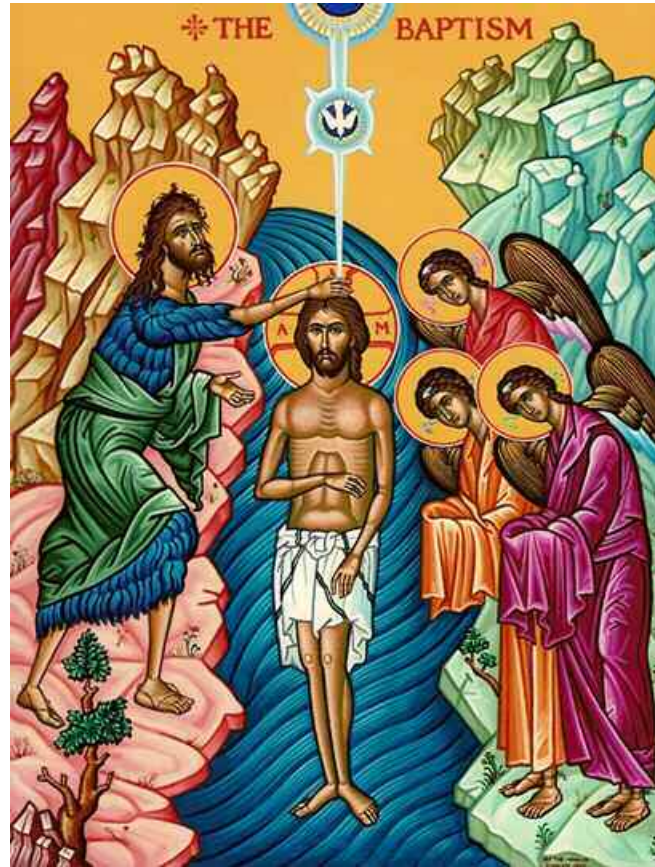


Initiation: From Ecstasy to Christian Incorporation

HAVING COME FROM Jewish schools of learning, Apollos was a scholarly and eloquent philosopher. In his thinking, he was quite close to Philo of Alexandria, the great contemporary of the Apostles. Perhaps he had been Philo's student or, more likely, his schoolmate. As his writings, *Of the Contemplative Life* and *Every Virtuous One is Free*, demonstrate, Philo had a strong sympathy with Essenism and Therapeutism, in which his allegorical interpretation of the books of the Old Testament received an occult nuance and emphasis. More than Philo, Apollos seems to have become involved in the meditative element of initiation that streamed through the Essene Order. Because of this, as happened to so many other Essenes, it appears that he found access to the Christian conviction. He now took his spiritualized, allegorical interpretation of the scriptures and joined it with the insight that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ; that the longings and prophecies of the Old Testament had thus been fulfilled. He had great successes with his lectures, particularly in Jewish circles.

Only too frequently [the Apostle] Paul has been compared to Philo, especially by Protestant theologians. The manner of thinking in his letters was characterized as Alexandrian allegorizing, though this was not limited to the Old Testament but extended to the contents of the New Testament as well. This conception of Paul as a Jewish theo-



Brother Simeon, 1992.

Baptism of Christ

The Being Who inaugurated the Baptism by Fire (the Holy Spirit) submits to the Baptism by Water given by John.

gian who advanced himself further by acceptance of new teachings confuses Paul with Apollos. It would be correct in regard to Apollos; Paul could not be more misunderstood. It is therefore important to focus clearly on the fundamental difference between the outlook of Paul and that of Apollos. In Acts, we learn of Apollos as well as his twelve disciples that their share in the Christian mysteries only extended as far as the 'baptism by John' (18:25; 19:3). What is meant by this?

The baptism by John signifies the level to which humanity had been able to aspire before the coming of Christ. The Christ idea was a profoundly familiar one to John. In his presentiments, he too could recognize the secret of the human incarnation of

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Christ in the one whom he had baptized. Yet the power and the ever-present being of Christ could only be experienced after the events of Good Friday and Easter. Thereby, a new principle of spiritual experience entered humanity. John the Baptist himself had indicated this prophetically, inasmuch as he had contrasted the baptism with water carried out by him, to 'the baptism with the Holy Spirit,' which in the future would proceed from the Christ-being.

The report that Acts gives of Paul's encounter in Ephesus with the twelve disciples of Apollos is one of the passages from which we can derive a concrete picture of how, even at that time, the 'baptism with the Holy Spirit' was an important ingredient of the original Christian congregational practices. Paul asked the twelve men whether they had received the baptism with the Spirit. It was evident from their answer that the mystery of the Holy Spirit was still unknown to them and that the source of their participation in the Christian life was purely and solely the baptism of John which they had received. The manner in which Paul subsequently spoke to them of Christ brought about the beginning of a decisive transformation in their minds. They longed for full incorporation into the Christian life. The baptism of John was now not considered sufficient for joining the congregation. A twofold rite of baptism was carried out. First they received the baptism by water; then, however, Paul added the so-called baptism by fire and performed on them the laying on of hands. The inner transformation in the twelve men continued; their souls were enkindled, their spirits enlightened.

Such insight into the early handling of the sacrament poses a number of questions. They begin to be resolved, however, if one considers that the dual rite of baptism carried out on adults in the early ages of Christianity contained the seed for the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. The two were moved to an earlier age of life only later—baptism to the beginning of childhood and confirmation to the onset of youth.

All pre-Christian initiation was based on the principle of ecstasy. The extreme and complete form consisted in the neophyte being placed into the deathlike temple sleep, the 'mystical death,' after



Watercolor. J. James Tissot. Brooklyn Museum

The Disciples of Jesus Baptize

While baptizing with water, after Christ's death, the disciples were able to baptize with "fire" through the laying on of hands: "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost."—Acts 8:17

undergoing the preparatory instructions and soul trials. The ecstasy lifted the fallen being of man to the divine heights from where, transformed and gifted with higher knowledge, it returned after three days into the bodily sheaths. In the late ages of antiquity when the ancient spiritual vision in humanity had virtually shrunk to intellectual thought, only a certain aspect of the ancient initiation remained in some places, for instance among the Nazirites and Essenes. After long, ascetic preparation by means of certain baptismal rites with water, the souls were loosened from their bondage to the body so that a certain revival of the ancient clairvoyance occurred.

Thus, in this manner, as a last shadow of the supersensory world, a half imaginative, allegorical

picture element became mixed in with the now abstract thinking. With the baptism carried out by long submersion in the waters of the Jordan, John the Baptist still brought it about that the souls experienced a death-like liberation from the body, even if only for a short time. As a result of their entering the higher worlds, they then brought back an awareness of their own mental darkness and of the approach of a divine light into everyday life. Apollos and his disciples who laid claim to the baptism of John had doubtless encountered only quite diminished versions of this. Thereby, they had attained to a slightly enlightened thinking that also enabled them to find theological, doctrinal access to the fact of Christ's human incarnation.

The transformation that was now brought about in the spiritual life of humanity through the Christ event consisted in the principle of ecstasy being replaced by that of incorporation. The Pauline principle of 'Christ in us' became operative. The principle of ecstasy was at an end; that of incorporation, a new beginning. The difference between the two makes clear the distinction between Apollos and Paul.

With this new beginning, the seed existed for a form of consciousness that does not arrive at its insights outwardly, but comes to them from within. The intellectual, brain-bound thinking, which was still to have a dramatically rich history reaching from the Neoplatonic and Alexandrian philosophy all the way to the mode of thinking of modern natural science, was and is a cognition leading from without to within. Today it is an appendage to sense perception directed solely to the external world. It came into being as a shrunken product of ancient, half-clairvoyant perception. The principle of incorporation viewed in the Pauline sense, must give birth one day to a new, creative thinking that will grasp the world from out of the core of the human being and, because of this, will also penetrate through the outer surface of things into their inner spiritual essence.

In the baptism by the Spirit or by fire, early Christendom had a means to the awakening of man's suprapersonal centre of being. It was not an outward warmth, not an external fire, with which this baptism was carried out. Indeed, it was not something that one person carried out actively, while another allowed it passively to happen. It was



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Oil and gold leaf on wood panel, Sister Marie-Paul, Printery House

Pentecost

“When the fountainhead of the ‘Holy Spirit’ sprang forth, the fiery tongues of Pentecost morning did not simply descend on the Apostles from outside or above. The flames were enkindled within; then, a higher spiritual element could come to meet the indwelling spiritual essence and be recognized by it.”

the loving, blessing help that could be offered by the congregation to the one who seemingly received something, but actually did it himself. The fire of the Spirit already had to be burning in the inner warmth of soul, then the laying on of hands could sanctify the flame by aiding it in attaining peace and harmony, turning it into a source of light, into a spiritual organ of perception.

When the fountainhead of the ‘Holy Spirit’ sprang forth, the fiery tongues of Pentecost morning did not simply descend on the Apostles from outside or above. The flames were enkindled within; then, a higher spiritual element could come to meet the indwelling spiritual essence and be recognized by it. The more clearly the secret of incorporation is understood, the more all misunderstandings vanish which would view as ecstatic conditions the

Pentecostal experience of the Apostles or what occurred in souls during the act of the baptism with the Spirit. The secret of these experiences consists in the exact opposite of ecstasy and rapture.

The twelve men in Ephesus took the step from the world of Apollos to that of Paul when they found their way from John's baptism to the Christian baptism. With it, the fulcrum of their spiritual life was moved from the head to the heart. Theology changed into religion. Not that they now changed from 'knowledge to faith,' from an experience in thinking to one of feeling. From intellectual head-thinking, they penetrated to an intensified and spiritual light, which corresponded to the spiritual element indwelling them creatively in the core of their being. What thinking can develop into in the future when it becomes Christian and is produced by the true Christ-permeated ego of man, was prophetically evident in the perception of those who were baptized 'with fire and the Holy Spirit' in the first days of Christendom. Though he had not been present on Whitsun morn, Paul was the actual guardian and cultivator of the baptism of the Spirit. Since Damascus, he was able to cognize exactly the portent of the future. He saw in this baptism the seed of an initiation into which Christian humanity would have to grow, particularly in those ages when the Damascus mystery will become an event for all humanity. Then Christendom will one day be able to enter into its 'era of the Holy Spirit.'

A 'confirmation' in the exact sense, an acknowledgment and strengthening of man's innermost being, took place through the baptism by fire and the Spirit. The first part of the dual rite of baptism, carried out predominantly with water, had relinquished the magical initiation character of John's baptism. It represented the symbolic conclusion and sealing of the catharsis, the purification by which the one who wished to fit into the community of Christ had prepared himself. By means of this baptism, the vessel was made ready and worthy of receiving something. The baptism with the Holy Spirit brought to life the higher content in the vessel. As in the course of time the first part turned into the baptism carried out on the child, and the second into the confirmation of the young person, the archetypal relationship becomes even more evident.



Engraving, Gustave Doré (1833-1883), for Acts 9:4

Conversion of Saul

While Pentecost was a Baptism of the Christ-sent Holy Spirit, the Damascus event was a baptism by the Person and in the Light of Christ Himself, transforming Paul's consciousness.

Through birth, the human spirit and soul have begun to dwell in an earthly sheath; baptism sanctifies this vessel. After two times seven years, the inner man is born in the maturing earth man; he attains to his own soul that is gradually maturing into a sense of self. Confirmation is the blessing and sanctification of what henceforth lives in the earthly dwelling as celestial content. Confirmation is therefore the sacrament of the Holy Spirit. Yet within a properly comprehended Christian sacramentalism, baptism and confirmation are not only to be connected to those moments in life when they are outwardly performed. They signify processes of development and goals of human striving which continue to develop further throughout life. Expressed in Pauline terminology, they are the mysteries of both the child of God and divine sonship which, proceeding from the archetypes of baptism and confirmation, or from baptism by water and fire, are to penetrate the whole of life. □