Only towards the end of the fourth century did the Pauline view begin to catch on in the Antiochene area.⁹

Because Adam and Christ are fused in one, the baptism of Jesus takes place on the first day of creation.¹⁰ The baptism of Jesus is first in another sense. Very likely the liturgical feast of Epiphany, which is the celebration of the baptism of Jesus, is anterior to the feast of

son Dieu 46 (1956) 121, 124–27. Raymond E. Brown calls Daniélou's article “extremely important” (*The Gospel according to John I–XII* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1966] 326).

⁶ Daniélou, “Les Quatre-Temps de Septembre” 127.

⁷ *Ephesians* 18.2 and *Smyrnaeans* 1.1–2 (*Sources chrétiennes* 10bis.74, 131).

⁸ Stuart G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis on Pascha and Fragments*, Texts and Translations (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) Fragment 15, pp. 82–83.

⁹ Edward C. Ratcliff, “The Old Syrian Baptismal Tradition and its Resettlement under the Influence of Jerusalem in the Fourth Century,” *Liturgical Studies*, ed. Arthur Hubert Couratin and David H. Tripp (London: SPCK, 1976) 142. Sebastian Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Liturgy*, The Syrian Church Series, ed. Jacob Vellian (Poona/Kottayam, India, 1979) 83; Gabriele Winkler, “The Original Meaning and Implications of the Prebaptismal Anointing,” *Worship* 52 (1978) 24–45.

¹⁰ Sebastian Brock, “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition,” *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature, and Theology* (Brookfield: Variorum, 1992) XI:21; Brock, “Baptismal Themes in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh,” *Symposium Syriacum 1976*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 205 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1978) 328. See also Gabriele Winkler's review of Augustin Mouhanna, *Les Rites de l'Initiation dans l'Eglise Maronite* (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1980), in *Oriens Christianus* 65 (1981) 199–200.

Christmas, as noted already by Bornemann.¹¹ This priority must have a theological grounding. It seems its origins are Egyptian. The first mention of a liturgical feast is in Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215), who notes that this was a feast also celebrated by the gnostic followers of Basilides.¹² In Syria (and Armenia), where the baptism of Jesus would play a role unequaled in either the Latin or Greek traditions, the feast is not known until the second half of the third century.¹³ By the time of Ephrem (ca. 306–373) it was the greatest feast in Syria.¹⁴ In the West there is no trace of the feast until the fourth century.¹⁵

Gabriele Winkler has demonstrated that the baptism of Jesus was an essential article of faith in the early Armenian (and Syriac) Creeds. The Armenian text reads: "We also believe in the Holy Spirit, uncreated and perfect, who spoke in the law, the prophets, and the gospels, who descended into the Jordan, and proclaimed the Sent One, and dwelt in the saints."¹⁶ The "Sent One" is the proclamation of Jesus as the messiah, the one sent by the Father at his baptism. Based partly on the presence of the baptism of Jesus in the *regula fidei* of Ignatius of Antioch and other evidence from the early Church, Winkler believes that its presence in the Armenian Creed represents an ancient stratum, and is indeed, the oldest and purest tradition.¹⁷

The later Syrian tradition saw the baptism of Jesus as among the primary truths taught to catechumens. The *regula fidei* of Philoxenus (ca. 440–523), one of the leading thinkers and authors of the nascent Monophysite Church, recounts the chief mysteries of Jesus' life, among which he relates his obedience to John, the baptism, and his being led into the desert.¹⁸ After finishing his recitation Philoxenus adds: "Such

¹¹ *Die Taufe Christi durch Johannes 2*; Christine Mohrmann, "Epiphania," in *Etudes sur le Latin des Chrétiens*, 4 vols. (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1958–1977) 1.255.

¹² *Stromata* 1.21.145 (SC 30.150); see Mohrmann, "Ephipania" 255.

¹³ Bernard Botte, *Les Origines de la Noël et de l'Épiphanie* (Louvain: Abbay du Mont Cesar, 1932) 21.

¹⁴ Boniface Luykx, "Épiphanie," in *Liturgische Woordenboek*, ed. Lucas Brinkhoff et al., 2 vols. (Roermond: Romen, 1958–1962) 1.689.

¹⁵ Henri Leclercq, "Épiphanie," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et liturgie* 5, part 1.197.

¹⁶ Quoted in Gabriele Winkler, "Eine bemerkenswerte Stelle im armenischen Glaubensbekenntnis: *Credimus et in Sanctum Spiritum qui descendit in Jordanem proclamavit missum*," *Oriens Christianus* 63 (1979) 130–62; idem, "A Remarkable Shift in the 4th-Century Creeds: An Analysis of the Armenian, Syriac, and Greek Evidence," *Studia Patristica* 17, part 3 (1982) 1396–1401. In place of "and proclaimed the Sent One," some variants have "and proclaimed in the apostles." But in both versions, the constant is the reference to the Jordan. See Winkler's critical evaluation.

¹⁷ Winkler, "Eine bemerkenswerte Stelle" 131, 132, 153, 155.

¹⁸ *Commentary on the Johannine Prologue* 64 (*Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientarium* 381.158).

are the first doctrines which one usually communicates to those who present themselves to become disciples."¹⁹ In other places, when he reviews the chief mysteries of Jesus after the manner of a *regula fidei*, he includes the baptism of Jesus.²⁰

Winkler calls attention to a late manuscript from 1216 which shows better the larger theological framework. The baptismal candidate is asked about belief in the Trinity, Incarnation, baptism, crucifixion, the three days in the tomb, the holy resurrection, the divine ascension, the sitting at the right hand of the Father, and the parousia.²¹ Here, again, the baptism of Jesus is ranged with the chief mysteries of the faith.

Winkler, whom I am summarizing here, points to Syrian anaphoras where what is normative is the descent of the Spirit on Jesus in the Jordan, not the coming down of the Spirit on Mary at the Incarnation. Because of the parallelism between the descent of the Spirit on Mary, effecting the conception of Jesus, and the descent of the Spirit on the bread, making it the body of Christ, one would expect that the descent of the Spirit at the Incarnation would better serve the eucharistic moment than the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at the Jordan, but the text is silent on the Spirit at the conception of Jesus.²²

Whether one is citing the creeds used in the baptismal rite, the eucharistic liturgy, or the Prayer of the Hours, the baptism of Jesus is a consistent and constitutive element. The role of the Spirit at the Jordan, Winkler concludes, is therefore the primary, creative, norming manifestation of the Spirit.²³

Except in the Armenian church, the baptism of Jesus as a constitutive element in the Creeds did not survive the Christological controversies. Because of adoptionism, which held that Jesus received his divine sonship and became the Christ, or anointed one, at his baptism, there are protests which touch the theology of Jesus' baptism. Sebastian Brock calls attention to the position of Jacob of Serugh (ca. 451–521), who says that the Holy Spirit did not appear at the Jordan to sanctify either Jesus or the water, but merely to bear witness. The proof is that the Spirit appeared only *after* Christ ascended out of the water.²⁴ The Syriac breviary, the *Fenquitho*, even gives a polemical

¹⁹ Ibid. (CSCO 381.159). In another passage with the character of a *regula fidei* Philoxenus see the baptism as the point from which Jesus is "the first born and the new man" (*Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 8 [CSCO 393.5]). See Aloys Grillmeier, "Die Taufe Christi und die Taufe der Christen: Zur Tauftheologie des Philoxenus von Mabbug und ihre Bedeutung für die christliche Spiritualität," in *Fides Sacramenti: Sacramentum Fidei*, Festschrift für Pieter Smulders, ed. Hans Jorg Auf der Maur et al. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981) 139–42.

²⁰ *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 2 (CSCO 393.2); *Commentary on the Johannine Prologue* 2 (CSCO 381.3).

²¹ Winkler, "Eine bemerkenswerte Stelle" 154.

²² Ibid. 161.

²³ "A Remarkable Shift" 1399.

²⁴ *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, ed. P. Bedjan, 5 vols. (Leipzig: Harrasowitz, 1905–1910) 1.159, cited hereafter as Bedjan. Excerpts used here of the untrans-

view of the Jordan event: "Who will dare to say, and not tremble, that Our Lord received the Holy Spirit when he was baptized in the Jordan."²⁵ This protest is a protection against adoptionism.

The Arians also use Jesus' baptism as a club. Both Athanasius (ca. 296–373) and Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) respond to the Arian taunts about Jesus' need of the Spirit, a want incompatible with claims to divinity. Athanasius explains that the eternal Word was not lacking anything, but "when the Lord, as man, was washed in the Jordan, it was we who were washed in Him and by Him."²⁶ Jesus is not washed for himself, but for us. Cyril notes that when the Arians read of the baptism they give "a big laugh" because Jesus "receives what he did not have."²⁷ Unyielding, Cyril gives the Spirit a decisive role in the economy, with the baptism of Jesus as the point of departure, the new beginning,²⁸ a point to which I shall return.

While the baptism of Jesus did lend itself to heterodox Christologies which called into question the divinity of Jesus, it is clear from both Ignatius of Antioch and Ephrem that early authors used it as a way of speaking of the divine origins of Jesus.²⁹ The Jordan event is not necessarily adoptionistic.

THE DIVINE ICON OF SALVATION

The baptism of Jesus is not a minor incident; it has a programmatic function, initiating, giving structure to a whole series of divine mysteries. Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315–367) says that in his baptism Jesus "fully realized the mysteries of human salvation."³⁰ Indeed, "the order of the heavenly hidden mystery is expressed" in the baptism of Jesus (*ordo etiam in eo arcani caelestis exprimitur*).³¹ "Order" here means the plan of salvation, the divine economy. Hilary details the order. "Through the testimony of the vision and the voice," through the opening of the heavens and the visible descent of the Spirit, through the Father's word attesting Christ's divine sonship, we learn that the baptism of Jesus is the icon of our salvation, namely, that what was fully realized in Christ is fully realized in us.³² "After he was baptized the portals of the heavens being opened, the Spirit is sent, and is recognized visibly under the appearance of the dove, and [the Spirit] is poured out, and he [Christ] is bathed (is baptized?) in a kind of anoint-

lated texts are given in Sebastian Brock, "Baptismal Themes" 327, and "Clothing Metaphors" 11–38. Columba Stewart has verified the texts in the Syriac.

²⁵ Text in Sebastian Brock, *The Holy Spirit* 78.

²⁶ *Against the Arians* 1.47 (PG 26.109).

²⁷ *Commentary on John* 2.1 (PG 73.208, 212).

²⁸ Robert L. Wilken, "The Interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus in the Later Fathers," *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972) 271.

²⁹ Grillmeier, "Die Taufe Christi" 174.

³⁰ Hilary, *On Matthew* 2.5 (SC 254.110).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

ing of the love of the Father. Then the voice from the heavens says: 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.' [This happened] so that we might learn at the same time what was fully realized in Christ. [Likewise] the Spirit, after [Christ's] baptism and the [opening] of the gates of heaven, rushes down upon us (*involare*) so that we might bathe in the anointing of heavenly glory," thus becoming children of God by adoption.³³ "For the truth has been prefigured in the very reality of the facts, and the image of the mystery (*sacramenti imaginem*) has thus been antecedently modeled for us."³⁴ The baptism of Jesus is both order and image of our baptism, and of the full Christian life.³⁵

The same doctrine is repeated in an Armenian text from the end of the fifth century, *The Teaching of St. Gregory*, which declares the baptism of Jesus as "the divine image of salvation" which all are to imitate.³⁶ But the "image" is more than the naked rite of baptism; it is, as shall be seen more clearly below, the order of the whole economy of salvation, cosmic in scope.

JORDAN MANIFESTING THE TRINITY

The Jordan establishes the principle of identity. With some frequency the Spirit alone identifies who Jesus is. Ephrem wants the singular way in which the Spirit rested on Jesus, passing over the others who were baptized by John on the same day, to be the decisive factor in naming Jesus: "The Spirit broke through the heights . . . and he abandoned the others and let himself rest only on one."³⁷ Jacob of Serugh wants to establish the Spirit as the principle of identity, but

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* Jean Doignon suggests that Hilary is dependent here on Tertullian, *On Baptism* 8 (Doignon, "La Scène Évangélique du Baptême de Jésus Commentée par Lactance [Diuinae institutiones, 4, 15] et Hilaire de Poitiers [In Matthaeum 2, 5-6]," *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1972] 71 n. 62).

³⁵ A possible parallel is Optatus of Milevis (fl. 370), who writes that the descent into the water before the anointing "initiates and orders the mysteries, providing in full measure for the baptized," and that what follows is "the order of the mystery" (*Against Parmenian the Donatist* 4.7 [*Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* 26.113]). This could refer either to the mysteries within the sacrament of baptism or to the larger order of salvation.

³⁶ 413; *The Teaching of St. Gregory: An Early Armenian Catechism*, ed. Robert W. Thomson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1970) 89, hereafter cited as Thomson.

³⁷ *Hymns on Epiphany* 6.1 (CSCO 187.147). Ephrem says something similar in his *Commentary on the Diatessaron* (Armenian version): "Although many were baptized on that day long ago, the Spirit descended on only One, and [on only one did he] rest" (CSCO 145.35); see Gabriele Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang zwischen der Erkenntnis und Ruhe in Mt 11, 27-29 und dem Ruhem des Geistes auf Jesus am Jordan: Eine Analyse zur Geist-Christologie in syrischen und armenischen Quellen," *Muséon* 96 (1983) 298.

also desires to avoid the suggestion that the Spirit's role was a sanctifying one, again a polemical note against adoptionism.³⁸ The Spirit came "to indicate [him], and not to sanctify."³⁹ The Spirit acts as "the finger" of the Father, pointing to the Son.⁴⁰ In Ephrem this showing of the Son by the Spirit descending on Jesus is directed to Christian baptism, "because through his baptism the Spirit is given."⁴¹ Jesus' baptism is more than model. By reason of the Jordan event and through it, the Spirit is imparted to others who believe in Jesus.

But the Father, too, has a special role in identifying Jesus by naming him the Son. Already in Justin Martyr it is both the descent of the Spirit "and at the same instant a voice out of the heavens" which declares who Jesus is.⁴² In one of the Armenian Creeds as well as in the *Teaching of St. Gregory* and in Philoxenus, both the Father and the Spirit bear witness to Jesus' identity, thus providing for the two witnesses demanded by Jewish law.⁴³

The baptism as a trinitarian event is developed with special insight in the *Teaching of St. Gregory*. Here the mutual knowing, and mutual showing of the Father, Son, and Spirit are the center of the Jordan event. Jesus "was first understood and known as the true Son of God [at his baptism] by the voice of his Father and the descent of the Spirit over him."⁴⁴ The Jordan is the first full revelation of Jesus' identity.

The double witness of the Father and the Spirit reveals "the consubstantial mystery of the power of the coming of the Son."⁴⁵ The specific content of this consubstantial mystery is the Word who was with God and was God from the beginning. Because no one knows the Son except the Father, the Father witnesses by voice from heaven that the Son is the eternal Word. Referring to the Father, the eternal Word says, "When he was, I then was," in this way demonstrating the consubstantial unity of the Trinity, "acting together in establishing and united in renewing."⁴⁶ For thirty years the Son "moved silently and unseen" among his contemporaries, "then he came to baptism, and at the baptism was made known to all" as the Word of God who tents among us.⁴⁷

³⁸ S. Brock, "The Epiklesis in the Antiochene Baptismal Ordines," *Symposium Syriacum 1972*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 197 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1974) 205.

³⁹ Bedjan 1.185.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Commentary on the Diatessaron* (Armenian version) 4.3 (CSCO 145.35).

⁴² *Dialogue with Trypho* 88; *Die ältesten Apologeten*, ed. Edgar J. Goodspeed (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914) 203.

⁴³ *The Key of Truth: A Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia*, ed. Frederick C. Conybeare (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898) 159; Winkler, "Eine bemerkenswerte Stelle" 155; *The Teaching of St. Gregory* 416 (Thomson 90); Philoxenus, *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 11 (CSCO 393.9, 10); Brock, "Baptismal Themes" 327 n. 12.

⁴⁴ *The Teaching of St. Gregory* 416 (Thomson 90).

⁴⁵ Ibid. 421 (Thomson 92).

⁴⁶ Ibid. 420 (Thomson 91).

⁴⁷ Ibid. 417 (Thomson 90).

The baptism of Jesus is the revelation of his identity as trinitarian communion. In Ephrem this revelation is made even to the human senses: "the Father [is manifested] to the hearing, by means of the divine voice and the proclamation, the Son to the touch, and the Spirit to the sight, in the bodily form of the dove."⁴⁸

According to the *Teaching of St. Gregory*, after Jesus is revealed as the Word, the Son, "standing in our midst, shows that Father and the Spirit to the world."⁴⁹ The baptism is not a private experience, but is turned outward to the salvation of all, to mission. Toward that concrete end, the revelation of the Father is not an abstract word, but a demonstration of "the glory of the Father in himself [Jesus]."⁵⁰ To see Jesus is to see the glory of the Father.⁵¹ The Spirit, too, is revealed in Jesus as the one who is without sin, righteous, and holy.⁵² By his baptism Jesus orders all "to imitate the divine image of salvation."⁵³ That image includes the movement through the Spirit back to the Father. The goal of Christian baptism is "to become pleasing to the Father."⁵⁴ The Spirit, therefore, comes down on the Son that he, the Son, might "reveal salvation to all,"⁵⁵ to teach us how to attain the Father. The baptism of Jesus sets the pattern for the whole trinitarian economy of salvation.

For Philoxenus the trinitarian dimensions of the baptism of Jesus are "the ineffable mystery, an incomprehensible act, a deed unfathomed by the mind."⁵⁶ "I recognize the Trinity in the Jordan: the Father who speaks, the Son who is baptized; and the Holy Spirit who shows."⁵⁷ But Philoxenus relates the trinitarian mystery of the Jordan to the Incarnation and to the cross: "One of the Trinity was in the womb; one of the Trinity was in the baptism; one of the Trinity on the Cross."⁵⁸ All who enter that mystery through Christian baptism "are born of baptism, that is of the Trinity."⁵⁹ Those who imitate Jesus' baptism embrace the whole human/divine spectrum. Such communion in the Jordan event restores one's true, integral humanity ("everyone not born of it is not reckoned a man") at one end of the spectrum, and at the

⁴⁸ *Hymns on Faith* 51.7 (CSCO 155.136).

⁴⁹ 425 (Thomson 93).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 426 (Thomson 93).

⁵¹ The knowledge of the Father in the context of the baptism in the Jordan is found in the Persian version of the Diatessaron as well as in the Armenian catechesis of baptism (Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 313).

⁵² *The Teaching of St. Gregory* 418 (Thompson 91).

⁵³ *Ibid.* 410 (Thomson 88).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 420 (Thomson 91).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 12 (CSCO 393.16).

⁵⁷ *Letter to Emperor Zeno on the Embodiment and Incarnation of God the Word*; text in Arthur A. Vaschalde, "Three Letters of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbôg (485-519)" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University, 1902) 123.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 11 (CSCO 393.10).

other, places him on the road to "return" to the Trinity, the source, the beginning and goal of the Christian life.⁶⁰

THE COSMIC ROLE OF THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

In an extensive section on the baptism of Jesus, the *Teaching of St. Gregory* places the Jordan event in the context of the Genesis account of the creation of the world. In the beginning the Spirit transformed chaos into cosmos, "moving over the waters, and thence set out the order of the creatures," including the ornamenting of the heavens where the angels dwell.⁶¹ The Spirit transforms chaos into cosmos. But there is a larger, cosmic role of the Spirit at creation. "He came down to the waters and sanctified the lower waters of the earth."⁶² What happened at creation is echoed at baptism.

This theme has a long history in both orthodox and heterodox circles. Already Ignatius of Antioch says, "He was born and has been baptized in order to purify the water by his passion,"⁶³ a theme taken up both by Clement of Alexandria,⁶⁴ and the *Gospel of Philip*.⁶⁵ Further, it is well attested by the second century and is extensive in the literature of the early Church.⁶⁶ Jacob of Serugh is explicit that by stepping down into the Jordan Jesus consecrated all waters: "The entire nature of the waters perceived that you had visited them—seas, deeps, rivers, springs and pools all thronged together to receive the blessing from your footsteps."⁶⁷ The Spirit restores a wounded cosmos.

The baptismal event touches the cosmic waters. This is especially clear in the *Teaching of St. Gregory*. At creation the Spirit moved over the waters, and from this act "set out the order of the creatures."⁶⁸ The Spirit changes disorder to order. Sin "had weakened and enfeebled and deprived of the grace of the Spirit" the waters and "the old deteriorated earthy matter."⁶⁹ The Spirit touches created matter in first creation, but when Adam sinned, the Spirit left Adam, but departed also from the whole of the creation, including the firmament of the heaven. However Christ stepped down into the Jordan and "by treading the waters with his own footstep, He sanctified them and made them purifying,"⁷⁰ restoring both the lower and the upper waters, a reference to Semitic cosmology.

⁶⁰ Ibid.; also 12 (CSCO 393.16).

⁶¹ 413 (Thomson 89).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Ephesians* 18.2 (SC 10.74); *Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, ed. William R. Schoedel and Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 85 n. 9.

⁶⁴ *Exerpts from Theodotus* 81.2 (SC 23.206).

⁶⁵ 77; *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 146.

⁶⁶ Brock, "The Epiklesis" 206.

⁶⁷ Bedjan 1:188. Brock has identified the texts from Jacob of Serugh in his "Baptismal Themes" and "Clothing Metaphors."

⁶⁸ 413 (Thomson 89).

⁶⁹ Ibid. 412 (Thomson 89).

⁷⁰ Ibid. 414 (Thomson 89).

The renewal of creation through the Spirit is nonetheless a trinitarian act. The Father sends the Son and the Spirit, the two "demonstrating the consubstantial hypostasis of the Trinity, acting together in establishing and united in renewing."⁷¹ As the Son and the Spirit are associated with the Father in creation,⁷² they are associated in the restoration of creation, which is itself the context for the transformative elevation of all persons "in the glory of adoption."⁷³

By the use of water at creation God "fattened all plants and reptiles and wild animals and beasts and birds, and by the freshness of the waters they sprung from the earth."⁷⁴ The God who nurtured first creation with water, likewise nurtures second creation by the baptism of Jesus, where God again cares for the earth, "purifying by the waters and renewing . . . earthy matter," which sin "deprived of the grace of the Spirit."⁷⁵

In another context the author speaks of "the mortality of creation,"⁷⁶ possibly a reference to the Semitic idea that if the Spirit of God is taken away all creatures perish (Judith 16:14). Just as at the beginning "the Spirit of the Deity moved over the waters, and thence set out the order of the creatures," so now at the new creation God sets out the new order at the baptism of Jesus.⁷⁷ The author specifically relates cosmic renewal to Jesus' baptism: "He renewed and rejuvenated creation once and for all. He opened the womb of baptism."⁷⁸

Philoxenus, who belongs to the same theological tradition, gives Jesus' baptism a commanding role in cosmic renewal: ". . . the return of all to God, and the gathering up and making new, that everything might become in him and he in all—this was kept for the Son. And its type became in [his] baptism, and its truth in his resurrection."⁷⁹ The image of the restoration of all things, the universal gathering up of all history and the whole of creation in Christ, is the Jordan event. At the Jordan "creation [is] renewed in power."⁸⁰

These cosmic mysteries, unsuspected even by John the Baptist, "commenced at [Jesus'] baptism."⁸¹ The eschatological return of the universe to the Father begins at the Jordan, though it is revealed only in the resurrection. This great cosmic vocation of the Son is hidden from every intelligence, but is made known by testimony of the Father and the Spirit. In fact, the revelation of the Trinity here, at the baptism, is the revelation of the Son's role in the cosmic restoration, in which "all things which are seen [are changed] to the other order, which does not fall under the senses."⁸² The baptism of Jesus is the inauguration of the new divine world.

⁷¹ Ibid. 420 (Thomson 91).

⁷³ Ibid. 414 (Thomson 90).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 413 (Thomson 89).

⁷⁹ Philoxenus, *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 11 (CSCO 393.9).

⁸⁰ Ibid. 12 (CSCO 393.16).

⁸² Ibid. (CSCO 393.10).

⁷² Ibid. 362 (Thomson 73).

⁷⁴ Ibid. 412 (Thomson 89).

⁷⁶ Ibid. 516 (Thomson 120).

⁷⁸ Ibid. 679 (Thomson 169).

⁸¹ Ibid. 11 (CSCO 393.9).

The cosmic dimensions of Jesus' baptism are unmistakable. Speaking of the relation of the human body to the visible universe, Philoxenus specifies that the groans of cosmic labor are changed into cosmic joy. "All created things are groaning and are in travail until today," the "today" being the corrupted cosmos in the pain of delivering.⁸³ The laboring universe cries out for the Jordan event, "that baptism in which Jesus, when he was baptised, fulfilled the will of his Father and created anew all things visible and invisible."⁸⁴ The groaning of the enslaved person is within the context of an enslaved universe, wailing and reaching out in hope of a joint liberation, touching visible and invisible creation, rational and irrational creatures. Humanity stands within the cosmos, not over against it, not apart from it. The travail of the one is the travail of the other. The cosmic chorus rises from the depths of the world laboring as in childbirth to bring forth that new world where the dominion of Christ is universal and absolute. "This is the mystery which was fulfilled in the baptism of our Saviour, which (baptism) indeed the Father ratified through his voice and the Spirit by his descent."⁸⁵ The human/cosmic pain reaches out to the baptism of Jesus where the Father and the Spirit are double witnesses to a trinitarian cosmic event, which is directed to the goal of all history. The first steps to an eschatological consummation begin at the baptism where "mystically God [becomes] in all and all in God."⁸⁶

WHO SANCTIFIES THE WATERS?

In Christian baptism it is the epiklesis of the Holy Spirit which consecrates the waters. But at the Jordan, Jacob of Serugh insists, the Holy Spirit does not consecrate the waters. This insistence arises out of the need to safeguard Jesus' sinlessness. He was not in need of baptism. Jacob emphasizes that the Spirit appeared *after* Jesus' baptism, and the role of the Spirit was simply to testify to Jesus, together with the Father.⁸⁷ "The Spirit did not come down to sanctify the water for Christ to be baptized in, for sanctification flows from the holy Son. [Only] after Christ had washed and gone up from the water did the Spirit descend in order to indicate [him], and not to sanctify."⁸⁸ Using the image of a coal of fire from Isaiah's inaugural vision (Isaiah 6:6), Jacob sees Christ himself as the live coal going down into the Jordan, thus inflaming and sanctifying the waters.⁸⁹ The move from the live coal in the waters to the Jordan as a furnace is an easy transition.⁹⁰

Christ himself is the sanctifier of the waters as he descends into the Jordan. But once the epiklesis of the Holy Spirit over the water was

⁸³ Ibid. 53 (CSCO 393.70).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 12 (CSCO 393.16). The formulation is admittedly clumsy.

⁸⁷ Brock, "Baptismal Themes" 327 n. 12.

⁸⁸ Bedjan 1.159.

⁸⁹ Bedjan 1.183.

⁹⁰ Brock, "Baptismal Themes" 326-27.

used for Christian baptism, there was a move, in the name of parallelism, to state that it was the Holy Spirit who sanctified the waters of the Jordan.⁹¹ "The Spirit descended from on high and sanctified the water by her hovering."⁹² However, originally it is Christ who consecrates the waters.

"COME TO ME BY MY ROAD"

The baptism of Jesus has strong ascetic overtones, especially for a life of poverty. "Come to me by my road."⁹³ But it is also the image of the new freedom, specifically trinitarian in character, pledged by the Father, attested by the Spirit: "Observe the freedom in which Jesus went forth, and do thou thyself also go forth like him,"⁹⁴ and "put on freedom."⁹⁵ So the Lucan account, according to Philoxenus, relates that Jesus "made new his members through his baptism."⁹⁶ Philoxenus points out that the genealogy up to Adam, which Luke gives, shows that the newly baptized now belong "to another order, and so [Luke] brought them to the Father."⁹⁷ The baptism constitutes a new stage in the unfolding economy,⁹⁸ and places history on a movement back to the Father.

Though the relation of the Jordan to the Christian life is a commonplace in the early Church, Philoxenus has a unique way of speaking of it. He wants to say two things: that Jesus' baptism is his, and his baptism is ours. Truly it is his baptism, but it is ours "because he was going to give it to us."⁹⁹ So he was baptized in the Jordan, and immediately "he gave it to us."¹⁰⁰ The centrality of Jesus' baptism for the understanding of Christian baptism should not diminish the Incarnation, which also has a large significance for Philoxenus's doctrine of baptism. The link between the two is soteriology. A double movement from God to humankind, and from humankind to God are brought to synthesis in Incarnation and baptism.¹⁰¹ Just as the Word became

⁹¹ Brock, "The Epiklesis" 204-5.

⁹² Ephrem, *Hymns on Epiphany* 6.1 (CSCO 187.147). Though the Epiphany hymns are attributed to Ephrem, they may be later. See Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate, Epiphania* (Louvain: Catholic University, 1959) CSCO 186.vii. See also *The Teaching of St. Gregory* 411 (Thomson 89): "He [the Spirit] Himself came down upon the waters, and made the waters at once purifying and renovating."

⁹³ *Discourse 9.272 (The Discourses of Philoxenus*, ed. E. A. Wallis Budge, 2 vols. [London: Asher, 1894] 2.260), cited hereafter as Budge.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 9.275 (Budge 2.264).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 9.268 (Budge 2.257).

⁹⁶ *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 12 (CSCO 393.16).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Contemporary exegetes also call attention to the cosmic dimensions of the baptism of Jesus; see Charles K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1947) 23-25; George B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke* (London: Black, 1963) 77-78.

⁹⁸ André de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa Vie, Ses Ecrits, Sa Théologie* (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1963) 284.

⁹⁹ *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 13; CSCO 393.16-17.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog* 419, 454.

flesh for our sake, so he was baptized for our sake, leading us back to God.

Earlier Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428), an outstanding representative of Antiochene theology, also wanted to keep the relationship between Jesus' baptism and ours, but, instead of stressing that it was really Jesus' baptism (our baptism conformed to his, or our baptism is his baptism), he desired to diminish the scandal of Jesus' baptism (his baptism conformed to ours, or his baptism is our baptism). He writes: "Know that you are baptised in the same baptism as that in which Christ our Lord in the flesh was baptised. [The baptism of our Lord] was in fact symbolically drawn to ours."¹⁰² Or, more precisely, "He was baptized in our own baptism."¹⁰³

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AS BOUNDARY

The baptism of Jesus constitutes a boundary, even a fence. But the boundary functions in quite different ways. For Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 374–444) the baptism is taken out of the narrow exegetical framework, out of the dogmatic discussion which sees it as a problem, and becomes a mystery of cosmic dimensions.¹⁰⁴ Cyril believes Adam lost the image of God because he lost the Spirit: "Our father Adam . . . did not preserve the grace of the Spirit, and thus in him the whole nature lost at last [gradually] the God-given goods."¹⁰⁵ If the loss of the image is tied to the loss of the Spirit, then the restoration of the image can only be linked to the return of the Spirit. The loss of the Spirit was universal in Adam; its restoration is universal in the New Adam. Though acknowledging that "at the time of the Incarnation [Jesus] received the Spirit from heaven," the Incarnation is not decisive for the permanent, secure return of the Spirit.¹⁰⁶ That is the function of the baptism of Jesus. In Cyril's Adam Christology, the Spirit is returned by the New Adam at the Jordan, thus "restoring human nature to its ancient state . . . its unshaken state."¹⁰⁷

For Cyril, as for the second century generally, the accent has shifted from Jesus' descent into the waters of the Jordan, to the descent of the Spirit on Jesus as he comes up from the waters.¹⁰⁸ "With the descent of the Spirit the time of renewal is at the doors, yea within the

¹⁰² *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, ed. Alphonse Mingana (Cambridge: Heffer, 1935) 66, cited hereafter as Mingana.

¹⁰³ *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Mingana 66).

¹⁰⁴ Wilken, "The Interpretation of the Baptism" 272; idem, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University, 1971) 127–42. I am indebted to Wilken in these paragraphs on Cyril.

¹⁰⁵ *Commentary on John 5.2; Sancti Patris Nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Joannis Evangelium*, ed. Philip E. Pusey, 2 vols. (Brussels: Culture and Civilization, 1965) 1.691, cited hereafter as Pusey.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 2.1 (Pusey 1.179).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 5.2 (Pusey 1.691, 692).

¹⁰⁸ Wilken, "The Interpretation of the Baptism" 270.

doors The Spirit who fled away from human nature, the one who can gather and form us in the divine image, this one the Savior gives us anew and returns us to our ancient condition and reforms us to his own image."¹⁰⁹ While granting that the Old Testament prophets had the Spirit, Cyril denies that one can compare the giving of the Spirit in order to prophesy, with the dwelling of the Spirit in Christ beginning at the Jordan so that the whole of humankind can be restored to the ancient image. Through the descent of the Spirit on Jesus we permanently possess "the full and complete indwelling in men of the Holy Spirit."¹¹⁰ The voice of the Father and the descent of the Spirit lay down the boundary where the old creation ends and the new begins. The dispensation of grace starts here. Cyril's teaching represents one of the most theologically profound reflections on the baptism of Jesus in early Christian literature.¹¹¹

Crossing Over the Frontier to the Spiritual Country

That at the Jordan the Law ends and grace begins was developed by others, John Chrysostom among them.¹¹² But Philoxenus develops it extensively. So decisive is the baptism of Jesus to Philoxenus's thought that he repeatedly returns to it to divide off the stages in the economy of salvation. There are three stages: from Mary's giving birth to the baptism at the Jordan, from the Jordan to the cross, and, finally, the cross itself.¹¹³ If in this perspective the first beginnings of the economy are at the birth of Jesus, and the end is the cross, then the baptism of Jesus dominates the central stage of the economy.¹¹⁴ From the moment of his baptism the way to the cross is prepared by the kenosis.¹¹⁵ During the period extending from the baptism to the cross Jesus stood "at the limit of spiritual perfection."¹¹⁶

For Philoxenus the boundary between the Old and New Testaments is not the Incarnation, but the baptism of Jesus: "In the Jordan he laid down the boundary of them both; for He ended that path, which was after the law, in which He was journeying because He kept the law, and from it He began the path of perfection, which He shewed in His own person."¹¹⁷ Before the Jordan experience Jesus' "rule and conduct of life . . . fell short of perfection."¹¹⁸ The reason: "Until the Jordan it was bondage, that is to say, He was subject unto the law as a servant,

¹⁰⁹ *Commentary on John* 5.2 (Pusey 1.695, 696).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind* 140.

¹¹² *Homilies on Matthew* 12.3 (PG 57.206).

¹¹³ Philoxenus, *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 9 (CSCO 393.5); *idem, Commentary on the Johannine Prologue* 2 (CSCO 391.3); *Discourse* 8 (Budge 2.244-45).

¹¹⁴ de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog* 402.

¹¹⁵ Grillmeier, "Die Taufe Christi" 175. ¹¹⁶ *Discourse* 8 (Budge 2.245).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 9 (Budge 2.262-63).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 8 (Budge 2.239).

but from the Jordan and henceforth His life and conduct were in freedom."¹¹⁹

Before the Jordan Jesus fulfilled the way of life of the law. But "from the Jordan he made the beginning of the way of His own rule of life."¹²⁰ Mary, on the other hand, remained on the law side of the Jordan. "For Mary stood in one rule of life, and Jesus stood in another, that is to say, she lived the life of the law, and He lived the life of the Spirit."¹²¹ As evidence that Mary remained behind on the law side of the Jordan Philoxenus cites the severe rebuke of Jesus at Cana, "What do I have to do with you, woman?"¹²²

After the baptism "the rule of life was more perfect," because Jesus was no longer subject to human authority.¹²³ At the Jordan the voice of the Father and the descent of the Spirit reveal "that the fence was removed between fleshly (beings) and spiritual (beings)."¹²⁴ John of Apamea (mid 5th century), who belongs to the same theological tradition, teaches that only after the witness of the Father and the Spirit at the Jordan did Jesus begin to teach. "No knowledge of the divine mysteries are manifested in men before he (Jesus) received baptism."¹²⁵ The mystery of knowledge begins here. Aphrahat (ca. 270–ca. 345) records that though Jesus was born of the Spirit, after his baptism the Spirit left him so that he could be tempted by Satan; no temptation preceded the baptism.¹²⁶

What the passage through the Red Sea was for Israel, the passage through the Jordan was for Jesus. He passes from the land of subjection (Egypt) to the "land of freedom,"¹²⁷ into "the spiritual country,"¹²⁸ "crossing from one world to another."¹²⁹ For Philoxenus the Jordan is "the beginning of the new order of the Spirit."¹³⁰

"No River is Good except the Jordan"

The Jordan has a role ascribed to no other river. Origen had likened the unique character of the Jordan to the unique Father: "Just as there is no one that is good, so there is one only God, the Father, so, among

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 9 (Budge 2.248).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. 8 (Budge 2.241–42).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid. (Budge 2.239–40).

¹²⁴ Philoxenus, *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 11 (CSCO 393.10).

¹²⁵ *Dialogues and Treatises* 10.117 (SC 311.149).

¹²⁶ *Demonstration* 7.17 (SC 349.405).

¹²⁷ Philoxenus, *Discourse* 9 (Budge 2.263).

¹²⁸ Ibid. (Budge 2.248).

¹²⁹ Ibid. (Budge 2.263).

¹³⁰ *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 11 (CSCO 393.9). See Franz J. Dölger, "Der Durchzug durch den Jordan als Sinnbild der christlichen Taufe," *Antike und Christentum* 2 (1930) 70–79. Ephrem teaches that the baptism of Jesus brings John's baptism to an end, and that Jesus baptized again all who had received baptism from John (*Commentary on the Diatessaron* 4.1 [SC 121.93]).

the rivers, no river is good except the Jordan."¹³¹ Gregory of Nyssa also believes that the "Jordan alone among all rivers had received the first fruits of sanctification and blessing," but the Jordan itself "spread the grace of baptism throughout the whole world."¹³² The Jordan as a saving place was foreshadowed by Joshua crossing over into the promised land, by Elisha twice passing over the river, and by the cleansing of Naaman.¹³³

Not surprisingly, the equation between the Jordan and baptism, which is probably of Alexandrian provenance, is a commonplace in early Greek-, Syriac-, and Latin-speaking areas.¹³⁴ A work uncertainly attributed to the Alexandrian theologian Didymus the Blind (ca. 313–398) declares "The Jordan is immortal baptism."¹³⁵ Eusebius relates that Constantine deferred baptism to the end of his life, desiring to be baptized in the Jordan,¹³⁶ but his hope was not realized. Jerome (ca. 342–420) made a revision of Eusebius' *Onomasticon* (ca. 330), which he issued as *The Book of Places*, remarking that even in his day (*usque hodie*) many believers came to the Jordan to be baptized.¹³⁷ The desire to enter into the mystery of Jesus' baptism by being baptized in the Jordan itself was already great enough as far away as North Africa for Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225) to protest: Now that Jesus has consecrated all waters by his baptism "there is no difference between those John [the Baptist] baptized in the Jordan and those Peter baptized in the Tiber."¹³⁸ Ambrose, too, looks askance at the elevation of the physical waters of the Jordan, maintaining that "where Christ is, there also one finds the Jordan."¹³⁹ Here Ambrose makes an equation not between the Jordan and baptism, but between the Jordan and Christ, a view already found in Origen, for whom the Jordan was the Word of God made flesh.¹⁴⁰

The consecration of all water by Jesus' baptism and the equation between the Jordan and baptism led to what Augustin Mouhanna calls "the willed confusion of the baptismal font and the river Jor-

¹³¹ *Commentary on John* 6.47 (SC 157.314).

¹³² *On the Baptism of Christ* (PG 46.493d).

¹³³ Origen, *Homilies of Joshua* 4.1, 4.4, 5.1 (SC 71.146, 148, 156, 158, 160); idem, *Commentary on John* 6.46 (SC 157.308, 310, 314); Dölger, "Der Durchzug durch das Rote Meer," *Antike und Christentum* 2.63–69; see also Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.9 (*Adversus Marcionem*, ed. Ernest Evans, 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon 1972] 2.290, 292); Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* 1.13–14 (SC 25bis.66–68); idem. *On the Mysteries* 16–17 (SC 25bis.164).

¹³⁴ Dölger, "Der Durchzug durch den Jordan" 74, 76.

¹³⁵ *On the Trinity* 2.14 (PG 39.700).

¹³⁶ *Life of Constantine* 4.62 (PG 20.1216).

¹³⁷ PL 23.931.

¹³⁸ *On Baptism* 4.3 (SC 35.70).

¹³⁹ *Sermon* 38.2 (CSEL 6.481). The manuscript text reads "ubique enim nunc Christus, ubique Iordanis est." But an editor, wishing to improve the rendering, changed it to "ubi enim nunc Christus est, ibi quoque Iordanis est" (Dölger, "Der Durchzug durch den Jordan" 75 n. 20).

¹⁴⁰ *Commentary on John* 6.42 (SC 157.296).

dan."¹⁴¹ Severus (ca. 465–538), the Patriarch of Antioch, and Sophronius (ca. 560–638), the Patriarch of Jerusalem, both record that the baptismal font is called "the Jordan."¹⁴² By extension all baptismal waters are the Jordan. Among the Armenians the blessing of Epiphany water for use in initiation asks God to "endue it with the grace of the Jordan."¹⁴³

RESTING AT THE JORDAN

In a long technical philological article Gabriele Winkler has researched the themes of resting and knowing at the Jordan in Syriac and Armenian sources. In spite of its length I will partly summarize, and, in a minor way, supplement this important contribution.¹⁴⁴

According to a series of Armenian and Syriac witnesses, a tradition which has its origin in Syria, there is a clear relation between Matt 11:28–29 (rendered not "I am meek and humble," but "I will make you quiet because I am quiet . . . I will give you rest . . . you will find rest for your souls") and the baptism of Jesus as well as Christian baptism. Besides the Matthean text, John 1:32 ("I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him") and Acts 2:3 ("divided tongues . . . rested on each of them") play a role.¹⁴⁵ The rest promised to believers is based on Jesus' "quiet" and the Spirit resting on him in the Jordan.¹⁴⁶

The Synoptics give no clue as to when Jesus promised rest, yet the apocryphal *Gospel of the Hebrews*, the oldest and most important representative of the Syrian type of the Gospel, places it in relation to Jesus' baptism: "And it came to pass when the Lord was come up out of the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended upon him and rested on him and said to him: 'My Son, in all the prophets was I waiting for thee that thou shouldst come and I might rest in thee. For thou art my rest; thou art my first-begotten Son that reignest for ever.'¹⁴⁷ History was in expectation, in eager longing, until the full

¹⁴¹ *Les Rites de l'Initiation dans l'Eglise Maronite* 238.

¹⁴² Severus, *Homily* 88 (PO 23.95). See also the hymn sung at the entry into the baptistry at dawn on Sunday (PO 6.131); Sophronius, *On the Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John*, Miracle 39 (*Spicilegium Romanum*, ed. Angelo Mai, 10 vols. [Rome: Urban College, 1839–1844] 3.436–37). I am indebted to S. Brock for these two references.

¹⁴³ "Canon of Blessing the Water on the Day of the Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ," *Rituale Armenorum*, ed. Frederick C. Conybeare (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905) 176.

¹⁴⁴ Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 267–326.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 274–79. Very likely the original Armenian reading of John 1.32 is: "I will make you quiet . . . because I am quiet . . . and you shall find rest." Unlike the Greek of John 1.32, which reads the Spirit "remained" on Jesus, the Armenian reading is "rested" on Jesus. The Syriac, in contrast to the Armenian, conforms to the Greek. But it is possible that the Armenian, which is generally dependent on the Syriac, represents the original Syriac reading, which was later changed under Hellenizing influences.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 300.

¹⁴⁷ *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, R. M. Wilson, 2 vols., rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990) 1.177. This fragment is preserved in

abundance of the Spirit could rest on the Son, who then became the rest of God. All of the Armenian and a number of Syriac sources support the view that the Spirit rested on Jesus.¹⁴⁸

Ephrem makes it clear that "many were baptized on that day [by John the Baptist], but the Spirit descended and rested only on one."¹⁴⁹ If the Spirit rested on only one of all those baptized, it was for the sake of Christian baptism. Immediately Ephrem names the purpose of the descent of the Spirit: "And because the Spirit descended in his baptism, the Spirit is given by his baptism."¹⁵⁰ In the beginning, therefore, the Spirit rested only on Jesus, but afterwards on the disciples at Pentecost, which is also a baptismal event, and on those who receive Christian baptism.¹⁵¹ As the rest signifies the permanent possession of the Spirit for Jesus, so also in its way for his followers. Is the quiet of Jesus and the resting of the Spirit at the Jordan the beginning of the contemplative dimension of the Christian life?

THE GLORIFICATION OF JESUS BEGINS AT THE JORDAN

Already the *Testament of Levi*, an apocryphal work begun in the last century before Christ but edited by Christian hands, ties the baptism of Jesus to glory: "The heaven will be opened and from the temple of glory sanctification will come upon him, with a fatherly voice. . . . And the glory of the Most High shall burst forth upon him [variant: "and his glory will elevate him]. And the spirit of understanding and sanctification shall rest upon him [in the water]."¹⁵² The glory, tied to the theology of rest, will be fully manifested in his resurrection, but it begins already here at the Jordan.

In the early 4th century Ephrem also places the first glorification of Jesus at his baptism: "The river in which he [Jesus] was baptized, receives him symbolically anew: the moist womb of the water receives him in purity, bore him in splendor, and let him ascend [out of the water] in glory."¹⁵³

The *Teaching of St. Gregory*, containing the oldest Armenian baptismal catechesis to come down to us, possibly from the end of the 5th century, is most explicit in relating the glorification of Jesus to the

Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 4, commenting on Isaiah 11.2 (PL 24.144–45). Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 293.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 279–92.

¹⁴⁹ *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 4.3 (SC 121.95).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 300–2. See especially *The Teaching of St. Gregory* 614 (Thomson 151). Winkler conjectures on the basis of the Syrian and Armenian sources that "originally Mt 11, 27–29 in a general way stood in a baptismal context" (310).

¹⁵² *Testament of Levi* 18.6–7; emphasis added. Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 291.

¹⁵³ *Hymns on the Church* 36.3 (CSCO 199.88).

Jordan event, which, as in the *Testament of Levi*, embraces the rest of the Spirit.¹⁵⁴ In an extended passage on the baptism of Jesus, the *Teaching of St. Gregory* narrates, in relation to the passion, Jesus' request to the Father to "glorify your name." The voice of the Father, speaking as Jesus' "hour" approaches, replies: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (John 12:28). This hour of glorification is anticipated at the baptism, the Father acknowledging the Son both at the approach of the passion and at the Jordan. "In the same way" as at the passion, so now at his baptism, "the Son, standing in our midst, shows the Father and the Holy Spirit to the world."¹⁵⁵ The Father declares that he is well-pleased with the Son, and sends the Spirit upon Jesus, so that the Spirit both rests on Jesus and glorifies him in the waters of the Jordan. So the Son proclaims both the Father and Spirit, while the Father testifies to Jesus' sonship and, finally, the Spirit rests on him. Both Father and Spirit manifest the glory of Jesus at his baptism.¹⁵⁶

The "rest" is manifold. The Spirit rests on Jesus, and according to the *Testament of Levi* "the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge rests on him [in the water.]" In the *Teaching of St. Gregory* the resting of the Spirit on Jesus is a dimension of the Spirit's glorifying Jesus. Sebastian Brock has pointed out that it was very likely Origen who first gave baptismal connotations to the phrase "he leads me by restful waters" of Psalm 22(23):2. The theme was afterwards taken up by Eusebius, Athanasius, Hesychius of Jerusalem, and Theodoret. In the Antiochian epiklesis of the baptismal rite the theme becomes "the water of rest."¹⁵⁷ Precisely because the divine rest has descended on Jesus in its fullness and is there first actualized, the Son can both promise and impart the rest to the Christian community.¹⁵⁸ The baptism of Jesus is the paradigm of Christian baptism; his rest is our rest.

KNOWING AT THE JORDAN

The Teaching of St. Gregory relates the mutual knowledge of Father and Son, explained above, to the "rest" of the Spirit and the glorification of Jesus at his baptism.¹⁵⁹ Its author cites the Armenian translation of Isaiah 52:13, "Behold my child will deal prudently, he will be raised up and exalted and glorified exceedingly." This prophecy is fulfilled at the Jordan, for it was there that Jesus "was first understood and known as the true Son of God by the voice of his Father and the descent of the Spirit over him."¹⁶⁰ The emphasis on the priority of the Jordan as the place and time where Jesus' sonship was first under-

¹⁵⁴ Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 302-4.

¹⁵⁵ *The Teaching of St. Gregory* 425 (Thomson 93).

¹⁵⁶ Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 302-4.

¹⁵⁷ Brock, "The Epiklesis" 187, 206-7; see also *The Holy Spirit* 79.

¹⁵⁸ Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 314.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 302-4.

¹⁶⁰ *The Teaching of St. Gregory* 416 (Thomson 90); emphasis added.

stood, known, and glorified, has support in another Armenian text, *The Key of Truth*, where this priority is repeatedly insisted upon.¹⁶¹

These accents in the Syrian and Armenian sources lead Winkler to conclude that an archaic Spirit Christology has its origins in the Jordan event. There the Son is revealed as Spirit-filled and as Only-begotten (First-born) of the Father. She notes the dominance of Spirit Christology, to the complete exclusion of Logos Christology.¹⁶²

THE JORDAN AS BIRTH EVENT

In the narrative of Jesus' baptism at Luke 3:22, the best Greek manuscripts read, "You are my beloved son; in you I have taken delight." Most commentators follow this tradition. But in manuscript D (Codex Bezae in Cambridge) and in some Old Latin texts, as well as in some early Christian writers, the last phrase reads "today I have begotten you." On the basis of the principle that the more difficult reading is given priority, this last reading is preferred by a number of commentators (Grundmann, Harnack, Klostermann, Leaney, W. Manson, Moffat, Streeter, Zahn).¹⁶³ The more difficult reading makes the Jordan experience the birth of the Son. This is not necessarily an adoptionistic view.

Justin Martyr (ca. 100–ca. 165),¹⁶⁴ Cyprian (d. 258),¹⁶⁵ and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (beginning of 2d century, written originally in Greek but coming from a Syriac-speaking area)¹⁶⁶ are among the early witnesses to the variant. The conviction that the baptism of

¹⁶¹ "First was our Lord Jesus baptized by the command of the heavenly Father, when thirty years old. . . ." The text continues with a series of 28 "[first] thens," indicating that from the baptism dates the beginning of his maturity, authority, lordship, glory, praise, etc. (*The Key of Truth* 74–75). This manual is concerned with both doctrine and liturgy. This text is considered adoptionist by both Conybeare (*Rituale Armenorum* viii) and Nina G. Garsoïan (*The Paulician Heresy: A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire* [The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1967] 157, 166, 185). But P. Lemerle has questioned the position of Conybeare and Garsoïan that the Paulicians were of adoptionist origins ("L'histoire des Pauliciens d'Asie Mineure d'après les sources grecques," *Travaux et Mémoires* 1–144, esp. 4). Winkler leaves unmentioned the discussion of Conybeare, Garsoïan, and Lemerle. Even if the text were adoptionist, now somewhat in doubt, that would not entirely cancel out its worth in the present context.

¹⁶² "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 325, 327. Winkler's position seems to be supported by the rather obvious avoidance of "the Word was made flesh" by the author of *The Teaching of St. Gregory*. In sections 422–424 (Thomson 92) the author seems to be taking special pains not to quote John 1:14, though he quotes verses before and after.

¹⁶³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 485. Daniel Vigne in *Christ au Jourdain* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1992) treats extensively of the Lucan variant. This excellent book on the baptism of Jesus, which came to my notice only when this article was completed, is concerned only incidentally with the Syriac and Armenian materials.

¹⁶⁴ *Dialogue with Trypho* 88, 103 (*Die ältesten Apologeten*, ed. Goodspeed, 203, 219).

¹⁶⁵ *Testimonia* 2.8 (CSEL 3/1.73).

¹⁶⁶ 9 (*Didascalia Apostolorum*, ed. R. Hugh Connolly [Oxford: Clarendon, 1929] 93).

Jesus was the day of his birth "was extremely strong in Armenia."¹⁶⁷ The liturgical expression of this can be found in the Syrian celebration of the nativity and the baptism of Jesus on the same day, January 6, as is the case to this day among the Armenians.¹⁶⁸ On this basis Winkler suggests that the understanding of the baptism as a birth event "probably" has its origin among the Syriacs (who influenced the Armenians).¹⁶⁹

For Clement of Alexandria the Jordan as birth event forces adversaries to recognize that the Word, "the perfect One born of the perfect One," the Father, "received a perfect regeneration in order to give a prefiguration of God's economy."¹⁷⁰ What the perfect One models in the Jordan is the regeneration which determines the whole economy.

Hilary of Poitiers refers three times to the Jordan as a birth event. In his early years as a bishop, therefore before 356, in a written commentary destined very likely for his presbyterium,¹⁷¹ he emphasizes that the descent of the Spirit is itself a kind of bathing or baptism.¹⁷² This reference to bathing, or being baptized, in the anointing of the Father is immediately followed by "The voice from heaven said: 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'"¹⁷³ The Jordan event is the day of Jesus' birth in that his sonship is proclaimed. This will be determinative of the notion of Christian baptism as giving birth to children of God.

In his last years, between 356–359, Hilary returns to the theme in his *Tract on the Psalms*, where he twice cites the Lucan variant. Although Jesus existed before his baptism, that event is truly a birthing of "the perfect Son," because "the Son of man and the Son of God are joined together in baptism," without detriment to the fullness of either his humanity or divinity, a clear defense of the Jordan experience against accusations of adoptionism.¹⁷⁴

Though there is considerable evidence of the Spirit as mother in Syrian and Armenian sources at the Genesis creation account and at Christian baptism, the Mother-Spirit at the Jordan is found only in the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and Aphrahat.¹⁷⁵ In the *Gospel of the Hebrews*

¹⁶⁷ Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy* 229.

¹⁶⁸ Brock, "Clothing Metaphors" 26 n. 64.

¹⁶⁹ Gabriele Winkler, "Zur frühchristlichen Tauftradition in Syrien und Armenien unter Einbezug der Taufe Jesu," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 27 (1978) 299.

¹⁷⁰ *The Teacher* 6.25.3 (SC 70.158).

¹⁷¹ Jean Doignon, Introduction, Hilaire de Poitiers, *Sur Matthieu* (SC 254.19–20).

¹⁷² *On Matthew* 3.6 (SC 254.110).

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Tract on the Psalms* 2.29, 30 (CSEL 22.59); see Jacques Dupont, "Filius Meus es Tu," *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948) 522–43; Evald Lövestam, *Son and Savior* (Lund: Gleerup, 1961).

¹⁷⁵ Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang" 324. For the Holy Spirit as mother at Christian baptism, see Winkler, "Die Tauf-Hymnen der Armenier: Ihre Affinität mit syrischem Gedankengut," in *Liturgie und Dichtung*, ed. H. Becker and R. Kaczynski, 2 vols. (Munich: St. Ottilian, 1983) 1.381–420; idem, *Das armenische Initiationsrituale*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 217 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1982) 456–57.

the Spirit, which rests on Jesus in the fullness of the fount, is named in another fragment as the Mother-Spirit.¹⁷⁶ Aphrahat refers to the baptism of Jesus in which he was "born of the Spirit."¹⁷⁷ Elsewhere in the *Demonstrations* Aphrahat identifies the Spirit as mother.¹⁷⁸ According to Aphrahat, the feminine Spirit gives birth to Jesus at the Jordan.¹⁷⁹

The Jordan as Womb

The baptism of Jesus as a birth event is linked to the Jordan as a womb in relation to Christ and to Christians. Ephrem uses the womb image to link the mysteries of Incarnation, Christ's baptism, and the universal proclamation of salvation symbolized by the descent into Sheol. To this end Ephrem postulates three wombs: Mary's womb, the womb of the Jordan, and the womb of Sheol.¹⁸⁰ Because Ephrem is thinking in sacred (or liturgical) time rather than historical time, he can move backward and forward, without the restrictions of linear time. The baptism of Jesus can be the source of Christian baptism even though in a temporal sequence the death and resurrection do not occur until later.¹⁸¹ Brock recalls that, for Ephrem, the Incarnation is effective at any single "staging post" in the economy, of which the Jordan experience is one.¹⁸² Events which are situated at different posts, such as nativity, baptism, crucifixion, descent into Sheol, and resurrection, all participate in the same saving content.

In one stanza Ephrem starts with the baptism of Jesus, which he then links with the tomb, Tabor (or ascension), womb, again baptism, and finally ascension. Thus he associates baptism with the chief mysteries of Christ's life: his death, transfiguration (or ascension), Incarnation, and ascension.¹⁸³ John of Apamea (writing between 430–450)

¹⁷⁶ "Even so did my mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs and carry me away on to the great mountain Tabor" (*New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Schneemelcher, 1:177). Schneemelcher notes that Origen refers twice to the text (*Commentary on John* 22.12 [SC 120.262]; *Commentary on Jeremiah* 15.4 [SC 238.122]) and Jerome three times (*On Isaiah* 40.9 [Corpus Christianorum 73.459]; *On Micah* 7.6 [CCh 76.513]; *On Ezekiel* 16.13 [CCh 75.178]). In his *Commentary on John* Origen goes out of his way to point out the feminine nature of the Spirit.

¹⁷⁷ *Demonstrations* 6.17 (SC 349.405). ¹⁷⁸ 18.10 (SC 359.761).

¹⁷⁹ This is in keeping with the role the Mother-Spirit plays in early, but not later, Syriac literature; see Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Rome: Centre for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies, 1985) 140–44; idem, *The Holy Spirit* 4–5. Brock notes that *Logos*, Word, was also feminine in Syriac, and that from the late fourth century onwards Spirit was construed as masculine, under Greek influence; see Winfred Cramer, *Der Geist Gottes und des Menschen in früh-syrischer Theologie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979) 27, 36–38, 68, 84.

¹⁸⁰ Brock, *The Luminous Eye* 71–72. ¹⁸¹ Ibid. 16.

¹⁸² Ibid.; Brock, *The Holy Spirit* 8–9; idem, "Clothing Metaphors" 12.

¹⁸³ "As the Daystar in the river, the Bright One in the tomb, he shone forth on the mountain top, and gave brightness too in the womb; he dazzled as he went up from the river, gave illumination at his ascension" (*Hymns on the Church* 36.5 [CSCO 199.88]).

wants those who have problems finding significance in many mysteries of the faith, to concentrate on Christ's birth, baptism, and resurrection, as each of these gives entrance into the mysteries of Christ's life.¹⁸⁴ This ranging of the baptism among the major mysteries of the faith (Incarnation, baptism, death, resurrection) is seen earlier in a great semi-credal doxology by Ignatius of Antioch.¹⁸⁵ The global quality of the Jordan mystery is seen in the practice of swearing by the baptism of Jesus.¹⁸⁶

LIGHT AND FIRE AT THE JORDAN

At least as far back as Justin Martyr, possibly influenced by the *Ebionite Gospel*,¹⁸⁷ fire and light were associated with the Jordan. Justin writes: "As Jesus went down into the water, the Jordan was set ablaze."¹⁸⁸ In Proclus (b. before 390), the Patriarch of Constantinople, the result of Jesus' baptism is that "fire is baptized by water."¹⁸⁹ Jacob of Serugh alludes to the coal of fire of Isaiah 6:6: "(Christ), the coal of fire went down to wash in the stream, and the flames of its sanctifying power poured forth."¹⁹⁰ Indeed, in Jacob, the Jordan becomes "a furnace," where Christian baptism recasts the original image marred by sin.¹⁹¹ According to Philoxenus, by going down into the Jordan Jesus "set fire and Spirit within baptism."¹⁹² The fire can have a purgative function, but it also signifies sanctification and transformation.

Brock thinks that the reference to the mountain is not to the transfiguration, which plays a minor role in Ephrem's theological thought, but there are two references to the Ascension, as there are two to his baptism ("St. Ephrem on Christ as Light in Mary and in the Jordan: *Hymni de Ecclesia* 36" 138, 142–43).

¹⁸⁴ "Second Treatise on the Mystery of Christ," in *Dialogues and Treatises* 10 (SC 311.153).

¹⁸⁵ *Smyrnaeans* 1.1–2 (SC 10.132); see also *Ephesians* 18.2 (SC 10.74). See Ignatius of Antioch, *A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, ed. William R. Schoedel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 220–22.

¹⁸⁶ "I abjure thee by him who was baptized in the river Jordan . . ." See Sebastian Brock, "A New Syriac Baptismal *Ordo* Attributed to Timothy of Alexandria," *Muséon* 83 (1970) 378.

¹⁸⁷ Fragment 3; *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Schneemelcher, 1.169.

¹⁸⁸ *Dialogue with Trypho* 88.3 (*Die ältesten Apologeten*, ed. Goodspeed, 202).

¹⁸⁹ *On the Holy Epiphany 2* (PG 65.760); Wilken, "The Interpretation of the Baptism" 275.

¹⁹⁰ Bedjan 1.184 (Grillmeier, "Die Taufe Christi" 164). Though usually it is Christ who heats the water of the Jordan, in one passage it is the Holy Spirit (Brock, "Baptismal Themes" 334; idem, "A New Syriac Baptismal *Ordo*" 409 n. 64). Originally it was Christ who heats the water, but influenced by the theology of Christian baptism, where it is the Spirit who comes down upon the water, the idea developed that at Christ's baptism it was the Spirit who heated the water.

¹⁹¹ Bedjan 1.181. Narsai (d. ca. 503) has a similar formulation where the Spirit heats the water. "The furnace of the waters His purpose prepared mystically; and instead of fire He has heated it with the Spirit of the power of His will" (*Homily* 22, "On the Mysteries of the Church and on Baptism," in *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, ed. R. Hugh Connolly [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1909] 41).

¹⁹² *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 12 (CSCO 393.12).

Sometimes the emphasis is not on fire as heat, but as light. At Jesus' baptism "a mighty light flashed upon the Jordan."¹⁹³ For Ephrem there are two light bearers, Mary and the Jordan, in both cases the radiance comes from Christ dwelling in their wombs. The light of Christ also dwelt in Moses in an exterior and temporary way, while it is interior and permanent in Mary and the Jordan.¹⁹⁴ "The brightness which Moses put on was only an exterior shell, but the river in which Christ was baptized put on Light from within, and so did Mary's body, in which he resided, gleam from within."¹⁹⁵ In celebrating the feast of Jesus' baptism, Gregory Nazianzus (329–389) has John the Baptist, "the lamp," addressing Christ, "the Sun."¹⁹⁶ "The Great Light," Christ, is assisted by "perfect lights," that is the baptized, who should become "as stars in the world."¹⁹⁷ Light and fire are images of baptismal divinization.

Divinization and the Robe of Glory

In both the Greek and the Syriac tradition the divinization of believers is a major preoccupation. The special character of the Syriac teaching in Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh, and Philoxenus is little known in the West and is the focus of these pages, which are indebted to Sebastian Brock.¹⁹⁸

The broader patterns of the Syriac teaching on divinization is determined by an Adam Christology, merging the identity of the Adam of Genesis (First Adam) and Christ (Second Adam).¹⁹⁹ In succinct terms Ephrem states the thesis: "The Exalted One knew that Adam had desired to become a god, so he sent his Son, who put on Adam in order to give him his desire."²⁰⁰ The divinization Adam sought comes about by the Incarnation where the Son clothed himself with a full humanity. Though by no means peculiar to the Syriac tradition—clothing images are found in Latin and Greek sources also—they are especially abundant in Syriac sources because it is essentially a Semitic image. Through a series of clothing images, including "robe(s) of light," "robe of glory," "garment of regeneration," Aphrahat, Ephrem, and Jacob of

¹⁹³ Barsalibi, *Commentary on the Gospels*, purporting to be citing Tatian's *Diatessaron* (*Evangelion da-Mepharresche: The Curetonian Version of the Four Gospels*, ed. Francis C. Burkitt, 2 vols. [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1904] 1.115).

¹⁹⁴ *Hymns on the Church* 36.1–7 (CSCO 198.87–88). Brock, "St. Ephrem on Christ as Light" 143. In Jacob of Serugh it is the Spirit which is the light "shining between the waves" (Louis Leloir, *Le Témoignage d'Ephrem sur le Diatessaron* [CSCO 227.1061]).

¹⁹⁵ Ephrem, *Hymns on the Church* 36.6 (CSCO 199.8).

¹⁹⁶ *Discourse* 39.15 (SC 358.182).

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 39.20 (SC 358.194, 196).

¹⁹⁸ "Clothing Metaphors."

¹⁹⁹ But in Aphrahat Christ is the First Adam and the Adam of Genesis the Second Adam; see Cramer, *Der Geist Gottes und des Menschen in früh-syrischer Theologie* 73–74.

²⁰⁰ *Hymns of Nisibis* 69.12 (CSCO 240.100).

Serugh point to the divine life communicated through the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan.

But "the robe of glory" and other clothing images form a continuum, binding together anthropology, Christology, Christian life, and ecclesiology. The image of the robe of glory operates in four main moments in salvation history: in Adam before the fall, at the fall, in the Incarnation, and in the baptism of Jesus,²⁰¹ but also extends into the transfiguration of Jesus, resurrection, Christian baptism, the Eucharist, and eschatology.²⁰²

Something of its range can be seen in a single stanza of one of Ephrem's hymns. Ephrem is singing of the swaddling bands in which the infant Jesus was wrapped, the clothes the adolescent Jesus wore, how he "clothed himself in the water of baptism," how linen formed his shroud: "All these changes did the Merciful One make, stripping off [glory] and putting on [a body]; for He had devised a way to reclothe Adam in that glory which Adam had stripped off. He was wrapped with swaddling clothes, corresponding to Adam's leaves. He put on clothes instead of Adam's skins; He was baptized for Adam's sin, he was embalmed for Adam's death, He rose and raised up Adam in his glory. Blessed is He who descended, put Adam on and ascended."²⁰³ Adam/Christ and his clothes span the range of the mysteries, including Incarnation, baptism, death, resurrection, and ascension. The baptism is integral to the divinization of Christians because at the Jordan Christ also puts on the robe of glory.

The authors describe the robe in a variety of ways. The New Testament roots are in Gal 3.27: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Jesus himself is the Light, "the Daystar in the river," who dazzles a series of what might be called "economic places": the river, the mountain of transfiguration, the tomb, and the locus of the ascension.²⁰⁴ In Ephrem "the river in which Christ was baptized put on Light from within, and so did [Mary's] body, in which he resided, gleam from within."²⁰⁵ Because the Jordan contains the splendor of Christ's light "the invisible Spirit . . . clothes all [candidates for baptism] with robes of light" at the bath of new birth, according to *The Teaching of St. Gregory*.²⁰⁶ For Jacob of Serugh, all who come to baptism receive "a garment, wholly of light . . . woven with fire and Spirit,"²⁰⁷ "a garment of living fire."²⁰⁸ In a delightful formulation, Jacob imagines the Trinity combining their ef-

²⁰¹ Ibid. 11-12.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ *Hymns on the Nativity* 23.13 (CSCO 187.109).

²⁰⁴ *Hymns on the Church* 36.6 (CSCO 199.88).

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ 412 (Thomson 89). Gregory Nazianzus also describes catechumens as putting on "robes of light" at baptism (*Oration* 40.25 [SC 358.254]).

²⁰⁷ Bedjan 1.208.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 1.196.

forts to prepare the robe for the baptismal candidates. "The Father prepared the robe, the Son wove it, and Spirit cut it [from the loom], and you [the Son] went down [into the waters] and put it on in divine fashion."²⁰⁹

Christ Deposits the Robe of Glory in the Jordan for the Catechumens

Through sin Adam himself became lost and forfeited the robe of glory. To find Adam and restore the robe, divinity itself "puts on Adam" by putting on a body at the Incarnation. According to Brock, the three staging posts of the Incarnation (nativity, baptism in the Jordan, descent into Sheol/resurrection) are presented as the descent of the divinity into three successive wombs (Mary, Jordan, Sheol). By the descent of Jesus into the womb of Mary the Son becomes the Second Adam. At Jesus' descent into the Jordan as the Second Adam he places the robe of glory in the water so that Adam can go down and recover it: "Christ came to baptism, he went down and placed in the baptismal water the robe of glory, to be there for Adam, who had lost it."²¹⁰

A dimension of Christ's descent into the Jordan is his descent into Sheol to look for the lost Adam and give him the robe of glory. In Jacob of Serugh, Christ explains to John the Baptist why he seeks baptism at his hands: "I am trying to find the lost Adam; let me go down and look for Adam, the fair image."²¹¹ Jacob runs together the descent into the Jordan and the descent into Sheol, where Adam is sometimes identified as a lost pearl that has to be recovered.²¹² The descent into Sheol takes place not in historical but in sacred time, not in geographical space but in sacred space. Fusing the descent into the Jordan with the descent into Sheol is a way of declaring that the whole process of Incarnation affects all historical time, all geographical space, wherever Adam is lost. Christ thus enters into both past and future time.²¹³ Salvation is, in fact, universal in a temporal sequence and beyond history.

At baptism the candidate goes down into the waters to take up the robe of glory that Adam had lost, that Christ had recovered and deposited in the Jordan. In an Epiphany hymn (used therefore at the celebration of the Jordan event) Adam is conceived of both as an individual and as a corporate personality who includes the catechumens. "In baptism Adam finds that glory which had been his among the trees of Paradise; he went down and took it from the water, put it on, and went up and was held in honor in it."²¹⁴ Ephrem directly addresses the

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 1.211.

²¹¹ Ibid. 1.177.

²¹³ Brock, *The Luminous Eye* 16–17; idem, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition* (Kot-tayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1989) 37–40.

²¹⁴ Ephrem, *Hymns on Epiphany* 12.1 (CSCO 187.173); Brock, *The Luminous Eye* 73. "At his baptism He vivifies all baptized by having Himself received baptism" (*The Teaching of St. Gregory* 414 [Thomson, 90]).

²¹⁰ Ibid. 3.593.

²¹² Ibid. 2.599.

catechumens: "Go down, my brothers, and put on the Holy Spirit from baptism."²¹⁵

Yet the Jordan event has a more pronounced ecclesiological dimension. The baptism of Jesus is seen as the betrothal of Christ and the Church, "the bride of light," with the Baptist as the best man.²¹⁶ Jacob visualizes the Church at the Incarnation and at the Jordan in terms of clothing: "Christ put on the church in the virgin's womb, and she put him on in the waters of baptism."²¹⁷ In a text from the Syrian Orthodox *Fenquitho* (Breviary), the Church declares, "He put us on and we put him on."²¹⁸ Because the robe Christ recovered is the garment Adam had in paradise, the putting on of that robe at baptism, according to the Maronite rite, is an entry "into paradise, that is, the believing church."²¹⁹

Baptism and resurrection are usually linked through the use of Rom 6:5 ("For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his"). But Ephrem, without reference to the Romans text or death, relates "the robe of glory" to the resurrection. When Christians go down into the waters to pick up the "robe of glory" deposited there by Christ, they are proleptically being clothed with the resurrection "robe of glory."²²⁰

The robe of glory belongs to the Genesis paradise of Adam at the beginning of time, but also to Adam's restored paradise at the end of time, the eschatological fulfillment. When the Christian goes down into the Jordan, that is, into Christ's baptism, to take up the robe of glory Christ deposited there, the Christian takes on the tension of a realized eschatology, already and not yet. Baptism is the wedding feast of Christ and the Church, with the catechumens as the guests, who have been given a wedding garment, which, not surprisingly, is the robe of glory.²²¹ The wedding robe is to be kept spotless until one enters fully into the eschatological paradise.

In a quite different context Philoxenus interprets the baptism of Jesus as the beginning of all that the Father intended when the Son took flesh: "The return of all to God, that gathering up and the making new, that everything might become in him and he in all: these mysteries commenced at [Jesus'] baptism."²²²

²¹⁵ *Hymns on Epiphany* 5.1 (CSCO 187.145).

²¹⁶ Brock, "Baptismal Themes" 328.

²¹⁷ Bedjan 3.288.

²¹⁸ Quoted in Brock, "Clothing Metaphors" XI:18. This is a Syriac equivalent of the doctrine of divinization, shared with the Greeks, namely that God became human in order that human beings might become God.

²¹⁹ *Codex Liturgicus Ecclesiae Universae 2: De Baptismo* (ed. Giuseppe A. Assemani, 13 vols. [Rome: Apud Angelum Rotilium, 1749–1766] 2.331).

²²⁰ Ephrem, *Letter to Publius* 12; Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius," *Muséon* 89 (1976) 284.

²²¹ Ephrem, *Hymns of Nisibis* 43.21; Brock, "Clothing Metaphors" 19–20.

²²² *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 11 (CSCO 393.9).

CONCLUSION

In the early Church, the baptism of Jesus is a major mystery, ranged alongside Jesus' Incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.

The early material restates the biblical conviction that Jesus permanently possesses the Holy Spirit as witnessed to in the Jordan event, and that he will dispense the Spirit to believers in the sacrament of baptism. What is clearer in the postbiblical material is that the baptism of Jesus is worthy of inclusion in the creed. At the Jordan the Father and the Spirit establish themselves as the principle of identity. Jesus' own baptism, the original, perfect baptism, is the permanent source of ours, the pledge of our full humanity. After his baptism Jesus gave it to us to be ours. Jesus' baptism, a birth event, opens up ours. Not a private event, it presents the order of salvation, the image of the divine economy. The whole mystery of Christ is gathered together in the baptism, stressing the pneumatic origins of Jesus.

Here takes place the mutual knowing and showing of Father, Son, and Spirit. Here the Messiah is first declared, first known. Here begins the glorification of Jesus. The whole history, the entire visible and invisible creation, labors, groans, yearns for the moment when the voice of the Father declares Jesus his Son, when the Spirit rests upon him, as the perpetual source of Christian baptism. To those who follow him down into the waters, Jesus imparts his quiet and the rest of the Spirit, a new way of knowing. As the cosmic Spirit in the Genesis account transforms chaos into cosmos, giving order and making first creation fruitful, so at Jesus' baptism the Spirit touches the visible and invisible universe, dwelling in the material water so that it can bring forth children to the glory of adoption. Both the glorification of Jesus and the cosmic mysteries begin at the Jordan.

In the Jordan, a place of light, the Spirit, which Adam lost for himself and material creation, is restored. Christ, the New Adam, goes down into the Jordan to deposit there the robe of glory Adam lost, so that a restored Adam, redeemed humanity, can go down in Christian baptism to put it on again and possess the glory of adoption. As Adam's loss of the Spirit affected the whole of the created universe, so in the baptism of Jesus the restoration of the Spirit to the created order is universal. The descent of Jesus into Sheol, which is linked to Jesus' baptism, is the sign that salvation works backwards as well as forwards. Salvation breaks time past and pushes beyond future history. Salvation is universal.

The Jordan, a river unlike any other, Jesus sets ablaze. And those who go down into this furnace are divinized—God gives in to Adam's original temptation—and are placed on the path to the eschatological consummation, on the road back to the Father. The end times begin in the waters of the Jordan.