YOUR SPIRIT BREATHED ON THE WATERS:
A TRINITARIAN GIFT OF IDENTITY IN POSTCONCILIAR INFANT BAPTISM

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by

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Abstract

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Sacramental theology has been grappling with the trinitarian mystery in recent years, trying to appropriate the pneumatic dimension of Christian liturgy which was all but lost in the West. Attempts to find the Spirit through exclusive recourse to symbolic and linguistic models of sacrament, however, have backfired because the Spirit’s mission in the trinitarian economy requires a “hidden visage.” In this work, an alternate model, “efficacious engagement,” is developed to explore the way that human identity is formed by participation in ritual and how grace can be experienced as an embodied reality. Applying this phenomenological and theoretical model to the postconciliar Roman rite of infant baptism reveals a complicated ritual dynamic that mirrors the dynamism of the Godhead. The study then explores how infants participate bodily in the trinitarian relations and even allow the Christian assembly to renew itself as Body of Christ. Infant baptism thus becomes an economic reality, one that reveals significant aspects of the trinitarian manifestation in salvation history. Finally, the observations on trinitarian and sacramental economies at work in infant baptism are explored in terms of sign, symbol, and the problem of the gift.
For Thomas and Juliana,
who have given me many gifts --
which they do not know they give
and which I know I cannot return --
the very least of which
is this work.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE SACRAMENTAL ECONOMY

In his treatise on the sacraments in general, Thomas Aquinas says, “signs are given to human beings,” so that, properly speaking, a sacrament is “a sign of a sacred thing inasmuch as it is sanctifying human persons.” Sacraments can be considered according to what they have in common only if they are considered as part of the structure of salvation history, by which the trinitarian God, through the missions of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit, invites and enables human persons to participate in the eternal happiness of the Godhead. Thus when speaking of the sacraments in general, Thomas argues, one must consider the ritual signs as being addressed to human beings, who are sanctified by means of those signs. The proper context for considering the sacraments is the process of sanctification, which has three parts: “the very cause of our sanctification, which is Christ’s passion; the form of our sanctification, which is grace and the virtues; and the ultimate end of our sanctification, which is eternal life.”

Strictly speaking, then, the definition of the sacraments considered in general in the Summa Theologiae is not that they are signs and causes of grace, although Thomas does eventually treat them under these modes; rather, sacraments are those celebrations


2 I.e. “de sacramentis in communi” (ST IIIa, preface to the treatise on the sacraments).

3 ST IIIa, 60, 3.
of the Church which can be considered to be part of the economy of salvation. In question 60, article one he acknowledges that sacraments can be considered according to a number of different patterns, but “for our present purposes [i.e., the consideration of the sacraments in general] when we speak of the sacraments we have in mind one specific connection with the sacred, namely that of a sign. And it is on these grounds that we assign sacraments to the general category of signs.” The sacraments are part of the economy of salvation, and that economy is ordained to the sanctification of human persons, whose nature it is to be changed by signs. Therefore the sacraments themselves are most effectively considered under the category of sign. The sign and cause functions of sacraments have often been seen as at variance, with one or the other as primary referent. It is right to see these two functions as cooperative, as contemporary commentators have noted, but this should not disguise the fact that the sign function and causality of the sacraments are always secondary to their soteriological importance.

During the 20th century, there was a great change in the way that the economy of salvation was perceived among Western theologians. This change was orchestrated most powerfully by the work of Karl Rahner, who argued that the mystery of the salvation of human persons was a deeply trinitarian mystery. In fact, the Trinity is the one mystery of human salvation, both in the sense that what is mysterious about human salvation is the trinitarian mystery and in the sense that human salvation can only be accomplished by participation in the trinitarian love of God.

The sacramental economy, too, has a trinitarian structure and shape, not because the ritual elements signify the trinitarian persons in a merely accidental and arbitrary

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4 ST, IIIa, 60, 1 (Bourke translation: Blackfriars vol. 56).
5 ST, IIIa, 60, 4.
fashion, but because the Trinity accomplishes salvation and salvation is the Trinity giving Godself to human persons. Only in this way can the primary importance of the sacraments, considered in general, be preserved: their integral place in salvation history as the ongoing and existential availability of the economy of God to human persons. The symbolic and signifying function of the sacraments must take its place within this fundamental theological recognition, and depends on the fact that signs or symbols are one of the primary ways human beings organize and are organized by their worlds. Symbolic functioning may not, however, be the only way human persons can come into the economy of salvation being worked through the sacraments, and, in order to open the horizons of sacramental theory, it will not be the guiding concept of sacramental efficacy in this project.

This chapter will consider the trinitarian structure of salvation history in the work of Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose trinitarian visions have, in different ways, been very influential in reenvisioning theology and Christian life. Next, the place of liturgical and sacramental practice in allowing human beings to enter this trinitarian dynamic, to appropriate this Christian life, will be considered. Finally, the testimony of the New Testament (especially Paul and John) and a few patristic authors on the soteriology of sacramental practice will be examined. These works provide the foundation for later Christian reflection on the sacraments as the epitome of human participation in God’s life.

In the first part of chapter 2, an argument will be made that Christian identity, rather than symbolic representation, should be the starting point for any consideration of specific sacraments and their place within the economy. Louis-Marie Chauvet’s work⁸

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will be considered in this section as a paradigmatic example of a symbolic exposition. Because the sacraments are a significant aspect of salvation history precisely in the fact that they are concrete, existential, repeatable,\textsuperscript{9} inculturated, and embodied, it is important to consider a case study when speaking of the sacraments within the context of salvation history. Chauvet chooses the eucharist for a case study in his work,\textsuperscript{10} but the eucharist has always been recognized as unique among the sacraments. For this and other reasons which will be discussed later, infant baptism has been chosen as the case study for this project. Chapter 2 attempts to prepare for the careful examination of infant baptism as a formative ritual enactment of identity change by considering human identity as fluid, in process; as embodied and perceptual; and as affected by ritual practice. The goal is to present a model of ritual identity formation which is broader than the symbolic gift exchange offered by Chauvet and at the same time capable of the complexity and nuance required when one tries, simultaneously, to see the fully human aspects of ritual behavior and to recognize extra-human agency.\textsuperscript{11}

In chapter 3, infant baptism is considered. First, the choice of infant baptism as the case study for this exploration of sacraments \textit{in genere} is defended by a brief consideration of the importance of infant baptism, in its practice and in the ambivalence with which it has sometimes been regarded, to sacramental theology. Next, the application of the notion of identity developed in chapter 2 to the specific situation of infants is considered. The sensory and cognitive development of infants and young

\textsuperscript{9} Some of the sacraments are not repeatable in an individual’s lifetime, of course, but they are repeatable throughout the course of history.

\textsuperscript{10} Chauvet, \textit{Symbol and Sacrament}, 161ff, 268ff. Eucharistic Prayer 2 of the reformed Roman rite is especially important; see chapter 2 for further discussion.

\textsuperscript{11} Some social scientists are open to considering extra-human agency in ritual in order to fully participate in and observe others’ rituals; this was in discussion among some attendees at the 2008 Ritual Dynamics conference in Heidelberg, Germany. (Conversation among participants in the “Ritual Transfer” seminar.) Similar assumptions seem to be made in the work of Thomas Csordas, e.g. \textit{The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing} (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), xi-xii, 1-5.
children is compared to the concepts of ritual process and phenomenological identity considered in chapter 2, supporting the supposition that infants can be subjects of inculturated ritual processes.

In chapter 4, the case study is presented. The rite examined is the postconciliar Roman rite of baptism for children under the age of reason, but the case study focuses on the phenomenological and developmental abilities of infants (that is, children under six months of age). This chapter is written, quite self-consciously, as a theologian practicing social science: in other words, there is an attempt to temporarily isolate the human ritual aspects from the questions about the sacramental economy in order to consider these aspects as fully as possible. Theological interpretation of the results is therefore, as much as possible, postponed until the case study is over. At the same time, the author, as a theologian, believes that human ritual practice cannot be fully divorced from divine activity even within the natural realm; likewise, the author’s theological presuppositions inevitably influence the reading of the ritual performance. No doubt a true “outsider” to the liturgy would construe aspects of the rite very differently, but there is no attempt to imitate an outside perspective here; this is an unabashed rendering by a practitioner of the Roman rite, motivated by internal commitments to tradition and renewal. Thus there is no claim to an “objective” reading of the ritual performance, but merely to a distinctly sacramental ritual reading – or, to use more traditional language, an anabatic reading of the liturgical practice.

This leads, in chapter 5, to the katabatic rendering of the ritual. The distinctive feature of viewing sacraments as defined by an integral place within salvation history is that the theological aspects of the rite -- the katabatic aspect of the liturgy, or the properly sacramental efficacy of the rite (that is, the rite as it is made an effective extension of the work of the Incarnate Word in the world) -- can be seen by faith to be incarnated or made present within the anabatic dimension. For this work the focus is on
the trinitarian dimensions of this efficacy, which can be considered in three ways: the construction of the ritual community as the community of the Trinity; the recognition of the infant’s identity (both prophetically and as bestowed by the rite) as participating in the Trinity; and the dynamic of the bestowal of the identity as trinitarian.

Finally, chapter 6 will be devoted to several kinds of applicability of this project. First, the results of chapter 4 and 5 are reintegrated into the concept of the sacraments “in common,” particularly with respect to the sign value of sacraments in Thomas Aquinas and the concept of “real symbol” in Rahner’s work. Next follows a consideration of the theme of gift in postmodern thought and its relation to the results of chapter 5: in particular, can there be a trinitarian “gift” and what form would such a gift take?

Section 1.1: The trinitarian dynamic of salvation history

The doctrine of the Trinity gradually developed from the early Christian experience of salvation through Yahweh, Jesus, and the Spirit of God. In First Corinthians, for example, Paul reminds his readers, “you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Nonetheless, by the middle of the twentieth century, the Trinity was so divorced from the vitality of Christian life that Karl Rahner proclaimed, “should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.” Rahner feared that though the church clung to dogmatic trinitarian language, the trinitarian reality failed to make itself felt in the hearts and lives of believers, particularly western, Roman Catholic Christians.

The first step, Rahner felt, was to revitalize the Trinity as a doctrine about the economy – that is, a doctrine that proclaimed the way in which God comes to be known

12 All Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.
13 Rahner, Trinity, 10-11.
and felt in human experience. In *The Trinity*, Rahner attempts to take account of the way that God is manifested in a special threefold manner to the human person through grace. Rahner’s challenge has resonated widely, in part because of the insight that any “irreducibly trinitarian” view, as Christoph Schwöbel puts it, will thus be “distinctively theological” and “authentically Christian,” thus evading a secularization of such concepts as personhood, identity, and freedom.

Because Rahner’s starting point is grace, which is the existential participation of each particular human person in the divine life, his description of the Trinity has the potential to span the economy from the divine will and plan to its realization in the life of one human person. According to Rahner, the human person is already, by creation, constituted in such a way as to be able to receive the communication of the trinitarian mystery (“in the image of God”); at the same time, the dynamic of history (God’s plan) is the story of this mystery reaching out toward human beings. In Rahner’s analysis in *The Trinity*, however, the emphasis is on the constitution of human persons as recipients of grace and the trinitarian form of that grace.

Rahner’s exposition of trinitarian grace in this work proceeds from three basic premises. First, when theologians speak of the free and gratuitous character of God’s self-communication, they are speaking not of an arbitrary freedom of choice about the nature of that communication, but about a free act, not necessary to God, which is already trinitarian. In the attempt to preserve God’s absolute sovereignty, it is not necessary, for example, to assert that God could have become incarnate as any kind of creature, nor to assert that any one of the Persons of the Trinity could have taken on a

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16 Ibid., 86.
human nature; these assertions, Rahner argues, would make nonsense not only of the doctrine of the Trinity, but of the Incarnation itself.\textsuperscript{17} If God is Trinity, God need not choose to communicate Godself to any created being; however, if God does so choose, the communication will inevitably be shaped by trinitarian reality, because it is a communication of Godself by Godself.\textsuperscript{18} Thus God’s freedom already has a trinitarian character, so it is not necessary to suppose that the missions of the Persons in salvation history (whether proper or appropriated) are arbitrary. On the contrary, Rahner supposes that the missions are closely integrated with one another, dependent on one another.\textsuperscript{19} This premise opens the possibility for Rahner to make ontological claims about the trinitarian character of the economy of salvation.

Rahner’s second premise, closely connected to the first, is that God’s self-communication is a real communication: it must have an addressee, and that addressee must be capable of receiving the communication of God. “The mystery of God’s self-communication consists precisely in the fact that God really arrives at man, really enters into man’s situation, assumes it himself, and \textit{thus} is what he is.”\textsuperscript{20} As suggested earlier, the distinctive feature about Rahner’s theology here is that he sees a continuity between the incarnation and the advent of grace in human life. They form one integral economy of salvation; thus the patristic doctrine about the incarnation, that the Word truly takes on the human life and human situation, including the full experience of body, soul, and will, comes for Rahner to suggest something broader about God’s relation to humanity. The reason that the Word can take on human nature without ceasing to be God is that human nature, from its very origin, is the realization of God’s self-communication. It is

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 28-30, 89-90.
\textsuperscript{18} See ibid., 86-87.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 88-9. Italics in this work appear in the reference text unless otherwise noted.
simultaneously “the condition of the possibility of constituting an addressee” for free extra-trinitarian communication and the possibility of the exteriorization of the Word, for “Christ’s human nature . . . is precisely that which comes into being when God’s Logos ‘utters’ himself outwards.” In other words, Rahner’s second premise is that human persons are created in such a way that not only can the Word become flesh without ceasing to be the Word, but also that other human beings may receive the communication offered by that incarnation and by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Both facts about human nature -- its suitability as exteriorization of the Logos and as addressee of revelation -- are to be attributed to the order of creation.

This leads to Rahner’s third premise, which is that real conclusions about the economy of salvation can be reached from the observation and analysis of grace, precisely because grace is particular, concrete, and human. Thus his systematic description of the trinitarian mystery begins, “[i]n agreement with the nature of the addressee . . .” The starting point for analysis of the economy of salvation, according to Rahner, is the individual human person who is constituted as the recipient of the mystery of God’s self-communication, rather than the unity of the Godhead or the incarnation historically speaking.

In brief, Rahner interprets salvation history, in its totality from creation to the eschaton (or more accurately, to the salvation of the creature), as the interrelated moments of the missions of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. In accordance with his famous axiom (“The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity”), Rahner takes the experience of these missions in the life of the human person seeking salvation to be emblematic of the relations of the Persons to one

21 Ibid., 89.
22 Ibid., 91.
23 Ibid., 22. Italics of original text have been suppressed.
another. Grace, for Rahner, is realized by a dual moment directed to complementary aspects of human existence: history or truth and spirit or love.

Rahner begins by laying out four opposed moments of human existence: origin and future, history and transcendence, offer and acceptance, and knowledge and love. Since this work does not use Rahner’s theological anthropology, it is not necessary to examine each of these pairs of aspects in detail. It is sufficient to consider in what way the united concepts and their interrelatedness characterize the missions of Son and Spirit in salvation history. In this aspect, Rahner is clearly guided by the facts of revelation (hence his insistence that he is doing an economic theology of the Trinity), rather than by philosophical reflection or speculative theology: his primary data are the fact of the incarnation and its purposes, revealing the Father and giving the Spirit.

The mission of the Son, then, is characterized by the concepts origin, history, offer, and truth. This mission is manifest in creation as well as in incarnation. The work of the Logos is that which originates and offers the self-communication of God (the Father) by constituting the possibility of an external recipient of the divine love (human nature, made in the image of the Word). Moreover, this origin and offer take place in history because the Word, by the fact of creation, initiates history, and by the incarnation takes it up and gives the offer of God’s self-communication a historical facticity. Finally, this mission is “truth” because the offer means “letting [God’s] own personal essence come to the fore, positing [Godself] without dissimulation,” which is the core of truth. “Divine self-communication, as a ‘revelation’ of God’s nature, is truth for us.” To reintroduce traditional language at this point, the Word’s mission is truth because the

24 Ibid., 91, 94.
25 Ibid., 94-5.
26 Ibid., 96.
27 Ibid.
Word is the faithful showing forth of the Father which allows the Father to communicate Godself to the world. This is true in three ways: in the intratrinitarian realm, in the realm of creation of the human nature, and in the historical event of the incarnation.

The mission of the Spirit, on the other hand, is characterized by future, transcendence, acceptance, and love. Rahner acknowledges that this mission is more difficult to see and comprehend. One of his concerns is to argue, against a Pelagian misunderstanding, that the acceptance of God’s self-communication and its voluntary aspect is itself the work of God (the Holy Spirit). Affirming this without evacuating human free will is of course a perpetual problem in theology. Part of Rahner’s solution is the already-mentioned interdependent dynamic of the two missions: the acceptance of the offer flows naturally out of the offer itself just as in human existence, openness to the future or to transcendence of the individual flow naturally out of the individual’s history and experience. \(^{28}\) Briefly, then, the work of the Spirit is to arise out of the offer, both in the created freedom of the creature and in the opening of suprahuman realms of potential freedom so that God may become the future and the transcendence of the human person. \(^{29}\) Rahner’s explanation of why this is “love” remains rather obscure, \(^{30}\) but for the purposes of this project it is sufficient to observe that this transformation of a historical manifestation of God’s self-communication into a personal and appropriated relationship of acceptance is the consummation of love between God and humanity.

Rahner concludes: God’s “self-communication, insofar as it occurs as ‘truth,’ happens in history; . . . insofar as it happens as love, it opens this history in

28 Ibid., 97; cf. 91-2.
29 Ibid., 98.
30 “It is more difficult to explain how [this aspect of the divine self-communication] must be characterized as love. Yet the self-communication which wills itself absolutely and creates the possibility of its acceptance and this acceptance itself, is precisely what is meant by love. It is the specifically divine ‘case’ of love, because it creates its own acceptance and because this love is the freely offered and accepted self-communication of the ‘person’” (Ibid., 97-98).
transcendence towards the absolute future.” Creation and incarnation -- presumably including the sacramental extension of the incarnation through the ministry of the church -- are understood in continuity, as together revealing the nature of God. This formulation is also a reminder of the inseparability of the missions of Son and Spirit. Perhaps the best measure of its explanatory power comes from a comparison with a few verses of John 14-16, which characterize the relationships between Father, Son, Paraclete, and disciples with a similar fluidity and dynamism. For example, the mission of the Son as offer and truth (faithful presentation of the Father) is a good exposition of John 14:10: “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.” Likewise, the interrelationship of the two missions clarifies how “the Spirit of truth” (14:17) becomes the agent of recognition of Christ’s ongoing presence even after his return to the Father (14:18-24) and is also recognized as love for Christ. Finally, Rahner’s choice to locate the fundamental evidence for the economy in the human person’s experience of grace can provide interpretation for how the testimony of the disciples of Christ and that of the Spirit can be considered to be interchangeable or complementary (15:26-27).

On the other hand, the telescopic gaze of Rahner’s trinitarian economy of salvation has its limits. Clearly the ministry of the Word in creation and in incarnation (and perhaps also in sacraments) are distinct in particular ways as well as coherent in other ways. Similarly the work of the Spirit in prophecy and inspiration before the incarnation and in recognition and sacrament after it cannot be assumed to be the same. The history of salvation must, in fact, be historical; even if one can affirm that the whole history of salvation is present in the salvific experience of one particular person, this

31 Ibid., 98.
cannot mean as an undifferentiated indistinction but rather as the full presence of an entire process contained in a point. The whole dynamic change must be made present in the compression, with real distinctions in the economy preserved.

This drawback of Rahner’s work can be minimized by conversation with the work of Balthasar, whose rendering of the trinitarian economy of salvation is quite profoundly historical -- so much so that historicity itself becomes a reflection of the “theo-drama” which is characteristic of the intratrinitarian relations. For example, Balthasar’s treatment of the trinitarian structure of creation attempts to wrestle with the whole creation, rather than human nature alone, and to do so using reflection on the whole trinitarian dynamic, rather than the mode of being of the Word. According to Balthasar’s understanding, God is best described neither by the term being, since such is most easily associated with that existence which finite creatures have, nor by becoming, because that in turn may be confused with earthly change. Instead, Balthasar suggests that the immanent Trinity’s mode of existence may best be imaged as an eternal “happening” which is “the coming-to-be, not of something that once was not (that would be Arianism), but, evidently, of something that grounds the idea, the inner possibility and reality of a becoming.” This divine “Event,” the processions of Son and Spirit from God the Father, is a timeless dynamism that grounds the existence of the world as well as of God. In fact, the foundation of the possibility of change in the world is due to the fact that God’s existence is marked by Event which itself is beauty, goodness, and truth.

This approach may make Balthasar’s trinitarian ontology seem less “economic” than Rahner’s, but on the other hand it reserves more revelatory force for the incarnation and for the tradition preserved in the Gospels. In short, the difference between the two economies is whether the economy is revealed in the personal appropriation of grace or in the apostles’ witness to Jesus’ mission, and both approaches have merit.


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Moreover, “[a]ll earthly becoming is a reflection of the eternal ‘happening’ in God, which . . . is per se identical with the eternal Being or essence.”35

The divine Event, however, does not merely characterize the constitution of created being out of unity and particular forms;36 it is the foundation for the economy, the extratrinitarian missions of love in the world. “The immanent Trinity must be understood to be that eternal, absolute self-surrender whereby God is seen to be, in himself, absolute love; this in turn explains his free self-giving to the world as love, without suggesting that God ‘needed’ the world process and the Cross in order to become himself.”37 The idea that the central mystery of God can be considered “Event” is the reason why the events of time, according to Balthasar, can be considered “theo-drama”: that is, a working out in time of the essential mystery which is the immanent Trinity. What makes it “drama” is, of course, a plot, and the center of this plot is the self-sacrifice of the Incarnate Word, or Jesus’ “hour.” Balthasar’s use of the Biblical phrase is noteworthy: his explication of the theo-drama rests on the sense, present especially in the Gospels, that Jesus’ ministry has a decisive turning point, which is both the goal and the overthrow of everything that has come before it (Law, Incarnation), both the ultimate tragedy and the ultimate victory.38

The self-sacrifice of the Son, according to Balthasar, has this paradoxical quality because it is the moment at which the historical drama of the created universe becomes transparent to the eternal drama of the Trinity. This is the reason why Jesus’ death (which, as “the hour,” already theologically incorporates his resurrection and

36 Ibid., 72-3.
38 Ibid., 231-44.
glorification in the New Testament\textsuperscript{39} can have transtemporal significance within the created order. Crucial to this inversion, moreover, is the unity within the hour of passive and active potentiality in Jesus’ mission: his hour is marked by “his ‘being-given-up’ . . . a seemingly passive letting-things-happen.”\textsuperscript{40} This passivity is unlike human passivity, however, because it is grounded in a supreme power\textsuperscript{41} and is able to accomplish “a demand that goes beyond all limits, a demand that could only be made of him.”\textsuperscript{42}

This paradoxical passivity, then, according to Balthasar’s understanding of the world as “theo-drama” and of the “hour” as its crucial moment, is a revelatory flash of the intratrinitarian dynamic. It is not only a revelation of the Word within the Trinity but actually a manifestation of the whole intratrinitarian dynamic, which Balthasar explains using the overarching language of self-giving and love. Divine love is enacted through two kinds of divine power, an active and a passive power. The Father gives the gift of being; yet because ultimate love constitutes itself by giving itself, the Father, precisely \textit{because} he gives over his entire existence without reservation, “does not lose what he gives, that is, himself.”\textsuperscript{43} Meanwhile, the Son still plays an indispensable role in his own generation: “within the trinitarian process one Person is, as it were, passive, while another Person is active.”\textsuperscript{44} This “passive generative potentiality”\textsuperscript{45} means that “[t]he Son even cooperates in his begetting by \textit{letting} himself be begotten, by holding himself in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 238. See Jn 12.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 237.
\item \textsuperscript{41} “He \textit{allows} himself to be handed over. But, at the heart of this obedient letting-things-happen, there is an active consent, deliberate action: ‘I lay down my life’ (Jn 10:17) ‘of my own accord’ (18)” (Ibid., 241).
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 237.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Balthasar, \textit{TD5}, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid.; quoted from Bonaventure, \textit{Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum}, d. 7, dub 7.
\end{itemize}
readiness to be begotten." Furthermore, the passive power is not limited to the "recipient" (that is, it is a mark of the trinitarian dynamic, not the personhood of the Person of the Son or Spirit), for "the Father, too owes his Fatherhood to the Son who allows himself to be generated, and he also owes his power of 'spiration' -- of 'breathing forth' the Spirit -- to the Spirit who allows himself to be breathed forth by Father and Son." Thus in the Trinity there is a power to receive, with the intent to give oneself in return, expressed in gratitude by each Person for each Other. Thus the trinitarian dynamism is at the root of all extratrinitarian activity.

God “wishes to be almighty not solely by creating: by begetting and breathing forth, and allowing himself to be begotten and breathed forth, he hands over his power to the Other -- whoever that Other may be -- without ever seeking to take it back.” Balthasar concludes, “absolute self-giving is beyond 'power' and 'powerlessness': its ability to 'let be' embraces both.” For Balthasar, salvation history becomes the drama by which God draws human beings (indeed, the whole cosmos) into this “kind of 'super-death' that is a component of all love.” The procession of Son from Father as the radical recipient of this ultimate love “involves the positing of an absolute, infinite 'distance' that can contain and embrace all the other distances that are possible within the world of finitude, including the distance of sin.” This distance is maintained and bridged by the...

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46 Ibid., 87.
47 Ibid., 245.
48 Ibid., 66.
49 Ibid., 74.
50 Ibid., 84.
51 Balthasar, TD4, 323. For more on the Spirit as distance, see the work of Sarah Morice-Brubaker in “Place of the Spirit: A Trinitarian Theology of Location” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, in progress). For the pneumatological aspects of this concept I am indebted to Brubaker’s talk, “Christ’s Resurrected Body as Key to a Nonviolent Theology of Location,” at the 2007 AAR-SBL in San Diego (abstract S19-63). Her work also resonates with Thomas Aquinas’ theology of place in his treatise on the eucharist, esp. ST IIIa, 76.
The transformation of the cosmos into the temporal enactment of this eternal reality in the hour of Christ means that every finite distance between God and the world becomes relativized by the finite realization of this ultimate distance (on the Cross), so that the Spirit can become the bridge between the alienated cosmos (even at the height of its alienation, i.e. “while we were sinners” [Rom 5:8]) and God the Father.\(^{52}\)

For the purpose of creating a broad background image of the trinitarian dimensions of salvation history before considering how the sacraments fit into that history, it is possible to explore these two visions together. It is worth noting that both Rahner and Balthasar are attempting retrieval -- Rahner in the immediate context of magisterial statements on the Trinity, Balthasar in his own web of congenial authorities. Moreover, both recognize the sheer variety, as well as the depth, of traditional thinking on the economic Trinity. Both constructions can thus be labeled traditional in outline (although neither is traditionally rendered) and there is a fair amount of overlap between their depictions.

In brief, then, the (immanent) Trinity is the foundation for the economy of salvation. There are at least three concrete moments of this economy which have revelatory potential in opening human beings towards participation in the relationality of God: the cosmic order, created humanity, and the history of the Incarnate Word. These are by no means independent moments; in fact, they are ordered to one another not merely because they are dependent on one another, but more deeply because the three together form one manifestation and expression of the intratrinitarian dynamic. Furthermore, although the dynamic of the immanent Trinity is not accessible to the created intellect \textit{in se}, whatever can be known about the Trinity through God’s free self-gift in the economy is true; thus, the mystery does not preclude that anything can be said

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 324.

about God, but rather assures that all that can be said about God does not exhaust God’s nature.

One of the more interesting areas of agreement, then, between Rahner and Balthasar is that the manifestation of God in the world is neither an arbitrary external manipulation of the created order by a God who remains essentially unknowable (or only reveals purely verbal formulations about Godself) nor a revelation of particular Persons acting in particular instances. In other words, their analyses allow for understanding God’s nature through the economy without abandoning the notion that when the Trinity acts *ad extra*, all the Persons are acting. In Rahner’s understanding of the trinitarian constitution of the human person as a recipient of God’s self-communication, humans are not merely made in the image of Christ, but are codetermined by history and freedom so that they are able to enter into the trinitarian mystery in truth and spirit. Similarly, for Balthasar Christ’s “hour” does not merely reveal Christ’s place in the trinitarian mystery, but in fact dramatizes in time the whole mystery of the Father’s self-emptying love, including Christ’s obedient gratitude and the infinite gap and bridge of the Spirit.

Rahner and Balthasar thus, in different ways, address the trinitarian grounding of salvation history in line with the two ways that sacraments have traditionally been seen as part of the economy of salvation: as means of grace and as extensions of the efficacious salvific power of the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. Their work strongly suggests that insofar as the sacraments are either means of grace or the work of Christ incarnate in his Church, they cannot be considered otherwise than in a trinitarian context; moreover and more importantly, they provide some initial lines for recognizing the trinitarian dynamic within the sacramental economy. Presuming for the moment that there is traditional support for considering the sacraments as a fourth (not independent) moment of the manifestation of the Trinity in the world, the sacramental economy will be marked by history (remembrance or anamnesis) which is to be traced to
the mission, in creation and incarnation, of the Word of Truth. That history, however, will tend to sublimate itself in the freedom of the creature to turn towards God as his or her future, and in this mystery by which the creature freely cooperates with God the Spirit’s work of love can be recognized. From Balthasar’s understanding of the economy, on the other hand, it is possible to see sacrament as the means of the *admirabile commercium* by which Christ, through his kenosis (itself an image of the self-emptying love of the Father) gives to his people his own place in the trinitarian economy. This is accomplished by subsuming the distance of sin into the infinite distance of the Spirit (the love of Father and Son) which bridges the moral and ontological gaps between humanity and God.

Section 1.2: The sacramental economy of salvation

Modern scholarship continues to recognize the connection between liturgical practice and grace as identification with the trinitarian God. Catherine Mowry LaCugna is perhaps the most prominent example of attention to the liturgy in recent trinitarian theology. In her attempts to restore the doctrine of the Trinity to practical relevance for Christians, she saw the liturgy as a natural place for inspiration. Not only did she reserve a chapter to the historic witness of liturgical practice in her trinitarian theology, she also referred to the importance of the liturgy in her essay, “Can Liturgy Ever Again Become a Source for Theology?”:

Liturgy -- particularly the sacraments of initiation, creeds, doxologies, anaphoras, and the rhythm of the liturgical year and daily office -- is the one place which kept alive some awareness of the trinitarian pattern of

54 See Balthasar, *TD4*, 241-2, 244-54.

55 LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 111-42. Unfortunately, more recent liturgical scholarship has called into question some of the assumptions about date and provenance which are critical to her argument in this chapter, especially with regard to church orders. See Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 73-97. Nevertheless, LaCugna’s work is exceptional for choosing to engage these sources at all.
Christian faith, trinitarian not because of the number ‘three’ but because it was the ritual celebration of redemption by God through Christ in the power of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{56}

LaCugna recognizes the potential of the liturgy as a source for trinitarian reflection, not because a simplistic counting of aspects of liturgical rites turns up many “threes,” but because liturgical practice is “the ritual celebration of redemption by God through Christ in the power of the Spirit” -- in other words, is the part of salvation history by which redemption is appropriated by Christians, and is thus part of the manifestation of the Trinity in the economy.

Of course, it is difficult to describe and analyze the level at which liturgy is trinitarian. A verbal analysis of rites can take one only so far towards a full recognition of the trinitarian nature of Christian liturgy. Robert Taft recognizes this when discussing the difference between eastern and western liturgy:

[\textit{E}astern prayer is explicitly and consciously trinitarian in ways that western liturgical prayer is not. I am not talking about phrases, the repetition of trinitarian formulae like doxologies, but about the \textit{liturgie profonde}, which in the east simply cannot be regularly prayed without the attentive worshiper becoming imbued with a piety that remains trinitarian through and through. That, in my view, is simply not true of the west, where the Holy Spirit, though professed, is just not a conscious operative factor in a radically Christological liturgical piety.\textsuperscript{57}]

With the phrase “\textit{liturgie profonde},” Taft implies a deep reality which comes from the experience of the regular celebration of a liturgy, a reality which springs from the words, actions, and things of the liturgical rite -- where else? -- but which cannot be reduced to them by a facile analysis.

Both LaCugna and Taft recognize that even where trinitarian language and trinitarian redemption are both present in liturgical practice (because “soteriology and

\textsuperscript{56} LaCugna, “Can Liturgy Ever Again Become a Source for Theology?”, 4-5. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{57} Robert Taft, ”'Eastern Presuppositions' and Western Liturgical Reform,” \textit{Antiphon} 5:1 (2000), 11.
doxology are ultimately one and the same,\textsuperscript{58}, description of the trinitarian language is ultimately not enough to account for the fullness of the communication of trinitarian life which happens in the liturgical act. Gheevargese Panicker’s analysis of the trinitarian dimension of the Anaphora of St. James provides a clear example.\textsuperscript{59} Panicker quotes Rahner’s concern that the western church lacks a real trinitarian spirituality and argues that the Syro-Malankara rite, of which he is a practitioner, can provide insight. He describes the Liturgy of St. James and argues that the anaphora is “full of trinitarian expressions” and “conspicuous by the clarity of its trinitarian schema.”\textsuperscript{60}

Still, Panicker is unsatisfied with his analysis of language as a demonstration of the real “trinitarian dimension” of the liturgy. He admits that “it is the epiclesis which has become almost exclusively the pneumatological moment par excellence indicating the intervention of the Holy Spirit,” but maintains, “[i]n reality the role of the Holy Spirit in the eucharist surpasses the design of a pointed formula. The eucharist of the Church and the eucharistic Church is entirely the epiclesis invocation, as it is entirely a memorial.”\textsuperscript{61} The eucharistic rite has a pneumatological character that transcends the Spirit language of the epiclesis because the Church, as a eucharistic body, is identified pneumatologically and epicletically (as well as memorially and thus christologically).

The trinitarian language of the rite reflects the trinitarian identity of the particular church which practices it, but it does not exhaust that identity, because the trinitarian identity of the church is not simply the internalization of many repetitions of trinitarian names but is rather the result of the Trinity working within the rite to establish the Church:

\textsuperscript{58} LaCugna, “Can Liturgy . . . ?” 4.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 125.
In the same way as in the time of incarnation of the Word, the Holy Spirit did not incarnate himself, but penetrated the human nature of the Lord from whom he is eternally inseparable; so in the same way in the time of the Church, the Holy Spirit is not the object of a festive or eucharistic memorial, but he constitutes the power, the very grace of the memorial and of the presence of Christ in the Church.\(^{62}\)

The deeply trinitarian dimension of the West Syrian anaphora of St James, then, according to Panicker, is revealed in a trinitarian dynamic that grounds the “christocentric” but not christomonic” language.\(^{63}\) This dynamic is most clearly revealed when it is concealed: the role of the Holy Spirit, who is at the same time the ineffable person and the divine gift which hides his visage and his name,\(^{64}\) is the fulfillment and completion of Christ’s presence for his people in the eucharist -- and is thus more easily overlooked.

The epiclesis of the anaphora of St. James is the point at which that liturgy’s pneumatic dimension comes into clear focus, although in fact the whole anaphora is equally pneumatic with that epiclesis. According to Panicker, the very “hiddenness” of the Spirit, as opposed to Christ, in the eucharist and the Church, is a manifestation of the trinitarian dynamic. The tendency to see a pneumatic dimension of the liturgy in a relative lack of pneumatological language is clearly an indication of the deep trinitarian identity and spirituality of Panicker’s rite -- the liturgie profonde.

If the sacraments shape Christian identity, in order to study the dynamics of Christian life, sacramental theology must find a way of exploring the trinitarian depth dimension of liturgical practice. Unfortunately, even in the best case, as Panicker argues, a verbal exploration of the names of the Persons of the Trinity in the liturgy fails to disclose the fullness of the manifestation of the Persons in the mysteries of the Church. If

\(^{62}\) Ibid. Emphasis added.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 123.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 126.
even in the East, the Holy Spirit “hides his visage and his name,” what can be said for the liturgy (and thus the spirituality and Christian identity) of the Latin rite Roman Catholic Church, whose traditional anaphora contains only a nonpneumatic epiclesis? Panicker has already intimated in part the direction of an answer to this question. The Holy Spirit in the West Syrian liturgy, he reflects, “constitutes the power, the very grace of the memorial and of the presence of Christ in the Church.” It is the activity of God in the liturgy that is trinitarian. Trinitarian liturgical language is a partial reflection of this sacramental economy, but is not exhaustive. This correlates perfectly with the observation that Christian identity, too, is reflective of the liturgical language but not exhausted by it. Edward Kilmartin’s work, among others, provides some indications of how this may be so. He observes that the law of prayer provides its practitioners with “a comprehensive, and, in some measure a pre-reflective, perception of the life of faith.” In other words, the adage “the law of prayer founds the law of faith” applies most perfectly at the level of prereflective identity of the believer, and might be expanded in the following way: the practice of liturgical prayer is the basis for Christian identity, out of which springs explicit reflective belief.

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65 Ibid., 126.
66 In liturgical history, *epiclesis* is often used to imply pneumatic language. For the purposes of structural comparison, however, it is sometimes useful (as in instances like the Roman Canon) to preserve the more generic meaning of the word (“invocation”). When necessary, I will use pneumatic and nonpneumatic to clarify the import of the word.
67 Panicker, 125.
69 Prosper of Aquitaine, *De vocatione omnium gentium*, I, 12. See e.g. discussion ibid., 96-7.
70 Besides Kilmartin’s work, this is a premise of Aidan Kavanagh’s *Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992). Kavanagh’s work has had a large impact on liturgical studies; this project is of course influenced by his methodological work. Cf. also the different treatment of method in theological reflection on liturgical sources in David Fagerberg’s *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology*? (Chicago: Liturgy Training, 2004).
The “law of prayer,” then, is the foundation of the trinitarian dimension of Christian identity because liturgical practice plants Christians within the trinitarian activity of the economy of salvation. The sacraments have historically been recognized as particularly important moments in that practice, and thus in that economy and identity. This in turn suggests a methodological revision: instead of a merely linguistic analysis, what is necessary here is an examination of the trinitarian efficacy, linguistic, symbolic, performative, embodied,⁷¹ by which the sacraments become the manifestation of the trinitarian enactment of salvation for human persons.

The disciplines of the social sciences, particularly those implicated in the cross-disciplinary field of ritual studies, have a set of methods for exploring the cultural efficacy of ritual practices. Of course, trinitarian efficacy (divine power) and cultural efficacy are not the same. Divine power, unlike cultural power, cannot fail or misfire (Isaiah 55:10-11); moreover, it does not have its ultimate foundation in the human realm. There are two problems with confusing these types of efficacy: one is a fear of conceptually “trapping” God’s power in human action and thus failing to do justice to God’s absolute sovereignty (the “magic” critique), and the other is the concern of attributing oppressive social constructs to God (the eucharistic pogrom critique). Any attempt to take account of the sacraments as culturally efficacious instruments, therefore, must take care to rule out both of these misinterpretations. These critiques will be addressed more fully in the next chapter; at the moment, the concern is to explain why, despite these concerns, cultural efficacy is an indispensable element in the theological consideration of any divine efficacy of the sacraments.

⁷¹ The breadth of this list of course raises an obvious question: what does identity mean? My reluctance to define the term is deliberate; what I am interested in here is the naive understanding: “what makes a person him or herself (rather than someone or something else)?” See Jean-Luc Marion, “Mihi magna quaestio factus sum: The Privilege of Unknowing,” Journal of Religion 85, no. 1 (2005): 1-24. Since the goal of the method elaborated in the next chapter is not to attain an understanding of Christian identity strictly speaking, but to explore techniques for producing Christian identities (in order, later, to see those techniques as reflective of the dynamic by which the trinitarian Persons timelessly provoke one another), no presupposed definition is necessary.
This chapter began with an assertion that the sacraments, in so far as they can be considered “in common,” that is, as a genre or integrated set of practices, must be considered within the structure of salvation history, which is itself trinitarian. This implied that the efficacy of the sacraments, being “economic,” is likewise trinitarian. A careful consideration of Thomas Aquinas' introduction to the treatise on the sacraments suggested this approach, but by no means established it. Some additional arguments are necessary here, in order to consider the connection between the cultural efficacy of the sacraments (which are, indisputably, cultural events) and their salvific power, which is to say their place in the economy of salvation -- trinitarian, divine efficacy. This connection is at the heart of how sacraments can be thought to make Christian people -- how they can be the “law” or “rule” of prayer.

The concept of sacrament is a theological concept which developed gradually, like many other theological concepts, including the Trinity. It was developed in order to account for the Church’s early and abiding belief that certain rituals were a particularly significant participation in the economy of salvation, the great plan by which God the Father was reconciling human beings through the work of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Like other concepts later understood to be indispensable to Christian faith, sacramentality is rooted in the New Testament texts, develops in patristic exegesis and reflection, and continues to be the subject of theological analysis thereafter. Only a concise presentation of examples from these first two periods is possible here, but a very few examples will suffice to show that the later understanding of “sacrament” included a widespread

72 Narrowed to seven rituals only in a few churches late in the medieval period. This historical context supports the reading of Thomas above; he could not have taken for granted, as modern Roman Catholic commentators might, that “the sacraments in general” meant “the common functioning of baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, orders, marriage, and anointing of the sick.” While Peter Abelard’s Sentences treated these seven, Hugh of St Victor’s On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith distinguishes between those necessary for salvation (baptism and confirmation, which “have been so joined in the operation of salvation that unless death intervenes they should by no means be separated” [II:7], and eucharist) and other categories, including many things that would be considered sacramentals later in the history of the Roman Catholic Church (see e.g. II:9.1). Similarly, in many eastern churches today, there are more than seven sacraments.
conviction that certain Christian ritual activities constituted participation in the economy of salvation designed by God.

The body of Paul’s letter to the Romans, written between 55 and 58 C.E., makes an argument for the consideration of baptism as a sacrament precisely because of its place within the economy of salvation. The context of Paul’s well-known discussion of baptism is chapters 5-8 of Romans, which constitute a soteriological explanation how God’s economy of salvation has been extended to Gentiles, who stand outside the revelation of the Torah. The section is capable of several interpretations, but it is clear that baptism holds a central role in the economic bestowal of salvation in Christ.

Paul sees the problem of humanity as sin, a problem that is not resolved by the giving of the law because the Law itself creates a more powerful desire to sin (Rom 7). In other words, the problem is not merely one of knowledge but also of capacity. By the death of Jesus Christ, God solves this problem: “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:3-4). Baptism is essential to this transition (although circumcision is not: see e.g. I Cor 7), because those who are dead are neither subject to the Law nor to sin (Rom 7:1-3). Christ is dead and thus free, but those who are alive are still subject to the commands of the law and the deception of sin (7:7-25). But Christians have died through their participation in Christ’s death, because of their baptism:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have

73 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 560. In the discussion that follows my reading is partially influenced by Brown’s discussion of Romans in this text.
been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (6:3-4).

For Paul, baptism is an essential element of salvation history. Although “how” Christians participate in the salvific mystery of Christ through baptism is left unresolved in his reflection, it is clear that baptism is the economic completion of Christ’s mission; it is what allows both Jews and Gentiles to be “reconciled to God through the death of his Son” (5:10) -- or, to put it differently, what allows the death of the Son to hold significance for other people.74 By baptism human persons enter into God’s economy as it is enacted by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and this not only as a memorial, or even anamnesis, of a past event, because part of the salvific event remains in the future (“we will . . . be united with him in a resurrection like his”). Moreover, this is a trinitarian event, because participation in Christ’s death also entails a particular share in the Holy Spirit: to live in “newness of life” is the same (soteriologically speaking) as to walk “according to the Spirit” (8:4-5). In Romans 6, then, baptism is already recognized as (somehow) participation in the trinitarian plan (economy) of God through both Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Interpretation of the “sacramental” passages of the Gospels is difficult. There is no comparative material from the same period that could indicate whether the narrative passages associated with sacramentality at later historical periods (most notably the accounts of baptism in all four Gospels, including the peculiar testimonies of Jn 1:29-34, 3:22, 4:1-2; the synoptic accounts of the Last Supper and/or the feedings of the multitude; and John 3, 6, and 13) were actually representative of any liturgical tradition in the New Testament period. Although it would be interesting to know whether the authors of these Gospels and their communities considered these stories reflective of

74 Baptism exists in tension with “second Adam” language, which generally refers this shared causality to the incarnation of Christ instead of to baptism. Sometimes, especially in patristic homilies, the two coexist.
liturgical practice, for the purpose of this section it is enough to note that these passages became inextricably linked to sacramental rituals in later commentary, shaping both practice (especially in the sense of access to the rites) and interpretation.

One particular motif of the Johannine passages is sufficient here: the motif of the necessity of the sacramental acts to participation in the salvific mystery. This idea is pronounced in the discussion of birth by water and the Spirit (John 3:5), eating the bread of Christ’s flesh and drinking his blood (6:53), and the footwashing (13:8). Without assuming that the communities which first received this gospel and were influential in determining its canonicity saw these as reflective of their liturgical practice, it is clear that these passages were greatly influential in the history of liturgical practice and interpretation. The scriptural injunctions of necessity were attached to initiatory practice and to the eucharistic meal. They then became an argument for access to these liturgical practices, including initiation (baptism and eucharist) of infants and the ill and communion of the sick or senile as well. They also affected interpretation of these rites, in that these sacraments could be seen through the lens of these passages as essential aspects of Christ’s mediation of salvation to human beings. In this sense they

75 Characteristically this language is accompanied by “everyone who” language that affirms the inverse (i.e., “everyone who . . . will have eternal life”: see 3:6-8, 6:35, and note the presence of this language also in 1:12-13 (where it refers to those to whom Christ “gave power to become children . . . born . . . of God”) and 4:14 (where for those who drink, “[t]he water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life”). Of course this language in John is not solely associated with sacramental imagery, but its association with imagery taken to be representative of baptism and eucharist in later ecclesial thought has been very influential.

76 For an example of a reconstruction of the distinctive qualities of this community which assumes these passages are reflective of liturgical practice, see Raymond E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple (New York: Paulist, 1979), e.g. 78-9, n. 145.

77 In some communities, perhaps not “baptism” strictly speaking, but in the era of crossfertilization the idea of necessity, perhaps originally associated with footwashing, came to be assimilated to “baptism” broadly as this became emblematic of the entirety of preeucharistic initiation. Where confusion is unlikely (i.e. in the period between the crossfertilization of rites in the fourth century and the dissolution of the initiatory rites in the medieval period), “baptism” will sometimes be used to refer to all the initiatory actions excluding eucharistic reception, rather than just to the water bath.

28
contributed to the conviction that baptism and the eucharist were parts of salvation history.

Typological interpretation of the sacramental rites in the early church adds significance to the necessity of understanding initiation and the eucharist within the context of salvation history. Patristic exegetes followed the example of some of the authors of the New Testament in using typological exegesis to explore the unity of God’s overarching plan for the salvation of the world. This typology used metaphorical readings of Old Testament imagery both in order to establish a broad continuum between the preincarnational workings of God on behalf of God’s people and the work of Christ and the Church and in order to draw attention to subtle distinctions (in favor of the superiority of the new covenant). Similar exegetical styles were applied to liturgical practice, especially to baptism and eucharist, from the early period.78 Origen’s typology of baptism is particularly instructive: Origen’s typological readings of baptism emphasized the crossing of the Red Sea and of the Jordan River as types.79 This use of Exodus imagery not only saw metaphorical instruction for baptized Christians in the Exodus experience of Israel but claimed that Christian baptism was the ultimate referent of the saving experiences offered by God in the Old Testament.80 Placing images of salvation through water in conversation with John 3:5, Origen implied that participation in the saving work of God was “baptismal” even in Israel: “The strong assertion of


80 Ibid., 119.
salvation through baptism is related to Noah’s being saved out of the waters of the flood.” 81

In the West, baptism’s integral role in the scope of salvation history gave weight to the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Tertullian used widespread agreement on the gifts of baptism, which were “the remission of sins, deliverance from death, regeneration, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit” 82 to ridicule Marcion’s dualism and rejection of the Old Testament. 83 This use of the soteriological importance of baptism in the construction of the Christian canon emphasizes the argumentative power attached to the conviction that Christian initiation was an essential element of the economy of salvation.

Soteriologically, then, the sacraments were to facilitate the formation of an identity that enabled their participants to enter into the trinitarian mystery of salvation: to become conformed to Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Consideration of this “naming” language should not camouflage the fact that the whole reality of sacraments was trinitarian; the sacramental regimen was intended to alter the fabric of Christians’ whole identity, resulting in a fundamental difference of life. Thus the efficacy of the sacraments was in creating a Christian identity – a project in which the Trinity cooperated with human beings. 84

A comprehensive survey of the characteristics the church fathers associated with sacramental formation of Christian identity is beyond the scope of this project, but a few relevant aspects of their understanding will be explored here, as an argument for the

81 Ibid., 121.
truly anthropological character of Christian identity. Georgia Frank’s examination of the fourth-century mystagogues and their liturgical catechesis is an apt guide.\(^{85}\)

Frank’s goal is to consider the functioning of the physical and spiritual senses in the liturgical catechesis of Ambrose of Milan, Cyril (or perhaps John\(^{86}\)) of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. She is particularly interested in vision as the most trusted of the senses and in the functioning of mental imagery as a guide to physical perception in the eucharistic context. The importance of her article, however, is even broader than these (already quite significant) observations. In the context of the soteriological relevance of sacramental practice already discussed here, it is clear that the liturgical exegesis of these bishops functions as a guide to formative and efficacious experience of the sacramental rites; in other words, the purpose of these homilies is to enhance the identity-forming potential of the ritual experience of the auditors.\(^{87}\) As a direct result, from these homilies it is possible to determine some of the qualities these mystagogues associated with Christian identity and Christian formation, and that will be the topic here.

First of all, Christian identity was cultural. It depended on a framework of perception that was sensory, but learned. Frank begins by noting that Ambrose, concerned that a neophyte’s first experience of the eucharist was likely to produce confusion, pointed to the possibility of another layer of perception: “You have seen what you were able to see with the eyes of your body, with human perception; you have not


\(^{86}\) For the purposes of this section, the mystagogue will be called Cyril, as the matter of authorship does not affect the argument.

\(^{87}\) Frank notes that the mystagogical homilies of the fourth century were particularly adapted to the ecclesial context of the time, which included many adult converts and a secrecy surrounding eucharistic practice. In succeeding centuries, when the majority of baptizands were infants or deathbed converts, such homilies became impractical, and were succeeded by other tools for liturgical exegesis (Frank, 622-3). See chapter 2 for more on this function of identity formation.
seen those things which are effected but those which are seen." To learn to perceive this new layer of experience required one to practice discernment, to overlay on liturgical experience “a host of mental images that would reframe the physical perception of the Eucharist.” In other words, the fourth-century mystagogues did not attribute to the sacrament (or to their own words) a miraculous propensity to overcome the debased physical senses, but rather helped to shape a cultural discipline which allowed their auditors, through practice, to see the unseen.

Frank points out that in the eastern tradition beginning with Origen and continued in Cyril of Jerusalem’s homilies, the “spiritual senses” corresponded to the physical senses on the one hand and to the spiritual exegesis of scripture on the other. The experienced, well-formed Christian is able to perform “exegesis” on his or her sensory perceptions, which thus “began at the body, but perceived what was beyond it.” Cyril’s homilies, however, transformed Origen’s understanding of the spiritual senses: they were not the privilege of the spiritually advanced, but were the gift of baptism; moreover, they “never displace the physical [senses],” but rather, when the liturgical rite touches the physical sensorium, the spiritual senses are active in discerning the spiritual reality. Similarly, the homilies of John Chrysostom emphasized that even though the content of the physical and spiritual senses may sometimes be at odds, spiritual vision “transformed and enhanced bodily sight rather than ignoring it.” When the initiand comes “to the sacred initiation, the eyes of the flesh see water; the eyes of faith behold

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88 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* 3.10; cited in Frank, 620.
89 See Frank, 636.
90 Ibid., 621.
91 Ibid., 626.
92 Ibid, 627.
93 Ibid., 636.
the Spirit.” There is no implication here that the physical eyes are superfluous; rather, spiritual sight is able to “make the unseen visible from the seen.”

This leads to another observation, closely related to the cultural nature of Christian identity, in the homilies: Christian identity is bodily. This follows in part from the incorporation of the physical and spiritual sensorium in the teachings of Cyril of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom, but can also be seen in each’s attentiveness to participants’ gestures. Part of the cultural conditioning implied in Cyril of Jerusalem’s homilies, Frank argues, is the creation of “imaginal bodies” for the worshipers and the cosmos (such as the angelic beings) that enabled the participants in the eucharist to create “a space in which to receive a body,” i.e. of Christ. Frank notes that despite the importance of the biblical locations of Jerusalem in the Catechetical Lectures (pre-baptismal catechises), the sacred territory of the Holy Land did not play a role in the sanctifying imagery of the Mystagogical Catecheses. Instead, Cyril emphasizes the neophyte’s capacity for spiritual sight and spiritual gestures, suggesting that his or her body has become the location of the sacred mysteries of redemption.

John Chrysostom’s approach is even more instructive. His homilies emphasized the postural and gestural elements of the baptizands’ experiences as integral to the discernment expected of the spiritual sensorium, creating “bodies . . . through which to see the unseen.” These spiritual aspects of the neophytes’ bodies, moreover, were not perceptible only through the use of the neophytes’ own mental imagery but were also

94 John Chrysostom, Catecheses baptismales 3.3.9; quoted ibid., 635.
95 Cat. 2.9; cited in Frank, 635.
96 Frank, 629.
97 Ibid., 630.
98 Ibid., 631.
sensible to other spiritual agents, especially Satan. Thus Frank concludes that the mystagogues shared “the conviction that the worshiper approached and encountered divine presence in space, and not in some disembodied illusionism. And the body was the starting point for such consideration.” Whereas a modern interpreter might tend to see the visual strategies Frank discusses as “mere” mental imagery which does not correspond to any trans-subjective reality, the evidence suggests that the mystagogues saw them as disciplines which molded the subject in order to perceive the spiritual realm.

This provides an interesting hermeneutic for Augustine’s suggestive but vague definition of sacrament in *Tractate 8o on John*: “[t]he word is added to the elemental substance, and it becomes a sacrament, also itself, as it were, a visible word.” Augustine’s definition, therefore, is a western one, and is crucially, though not solely, responsible for the privileging of word over embodied ritual action in western understandings of sacramental theology. Yet the context suggests that Augustine’s meaning might have been as soteriological, cultural, sensory, and embodied as his fourth-century predecessors. First, the word Augustine refers to here is not the ritual formula (as it becomes in scholastic theology) but “the word that I have spoken to you” (Jn 15:3): that is, Christ’s word, which in the Gospel according to John, is effective “because it is believed.” In other words, the word here represents the whole ministry of Christ, the Word. It becomes united with the sacramental element to create the soteriological ritual that Augustine designates as sacrament. As a result, Augustine says, the water of baptism “touches the body and yet washes clean the heart” by the word’s

99 Ibid., 631-2.
100 Ibid., 642.
effect, “not because it is said, but because it is believed.” The soteriological effect of Christ’s ministry, then, is incorporated into the bodily act of baptizing in water through the ritual of the sacrament. Support for this reading comes at the end of the homily, when Augustine concludes,

[t]his word of faith has so much power in the Church of God that, through the very one who believes, offers, blesses, immerses, it cleanses even the tiny infant, not yet having the capacity with its heart to believe to justice and with its mouth to make a profession of faith to salvation. All this is done through the word, of which the Lord says: “Now you are clean by reason of the word that I have spoken to you.”

Clearly, the word here, accepted in faith, does not refer to any cognitive appropriation of the sacrament. Perhaps the cleansing power of the word refers instead to the culturally and corporeally effected incorporation into the work of Christ, which results in a Christian identity with specific characteristics.

This brings up a third feature of patristic reflection on sacramental Christian identity: it is corporate. This is particularly clear in the case of Augustine’s reflection on infant baptism above, which depends on the context of “the Church of God,” but it is implicit in any presumption that identity can be culturally formed by ritual and authoritative exegesis. Thus, it is true also in the soteriological understandings of sacrament discussed above in this chapter. This point has been postponed this far, however, in part to preclude the possibility that the corporate character of sacramental Christian identity can be interpreted as excluding its full personal character. The cultural and bodily aspects of formation, especially inasmuch as they are determined by rituals and learned through directed practices, presuppose a corporate Christian identity, but at the same time guarantee that the fully developed identity will be personal inasmuch as

103 Ibid.
104 Ibid., 80.3.3.
105 For more on this point, see chapter 2.
its development depends on the initiand’s participation in the developmental process and its end is the result of the initiand’s own phenomenological experiences.

More will be said about the interpretability of Christian ritual as identity forming in chapter 2, but for the present it suffices to observe that Christian sacramental practice entails a participation in the trinitarian mystery by which human persons are reconciled to God. This occurs because of a mysterious connection between certain rituals in Christian life and the ministry of Christ, the Incarnate Word, whose existence is already trinitarian. Despite the mystery of this connection, the establishment of Christian identity by means of sacramental practice is anthropological: it is personal and corporate, culturally-developed and embodied.

The anthropological principle of sacramental interpretation is best understood as springing from a theological and historical principle. As seen in the understanding of Rahner and Balthasar, the trinitarian economy can be seen breaking into the world in at least three ways: in the creation of humanity, which is constituted by an availability to trinitarian completion; in the existential, individual act of this completion which includes participation in the (historical) ministry of the Word and the (transcendent) mission of the Spirit; and in the drama of the mystery of salvation by which the turning point of history is identified as the moment at which the Word becomes a human being so that the trinitarian love and distance (Spirit) encompass creation and sin as well as the intratrinitarian relationships. In every case, this trinitarian economy implicates the cultural and bodily – the anthropological – by God’s free economic action, rather than by necessity. Human persons were created bodily and cultural, they experience realities in an embodied cultural context, and in the incarnation of the Word the Trinity irreversibly involved Godself in a human reality that was not only embodied, subject to

\[\text{106 Always including, as in Balthasar’s work, the whole ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ and concomitant work of the Holy Spirit.}\]
pain and death, but also fully cultural – exposed to Hellenism and Judaism of various forms, integrated in various ways.

Christian identity that is trinitarian, salvific, embodied, cultural, corporate, and personal will clearly be human, anthropological, but its form and formation might well vary according to the needs and capacities of those to whom the Trinity is bringing salvation. In the following chapter, the concept of “efficacious engagement” will be introduced as a way of thinking about the cultural formation of trinitarian identity without presupposing one particular method of cultural formation (e.g. cognitive, textual, causal, or symbolic). A broader methodology is particularly important in the light of infant baptism, which provides the case study for this work.
CHAPTER TWO

EFFICACIOUS ENGAGEMENT

The previous chapter argued for the consideration of sacramental efficacy as – first and foremost – an integral part of the trinitarian plan for the salvation of humanity. Sacraments are thus soteriological, so (due to the human participatory aspect of salvation) they take on anthropological forms appropriate to their (free, trinitarian) purpose. This is the theological principle according to which the sacramental rites can be studied as human rituals which nonetheless provide insight into the trinitarian economy of salvation.

Recent work examining the anthropological principles underlying sacramental efficacy have centered on notions of symbol as a means for enacting human change. This development is a reasonable reappropriation of the western, scholastic understanding of sacraments (in genere) as signs and causes¹ and simultaneously in tune with contemporary understandings of human beings, particularly certain forms of phenomenology and branches of critical theory. It has been hailed for getting behind the problematic of “magical” understandings of sacramental efficacy and the failures of so-called “ontotheology” which reifies the divine. Its impact on ritual performance, however, has been its most important effect: sacraments tended to be minimalistic when causation was the primary model. An understanding of sacramental efficacy in the symbolic realm motivates ritual performance that is rich with unsuppressed sensory

¹ For more, see chapter 6.
phenomena and capable of overflowing into abundant existential meaning for participants.

Despite these benefits, there is still room for broader modeling of the sacramental mysteries of the economy when these are considered in their properly trinitarian context. One must first observe that trinitarian principles do not bind sacraments to symbolic efficacy: if one of the canonical metaphors for intratrinitarian relations is speech or Word, another is generation or reproduction. When one considers the career of Jesus, one is forced to acknowledge that even the Word of God was able to become an *infans* – an unspeaker – without losing his essential identity. Yet *infantes* are not capable of symbolic appropriation.²

In the trinitarian, soteriological context of sacramental practice, “efficacious engagement” is used in this work to refer to the anthropological means by which human beings are enabled to become participants in the *ad extra* trinitarian actions of salvation history. This term incorporates several premises, which are taken to be guaranteed by revelation and tradition, not by observation or deduction: (1) God is the agent of human salvation; (2) by God’s gracious and trinitarian work, human beings may become participants in the trinitarian dynamic and thus in the divine happiness; (3) by the ordering of God’s plan, human persons must freely and actively participate in this work in order to achieve this end; (4) “sacramental” rituals³ are one means of such free and active participation. The last two premises imply that there is an anthropological and ritual dimension to salvation history and thus to the trinitarian manifestation in the world (the economic Trinity or, better, the Trinity in the economy). Efficacious

² See chapter 3 for relevant information on child development.

³ In this premise the word is vague, referring, as in chapter 1, to those rituals which have been taken up into the economy of salvation; this premise thus means only that there are some rituals which have been so taken up which can thus be designated “sacramental” or “sacraments.” As for how many can be so designated, and whether the term would apply to each in the same way, or in what way Christ and the Church can be said to be sacramental, such questions are reserved until after -- by the case study in this work -- the new model has been constructed.
engagement, then, refers to the fact that there are anthropological and ritual means at
the disposal of human beings (always presupposing the first two premises) which allow
them (by divine grace) to cooperate in their own salvation. The purpose of this chapter is
to consider a broader way of examining effective ritual participation by looking at ritual
activity as identity formation, rather than symbolic manipulation.

The first section will examine one of the most influential recent pieces on
symbolic efficacy in the sacraments, the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet.⁴ Although
Chauvet’s work is a profound examination of Christian identity formed through symbolic
gift exchange, it will here be argued that the approach does not suffice to account for
sacramental efficacy in salvation history. The second section will then propose an
alternate model for understanding the ritual construction of Christian identity and
provide a method for examining Christian ritual for its potential effects on identity
formation.

Section 2.1: Louis-Marie Chauvet and symbolic efficacy

In his monumental work Symbol and Sacrament, Chauvet uses a symbolic model
to explain sacramental efficacy. This move, which is supposed to establish another pole
from the ubiquity of ontotheology,⁵ is able to account for two major aspects of
sacramental practice that are particularly important to Chauvet: “presence in absence”
and the “return-gift.”

Chauvet’s starting point is the structuring of Christian identity, which he takes to
be established through symbolic exchange. He argues from the principles of continental
philosophy, from an exegesis of Luke 24 (the Emmaus story), and from a narrative
analysis of Eucharistic Prayer 2 in the postconciliar Roman rite that Christian identity is

⁴ Exemplified by Chauvet’s Symbol and Sacrament (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995).
⁵ Ibid., 9.
established by a consent to the absence of that thing (Jesus Christ) which is mediated as present. To be a Christian, Chauvet argues, is to consent to the symbolic mediation of that which one might wish to be immediately present; this is to hold oneself “in a mature proximity to absence” (Heidegger) or “in the trace of the Absent” (Levinas). Jesus Christ is, by the Ascension, absent; it is only through the ministry of the Church (seen in the broadest possible sense) that he can be experienced as present: even then, it is as a presence of an absence, or of the Absent One.

Chauvet identifies three ecclesial mediations (symbolic orders) by which Christ’s absence can be experienced as present: the scriptures, sacraments, and ethical life. It is essential, in Chauvet’s view, to recognize that none of these gives Jesus in an undifferentiated presence; none present Jesus as a dead body but rather offer the risen Christ through the mediation of the Church. Then it is possible to recognize the Church “as the privileged place of [Christ’s] presence” and as “the most radical mediation of his absence.” The insufficiency of each mediation to “satisfy” one’s desire for the presence of Christ tempers Christian identity, so that “it is precisely in the act of respecting his radical absence or otherness that the Risen One can be recognized symbolically. For this is the faith . . . . Those who kill this sense of the absence of Christ make Christ a corpse again.” Thus ethical practice is linked to scriptural and sacramental mediation in that each leads to the other -- not, it seems, because the practice of one overflows into another, but rather because the failure of each draws practitioners into the others.

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6 Ibid., 84ff.
7 Ibid., 75. Italics omitted.
8 Ibid., 173-8.
9 Ibid. 177.
10 Ibid., 178.
When Chauvet turns to the sacramental life in particular, he argues that the sacramental gift can only be received by an “appropriation . . . through disappropriation,”11 because grace is only received by experiences which are closer to “dispossession” than to anything commonly thought of, in human terms, as “possession.”12 This likewise implies an intimate relationship between liturgical and ethical practice: “no one can claim to truly recognize Jesus as the living Lord unless one announces him at the same time: there is no possible reception of the gift of the good news of the resurrection without the return-gift of Christian witness.”13 This witness, Chauvet argues, is community life and charity towards the members of that community.

These observations give Chauvet’s sacramental theology a great deal of continuity with trinitarian theology, if a few of the premises of the trinitarian economy of Rahner and Balthasar are taken into account. Thinking about sacramental grace as the trinitarian self-communication to a human person, as in Rahner’s work, justifies the connection between the sacramental gift and the ethical return-gift. If the sacramental gift is one particular instance of the self-communication which is the moment of salvation history, then it must contain in itself both offer and acceptance so that “the very acceptance of a divine self-communication through the power and act of freedom is one more moment of the self-communication of God, who gives himself in such a way that his self-donation is accepted in freedom.”14 Moreover, the unity of these dual moments is based in the integrity of the structure of the human person, so the acceptance, though the work of God, remains free. In other words, the gift does not imply the return-gift because of some extrinsic obligation imposed by the giving of the gift itself

11 Ibid., 276. Italics omitted.
12 Ibid., 44-5.
13 Ibid., 164-5.
or because of sacrificial language in the eucharistic rite. Rather, the return-gift is carried in the gift itself because the gift is a communication of the trinitarian God which “really arrives at” humanity.\(^{15}\)

Looking at Chauvet’s analysis of the sacramental gift in the context of Balthasar’s concept of the trinitarian self-giving, one can see that the sacramental gift offers a trinitarian identity to the participant. This includes not merely the healing of the *imago Dei* or *vestigia trinitatis* in the human soul, but is the adoption of the human person into the sonship of Christ, so that the Father bestows on him or her, by the sacramental exchange, the fullness of the divine life (Jn 1:16). Since the divine life, as Balthasar sees it, is “in essence perfect self-giving,”\(^{16}\) the appropriation of the gift will of necessity imply a disappropriation: entry into the trinitarian life consists in becoming a secondary fountain of self-gift. Likewise the sonship of Christ is obedientially oriented towards the fulfillment of the will of the Father,\(^{17}\) and so the Son pours himself out in offering to the world. Thus the intra-trinitarian generation is the origin of the return-gift that Chauvet describes as “*agape between brothers and sisters.*”\(^{18}\)

Despite these easy trinitarian observations based in Chauvet’s sacramental theology, there is reason to think that a broader approach to the trinitarian nature of sacramental ritual, with a new understanding of its situation within the whole of the economy of salvation, would be more useful. For an example of the shortcomings of Chauvet’s symbolic approach, his analysis of Eucharistic Prayer 2 (hereafter EP2) of the postconciliar Roman rite will be examined here. This analysis, which appears in chapter 8 of *Symbol and Sacrament*, plays a crucial role in Chauvet’s construction of a symbolic

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 89.


\(^{17}\) Ibid., 88.

\(^{18}\) Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 277.
gift exchange model of sacramentality: it is the “case study” that establishes the dynamic of sacramental communion between God and human persons, then accepted as characteristic of all sacrament.  

Chauvet uses a narrative analysis of EP2 to consider the text of the prayer as a symbolic gift exchange between human persons and God. He is careful to establish that the initiative in the exchange belongs always to God, who gives the sacramental body and blood, together with grace. This obligates the assembly to offer a return-gift, which is ritually realized in the offering clause of EP2. This ritual offering, however, is a merely symbolic representation of the real ethical return-gift, which is the life of communal love (agape, the ethical life mentioned earlier). The offering clause therefore demonstrates “appropriation through disappropriation,” because the gift once received and placed on the altar is immediately offered back to God; it likewise represents the connection between liturgical and ethical practice characteristic of Chauvet’s work.

A more careful reading, however, reveals flaws in the analysis. The first crucial problem is the isolation of EP2 from its ritual and performative context in this analysis, which leads Chauvet to misread the significance of the eucharistic gift. Due no doubt to the influence of traditional medieval western understandings of consecration, Chauvet identifies the institution narrative as the moment when the gifts of God, the body and
blood of Christ, are received. This creates a problematic disassociation of the reception of the gift from the ritual meal, which is at once the embodied symbol of the reception of the gift and the performative enactment of the communal love Chauvet wishes to implicate in the prayer. The reception of God’s gift is not enacted -- because not experienced as gift, as given -- in the institution narrative, but in the rite of communion. The embodied church does not receive the sacramental element in the recitation of the words of Christ, but in eating and drinking. Thus the church offers the eucharistic gift back to God even before receiving it; or rather, the gift offers itself in “an act of oblation, that is, of dispossession” in being given to the assembly. One might say, against the Donatists, that one can only give what one does not (yet?) have.

Similarly, Chauvet is undoubtedly correct when he observes that grace is itself marked by dispossession, but he overlooks significant aspects of that fact. Grace is marked by dispossession because it is entry into the trinitarian life which is absolute self-gift. The moment of reception of the gift is the communal meal, in which the assembly’s participation symbolically enacts the return-gift, “a self-giving called agape between brothers and sisters.” Participants’ reception of communion is not an assent to an obligation of mutual love, but the practice of mutual love in their bodies. This suggests that Chauvet’s discussion of the tie between liturgical and ethical practice is, despite his best efforts, still too extrinsic to do justice to ritual. Chauvet argues that “[t]he cultic offering is only the symbolic representation of a return-gift yet to be ‘veri-fied’

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24 “This [sub-program] seeks to obtain Jesus Christ, through the Spirit, under the mode of sacramental body and blood: the anamnesis declares this realized, but . . . in an act of oblation, that is, of dispossession” (Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 270-1, emphasis added).

25 Ibid., 271.

26 Ibid., 44-5.

27 Ibid., 277.
elsewhere,” but in fact, if the eucharistic gift offered to the people of God is truly grace, that is, entry into the trinitarian life, then the capacity to become absolute self-giving in the world is the gift itself, not an obligatory return-gift. More, this capacity to pour oneself out, kenosis taking on the form of the body of Christ through the power of the Spirit, is the only form grace can take, because God has no other gift to give than God’s own life.

Chauvet’s focus on the prayer text outside its context, as well as his desire to find justification for the unique character of grace in the words spoken instead of in the mystery of God’s gift itself, stem from his reliance on a language act model for sacramental communion between God and human beings. “The word should not be treated,” he says, “as merely one example among others but as the very archetype of what happens between subjects and within any subject.” The claim that the speaking of a word is the foundation of subjectivity is Chauvet’s explanation for the fact that any gift obligates the recipient to a return-gift:

every word ‘received’ as such imposes an obligation. To refuse to answer the person who is speaking to us is to refuse to receive this word as a gift, to break the alliance by short-circuiting the communication . . . . However, every language act, as we have stressed, has an illocutionary dimension which makes it, explicitly or not, a word given, in which it is always ultimately oneself that one gives, oneself that one surrenders and ‘exposes’ to the risk of being misunderstood. Such is the bread of the word which enables us to live as subjects.

This characterization of the sacramental rite as a language act – or, better, the use of a language act model to interpret the sacramental action – is not arbitrary. It stems from the foundational question of Chauvet’s work: why the scholastic theologians used the category of “cause” to interpret sacramental grace, when “there is an (apparently

28 Ibid., 276.
29 Ibid., 266.
30 Ibid., 267.
fundamental) heterogeneity between the language of grace and the instrumental and productionist language of causality.”

Chauvet takes the answer to this question, broadly speaking, to be “the ontological presuppositions which structured [the scholastics’] entire culture;” that is, “the ‘foundational ways of thinking’ that aim at explaining the totality of being.” This kind of thinking gives rise to a methodological pole which at its most basic makes it impossible to adequately consider the distinction between the system of thought and reality itself. This leads to a kind of “conceptual idolatry” in which the ossified conceptual order (of analogy, in the case of the scholastics) can loom larger than God the “non-other,” the “unrecognizable,” who can never be known except in a relationship. Thus, Chauvet concludes, theology cannot be done outside this relationship, so “cannot be disconnected from the believing subjects who are required to give place to the crucified God whom they profess and are thus themselves questioned in their very act of asking questions about God.” In order to do justice to the subjectivity of grace and thus of sacrament, then, Chauvet wishes to construct an opposing pole for sacramental thought: “this second way is that of language, or of the symbolic.”

31 Ibid., 7.
32 Ibid., 8.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 217.
36 Ibid., 74.
37 Ibid., 75.
38 It is worth mentioning that these concerns are quite similar, though differently expressed, to those motivating the theological reappropriation of scholastic theology in the work of Edward Schillebeeckx and Rahner.
39 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 76.
40 Ibid., 9.
new pole must provide a discourse about sacraments and grace which itself is a performative language, altering those who use it even as it allows them to speak. The goal of theologians, then, would be “not to demonstrate anything by a calculating knowledge but to give witness to that in which they know themselves to be already held.”

In order to construct this pole, Chauvet turns to the work of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger likewise questioned the withdrawal of the subject from within the explicit range of the discourse of classical metaphysics: “every metaphysical question can be asked only in such a way that the questioner as such is present together with the question, that is, is placed in question.” This is because Being is not a determinate and passive field of “objects” offered for view; rather, Being and humanity constitute one another and call to one another. Thus the first step in ontology is an anthropological and epistemological question: what relation do human beings bear to the world?

According to Heidegger, it is the essence of human beings to “ek-sist.” The word expresses both the potentiality and risk of human experience. Humanity “stands out into the openness of Being,” always experiencing the self against the transcendent. Human beings must stand out into transcendence and come to know it, but it must retain its transcendence: “the god who remains unknown, must by showing himself as the one he is, appear as the one who remains unknown. God’s manifestness -- not only he himself --

41 Ibid., 65.
44 Ibid., 252.
is mysterious.”⁴⁶ Thus the existence of human beings depends on finding “a disclosing that lets us see what conceals itself, but lets us see it not by seeking to wrest what is concealed out of its concealedness, but only by guarding the concealed in its self-concealment.”⁴⁷ This disclosing, Heidegger believes, is the the ultimate significance of what he means by “language,” which he describes as “the master of man.”⁴⁸ Language at its deepest “beckons us, at first and then again at the end, toward a thing’s nature,”⁴⁹ and poetry is the nearest human utterance to actually fulfilling this ultimate purpose of language.⁵⁰

Heidegger’s identification of the poetic as the human capacity to measure oneself against the transcendent, and his association of this capacity with the ideal of language, is the origin of Chauvet’s use of the language-act model to study sacramental exchange.⁵¹ Since Heidegger’s notion of language is irreducibly oriented towards the subject⁵² and draws humanity towards the unknown while maintaining its mystery, Chauvet concludes that only a model of sacrament formed by language can take account of grace, which “[l]ike the manna in the desert, which is perhaps its most beautiful biblical expression, . . . is of an entirely different order from that of value or empirical verifiability.”⁵³ When Chauvet moves from the philosophical groundings of his project in Chapter 2, “Overcoming Onto-Theology?” to the more practical foundation in “Mediation” (Chapter 3) and “Symbol and Body” (Chapter 4), he maintains language as the mediator between

46 Ibid., 220.
48 Ibid., 213.
49 Ibid., 214.
50 Ibid., 220.
51 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 55-7.
52 See ibid., 132-5.
53 Ibid., 44-5.
the human subject and the reality that continually withdraws. The social sciences, particularly linguistics, ritual studies, and psychoanalysis, are introduced to develop the “symbolic efficacy” model of sacramental activity. This shift, however, produces an unarticulated shift in the meaning of the word *language* and its implications for human life and sacramentality.

Chauvet begins with an uncontroversial presentation of the cultural means of human existence: “[r]eality is never present to us except in a mediated way, which is to say, *constructed* out of the symbolic network of the culture which fashions us.” He compares the symbolic order “to contact lenses which cannot be seen by the wearers since they adhere to their eyes but through which all their vision of the real is filtered. Therefore, the real as such is by definition *unreachable*. What we perceive of it is what is constructed by our culture and desire, what is filtered through our linguistic lens.” For Chauvet, the symbolic order (his new methodological pole) and linguistic reality are, in all essential respects, equivalent: “What is true for the symbolic order is clearly and in the same way true for language. *Subject and language build themselves up in tandem.*” From being a beckoning toward the truth of a thing, something which allows a subject to step out into the transcendent (to “ek-sist”), language becomes in this chapter a horizon that limits a subject’s ability to see outside his or her cultural setting. The subject is ossified and tied to the cultural conceptions of his or her linguistic community, without even being able to see his or her limitation. While this view is to some extent consonant with the use of “horizons” in phenomenology, it overlooks the complexity of humans’ cultural affiliations, which allow them to negatively as well as positively appropriate the values of their cultures.

54 Ibid., 84.
55 Ibid., 86.
56 Ibid.
Heidegger, on the other hand, hints that his “language,” which mediates the way that human beings stand out into (ek-sist in) the world, is not, strictly speaking, a linguistic reality. In “A Dialogue on Language” Heidegger admitted that there was a “danger” in his dialogues with Japanese colleagues, because “the spirit of the Japanese language remained closed” to him.57 His Japanese interlocutor suggests the problem: “The language of the dialogue constantly destroyed the possibility of saying what the dialogue was about.”58 Heidegger, however, wishes to see the dialogue as a kind of disclosure which maintained the mystery of the shared reality behind both languages, a kind of poetry. He seeks to be reassured that true “language” may transcend cultural specifics: “Some time ago I called language, clumsily enough, the house of Being. If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man.”59 The interlocutor picks up on his use of the word “presumably”: “Assuming that the languages of the two are not merely different but are other in nature, and radically so.”60 Again Heidegger seeks reassurance: “And so, a dialogue from house to house remains nearly impossible,”61 provoking this comforting response: “You are right to say ’nearly.’ For still it was a dialogue . . .”62

58 Ibid., 5.
59 Ibid. Emphasis added.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid. Cf. the assertion of Jacques Derrida on the gift: “What I really do not know, and I confess I do not know, is whether what I am analyzing or trying to think is prior to my own culture, our own culture, that is, to the Judeo-Christian, Greek heritage of the gift . . .” (“On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, Moderated by Richard Kearney,” in God, the Gift, and Postmodernism [Bloomington: Indiana University, 1999], 73).
After this conversation Heidegger eventually agrees that his grappling with language is an attempt to go beyond the limitations of specific linguistic instantiations, even if he is unable to judge the success or failure of that attempt:

I do not yet see whether what I am trying to think of as the nature of language is also adequate for the nature of the Eastasian language; whether in the end -- which would also be the beginning -- a nature of language can reach the thinking experience, a nature which would offer the assurance that European-Western saying and Eastasian saying will enter into dialogue such that in it there sings something that wells up from a single source. \(^{63}\)

In fact, the mediation of “language” that Heidegger speaks of, or hopes he speaks of despite the inevitable limitation of cultural particularity, is the mediation of this single source which, Heidegger believes, is what allows linguistic mediation to occur. Poetry is singled out because it is, Heidegger believes, the linguistic instantiation that rests closest to the source; it remains the language act which most nearly makes available the self-disclosure, the clearing of Being. Nonetheless, no single language act really performs the task of “language” for Heidegger: language itself, like Being, continually withdraws from thought.

Rather than contact lenses, then, Heidegger’s metaphor of language as the “house of Being” suggests a meeting-place in which Being and humanity dwell and where their mutual relationship can take place. For there is a reciprocity between Being and humanity, as each depends on the other: “As ek-sisting, man sustains Da-sein in that he takes the Da, the clearing of Being, into ‘care’,”\(^{64}\) likewise “Being itself . . . has projected the essence of man into ‘care.’”\(^{65}\) For Heidegger, “language remains the master of man”\(^{66}\) implies that not all the initiative or “care” for world-building belongs to human subjects.

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65 Ibid., 252.
Being is in a mutually interdependent relationship with humanity; this relationship is “meaning,” or what Heidegger calls “world.” The mutual interdependence of meaning is iconicized by the word “language,” because (shared) language is a cultural reality which allows speakers to construct a mutually interdependent meaning, but the goal is to revitalize a thinking that recognizes how human beings are constituted as subjects by Being (“the thinking about Being”), not to identify linguistic conditions for this subjectivity.

Unlike Heidegger, the social sciences take as a premise that language is (merely) a culturally evolved activity of humanity, prior to every individual, but developed by the linguistic group as a whole. There is no posited “speaker” outside humanity (“language,” “Being,” or “God”) whose initiative is required for human beings to speak. In linguistics and related fields, in other words, “[s]peech expresses meaning; it does not reveal or disclose it. Language is merely a means of communication in and through which man can convey meaning; but it can never be a source of meaning and of life.” Such a view “is oriented toward, but also limited to, what can be brought to light about linguistic phenomena by empirical investigation.” Phenomenology, on the other hand, argues “that speech is primarily a creative activity that brings meaning to light and sometimes even originates it.” Therefore the scientific views of language cannot be fully reconciled with phenomenology, which takes as its starting point “the relation between language and ‘meaning-giving ek-sistence.’” This distinction casts grave doubt on Chauvet’s apology for the introduction of the linguistic sciences:

69 Ibid., 5-6.
70 Ibid., 7.
71 Ibid.
If Heidegger sees here a manifestation, dimly outlined, of the invitation by Being (always linked to the Logos) to the human being, linguistics and psychoanalysis attempt to show us the concrete process of this invitation. The reason for the rapid detour which we propose to make through these two disciplines consists in this: they permit us to elucidate in a concrete manner two points which will be important in our later reflection on the connection between God and humans in sacramental theology (and Christology). First, how are we to understand the communication between God and humans, while at the same time preserving their radical difference (the scheme of difference-otherness)? And second, how are we to understand that there is no truly human life except one radically crossed by death (the scheme of initiation)?

Linguistics and psychoanalysis, however, make no attempt to show the invitation by Being to human beings; on the contrary, they are interested in all kinds of language acts (and subconscious movements) between human subjects, but only in these.

The distinction between the ideal (Heideggerian) function of language and the linguistic (scientific) method of investigation becomes evident in Chauvet’s discussion of the illocutionary or performative dimension of human language. This language changes the relation between the subjects, so Chauvet concludes that a failure of the addressee to respond properly to the illocutionary dimension of language “would be interpreted [by the speaker] as a personal insult, a wounding attitude ignoring the presence of the request, a symbolic murder.” Unfortunately, Chauvet overlooks the fact that the illocutionary dimension of language can itself be used to commit symbolic murder; every language act may have an illocutionary or performative dimension, but this does not imply that every linguistic exchange between human speakers rises to the status of “the invitation by Being.” Chauvet cites as illocutionary examples “I promise,” “I baptize,” “I confirm”; he does not make use of the equally performative examples demonstrating control (“You’re mine”) or threatening violence (“I’ll kill you”), or derogatory (sexist or racist) epithets. All of these can be used to negate the identity of the addressee as a

72 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 92.
73 Ibid., 132.
subject, to take away his or her voice. Repetitions of such illocutions are used in abusive relationships to set up the abuser’s dominance, just as repetitions of positive performative utterances are used to build up positive relationships. In other words, the performative dimension of human language can be used to silence as well as to invite human beings, to dissolve and deny as well as to create relationships.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cautions his disciples about precisely this kind of performative ambivalence of language:

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool,” you will be liable to the hell of fire (Mt 5:21-22).

The “quasi-languages” (“‘supra-language’ made up of gestures, mime, and all artistic endeavor; ‘infra-language’ of the archaic impulses of the unconscious”74) are subject to the same critique. Thus Jesus continues, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt. 5:27-28). In other words, the illocutionary dimension of language which Chauvet depends on is effective, but it is not at all clear that this is a symbolic dimension of language, either in the usual sense of representing something and requiring interpretation, nor in Chauvet’s sense of being “outside the order of value.”75 In fact, in Chauvet’s source, J. L. Austin’s How to Do Things With Words, the efficacy of one of the primary examples, “I bet you,”76 falls

74 Ibid., 87, n 8.
75 Ibid., 100.
76 J. L. Austin, How to Do Things With Words (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1975), see 5, example E.d. This example recurs throughout the text.
precisely within the order of economic value. It is, of course, symbolically constructed in the sense of being culturally dependent, but so is economic value.\textsuperscript{77}

Because the symbolic effects of language acts, which are the “efficacy” studied by linguistic sciences are inadequate to the mediation of Heidegger’s “language which speaks” -- or, more to the point, to that of the Word become flesh -- the question of the efficacy of the Christian sacraments cannot be resolved simply by an appeal to symbolic efficacy. In Chapter 4, Chauvet concludes that in the sacraments,

the communication of grace is to be understood, not according to the “metaphysical” scheme of cause and effect, but according to the symbolic scheme of communication through language, a communication supremely effective because it is through language that the subject comes forth in its relation to other subjects within a common “world” of meaning. It is precisely a new relation of places between subjects, a relationship of filial and brotherly and sisterly alliance, that the sacramental “expression” aims at instituting or restoring in faith.\textsuperscript{78}

This is true of the sacraments, yet it is not adequate. The work of Miri Rubin on the eucharist in the Middle Ages, for example, shows how “a common ‘world’ of meaning,” even among Christians, may yet be a world inimical to the universal love demonstrated by Christ, and “filial and brotherly and sisterly alliance” may become violence against those in the out-group.\textsuperscript{79} The eucharist is certainly symbolically effective, whether as a means for the subjection of Jews in the late medieval period or as a mediator of the unifying love Christ offers to his brothers and sisters; yet no theologian would wish to argue that both of these are equally a communication of grace. It is the efficacy of the sacraments as a communication of grace which interests the theologian and which is the object of such traditional phrases as ex opere operato or “it is Christ who baptizes.” The

\textsuperscript{77}In fact, economic value is precisely cultural and symbolic, which represents another problem for the distinction Chauvet is trying to draw between symbolic and economic exchange.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., 140.

\textsuperscript{79}Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
symbolic efficacy of ritual may effect both good and evil; sacramental efficacy, however, is an extension of the effective word of creation, in accordance with which God found his works to be good.\(^8\)

The reason sacraments and grace are “outside the order of [human] value,” then, is not a consequence of their being language acts. Rather, as already established in chapter one, this is due to their character as participation in the dynamic of the Trinity and particularly in the economy by which this dynamic is made manifest to humanity and invites human persons to share in it. Thus there seems no need to restrict the study of sacramental ritual efficacy to a linguistic model. On the other hand, this model does have some drawbacks for a study of Christian sacraments. First of all, it reinscribes the neoscholastic, western hierarchy which privileges the word or form, the intelligible part of the sacramental ritual, above the embodied material and behavioral parts. This tempts the scholar to think of sacramental meaning and purpose as something intellectual and obscure, accessible only to the knowledgeable elite. A linguistic model of sacramental reality tends to suppress the exterior, material, and bodily parts of the rite in favor of a sacramental reading based solely on the text, like Chauvet’s interpretation of Eucharistic Prayer 2. This minimizes the performative nature of the rite by theoretically prioritizing the written, universal, textual words over the sensual, particular, experiential whole that is the rite in practice.

Chauvet attempts to overcome this problem in his use of language: “in its significant *materiality*, language represents the unavoidable law and poses the

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\(^8\) Chauvet of course recognizes this distinction: it is acknowledged explicitly in *Symbol and Sacrament*, “A Reality Extra-linguistic Nevertheless,” pp. 443f: “as with everything concerning God, from the first we declare grace to be *irreducible* to any explanations . . . . What we are proposing here is in no way a reduction of grace to the socio-linguistic mechanism of symbolic efficacy.” The critique here is not meant to imply that Chauvet’s model is reductionist, but simply to open a space for an alternate model which may be more fruitful by showing explicitly that the sacramental efficacy of sacrament is not dependent on their resemblance to language acts.
primordial stumbling block [for] every fantasy desire for self-possession." He turns to Derrida's concept of writing: "[t]he very idea of institution -- and thus of the arbitrariness of the sign -- is unthinkable before the possibility of writing and outside of its horizon." Before here of course refers to logical priority, not priority in time; language is always marked by the trace of writing, which threatens the presence apparently offered by orality. The "mute body and opaque material" of writing thus resists and restricts the tendency to locate "meaning" in the self-presence, the intelligibility of the word. When speaking of liturgy, however, the liturgical text offers another kind of illusory self-presence -- for liturgy is only fully embodied when it exists, that is, when it is performed. Nor does this existence make liturgy metaphysically present, for in its performance liturgy exists not in itself, but in that other body which threatens the body of the text: the human body, which is ultimately never present to itself. In its performance, liturgy, which may initially appear to be text, withdraws into human bodies and becomes part of the fabric of life.

Another drawback of the language act model is its limitation with respect to prelinguistic, nonlinguistic, and extralinguistic dimensions of grace. This limitation becomes especially apparent with respect to infant baptism. For baptism of infantes is literally the baptism of those who are speechless. A linguistic model for the exchange that constitutes them as members of the community is particularly inappropriate, for they cannot receive any word "as such." Nor are they capable of a quasi-linguistic return-gift, even if it is as simple as "a nod of the head, a look conveying our interest in what is

81 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 141.
82 Derrida, De la grammatologie, 65 [Of Grammatology, 44]; cited ibid., 143.
83 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 143.
84 Ibid., 267.
being said.”\textsuperscript{86} The language act model thus casts doubt on the potentiality of nonspeakers to receive grace.\textsuperscript{86} Yet the Christian tradition holds, in the practice of infant baptism (and infant communion), that infants are in fact susceptible of grace. The problem is not with this tradition: the problem is that the language act model represents the interlocutors’ capacities as relatively equal, whereas infants have capacities which differ greatly from those of adults.\textsuperscript{87} Posing the problem in this way, moreover, leads one to question whether the linguistic model might camouflage the infinite difference in capacity for gift-giving and gift-reception between human beings and God.

The goal, then, of enlarging the methodological foundation to include ritual rather than linguistic efficacy is threefold: to account for the fact of grace experience in infants and other nonspeakers (even if it remains impossible to characterize), to differentiate sacramental efficacy from the ambiguous efficacy of language acts, and to open a broader view in order to respect the bodily and ritual nature of liturgical exchange.

Section 2.2: Efficacious engagement

The one commonality between the three flaws in Chauvet’s symbolic gift exchange model discussed above is that they all stem from an oversimplified understanding of human (and thus Christian) identity as something relatively static, fixed by one’s culture, and intellective-linguistic rather than integrative.\textsuperscript{88} These factors

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid. Clearly, interest in what is being said is beyond prelinguistic persons by definition.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Chauvet’s reading of baptism is based on a socio-linguistic interpretive stance which cannot conceptualize the meaning of infant baptism for the baptizand: see ibid., 438-43. This point will be considered more fully in chapters 3 and 4.
\item \textsuperscript{87} See ibid., 92-3.
\item \textsuperscript{88} One might wonder whether the reduction to consciousness was the root of these problems, but the answer seems to be no. Other thinkers influenced by Heidegger (e.g. Levinas, Derrida, Marion) incorporate the concepts of symbol and of gift (though, especially in Derrida, in a very different form) without compromising the fluidity of human existence.
\end{itemize}
quite naturally make infant initiation seem to be a benign or even malign abnormality, given that infants are not only prelinguistic, but also in a rapid state of development and still undergoing the process of cultural formation. Nonetheless, this oversimplified understanding is equally problematic with respect to adults (though the problems may be less evident): adults, too, have dynamic identities, are constantly undergoing personal change, and are shaped by but also defy their culture’s assumptions and characteristics. Moreover, although they may tend to have highly intellective-linguistic means of continuous formation, nonlinguistic practices play a subtle role in their identities as well. It seems likely that those who are particularly inclined to intellectual and linguistic methods of cultural and religious formation would be most likely to write books on ritual and sacramental formation; therefore, it is probable that the prereflective identity formation of most Christians tends to be more influenced by nonlinguistic practice than that of most scholars in theology or liturgy.

Identity is, of course, a difficult concept; for the purpose of the method to be developed in this chapter (i.e. efficacious engagement in the liturgy), identity refers to the interface between continuity and change in a human being’s experiences that allows him or her to incorporate new aspects of self. Development, in other words, whether through ritual formation or other means, requires that some aspects of self be maintained; these enable the acceptance, revision, or denial of other aspects. Identity, then, is an attempt to isolate the distinctive part of what is meant by formation. This concept allows for a method that recognizes contributions of body and cognitive activity, of ritual as well as interpretation, of disciplines imposed by others and those one imposes on oneself.

89 See discussion of Aidan Kavanagh’s critique of infant baptism in chapter 3.

In *Liturgy and the Social Sciences*, Nathan Mitchell summarizes some of the insights gained from studying emerging ritual and makes a call for them to be integrated into the (traditionally more “high-church consensus”) sacramental understanding of liturgical theology. A brief excursus through the main points of this summary will suggest the fruitfulness of an “identity” or “formation” model for understanding sacraments as a cultural reality.

First, Mitchell observes that the diversity of contemporary culture causes ritual to proliferate; for example, “family affiliation is chosen rather than imposed,”\(^1\) meaning ritual participation becomes a more salient factor in determining familial membership than either genetics or ethnicity. Such participation may even “generate social solidarity even in the absence of shared beliefs.”\(^2\) Emerging ritual, in fact, may be consciously used to bridge gaps in shared beliefs in order to make collective action possible.\(^3\) As Mitchell suggests, what is true of emerging ritual is also true of (culturally efficacious) ritual in general: ritual can be used to single out one from among the bewildering array of potential social bonds, to overcome discrepancies in logical or intellectual understandings. By doing so, ritual participation creates social bonds that might not follow from genetic or propositional logic. To put it more broadly, ritual participation becomes a means of identifying oneself with a particular group and its way of life. The family meal may be a means not only of identification with the family group\(^4\) but also of

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\(^2\) Ibid. Original italics omitted.

\(^3\) See e.g. Mitchell’s description of civil rights action in *LSS*, 41: “blacks and whites, Protestants and Catholics, Jews and gentiles, the devout and the doubting, joined in demonstrating a solidarity . . . [showing that] ritual potency does not necessarily derive from a structured belief system to which all participants adhere.”

\(^4\) For example, suppose a young woman whose stepfather is deceased still comes to his family’s Christmas celebrations. She makes herself “family” in a way that transcends and may overcome genetic relations.
the ethnic group to which that family (by ritual, tradition, and self-understanding) belong.\footnote{Kertzer, “Lasting Rites,” 24; cited in Mitchell, LSS, 40.}

Ritual participation thus exercises an impact on personal, familial, ethnic identity, but how? As emerging rituals demonstrate, it is not necessary that the ritual “represent a shared system of belief.” In fact, the politically effective rituals of the American civil rights movement made no such presupposition, nor do the statistically effective rituals of Alcoholics Anonymous.\footnote{Ibid., 41, 43-6. Note that the one example created social change, the other facilitates personal change.} This means that though theorists may examine the symbolic representation of ritual behavior, no one shared system of meaning or symbolism is necessary for ritual to “work.” Rituals do “encourage us to interpret reality in very specific ways,”\footnote{Ibid., 39. Italics omitted.} but this is more the cause than the result of a symbolic consensus among members of the created group.

This conclusion may seem dubious, but for emerging ritual, at least, it is clearly true. If all rituals are “human improvisations,”\footnote{Ibid., 42.} improvisational character is particularly evident in emerging ritual. Emerging rituals arise among the marginalized, whose commonality is their accidental marginalization and whose social bond is created by fragile, invented rituals. These rituals arise \textit{in search of} a shared set of meanings; one seeks a new identity (e.g. a sense of belonging to a family group, freedom from debilitating addiction) and -- reluctantly, cautiously, or recklessly -- engages in rituals that reach towards this behavior.

These observations hold true of mainstream ritualizing as well, even acknowledged, traditional, religious rituals. “Just as language is always being invented in
the process of using it,” Grimes observes, “so ritual is always in the process of being created as ritualists enact it.”99 This is because rituals are embodied actions,100 and the human body is always in motion. More will be said about the relationship between the body, ritual, and human identity in the next section; here it suffices to observe that the “high-church consensus” view about traditional religious rituals sees them as “received (as part of a tradition) rather than invented.”101 But to receive a pattern into one’s own body is to (re)invent that pattern: to accept it is to change it.

This becomes clearest, as Mitchell suggests, at the margins of human social and cultural behavior. One such margin is the “reception” of the cultural tradition by the new generation: the inculturation of children. The next chapter will consider the implications of this margin in more detail, but briefly, the measure of the success of any tradition is its capacity to be received by its social group (thus constituting it, as said above). The social construction of childhood tends to camouflage this period of ritual reception, but the evolution of ritual practice, together with cohort effects of cultural identity, make it clear that as a new generation “receives” cultural practice, they also transform it -- and themselves.

The study of emerging ritual, then, suggests the possibility that (1) ritual and sacramental behavior is significant because of its potential for forming and transforming persons within their social settings and (2) infant reception of cultural practices is a particularly evocative example of such formation and transformation. These observations together lead to the potential for finding a model which is prelinguistic (and potentially a foundation for linguistic or symbolic formation) and embodied, which can approach the question of cultural formation from infancy. At the same time, this model

101 Ibid., 47.
will consider the question of transformation of identity within a broader framework than a change of ideas, attitudes, or interpretive stances.

The term “efficacious engagement” will be introduced here for the method which examines sacraments as ritual practices, culturally and socially inscribed and inscribing, fully embodied phenomena which, *by their very enactment* (i.e. not because of the importation of external references), are capable of altering the identities of persons and communities. The proposed model considers the embodiment of human beings (humans as embodied creatures, not beings in a body or with a body) and thus considers the ritual action and phenomena as they shape the bodies of the participants, thereby creating new meaning in and on those bodies and forming new identities of those embodied persons. Liturgical practice is linked to the formation of the self over time and the building of a “world” of meaning. “Engagement,” then, suggests an embodied and cognitive participation in the event, where both bodily and cognitive activity is to the participant’s ability, not to an exterior standard (“age of reason,” “language act”). This allows sensitivity to human development, which depends on as well as facilitating cultural practice. “Efficacious” refers to the capacity of the rite to alter the status and identity of its participants, or of ritual participants to alter their identity within their cultural and social setting through the rite. There is a link between this and theological concerns of “sacramental efficacy” (in both traditional categories of “validity” and “fruitfulness”), but this link will only be considered in chapter 5, since the method demands that “[t]he meanings of ritual unfold from within the ritual action itself [rather than being] imported from outside the ritual event.”

In the remainder of this chapter, the work of Marcel Mauss, Michel Foucault, and Talal Asad will be used to examine ritual process as an embodied and inculturated means

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102 See ibid., 46-9.
103 Ibid., 49. Italics omitted.
of developing identity. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s seminal work provides a foundation for thinking about embodied perception as a world-forming class of experience. This leads, finally, to ritual considered “in its own right,” which can “insulate” its practitioners from ordinary social constructs in order to become transformative phenomena.

Ritual discipline and identity construction

The essential embodiment of human experience and human identity is an indispensable element of the project of reframing ritual formation. Asad, in his attempt to take account of the construction of the modern category of “ritual,” has critiqued the modern view of ritual as exclusively symbolic, ignoring its utilitarian importance. In a 1997 essay, Asad expresses concern at the tendency for anthropological work to divorce the experience of the individual body (in which emotional states are normally included) from the culturally conditioned, symbolically constructed social effects of ritual practice. Even anthropologists “who addressed themselves to the systematic connections between social representations and individual bodies in the context of ritual” nonetheless “regarded ‘the body’ (especially its innate impulses and feelings) as essentially non-cultural.”

Asad suggests instead that bodily experience be considered “not as an autogenetic impulse, but as a mutually constituting relationship between body-sense and body-learning,” which leads to a view of the human body not


106 Ibid., 44-5.

107 Ibid., 48.
as the passive recipient of ‘cultural imprints’, still less as the active source of ‘natural expressions’ that are ‘clothed in local history and culture’, but as the self-developable means for achieving a range of human objects---from styles of physical movement (for example, walking), through modes of emotional being (for example, composure), to kinds of spiritual experience.¹⁰⁸

For understanding the efficacy of ritual, then, one must recognize the human body as continually in formation, and acknowledge that the physical formability of the body is crucial to the social and cultural development of the whole human person. Dividing human activity into “physical” and “nonphysical,” “utilitarian” and “symbolic,” or ritual into “matter” and “form ula,” is a distraction, because bodily activities can be used to develop certain desires and emotional capacities as well as physical skills.

The body, then, can be the first symbol of ek-sisting humanity only because it is the original means of experiencing and changing the world. Through engaging with the world, the body mediates the human being’s experience of being-in-the-world. The body, moreover, is amenable to formation, and when the body changes, the person’s being-in-the-world, his or her self, is altered. Thus it is the body as a tool for self-formation that creates the body as a symbol of the whole person and undermines the dichotomy between the “natural,” “innate” body and “the (disembodied) mind [that] confronts ‘the world’ through the interface of ‘symbols’.”¹⁰⁹ Overcoming body-mind dualism thus allows Asad to recognize that a particular kind of efficacy is indispensable for ritual, because rituals not only express a particular kind of social structure, but also form a particular kind of human living in the world.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 44.
¹¹⁰ This efficacy, of course, is still at the purely human cultural level, and is thus not sufficient to account for the peculiar qualities of grace bestowed in the sacrament. Nonetheless, because of the Catholic tradition of seeing a continuity between the mechanisms of nature and those of grace, it is possible to attempt a sacramental model that begins with this purely human ritual efficacy and reaches from it towards the supernatural realm of the gift of grace. Therefore Asad’s focus on embodiment as a “self-developable” experience and on the acquisition of “physical and linguistic skills” as a goal of ritual
Asad’s work is based in part on Mauss’s essay on the use of “body techniques” to construct physical and social capabilities in the practitioner. Body techniques, according to Mauss, have two essential characteristics. First of all, they are culturally constructed actions, “assembled by and for social authority;” thus they are traditional, for “[t]here is no technique and no transmission in the absence of tradition.” Body techniques are created and transmitted by imitation and repetition. Nonetheless, their purpose is not primarily symbolic: they are “felt by the author as actions of a mechanical, physical or physico-chemical order.”

Body techniques are also effective: their practice successfully transforms the practitioner in identifiable ways. In fact, the purpose of body techniques is “an adaptation of the body to their [i.e. the practitioners’] use.” The cultural formation of the body is an “education in composure . . . [which] allows a co-ordinated response of co-ordinated movements setting off in the direction of a chosen goal.” The social construction of the body and the creation of individual capability are thus linked, though they are also in tension. Body techniques “teach composure, resistance, seriousness, presence of mind, dignity, etc.,” allowing their practitioners to become “habilis, behavior will be guiding ideas for the first part of the analysis of infant baptism.

112 Ibid., 120.
113 Ibid., 104.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 121.
116 Ibid., 121-2.
117 Ibid., 121.
which . . . designates those people with a sense of the adaptation of all their well-coordinated movements to a goal, who are practised, who ‘know what they are up to.’”  

Mauss’s body techniques include initiation rites as well as more everyday practices such as particular modes of walking and swimming. They are socially imposed in order to physically effect the transformation of the individual, because the body is a tool whose actions may shape the identity of the practitioner of these rites. Mauss hints that this transformation is effective not only on the physical and psychological level, but even in the spiritual realm: “I believe precisely that at the bottom of all our mystical states there are body techniques which we have not studied, but which were studied fully in China and India, even in very remote periods . . . . I think that there are necessarily biological means of entering into ‘communion with God.’”

According to Mauss, then, the human body, precisely as “self-developable” site of the self, is the key to attaining capabilities generally thought of as psychological, moral, and even spiritual. As Asad puts it, “The inability to ‘enter into communion with God’ becomes a function of untaught bodies.” Ritual discipline, therefore, as Asad sees it, is a matter of teaching bodies, and thus of creating the ability (especially in the monastic setting) of entering into communion with God. Asad follows the work of Foucault, who calls the techniques of the monasteries “technologies of the self,” which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

118 Ibid., 108.
119 Ibid., 121.
120 Ibid., 122.
Foucault is interested in the monastic rhetoric of self-renunciation, which he takes to be a specifically Christian form of such technologies. Foucault saw monastic concern with sexuality and chastity, and especially the development of auricular confession, as a change from action as the site of transformation of self (self-mastery of the Stoics) to thought and desire as that site (self-renunciation of the monks).\footnote{Ibid., 16-49.} Foucault recognized that Christianity adopted and changed certain ancient technologies in pursuit of this new goal.\footnote{Ibid.}

Asad nuances Foucault’s observations by recognizing that if Christians privileged renunciation of the self in their rhetoric, this image cannot be taken in strict opposition with the Stoic “taking care of oneself.” Rather, “renunciation” in monastic terms signifies the renunciation of a certain kind of self -- Paul’s “old self” and the desires connected with its disordered appetites, physical and spiritual -- in order to accomplish a transformation into another kind of self, one saved by God and desiring God. In fact, “the rhetoric of renunciation is part of the construction of a self-policing function and . . . should not, therefore, be seen as the rejection of a presocialized (real) self.”\footnote{Talal Asad, \textit{Genealogies of Religion} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1993), 140.} This self-policing function points to the larger goal: the construction of a Christian identity.

Creating this Christian identity was a ritual process, in which those celebrations that modern people easily recognize as “ritual” played a dominant role. The Divine Office, especially, was “a practice among others essential to the acquisition of Christian virtues,”\footnote{Ibid., 63.} and the sacraments were likewise crucial.\footnote{Ibid., 155-8.} These practices allowed a monk to become \textit{habitus}, fitted to his vocation:

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\footnote{Ibid., 63.}
If there are prescribed ways of performing liturgical services, . . . there exists a requirement to master the proper performance of these services. Ritual is therefore directed at the apt performance of what is prescribed, [which] involves not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority: it presupposes no obscure meanings, but rather the formation of physical and linguistic skills.\footnote{128}

Within the monastic context, then, there are 4 relevant characteristics of liturgical practices: (1) they are oriented towards a goal: the development of the virtuous Christian self; (2) they are prescribed ritual disciplines which come together in a particular system;\footnote{129} (3) they prioritize physical and linguistic activities ("exercises") over symbolic interpretations; and (4) they presuppose authoritative structures which dictate the prescriptions and abilities required.

One key result of Asad’s analysis is that there is no necessary contradiction between symbolic and practical construction of attitudes. For example, Asad draws on the preaching of Bernard of Clairvaux, whose task it was to assist the transformation of the self in the case of adult postulants to Clairvaux. Instead of denying the sensual desires of these postulants, Bernard “sought to use concupiscence itself as the material for exercising virtue”\footnote{130} through “a skillful deployment of biblical language so that it might resonate with, and reintegrate, the pleasurable memories and desires that had been fashioned in a previous secular life.”\footnote{131} Bernard’s authoritative rereading of his postulants’ lives, done cooperatively with them, consisted in a symbolic reinterpretation of desire and sensuality. The “authorized reception” of this language, however, “was intrinsically connected to the regular performance of the liturgy, to the private reading of

\footnote{128} Ibid., 62.
\footnote{129} Asad’s case study is the \textit{Rule of St Benedict}; however, the recognition of the Divine Office as crucial to the construction of a Christian self went beyond the cloisters, judging by the popularity of laypersons’ Books of Hours. Even though these in some cases might be false tokens of piety rather than real indicators, their very status as tokens depended on their recognition as foundational to devotional life.
\footnote{130} Asad, \textit{Genealogies of Religion}, 142.
\footnote{131} Ibid., 142-3.
the Scriptures, and to the sermons whose style was developed by Bernard.” In other words, Bernard’s language, his symbolic rereading of desire, was effective only insofar as it was integrated with the liturgical disciplines and the other ritual aspects of life at Clairvaux. One important function of the ritual disciplines of the monasteries, then, was an *authorizing function*, that of rendering a particular interpretation of the world compelling to the practitioners. This world is partially constructed by a set of symbolic relationships; however, these symbolic relationships are themselves authorized by physical practices; that is, they are ritually inscribed on the body, on the physical body of the monk and on the social body of the monastery.

An *authorizing structure*, then, is a ritually contextualized action, symbolic system, or relationship which creates experiences that tend to facilitate consensus among a social group. The structures of authority and those of ritual reinforce one another: authorities are not constructed out of books, but emerge from the ritual experiences of the members of the social group; at the same time, they authorize ritual elements both by mandating disciplinary practices and by offering interpretations in the realm of the symbolic system.

Monastic disciplines were effective for their participants (or, as Foucault says, they were technologies of self) insofar as they enabled practitioners to develop a new kind of identity. Rather than chastity, Asad focuses on obedience and humility as the central virtues identified as the goal of the ritual process prescribed by the *Rule of St Benedict*. The voluntary submission of the will to one’s superior was developed through varying disciplines in different monastic traditions: for example, both the spectacular Divine Office of Cluny and the intentionally humiliating manual labor of the

132 Ibid., 143.
133 Ibid., 125.
Cistercians were designed as exercises in obedience. The specific ritual processes, even between monasteries practicing the Benedictine Rule, varied, but the ritual process -- the goal, the prescription, the practice of ritual disciplines, and the authorizing structures supporting and supported by those structures -- appear in each case.

The monks were not concerned with the social symbolism of their rituals, but with the practical prerequisites (“physical and linguistic skills” oriented to “apt performance”) and the ultimate object of liturgical discipline (“the acquisition of Christian virtues”). The ritual disciplines of the process required particular skills and the exercise of, for example, disciplines of submission allowed the practitioners to become persons “practiced” in submission -- obedient monks. It is crucial to recognize that the monastic virtues are not the result of heroic intentions, but of practice. Virtues are skills. Asad observes, “It is a modern idea that a practitioner cannot know how to live religiously without being able to articulate that knowledge.”

Efficacious engagement in the ritual process alters the identity of participants by “practicing” their identity with a particular goal, whether that goal is in the domain of physical or psychological capacity, in that of spiritual capacity, or in the intersection of these domains.

Asad’s examination of the monastic ritual processes thus introduces another concept important to the development of a method for efficacious engagement. *Techniques*, in a conscious echo of Foucault, will here be used to refer to those physical and linguistic practices which are done repetitively and attentively as part of a ritual process. Asad’s work suggests that such practices authorize and facilitate a particular

134 Ibid., 147-53.
135 Ibid., 36.
136 Repetitive here might refer to variations on an internalized theme rather than strict iterations, and attentively means one’s sensory, symbolic-linguistic, and spatio-physical abilities are brought to bear in and on the rite.
kind of being-in-the-world; the world thus created is not only a symbolic world, but also a world of action. Facilitating a particular kind of being-in-the-world already includes the practice of certain behaviors and responses to environmental cues. These are experienced as “natural” by those in the social group, although they are culturally dependent.

"Efficacious engagement” is a model which explores how participation in sacraments and the ritual processes integrated with sacramental practice allows practitioners to be transformed in their identity. This model acknowledges the importance of authorizing structures, including canonical and familial power structures, in developing a sense of identity. In fact, no one develops a sense of identity independent of existing power structures. At the same time, ritual processes also include particular sensory phenomena and symbolic systems that may subvert the assumed power structures. More importantly, the processes facilitate gaining capacities (associated with desired goals) as well as changing one’s expectations and desires to attain a new identity, one which is founded on a particular system of ritual and authority but which, in the end, the practitioner comes to recognize as his or her own (habit).

Merleau-Ponty: Perception and behavior

The account of ritual process and ritual authority according to Talal Asad raises many interesting possibilities for examining sacraments as the exercise and acquisition of skills and aptitudes, but it also raises important problems for the current study. For example, the authority Asad examines in his study of Bernard is quite explicitly linguistic: it is a reorganization of the participants’ worlds via linguistic imagery. The identity constructed by this imagery is embodied and enacted, but is it possible to see

137 The phrase, of course, comes from phenomenology; for an example of its use within an exploration of ritual processes, see the ritual studies work of Thomas Csordas, especially The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
identity-construction at work in a prelinguistic or extralinguistic way? More generally, is it *really true* that the ritual process writes a new identity on the body, or is the body merely the “means of expression” of a new identity being processually written “into the mind”? The work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty provides some focus on sensory perception, which (1) is active, not passive, and embodied, not solely cognitive; (2) is an aptitude which can be acquired by ritual process; and (3) can be seen as “symbolic” and in continuity with linguistic behavior, but is not in itself linguistic.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology was developed in part out of a concern that experimental psychology, which was intended to produce a working model for human perception and behavior, began by creating conditions which, by isolating the experimental subject (human or animal) from its natural environment, evoked only pathological responses. Merleau-Ponty intended, by reflection, to construct an alternate model which considered psychological activities within their vital context. The very processes of perception and of learned behaviors -- even in animals -- presuppose a “meaning” intrinsic to the acts, which alone allows perception and learning to occur. Thus perception and learning, in Merleau-Ponty’s model, are embodied facts, in which cognitive aspects are fully integrated with motor and sensory activities.

For example, in *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty presents the example of an accomplished typist or organist:

A subject who “knows” how to type or to play the organ is capable of improvising, that is, of executing kinetic melodies corresponding to words which have never been seen or music which has never been played. One would be tempted to suppose that at least certain elements of the new musical phrase or of the new words correspond to rigid and already acquired sets [of physical motions]. But expert subjects are capable of improvising on instruments unknown to them and the exploration of the

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138 The parallels with historical questions of sacramental necessity are interesting but not, at this method level, immediately relevant.

instruments, which is evidently a preliminary necessity, is too brief to permit a substitution of individual sets.\textsuperscript{140}

In this case, perceptual activities (i.e. seeing words or music) and motor activities (performing the words or music) are clearly integrated into one cohesive aptitude. Moreover, this aptitude is, broadly, interpretive: the typist or organist does not see, then read, then recreate the words or music, but rather sees, understands, and performs simultaneously. The performance, not the “notes,” are the goal and the interpretation of the score.\textsuperscript{141} The recreation of the words or music does not consist in reading each letter or note, finding the corresponding key or pedal, and then executing an appropriate movement; rather, the player has internalized a structure shared by perceptual cues and performative gestures which constitute one whole interpretive activity:

The new correlation of visual stimuli and motor excitations must be mediated by a general principle so as to make immediately possible the execution, not of determined phrases or pieces, but of an improvised piece if necessary . . . . The adjustment of motor excitations to visual excitations is accomplished by their common participation in certain musical essences.\textsuperscript{142}

By this “common participation in certain musical essences” Merleau-Ponty calls attention to a significance which is not cognitive but performative.\textsuperscript{143} The signification of musical notation is conventional,\textsuperscript{144} yet the notes carry intrinsic significance in that learning them allows people to act meaningfully in a new milieu:

While the notes taken separately have an equivocal signification, being capable of entering into an infinity of possible ensembles, in the melody each one is demanded by the context and contributes its part in

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\textsuperscript{140} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Behavior}, 121.
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\textsuperscript{141} This point has been made on several occasions by Nathan Mitchell; see e.g. \textit{Meeting Mystery}, 45f.
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\textsuperscript{142} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Behavior}, 121.
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\textsuperscript{143} Cf. observations on the prereflective meaning of liturgical practice: chapter 1, p. 22.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{144} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Behavior}, 121.
\end{flushright}
expressing something which is not contained in any one of them and which binds them together internally.\textsuperscript{145}

In other words, “meaning” has a motor component too, an embodied component which is evident when learning “aptitudes,” rather than “reflexes,” becomes the focus. Physiology and psychology seem at odds until one “conceive[s] of coordination, whether it be receptive or incito-motor, as Gestalt theory does, that is, as the constitution of ‘forms’ or of functional structures.”\textsuperscript{146}

Not only complex behavioral capabilities, however, can be conceived of as aptitudes. Perception is an aptitude too, for if one turns one’s head to look out the window, one must have a preconception of where the window is and what it will look like \textit{before} one’s eyes can focus on it as an object.\textsuperscript{147} At the same time, perception is not completely internally-directed, for

\begin{quote}
[t]o say that I have a visual field is to say that by reason of my position I have access to and an opening upon a system of beings, visible beings, that these are at the disposal of my gaze in virtue of a kind of primordial contract and through a gift of nature, with no effort made on my part; from which it follows that vision is prepersonal.\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

Thus perception appears as a kind of aptitude in which both the human being and the world actively cooperate. The “world” is not an object, since it is presented to the perceiver as a “given”;\textsuperscript{149} likewise, to perceive it is a kind of participation, because “to look at an object is to inhabit it.”\textsuperscript{150}

The “form,” then, which Merleau-Ponty attributes to motor and sensory behavior, consists in a embodied (not solely or primarily cognitive or conscious) “knowledge” of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[145] Ibid., 87.
\item[146] Ibid., 87-8.
\item[147] See Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Perception}, 18ff.
\item[148] Ibid., 251.
\item[149] On gifts, givens, and givenness, see 6.2.
\item[150] Ibid., 79.
\end{footnotes}
the relevance of the environmental stimuli to the embodied actor (animal or human),
without which no perception, activity, or learning can take place. “Nerve functioning
distributes not only spatial and chromatic values but also symbolic values,” he
comments, where “symbolic values” refers to the “meaning” of the thing seen as “use-
object.”151 Particular kinds of perception are learned, but “[t]he physiological process
which corresponds to the perceived color or position or to the signification of a word
must be improvised, actively constituted at the very moment of perception.”152 This
distinguishes “symbolic” learning (i.e. that capable of improvisation, because capable of
recognizing implicit structures in the environment) from lower-order associations. In
order to be part of “an adapted behavior,” vision, for example, must be fused with a
kinetic understanding of “virtual space,” so that “each point of the concrete expanse [of a
cloak] currently seen must possess not only a present localization but also a series of
virtual localizations which will situate it with respect to my body when my body
moves.”153 What is learned is not a particular behavior, but “an adapted response to the
situation by different means.”154

Clearly, these perceptual aptitudes are themselves learned. But learning, too, is
the acquisition of adaptation to whole forms that are internally self-regulating:

Form, in the sense in which we have defined it, possesses original
properties with regard to those of the parts which can be detached from it.
Each moment in it is determined by the grouping of the other moments,
and their respective value depends on a state of total equilibrium the
formula of which is an intrinsic character of “form.”155

151 Ibid. Here again the assumed dichotomy between symbolic and functional is broken by observation
of human behaviors.
152 Merleau-Ponty, Behavior, 88.
153 Ibid., 89.
154 Ibid., 96.
155 Ibid., 91.
Seen as the process of grasping these forms, “learning does not appear to be the addition to old forms of behavior of certain determined connections between such and such stimuli and such and such movements, but rather to be a general alteration of behavior which is manifested in a multitude of actions.”¹⁵⁶ Such learning, which seems to be limited to higher-order primates or perhaps to human beings, is a capacity “to be open to more complex structures in which the reflexogenic value [of a stimulus] is distributed in terms of space and time.”¹⁵⁷

This “symbolic” aptitude, however, has its foundation in a deeply animalian capacity, for even fish, in their ability to associate particular visual stimuli with their motor responses, demonstrate “an aptitude for choosing, a ‘method of selection,’” which is learned in response to experimental trials.¹⁵⁸ Such diverse abilities as discrimination of shades and colors, of foods and non-foods, of causes and their effects are acquired as they become relevant to the life-functioning of the animal involved. Thus the specifically human ability to learn “aptitudes” (that is, the creation of “meaning” -- meaning which may be performative or perceptual as easily as cognitive -- in the act of appropriating the world, of “being-in-the-world”) is in continuity with this simpler ability to acclimate to change by discernment of new kinds of value. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty’s analysis provides a model for the acquisition of linguistic aptitudes as the percepts of words (and the meaningful structures they presuppose¹⁵⁹) come to be relevant to a child’s life-functioning and to be interpreted through his or her kinetic behaviors, in response to the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 96.
¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 109.
¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 97.
¹⁵⁹ "On the basis of a word as a physical phenomenon, as an ensemble of vibrations of the air, no physiological phenomenon capable of serving as a substrate for the signification of the word could be described in the brain; for we have seen that, in audition and also in speaking, a word as an ensemble of motor or afferent excitations presupposes a word as a melodic structure and this latter presupposes a sentence as a unity of signification" (Behavior, 92).
intrinsic structures governing these linguistic realities (which are, of course, conventional and cultural). Finally, Merleau-Ponty provides an explanation for the cultural construction of reality without evacuating the subject on the one hand or the world on the other hand as active participants in the process: “consciousness projects itself into a physical world and has a body, as it projects itself into a cultural world and has its habits.”

The aptitudes for perception and action, fully acquired, coalesce into habits.

Connecting this back to ritual process and efficacious engagement, there are several new observations to be made. First, perceptual capacities as well as Asad’s “physical and linguistic skills” can be developed by ritual processes. Second, these perceptual capacities, as well as the physical and linguistic ones, are not developed in isolation, but are acquired as “aptitudes” which are “interpretive” in that they allow the practitioner to create performative, meaningful responses to the environment. Third, these aptitudes are not attitudinal or cognitive, but embodied -- “ritualized” -- learned responses which include improvisation. Finally, the acquisition of such aptitudes is crucial for the development of one’s “being-in-the-world,” in that they allow one to be embodied within the world in a particular way.

*Ritual folding*

In order to fully integrate the emphasis on phenomena and perception into the interpretation of ritual, there must be a method for isolating ritual from its “ready-packaged” symbolic significance in order to focus on its body-forming meaning, its sensory phenomena, and its power to develop one’s being-in-the-world. This methodological point relates to a theoretical problem in current ritual studies. It has

been long known that rituals have the potential to reinforce a particular set of social and cultural norms; it has more recently been observed that they likewise have the potential to subvert these norms and reshape societal values.\textsuperscript{161} This is moreover not a matter of individual interpretation; though individuals’ appropriations of ritual may of course vary, one can discern “transformative” rituals with respect to overall cultural values as well as those which transform individuals to be conformed to those values. If it is at first puzzling how animals learning discern the “right” phenomena in an association with the goal,\textsuperscript{162} it is equally puzzling what “internal form”\textsuperscript{163} permeates rituals, in one case reinforcing the status quo, in another subverting it.

In a recent volume edited by Don Handelman and Galina Lindquist entitled \textit{Ritual in Its Own Right}, some ritual theorists try to address this problem. The volume asks to what “extent, if any, [do] particular [ritual] phenomena have degrees of autonomy from the worlds that create them; whether such qualities of autonomy are significant; and, if so, what such significance might be about.”\textsuperscript{164} Authors of studies in the book differ in their opinions as to what degree of autonomy may be attributed to ritual, but it seems necessary to attribute some degree of autonomy in order to account for the transformative results of ritual process. Ritual is a crucial aspect of certain kinds of personal transformation. Those undergoing such transformation are not, at the outset, fully integrated into a given system of norms, so the ritual evidently provides a means for appropriating these new norms, relationships, and identity features.

\textsuperscript{161} See e.g. Mitchell, \textit{LSS} for an introduction.
\textsuperscript{162} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Behavior}, 94-6.
\textsuperscript{163} On analogy with Merleau-Ponty’s reflections.
The treatment of ritual autonomy from external cultural forces seems to be a natural extension of the work on ritual by Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner. The idea of ritual process, introduced by Van Gennep and greatly expanded by Turner, posits that rituals transform (people, systems) according to a structure which separates initiands from the social structures which bind them to specified roles, leaving them, for a ritual period, with an ambiguous social status. Finally, the ritual reintegrates the initiands into a new status, having altered their social standing. In order for ritual to function in this way -- to be able to separate persons from their socially-dictated roles -- it must have a kind of cultural insulation from extra-ritual status assignments. Thus Handelman and the other authors of Ritual in Its Own Right consider the possible “degrees of momentary autonomy from social order” of ritual action. These varying degrees of autonomy, as Handelman points out and supports with several examples, “seem to relate to what may be called the interior complexity of how phenomena are organized . . . [which is] related to what persons can do within [rituals], and how they act on persons.”

The capacity of ritual to generate social and personal change, then, cannot be explored if one limits the field to ritual as “a model of and model for cultural worlds . . . as representation . . . [or] as functional of and functional for social order . . . [or] as yet

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166 Handelman, “Introduction,” 2.

167 Ibid., 3.
another arena for the playing out of social, economic, and political competition and conflict.”\textsuperscript{168} Instead, Handelman suggests a method

whose prime locus of inquiry is initially within the rituals themselves . . . . [so that] no assumptions need to be made immediately about how sociocultural order and ritual are related, neither about the meaning of signs and symbols that appear within a ritual, nor about the functional relationships between a ritual and social order.\textsuperscript{169}

Of course this viewpoint, like ritual autonomy, can only be accepted to a degree, and yet it offers a very important framework for understanding the transformational potential of ritual praxis. Therefore, the method will “separate (to an extent, arbitrarily) the phenomenon from its sociocultural surround . . . . [and then] reinsert the ritual into its surround, with the added knowledge of what has been learned about the ritual, taken in and of itself.”\textsuperscript{170}

In order to apply this concretely, Handelman turns to the theoretical construct of self-organization.\textsuperscript{171} In fact Handelman redefines ritual: “[w]hat we are calling ‘ritual,’ however loosely, is treated here as a class of phenomena whose forms, in greatly differing kind and degree, are characterized by interior complexity, self-integrity, and irreducibility to agent and environment.”\textsuperscript{172} In his brief studies, Handelman presents examples of “rituals” which are minimally interiorized and integral and those which are marked by greater degrees of these qualities. In a nod to mathematical topology, Handelman coins the term “ritual folding” to describe a ritual’s “curving towards closure and twisting towards openness . . . separable yet inseparable from its surround . . . .

[R]itual twists back into relations with the broader world within which it is embedded

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 3-4.
  \item \textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 10ff.
  \item \textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 10.
\end{itemize}
and from which it takes form."\(^1\) Handelman presents evidence that “greater interior complexity” leads to greater self-organization, greater “capacity of the ritual for temporary autonomy from its sociocultural surround,” and greater “capacity of the ritual to interiorize the distinction between itself and its surround and so to act on the latter from within itself, through the dynamics of the ritual design.”\(^2\) Thus more complex (well-folded) rituals have a greater degree of autonomy; they are therefore also endowed with greater transformative potency.

Greater interior complexity, concretely, means the variety and depth of phenomenal self-reference within a single ritual’s system. Self-reference has the potential to create recursive meaning-giving structures in ritual practice, changing and perhaps even overturning (to adopt the geographical and curvaceous metaphor of Handelman) the symbolic and functional systems of its cultural surround. In Handelman’s maximally folded example, Slovene pig-sticking,\(^3\) the temporal arrangement of the rite facilitates increasing insulation from the sociocultural surround, offering ritual “protection” from the dangers which would normally be associated with the practices of the rite. This allows culturally “marginal” features to become central and central features to be marginalized. In the end, “[t]he exterior border [of the farmstead] destroys the interior border, changing both in the process, so that during the remainder of the fold’s time/space, neither border exists . . . . [T]he butchers re-entering the home are not the same ones who went out to kill the pig . . .”\(^4\) In other words, the transformative potential of the rite springs from its “insulation” from the norms of everyday life, and this insulation is created by “folding”: phenomena within the rite that

\(^{1}\) Ibid., 13.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., 21ff.
\(^{4}\) Ibid., 26.
reference each other in order to gradually make the rite, rather than “ordinary” time and space, its own self-sufficient justification.  

This needs further specification. In the current study, the method adopted sees Christian ritual as progressively “folding away” the cultural surround in order to permit radical and transformative readings of reality and the bodies of the ritual practitioners. To some extent, the order in which these realities are folded away are arbitrary, because the experience of ritual insulation will be different for each practitioner. There are two surrounds which maintain a voice (or perhaps a whisper) throughout the ritual analysis of chapter 4: the history of Christian initiatory practice and the cultural constructs surrounding infancy. These surrounds are maintained in order to allow the rite to speak, because they motivate the rite’s interior momentum and allow its self-reference to be recognized.

The history of the rite speaks in the rite because the practitioners receive the rite itself as a given and, by performing it, embed it into their own personal histories (thus becoming part of the history of Christian initiation). Thus among the rite’s many possible meanings “in its own right,” one which is particularly interesting is the meaning it carries “on its own,” the one it bears as a phenomenological “given” partly outside the determination of any of its participants. Thus in the analysis to follow the phenomenological description has been in many places silently guided by historical practice and in a few places explicitly contrasted with and corrected by history. As an example, the phenomenological peaks of the rite are determined by ritual folding at one point in chapter 4. The resultant moments (sign of the cross, anointing, immersion/infusion, anointing, garment, ephphetha) can be seen by the intrinsic dynamism of the rite to be nested, with the most important phenomena “folded” inside

177 Note the applicability of this notion to the traditional understanding of ritual, even though the concept of ritual folding permits a much broader definition of “ritual.” (Cf. Mitchell, LSS, part 1; Asad, Genealogies, ch. 1.)
less important gestures. This description, however, is permissible because the moments it identifies as most significant (anointings and the bath) are already historically identified as the most important moments in Christian baptismal practice. Moreover, historical liturgiology assists the phenomenal description in identifying the latter anointing as far more significant than the ritual gestures which follow. At a few points, which will be readily identified in the analysis, the historical tradition clearly overrides any understanding of the ritual considered in itself. This is necessary because some of the possible meanings of the ritual “in its own right” would have the ritual depart entirely from its concrete existence as Christian baptism. Although these readings may be very valuable, they are not the purpose of this study, which intends to consider in what way baptism is a Christian sacrament (i.e. part of the sacramental economy of salvation).  

The cultural constructs of infancy, on the other hand, maintain a voice in the analysis because the rite’s complex dynamic of sociocultural support and subversion can only be understood with these constructs as a background. Moreover, the descriptive lens chosen for this study is the experience of the initiand, who is an infant; the infant’s capabilities and development are therefore a necessary component of any embodied, phenomenal exploration of the ritual performance. In addition, the dynamics of the rite and of domestic life engage the infant’s parents as “co-agents” of initiation; therefore these familial structures are “less folded-away” (if such a comparison can be made) than other social structures. As the ritual analysis will show, such structures are maintained in the rite only to be subverted by that dynamic which allows marginal features to become central.

Section 2.3: Christian ritual process

178 See discussion in chapter 1 on the purpose of the study as an “insider’s analysis” of the ritual (p. 5).
If one considers “ritual processes” to be structures of ritual which facilitate self-development towards authorized goals through principles of phenomenological embodiment, then the Christian sacraments can be seen as ritual process. This is useful in that it takes a step back from defining one Christian identity structure (as in Chauvet’s work), instead focusing on particular ritualized strategies for developing Christian identities. Furthermore, it serves as a constant reminder that Christian identities are, first and foremost, Christian bodies -- babies among them. The rest of this study will take the Christian bodies formed by infant baptism according to the postconciliar Roman Catholic rite to be one particular strategy. Examination of the rite’s phenomena, together with a consideration of the ritual folding, reveals how the performance of infant baptism redefines the body of the infant as Christian and the Body of Christ in the assembly simultaneously. This, in turn, marks Christian baptism as a distinctively trinitarian event.
CHAPTER THREE

INITIATING INFANTS

Chapter two began with an evaluation of Chauvet’s use of language to model sacramental gift exchange. Preeminent in the construction of that model, as was shown there, is the use of Eucharistic Prayer 2 as paradigmatic for sacramental exchange. Baptism, as will be shown in chapter 6, has in many ways been the paradigmatic sacrament for developing a theology of the sacraments in general. It is the first sacrament to be connected to an explicit soteriology in Christian literature (Romans 6) and theologies of the other sacraments have often been developed around it. Augustine’s discussions on the minister, effects, and efficacy of baptism, inspired by the Donatist controversy, shaped the entire discipline of sacramental theology to the current day. Certainly the credentials for baptism as a case study cannot be questioned, and any model of sacramentality which fails to explain baptismal grace can be judged lacking in significant ways. But there are some more positive reasons to think that a model developed out of baptism has advantages in relation to the specific criticisms which were leveled against the language act model in chapter 2.

First, the language act model was linked to the narrative analysis of the eucharistic prayer. As mentioned, this isolates the cognitive “content” of the eucharistic rite as the crucial dynamic of sacrament. The eucharist is particularly vulnerable to a cognitive reduction because the current rite integrates body action in the rubrics at very

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1 For example, Tertullian compared baptism to the second plank for one shipwrecked (On Repentance).

2 See, e.g., the structure of the treatise on the sacraments in the Summa Theologiae.
few points, and most movement involves only the celebrant. More importantly, the material elements of ("matter") of the eucharistic liturgy have a different type of value sacramentally than those of any other rite of the church. Not only does their reservation and adoration call for special treatment, they convey on the eucharistic prayer a special kind of importance which may not transfer to understanding other sacramental prayers.

The baptismal rite, on the other hand, is more pervaded with ritual action and sensory phenomena: gesture, scent, procession, dressing and undressing. Baptism’s “messiness” makes it more difficult to “extract” the linguistic content and consider the sacramental significance in it alone. The main prayer of baptism, the blessing of the baptismal water, does not seem to have the same comprehensive significance that the eucharistic prayer does; on the other hand, the “formula” of baptism is not a prayer (and thus cannot share the narrative Chauvet attributes to the eucharistic prayer). The action of baptism also spans the whole rite, rather than being concentrated in the communion rite. Finally, whereas the eucharistic elements are the central feature of that sacrament, the transience of blessing in the baptismal waters instead highlights the ritual action and the initiand’s body. Thus baptism might be a better choice to emphasize the ritual and embodied nature of the sacramental economy.

Another concern with the language act model was its tendency to restrict grace to linguistic channels, eliminating the possibility of extralinguistic mediations of grace. Clearly, infant baptism is an example of prelinguistic channels of grace; furthermore, the more obvious embodied qualities of baptismal celebration tend to focus attention on extralinguistic mediations of the economy. Most importantly, the combination of these

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3 This was not always the case even in the eucharistic liturgy. See e.g. the description of the papal mass around 700 C.E.: Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy* (New York: Oxford, 1979), 60–70. In addition, analysis of the whole mass, rather than just the eucharistic prayer -- especially in cases where the eucharistic liturgy is the site for celebration of another ritual, such as the dedication of a church, one of the preparatory rites for the RCIA, or the marriage vows -- would also present a broader view.
facts leads to an analytical focus on the embodied experience of phenomena in the rite, so that infant baptism helps focus on the bodiliness of the sacramental economy of salvation.

Third, the language act model represents interlocutors as relatively equal in their capacity for gift-giving and gift-reception, an assumption which can be justified in most human-human interactions, but is dubious in cases involving infants on the one hand or the divine Persons on the other. This assumption can only be maintained by forgetting the tradition that the recipient of sacrament is radically altered -- his or her very identity is changed -- by the sacramental action. Because the eucharistic celebration is a repeatable sacrament of conversion, it is easy to forget this radical change in identity -- the person who received communion last week, after all, is the same one going forward to receive it today -- it seems. Baptism, on the other hand, emphasizes this radical alteration. Since it is the entry to, not the summit of, sacramental life, it is clearly marked as a new beginning. Even more importantly, the practice of infant baptism is a potent reminder that the recipient of a sacrament has no gift of his or her own to offer; before the intervention of grace, the human person cannot offer himself or herself to God. Only by God’s grace is this gift made possible.

Fourth, this leads back to the question of sacramental efficacy as qualitatively more than the cultural efficacy of the sacrament is able to explain. Chapter 2 cautioned against taking the ambivalent symbolic value of sacrament, which has historically effected evil as well as good in the world, for salvific grace. Baptism, of course, has a similarly checkered history (one considers, for example, forced baptism of Jews and Arabs). Still, the distinction between the ecclesial effect (character, which occurs ex opere operato and is the res sacramenti of the ultimate effect) and the fruitful effect

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(grace, specifically the infusion of gifts and virtues under the influence of the Holy Spirit) served as a reminder, even in the scholastic treatises, of the mysterious gap between human and divine causality and objective and subjective efficacy. (Thus the scholastic treatises explored, for instance, the “revival” of baptism when the “obstacle” to its fruitfulness was removed -- a counterintuitive assertion that was nonetheless necessary to do justice to the tradition against rebaptism. This peculiar framework revealed the inadequacy of human norms for causality in treating the sacramental work of God.5)

Finally, consider the trinitarian nature of the sacramental economy. While the eucharist, as consummate sacrament, evokes the Pascha as consummation of Christ’s earthly ministry, baptism’s imagery spans the whole of his work, from birth to resurrection.6 Besides being more inclusive, this openness also means that baptism recollects those moments in Christ’s life which represent the trinitarian essence of salvation history most strongly: the “overshadowing” of Mary at the incarnation, the Theophany at the baptism, the sonship proclaimed at the transfiguration, the resurrection appearances and assumption. This does not mean, of course, that there cannot be a trinitarian eucharistic model; it just means that in the choice of a case study, infant baptism has some notable advantages for consideration of the sacraments “in general,” i.e., as ecclesial rituals which are part of the economy of salvation.

5 In fairness, the scholastic treatise on eucharistic presence in the Summa Theologiae is similarly counterintuitive, and for precisely the same reason (e.g. IIIa, 76). But it is relatively easier to reduce the gaze on the eucharist to the elements, rather than the community action, and this, while retaining the odd causality, eliminates the component of human freedom. Baptism, by emphasizing new identity, highlights this component.

Section 3.1: Historical practice of initiation

Although the advantage of choosing a case study, i.e. a particular ritual practice, is particularity, that is likewise its disadvantage. An attention to real performance is necessary, but one wishes the theological analysis to focus on those elements of performance which resonate widely within the ecclesial tradition. In order to accomplish this, this section will briefly survey some of the practices of Christian initiation. Particular attention is paid to initiation of infants and young children; to the importance of the identity change attributed to infant baptism; and to the eastern and western churches before and during the time of liturgical cross-fertilization (roughly taken to be the late third to late fifth centuries).

Comparative historical analysis is necessary as background to a ritual examination of the rite of infant baptism for several reasons. First, it provides perspective on the Christian tradition: just as Eucharistic Prayer II is not the one representative structure of all eucharistic rites, the postconciliar baptism of infants in the Roman Rite is not representative of the dynamics of all Christian initiation. The postconciliar rite examined here should be considered as a case study, though an extensive one. Second, it shows how ritual practice, cultural norms, and interpretations of initiation all mutually determine one another. No rite is practiced in a culture-free zone, and ritual process does not form Christians divorced from cultural, symbolic, and political interference. Third, history grounds the analysis by keeping the cultural and

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7 A case study is beneficial to any liturgical theology because “... an ordo or pattern apart from its concrete doctrinal, cultural and textual expressions in actual liturgies simply does not exist in any independent or pure form. That is, an ordo or pattern is something deduced or abstracted from already existing liturgies and these already existing liturgies themselves concretize precisely the doctrinal, cultural, and textual expressions of the Church’s faith for which the liturgy exists to serve and by which the faith and life of the worshiping community is nurtured and formed. In other words, there is no ordo apart from the ways in which this ordo of Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending is actually expressed, performed, or ‘done’ in those liturgical assemblies called Church.” (Maxwell E. Johnson, “Is Anything Normative in Contemporary Lutheran Worship?” in The Serious Business of Worship: essays in honour of Bryan D. Spinks, edited by Melanie C. Ross and Simon Jones [New York: Continuum, in press]). I am indebted to Melanie Ross for bringing this exemplary observation to my attention.
historical origins of particular practices in view, precluding fanciful speculation while enabling that *speculatio* which explores the divine realm of grace through understanding the human realm of culture.

On a more practical level, historical analysis points to the most significant aspects, actions, and concepts of Christian initiation. Although elements common to several traditions are not necessarily most ancient, structures perceived as most important resist change. Moreover, importation of elements (and thus commonality across rites) generally suggests that the structural elements imported are seen as strongly representative of Christian initiation. It is thus a confirmation of the model proposed here, rather than a distinctive contribution, that it suggests that the two anointings and the water bath are the most anthropologically significant points in the rite. The perspective offered also gives a field for objection to particular points in the rite. For example, the historical significance of the proclamation of faith in the context of baptism makes the framing of the “renewal of baptismal vows” in the postconciliar rite suspect.

The best example of the relevance of historical analysis as the background of ritual studies and liturgical theology, however, is the historical tradition of communicating baptized infants immediately as part of their initiation. This, alas, is no longer part of the initiation of infants in the West. By the perhaps paradoxical method of examining closely what is left of infant initiation in the West, this project indirectly

8 Paul Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University, 2002), 11. This observation was the work of Anton Baumstark, who was of course only noting a tendency of liturgical history. Bradshaw’s caveats in this section are important; for this work, preference has been for definite liturgical practices and their interpretation, rather than for prescriptive or specious liturgical works.

9 Of course, it could also be due to political power structures.

10 Based on ritual folding. See chapter 4.
makes a case for the intelligibility of infant communion as a ritual process which can be spiritually fruitful as well as historically legitimated.

In his study *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, Maxwell Johnson gives a comprehensive summary of the development of Christian initiation and the imagery used to interpret it.¹¹ His summary will be used to guide this section. Little is known about the specific structure of Christian initiation during the New Testament period. The most important structures seem to have been communal, indiscriminate meal sharing¹² and water baptism by submersion or immersion,¹³ both of which probably have roots in the historical life of Jesus himself.¹⁴ Footwashing and handlaying also have more elusive or perhaps eclectic connections to the earliest Christian initiations.¹⁵ Finally, metaphorical imagery about Christian initiation in the New Testament (clothing, anointing, light) suggests ritualizations which may have been realized in the New Testament period itself, but in any case were abundantly realized later in the Christian tradition.¹⁶

The post-Testamental, prenicene period is particularly fruitful for the history of Christian initiation because more documentary evidence is available than the New Testament period but little liturgical homogenization had occurred. The Syrian tradition of initiation tends toward Jordan imagery, which is also associated in the East with Christ’s birth and the manifestation of the Trinity as exemplified in Eastern celebrations

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¹¹ Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007) [hereafter *Rites*].

¹² Indiscriminacy refers specifically to the social distinctions between Jews and Christians. Although Jesus’ own meal practices were much more inclusive, some Christians during the New Testament periods seem to have practiced a “closed table” with regard to nonbelievers. See Mitchell, *Eucharist as a Sacrament of Initiation*; Johnson, *Rites*, 3-7.


¹⁴ Ibid., 5, 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., 29-31.

¹⁶ Ibid., 37-8.
of Epiphany. Therefore Epiphany was probably the preferred baptismal day in the Syrian churches. The simultaneous celebration of Jesus’ birth and baptism probably assisted the feminine gender of the word “Spirit” in Syriac in contributing to the image of the font as womb. Within the Syrian rite, however, the pneumatic emphasis of initiation does not fall on the water bath, as it does in most other Christian ritual traditions, but on the (prebath) anointing known as rushma (“sign”). This anointing was pneumatic and messianic, being identified with Christ’s anointing with the Spirit at his own baptism in the Jordan: “it was the anointing that became, in Syria, the first and only visible gesture for the central event at Christ’s baptism: his revelation as the Messiah-King through the descent of the Spirit.” The central image of fire is also here associated with the Holy Spirit, with anointing and with oil. The later Syriac tradition gradually accommodated the majority emphasis on the water bath, without fully losing the significance of the rushma. In general, the interpretation of anointings in the Christian tradition tend to change: because oil is associated with the Spirit, ritual anointings tend to accumulate pneumatic emphasis. Because oil is also associated with exorcism, however, which tends to exclude pneumatic interpretation, they also easily lose pneumatic emphasis.

The dominant symbol of baptismal interpretation outside Syria was the water bath. In Egypt the typological emphasis was on the Jordan event, but as seen through Israelite imagery: the Exodus and conquering of the Holy Land. Death and resurrection thus played a role, even within the context of a Jordanic complex of imagery: Origen

17 Ibid., 59-60.
18 Ibid., 61.
20 Johnson, Rites, e.g. 57.
21 Ibid., 71-3.
integrates a reading of Romans 6 into the dominant paradigm of the Jordan event. He also witnesses to a creed (done in question-and-answer form) as part of initiation.\textsuperscript{22}

Finally, Origen testifies to the practice of infant baptism and speculates that it signifies some kind of impurity in infants that requires cleansing.\textsuperscript{23} This becomes the germ of the theological argument for original sin eventually advanced by Augustine.

In the West, there is very little hard evidence of the shape of initiation at Rome before the medieval period; North Africa, on the other hand, is well-attested and highly influential. By the late second century the western tendency to consider the last major ritual act efficacious (and the rest preparatory), combined with the tendency of pneumatic emphasis to slide towards anointings and handlayings (based on Scriptural motifs), led Tertullian to say, “Not that \textit{in} the waters we obtain the Holy Spirit; but in the water, under (the witness of) the angel, we are cleansed and prepared \textit{for} the Holy Spirit” who is given in a postbaptismal imposition of the hand following an anointing with chrism.\textsuperscript{24} Here not only the prebaptismal anointing but even the water bath itself is taking on a “preparatory” role, as tends to happen to any structural elements associated with cleansing or exorcism.

By Tertullian’s time, too, the distinctive western emphasis on Paschal baptism and its connection to Romans 6 is established.\textsuperscript{25} The credal questions, like in the early eastern initiations, were integrated with the submersions or immersions, which, in North Africa, were three in number. Tertullian also witnesses to, but critiques, infant baptism, implying that it is unnecessary and concerned that such children are likely to need to join

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 73.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 74-5.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 86.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 87-8. But see also Johnson, \textit{Images}, 36, which calls attention to the continuing diversity of interpretation in the West until the liturgical movement. Also, recall that parts of the East, especially Alexandria (Origen) and Jerusalem (Cyril) also use Christ’s death and resurrection as paradigmatic imagery in baptismal contexts.
the order of penitents.\textsuperscript{26} Cyprian, on the other hand, (as well as Augustine, later) considers infants to be the ideal sacramental subjects, since they cannot be hindered by personal sin from receiving grace.\textsuperscript{27} Cyprian, in fact, considered the existential situation of babies particularly reminiscent of the status of catechumens repenting before baptism:

\begin{quote}
We think [baptism] is to be even more observed in respect of infants and newly-born persons, who on this very account deserve more from our help and from the divine mercy, that immediately, on the very beginning of their birth, *lamenting and weeping, they do nothing else but entreat.*\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Infant communion, of course, was part of the initiatory practice which Cyprian is defending; infants were not only appropriate baptism candidates but perfect communicants. This argument comparing infant behaviors to catechumenal repentance is the close relative of ancient and modern understandings of Christ’s sayings about children (Mk 9, 10 and parallels) which sees in infants’ dependence and helplessness an idealized picture of Christian behavior.\textsuperscript{29}

The reconstructed document generally known as the *Apostolic Tradition* can no longer be assumed to be representative of any one community’s worship at any particular period; it is not even certain that its various additions and redactions are all Eastern or all Western.\textsuperscript{30} Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that its strata include a reference to infant baptism as practiced simultaneously with adult baptism: “Baptize the little ones first. All those who can speak for themselves shall do so. As for those who cannot speak for themselves, their parents or someone from their family shall *speak for them.* Then

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 89-90.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 91, 196.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 92.
\end{itemize}
baptize the men, and lastly the women . . . “31 This seems to indicate that prelinguistic persons were baptized with minimal ritual adaptation, and that proxy confession was the norm. Bradshaw et al. assign it to the earliest stratum of the document. The provenance of the document in question, however, remains so problematic that not much can be made of its testimony. Therefore its ritual specifications, besides this unique rubric, will be omitted entirely.

The postnicene period was largely one of increasing standardization and cross-fertilization in Christian liturgy. Three major alterations were occurring throughout the Christian churches. Following a brief synopsis of these, the discussion will concentrate on the postnicene west, where questions about infant baptism arose and the beginnings of the dissolution of (especially infant) initiation can be seen. This will lead naturally into the crystallization of Roman infant initiation during the medieval period.

First of all, the postnicene period was the age of the catechumenate, during which preparation for Christian initiation of adults was becoming longer, more formalized, and more intensive. This was largely because, after the peace of Constantine, the Church sought “to ensure that its sacramental/baptismal life would have some kind of integrity when authentic conversion and properly motivated desire to enter the Christian community could no longer be assumed.”32

Secondly, more ritual elements were exchanged between east and west. In the west, this meant that, in the wake of the ecumenical councils, pneumatic language was increasingly attached to various parts of the initiation rites. Such language was attracted especially to anointings and handlayings because of obvious scriptural warrants. At the same time, elements that had been pneumatic in the eastern rites, especially those preceding the bath, began to take on an exorcistic meaning dually influenced by the West

31 Ibid., 108; cited in Johnson, Rites, 104. Emphasis added.
32 Johnson, Rites, 119.
and by the desire to increase the emotional and spiritual preparation for the baptismal event. In general a greater emphasis was placed on the dramatic and emotional character of the initiation rites.

Thirdly, theological interpretation of the event of baptism, in both East and West, was increasingly influenced by the death-and-resurrection imagery of Romans 6. While this image only came to dominate liturgical texts (at least Roman Catholic texts) as a consequence of the liturgical movement, the postnicene period saw its increasing adoption as a major mystagogical theology of initiation.

All these changes must have denormalized infant initiation. In the context of a long and intensive catechumenate, a ritual sequence “designed to heighten dramatically the experience and emotions of those being initiated,” and a relative decrease of adoption and new life imagery, inattentive infants and chatty children must have seemed a cipher. It is hardly surprising that they tend to disappear from the theological landscape of initiation -- though they did not disappear from its performance -- reemerging only to pose a problem for Augustine.

Augustine seems to have been the first commentator on baptism to seriously consider the (in)applicability of the specifically adult rite of baptism to infants. His theology of original sin was motivated in part by a consideration that the church not only baptized infants (a fact discussed by Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian), but exorcized them. This seemed incongruous if infants were really innocent, so Augustine concluded

33 Ibid., 115-57.
34 Ibid., 141.
36 Potential reasons for this change, which seems to have originated in West Syria, are discussed in Johnson, Rites, 137-44.
37 Ibid., 119.
38 Ibid., 194-5.
that, like adults, they must need “to be liberated from sin, death, and the devil.” ³⁹ At the same time, Augustine saw communicating infants as “the model of the perfect subject for the sacraments. This is in part because the infant images the total helplessness of the human condition. The human creature must come to the Father with the same helpless abandon as the sucking infant does to his mother.” ⁴⁰

The idea of infants as ideal sacramental subjects is thus retained in Augustine. Progressively, however, perhaps as a consequence of developing ideas of subjectivity and expression, whether infants were capable of initiation became more and more questionable. This development was largely the consequence of, not the reason behind, the dissolution of initiation in the Roman rite, which will be the final topic of this section. The historical processes leading to dissolution -- largely a gradual conflation of several pneumatic postbaptismal ritual gestures with a Roman tradition that reserved one of them to the local bishop -- are abundantly treated in Johnson’s The Rites of Christian Initiation and elsewhere; after a brief outline of the development of dissolution, the consequences will be the main concern here.

In the prenicene period there is evidence of various postbaptismal ritual gestures in North Africa, including (from Tertullian) a single anointing, a pneumatic handlaying prayer, and (from Cyprian) the sign of the cross, followed, of course, by first eucharist. ⁴¹ Moreover, in this time period in the West the rite was schematically divided into pneumatic and non-pneumatic structures -- or, more properly, elements which might previously have borne pneumatic interpretation became cleansing. ⁴² In the postnicene

³⁹ Ibid., 195.
⁴⁰ David Holeton, Infant Communion: Then and Now, (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1981), 6; cited in Johnson, Rites, 196. This metaphor of lactation in eucharistic context has of course enjoyed a long and illustrious history in the Christian tradition.
⁴¹ Johnson, Rites, 85-7.
⁴² Ibid., 87.
period, this foundation combined with a Roman tradition that reserved a pneumatic postbaptismal anointing, having the form of the sign of the cross on the initiand’s forehead, to the bishop alone. If no bishop was present, the presbyter would anoint with chrism atop the head, and the bishop would later sign the initiand with chrism in the consignation “reserved to the bishops when they give the Spirit, the Paraclete.”

This distinctively Roman pattern did not at first disrupt the overall structure of initiation. In Spain, for example, where the word “confirmation” first seems to have been applied to a postbaptismal rite performed by the bishop following the initiand’s complete initiation, “it is not the newly baptized but the sacramental ministry of the local presbyter or deacon which is confirmed by the bishop’s visit.” In the seventh and eighth centuries, witnessed by the Gelasian Sacramentary and Ordo Romanus XI, the ritual instructions for infant initiation still called for a full if brief set of catechetical rites (including the traditio of the Gospels, the Nicene Creed in Greek and Latin, and the Our Father), Paschal baptism, credal questions addressed to the candidates, an anointing with chrism, episcopal pneumatic imposition of hands followed by episcopal consignation with chrism (“confirmation”), white garments and coins given them by the bishop, first communion, and even a rudimentary mystagogy period during the Easter Octave.

The real progenitor of the dissolved Roman rites of initiation, as well as of the postconciliar Roman rite for infant baptism, was a ritual in the Gelasian Sacramentary intended for a “sick catechumen.” Johnson writes:

43 Ibid., 162.
44 Ibid., 183.
46 Ibid., 230.
In this particular rite, following a series of special prayers for the 
restoration to health, the catechumenal ceremonies of the *traditio* of the 
Creed and Lord’s Prayer, together with all the rites associated with the 
seventh scrutiny on Holy Saturday morning above, formed merely an 
extended introduction to the rite of baptism itself. After an abbreviated 
blessing of the font and waters, baptism and the postbaptismal anointing 
were administered in the same way as we have seen already. But in *this* 
rite the postbaptismal anointing was followed immediately by the 
reception of first communion either at a special baptismal Mass or from 
the reserved Eucharist. The postbaptismal rites of handlaying and 
anointing associated with the bishop, therefore, were added only *after* 
first communion had already been given! 47

Once infant communion is eliminated, this rite is substantially equivalent to the 
prevailing rites of infant initiation in the Roman West, including the postconciliar rite -- 
except that the latter makes no provision for infant communion.

Thus, as Mark Searle observes in his article “Infant Baptism Reconsidered,”

“what had at first been the exceptional case eventually became commonplace as an 
increasing percentage of the candidates for baptism came in fact to be children in a 
period where infancy was itself so precarious a condition that to be a newborn was ipso 
facto to be in a life-threatening situation.” 48 This view is supported by a twelfth-century 
French text which argues for the practice of infant baptism outside of defined baptismal 
feasts. Restriction of baptism to specific feasts, it argues,

has adults in view. In the early Church adults who were sick could say so, 
and then they were baptized . . . . But all this does not apply to little 
children, for who is more ill than an infant who cannot make it known 
that it is ill? The baptism of children should therefore not be put off, for 
they may die of the least ailment. 49

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47 Ibid.

Johnson (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), 369.

Although Augustine’s view of the damnation of the unbaptized undoubtably plays a role here, the argument explicitly ties infant baptism not to their eternal but to their mortal insecurity: infancy is an illness from which all too few recover.\textsuperscript{50}

As \textit{quamprimum} baptism became the norm, then, there was no time for the full set of catechumenal rites. The cultural formation of infants was camouflaged by the relative cultural homogeneity of “Christendom.” Cultural artifacts and practices of Christianity became more and more integrated into the undifferentiated social sphere, so that Christian formation of infants became increasingly invisible and unnoticed. Finally, in the thirteenth century, with the gradual withdrawal of the laity from the chalice, infant communion (which had by this time become restricted to the chalice) disappeared.\textsuperscript{51} Finally the dissolution of infant baptism, so long a matter of popular practice, became incorporated into canon law.\textsuperscript{52}

So the emergence of confirmation as an episcopal reduplication of the North African (or Roman?) pneumatic postbaptismal ritual gestures assisted the development of doubts as to the real status of infants as ritual subjects. The latter conviction eventually led to the discarding of the catechumenal rites altogether, to baptism of infants as a clinical precaution and the postponing of communion until the so-called “age of reason.” The events of modernity -- the emergence of pluralism as an identified phenomenon and, much later, the restoration of communion to laypersons in the liturgical movement -- actually exacerbated the cultural and ritual isolation of Christian children. Before these, Christian children were ritually initiated into the social and cultural surround of Christendom. The ritual practice of laypersons did not normally include eucharistic reception, which meant that children were not “marked” by their

\textsuperscript{50} For more on the importance of baptism for infants who die before reaching maturity, see chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{51} Johnson, \textit{Rites}, 262-6.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 263-4.
exclusion from the table. Thus two of the most positive aspects of modern Christianity, intercultural dialogue and liturgical renewal, have paradoxically made children’s cultural identity in the Christian community much more precarious.53

Section 3.2: “Abnormality” or alternate norm?

In the light of the extensive history of infant baptism in the Christian tradition, the unparalleled importance of this rite for Christian identity and church membership, and the relatively unproblematic status of that practice until the Reformation, Aidan Kavanagh’s maxim that infant baptism is at best a “benign abnormality” is untenable.54 Given the phenomenal diversity of initiatory practices in both East and West, it seems unnecessary to isolate this one common aspect of Christian initiation, its application to infants, as abnormal. Moreover, Christians who had been baptized as infants were universally admitted to communion until lay communication became exceptional, so the baptism of infants was not treated as abnormal in liturgical practice. Infant baptism, like adult baptism, was thought to be connected in some mysterious way to the condition of the human person (which was considered to be universal) and to the saving work of Christ (likewise universal). Even Augustine’s question about infant baptism only led him to find an explanation in the common human condition and in the work of Christ, which was extended to all persons by virtue of the fact that “Christ baptizes” in the ritual of the Church.55 “Abnormality” is an evaluative criterion that is not substantiated by the Christian tradition.

54 Ibid., 267-75.  
55 Augustine, Tractates on John, 6.7.
The context of Kavanagh’s assertion is provided by his conviction that a focus on adult baptism as the norm for Christian initiation is necessary to keep infant baptism from devolving into “a malign abnormality due to pastoral malfeasance, theological obsession, or the decline of faith among Christian parents into some degree of merely social conformity.”\(^5^6\) In other words, Kavanagh’s motivation is similar to that of the first “turn to the adult” in the great catechetical age -- in a period when Christian formation of initiands seems to be in doubt, a pastoral emphasis on peak psychological experiences and personal commitments makes sense. Kavanagh clearly manifests a great affinity for this “golden age” of Christian initiation, for its eminent mystagogues and its emphasis on death-and-resurrection imagery. But there is a danger in limiting the voice of the great diversity of the liturgical and theological tradition to one monologue, however powerful.

The direct evidence Kavanagh claims for the normative status of adult baptism is contained in several conciliar and post-conciliar documents of Vatican II, which are cited in *Shape of Baptism*, pp. 122f, nn. 4f. Clare Johnson has examined these citations in depth in her dissertation and concludes “that Kavanagh’s long-influential assertion of the ‘officially stated’ theological normativity of adult initiation is based on an argument from silence in the documents of Vatican II.”\(^5^7\) Moreover, his “preference for the ‘conversion model’ of Christian initiation seems to have influenced his reading of these documents to some extent.”\(^5^8\) Certainly adult baptism has not been officially declared theologically normative.\(^5^9\)

\(^{56}\) Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism* (New York: Pueblo, 1978), 110 [hereafter *Shape*].  
\(^{57}\) Clare Johnson, *Ex Ore Infantium*, 282.  
\(^{58}\) Ibid., 281.  
\(^{59}\) In fact, any assertion that some particular kind of liturgical practice has been declared theologically normative to the exclusion of other legitimate and valid forms of Christian liturgical practice should be considered suspect. The theological tradition holds that liturgical practice is “canonical,” which is the point of the adage *lex orandi, lex credendi*. In fact liturgical practice constitutes (under conditions of widespread and long-term practice) the Biblical canon, as Brevard Childs suggested in *The New Testament as Canon* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity, 1994), e.g. p. 31.
What about the indirect evidence Kavanagh offers for the claim that infant baptism is abnormal? This evidence takes two forms. Kavanagh describes the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* as the “last and most mature outcome of the postconciliar subcommission’s work.” He argues,

> the document’s purpose is less to give liturgical recipes than to shift the Church’s initiatory polity from one conventional norm centering on infant baptism to the more traditional norm centering on adults. *Nowhere does the document say this in so many words.* If this is not the case, however, then the document not only makes no sense but is vain and fatuous. Its extensive and sensitive dispositions for gradually incorporating adult converts into communities of faith nowhere suggest that this process should be regarded as the rare exception. On the contrary, from deep within the Roman tradition it speaks of the process presumptively as normative.

Thus Kavanagh’s indirect evidence for the normality of adult baptism is an interpretation of the *RCIA* as the paragon of the postconciliar reforms and his view that the historical tradition of Christian initiation treats adult baptism as normative.

The first argument, that the *RCIA* presents adult initiation as normative, is admittedly an argument from silence, and as such problematic. Its late date does not necessarily argue for its normative status; indeed, it was partly based on “collating reactions to the previously issued rites of baptism for children and confirmation,” which may well indicate that it is a better-formulated rite, but implies a dependent status for the reform. The judgment that the rite is “vain and fatuous” if adult baptism is not regarded as the sole norm can be sustained only if it is assumed that only one type of initiation, that for adults or that for children, can be regarded as really legitimate. Yet it is evident that the council regarded both adult and infant baptism as legitimate expressions of Christian initiation; adult baptism required more abundant reformation

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60 Kavanagh, *Shape*, 105.

61 Ibid., 106. Emphases added.

62 Ibid., 105.
because, as Kavanagh notes, its practice had, in the wake of the Protestant and Catholic reformations, been largely lost, so that adult initiation was in practice little more than the infant rite applied to a larger person.63

The argument that adult baptism has traditionally been regarded as theologically normative cannot be sustained either; as shown above, initiatory practice has always been diverse, and the age of initiates has played a small role in this diversity. The patristic documents undoubtedly provided more guidance for the reform of adult initiation, both because adult baptism had been eviscerated by time (leaving infant baptism as the only practicable norm) and because the documentation recording early initiatory practice seems more relevant to adult initiation than to infant initiation. The very fact, however, that infant baptism has provoked so much reflection gives it significance, and the diversity of historical liturgical practice argues against the idea that there need be only one norm for any particular sacramental rite.

The novelty of the RCIA, in fact, is that in the postconciliar period the Roman rite for the first time acknowledges two different, simultaneous, practical norms for initiation: one for adults and a different one for children under the age of reason. This is emphasized by the stipulation, in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, that the revision of the rite for baptizing infants should “tak[e] into account the fact that those to be baptized are infants.”64 Both rites are new, suggesting that the council felt that the single preconciliar norm resulted in a rite which was not appropriate to the needs of adults or infants. This dual normativity of initiation provides a rich new liturgical resource for theological reflection; nonetheless, theological reflection on the initiation of infants is deeply traditional.

63 Ibid., 104.
64 Sacrosanctum Concilium 67.
Mark Searle has argued that there are several ways in which infant initiation provides an important *locus theologicus*.65 Despite the fact that the current Roman practice is only partial initiation of infants (i.e. baptism and chrismation without confirmation and communion), these observations still hold of infant baptism. First of all, Searle argues, the characterization of adult baptism as “antique and paschal” and that of infants as “medieval and sociopersonal”66 is inaccurate. The ancient catechumenates included children of all ages as well as adults. The novelty of the Middle Ages was not that infants were initiated but that they failed to be *fully* initiated, as Searle points out.67 Furthermore, baptism in antiquity, whether celebrated on the Pascha or at another suitable time of year, was not merely paschal but also encompassed a wealth of other metaphors, including “adoption, divinization, sanctification, gift of the Spirit, indwelling, glory, power, wisdom, rebirth, restoration, mission, and so forth.”68 These metaphors tend to be crowded out by the heavily paschal and christocentric character of the RCIA, but may be more visible in infant baptism, especially in the modern rite where references to original sin are more modest and reticent.

Maxwell Johnson, in his study *Images of Baptism*, acknowledges that “in our history we have often allowed some baptismal models (e.g., baptism as liberation from original sin or as death and resurrection) to function in . . . an exclusive manner.”69 The idea that a paschal model for baptism is the normative or Western model, however, is actually a contemporary idea:

65 Searle, “Infant Baptism Reconsidered.”
67 Searle, 370.
68 Ibid., 385.
In spite of the fact that Romans 6 has become the dominant baptismal image in our own day and is often held up as the image preferred in the history of the Western liturgical traditions, . . . baptism as “new birth” or “adoption” along the lines of John 3:5 is likewise a dominant Western baptismal image and paradigm, and . . . Romans 6 itself is, quite surprisingly, relatively absent from the liturgical sources themselves.  

The set of imagery orbiting the use of John 3:5 in the tradition (birth, adoption, new life, etc.) is more strongly associated with the Holy Spirit than death and burial imagery is, as exemplified in one of the texts Johnson cites (from the Lateran baptistery, 432-440 C.E.):

Here a people of godly race are born for heaven;  
the Spirit gives them life in the fertile waters.  
The Church-Mother, in these waves, bears her children  
like virginal fruit she has conceived by the Holy Spirit.  

Imagery of birth, womb, motherhood, and new life, Johnson concludes, “appears to be the preferred baptismal image” in Western liturgical texts, even if Western theologians like Ambrose of Milan appeal to Romans 6 for interpretive purposes.

Easter baptism of adults in the West does not suppress this complex of imagery, as Johnson observes. Nonetheless, these images are particularly appropriate to and naturally arise in the celebration of the baptism of infants, because the ritual participants themselves are potent symbols of new life, birth, infancy, and parenthood. Since infant baptism evokes these images particularly strongly, and these images are powerfully associated with the work of the Holy Spirit, which is neglected in Western sacramental theology overall, the study of infant baptism may prove helpful in uncovering the trinitarian structure of the rite of baptism.

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70 Ibid., 36.
71 Ibid., 39.
72 Ibid., 48.
73 See ibid., 52-4.
Of course, most of the questions about infant baptism, including Kavanagh’s, are raised by the question of whether baptism can really form any kind of identity in an infant. Baptism of infants is a particularly difficult case, both because of its unnatural isolation from the fullness of the process of initiation and because “most sacramental questions come together in a particularly concentrated way in the issue of the sacramental initiation of infants.”

Because of the limited capabilities of the sacramental recipients of infant baptism, the question of the bestowal of identity is raised in a particularly compelling way. This work will explore identity formation in infant baptizands through ritual based on the proposed model of efficacious engagement.

Section 3.3: Infants’ capabilities and self-development

Christians are “made, not born,” as Tertullian famously said: they are made Christians by a process of initiation. As a work of grace, becoming a Christian is beyond the ability of the initiand: it is the result of election by God and the community. At the same time, initiation requires the initiand’s proclamation of faith and consent to the work of God and the church. In this sense, every initiand is an agent of his or her own initiation. The tension between the initiand’s agency through personal faith and his or her consent to be initiated by the Christian community is essential to Christian initiation.

In adult baptism, this tension is maintained by balancing the community’s election and “sponsoring” of a catechumen (in the postconciliar rite, this is ritualized by the rites of sending and of election) with the catechumen’s personal development, desire for initiation, and proclamation of faith. In infant baptism, however, the catechumen cannot proclaim faith and consent to be baptized. Thus from the very early period, an adult spoke on behalf of the infant catechumen. In the patristic period, this seems to

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74 Searle, 366.
75 Tertullian, *Apologeticus pro Christianis*, 18.
have caused little concern (though there were pastoral concerns about the baptism of infants, e.g. Tertullian’s). By the Reformation, however, concerns about this “proxy faith” of infant catechumens were deep and far-reaching, and these continue today.76 A consideration of the historical development of this concern is beyond the scope of this work, but the following section will provide a perspective on agency in the context of the concepts of identity and self-process unfolded in chapter 2.

The modern concern about “speaking on behalf” of an infant springs from the specifically modern understanding of faith and, correspondingly, of the significance of the public proclamation of faith. This modern understanding sees faith as a ephemeral disposition perceptible only by the subject. The existence of faith within the human person can only be affirmed by the person himself or herself, and he or she may deceive others. Moreover, faith is defined within a cognitively-centered definition of the self (along the lines of Descartes), so that infant faith becomes a poorly-defined concept.77 Within this context, an adult’s affirmation of faith “on behalf of” an infant catechumen, since the adult has no knowledge of the infant’s inner state, cannot be regarded as decisive. Thus baptism of infants becomes problematic, and the Roman church’s teaching that infants are baptized “into the faith of the Church” requires defense.

This meaning of faith was not the standard one at the time proxy professions for an infant (or an unconscious catechumen) or the adage “into the faith of the Church” developed. Augustine, for example, writes about a friend of his who became ill and was baptized without his knowledge. His friend had been a caustic critic of orthodox Christianity, so Augustine considered his friend’s unwilling baptism insignificant and even absurd. When his friend was well enough, Augustine visited him and laughed at his baptism. Since the rite was something which “had been done to his unconscious body,”

76 See e.g. Searle, 396.
77 Clare Johnson, Ex Ore Infantium, 263-6, 324-7.
he had no idea that it would have any influence on the mind and soul. Unexpectedly, his friend took the baptism gravely and forbid Augustine to speak disparagingly about it.\textsuperscript{78}

This surprising experience no doubt influenced Augustine when he wrote, in \textit{Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins}, about the baptism of infants. Augustine calls unbaptized infants “unbelievers,” but infants who have been baptized are “believing.”\textsuperscript{79} Since infant faith, according to this, is accessible to outside analysis and decisively determined by ritual initiation, Augustine clearly does not see faith (at least in the context of Christian initiation) as an ephemeral cognitive state which can be known only to the subject.

There is a significant parallel between the change in the understanding of faith between the premodern and the modern periods and the simultaneous change occurring in the understanding of ritual. According to Asad, the medieval understanding of truth saw it as something that was marked on the body, an aspect of the self. Thus medieval judicial torture, for example, was intended as a way of writing the truth about the crime upon the tortured’s body and pressing it out in the form of verbal confession.\textsuperscript{80} This understanding of truth made attributing faith to infants (i.e. as a part of their body-makeup) perfectly comprehensible, and also correlated well with understanding ritual processes, in the context of religious communities, as “provid[ing] the discipline necessary for the construction of a certain kind of personality.”\textsuperscript{81} In the Renaissance, on the other hand, truth became divorced from the dual concepts of body-formation and ritual discipline, so that power, not virtue, came to be connected with truth (and faith). When truth is about power, “behavioral signs need to be seen as representations conceptually detachable from what they represent; only then can they invite readings in

\textsuperscript{78} Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 4.8. Emphasis added.  
\textsuperscript{79} Augustine, \textit{Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins}, e.g. 28, 25.  
\textsuperscript{80} Talal Asad, \textit{Genealogies of Religion}, 90-5.
a game of power.” Concepts of self then “depended . . . on the maintainance of moral distance between public forms of behavior and private thoughts and feelings.” The strategies governing behavior were thus altered in this new context, and the concepts of truth were changed to an “objective” notion -- i.e. divorced from a person’s embodied existence. But the faith which is implied in baptismal proclamations of faith is not ephemeral and imperceptible, though it is personal. Instead, it is a matter of a complex, specific form of being-in-the-world that incorporates the physical with the cognitive and the spiritual, the cultural environment with the distinctive individual ways of assimilating experience. Thus it is more closely aligned with identity structures (truths) formed by ritual process than those constructed independently of such processes.

In the previous chapter the characterization of ritual processes as “technologies of the self” was discussed. That designation, of course, might cast doubt on the possibility of infant participants in such techniques. Infants, after all, have no conscious apprehension of socially-designated goals for which they are striving. Even among adults, however, autonomy is easily overestimated. Foucault calls the disciplines “technologies of the self” in order to distinguish them from other ritual disciplines which are imposed without or even against the will of the subject of discipline, but Asad has shown that this distinction is a subtle one, and there are many ways in which ritual disciplines transgress the boundaries between intentionality and imposition. Monastic discipline can be seen in two parts: a goal which is both constructed by authority and desired by the individual, and a ritual process which is prescribed by authority and practiced by the ritual subject. The “technology of the self” is more accurately called “technology of the community,” because it is from the community that the practitioner

81 Ibid., 114.
82 Ibid., 65.
83 Ibid., 67.
constructs and appropriates the goal and the ritual process used to attain that goal. If this is true, then nothing precludes examining infant baptism as a ritual discipline, a “technology of the community” which initiates the infant into particular goals, skills, capacities, and relationships essential to Christian life. Moreover, this initiation can take place on a preconscious level, like the infant’s initiation to other cultural realities, rather than on the adult cognitive level which infants have not yet achieved.

If infants, then, have the appropriate capacities to undergo and be formed by ritual processes, then the question of agency can be reframed more productively. Developmental psychology will thus be consulted here on the capabilities of infants. Although the Roman Rite of Baptism for Children (hereafter RBC) is intended for all children under the age of reason (i.e. from birth through six years of age), for the purposes of this work greater restriction is required, so as to pay attention to the real capacities of the child initiand. Thus the most difficult case has been selected, that is newborns, 0-6 months of age.

One undisputed fact is that infants of this age are not yet able use “the symbolic function” to understand their world. Yet one must be cautious again: symbolic here does not mean aneconomic behavior, but “the ability to use symbols, such as words, images, and gestures, to represent objects and events mentally.” This ability develops gradually in tandem with language throughout young childhood. There are more fundamental abilities, however, which do develop at this critical period, and these will be examined here. Moreover, the child at this age has a substantial dynamism: a propensity

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84 Rite of Baptism for Children (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2002). Numbers indicate paragraphs, not pagination.

85 E. Mavis Hetherington et al., Child Psychology: A Contemporary Viewpoint (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006), 332. Emphasis added. Since the psychology referenced in this work is so basic, this general textbook of child development is used as a reference throughout. Original studies can be found in the book’s text and citations.

86 Ibid., 332ff.
to rapid development and the progressive acquisition of skills. Many capacities cannot be clearly identified in young childhood; the child can use them in particular circumstances or assisted but not in other contexts or alone, for instance. This important facet of child psychology will also be treated in this section.

Infant sensory activity is surprisingly sophisticated and complex. To some extent, the work of Merleau-Ponty suggests this: human perception is organized for object recognition before any particular percept is recognized;\(^{87}\) is “open to [learning] more complex structures” for behavioral organization;\(^{88}\) is “intentional” not in the sense of being consciously directed towards a mentally-recognized goal but in the sense of being adapted to an end relevant to the person’s functioning.\(^{89}\) In a word, perception does not depend on memory, but memory depends on the ability of perception to identify relevant phenomena and suppress irrelevant ones.\(^{90}\) It is thus less surprising to find that infants are, in fact, highly attuned to their world, with sensory capacities which far exceed their motor capacities. “Researchers have discovered that babies’ sensory and perceptual capabilities are quite well organized even at birth, allowing infants to begin adapting immediately to their new environments.”\(^{91}\)

The perceptual abilities of a newborn are “especially well equipped to respond to his social environment, including human voices, faces, and smells.”\(^{92}\) Infants can hear relatively well even before birth, can distinguish their own native language by their birth,
and can make key distinctions between phonemes before one month of age.93 Young infants not only prefer music to noise but can also demonstrate a preference for certain kinds of music over other kinds.94 In fact, the very ability of infants to demonstrate preference (in studies, often by prolonged attention or by learning specific sucking rhythms in order to “request” particular kinds of stimulation95) suggest that even infants can resolve sensations into phenomena, though the exact form of these phenomena may be unknown.

Although newborns’ visual clarity and ability to recognize whole forms is limited, newborns are still able to recognize the contours of their mothers’ faces within a few days after birth.96 Similarly, infants demonstrate “shape constancy” -- the ability to perceive an object’s shape as constant despite changes in orientation and perspective97 -- which is crucial to perceiving objects.

Newborns also have a sophisticated sense of smell, of taste, and of touch. Research has shown that newborns prefer their mother’s smell and the taste of her milk to other smells and tastes; moreover, infants become habituated to flavors they experience in their mothers’ milk, thus imbibing their native culture.98 Newborns are also sensitive to both positive and negative sensations of touch, including pain, and can use their sense of touch actively to explore objects in their hands at only two days of age.99

93 Ibid., 140, 284f, 283.
94 Ibid., 142.
95 Ibid., 139-40.
96 Ibid., 146-7.
97 Ibid., 150.
98 Ibid., 151-2.
99 Ibid., 152-3.
Besides being sensitive to these stimuli, newborns are also able to organize the information they are receiving with their senses into meaningful patterns, including localization of sounds,\textsuperscript{100} discrimination of faces,\textsuperscript{101} expectation of temporal patterns after a few repetitions,\textsuperscript{102} and intermodal perception of objects. This latter signifies the ability to coordinate information from more than one sense in order to create meaningful (i.e. world-relevant) knowledge. For example, infants can identify textures by sight which they have been exposed to only orally and can identify visual percepts that match audio tracks.\textsuperscript{103} This suggests “that infants are probably born with the capacity for intermodal transfer. And over the first year, with added experience, infants improve markedly in this ability.”\textsuperscript{104} In fact, experience is necessary to the development of many specific kinds of perception and motor control.\textsuperscript{105}

The most important motor development during this period is learning goal-oriented methods for reaching and grasping objects. Even newborns coordinate their motion with their visual perception enough to “swipe” at interesting objects.\textsuperscript{106} By six months of age, most infants can direct their reach by sight and grasp objects of various sizes and shapes once they reach it.\textsuperscript{107} This, like the development of visual tracking, implies a simultaneous knowledge of how to coordinate inputs, how to control the appropriate muscles, and where one’s body is in respect to the environment -- in other words, the recognition of one’s own body as a particular locus. This is interesting because

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 142.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 151.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 153-5.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 154.
\textsuperscript{105} See e.g. ibid., 145 (color), 149 (depth), 180-1 (locomotor), 182-3 (blindness).
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 177.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 177-8.
even though the infant cannot recognize an image of his or her body as a symbolic representation of self, \footnote{As in mirror experiments: see ibid., 259, 340f, 675 (related to language ability); Chauvet, 95-7.} he or she inhabits it in a way that differentiates it phenomenally from any other phenomena, and in such a way as to constitute objects and phenomena in the world.

Besides the ability to perceive and alter the world through their sensorimotor skills, young infants have several crucial abilities for self-organization. One of these is state control. “States” refers to the level of alertness and engagement of young infants, from sleep through quiet alertness to fussy crying. These states are not “random” or “haphazard”; they “recur in a regular, periodic fashion as part of a larger cycle.” \footnote{Child Psychology, 128.} This provides evidence that even as newborns, “human beings are not passive, stirred into action only by outside stimulation. On the contrary, internal forces regulate much of our behavior and account for many changes in our activity levels.” \footnote{Ibid.} At the same time, state control allows the infant to adapt to the cultural environment: by two months of age, infants sleep much more at night and are awake more during the daytime than they are at two weeks of age. \footnote{Ibid., 129.} The quiet alert stage, which is optimal for engagement with the world, shows a similar dependence on internal and external factors. One study of postural techniques on infant alertness showed that parents could soothe a crying or sleeping baby to visually engage with the environment by bringing the baby upright on the parent’s shoulder in 77.5% of cases. \footnote{Ibid., 133-4.} Other postural techniques were effective in a smaller percentage of cases. In this study, parents’ postural technique \emph{facilitates} engagement but does not guarantee it. One may see that there are “ritual processes” or

\begin{thebibliography}{112}

\footnote{As in mirror experiments: see ibid., 259, 340f, 675 (related to language ability); Chauvet, 95-7.}
\footnotetext{108}{Child Psychology, 128.}
\footnotetext{109}{Ibid.}
\footnotetext{110}{Ibid.}
\footnotetext{111}{Ibid., 129.}
\footnotetext{112}{Ibid., 133-4.}

\end{thebibliography}
“technologies of the community” at work even in infancy: the infant’s state control is necessary to regulate when he or she can engage with the world and when he or she is too tired to do so; at the same time, the opportunities for engagement offered by the infant’s “world” (“natural” and “cultural” phenomena) gradually change the sleep-wake cycle to accord better with the infant’s cultural community.

Further insight into the application of ritual processes to infancy can be found in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of cognitive development. Like Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of perception, one of the advantages of Vygotsky’s model for human cognition is that it incorporates a scheme for understanding how human capacities can increase with time and practice. This model proposes that cognitive development is, in good part, the result of children’s interaction with more experienced members of their cultural community . . . . The child and her partners solve problems together, and through the assistance that her partners provide, the child has the opportunity to participate in intelligent actions beyond her current individual capabilities.113

For Vygotsky, language is one of several “mediators, or psychological tools and signs” that permit more effective interaction with the world.114 Mediators and their uses change over the child’s lifetime, and different forms of mediation enable different skills and abilities. Mediators, and the skills depending on them, are also culture-dependent. Some culture-dependent mediators may emerge before language, so that language is only one facet of the complex “higher mental functions” which may eventually enable the child to be a full adult member of his or her social community.115

113 Ibid., 350.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 351.
Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Vygotsky’s work for this project, however, is in his recognition of “the zone of proximal development.”

This is the space which differentiates “a child’s ‘actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving’ and his ‘potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.’”

The zone of proximal development has several important properties. It acknowledges the indeterminacy associated with learning processes: skills, abilities, and characteristics are not acquired instantly. During the learning process, abilities may be exhibited under certain conditions and not exhibited under others, which is one reason why a ritual process, with authorizing structures which facilitate the activity and prescribe it under particular conditions, may be necessary for the development of some skills. The zone of proximal development also marks out the imminent sphere of the child’s development; the activities in its range are those that the child is in the process of acquiring. It thus gestures towards the goal-oriented nature of ritual process. It also suggests a means for the acquisition of new skills and describes the process by which this is gradually accomplished:

more experienced learners are able to break down an activity into components to make it more understandable and accessible to the learner. More experienced partners also help the learner by modeling new strategies . . . and by encouraging and supporting the child’s involvement.

There are several learning structures developed in response to this theory of cognitive development, including scaffolding, the community of learners, and guided
participation, all of which bear certain resemblances to aspects of the monastic disciplines described by Asad.

Infants certainly do not, as monks do, engage in ritual processes in conscious pursuit of particular self-goals, but the zone of proximal development -- the development space where the child is currently learning new skills -- is also the area where engagement is most rewarding. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has done research into the psychology of enjoyment, and is particularly interested in what he calls “autotelic activities”: those that are pursued “for their own sake,” i.e. because they are enjoyable. These include games, sports, artistic endeavors, and certain types of work. These activities help practitioners focus their attention by narrowing the field of meaningful challenges, which may be a particularly helpful “scaffolding” device for infants and young children. At the same time, they provide some meaningful challenges to exercise individuals’ skills. In fact, the most successful autotelic activities “present ever more difficult opportunities for action, so that the level of skills one can attain is in principle inexhaustible, and a person who takes advantage of the opportunities can feel that his control is increasing all the time.” Thus infants engaging in ritual processes which support their developing capacities in ways meaningful to the community (along the lines of the “technologies of the community” examined in the previous chapter) are likely to be fully engaged with those activities because they enjoy them. Thus no extrinsic motivating force (such as understanding the goal) is necessary on their part.

119 Ibid., 354.
120 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Beyond Boredom and Anxiety (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), e.g. 192. Cf experiment on planning and relevant context: Child Psychology, 383.
121 Csikszentmihalyi, Beyond Boredom, 192.
Section 3.4: Infant ritual process

Infants, then, can be subjects of culturally-determined ritual processes; in fact, these processes enable them to acquire later cultural skills such as language. Cognitive understanding of the “goal” of ritual is not necessary for fruitful engagement with it, and the skills developed through childhood rituals for acquisition of perception and behavioral adaptation may be just as relevant for spiritual disciplines as they are for cognitive, emotional, and physical disciplines -- if indeed such lines must or may be drawn.

The history of baptism in both western and eastern Christianity reveals that such ritual processes are an indispensable part of the Christian tradition, by which people are initiated into Christian life. The age of the initiand plays an important, but ultimately minor role in determining ritual practice and interpretation: infants generally were initiated in the same manner as adults until the contemporary reforms, so that other factors of liturgical variation (such as the status of Christians in the surrounding culture, cultural values, local practices, and language) played a greater role in dictating initiation practice. On the basis of phenomenology and ritual process, it is possible to assert that ritual techniques in which infants participate according to their abilities do have an effect (when supported with proper cultural backgrounds) on their acquisition of identity structures; therefore, the Christian practice is comprehensible even on modern terms (with contemporary notions of subjectivity, etc).

The limited capacities of infants are important when interpreting Asad on Mauss and Foucault, as well, and thus the case study contributes to the methodology. Although Asad is following Mauss and Foucault in his construction of ritual disciplines, he changes the terminology referring to them in a subtle but significant way. Mauss describes his area of interest as “body techniques,” which acknowledges the traditional character of
the objects of study but (a) apparently limits it to traditions which have a strictly physiological character and (b) leaves notions of agency and intentionality unresolved. Foucault, on the other hand, chooses the term “technologies of the self.” This choice explicitly acknowledges the continuity -- organized by such techniques -- between body and mind, soul, spirit, culture. On the other hand, this term answers the question of agency and intentionality too precisely: the self is the agent, provides the intention; yet at the same time the self is the object and goal of the technologies. Insofar as a technology is free of the imposition of outside power, just so much is it a technology “of the self.”

Asad uses the term “discipline,” which preserves an inherent tension between self-agency and outside agency. He emphasizes that the monk of the Benedictine order chooses willing obedience as his own goal, and thus he attains the identity and character of a monk. On the other hand, he can see both torture (as the imposition of power in order to create truth in the tortured) and the cooperative imposition of authority in the Cistercian monasteries as such disciplines. In the latter case, the abbot uses his authority to create in the younger monks and novices the possibility for willing obedience and give them a narrative which incorporates their experience in the monastic pattern. Thus, the processes by which the self is created have a kind of indeterminate agency: the individual undergoing transformation plays an essential role, but performance of that role relies on outside authority for its completion.

122 Marcel Mauss, “Body Techniques.”
123 Foucault, “Technologies of the Self.”
124 Ibid., 18.
125 Consider, for example, the word discipline in the phrase “disciplined child”: the word may refer to a technique imposed upon the child or to a disposition resulting in part from that technique.
126 Asad, 125.
127 Ibid., 83-124
128 Ibid., 125-169.
Asad’s examination of “discipline” makes it possible to examine practices which are simultaneously bodily, cognitive, spiritual. More, he suggests the possibility of examining coordinated agency between willing agents with drastically different roles. This, as is demonstrated by even the brief analysis of child psychology above, is essential to any proper understanding of children’s developing social, cultural, ritual, and religious identity structures, but it is also essential -- though more easily overlooked -- in understanding adult ritual processes. In the following chapter, the case study will consider how the coordinated agencies occurring in the rite nevertheless leave room for the infant initiand (and, in chapter 5, for God) to participate in baptism.
CHAPTER FOUR

RITUAL ANALYSIS

As explained in chapter three, the role of baptism within the structures of Christian cultural norms has always included a place for election (i.e. the role of the other, especially of the church) and for self-determination in freedom in the choosing of candidates. Modern understandings of faith, affirmation, and the self problematized infant baptism, which played a role in the reform of the Roman Catholic rite for the baptism of small children. Nonemergency infant baptism (which is what will be analyzed here) relies in part on parent-infant coordinated agency. In order to evade the problem of infant agency and infant formation it is only necessary to fall back on an implicit interpretation of the rite as an elaborate catechism for the assembly or even as initiation of parents.¹ Annalale Bugnini, for example, in his history of the Second Vatican Council and the development of the postconciliar rite of baptism for children, says:

Children are indeed the subjects of baptism but their real condition is taken into account, and therefore they are not questioned as if they were capable of responding. They are directly addressed only when such an address is meaningful: when the minister declares their acceptance into the community or performs rites directly on them. The rite is therefore performed for the children, but the celebrant addresses the Christian community and gets them involved, especially the parents and godparents.²

¹ This also raises modern Western concerns about the legitimacy of parents’ authority over the spiritual choices of their children, a concern not shared by most premodern or nonwesternized cultures.

Although Bugnini explicitly calls infants the subjects of baptism, his language objectifies them and attributes the possibility of participation in the rite only to adults. One has only to envision the application of these directives for performance in the initiation of a chatty and curious child of six -- or three, or two! -- to realize that the ritual is no more appropriate to the “real condition” of all children below the age of reason than it is to that of adults. The result is a ritual that seems to waver between initiation of infants and initiation of parents – for it is the parents who “participate” and who are credited with a new identity and responsibility in the rite.

The problem is that the development, formation, and performance of the ritual of postconciliar initiation of infants and young children are not informed by a satisfying and coherent theory of infant ritual participation. Catholics have been unable to present a theologically coherent account of initiation for infants, so the initiatory ritual elements of baptism have been partially displaced to the adult participants. This is actually facilitated by a partial understanding of the coordinated agency mentioned above, which relieves anxiety about parental authority and also camouflages the subtle, but distinctive and essential role of the infant initiand in the rite. The resulting ambivalence about children’s status as ritual agents and Christian persons extends beyond the liturgical practice of initiation, as Clare Johnson has shown in her work.3

Bringing the perspective of ritual play to the problem of interdependent agency can provide a fruitful solution to this difficulty. The concept of play is crucial to examining infant participation in human ritual because the coordinated agency of infant-parent play facilitates effective engagement for infant initiands; because play activities develop essential physical, linguistic, and cultural skills; and because the autotelic nature of play activities strengthens the coordination of the cooperating agents, including infant

3 Clare Johnson, Ex Ore Infantium.
and parents as well as other actors. This chapter will consider in what way ritual play can allow infants to participate in the RBC as a ritual process and what the outcome of such participation may be.

Section 4.1: Disappropriation in the postconciliar rite of infant baptism

Chapter 3 explored how technologies of the self could more profitably be explored as “technologies of the community,” that is, how authorizing structures organize ritual self-development. In the interest of seeking the formation of the infant in the postconciliar baptism of infants, then, one beginning is to look at the rite’s treatment of authority. Applying this lens to the rite of infant baptism, even briefly, brings out a movement towards “disappropriation” of authorities. Despite infants’ relatively undeveloped capacities for symbolic and linguistic communication, the momentum of the rite reveals that they are not passive recipients of an identity status offered by the agency of parents and church.

At the very outset of the rite, the identity of the child is posed as a challenge. After the greeting, the celebrant addresses the parents: “What name do you give your child?” By questioning the child’s identity (in the form of his or her name), the ritual establishes itself as an initiation. At the same time, it recognizes the parents’ authority as the source of the child’s identity in the ecclesial context. The parents respond with the child’s name. The celebrant continues by asking, “What do you ask of God’s Church for N.?” This response accepts the infant’s name as a provisional answer to the question of the initiand’s identity, while the question requests a basis for relationship between this

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4 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995), e.g. 276, 279.
5 Rite of Baptism for Children (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2002), 76 [hereafter RBC]. Numbers refer to paragraphs, not pagination. In the ritual analysis, the “Rite of baptism for one child” (72ff) has been chosen for quotations for purely aesthetic reasons.
6 Ibid.
person -- whoever he or she may turn out to be -- and the community which the
celebrant represents. Like the problem of the child’s identity, this relationship is referred
to the parents’ authority, and they request that their child be baptized.

The celebrant responds to this request by explicitly calling out the parents’
authority: “[Y]ou are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of
the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God’s commandments as
Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you
are undertaking?” The parents respond in the affirmative, and the godparents, when
questioned, agree to support them in their endeavor. Only at this point does the rite
acknowledge the infant by welcoming him or her: “N., the Christian community
welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of
the cross. I now trace the cross on your forehead, and invite your parents and godparents
to do the same.”

This exchange has a contractual quality. The question about the child’s identity is
diverted and the question about the child’s connection to the community is transformed
into a reminder of the parents’ connection and their duties with respect to that
community. Only after receiving the parents’ assurance of their efforts on the child’s
behalf will the community accept the child as part of itself (thereby giving the child a new
identity, or beginning the process of the child’s initiation into the community). The
infant’s initiation, from the reception of children alone, seems to be something that can
be offered at will by the church, which acts on the condition that the parents (promise to)
put great effort into teaching, training, and raising the child as a Christian. Agency is
restricted to the community, which can exercise its part freely and easily, and to the

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RBC, 77. This unfortunate rendering of the Latin (a gentler translation would be “Do you recognize
that you are undertaking the responsibility . . .”) is perhaps intended to give parents a quick
introduction to Derrida’s the impossible.

Ibid., 79.
parents and godparents, whose exercise of their authority implies a difficult task ahead for them.  

This beginning seems to suggest a simple analysis, which would conclude that initiation of infants is the result of a quasi-legal agreement regarding the child’s future between parents and church, who together hold an absolute authority over the child. The true initiation of the baptismal rite would then be the ecclesial authorization and sacralization of parenthood: an initiation of the parents into the duties, responsibilities, and tasks of Christian parenting. This conclusion would find support in the proclamation of faith of the postconciliar rite, which is presented as a renewal of the parents’ baptismal vows rather than as a profession of faith on behalf of the child. The infant’s new identity, then, would be bestowed on the condition that the parents raise their child as Christian parents, a condition reaffirmed by the parents’ and godparents’ participation in placing the sign of the cross on the child’s body. But the rite deconstructs itself, for this condition -- that of being Christian parents -- is already imposed on them by their own baptismal vocation, which, whatever else may be said of the identity it creates, certainly imposes the necessity of performing all the regular tasks of human life as a Christian. Thus baptism would be a ritual of publicly acknowledging the parents’ roles, but historically baptism has instead been recognized as affecting the child’s status.

Further analysis of the ritual confirms this complication. The second time the parents are exhortd about their responsibilities to the infant’s Christian upbringing, the

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9 Chauvet’s reading of psychoanalysis would incline to the idea that naming is decisive in the constitution of the sacramental subject (Symbol and Sacrament, 95-7). It is worth noting that his description of baptismal efficacy (“Symbolic efficacy . . . [transforms] the perception these persons have of themselves . . .”) does not make sense in the context of infant initiation (439). Cf. also p. 443: “the baptized (supposed here to be adults) . . .”

10 “If your faith makes you ready to accept this responsibility, renew now the vows of your own baptism” (RBC, 93). This departure from the tradition of speaking on behalf of the infant, without, as mentioned earlier, any true theology of childhood, is troubling.

11 See e.g. Augustine, Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins, e.g. 28, 25.
rite says, “If your faith makes you ready to accept this responsibility, renew now the vows of your own baptism.” The baptismal vows are linked to the new responsibility of raising the child as a Christian, but these vows do not create a new identity for the parents. The identity implied by the baptismal profession of faith has already been granted in the parents’ own baptisms. The vows and the dialog in the reception of the child is a public ritual repetition of a duty already implied by the parents’ baptismal identity. Furthermore, this duty has already been acknowledged by them in the acts of contacting the church regarding baptism, undergoing a formative process, being present at the rite, and formally requesting that the church baptize their child.

In the reception of the child, then, the infant’s identity appears to be a simple question: the issue is his or her membership in the community represented, and this is settled, apparently decisively, by the parents’ relationship to that same community and their promise to raise their children in the faith. The promises that apparently secure this new identity for the child, however, are reproclamations of the parents’ identity and responsibilities. Their agency in the reception of the child, then, does not truly change the identity status of any of the major participants. It remains, rather, a preliminary introduction to the infant’s initiation which serves the purpose of summing the cultural conditions (authority) which justify the infant’s initiation. These cultural conditions, however, are progressively buried by the rite as the child’s identity, rather than the preconditions for his or her initiation, become the focal point.

The liturgy of the word subverts this neat, juridical impression of agency. The readings themselves begin this subversion, drawing the gaze of the participants out of the apparently predictable realm of human authority, in which the destiny of a child can

12 RBC, 93.
be packaged, handed over, and assured ahead of time, into the very unpredictable realm of grace. In the reading from Mark 10, one of the possible readings for the rite, children not only become welcomed into Jesus’ presence, but become the privileged site where, contrary to the disciples’ expectations, the Kingdom of God is taking place. Next, the intercessions attribute initiation to Jesus, whose death and resurrection give “the new life of baptism” and membership in the church. Furthermore, baptism, confirmation, holiness, and final salvation are all requested as gifts. Suddenly, the agency of parents, godparents, and community is limited to a simple request for something beyond human power. Similarly, the prayer before the anointing attributes freedom from original sin and indwelling of the Holy Spirit to God’s power alone.

The formula of anointing clarifies this: “We anoint you with the oil of salvation in the name of Christ our Savior; may he strengthen you with his power, who lives and reigns for ever and ever.” In this culminating act of the liturgy of the word, juridical authority has given place to the power of Jesus Christ. The formula accounts the divine power with a physical contact with the child’s body. Even though this touch is the work of the minister, the formula also calls attention to the inadequacy of any human power to accomplish the task. Paradoxically, then, the performance of this ecclesial ministry reveals the impossibility of it ever attaining its goal: the anointing is done “in the name of Christ” so that his power may meet the child’s need.

16 RBC, 84.
17 Ibid., 84-6.
18 Ibid., 87. Emphasis added.
This formula provides an opposing pole from the welcoming of the child. Both include a form of touch, an address, provide a socio-cultural context and a new form of identity. The welcome, however, concludes the human act of naming by which the parents exercise their authority to determine the infant’s culture. The context is a human ritual community that is bound by particular rules and expectations for one another -- even canons -- and the new identity is effected by the application of a symbol to the infant, representing a reality (i.e. completed identity) which can only be completed in the future by full cognitive appropriation. This kind of identity, however, risks futility, for it can maintain its posture as meaningful only when one evades the question of infants that do not survive to full cognitive appropriation, either because they die prematurely or because they are developmentally disabled. The fact which modern Western commentators on the rite tend to avoid, but which was highly pertinent to earlier commentators,\(^\text{19}\) is that of children who do not survive. In other words, the church baptizes infants for the sake of those who die, not for those who live. This is not to say that infant baptism is only valuable or necessary to those who die -- far from it -- but that any explanation of baptismal efficacy must grapple with the question of infant mortality; in particular, with the question of what benefit baptism can be to the precognitive dead. If the baptized child only attains the fullness of Christianity with the attainment of reason, the explanatory model is not consonant with the tradition of infant baptism. The sociocultural (and symbolic) explanation here suggested for the rite of welcoming cannot pass that test.

The anointing, on the other hand, is a ritualized renunciation of the idea that human persons are formed solely by the irresistible power of cultural formation -- just as Jesus forced the disciples to renounce their expectations of discipleship in Mark 10. This

\(^{19}\) See section 3.1.
means renouncing the “contact lens” view of culture and recognizing developing children as subjects capable of discriminating between the cultural phenomena opened to them. It also means rejecting any defense of infant baptism which argues that the parents’ cultural influence is sufficient reason to admit infants into the company of the church -- any “common sense” understanding of the church as a human institution must constantly be challenged by the realization that the infant is, in the end, mysteriously appropriate, ready to receive sacramental grace -- has reached the space of the reception of God’s life ahead of the church’s proclamation of his or her readiness. To this end, the liturgy of the word reveals the body of the infant as a place where (the community can only hope and pray that) God is working outside of human (adult) understandings of potential. This partial renunciation of the power of human cultural authority opens up a space where, because the child is given a level of real agency, God can contradict human assumptions: the infant’s body becomes the place where, beyond the imposition of the sign, the prayer is offered and God is invited.

The liturgy of the word subverts (but does not invalidate) the human, cultural, and even legal understandings of authority in the reception of children. By discovering the futility of these authorities, however, it reveals another kind of authority and agency that is acting in the rite in tension with the authority of parents and church. This is a strange authority in which mysterious and unpredictable divine power and powerless but well-adapted and capable babies seem to conspire together. This revelation can be called “disappropriation” (echoing Chauvet) because it is not a dramatic reversal in the rite, but follows naturally as soon as the community, having accepted the child as its own, begins to perform its natural function by praying for the child. Prayer inevitably hands the

20 See critique of Chauvet in chapter 2.
authority of the community over to the trinitarian God, and only in this handing off of responsibilities can the community fulfill them.

The dialogue of the reception of the child implies that the authority of the church is parallel in some ways to that of the parents. Parents’ authority over their children is goal-directed and self-moderating. The authority of parenthood is oriented towards the development of the child, a goal which is progressively realized. As it is realized, the authority of parenthood changes in degree and kind as it disappropriates each particular responsibility to the child’s self-control. Similarly, in the rite of infant baptism, the church’s authority over the infant’s status as a Christian begins with discernment (before the rite21), proceeds to an (apparently) absolute affirmation in the reception of the child, but then retreats in favor of divine and human freedom in later parts of the rite. The authority of parenthood has an inherent tension, and this tension is preserved in the ritual authority of the rite of baptism. This tension is what allows the rite to become a self-process,22 because the imposition of authority on the infant in the rite is oriented towards the creation of a new set of capacities and relationships with which the infant can fully participate. This will be demonstrated fully in the next section, but it is suggested by the disappropriation of the rite.

Section 4.2: The authorities of play

Chapter two considered ritual process, and chapter 3 explored its applicability to infant initiands. Authority emerged in both places, but has come to the fore again here: in what way can the ritual relationships which are key to the performance of infant

21 RBC, “Introduction,” 8.3.
22 Cf. the examination of monastic self-processes in chapter 2 and 3.
baptism be authoritative and yet fraught, as the disappropriation of the rite reveals, with
the seeds of their own deconstruction?

One possibility emerges through the consideration of infant-parent interaction as
play. Play, like ritual, has the potential to subvert authority structures by ludic behavior
without eroding the activity’s momentum. In addition, play has several characteristics in
common with ritual which are relevant to self-process. The work of Mihaly
Csikszentmihalyi reveals four aspects of play which are relevant to ludic and self-
developmental ritual. First, play activities are autotelic: that is, engagement in the
activity is itself rewarding; play is self-motivating. Second, play activities are linked to
skill development and, as a result, to self-orientation in a world. Third, play activities, in
order to support skill development and self-orientation, artificially limit the relevant
world and its stimuli within a narrower range in order to provide more concrete
challenges and feedback. Finally, within this narrow range, many play activities enable
and support cooperative agency, in which two or more persons must work together in
the limited field to continue the activity.

This last point is crucial for infant play. Adult play activities like games may
require group participation in which each person willingly follows a set of rules in order
to ensure the emergence of the activity. Infant play activities, however, almost always
require the participation of another person, generally an adult or much older child.
Moreover, the cooperation of such play does not merely consist of self-limiting, but of
active supplementation of the infant’s nascent skills. This “cooperative agency”
simultaneously (a) enables the child to use the capacities he or she is developing; (b)
encourages the further development of these capacities through practice; and (c) rewards
both infant and older participant (hereafter called “parent” for simplicity). Thus in infant
play cooperative agency is linked to efficacious engagement.
Some examples of infant participation in parent-child autotelic activities will give the best introduction to the phenomenological analysis. These examples will also help to introduce a more nuanced concept of efficacious engagement in the context of infant play: the term “coordinated agency” is adequate for labeling the co-participation of more than one agent, the real exercise of agency of each, and the goal-oriented nature of their cooperation, but it does not acknowledge the real differences between parent and infant agency in infant play or the special character of each. To account for these things, the words “technique” and “engagement” will be introduced here, although the terminology of infant participation will be elaborated later in the chapter.

*Technique* refers to the parents’ role in orienting and introducing the infant to the play activity. This term echoes Mauss and Foucault because technique is *imposed on the infant’s body* in order to create a phenomenal, social, and cultural experiential effect for the infant. *Engagement*, on the other hand, refers to the *infant’s use* of his or her acquired skills in order to further the experiential effect, practice developmental abilities, and learn about the world. Recall the experiment mentioned in chapter 3, in which infants and their parents each played a role in the infant’s coming to the quiet alert state from a sleeping or crying state.\(^{23}\)

Another example of technique and engagement in infant development is breastfeeding. A newborn, full-term infant who is introduced to the breast soon after birth already has a relevant skillset: the infant has practiced sucking in the womb, has an instinctive understanding that bulls-eye patterns like those found on the nipple are likely places to suck, has eyesight adequate to identifying these patterns, can root and cry for food, and can suck and breathe at the same time without detaching from the breast. These abilities, however, cannot attain their goal without the cooperation of the mother,
who must bring the infant’s mouth to the breast, assist the untrained muscles with achieving a good latch, and support the head, since the newborn’s neck muscles are too weak to hold it in position. At the same time, unless the infant uses his or her acquired abilities, the mother’s intervention will be ineffective.

The mother’s intervention to hold the infant’s body in the proper position is technique; the infant’s participation with the appropriate skillset is engagement. The two, clearly, depend on one another; technique is often spurred by the child’s rooting, grunting, or crying; the infant’s engagement requires the proper positioning. Technique and engagement together provide the rewards for infant and mother.24 Clearly, the relevant field of activity is limited to the breast and the infant’s mouth, and this limitation encourages the infant to make developmental advances in relevant skills. Over the ensuing few months, the infant becomes much better at sucking and breathing without aspirating any of the milk, at latching on independently, and at holding the mouth in the proper position. Eventually, he or she becomes four or five times as efficient as a newborn – able to drink twice the milk in half the time. At the same time, by breastfeeding the infant and mother are forming his or her identity.25

A second example, which is more clearly related to autotelism and thus to play, is the infant’s gradual development of linguistic abilities. Like breastfeeding, the infant’s

24 Research on the rewards for breastfeeding mothers is widespread and well-established, even though breastfeeding is not always, or perhaps not primarily, an autotelic activity for mothers. For a recent compilation of studies on the benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and infants, including a summary and an annotated bibliography of primary studies, see "Breastfeeding and Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes in Developed Countries," Evidence Report/Technology Assessment 153, prepared for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, available at the AHRQ’s website. Study accessed October 7, 2008 at http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/tp/brefouttp.htm. Briefer, less official reports are readily available on the internet.

25 Studies (though with some methodological problems, most notably correlation-causation fallacy and self-selection of participants) have shown that breastfed babies have a different range of abilities and expectations than do formula-fed babies. See ibid, “Relationship between cognitive development and breastfeeding in term infants,” 50-61. More compelling in the context of sacramental theology, perhaps, is the fact that breastfeeding infants become acclimated to traces of the dominant cultural flavors in their mothers’ milk and thus are more likely to accept these flavors during and after weaning. Breastfeeding plays a role, for culinary experience, which is parallel to linguistic exposure for language development.
development of relevant skills begins while still in the womb: studies have shown that newborn infants prefer their (mothers’) native language over other languages and their parents’ voices over other voices.\textsuperscript{26} Linguistic capacity seems to be partially innate; at the same time, the infant’s exposure to a particular language and therefore his or her development in that language to the exclusion of other possible linguistic capacities is a result of technique. The infant begins to engage in linguistic activities as a form of play very early, first tracking utterances and connecting visual to sonic input. The newborn also experiments with vocalizations of different kinds as forms of communication with his or her caregivers. Later (around 2-3 months), the infant begins to develop the phonetic range specific to his or her native language, and this development leads gradually to the mastery of the phonetics, grammar, syntax, semantics, and cultural surround of his or her linguistic group.\textsuperscript{27}

The interaction between technique and engagement in the case of language is more obvious (because the process is more gradual and well-known) and yet more subtle (because technique is often offered unconsciously and engagement is taken for granted). This example is useful, however, in part because it shows that technique and engagement are more fundamental processes in the development of human identity than the cultural and linguistic lens which Chauvet identifies as the crucial medium for sacramental grace. If linguistic exchange were more fundamental to identity than effective engagement (i.e. if infants were unable to effectively engage in cultural processes), then infant baptism might indeed be, as Aidan Kavanagh labeled it, a “benign abnormality.”\textsuperscript{28} However,

\textsuperscript{26} Note that this shows that expectation, technique, and engagement are not precultural, universal kinds of interaction with the world. They are, rather, characteristics of infants’ cultural embodiment in the world which, moreover, are developed in and through culturally-determined relationships.

\textsuperscript{27} See E. Mavis Hetherington et al., \textit{Child Psychology: A Contemporary Viewpoint} (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006), 140-3, 269, 281-6, and especially 174-6 [hereafter \textit{Child Psychology}].

\textsuperscript{28} See chapter 3.
linguistic exchange is an ability which gradually develops as part of the identity processes of human persons. Technique and engagement are required for the development of this ability, so they are more fundamental. They are, of course, not necessarily more important for adult identity than linguistic abilities – for example, linguistic and cultural orientation might largely overtake the functionality of technique and engagement in some or most adults. (Recall Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development model and the different “mediators” available for intellectual development.)

Infant baptism, then, is important because the ludic and ritual elements of its formative processes are what lie behind, what (in part) determine the contours and limits of the later adult cultural orientation. In other words, infant baptism, like infant exposure to linguistic phenomena, provides a necessary experiential backdrop for the development of particular skills and cultural understandings: it effectively initiates a ritual process oriented to the formation of infants as Christian people, and this process is key to Christian being-in-the-world.

**First bath**

To demonstrate the applicability of effective engagement to infant baptism, it is useful to begin with a cultural analogue of infant baptism in the United States: the “first bath,” which generally refers not to the first cleansing of the infant’s body but rather to the infant’s first partial submersion in a body (tub or sink) of water.

29 See *Child Psychology*, 269-70.
The “first bath” (distinguished from sponge baths which are applied for the first few days) is a cultural milestone in the United States.\textsuperscript{30} There are expected times, places, forms, artifacts, participants, and techniques to this event. There is also a near infinite amount of variability. Nonetheless, it is possible to sketch a “typical” first bath. For full term infants, the first bath takes place around one week after birth, when the infant is between five and ten days old. There are two requirements: the infant must have lost the stump of his or her umbilical cord and must be able to regulate his or her own temperature (full term babies can do the latter at birth). The first bath is at home, unless the infant is hospitalized. It can take place in a sink or bathtub. Participants usually include both parents and whoever else is around helping the parents out that day. It is not rigidly planned ahead of time and does not evoke special invitation. Photos are often taken to commemorate the bath. Techniques vary; generally either an infant tub is used to hold the infant in a partially reclined position or a parent holds him or her in this position. Sometimes the parent is seated in the bathtub and holds the infant in his or her lap. The child is partially submerged in warm water. The other parent or another participant wipes the infant with a damp washcloth that has a drop or two of baby soap on it, and then pours water over the child. The infant is then removed from the water and wrapped in a towel. Sometimes oil or lotion is used after the water bath, especially for infants who were born with skin conditions. Critically, the participants usually talk to the infant throughout the procedure, often asking him or her questions.

Despite important differences, there are significant parallels between this domestic ritual and the ecclesial rite of infant baptism. Most significant is the pouring of

\textsuperscript{30} Research for this example was done through searches of “baby first bath” on Google Images, Youtube, Blogger, and Flickr. The status of the first bath as cultural milestone, in my opinion, is best proved by “borderline” cases, such as blogs by parents whose children are hospitalized who make this event a grasping at “normalcy” for their children (or lament that the nursing staff “stole” it from their experience of parenting). Because these stories are so personal, and blog posts are written and read in an air (if not a fact) of ephemerality, I choose not to reveal those which influenced my reading here.
water over the child while he or she is held over or in a basin of water. This aspect of bathing is what makes a first bath “first” -- not the symbolism of bathing (because the child has been cleaned by sponge bathing before this), but the experience of being wetted all over, chilled from coming out of the water, and then dried. The question asked of the domestic ritual is whether the child enjoys the water bath or whether he or she cried (often, the answer is both). There is an emphasis on familiarizing the child with the experience of bathing, which will be a significant part of his or her life. The rite is not “unsuccessful” if the child does not enjoy the experience, because introducing the experience is the goal. Nevertheless, if the child does enjoy the bath, it is, in some sense, “more” successful: familiarity, comfort, pleasure in this significant cultural norm have begun to be achieved.

The American first bath exemplifies a number of useful aspects of domestic parent-infant “play”: (a) it is initiated by parents, who have a developmental and cultural goal for the activity; (b) it is a deeply corporeal activity adapted to the infant’s abilities (for example, it includes tangible and olfactory experience as well as visual and verbal components, which rely on less well-developed sensory systems); (c) it evokes and is attentive to the infant’s response; (d) it is ludic and improvisational; (e) celebration of the moment is combined with a looking towards a future, gradual development of the infant’s cultural identity; and (f) it is not subjected to judgments about its success or failure.

Can the rite of infant baptism be explored as a ritual “playground” for young infants? It is not an easy task, because the rite of baptism is not “designed” as “play.” Yet there are significant parallels between the ritual play exemplified by the first bath and the rite of infant baptism. The role of parents’ initiative in determining an infant’s
baptism has already been examined, and the other five elements (b-f) above are widely recognized as characteristic of many kinds of ritual activity.31

Thus it is possible to see the rite of infant baptism as a kind of playground. The ritual explicitly acknowledges the role of the parents’ authority in directing the ritual process. The rite also explicitly acknowledges its goal-oriented nature in the conclusion, when the introduction to the Lord’s Prayer projects the brokenness of infant initiation in the West32 by pointing to its fulfillment in confirmation and holy communion. The Lord’s Prayer (unlike the profession of faith) is “in the name of this child, in the Spirit of our common sonship.” In other words, the momentum of the rite is from parents’ authority and direction to the goal of Christian identity of the child, which is both achieved and looked for at the end of the rite.

The rite is also highly sensory and corporeal, combining experiences of a visual, auditory, olfactory, tangible, kinesthetic, and social nature with opportunities for the child to respond. This aspect is particularly evident in the pacing of the rite. In the first touch-and-address moment,33 the parents and godparents, whom the infant knows well, play an important role in “echoing” the touch of the relatively unfamiliar celebrant. The unfamiliar social and tangible phenomenon is thus given a kind of familiarity for the infant. Then there is a long period in which relatively little interaction is required of the infant, and the infant is allowed and perhaps encouraged to enter a more attentive state.

During this period, the infant is becoming accustomed to the ritual environment, with its accompanying cultural elements of word, space, song, assembly. Later, the infant’s attention is again required in a more demanding way, by the application of oil

31 See e.g. Catherine Bell, Ritual (New York: Oxford University, 1997), 138-70.
32 RBC, 103; cf. on the reference in the intercessions: Clare Johnson, Ex Ore Infantium, 150. Johnson is troubled by the highlighting of the rites’ disunity which is achieved by such proclamations, whereas I feel that a broken rite should shout out its brokenness as loudly and clearly as possible.
33 See “Ritual folding” below.
and another period of direct address and eye contact by an unfamiliar person. Another quiet period intervenes, marked by activity near the font, where the infant is. The infant thus has the opportunity to focus on and assimilate phenomena associated with this activity.  

Then there is the high point of the rite. The infant is bathed, and the assembly watches expectantly to see whether he or she will gasp or cry. The infant is anointed again, this time on the head. The infant may be newly dressed in the white garment (this is specified by the rite, but not always actually done in practice). A candle is lit and held near the infant, where he or she can see and smell it. Finally the celebrant may touch the infant’s ears and mouth. Several direct addresses are involved here, and the whole assembly is looking at the child, which he or she may recognize.

There is usually a ludic feel to this ritual experience: in the context of infant baptism and the introduction of the relatively novel and unpredictable element of water and the child’s reaction to water, the assembly is usually positively engaged. There is an interest in how the infant will respond -- will he or she cry, gurgle, smile, fall asleep? At the same time, there is also an awareness that the ritual is future-oriented, expressed by certain formulae in the rite (see next section) as well as, on the more popular side, by the interest in keepsakes (baptismal gown, candle) and photographs.

Finally, there is no evaluation of whether an infant’s baptism was “successful” or not: the rite is successful because by its very performance it begins the essential process

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34 Directing attention toward preferred objects is one of an infant’s skills from birth: *Child Psychology*, 137-40.

35 Based on my experience in parishes in Illinois. When the baptismal garment is not put on during the rite, the infant is already dressed in his or her baptismal garment at the very beginning of the rite, and the infusion, done only on the head, does not require undressing. In some cases, an additional part of the garment, such as a stole or bonnet, is added at the moment for the dressing formula.
of familiarizing the infant with the Christian ritual environment and thus of creating for him or her an inculturated identity.  

Based on this paradigm of infant baptism as a ritual playground, the next few sections will examine some various aspects of the rite as they conduce to the development of a distinctive kind of identity for infants.

**Ritual folding**

Ritual folding, as explained in chapter 2, is a ritual studies perspective that examines how rituals, first and foremost, exist “in their own right.” That is, the ways rituals point to, intersect, and interact with their own parts logically precede their references to external cultural and social settings. This is important because it is often the ritual folding of the rite, by juxtaposition of elements and nearness of association, that determines which of the rite’s many polysemous symbolic associations will be raised in the ritual action. Depending on the ritual folding for example, a rite which evokes social stratification may support or subvert the cultural norms. Handelman’s article persuasively suggests that deeply-folded rites contain more power than less-folded rites.

Ritual folding is particularly important for infant baptism in two ways. First, children undergoing the RBC have a limited understanding of cultural contexts and

36 This observation inevitably reminds one of the doctrine of *ex opere operato*, but in fact this is a human precursor or ritual aspect. *Ex opere operato*, strictly speaking, refers to the work of God that is inerrantly done in the ritual, whereas this kind of “success” is merely cultural. The two are linked, as the next chapter will show, but they are distinct.


38 Handelman, “Introduction.”
symbols. Since ritual folding examines how ritual is shaped by its own intrinsic dynamic even apart from the cultural surround, it enables an analysis that is more pertinent to the experience of children, particularly infants. Second, ritual folding creates an implicit and progressive sense of the rite’s “insulation” from exterior circumstances and roles. This is important in two ways. First, the progressive disappropriation of the rite of infant baptism is enabled by ritual “insulation” from the normal authorities and assumptions of ordinary life. This allows the infant’s own capacities to be enabled, increased, and formed in new ways. Simultaneously, the ritual insulation produced by ritual folding provides the limitation of field necessary to produce the ludic atmosphere crucial to ritual play.

In the postconciliar rite of infant baptism, one example of ritual folding is particularly noticeable. This is the ritual element of a touch of the infant by the celebrant, or sometimes by the child’s parents. The touches in the rite include the welcoming sign of the cross, the prebaptismal anointing, the water bath, the postbaptismal anointing, the clothing in the garment, and the ephphetha (if these latter two are performed). These points in the rite are significant in three ways: they provide culmination points of the periods of ritual action (see discussion of ritual pacing below), they are instances of ritually-directed physical contact between the infant and the celebrant (and tangible phenomena are particularly important to the infant, as discussed above39), and they usually coincide with second-person direct addresses to the infant by the celebrant.40 As such, these points are particularly important to the analysis of the ritual action which follows.

39 In fact, most of the phenomena that are readily accessible for assimilation by infants a few weeks old are concentrated at these ritual points.

40 Recall Bugnini’s assertion that at these points in the rite such an address is “meaningful.”
Section 4.3: Efficacious engagement in infant baptism

Technique, as mentioned above, is the adult guidance, expressed by forming the infant’s body, which enables a child to participate in a cultural activity through coordinated agency.\footnote{Compare the zone of proximal development and scaffolding discussed in chapter 3.} In this section technique and engagement will be examined in more detail, together with related concepts necessary to analysis of infant baptism.

The question of technique in infant baptism immediately refers back to the ambivalence of the rite about agency and participation. Based on the observations above, one may say that inasmuch as parents and celebrant are treated as the (only) major actors, the rite recognizes technique but fails to recognize infant development and relationality. Inasmuch as the rite holds the agency of parents and celebrant in tension with a real agency of infants and of God, technique in the rite is allowed to take its natural place within engagement and development.\footnote{To what extent this fruitful tension is maintained varies not only within the parts of the rite (as indicated in the section above) but also, and even more powerfully, among the celebrations of various communities and times. Thus, I do not intend here to be making judgements on the fittingness of the rite’s various parts, confining myself instead to noting potential pitfalls for ritual performance.}

This section will conclude with an exploration of five aspects of infant self-processes. The aspects, in loose logical order, are authority (ability to shape the infant’s experience), technique (meaning the authorized imposition on the infant’s body of certain environments, stimuli, and social relationships), phenomena (perception of environments, objects, and persons resulting from technique), engagement (self-development processes embedded in the activity which invite or demand the infant’s participation), and identity (the end goal of these processes). In this section, “parent” and “parents” will be used for simplicity, but of course these roles may be played by another caregiver or by any human being capable of performing the tasks of play.
Authority

Very young infants rely on the parent playmate to direct virtually every aspect of play. Parents determine the context and environment for play, cooperate with the infant to determine the duration and direction of play, model new play activities, provide reassurance when the infant is confronted with a new phenomenon, and encourage the practice of new skills.

Authority in the play context, crucially, is not an imposition of power for the benefit of the more powerful party. Instead, the play context determines that the partners are both engaging in the activity with a common purpose -- play -- and that authority is exercised in order to further that purpose. Why, then, use the term “authority” rather than a more neutral word, such as “relationship” or “bond”? The neutral term camouflages several significant aspects of the relationship: the differing capacity levels of the two partners, the drastic difference in developmental potential of the two partners, and the fact that often the parent must coax or coerce the infant to participate in an activity he or she dislikes, for example. “Authority” preserves these implications. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that authority, in the case of parent and child, is a kind of relationship which ideally reserves power, or at least the power of coercion (as distinct from modeling and imitation), for activities which are of great importance to the child.

Thus, in the context of play, authority indicates the relationship between infant and parent, their drastically different capacities relevant to the activity, and the cooperative functioning of those capacities to create enjoyment for both partners. Finally, successful play -- that which is enjoyed by infant and parent -- increases the relational bond and thus the authority of parent to infant.
Technique

The question of technique raises the importance of differing capacities at once. Technique is used here to refer to a parent’s positioning of an infant’s body so as to provide a particular range of experience or to give access to a certain kind of phenomena. “Positioning” here should be taken loosely: it can mean giving the infant a certain posture, placing him or her in a specific place, helping him or her perform tasks he cannot do alone, or, more metaphorically, introducing him or her into a social situation or setting. This metaphorical use does not overextend the meaning of the word precisely because a social situation or setting is offered to the infant through a set of phenomena which his or her parents, by technique taken more strictly, position him or her for. Having the metaphorical use at hand will simplify the analysis.

In play, the parent uses technique to initiate the activity by placing the infant in a position where he or she can play. For example, the mother may put the infant down on her lap and place her finger where her child can grasp it.

Phenomena

The phenomena of the infant’s experience is the most nebulous part of the analysis of play. Since infants cannot explain their experience, such phenomena must be implicated from techniques and engagement. In the very simple current example of grasping one’s mother’s finger and making faces and noises with her, the phenomena of the mother’s hand and face are implied by the child’s interaction with each. If the child grasps the finger, that finger must be present to his or her sensory field; if the child imitates the mother’s facial expressions, then he or she must have a perception of the
face (though, as studies seem to indicate, this might not be the same as an adult’s perception).  

**Engagement**

Engagement is the key element of self-development processes. “Engagement” refers to the active participation of a human subject in an activity to the best of his or her ability. This implies that specific skills are required for engagement. Engagement also exercises these skills and encourages the development of other skills peripherally important to the activity.

Enjoyment is crucial to engagement. Anticipation of enjoyment motivates engagement; intense enjoyment, as Csikszentmihalyi has shown, intensifies engagement beyond conscious intent into a state including egolessness (“flow state”). In the realm of coordinated agency, engagement is the complement of technique, because engagement requires skills on the part of the active participant (infant) whereas technique is imposed on the body by the parent.

Engagement includes voluntary attentiveness, a skill and disposition infants possess at birth. Engagement with the perceived object through sensory attention is necessary for phenomena, while a desire to perceive phenomena motivates engagement. Engagement also includes social interactivity, motor movement (including sucking), expression of interest and preference, and expression of discomfort. Engagement is, in short, the infant’s use of his or her capabilities, within the contexts provided by technique, for world exploration. This is a practice that children do apparently for its own sake, and their pleasure in it is evident, so engagement can be labeled autotelic. It is

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43 For an overview of infants’ sensory and perceptual capacities from a scientific point of view, see chapter 3.

44 *Child Psychology*, 137-40.
also, however, a self-process: engagement develops skills by requiring them; at the same
time its explorative purpose produces orientations to the world which then guide the
development of further orientations.\textsuperscript{45}

Engagement can be exemplified by the play of a slightly older infant (about 2
months). The infant lies on her back in a dedicated play area (or blanket) and plays with
her father, who may start with exaggerated facial expressions and playful talking.
Through previous experience, the infant knows that this environment and behavior
initiates a certain kind of play. She responds (if in the mood) with smiles, giggles, hand
waving, and kicking. Taking the hint, her father pulls out a favorite toy: bright-colored,
noisemaking. He shakes it and the infant giggles more, intermittently sucking on her
hand. The infant’s attention drifts between her father’s face, the toy, and a mirror hung
in the play area where she can see her own face.\textsuperscript{46}

The infant here is engaging with her sensory skills (tracking, recognition,
association of tangible, auditory, and visual phenomena), her social skills (smiling,
laughing, verbalizing, imitating), and her motor skills (waving and kicking, hand-mouth
coordination, sucking). The activity is enjoyable for her and for her father. She is
developing skills through practice. Her engagement rewards her with phenomena, which
provide a means of world orientation: she is learning about objects that sound when
moved, about people and cooperative games, about her father and his personality, about
her own body and its capabilities. These kinds of knowledge are important both in
themselves (as world-forming) and as foundations for further world exploration
(orientation towards future self-development).

\textit{Identity}

\textsuperscript{45} Recall the methodological links between self-processes, identity, and world-orientation in chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{46} This example is developed from personal experience and examination of videos of infant play.
The work of Thomas Csordas shows how one’s sense of identity (a) gives insight into understanding the world (i.e. provides “orientation” for “being-in-the-world”) and (b) provides a structure within which new such insights can be acquired (i.e. gives a foundation for the development of new orientations in the world). In other words, identity is something which forms the world but also shapes one’s ability to be formed by the world. It is inherently processual and iterative.

Several conclusions can be drawn from examining infant play as identity formation. Infant development proceeds under the authority of the infant’s parents: they shape the contexts within which capabilities are developed. The most direct application of this authority comes in the form of technique, which is the parents’ imposition of particular positions on the infant’s body. This is significant because it first of all implies that the authority of the parents implicates an identity for the infant through a formation of the body itself. The body is a malleable instrument, and through play certain postures, contexts, and stimuli become part of particular orientations in the world. Phenomena that are consistently offered and grasped by the infant in the context of play become colored with a ludic orientation towards the world, and so ludic qualities become part of the child’s identity in relation to particular settings and people. By engagement, according to his or her capacities, the infant appropriates these orientations, according to his or her disposition. The activities of engagement also develop further skills and knowledge, which direct the acquisition of further orientations.

This provides a way of examining the identity -- recognizing it as always in formation -- of even very young infants. The child is developing skills, relationships, knowledge, and heuristics which are applicable to all facets of life. Moreover, the self-processes that form this identity can be examined by looking at authority, technique, and

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opportunities for engagement and phenomenal recognition. These will themselves be shaped according to personality factors of the infant (disposition, preference, cultural background, and previous experience), but technique and engagement give a place to begin a ritual analysis of identity formation for infants.

In the next section, then, relevant parts of the rite of infant baptism will be discussed under these categories, paying special attention to technique, resultant exposure to phenomena, and potential for engagement.

Section 4.4: Ritual analysis of infant baptism

The analysis of the postconciliar rite of infant baptism will be guided by the techniques used in its performance. Techniques in the rite can be usefully divided into two types: general techniques, which arise out of the parents’ general skills of parenting; and particular techniques, which are rubrically guided by the outline of the ritual.

General techniques

There are a number of essential techniques involved in infant baptism that are not rubrical. These are in some sense the grounding for the specialized techniques of infant baptism, so they will be examined first. Artificially but usefully, these techniques can be denominated under four categories: (1) postural positioning where engagement with phenomena is possible, (2) directing the infant’s attention to important actions and events, (3) making eye contact with and interacting with the infant, and (4) quieting or calming the infant.

These four types of techniques form a groundwork not only for the ritual of infant baptism, but for all parent-child activities. Their purpose is to create a nonthreatening situation in which the child can achieve engagement with the activity at hand. The child
is soothed so he or she does not become overwhelmed by the activity, interaction with
the parent provides reassurance and reward, the infant is introduced to the environment,
and he or she is held in such a way as to encourage engagement. Already the agency of
the child emerges naturally from his or her parents’ authority, if the parents are able to
freely use that authority to stimulate the child in a fitting manner. Moreover, the process
encourages the growth of agency by creating an orientation by which the child learns to
move from familiar phenomena (the parent’s touch, voice, and scent) to unfamiliar ones
(the activity itself) and back. This is an essential skill for the formation of identity, in
that it creates a self-process which can adapt and accumulate new identity elements
without displacing the child’s identity.

The familiarity with a novel set of orientations to the world, which the rite intends
to bestow on the infant being baptized, becomes accessible to him or her through the
parents’ familiarity with these orientations and the child’s familiarity with his or her
parents. Thus, the central foundation for the new identity received in baptism is the
child’s relationship with his or her parents. The introduction implicitly suggests that
there is a particular significance to the parent-child relationship for the performance of
infant baptism, which the general techniques make manifest. Parents and infants are
capable of acting with coordinated agency at a level that cannot be attained with the
same consistency and ease even by practiced and willing adults.

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48 Child Psychology, 238-65.
50 RBC, Intro.
51 See e.g. Child Psychology, 278. The reasons for this superior capacity for coordinated agency
between parents and infants are varied, speculative, and beyond the scope of this work. Possibilities
include the limited capabilities of the infant, cultural transmission of techniques, coordination of goals,
the developmental process, and, very probably, evolutionary pressures. This observation is not meant to
exclude the possibility of failed coordination. Failure of coordination probably occurs very often.
One advantage of a more fluid approach to identity, resulting from a real attentiveness to infant identity, is that it recognizes that every initiation depends -- without being reducible to -- a previous identity structure. In the case of infant baptism, the identity structure that facilitates the infant’s ability to become initiated into the Christian faith is the infant’s relationship with and reliance on his or her parents. Part of the structure that facilitates this is the infant’s ability to develop his or her own agency by moving beyond the parents’ provided technique into the environment and experiencing phenomena and formulating orientations in that environment.

One very simple aspect of the identity bestowed by the rite, then, is the opportunity for the initiand to enter the Christian environment (as a playground) and engage with its phenomena. In other words, the rite opens up (both on the level of cultural legitimation and that of practical capacity) the world of Christian phenomena to the infant’s ability to exercise a personal agency and engage. By the rite considered as a whole, Christian phenomena (not to be reduced, for children, to symbol, which is already too cognitive and representational) are offered as a world for the children, in which children are free, encouraged, and enabled to practice becoming themselves.

Specific techniques: Folding

If the general techniques reveal the significance of the parent-child relationship within the ritual context of infant baptism, particular techniques show much more clearly the significance of the infant’s body in mediating and accepting new identity roles. The particular techniques which stand out in the baptism of infants (identified by ritual folding) are the signing of the cross in the welcome, the prebaptismal anointing, the bathing, the postbaptismal anointing, the clothing, and the ephphetha.
Among these, it is possible to distinguish a whole aspect of baptismal technique which applies phenomena to the skin, so that they run along the contours of the body, recreating its boundaries and perhaps changing its meaning. These “skin techniques” are a spectacular example of ritual folding, in which parenthetical “folding” of phenomena offered to the infant’s engagement create the progressive insulation from the cultural surround which is essential to enable subversion and formation. The first and the last are minimally skin techniques, with only a slight touch of a hand, and the touch points outside the rite to social or symbolic relationships of which the infant is only vaguely aware, if at all. The liturgy of the word, with the readings and litany, creates inclusion with the explanatory rites, in that each segment is a symbolic elaboration of the ritual in progress. Within these folds, the two anointings have significantly more phenomenal resonances. The first anointing is on the body, the second on the head. Besides the tangible similarity of the oil on body and head, the scent creates a strong sense of folding.

The bath is the most-included element and also has the most resonance with other parts of the rite. It reflects the two anointings in that each makes use of a fluid that draws out the presence of the child embodied by calling attention to the extensibility and limit of that body. This will be examined in more detail later. The bath also immediately precedes the postbaptismal anointing, and they frequently are both imposed on the head. The bath likewise has resonances with the clothing ritual (when this is done), in that each is part of a familiar domestic routine. This familiar ritual is “punctuated” by a less familiar element, which nevertheless is similar to the prebaptismal anointing the infant has just experienced.

Another aspect of the particular techniques is the attention to the infant’s sensory capacities. The forehead, easily accessible to all a newborn’s sensory capacities, is a special locus of applied technique. Tangible and olfactory stimulation, which are
particularly well-fitted to the infant’s pronounced sensory abilities for touch and smell, play an extensive role in the ritual. Finally, the so-called “explanatory rites” include the second anointing, with its tangible and olfactory aspects; the process of dressing which provides a tangible phenomenon over the whole body; the candle (though not in itself providing a particular technique, the candle is a significant object of the general techniques) which exercises the visual capacities of the child; and the ephphetha with its touch of the ears and mouth, centers of hearing and taste. The ritual folding of infant baptism requires consideration of both these aspects of the ritual techniques.

Specific techniques: Skin and boundary exploration

If ritual folding exposes the dynamic of ritual, it is important that the crucial moments of the ritual folding also have significant elements directed to the infant: sensory phenomena and personal address. These moments highlight the skin as phenomenal matrix where the person and the world meet. In the first ritual touch, one parent is holding the infant, probably prone on one arm. The celebrant makes eye contact with the infant and calls him or her by name. After addressing him or her, the celebrant then makes the sign of the cross on the infant’s forehead with the pad of the thumb. The infant has the opportunity to react to this unfamiliar presence and contact. He or she can make eye contact with the celebrant if he or she chooses. The touch also provides the opportunity for the infant to track the celebrant’s movement and associate the tactile stimulus of the thumb with the visual and verbal stimuli of the celebrant’s movement and address.

The parents and godparents then (usually rather awkwardly) shift about and each make the sign of the cross on the child’s forehead in turn. This lengthens and repeats the

opportunities for engagement offered by the touch. It also invites the infant into a resemblance, a resonance, between the unfamiliar adult and his or her parents and close friends or family. This resemblance is enacted for the infant’s experience rather than presented for his or her cognitive appropriation. Such enacted resemblances become part of the infant’s authorizing structures, which are thus expanded from the parents and their domestic domain into the other dimensions of human cultural life. For this process of expansion, it is crucial that the similarities and differences between the dimensions be enacted on the body, so the infant practices existing in each of these new cultural environments and thus begins to produce a self-orientation.

As such, the extensibility and limit of the infant’s body is paralleled by the extensibility and limit of his or her cultural orientation. Like the skin, the infant’s being-in-the-world is only revealed as such at the boundaries of his or her experience, where he or she is challenged to imitate or improvise a orientation and world structuring that is based in his or her experience so far but transcends his or her level of mastery. In this way, as discussed earlier, being-in-the-world is itself a skill which is capable of development, or, to put it another way, a self-process which incorporates other self-processes into itself and is the purpose of every smaller self-process.

The prebaptismal anointing deepens the constructive parallel between the infant’s body and his or her cultural capability. A touch of the forehead gives way to a touch on the infant’s chest; the dry thumb is replaced by the sensation of oil smeared on the skin; and the aromatic neutrality of the previous gesture is swept away by the scented oil of catechumens. The intensity of ritual gesture is certainly increasing, parallel to the ritual pacing acknowledged earlier; but this gesture is again followed by a period of dialog and proclamation devoid of infant-directed activity (blessing over the water, renunciation of sin, proclamation of faith, and question of intent). There is a difference,
however; whereas the infant spent the liturgy of the word in the pews with the rest of the
congregation (or, in the worst case, in the nursery with a babysitter\textsuperscript{53}), he or she probably
spends this period next to the font before the congregation.

With respect to extensibility, too, there is a new intensity to the prebaptismal
anointing. The sign of the cross is a touch that remains confined within a space directly
under the adult’s control. The addition of oil as an element, however, both mediates and
alters touch. The oil applied makes the infant’s body “retain” the touch, in that the
element remains after the hand is removed, so that the phenomenon is extended in time.
Moreover, the oil both spreads out and soaks in on the infant’s skin. The boundaries of
the contact are determined not only by the hand control of the anointer, but also by the
contours of the infant’s body. In other words, the infant as embodied person exerts some
influence over the shape of this contact.

This observation about extensibility means that the enacted technique of the rite
parallel the symbolic judgements that can be made about the sign of the cross and the
anointing, as discussed above in the section on the rite’s ambiguity about agency. The
infant is never required by the rite to exercise fully conscious cognitive agency, but he or
she does not remain passive in the ritual either; rather, his or her body capabilities exert
their own distinctive power on the ritual, and the infant as an embodied person
participates in the rite’s enactment of identity. This participation is asymbolic but does
depend on the infant’s body and capacities for world-orientation.

This potentiality of participation in the rite is revealed yet more clearly in the next
layer of ritual folding. So far in the ritual, the infant’s head has been touched by the
celebrant and his or her parents and godparents; his or her chest has been anointed with
oil by the celebrant. The next ritual gesture, the water bath, deepens and expands the

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{RBC}, “Introduction,” 14. See also Clare Johnson, 149.
role of elemental mediation in these touches: water is a much less viscous fluid than oil
(by two orders of magnitude at room temperature), and baptism, even when done
minimally by pouring over the forehead, inevitably creates more splash, flow, and
contouring than oil does. Water also conducts heat away from the body more effectively
than oil, so that -- even if warm water is used -- temperature change is part of the
phenomenon of baptism. In other words, water is a substance more “out of control,”
more fluid, than oil is. This means that the infant’s body plays yet a greater role in
experiencing and directing the course of the ritual touch.

In terms of world-orientation and engagement, the greater physical
unpredictability of water is counterbalanced by the infant’s more comprehensive
experience of water’s behavior in immersion and infusion. In other words, the water bath
remains just outside the world-orientations or identity patterns that the infant can be
expected to already have developed. It forces the infant to assimilate a new world
pattern, but it does so in a way that is shaped and formed by a domestic rite already
within the realm of the child’s expectations, so that the activity falls into the infant’s zone
of proximal development.

There is a skillset that is crucial to human life which may be the object of
development according to the “play” of the water bath: breathing. Infants’ breathing
skills are surprisingly complicated and often overlooked. An infant begins practicing
breathing in the womb, and must establish an effective pattern immediately after birth.
Moreover, the breathing pattern established in the nose must be able to coexist with the
sucking patterns of the mouth and throat. Despite this considerable accomplishment,
infants’ breathing patterns continue to develop and mature for the first several months
after birth. Eventually they discover how to alternate use of the mouth and the nasal
passages to breathe, and these skills are obviously essential to the later development of speech.

Immersion or infusion of an infant (or an adult) causes an interruption of breath, which can be elaborated into a gasp or a cry. The response that is evoked by immersion or infusion, then, is one which is easily within the range of the infant’s physical capabilities. Nonetheless, it provides room for development in that it provides association of the relatively familiar experience of being immersed or infused with the increasing pace of the unfamiliar ritual. This assimilation is a challenge to the infant’s orientation in the world. Sometimes this challenge is such that the child begins to cry and must be soothed by the parents -- and this soothing, as discussed earlier, should not be considered tangential to the rite’s techniques but rather is essential to the infant’s successful negotiation of his or her new identity. Nor should crying be thought an indication that the rite has failed: crying is an essential form of communication for the infant, by which he or she makes the parents aware of his or her need for help in assimilating this new environment. Thus crying is proof that the infant is engaged in the world-orientation of the rite. His or her parents respond with some of the general techniques above, which reassure the infant.

The relatively stressful experience of being baptized provides an important instance of engagement, in that it gives the child the opportunity to practice one of the skills that newborns are learning: ability to be calmed after a stressful stimulus. This capacity varies widely based on the infant’s disposition, but is also a matter of practice and assimilated experience. The drying of the infant after the water bath, together with one or more of the following gestures, can become an opportunity for the infant to allow himself or herself to be distracted from his or her previous stress (if he or she was stressed) by these new experiences.
Immediately after the water bath, the infant is anointed again. The theme of the postbaptismal anointing is one of vocation, the prophetic, priestly, and kingly vocation of Christians, following in the pattern of Christ. For the infant, the main phenomenon offered for engagement is probably the scent. Notice the ritual folding: the anointing on the head evokes the sign of the cross on the forehead, but intensifies it by the experience of the scented oil, which also resonates with the prebaptismal anointing. The return to another anointing also heightens the ritual significance of the water bath and provides the infant with another opportunity to assimilate the profound sensory phenomena of anointing. The infant’s opportunities for engagement are very similar to those offered in the prebaptismal anointing, but the infant now has reason for more confidence and assurance in his or her engagement, and further practice at his or her capacity for integrating these phenomena into his or her world.

Up to this point, each of the ritual gestures has played a distinct role in the folding of the ritual, and thus in its suitability as “play” for the infant undergoing spiritual development. The final “explanatory rites,” however (into which category, for both historical and ritual reasons, the postbaptismal anointing should not fall), are less important as instances of ritual folding. They are, in fact, “explanatory,” symbolic, and, as such, directed more at the participating adults than at the infants. Nevertheless, they offer some phenomena that should be included in the analysis, and they will be examined, though briefly, here.

Dressing the infant in a garment following the baptism has several significances. First, it is familiar to the infant being part of the domestic bath ritual mentioned earlier; in fact, infants are dressed and undressed several times a day in their first few months.

54 Accompanied with the formula: “N, you have become a new creation, and have clothed yourself in Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven” (RBC, 99).
Yet the difficulty of the process without a flat surface, in the middle of a ritual in front of a crowd of people, gives the process of being dressed the same mix of familiarity and unfamiliarity which is crucial to the infant’s assimilation of the water bath and the anointings. Second, the dressing is in some cases the most comprehensive ritual touch in terms of impacting the skin all over the body: when the baptism is performed by immersion, it is reduced to second place. In either case, its phenomenon of covering the whole skin is the final iteration of the ritual attention to extensibility and limit. As such, it provides an inversion of the extensibility discipline of the bath, for whereas the water conforms to the skin only to flow away and disperse, the garment conforms to the skin to remain and become, as it were, an extension of the skin and a new boundary between the child and the tangible phenomena of the environment. It thus has some resonance -- in extent and inverted significance -- with the water bath and likewise some resonance -- in its permanence -- with the qualities of anointing.

If the child’s sensory capacities for touch and scent have been particularly exercised and occupied by the anointing and dressing, the candle and the ephphetha provide at least a gesture towards the senses of sight, touch, and taste, and the capacity for speech. These gestures, as said before, remain largely on the level of symbol and thus out of the realm of the infant’s engagement; but the ephphetha does provide a ritual closing that seems to complete the folding of the rite by retreating to a bare touch of the child’s head, in this case on the ears and mouth.

Section 4.5: Implications, ritual and theological

This look at the techniques of infant baptism seen from the vantage point of play, that is, as techniques which offer the infant opportunities for engagement, and which also further their development and expand their orientation to the world, leads to several
conclusions about the ritual identity granted in the rite. First of all, as noted at the outset, it is an identity which does not depend upon the infant’s explicit exercise of any autonomous and cognitive assent to the rite; rather, it is initiated by the parental and ecclesial authority in such a way that these authorities disappropriate themselves of power in order to encourage the development of the infant’s own agency and to expect the intervention of God. Second, the manner of its bestowal is iterative, gradual, and not accomplished at any particular point of the rite. Rather, the rite itself enfolds and encapsulates ever greater significance of this identity, and the rite gives the infant the means to develop this identity fully. The new identity given is not a “thing,” but a dynamic process that begins in the rite itself but is fully accomplished by the infant’s self-development. Third, the identity is crucially involved in the child’s familiarity and comfort -- thus ability to assimilate and improvise with -- Christian phenomena within the context of Christian cult. These phenomena do not become significant once the child recognizes their symbolism much later in life (if at all); on the contrary, they provide the foundation for this symbolic understanding. Nor do they have significance only as catechetical helps to the parents, godparents, and other adults in the assembly. Instead, the phenomena of Christian initiation have their significance precisely in the infant’s experience of them in Christian initiation, which becomes the basis for their affective, cognitive, and symbolic significance throughout life. By being offered to the child’s engagement, these phenomena become part of his or her world, part of his or her orientation, part of the identity process of being a Christian, and this allows the initiand to found new skills and capacities on these phenomena and to engage with these phenomena again as he or she develops new skills. Since the ritual process of Christian identity is unending, crucially, a human person need not reach maturity to benefit from it. In one sense, there is no “maturity” of Christian initiation in this life -- rather, the
ultimate phenomena of death provide the maturation of Christian initiation. Thus, *dead baptized infants are Christians*, as the tradition clearly proclaims. Moreover, *live Christians are infants*, still undergoing the processual formation of Christian ritual orientation.

These initial observations raise the interrelated questions of ritual studies and theology: what is ritual play? and what can be inferred about spiritual development from the ritual play of infant baptism? The analysis has identified a number of different elements: techniques and their impact on the infant’s physical and social positioning; phenomena and their familiarity; engagement and assimilation of unfamiliar elements. If these elements can be considered aspects of play, what is significant about infant play from a ritual and from a theological perspective?

To answer this question, recall some of the initial characterizations of infant ritual play: it is world-building, cooperative, and organized. These aspects are crucial to the understanding of play as ritual (from the social science perspective) and spiritual (from the theological perspective).

*Infant ritual play is world-building.* Infant activities, especially play activities, help infants develop and orient in the world. Ritual play is distinctive in that it provides an integrated play environment in which enriching stimuli are part of a meaningful network. While symbolic relationships guide most of adults’ orientations within the field, infants’ orientations tend to be guided more by sensory phenomena, associative memory, and adults’ techniques. Despite this different mode, however, infants experience the ritual play environment as a distinct one with certain ties to their domestic experience (provided by similar sensory phenomena and techniques) but also with unique challenges (provided by ritual folding and the unique elements of the rite).
Theologically, this suggests that spiritual play draws on familiar play experiences to answer the specific challenges of spiritual development. The tone of translation, as it were, from the mundane to the spiritual is the task of the person at play. One resource for the task is the phenomenal field of ritual play, which allows the person a limited range within which to practice orientation to the tasks of the spiritual world. This opens up opportunities for spiritual activities within the other environments of his or her life.

*Infant ritual play is cooperative.* Infant play is cooperative in the specific way discussed earlier; that is, infant and parent (or other adult) agency complement one another in a way that is intended to supplement the infant’s capabilities such that he or she can engage in the play activity. Significant within this context is the way that complementary agency is revealed as not only allowing engagement, but even permitting the infant to enter into phenomena and relationships which, although not independent, are genuinely “his” or “hers.” Thus an infant’s new identity is acquired and a self-process is formed which requires, rather than is limited by, the infant’s dependence.

Cooperative ritual agency, then, enables the infant to begin a self-process that would not be possible if the infant was left to his or her own devices and powers. Ritual play introduces cultural phenomena to the infant and demands that these phenomena become his or her own in a culturally-acknowledged way. Even repeated gestures like the sign of the cross and the anointing, for example, by the ritual dynamic become part of the infant’s skin and thus of the boundaries of his or her identity. The same ritual logic governs the repeated application of holy water to “reawaken” the boundaries of the Christian skin throughout life.

This cooperation, as observed above, is progressively accomplished through the dynamic of the rite. Theologically, the complicated interaction of parents’, infants’, and ecclesial agency indicate that the structures of Christian identity are not bounded by
autonomous individuality, but neither are they compatible with complete and utter dependency. In fact, the spiritual play of Christian identity both acknowledges and creates interdependent competencies. This observation will be crucial to the next chapter.

Infant ritual play is organized. This is clear from the analysis, in which the ritual momentum is highly significant to the phenomenology of the event. Particularly significant in the case of infants are ritual pacing and skin techniques, which are easily overlooked by methods that focus on adult initiation and symbolic representation. Besides the ritual itself, additional -- perhaps competing -- organizational structure is provided by the infant’s own abilities and preferences. From the ritual perspective, it is important not to overlook the infant as an agent of ritual performance -- as a participant -- even though his or her participation takes a very different form than that of an adult or older child undergoing initiation. One significant aspect of ritual play, then, is that the coordination of ritual specifications and techniques and infant engagement creates a specific kind of limited world with specialized and predictable demands. This type of stimulation is crucial to the development of new skills. The embodied experience of ritual pacing is one way in which prereflective apprehension of religious realities by liturgy can be more effective than cognitive comprehension.55

Theologically speaking, the result of ritual folding, in its limitation of field, is to iteratively create a projected reality in which the relationship of the infant with his or her parents becomes a foundation but gradually withdraws from the techniques and phenomena of the rite. Techniques, which at the outset are an expression of the parents’ authority over their child, gradually become avenues which merely display the fluidity of

55 See e.g. chapter 1, and especially Edward Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice* (Franklin, Wis.: Sheed and Ward, 1988), 97.
initiation and mark the child’s body as a place of excess. In the Christian field, then, the child’s embodied experience is opened to unexpected and uncontrollable phenomena. Moreover, the resonance of the fluid gestures (water, oil) with the nonfluid ones that follow (garment, ephphetha) ensure that although the rite closes, its significance to the body is retained.

The limited field, then, ensures at least that spiritual play grants to the child a genuine kind of self-directedness. It does this by setting up a created world that is partially insulated from the infant’s ordinary rhythms and granting to the infant’s body, precisely as a body that is not yet fully under his or her (or anyone’s) control, a degree of self-sufficiency. Spiritual play makes the child’s limitations the means of grace.

These concepts of ritual and spiritual play – the limited field, the importance of cooperative agency within that field, and the impact of practices in the limited field to the overall orientation or orientations of the human person in the world – will be important in the following chapter, which examines the relevance of the ritual analysis to trinitarian theology. These concepts translate into three main questions that will be addressed in the following chapter: how is the Trinity constructed as belonging to the cultural group of the rite? how is identity bestowed within the rite? and how is the identity bestowed by the rite trinitarian?

56 See chapter 6.
CHAPTER FIVE

A TRINITARIAN SOTERIOLOGY OF INFANT BAPTISM

The previous chapter executed a study of the ritual dynamics of the postconciliar rite of infant baptism. The study was theologically motivated, but was insulated in large part from the concerns of Christian identity, the trinitarian economy of salvation, and salvific efficacy that were the driving forces in chapter one. At this point, it is appropriate to bring these concerns back into conversation with the results of the ritual study in order to draw some theological conclusions. Therefore, the main questions which guided the choice of the case study will be reiterated here: how does sacrament, at least as exemplified by postconciliar Roman infant baptism, become a part of the trinitarian economy of salvation? How does the human cultural (Christian) identity under formation in baptism also become the trinitarian identity which is requisite for salvation and for the soteriological import of sacrament?

These questions, at the end of the case study, were focused into a few questions which can be derived from the intersection of the case study with the soteriological concerns of chapter one: (a) how is the community celebrating baptism the community belonging to the Trinity and to which the Trinity belongs? (b) how is the infant's identity recognized and bestowed as a trinitarian identity? and (c) how does the bestowal of the trinitarian identity in infant baptism reveal the trinitarian economy in action?
Section 5.1: The community belonging to the Trinity

To answer the first question, on the community, it is necessary to return to the analysis of the dynamics of the ritual insofar as they relate to community constitution in the rite. Chapter four discussed the way in which the dynamics of the rite reveal a kind of disappropriation at work in the rite. The first part of the rite, labeled “welcoming of the child” in the text, begins with a concern about the child’s identity which is wholly referred to the dual authorities of the church and the parents. This leads to the final part of this section of the rite, in which the celebrant, parents, and godparents impose the sign of the cross on the child’s forehead. In the succeeding parts of the rite, exemplified by the liturgy of the word, however, the apparent authority of parents and ecclesial members is subverted even as they perform their natural task: to pray for the child. In the concluding moment of the liturgy of the word, the child is anointed in the name and power of Christ the Savior, in a clear acknowledgment of the insufficiency of natural authority to accomplish the purpose of the rite (that is, the initiation of the child).

The rite begins with human authority, with a concern to affirm the natural structures of power which impose guidance on the child’s life. The ecclesial structures are here treated as extensions of the natural parental structures, with a kind of power that, rightly used, benefits the child and also encourages and enables increasing autonomy in the various domains which constitute the child’s being-in-the-world. In this way the rite legitimates human authority, particularly the authority of parents over their children. This is appropriate – perhaps even necessary – because the rite to follow depends in part upon the functioning of this authority in order to “open” the world of Christian phenomena for the child’s engagement. In view of the disappropriation to follow, however, it is clear that this authority is only able to legitimate itself by looking toward its own limits.
Of course the family’s dynamic of authority (properly understood) has always been recognized in the Christian tradition as a vestige of trinitarian love. Balthasar's depiction of the intratrinitarian dynamic, as discussed in chapter one, explicitly attributes to the Logos the quality of obedience and, in a nuanced understanding of the word, receptivity.¹ In the sacramental ritual, however, something more is at work: the family (and ecclesial, which recalls the familial) dynamic not only reflects (symbolizes) the Trinity, but also enters into the trinitarian love.

For clarity, the ecclesial level will be considered here, since the whole assembly is involved in most of the disappropriation action. As discussed in chapter 4, the disappropriation begins as soon as the community, having accepted the child, begins to pray for him or her, and creates a climax point at the moment of the anointing of the child. This disappropriation indicates that the community’s exercise of its proper task (that is, to pray for the child as one of its own) requires a handing over of the “natural” authority of parents over children, of elder over younger, into the hands of Christ. Of the various traditional Christian images of baptism, this dynamic evokes adoption most strongly; however, when adoption is considered in isolation, it is usually considered merely as an image of God beginning to exercise care for the child, and not as the parents’ handing their own authority and responsibility for the child over to God. In other words, the ritual enactment of disappropriation creates a “giving up for adoption” motif within the adoption imagery. This dynamic is crucial for seeing the familial and ecclesial dimensions within the trinitarian economy.

In the trinitarian soteriological context established earlier, there are two relevant aspects of this dynamic. First there is the very fact of prayer; in Christian tradition

invocation can only be made through the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27, Eph 6:18, Phil 3:3). More will be said about this in a moment.

Second there is the handing over (of the child), accomplished through prayer, culminating in an invocation of Jesus Christ’s name and authority. In Balthasar’s work, the place of Christ in the trinitarian dynamic, exemplified by the passion, death, and resurrection of the theo-drama, is handing himself (back) over eternally to the Father in obediential love: “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” (Jn 14:31). Thus Christ not only willingly participates in his own execution (Jn 10:18) but also in his begetting and in the Father’s saving plan for human persons: “glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him” (Jn 17:1-2).

When the assembly gives over its own authority to the person of the Logos, then, they recreate the gathering in the image of Christ, who is eternally handing over his authority to the Father (from whom it comes). Thus the assembly becomes “the body of Christ” in a trinitarian context. Moreover, this act of disappropriation, which renews the bond of love between the Church and Christ, and thus between Christ and God, inevitably happens “in the Spirit” and becomes the means by which the Spirit is made present in the assembly. The Spirit is the distance and the bridge between Son and Father (Balthasar) and is likewise the principle by which Christians transcend historical (“natural”) determination in order to affirm a future of love (Rahner). In other words, whereas the first observation that Christian prayer always happens in the Spirit might be taken to imply that a preexistent presence of Spirit was required in the assembly in order

2 For a consideration of this dynamic in the context of postmodern debates on gift and Gift, see section 6.2.


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for prayer to be effective, a trinitarian and soteriological examination of the ritual
dynamic instead suggests that the prayer itself remakes the assembly (as a “technology of
the community”) to make the Body of Christ present in the Spirit.

Another way of considering this is to take as a starting point the metaphor of the
Spirit as space also mentioned in chapter one.4 This is a ritually-appropriate metaphor,
since the anointing of the child at the end of the liturgy of the word asks that the child
become a “temple of the Holy Spirit,” which evokes the body as an architectural reality
containing an empty (ritually-defined) space. Within the world of this metaphor, the
disappropriation discussed is a kind of self-emptying (kenosis) on the part of the
assembly. Like the kenosis attributed to Christ in Philippians 2, the pouring out of power
and authority here paradoxically establishes the identity of the one undergoing this
kenosis, so that because the act links the actor (by the Holy Spirit) to the superabundant
glory of the Father, the self-emptying has the end result of exaltation. (This exaltation,
crucially, is given by the Father, not accomplished by the act of self-emptying: thus the
prayers are requests for gift.) The Holy Spirit, then, is not something which enters in to
fill the emptiness established by disappropriation; rather, the Holy Spirit is the
emptiness and the act of disappropriation (“space,” not “contents”). The assembly is not
able to accomplish the act of prayer without the Holy Spirit’s presence, but at the same
time it is the act of prayer which opens up the Spirit’s presence within the assembly,
enabling self-emptying and thus the assembly’s ability to anoint in the name and power
of Christ.5

This clarifies a point from Karl Rahner’s The Trinity: the transcendent aspect of
salvation history (Spirit’s mission) does not just allow one to passively accept the
historical dimension, as past event, giving it ongoing relevance for oneself. Rather, the

4 P. 15.
5 Rite of Baptism for Children (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2002), 87 [hereafter RBC].
transcendent aspect renews the historical aspect by making it present again and again. This is not merely existential realization (in individual terms), but takes on historical, material, cultural, and communal importance. In fact, it is the work of the Spirit in the Church to renew the Body of Christ not in the abstract, but through the ritual performance; that is, in a way that is bodily, cultural, and material. In this way, the “transcendence” of the trinitarian manifestation in the world actually renews the historicity of that manifestation, because the dynamic of acceptance and love creates a new historicity in the cultural, bodily, and institutional reality of the Church assembled. Thus the liturgy becomes the privileged place of Christ’s presence in the Church (SC I.7) because the ritual enactment of liturgy creates a Spirit-filled field which alters the contours of the social body of the assembly into a Christ-shaped (cruciform) identity. Thus the mission of Christ, historically, can also continue in the histories of each of his members (2 Cor 5:17-20).

Again, this enlarges the work of Balthasar as well. The theo-drama is decisively realized in the created order by the incarnation of Christ (which, as “his hour,” especially means his passion, death, and resurrection⁶). Nevertheless, theo-drama does not continue on its own momentum, or, more accurately, once the Trinity has invited in human actors, those human actors are essential to the continuation of the plot. It is the human enacting of Christ’s obediential kenosis (for which liturgy is, in the identity-forming and thus strong sense, “practice” -- efficacious engagement) which allows the drama of human existence to retain its theological character – to continue to be the manifestation in the world of the absolute self-giving of Father and Son in the Spirit. This is true, of course, not by absolute necessity, but by the conditional necessity of God’s trinitarian will for the salvation of the world.

In sum, then, the disappropriation characteristic of the rite of infant baptism as it is considered in terms of the assembly's enacted self-identification (self-process or "technology of the community"), has several important consequences. First of all, it confirms the fact that the structure of disappropriation, which Chauvet extracted from a narrative study of a single eucharistic prayer, is not a feature merely of that prayer nor of eucharistic worship. Rather, this sacrificial character (or as Chauvet wishes to call it, this “anti-sacrificial structure”) is at least recognizable in the ritual dynamic of the postconciliar Roman rite of infant baptism as well. Moreover, this sacrificial aspect is not merely reflective of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but ritually enacts a reidentification of the community with the Logos, the Incarnate Word, who eternally offers himself in love and obedience (i.e. in the Spirit) to his Father. This identification is at the same time a participation in that Spirit, who alone makes the identification of Church with Christ and the offering to the Father possible. Finally, the Spirit's sanctifying work is not constrained to a recognition (now) of Christ's saving work (past), but enables the historicity of that work by its sanctification of the historical (now) act of the assembly in the liturgical rite.

These conclusions decisively answer the question posed by this section: how is the community constituted as that of the Trinity? Specifically, one may observe here that the community is constituted as that of the Trinity not by their individual membership in the Body of Christ, but by their collective action as the Body of Christ. This can be

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7 Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 282-6; see chapter 2, note 19. This terminology seems to me needlessly complicated, and also seems to prejudge the question of the intention and action of non-Judeo-Christian ritual dynamics: in other words, are they manipulative or kenotic? Of course the trinitarian analysis above might indicate that all non-Christian rituals should be judged as manipulative (inasmuch as the Holy Spirit is not operative in institutional expressions of religion outside the Church), but on the other hand Rahner's trinitarian theology suggests that the Spirit might be active “in one way” within the created order outside the historical incarnation and its associated events and “in another way” through the incarnation. Acts 17:23 raises a similar question with regard to extra-Judeo-Christian worship and seems to answer it with a kind of affirmation. In short, then, I consider the structural differences between Judeo-Christian sacrificial dynamics and other human rituals to be an open question, not only in regards to this project, but also in regards to the tradition. More specifically, it is one which should be approached by the tools of comparative ritual studies and philosophy of religion in conjunction with theological hermeneutics, rather than judged by theological methods alone.
confirmed, again, through comparison with traditional treatment of sacramental efficacy. For example, the Donatists wished to assert that the baptizer “cannot give what he does not have,” and therefore those baptized by insincere Christians (to be judged after the fact by apostasy – or baptismal “descent” from apostates) did not receive the Spirit in their baptism. Augustine countered this argument with his observation that when anyone baptizes “it is Christ who baptizes,” that is, that the sacraments are effective *ex opere operato* rather than *ex opere operantis*. Augustine thus attributed the Christic power of sacrament to the ritual dynamic itself, because the rite itself, practiced by the assembly under the proper ritual preconditions, makes the ritual assembly into the Body of Christ gathered in the Spirit.

Another important consequence of the specific momentum of disappropriation noted in the first part of the rite has implications for the infant’s identity in the community context. If the momentum of the rite is a handing-over of the infant’s identity towards God, the infant himself or herself is the one being handed over. Again, there is a trinitarian significance to the ritual momentum: the child’s body becomes the space where disappropriation is possible; thus the body is the place of the Spirit. At the same time the child, by being handed over to God in order to complete God’s plan for the salvation of humanity, becomes an extension of Christ’s mission in the world. The body of the infant thus, like the community, becomes the body of Christ.

If the original “justification” of the child’s initiation into God’s people seemed to be legal and contractual, this trinitarian embodiment of the initiand becomes an alternate justification. Chapter four showed how the disappropriation momentum shows

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8 This idea was adopted from Cyprian. Slogan adapted from William Harmless, “Baptism,” *Augustine Through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 88.


10 See *RBC*, 86.
that the contractual reading of infant baptism fails, because the rite itself recognizes that
the “conditions” for infant baptism – Christian parents committed to raising the child in
the faith, the desire of the community to welcome the child into its midst, and their faith
formation of the child – are inadequate to secure to the child the end goal of baptism,
that is, the life of God. At both climactic moments the celebrant underscores this
inadequacy by calling attention to his or her proxy role.\textsuperscript{11} The trinitarian analysis shows
that the rite then continues in the mode of \textit{prophetic recognition} – a recognition of the
child as the location of trinitarian grace in the world.

The importance of recognition as an aspect of sacramental grace was treated by
Nathan Mitchell in his “Conversion and Reconciliation in the New Testament: The
Parable of the Cross.”\textsuperscript{12} In this essay, Mitchell argues that conversion in the New
Testament, as gleaned from Paul’s letters and from the parables of the synoptic gospels,
is essentially a matter of letting go of the desire to be acknowledged (by self or others) as
righteous. This conversion is provoked by a person’s “\textit{recognizing God at work in the
world}, establishing a kingdom . . . which is surprising, unexpected, and even
scandalous.”\textsuperscript{13} Seeing God at work redeeming the unredeemable liberates sinners from
the futile effort of self-justification, thus allowing them to enter into the kingdom.\textsuperscript{14}

Sacramental grace, thus, can never be a matter of a legal exchange between
human beings and God\textsuperscript{15} but is rather a matter of the \textit{proclamation} of God’s salvific will
already being put into effect.\textsuperscript{16} This proclamation, however, is not a static declaration of

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{RBC}, 79, 87; see chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{12} Nathan Mitchell, “Conversion and Reconciliation in the New Testament: The Parable of the Cross,”
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 14-15.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 17.
God’s past and present work; rather, as implied above, its purpose is to provoke a crisis of recognition in the hearer, to demonstrate a situation “both ‘at hand’ and ‘yet to come.’” In this way it can be considered prophetic, because in declaring the work of God it also evokes a recognition and response that becomes, for the hearer, justification and liberation.

The disappropriation momentum, especially exemplified by the anointing, the first ritual discovery of the fluidity of the infant’s body, can be seen as a prophetic recognition of this type. As noted in chapter three, the disappropriation is an integral part of the very fact of prayer; in fact, as noted above, the community’s identity as place of the Spirit and Body of Christ necessitates that, having accepted the child, they must pray for it, and the prayer must be an act of disappropriation. On the other hand, this disappropriation would be self-deception if there were not a real possibility of identifying in the infant the trinitarian manifestation of grace already at work in the world. This is a prophetic recognition because in it the community recognizes the infant as a real locus of God’s grace and simultaneously alters the infant’s status in the community and potential for self-identifications. At the same time, this recognition alters the status of community, precisely as site of Spirit and Body of Christ, because it acknowledges in the infant a capacity for God’s grace which, crucially, is bestowed outside the causal arrangements available to the community. As such, the infant becomes for the community a prophetic proclamation of “the God whose predictable love appears in unpredictable places.”

A partial understanding of the trinitarian base for this prophetic recognition is intrinsic to the dynamic of disappropriation (in the child as one being-handed-over), but a fuller

17 Ibid., 8.
18 See chapter four.
look at this trinitarian “alternate justification” – as what intervenes when human legal justification reveals its failure – will be the topic of the next section.

For the moment, the question is what effect on the community as “community of the Trinity” is effected by such a prophetic recognition. Such a moment is clearly a call to conversion for the whole community and each member of it; the infant, an easily-objectified recipient of the sacrament administered by the community gathered, suddenly becomes a microcosmic, privileged symbol of the community’s ultimate calling (as Body of Christ and temple of Spirit). In baptism as in the eucharistic sacrifice, “The church is offered in what it offers.” In the case of infant baptism, as seen above, the infant becomes the locus of the dynamic of disappropriation which is a trinitarian dynamic intrinsic to the community’s performing the rite. The infant’s body thus becomes a model for the (trinitarian) Body of Christ. Even the sign of the cross symbolically foreshadows what the ritual dynamic confirms: it not only inscribes the physical body, but also inscribes the infant’s shape on the social or ecclesial body of the church.

When Augustine observes that in the eucharistic sacrifice, the church “is offered in the offering [it] makes to God,” he is reflecting (through Romans 12:1ff) on the nature of sacrifice. This maxim describes a link between the bodily discipline of the members of the church, the ecclesial Body of Christ, and the liturgical practices, especially sacrifices and offerings, of that ecclesial body. In the previous chapter, Augustine has concluded that the sacrifices prescribed by the Torah but repudiated in some of the prophetic writings are symbols of interior offerings of the self to God, which God desires because they are beneficial to his people (i.e. not on his own account).

20 Augustine, City of God, X, 6.
21 Ibid. (R. W. Dyson, transl.)
22 Ibid., X, 5.
chapter 6, then, Augustine discusses “true sacrifice,” that is, what is symbolized by these ritual sacrifices. The true sacrifice, in accord with Hosea 6:6, is mercy,²³ but “even the mercy which we extend to men is not a sacrifice if it is not given for God’s sake. For, though performed or offered by man, a sacrifice is a divine thing.”²⁴ This is how the human body becomes an instrument of God’s will:

a man who is consecrated in the name of God and pledged to God is himself a sacrifice insofar as he dies to the world so that he may live to God . . . . Our body also is a sacrifice when we chasten it by temperance, if we do so, as we ought, for God’s sake, so that we may not yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but as instruments of righteousness unto God.²⁵

This, “the true sacrifice of ourselves,”²⁶ is Augustine’s interpretation of Romans 12:1: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”²⁷

From the living sacrifice, Augustine proceeds to reflect on τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν, the “reasonable service” or “reasonable worship” of the ecclesial body. “[T]he whole of the redeemed City,” he begins, “that is, the congregation and fellowship of the saints---is offered to God as a universal sacrifice for us through the great High Priest Who, in His Passion, offered even Himself for us in the form of a servant, so that we might be the body of so great a Head.”²⁸ The historical body of Christ, that is, became the means and instrument by which the Word could offer himself and his church to God: “For it was this

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²³ Ibid.
²⁴ Ibid., X, 6.
²⁵ Ibid.
²⁶ Ibid.
²⁷ As quoted ibid.
²⁸ Ibid.
form that He offered, and in it that He was offered, because it is according to it that He is our Mediator. In this form He is our Priest; in it, He is our sacrifice.”

So Augustine argues that in speaking of the bodies of Christians in Romans 12, Paul proceeds naturally to the ecclesial body: “For, as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another . . . “

This, the self-sacrifice of the one ecclesial body as instrument of God’s will on earth, is the sacrament of the altar, “by which [the church] demonstrates that she herself is offered in the offering that she makes to God.” This theology of sacrifice facilitates seeing baptism, in which a child is “consecrated in the name of God and pledged to God” so as to have his or her body become an instrument of God’s will in the world, as a liturgical sacrifice and, furthermore, to see the liturgical sacrifice as a remaking of the ecclesial body. The child is “given up” so that the church, by giving him or her up (for adoption -- by handing over, by releasing, by letting go) may find itself (as Church) in his or her body, because his or her body is conformed to Christ’s body, which was given up (handed over, thrown away, discarded as unworthy).

In the signing with the cross, this link between the sacrificial character of the individual Christian’s bodily conformity to Christ and the total conformity of the whole ecclesial body through its liturgical practice is enacted: the church is inscribed in what it inscribes. In writing the cross of Christ on the infant’s physical body, the celebrant, parents, and godparents also rewrite it upon the ecclesial body, and thereby, by the shared sign, the infant’s body is grafted into the Body of Christ, which the assembly, as if surprised, discovers itself to be in the act of signing.

29 Ibid.
30 Romans 12:4, as quoted ibid.
31 Ibid.
This means that the infant also becomes a privileged site of trinitarian grace, so that he or she provokes the community to prophetically recognize his or her body as body of Christ, temple of the Spirit. This means that the community finds its own identity – or rather, its rightful, desired identity – in the body of the child which (in the superficial analysis) seemed to be under its power. The child which seemed to be in the hands of the church is suddenly recognized as being under the hands of God, so that the church body is called to recognize itself as being “offered in the one it offers” into inexplicable grace. By accepting this challenge of recognition, the church binds itself to the trinitarian working of salvation history in all its mysterious and subversive peculiarity; as such, the church “belongs itself” to the trinitarian God by releasing its own workings of salvation in favor of God’s. Moreover, it is precisely by this offering, because the church “is offered in the one it offers,” that the community is enabled to achieve its identity as Body of Christ. In other words, the dynamic of disappropriation is, at the communal level, a “technology of the community” with respect to the community itself, as well as to the child; it is a discipline or exercise, part of the ritual process of continual conversion into the Body of Christ through the indwelling of the Spirit; it forms the community's identity as much as the infant’s (and each depends on the other).

One can easily verify that this dynamic is also key to the eucharistic understanding of the maxim: the eucharistic community's offering of the sacrifice (not narrowly understood as the offering phrase of the eucharistic prayer but rather as a dynamic central to the whole eucharistic action, exemplified in that offering phrase) is a ritual discipline which forms part of a ritual process. This process is directed towards forming the community and the individuals within it as trinitarian; that is, it is oriented towards a goal which includes an experiential focus on God as the future of one’s own
history, an other-directedness, and finding one’s own identity in absolute self-giving.\textsuperscript{32} The offering of the eucharistic prayer is not, then, a merely ritual offering as Chauvet implies, which represents (externally, though really) a future obligation to live in charity. Instead, it is a ritual discipline which opens up to the world-orienting of the community and its members the potentiality for participating in the charity of the life of the Trinity. In Thomas Aquinas’ gloss, it is the \textit{res et sacramenti}, the body of Christ on the altar – as food which has been offered in prayer, not the ritual offering of the prayer – which becomes the means by which the \textit{sacramentum tantum} (the sign alone) can form the Church into the \textit{res tantum} (the Body of Christ).\textsuperscript{33} The bread attains its meaning and its purpose when it comes to be offered \textit{as} body of Christ on the altar, and only thus can it become the food which makes human beings one Body with the Word.

Section 5.2: The trinitarian identity bestowed on the child

The previous section argued that the ritual action of infant baptism, considered from the point of view of a technology of the community, has a trinitarian dynamic which Chauvet partially recognized in Eucharistic Prayer 2 of the postconciliar Roman rite and labeled disappropriation. It also suggested that in order for this dynamic to be both honest and effective, the community must be able to justifiably recognize in the child, distinct from his or her dependence upon the community, a trinitarian identity which corresponds to the ideal identity (goal) of the ritual processes of the community’s Christian culture. Only in this way can the community be “offered in what it offers” and therefore be enabled to become themselves Body of Christ, temple of the Spirit. At the same time, of course, baptism is a rite of initiation: as such, the identity “recognized” in the rite is itself “bestowed.”

\textsuperscript{32} See chapter one.

\textsuperscript{33} Thomas Aquinas, \textit{ST} IIIa, 80, 4, \textit{respondeo} and \textit{ad} 4.
The identity which the rite recognizes in the infant and the identity which is bestowed on the infant during the rite are closely related to one another. As already noted above, the body of the infant appears in the rite as the body of Christ -- as an essential part of the dynamic by which the assembly is enabled to recognize itself as body of Christ. Simultaneously, the body is also identified as the temple of the Holy Spirit, which emerges as an empty space, or a space filled with emptiness. Although it is the complete performance of the rite which creates this Christ/temple embodiment, it is possible to identify aspects of the ritual performance with each of these body images.

The first ritual effect identified in the ritual analysis of chapter four is the opening of a world of Christian phenomena for world-orientation. The phenomena offered by infant baptism are a foundation for Christian being-in-the-world: by offering these phenomena to the child (especially through the general techniques by which the parents facilitate his or her engagement with these phenomena), the rite affirms the child as a Christian subject, capable of creative self-orientation, at least in an early form.

According to the reasoning of chapter 4, the most significant phenomena of the baptismal rite are (in approximate order of significance): the wetting with water, the fragrant oils, touch flowing over the body, the touch on the forehead, and other ritual touches. Of these, three basic categories of experience emerge as particularly powerful: water, oil, and breath. Moreover, these are easily recognized as three core symbols associated with the Holy Spirit in the Christian tradition. Together, as suggested

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34 Although the two oils of baptism have distinct theological and historical meanings, in terms of the ritual event itself their most important phenomenal characteristics are echoes of one another.

35 Water, in the bath, and the garment, when the infant is dressed.

36 The postbaptismal anointing and the welcoming.

37 The anointing on the breast and the ephphetha, if the latter is done.

38 Note that all three of these emerge in the “core experiences” of the rite: the wetting and the postbaptismal anointing, which are also the historical and theological core of baptism in the West.
in chapter four, they define the contours of the infant’s body and rewrite his or her bodily identity in a new form. The bathed and anointed body of the infant becomes identified with the bathed and anointed body of Jesus, speaking about how Christian embodiment is circumscribed by the Holy Spirit. The breathing body of the infant becomes identified with the breathing body of Christ in the Spirit.

Skin techniques and the trinitarian missions

The bathing and anointings of the infant initiand have been labeled “skin techniques.” They occur on the external boundaries of the infant’s body and flow from the celebrant’s hand, representing the community “in the name of” Christ, to and over the infant’s skin. The bath is primary, marking one significant phenomenon: the fluid flows over the surface of the body, creating new boundaries with the world and a lasting sensation (temperature change). There is thus an alteration of status (not effected in this moment, because the ritual folding implicates other parts of the rite, especially the anointings, in this dynamic) and a challenge. If the outside of the Christic body is limned by skin techniques, the interior workings and directedness are sketched by the body discipline of breathing also mentioned in chapter 4. Thus the completeness of the infant’s embodiment, inside and out, becomes inscribed by the Spirit in the ritual action.

If this was read according to the symbolic or linguistic model, one could affirm that the infant became identified with Christ (the baptized and anointed one) by the ritual action, but this identification could occur only on the level of cognitive access. Thus the rite would, for the assembly (at least, for attentive and symbolically literate members of the assembly), identify the child with Jesus, but for the child, the model would not account for any identity change. The child’s identification with Christ would be a secondary construction, imparted to him or her by parents and church on the basis of their understanding of the symbolic rite. This “common sense” understanding of the
sacrament, however, cannot easily be maintained, because it does not fit with the history of infant baptism. As Searle argues, infant baptism became the norm because of high rates of infant mortality;\(^39\) in other words, infant baptism was more important for those who died than for those who survived.\(^40\) Those who died in infancy, however, did not receive any secondary formation to identify them with Christ, so the strength of baptism for the initiand must have been a creation of a Christian identity.

The ritual act, then, performs, not represents, a continuity between Jesus the Christ and the infant initiand. This requires a transsymbolic radical identification of the baptized one with Jesus, a transsymbolic power which operates not only in the realm of human understanding, but in the divine realm. Human symbolic behavior, from metaphor to exchange, cannot accomplish this, but the Holy Spirit does. On the human ritual level, the assembly recognizes in the ritual washing a likeness to the baptism of the Anointed One, but only by faithfully relying on the work of God who effects a radical identification of the baptizand with the Anointed One.

The mission of the Holy Spirit thus emerges in this analysis as the one most imminent to human experience, and also as that which acts like metaphor. The Spirit is the divine ποίησις, by which the Father reaches into the world and radically alters the personhood of those he has chosen to be his own (John 17), so that their very experience of the world might become Christic. The boundaries of this significance are manifested in the rite at its borders: at the beginning in the sign of the cross and at the end in the “explanatory rites.” Now that the Spirit has been uncovered as the agent of identification, these two parts of the rite will be reconsidered.

\(^39\) See discussion in chapter 3.

\(^40\) This point should, however, be contrasted with the more positive theologies of infant baptism of e.g. Cyprian of Carthage; if baptism in infancy was more urgent because of those who died, it was still immensely important to the formation of those who lived, as the ritual analysis of chapter 4 also suggests.
In the welcoming, the infant is marked with the sign of the cross. If this part of the rite can be seen as adoptive, this gesture does not convey a particularly positive understanding of the adoptive act. It is, in fact, like the mark of Cain, simultaneously a reminder of violence and a pledge of redemption. The cross affirms that the body of the infant is and will be a suffering body (as are all human bodies), and it does not rush to find meaning in that suffering. Instead, it identifies that suffering, especially meaningless suffering (from colic to childhood leukemia), with the facticity of Jesus. The experience of pain is one boundary of the phenomenon of human personhood, a marking of limitation and lack which comes to be incomprehensibly identified with the fullness of Jesus. The rite thus faithfully maintains, but fails to explain, that the infant is to be identified with Christ even in the experience of pain which threatens the integration of his or her human personhood.

At the other end of the rite the action focuses on the infant's sensorium, which is his or her way of interfacing with the world. If the experience of pain is the exterior world being inflicted on the human being, then the experience of the senses is the human being opening to the exterior world, ek-sisting into it. This movement encompasses but is not restricted to pain, so that any trinitarian soteriology which restricts human participation in God and divine entrance into history to suffering is inadequate. The rite assures, rather, that the whole interface between person and world -- or, in the language adopted in chapter 2, the whole process of cultural world-construction -- is consecrated by the act of baptism. Not only the baptizand's interpretations of the world, but the very fact of the world's interpretability and the processes by which it comes to be interpretable for the

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41 This is a concern with certain, though not all, formulations of liberation theology. For example, in *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), Jürgen Moltmann seems to make suffering the paradigmatic experience of human personhood, and it becomes the shaping concept for his trinitarian theology. But this approach overlooks the importance of the Judeo-Christian concept of God as creator (who creates humanity in God's own image, after which humanity's experience of sin, suffering, pain, and death is presented as contingent -- even though universal). It also injures the theme of liberation, inasmuch as freedom within suffering becomes the dominant concept.
subject are conformed to the Christic pattern by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the whole of human identity, of being-in-the-world, is subject to (or vulnerable to) the trinitarian process.

In order for world interpretability to be infused with trinitarian meaning for prelinguistic human beings, there must be a correspondence between the body of the infant baptizand and the body of Christ that is significant to the infant subject — i.e. prelinguistically. Cultural phenomena, of course, not only function prelinguistically but create the basis for linguistic formation. The data of revelation associate the phenomenal symbols of water, oil, breath with the Spirit and image the Spirit as beyond reason (John 3), the giver of words that are beyond human understanding (John 16:7-15). These thus suggest the possibility of the same role for the Spirit in the trinitarian manifestation through history: the prelinguistic and extralinguistic significance of the body as the impossible place for God's grace in the world. This is the basis for the traditional teaching that the sacraments bestow grace ex opere operato: the work of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments ties together the human cultural dimension of the sacramental action with the salvific activity of the Trinity.

Christian identity has historically, theologically, and culturally been tied to the process of naming ("christening") an infant baptizand. As suggested in the previous chapter, this association is suggested by the ritual dynamic of the rite of infant baptism, which begins with the name of the child. After the parents respond with the infant's name, the trajectory of naming in the rite becomes quite complex, with the celebrant

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42 See section 4.6.
43 See chapter 2, 3.
44 Section 4.1.
45 RBC, 76.
“claiming” the child in the name of “the Christian community”;\textsuperscript{46} the assembly invoking the names of the saints, which may include the name of the child and the church or its region;\textsuperscript{47} the celebrant anointing the child “in the name of Christ our Savior”;\textsuperscript{48} and the assembly praying the Lord’s Prayer “in the name of this child.”\textsuperscript{49} The central “naming,” of course, is that of the trinitarian formula: “N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{50}

What these naming incidents (often associated with the powerful touch-and-address moments highlighted in chapter 4) do over the course of the rite is alter the child’s name from an identity marker exclusively associated with his or her family status (“What name do you give your child?”\textsuperscript{51}) to one which identifies him or her with the trinitarian dynamic. This is the gift of the community, since they themselves are implicated in this dynamic by the act of participating in the child’s baptism (section 5.1), but it is simultaneously the action of the Trinity in the community gathered, since that community can only have the right to give the gift and claim the child insofar as they accept their identity as Body of Christ by the act of baptizing (and its associated dynamics of disappropriation and prophetic recognition) and that identity is offered to them by the work of the Holy Spirit which is radically free (John 3). Here the particularities of this identity will be considered.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 79.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 87. The reference to “name” is not present in the Latin \textit{editio typica}, although the identification with Christ is preserved, particularly by the ablative construction \textit{in eodem}: “Múniat vos virtus Christi Salvátoris, in cuius signum vos óleo linímus salútis, in eódem Christo Dómino nostro . . .” (\textit{Ordo Baptismi Parvulorum}, 50 [hereafter \textit{OBP}]).

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{RBC}, 103.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 97. It is essential that this naming points back to the profession of faith, which elaborates the meaning of each naming of God (ibid., 95).

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 76.
First, the name is the specific name of the child himself or herself. In its particularity and incommunicability it thus shares qualities with the child's body, already established as a powerful marker of his or her otherness and escape from the ultimate control of other people, even his or her parents'. It thus becomes a symbolic link to the phenomenological experience of touch, so that the ritual association of name and touch is effectual. This link allows the ritual to progress on the phenomenological level of the child's experience simultaneously with the symbolic-linguistic level of the assembly's social construction. Each part of the rite, then, signifies the transformation and progressive elaboration of the child's name by its link to a new kind of “Christian naming.”

The main aspect of name transformation in the welcoming of the child is the link of the child's name, with which the celebrant addresses him or her for the first time, to the name of “the Christian community,” on behalf of whom the celebrant acts. What ties the particular infant's identity to the group is a ritual action: the sign of the cross of Christ our Savior. At this point, the infant's biological ties to his or her parents are deemphasized (ritually enacted by having the parents sign after the celebrant, rather than initiating the gesture) in favor of this new marking of their body as belonging to the body of those signed with the cross, the body of the crucified one.

The next appearance of the infant's name is (possibly) in the Litany of the Saints, where it may appear as the name of the child's patron saint. Once again, this acknowledges the particularity of this infant, the concreteness of his or her personal identity, while relativizing it with respect to the Christian community — no longer limited

52 The notion of “claiming” the infant “for Christ our Savior” is also absent in the editio typica (OBP 41).

53 In English, “the sign of his cross”; in Latin, signo crucis . . . signo Christi Salvatóris . . .
to the assembly but recognized as “all holy men and women.” The name which
designates the child in his or her uniqueness is not unique -- it belongs to the child alone
only by being given in the context of this community in which it has previously belonged
to another. Christian names are second-hand.

This provides the necessary backdrop to the anointing “in the name of Christ our
Savior,” since the identity between infant and community already established allow for
Christ to (culturally) become Savior for the infant. The infant's body has been identified
with the body of Christ (historical as well as ecclesial); now the infant's name is
identified with Christ's name and with his power (virtus). Traditionally the prebaptismal
anointing of infants was taken to imply the existence of so-called “original sin”: the
strengthening of the infant with Christ's virtue was exorcistic, intended to combat any
demons that might be residing in the infant's soul. But what is original sin, or
equivalently, in what ways can the infant be newly identified with the (moral) strength of
Christ in his or her infant state?

Here Jean-Luc Marion's concept of original sin is useful. If any guilt eclipses
individual wrong acts to be an origin for evil, it is a desire for revenge. Undeserved
suffering prompts one to identify a wrongdoer in order to create “justice.” This
wrongdoer then “ought” to have suffering imposed on him or her in recompense for the
existential wrong. Thus, the suffering party (up to now, perhaps, innocent) becomes
guilty of the desire to pass his or her suffering on to (another potentially innocent)
sufferer. Thus the desire for justice, Marion argues, makes innocent people guilty of

54 RBC, 85.
55 See Clare Johnson, Ex Ore Infantium: The Pre-rational Child as Subject of Sacramental Action
(Ph.D. thesis, Notre Dame, 2004), 150-2 for a very different understanding of the prebaptismal
anointing.
fault; no one is exonerated in the end, because none can suffer without seeking to be exonerated by leaving another responsible -- none, that is, but Christ.\textsuperscript{56}

Marion thus transforms the doctrine of original sin, arguing that the only true innocence consists of accepting an undeserved guilt:

he who contests the doctrine of original sin, by arguing that he bears no responsibility for original sin, repeats, from the very fact of this argument, all the logic of evil (self-justification, refusal to take evil upon oneself so as to block its transmission, and so forth), and thus inscribes himself completely in that very sinfulness of which he claims to know nothing [i.e., because Adam blamed the original fault on Eve, and Eve on the serpent, in Genesis]; to declare oneself innocent of original sin and of its transmission, amounts, ineluctably and immediately, to repeating in an originary way, for one's own account, its fulfillment, and therefore to confirming its all-powerful logic.\textsuperscript{57}

Although Marion does not explore the question of infant baptism in this essay, it seems that on this reading of original sin, the infant, by accepting in his or her body the mark of exorcism (and thus the form of sinfulness, the label “original sin”) is conformed in the body to the body of Christ who suffered without laying claim to the innocence he merited, and thus broke the cycle of evil. The innocence of the infant, far from precluding his or her need for exorcism, makes his or her experience of exorcism (as an imputation of sin to an innocent) a perfect analogue of the one who was made sin for the sake of sinners (2 Cor 5:21). Thus the rite both recognizes and bestows the child's ultimate likeness to Christ in his salvific efficacy.

The baptismal formula, “N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,”\textsuperscript{58} has multiple resonances. Ritually, it is the site of the most fluid recognition of the child's identity; scripturally, too, it is washing “in water and the Holy Spirit” which alters the identity of a disciple of Christ. It is thus appropriate that


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 10.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{RBC}, 97.
this is also the most radical renaming of the child: the name of the child becomes the name of God, the Trinity. This points back to the profession of faith (RBC 95) which specifies how the name of I AM comes to be known as a trinitarian name. This is, as suggested above, the most radical moment of prophetic recognition: the child is acknowledged as a manifestation of the mystery of God. Thus, this is likewise the moment at which the gift of the child's trinitarian identity is most fully expressed. What can be said about this identity?

The child's trinitarian identity is, first, the ground for participation in the trinitarian mystery of salvation. This means a filial love for God the Father modeled on that of the Son: that is, gratitude, obedience, and a kenotic commitment to the Father's will for the salvation of the world. It also means a radical freedom (perhaps Marion's "freedom to be free") for the capacity for these relationships: love for the Father, compassion with (a feeling along with, an ability to share the desires of) the Son,\(^\text{59}\) commitment to the transformation of the world.

Curiously, this radical change is perhaps most fully manifest in the ritual dynamic at a moment which may be too pedestrian to attract any notice: the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. It is worth noting that this action points back to the trinitarian identity of the baptismal formula:

\[
\text{In the name of this child, in the Spirit of our common sonship, let us pray together in the words our Lord has given us:}
\]

\[
\text{Our Father . . .} \quad ^\text{60}
\]

At this moment the child's name comes to be parallel to the Spirit, in that becomes the principle of the community's unity with one another and with God the Father. In other words, the whole trinitarian work of salvation is summed here and \textit{attributed to the}


\(^{60}\) \textit{RBC}, 103.
child. Whereas before the community prayed for the child (as standing outside and facing him or her), now the community prays on the child's behalf (as able to speak in his or her voice); yet this very prayer on behalf reveals how it is because of the child that the community can (dare to) pray at all. The prayer shows how the child's new identity includes filial praise and petition of God the Father, emulation of Christ (“in the words our Lord has given us”), transformation of the world (“Thy kingdom come . . .”), freedom from sin, and the will to pass on that freedom to others (“Forgive us . . .”).

To pray this prayer “[i]n the name of this child” is, first, to assert in faith that the child is able to participate -- indeed, is already participating -- in these aspects of the trinitarian economy of salvation. The rite thus asserts this ability but does not defend it. Nor will this work attempt to do so; the child's ability to participate in Christ's saving ministry to the world is a mystery, except insofar as it is revealed -- or revealed in its concealment -- by the traditions of the church.61

Second, to pray is to assert that the child's trinitarian identity is the ground for the reformation of the trinitarian identity of the whole ecclesial community. The rite transforms the child's name by the invocation of the Trinity, and this change refers back to all the aspects of the child's name already emphasized by the practice of the rite: the child's relationship to his or her parents and their community, which is marked by the cross; the child's unique identity, which is nonetheless part of the universal Church, living and dead; the freedom granted by participation in Christ's saving work and the indwelling of the Spirit. The baptismal formula invokes the trinitarian Name as the unique bond of all these. The act of washing in general both affirms and challenges cultural categorizations;62 here, the baptismal action, as noted in chapter 4, affirms the

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61 See Marianne Sawicki, Seeing the Lord, ch. 2 on the importance of this mystery for the early church's preservation of Christ's sayings regarding children.

child's connection to the assembly while challenging the assumption that he or she is completely dependent on it. In chapter 4 it was asserted that the disappropriation dynamic suggests that in infant baptism “mysterious and unpredictable divine power and powerless but well-adapted and capable babies seem to conspire together;” now it is clearer that it is the renaming of the infant with the trinitarian Name which creates a new authority structure. The infant's name is identified with the trinitarian Name, which creates an equality between the infant and the other members of the assembly. The infant's participates in the *virtus* of Christ who saves by embracing the identity of sinners, rather than the innocence he merits; he or she likewise becomes the site of the indwelling of the Spirit who is the freedom to participate in the trinitarian mysteries of love and creation.

It is the infant's ritual participation -- i.e., the enactment on the infant's body -- of these saving mysteries which then allows, as suggested in section 1, the infant to become the body of Christ and temple of the Spirit. This in turn permits the assembly to recognize the infant prophetically as body of Christ, which is an exercise of its function within the trinitarian plan of salvation, by recognizing Jesus' body (historical, risen, and sacramental) as the Messiah of God. Thus the infant is the catalyst which renews the church community to act as Body of Christ, Temple of the Spirit. In other words, very significantly, the infant is able to give a gift to the community: though analyses which argue that the community is instrumental in bestowing Christian identity on the infant are correct, it is necessary to supplement these with the more subtle observation that the infant's initiation likewise bestows Christian identity on the community. This fact, in

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63 Chapter 4, page 124.

64 Cf. the initiand's renewal of the Christian assembly as expressed towards adults in the popular piety noted in Harmless, “Baptism,” 86: “Those emerging from the font were thought to possess miraculous powers of healing and intercession.”
turn, completes the infant’s Christian identity: he or she is able to participate in the trinitarian economy by assisting in the constitution of the ecclesial Body of Christ.

Section 5.3: The trinitarian bestowal of the infant’s identity

This project began with a concern about the traditional western emphasis on the Word’s place in the economy of salvation and a relative amnesia in the West about the role of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{65} Sacramental theology, as is well known, has been no exception to this western tendency; indeed, the medieval concern for “validity” (with its concomitant emphasis of the minimal correct words and actions) apparently excludes the Spirit from both the text and interpretation of sacramental practice. There have been multiple attempts to correct this tendency, all partially but none fully successful. For example, there is the work of Chauvet, whose sacramental christology will provide a backdrop for this section.

Chauvet critiques what he calls the “incarnational” focus of traditional sacramental theology and proposes instead a “Paschal” focus which concentrates on the Passion of Christ.\textsuperscript{66} This approach is intended to provide a platform for sacramentality which concentrates on the transformative power of narrative -- specifically the narrative of Christ’s suffering and victory over death\textsuperscript{67} -- rather than on the “automatic” power of instrumental causality. In this way Chauvet intends to preserve the subjective and human aspects of sacramental efficacy even by his choice of christological vistas.

Although this narrative christology goes a long way towards filling out the sacramental account of the mystery of salvation, a pneumatically-focused christological

\textsuperscript{65} See chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{66} Chauvet, \textit{Symbol and Sacrament}, 476-86. Chauvet’s argument here depends on liturgiological evidence which cannot be addressed here for reasons of brevity. See e.g. Johnson, \textit{Images of Baptism} for an alternate interpretation of the evidence with respect to initiation. As is clear from the structure of Chauvet’s work, the choice of a Paschal model is actually determined by the theological project.

explanation would be even more helpful. In the previous two sections the role of the Holy Spirit in the constitution of the community and of the baptizand as Christ's body were explored. In each case the Holy Spirit could be seen as a kind of sculpting, imperceptibly anointing the boundaries of the body in order to conform it to that of Jesus. The baptism of the infant suggests a similar role for the Spirit in the historical manifestation of the Word.

The shape of Christ's body is not merely cruciform, and there is an efficacy, as chapter 2 argues, to the human body and the development of human subjectivity. The dynamic of infant baptism as examined in chapter 4 suggests a more comprehensive view of Christ's body: the most powerful “body image” phenomena of baptism (washing, anointing, breathing) suggest three moments of Christ's life as formative for Christian identity: birth, baptism, and passion. These will be examined here.

Both biological and cultural factors of birth are suggested by the phenomena of infant baptism. The first breath is the sign that a human being has traversed the first period of endangerment (in the womb) and the first great boundary to take over a significant new responsibility: providing oxygen to the body. The first bathing and first anointing are the sign of entry into the cultural world (an unwashed infant has been rejected by its family and is in danger of being depersonalized; cf. Ezekiel 16). Christ's birth is the beginning of the voluntary-involuntary body discipline of breathing; the gifts of the magi suggest anointing, although no account of Jesus' bathing is recorded in the infancy narratives. The baptism of Jesus is, of course, marked by washing. In the East it was also associated with anointing because there was oil in the Jordan's water according to some of the early references. Of course, it can also be linked to the breath because

68 This is probably because the infancy narratives are later additions to the gospels and no supplement to the baptismal narratives (in a sense the “original” infancy narratives) was necessary: see Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

69 See chapter 3.
Jesus’ baptism, like any baptism, would have caused an interruption in the breath and thus in the body discipline of breathing.\textsuperscript{70} Jesus’ death, similarly, is marked by breath -- a wordless cry. (The “last breath” is, like the first, the mark of the boundaries of personhood.) The Passion is foretold by an anointing in two independent gospel traditions (Mk 14 and parallels, Jn 12) and closes with a flow of water from Christ’s side (Jn 19). There are thus many parallels between the presentation of Christ’s death and his birth/baptism.

These moments in Christ’s life, as suggested above, are also pneumatic moments. The gospel according to Luke attributes Christ’s incarnation to the “shadow” of the Holy Spirit (1:35). The infancy of Jesus, as mentioned earlier, presents a paradox: how can the incarnate Word be unable to speak? Since the Spirit’s manifestation always provides a witness to the relationship between Father and Son, the involvement of the Spirit in the incarnation (Annunciation) and its symbols in human birth (first breath, first bathing) shows how Jesus is Son of the Father even in his infancy.\textsuperscript{71} Similarly, the Passion shows Jesus as Son of the Father in his utter erasure: the wordless cry and Jesus’ reproach of God for forsaking him are, in their different ways, still utterances of the Word Incarnate. The first breath and the last breath, then, are moments when the Word fails to speak, when not only human but divine language seems to fall short of expressing the reality of the divine love.

In the baptismal rite, the Holy Spirit circumscribes the body of the baptizand and of the community, creating bridges out of the boundaries between infants and adults, between the uninitiated and the initiates, between God and the human community. In

\textsuperscript{70} See chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{71} Balthasar has provided an interesting theological account of the christological importance of Christ’s infancy in \textit{Unless You Become Like This Child}.
the Trinity, too, the “filial distance” or the radical reciprocity between Father and Son is accomplished through the Holy Spirit, who accomplishes the manifestation of the Father in his Word even when the Word is inarticulate.

The inarticulate Word, then, is rendered communicative by the transformative action of the Spirit. When the Word enters human life, it does so by, in a sense, breaking it: neither the boundaries of humanity (the temporal ones of birth and death, the phenomenal ones of pain and transcendence) are the same as they were before. Death is conquered, as the patristic exegetes argue, simply by becoming God's death. This is possible because in the “separations” effected by the history of salvation, as in the eternal filiation of the Son, the Spirit fills the intervening “space” (or perhaps is the intervening space) and thus assumes distance into the divine life. The Spirit consecrates the experience of otherness. Because of the Spirit, then, the divine life is experienced in the traces of human existence; or rather, the traces of human existence often result from the Spirit fragmenting human life with the divine entry.

In the economy, then, certain of the fragments resulting from Jesus Christ's entry into the world and its fracture during the passion and resurrection bear a special importance. These fully human celebrations spinning out of Christ’s actions and the posthumous recognition of him as the Incarnate Word and Savior became specially privileged sites for the Spirit’s continued breaking of the world and transformation of its distance into filiation -- human filiation on the model of the filiation of the Son as a

72 Marion, “Evil in Person,” 24.
73 Balthasar, TD5, 82ff.
74 “The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.” (“Ancient homily on Holy Saturday,” translation in Christian Prayer [1976]).
75 This word, of course, is used metaphorically and analogically, not literally and spatially.
human being. Over time, certain celebrations were recognized as such privileged sites for transformation that they were considered to operate *ex opere operato*.

Chapter 2 cautioned that the cultural efficacy of ritual must not be confused with the *ex opere operato* efficacy of the Christian sacraments (i.e., with the working of grace). It might have been possible to assert there, as a premise, that the Holy Spirit is implicated in *ex opere operato*. At this point, however, the picture is clearer: cultural efficacy is required in order (on the human side) to enter into the trinitarian manifestation in history. At the same time, this cultural efficacy is given a salvific significance by the intervention of the Holy Spirit (which can only be assured through faith). In the sacramental rite God acts not only “for us” but also “(through us) for the world.”

In the trinitarian sacramental economy, the Holy Spirit is then the one that breaks into cultural forms (whether phenomenal or significative) to take them into the reality of salvation. In other words, the sacraments rarely symbolize the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit acts in them to symbolize Christ.

The phrase *ex opere operato* has often been glossed as *ex opere operato Dei* or *Christi*, but perhaps it should be *ex opere operato Spiritu*. According to God’s will, the Holy Spirit takes the *opus operatum* (work of the Church) up into the work of Christ the redeemer. The work of the Church then becomes the work of God by the gift of the Holy Spirit, which *recreates* the sacramental identity between Christ and his ecclesial body. The Spirit is then always a principle both of grace and of worship, the anabatic and katabatic dimensions of sacramentality. Nor is the Son inactive in this principle, for he actively cooperates in his embodying in the baptizand and his or her community. The

77 This is the emphasis of the ethical reading of eucharistic liturgy by, e.g., Chauvet.
78 See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter With God* (Franklin, Wis.: Sheed and Ward, 1999), 71, 82-9.
79 Ibid., 73.
power of the Holy Spirit, in short, allows the power of Christ to come into presence in the cultural construction of the community and its members, so that the cultural efficacy of the sacramental practice can be conformed to God’s will. This is no magic, because the impetus to worship and the acceptance of grace are real human acts, but done “in the Holy Spirit”: that is, within the space of filiation the Holy Spirit opens to human beings in the wake of Jesus Christ’s mission.

The sacraments thus provide a particularly compelling example of the influence of the Holy Spirit generally in the world. This influence is always subtle and hard to distinguish from the natural workings of the human world, because the Holy Spirit’s mission occurs in the depth of the human personality.\textsuperscript{80} The Spirit’s name designates an aspect of human personhood, so that it is notoriously difficult to distinguish in practice between the human spirit and the Spirit of God. Similarly, it is difficult to distinguish between human ritualizations and the effects of God’s Spirit; therefore over time the church has acknowledged the saints in the one case and the sacraments in the other. The Spirit is the principle of distance; its very procession is as a gap between the Origin and the Other. In the human realm Spirit is characterized by discontinuity and paradox; phenomena that reveal its passing are marked by fluidity and unpredictability. No wonder its work is hidden so well that the western theological tradition (excluding the mystical strands) practically forgot its existence.

There is more: the Spirit’s mission succeeds precisely at the point that its influence is forgotten. In history, the presence of the Word in the world is fully realized at the point where the break between the divine and human realms becomes invisible, where God and humanity are truly reconciled in the person of Jesus Christ due to the “overshadowing” of Mary by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the purpose of the Passion and

Resurrection comes about when Jesus' humanity becomes invisible -- going from unrecognizably present to recognized to unseen (see Luke 24, Acts 1) -- because at that point Christ's relationship to the Father comes to be shared in the visible ecclesial body. Likewise, the salvation of an individual is complete only if his or her existence is truly pervaded by the love of God, so that the indwelling of the Spirit is a transparent phenomenon. In all these cases the Holy Spirit is hidden because it does not add or take away phenomena, but rather transforms them: the saint does not perceive himself or herself as holy, but his or her infinite distance from God is transformed by the Holy Spirit into holiness.\footnote{81 Thus the saints always consider themselves as sinners, but are usually considered holy by their contemporaries.}

All this raises the question of the Holy Spirit’s special role in sacramentality. If the anamnesis (“remembering”) is the proper revelation of the Son in the sacramental rites, the Spirit’s role seems to be characterized, rather, as a forgetting. More precisely, the role of the Spirit is, in calling the memory of Christ forward and making it present in the bodies of the assembly, to erase its own memory. The Spirit has fully formed the bodies of the baptized into the Body of Christ when they can no longer remember an identity that is divorced from him (Gal 2:19-20).

In terms of the economy of salvation, how does this amnesia come about through the anamnesis of Jesus? One can see this as a reversal of the original human sin. The first sin of human beings is in an attempt to usurp the place of God as origin and end of all things; that is, human beings wished to be the Unoriginate Father to themselves and to all else. It was natural (convenientia, fitting) that such a perversion of the human role must be reversed by the Son, whose personhood is constituted by infinite reverence for and obedience to the Father, and that this reversal would take the form of self-emptying for the sake of the Father and his creation. This self-emptying reached its climax when
the Son allowed himself to be handed over to sinners to endure their will. He thus
acceded to the human demand to be Father; he handed himself over to people as to the
Father; he gave himself to the human race as to the Father. In so doing, he irrevocably
gave to humanity the gift of the Holy Spirit which is the gift and bond of love between
Father and Son, thus taking the pattern of sin up into the trinitarian life. In future, then,
the space of sin can be transformed by the ministry of the Spirit into filial love.

In infant baptism, then, this reversal is enacted on the infant's body. The contours
of the infant's body are inscribed with the trinitarian gift of love, creating a dynamic of
reversal in which the infant gives the community its identity as Body of Christ. In this
process, the phenomena of Christianity are opened to allow the infant to begin creating a
world with them by its own embodied identity, before and apart from linguistic and
symbolic capacity. In so doing, the infant is enabled to act with confidence in conformity
with the inarticulate Word, who was nonetheless able to manifest the Father's love for
the world precisely through the failure of language. This action is marked by
development, but infant baptism is not validated by the baptizand's potential for
cognizant faith, but by the action of the Holy Spirit.

Infant baptism is, then, (in Balthasar's terms) a theo-drama: a voluntary
cooperation between the Trinity and human persons which essentially, dramatically, and
irreversibly changes the course of history. The body of an infant is already an
inculturated body in a world where culturation often, if not always, implies power,
oppression, suffering, and isolation. Infants are not only subject to pain, but are already
implicated in a cycle which inflicts pain and loss on others -- a cycle in which gratuitous
gift is absent. In this cycle, even the desire to do justice (as in Marion's analysis) leads to
vengeance and thus to self-indictment. The only escape is to be freed from the desire to
be Unoriginate Origin, Lawgiver, and Judge -- but human causality cannot effect this
freedom, no more than it can free people from the fact of culture. (The very desire to be
freed from culture, as Chauvet sees, becomes another instance of the desire to be one’s own immortal lawgiver.) In this ultimate paradox, the work of God (the Spirit) breaks into the world in the rite of baptism to reinscribe the answer of the economy: God grants humanity’s desire to become, impossibly, the ones in charge, handing over his Son on the cross, the Spirit in the Church. This move, though, suspends the cycle (economy) in favor of the break (oikonomia): when the Word dies on the cross, when the Church invokes the Name of Jesus, when the celebrant invokes the Spirit over the waters, control breaks out of its bounds, and the ones in control are revealed to be the bodies who are out of control. The crucifiers and the Crucified One, the assembly and the initiand reorganize the power structures: the one they killed kills death, the one they initiate initiates them into the work of God.

The work of God, then, is not only extended and reenacted by the sacrament, but changed, because the Body of Christ can only be that body by continually reentering the break in the cycle of the world. By initiating infants, the church cannot be sure that it is doing the will of God -- but by initiating the church takes its only possible chance, has its only hope of doing that will, of becoming the Body of Christ and inhabiting the space of the Spirit.
CHAPTER SIX

CROSSINGS: SYMBOL AND GIFT

This study has, at minimum, demonstrated the potential coexistence of a ritual studies approach to sacrament and a truly theological interpretation. There are two requirements, however, for such a method to be faithful in both areas. First, the ritual studies approach should be complemented by a comprehensive historical understanding of the rite’s development. This ensures that the ritual studies method is corrected by the tradition: for example, if the analysis of chapter 4 had indicated that the most important points of the rite were the sign of the cross and the ephphetha, I would be forced to conclude either that the analysis was misled (being mere associations without basis in the ritual tradition; i.e. interpreted outside its proper cultural context) or that the modern ritual was woefully misconstrued. Since the ritual approach agrees with the tradition, however, in designating the washing and anointings (together with the profession of faith, which, because of the focus on preliterate participants, played a relatively small role in the ritual analysis) the most important acts, the theological work can proceed with confidence. Second, the theological efficacy of the rite should not be attributed to or confused with the ritual efficacy which is the human result of human actions. To do this is to overlook the work of the Holy Spirit within the rite, which includes the risk of sacramental Pelagianism.

Other results of the study impinge on many areas; here three in particular will be considered. First, a brief examination of the bearings of this study on the symbolic tradition of sacramental efficacy will be necessary. For the purpose of brevity, this
section will only include a comparison of the pneumatological center of chapter 5 to the sacramental model of Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* (which ties together “sign” and “cause” in sacramental efficacy) and to Karl Rahner’s understanding of symbol in his seminal article “The Theology of the Symbol.” Implications of the trinitarian theology of each will also be considered, although a comprehensive analysis will not be attempted here.

Second, the trinitarian analysis of chapter 5 inevitably delved into discussion of the Holy Spirit, especially in his work in sacraments, as “gift.” The second section of this chapter will consider the relationship of these assertions to the problem of gift and of the divine Name in postmodern phenomenological discussion, particularly in the work of Jacques Derrida and his commentators. Again, a comprehensive discussion will not be attempted here, but the relationship between this philosophical endeavor and the theological argument of chapter 5 should be acknowledged briefly.

Finally, the work of the preceding two chapters shows that the work of God in the sacraments is intimately connected to their performance as ritual. Traditionally two effects of the sacraments have been acknowledged, one depending on the validity of the sacramental performance (and thus effected *ex opere operato*, that is, as discussed above, by the power of the Holy Spirit invisibly in the rite) and the other (often called the *fruitfulness* of the sacrament) on the dispositions of the participants in the sacrament, or in other words on their spiritual exercise by means of the rite. One of the advantages of the model constructed by the study of infant baptism above is its capacity to account for both kinds of efficacy, attributing both to the Holy Spirit. In this third section the fruitfulness of infant baptism will be addressed according to this model: what aspects of the ritual performance assist in the cultural formation of the infant and his or her

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appropriation of Christian identity; on the other hand, what aspects may hinder this identification for him or her or for the gathered assembly? The liturgical, practical, and catechetical implications of this, unfortunately, cannot be considered in this text.

Section 6.1: Symbol and practice

In the Sentences, Peter Lombard quotes the common adage that the sacraments *efficiunt quod figurant.*² This locution was introduced as a gloss on Augustine’s teaching on the sign character of sacraments. Thomas Aquinas took the signification of the sacramental rites very seriously, introducing sacraments first “in the category of sign”³ in his *Summa Theologiae* before examining them as instrumental causes.⁴ However, during the following centuries the importance of this adage was often overlooked, so that the link between the signification and causality of the sacraments was forced or forgotten altogether.

Karl Rahner reintroduced the connection with his commitment to a theological anthropology of spirituality. His essay “Theology of the Symbol” reconfigured the concept of symbol, rather than that of cause, in such a way that symbolism, properly understood, included a notion of causality. In this section Thomas’ and Rahner’s work on sacramental signification and efficacy will be compared to the pneumatological pole introduced in chapter 5.

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³ *ST* IIIa, 60, 1.

⁴ In *ST* IIIa, 62.
Thomas Aquinas begins his sacramental treatise in the ST by considering “sacramenta in communi” which tries to pull together the traditional accounts and understandings of the sacramental activity of God and the Church in one cohesive theoretical model. Thomas is thus bound (by the tradition) to connect the idea of signification (Augustine’s) with that of causality or grace in the sacraments (also Augustine’s). Interestingly, Thomas relies heavily on baptism in constructing his model. In fact, baptism seems to be the paradigmatic sacrament: when, in ST IIIa, 62, Thomas introduces the idea of sacramental causality, he chooses one quote to provide the traditional understanding of sacraments (here considered, as emphasized in ST IIIa, 60, in genere). “On the contrary, Augustine says (Tract. lxxx in Joan.) that the baptismal water ‘touches the body and cleanses the heart.’ But the heart is not cleansed save through grace. Therefore it causes grace: and for like reason so do the other sacraments of the Church.” In his reply, too, Thomas takes baptism as paradigmatic: “For it is evident that through the sacraments of the New Law man is incorporated with Christ: thus the Apostle says of Baptism (Gal. 3:27): ‘As many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ.’ And man is made a member of Christ through grace alone.”

Baptism, therefore, plays a crucial role in Thomas’s project to connect sacramental signification to sacramental causality. This is of course related to his conviction that the efficacy of the sacraments comes from their salvific purpose as “extensions” of the incarnation. Recall Chauvet’s interconnected critiques of traditional sacramental theology: the focus on causality, the reification of grace, the attribution of

5 See chapter 1.
6 See Thomas Aquinas, ST IIIa, 60-5.
7 ST IIIa, 62, 1 contra.
8 Ibid., respondeo.
sacrament to Christ to the detriment of the Spirit’s role, the focus on the hypostatic union rather than the Paschal mystery. When Thomas introduces his argument, on the distinction of different efficient causes, he refers back to the sign character of sacraments:

an instrumental cause, if manifest, can be called a sign of a hidden effect, for this reason, that it is not merely a cause but also in a measure an effect in so far as it is moved by the principal agent. And in this sense the sacraments of the New Law are both cause and signs. Hence, too, is it that, to use the common expression, “they effect what they signify.”

In other words, the sacraments are signs of salvation because they express God’s will to save humanity. This clarifies Thomas’s somewhat obscure general definition: “a sacrament properly so called is that which is the sign of some sacred thing pertaining to man; so that properly speaking a sacrament, as considered by us now, is defined as being the ‘sign of a holy thing so far as it makes men holy.’” Part of Thomas’s insistence on maintaining causality as part of the definition of sacraments stems from his cosmic vision: every created thing is, in a sense, a sign of God (in part because God is cause of all created things), but not every created thing is a sacrament.

The signifying function of the sacraments refers to salvation history, especially to the Passion of Christ. The three things signified by the sacraments are “the very cause of our sanctification, which is Christ’s passion; the form of our sanctification, which is grace and the virtues; and the ultimate end of our sanctification, which is eternal life.” All these things are Paschally centered, because the Passion of Christ was, according to Thomas, necessary for the salvation of humanity according to God’s will. Not that God

9 Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995), e.g. 467.
10 Ibid., 476.
11 Thomas Aquinas, *ST IIIa, 62, 1 ad 1.
12 *ST IIIa, 60, 2.
13 *ST IIIa, 60, 3.*
was compelled to enact the Passion, but it was perfectly suited to the needs of human beings and therefore it was “fitting” that God save humanity thus. On the other hand, human beings also needed to be connected to the Passion of Christ so that its causality (merit, satisfaction, redemption) could be transferred to them, or, equivalently, so that its sign quality could function for their conversion.

Thomas argues that the instrumental causality of a sacrament “belongs to it in respect of its proper form,” but this causal power is not divorced from its sign function. Thus baptism “produces effects upon the soul in the power of God,” but effects on the soul are recognized as cultural realities that operate in a properly human manner, including the symbolic realm, for “it is part of man’s nature to acquire knowledge of the intelligible from the sensible.” Thus even Thomas’s consideration of the validity of the sacraments, and thus of their “power” to convey ecclesial and spiritual effects, is based in cultural comprehension. The sacrament “touches the body through the sensible element, and the soul through faith in the words” and the words themselves are determined by the particularity of the language used in the rite and its use in ordinary life by native speakers. Thus “the words produce an effect according to the sense which they convey”, the signification of the sacraments and their causality are united both in their

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14 ST IIIa, 46, 1.
15 ST IIIa, 48, 6, ad 2.
16 "Christ’s Passion is the proper cause of the forgiveness of sins in three ways. First of all, by way of exciting our charity . . .” (ST IIIa, 49, 1).
17 ST IIIa, 62, 1 ad 2.
18 Ibid.
19 ST IIIa, 60, 4.
20 ST IIIa, 60, 6.
21 ST IIIa, 60, 7, ad 2 and ad 3.
22 ST IIIa, 60, 8.
origin (God’s will for the salvation of humanity) and in their outcome (union of the
ecclesial body with Christ).

Unfortunately, Thomas’s analysis asserts this union but does not explicitly
attribute it to the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, his pneumatology does facilitate a
rereading of the unity of sacramental signification and causality according to the Holy
Spirit.\textsuperscript{23} First, it is important to note that of course christology and pneumatology are not
mutually exclusive (in fact, they are mutually determinative). Thomas recognizes that
this is particularly true in the ecclesial realm when he discusses the grace of Christ as
head of the Church:

The head has a manifest pre-eminence over the other exterior members;
but the heart has a certain hidden influence. And hence the Holy Ghost is
likened to the heart, since He invisibly quickens and unifies the Church;
but Christ is likened to the Head in His visible nature in which man is set
over man.\textsuperscript{24}

In discussing Christ as head of the church, then, Thomas does not intend to eliminate the
Holy Spirit from the definition of the ecclesia. Similarly, in the case of the sacraments,
the christological principle implies a pneumatological pole, even though this is rarely
articulated in the treatise on sacraments:

As in the person of Christ the humanity causes our salvation by grace, the
Divine power being the principal agent, so likewise in the sacraments of
the New Law, which are derived from Christ, grace is instrumentally
caused by the sacraments, and \textit{principally by the power of the Holy
Ghost working in the sacraments}, according to Jn. 3:5: “Unless a man be
born again of water and the Holy Ghost he cannot enter into the kingdom
of God.”\textsuperscript{25}

In other words, though Thomas lamentably did not explicitly draw out a pneumatology
of the sacraments, the language of instrumental causality should not limit the efficacy of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} See e.g. Chauvet’s discussion in \textit{Symbol and Sacrament}, pp. 456-63.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Thomas Aquinas, \textit{ST} IIIa, 8, 1, ad 3.
\item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{ST} IaIIae, 112, 1, ad 2. Emphasis added.
\end{itemize}
sacrament to the humanity of Christ. Rather, when the sacraments symbolize and effect grace, they do so according to the whole working of the Trinity; the gift of grace is always appropriated to the Holy Spirit. In particular, in baptism, the paradigmatic sacrament, the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of efficacy.

Moreover, there is good reason in Thomas’s theology why the gifts of the Holy Spirit are, so to speak, subsumed into the human realm, either in the humanity of Christ or in that of those who receive the sacraments, for the Holy Spirit is “Gift,” and the Gift given comes to be indistinguishable from the spirit of those who receive it:

Before a gift is given, it belongs only to the giver; but when it is given, it is his to whom it is given. Therefore, because “Gift” does not import the actual giving, it cannot be called a gift of man, but the Gift of God giving. When, however, it has been given, then it is the spirit of man, or a gift bestowed on man.26

This is quite comparable to the result of the current study which suggests that the Holy Spirit’s mission often remains “hidden” because that mission requires that it be truly camouflaged by the human person’s own inner life. In fact, Thomas even comments explicitly on the spiritual quality of bodily exercise in the sacramental context: “exercise taken in the use of the sacraments is not merely bodily, but to a certain extent spiritual, viz. in its signification and in its causality.”27 It is the unicity of signification and causality which, according to the Summa, allows the physical practice and the spiritual transformation of the sacraments to be linked.

This partial defense is not meant to suggest that Thomas’s sacramental understanding of signification and causality is as pneumatologically driven as one might wish. In particular, the question of infant baptism was puzzling to him in the same way it

26 ST Ia, 38, 2, ad 3. Note that this throws doubt on Chauvet’s assertion (Symbol and Sacrament, 462) that “spiritual” in the ST’s treatise on sacraments does not refer to the Holy Spirit because it can be used interchangeably with “intelligible” (which here should perhaps be taken in the sense of “significative”).

27 Sed exercitatio per usum sacramentorum non est pure corporalis, sed quodammodo est spiritualis, scilicet per significationem et causalitatem (ST IIIa, 61, 1, ad 1).
is for modern proponents of a linguistic-symbolic model of sacrament. In his consideration of baptism, he asks (in the objection) why a sensible form should be addressed to an infant as the baptismal formula is, and his response is, “[t]he words which are uttered in the sacramental forms, are said not merely for the purpose of signification, but also for the purpose of efficiency, inasmuch as they derive efficacy from that Word, by Whom ‘all things were made.’”28 In other words, when pressed by the problem of infant baptism, Thomas retreats from pneumatology or signification as the means of efficacy into a “brute force” solution: the power of the creating Word. In the model proposed by this work, on the other hand, the infant state brings the work of the Holy Spirit into a special relief.

Rahner:

In his seminal article “The Theology of the Symbol,” Karl Rahner transposes the question of efficacy and signification from the strictly sacramental realm to the broader category of ontology. According to his exploration in this work, symbolic function is characteristic of all being. Moreover, Rahner develops an ontology of the symbol from the “peak” of all potential reality: the Trinity. His argument treats the self-communication of the Trinity as the central point of symbolic behavior, from which all other kinds of symbolic function should be defined.

The trinitarian foundation of symbolic ontology is implicit in the early part of the article, where the interplay of unity and multiplicity reveals it: “the ‘one’ develops, the plural stems from an original ‘one’, in a relationship of origin and consequence; the original unity, which also forms the unity which unites the plural, maintains itself while resolving itself and ‘dis-closing’ itself into a plurality in order to find itself precisely

28 ST IIIa, 66, 5, ad 3.
there.”\textsuperscript{29} It becomes explicit later,\textsuperscript{30} when an appeal to the trinitarian dynamic is made to explain the fundamental quality of symbol within Christian theology:

the Father is himself by the very fact that he opposes to himself the image which is of the same essence as himself, as the person who is other than himself; and so he possesses himself. But this means that the Logos is the ‘symbol’ of the Father, in the very sense which we have given the word: the inward symbol which remains distinct from what is symbolized, which is constituted by what is symbolized, where what is symbolized expresses itself and possesses itself.\textsuperscript{31}

Similarly, the incarnation becomes the extension of this principle “outward,” as it were, beyond the Godhead and into the realm of human apprehension, so that, in Rahner’s enduring principle, “[t]he humanity [of Jesus] is the self-disclosure of the Logos itself, so that when God, expressing himself, exteriorizes himself, that very thing appears which we call the humanity of the Logos.”\textsuperscript{32} Thus the depth of symbolic self-communication reaches out from the Trinity as its source and center (and thus, as Rahner explains in \textit{The Trinity}, the trinitarian self-communication “really arrives at” humanity in its concrete existence\textsuperscript{33}).

On the other hand, Rahner intends his theology to provide a real symbolic ontology, such that “each being -- in as much as it has and realizes being -- is itself primarily ‘symbolic’. It expresses itself and possesses itself by doing so. It gives itself away from itself into the ‘other’, and there finds itself . . . “\textsuperscript{34} Implicitly, then, he assumes that the ontological construction of reality, inasmuch as it is “symbolic reality,” is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} Rahner, “Symbol,” 227.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 235ff.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 236.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 239.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Rahner, \textit{The Trinity} (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 89.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Rahner, “Symbol,” 229-30.
\end{itemize}
permeated with the trinitarian dynamic. This is explicitly so with regard to the Word, of whom Rahner says,

the natural depth of the symbolic reality of all things -- which is of itself restricted to the world or has a merely natural transcendence towards God -- has now in ontological reality received an infinite extension by the fact that this reality has become also a determination of the Logos himself or of his milieu [i.e, in the Incarnation].

This must likewise be true of the Holy Spirit, by whom the Word became incarnate. In other words, if the Word as Image of the Father is the foundation for symbolic ontology, there must likewise be a pneumatic principle to account for the “being-there” accomplished by the symbolic function.

As in Thomas Aquinas, who functions as a model, this pneumatological principle remains hidden. By extending the principles discovered in chapter 5, however, it is possible to discern a kind of proto-pneumatology in this symbolic ontology. There is a resemblance in principle between the natural order of existence and the spiritual order, which is paralleled by use of the word “spirit” to name a realm of reality, an aspect of human personhood, and a Person of the Trinity. One can connect this “natural depth” of symbolism, this “merely natural transcendence towards God,” with the world-integrated aspect of the mission of the Holy Spirit. Is it because of the Holy Spirit’s constitution of the world (Ps 104:30) that “all things possess, even in their quality of symbol, an unfathomable depth”?

Examining the specific case in which symbolic function can be attributed to the human body provides more insight. Rahner posits that “the body is the symbol of the soul, in as much as it is formed as the self-realization of the soul, though it is not

35 Ibid., 239.
adequately this, and the soul renders itself present and makes its ‘appearance’ in the body which is distinct from it.”\textsuperscript{38} This means that every act of the human person is to be attributed to the soul: “in every human expression, mimetic, phonetic etc. in nature, the whole man is somehow present and expressing himself, though the expressive form is confined to start with to one portion of the body.”\textsuperscript{39} Moreover, the body itself in its spatio-temporal existence bears the same relationship to the soul as these expressions do to the human person, so that “each part [of the body] bears . . . within itself the symbolic force and function of the whole.”\textsuperscript{40} The existence of the body is the soul’s “taking form,” and similarly, the existence of the embodied rituals of the church is God’s grace “taking form”:

As God’s work of grace on man is accomplished (incarnates itself), it enters the spatio-temporal historicity of man as sacrament, and as it does so, it becomes active with regard to man, it constitutes itself . . . . [T]he sacrament is precisely ‘cause’ of grace, in so far as it is its ‘sign’ and that the grace -- seen as coming from God -- is the cause of the sign, bringing it about and so alone making itself present.\textsuperscript{41}

In other words, Rahner follows Thomas\textsuperscript{42} in making the cultural existence of sacraments the effect (and thus, according to Aristotelian logic, a sign) of God’s gracious will to save humanity. It is not hard, in this respect, to see the taking-of-form in the sacraments as the “embodiment” -- that is, the act of coming to be in the world -- of grace, or of the Holy Spirit. Thus, as the Holy Spirit is the principle of the incarnation, he is also the principle of sacramentality and -- perhaps -- the principle of spatio-temporal existence of all things. If so, then the symbolic reality, the union of the essence of the thing with its “determinate quantity” or “species” -- “which today we would call the given, concrete

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 247.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 248.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 249.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 242.
\textsuperscript{42} Rahner’s argument here is clearly inspired by ST IIIa, 62, 1, ad 1.
spatio-temporality, or spatio-temporal figure,”⁴³ is the work of the Holy Spirit, binding the substance of the thing to its “given, concrete spatio-temporality.”⁴⁴

There are three fissures for this idea in Rahner’s article, all related to the failures of symbolic function, or, perhaps more properly, derivative forms of it. First, Rahner hints at the human potential to degrade or empty the ontology of symbolism: “Every God-given reality, where it has not been degraded to a purely human tool and to merely utilitarian purposes, states much more than itself . . .”⁴⁵ This is problematic, in that an ontology of symbolism implies that a created thing only exists insofar as it functions symbolically (and vice versa); surely the utilitarian use of created things does not cause them to cease existing. Moreover, sacramental rites and things often seem to symbolize precisely in their function as utilitarian tools (thus: washing, eating, “the collection” of donations). Another problem is Rahner’s treatment of the derivative (ordinary) understanding of symbol, that is, “the concept of symbol where the symbol and the thing symbolized are only extrinsically ordained to one another.”⁴⁶ Again, no doubt this is a very shallow definition of symbol, but surely a full ontology of the symbol must account for this too? Yet if symbolic function is to be fully located in an “outpouring” of the thing itself into its spatio-temporal form, it is difficult to account for these “derivative” (or conventional) signs.⁴⁷ The final problem comes not in Rahner’s article, but emerges from

⁴⁴ This obviously carries potential implications for the theology of eucharistic presence, but those are not the concern here.
⁴⁶ Ibid., 251.
⁴⁷ Rahner offers a partial solution when he argues, “Where a free decision is to be proclaimed by the symbol and to be made in it, the juridical composition and the free establishment is precisely what is demanded” (ibid., 240), but although, for example, the written word Pax may signify the freedom of human persons to create language and signs to represent that language, it must, at some level, also signify the reality meant by the word Pax in order to be an effective sign -- and there is no way to account for that by the theology offered in this article. More broadly, this argument offers no way to account for conventional signs having different meanings.
the postmodern context of contemporary culture: what happens when symbols are surfaces that endlessly refer to one another, with no true “meaning” besides their own powers of association?48

All these questions are linked, and there is a possible answer in the light of the pneumatological interpretation here being proposed for Rahner’s symbolic ontology. Rahner suggests that the parts of the body, while all informed by the soul, differ in “their power of expression, their degree of belonging to the soul, their openness to the soul.”49 If one attributes the embodiment of essence in existence (the in-formation of a reality or the cause of symbolic function strictly speaking, according to Rahner) to the Holy Spirit, which is suggested by the results of the case study in chapters 4 and 5, one can conclude that not only do the parts of the body differ in their degree of symbolic function, but the existent beings in creation likewise participate in different ways in the symbolic functioning of reality. Some things are the natural symbols of their own essence, as the human body is of human being; others are linked only by the arbitrary (free) connection of spirit. Some of these latter are due to the ingenuity of human spirit, which is indebted to the Holy Spirit but acts with an autonomy in the order of creation -- these are cultural signs. Others are due directly to the trinitarian economy of salvation, and their signification and manifestation of a deeper reality are the work of the Holy Spirit. Most, though perhaps not all, of these latter also participate in the second category: they are human symbols which are informed by the Holy Spirit through the historical process of salvation so that they embody a real connection to that process. This is true not only of

the sacraments but of other particular signs -- especially the cross on which Jesus was crucified\textsuperscript{50} and the sacred scriptures.

If this gestures towards a pneumatically-determined ontology, it does no more than this. Many questions remain, of which the most important is, perhaps, what can be said of exceptionally powerful and effective symbolic forms which create cultural norms that are, apparently, directly opposed to the enactment of God’s salvation in history? In other words, how can the human spirit depart so far, in its ability to subcreate, from the Spirit of God? This question seems unanswerable, except in hope, which might pray that, in light of the great subversion of these forces in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, in the end, “all will be well.”\textsuperscript{51}

Section 6.2: Can the trinitarian Gift be given?

Throughout this work, the idea of grace and of the Holy Spirit as gift has been near. The problem comes, of course, from recent discussions of gift and its relation to freedom, economic exchange, obligation, and -- at the root of all -- power. Though the question is not necessarily political, a political framing of the question helps to bring out the theological implications: does God give the Gift in order to bring human beings into His (quite deliberately gendered here) control? in order to oblige them to act as He wills? If not (and surely God does not!), what are the implications of speaking in terms of obligation and exchange? What kind of gift can be given that does not bring the recipient into submission? And what does this mean for the Christian tradition, which has been very happy to speak in terms of obligation towards God? These questions will certainly not be answered here: this section is merely meant to acknowledge the claims of this

\textsuperscript{50} Cf. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{ST} IIIa, 25, 4.

\textsuperscript{51} Julian of Norwich, \textit{The Showings of Julian of Norwich}, edited by Denise Baker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995) 42-7 [ch. 30-3].
debate on the work done here and, perhaps, to point to some possibilities for further work in a sacramental phenomenological theology.

Perhaps it will be helpful to look one last time at the Summa Theologiae, for Thomas very directly considers the question of whether a divine Person can be said to be “given” as a “gift”:

The word “gift” imports an aptitude for being given. And what is given has an aptitude or relation both to the giver and to that to which it is given. For it would not be given by anyone, unless it was his to give; and it is given to someone to be his. Now a divine person is said to belong to another, either by origin, as the Son belongs to the Father; or as possessed by another. But we are said to possess what we can freely use or enjoy as we please: and in this way a divine person cannot be possessed, except by a rational creature united to God. Other creatures can be moved by a divine person, not, however, in such a way as to be able to enjoy the divine person, and to use the effect thereof. The rational creature does sometimes attain thereto; as when it is made partaker of the divine Word and of the Love proceeding, so as freely to know God truly and to love God rightly. Hence the rational creature alone can possess the divine person. Nevertheless in order that it may possess Him in this manner, its own power avails nothing: hence this must be given it from above; for that is said to be given to us which we have from another source. Thus a divine person can “be given,” and can be a “gift.”

There are several important points here. First of all, although Thomas goes on, in the next article, to emphasize the importance of gratuity for the definition of gift, in this first article he argues that a gift is such from its potential givenness, not its actually being given. Another important distinction is his concern with the relation of the gift to its receiver. He argues that the Holy Spirit can be possessed (i.e. can become a given Gift) by human beings only if they are united with God. In this case it is not so much that the human person “possesses” the Holy Spirit as that he or she is possessed by the Spirit and

52 Thomas Aquinas, ST Ia, 38, 1. Emphases added.

53 “[A] gift is properly an unreturnable giving, as Aristotle says . . . and it thus contains the idea of a gratuitous donation. Now, the reason of donation being gratuitous is love; since . . . we give something to anyone gratuitously forasmuch as we wish him well. So what we first give him is the love whereby we wish him well. Hence it is manifest that love has the nature of a first gift, through which all free gifts are given” (ST Ia, 38, 2).

54 “Gift is not so called from being actually given, but from its aptitude to be given” (ST Ia, 38, 1, ad 4).
thus participates in God's (trinitarian) possession of Godself. These scholastic considerations are helpful for a consideration of Derrida.

As John D. Caputo has argued at length, the musings of Jacques Derrida on the question of the gift should not be taken as hostile to the possibility of gift, or of infinite gift, or even of God. Rather, Derrida is committed to the encounter with the wholly Other (tout autre), or committed to the dream that this impossible encounter will come. Deconstruction is a preparation -- a theologian might even say an ascetic discipline -- for the advent of the impossible, because “[i]f we have not adequately prepared ourselves in advance for the shock of alterity, the alter, instead of shocking us, will just pass us by without a ripple.” The crucial function of deconstruction, for Derrida, is to expose the impossibility of the Gift, to save it from becoming merely another “gift” in the human economy of exchange, so that if the Gift is given (or, rather, chosen) it will be the gratuitous (and thus impossible) gift which is truly desirable. “What I am interested in is the experience of the desire for the impossible. That is, the impossible as the condition for desire. Desire is not perhaps the best word. I mean this quest in which we want to give, even when we realize, when we agree, if we agree, that the gift, that giving, is impossible, that it is a process of reappropriation and self-destruction.”

Thus Derrida takes as a starting point the gratuitous character of gift, which is what makes it the impossible which is the object of desire. Pure gift would be, he argues, entirely outside any economy of exchange:


56 Ibid., 22. Similarly Marion affirms a need for a kind of discipline: in order to describe the gift, “[w]e have to commit ourselves by achieving the gift by ourselves, in such a way that we become able to describe it” (“On the Gift: A Discussion Between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion,” God, the Gift, and Postmodernism, edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon [Bloomington: Indiana University, 1999], 64 [hereafter “On the Gift”]).

For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt. If the other gives me back or owes me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of a long-term deferral or differance.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus there is no common ground between gift (or Gift) and economy (or oikonomia?), even though any particular gift, when recognized as gift, cannot escape economy. As Caputo puts it:

\begin{quote}
The gift is an event . . . something we deeply desire, just because it escapes the closed circle of checks and balances, the calculus which accounts for everything . . . . The tighter the circle is drawn, the less there is of gift. For when a gift produces a debt of gratitude -- and when does it not? -- it puts the beneficiary in the debt of the benefactor, who thus, by giving, takes and so gains credit. Hence, there is no gift and what gifts there are, if there are any, turn to poison (Gift).\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

Full gratuity would exclude the recipient from any obligation or possibility of return-gift; thus by emerging as a phenomenon (becoming visible) the gift erases itself.\textsuperscript{60}

Despite manifest concerns about objectification of grace, Chauvet is willing to accept that the divine Gift cannot but enter into the economy of human exchange:\textsuperscript{61}

\begin{quote}
Every gift received obligates. This is true of any present: as soon as the offered object -- anything whose commercial or utilitarian value does not constitute its essence as a gift -- is received as a present, it obligates the recipient to the return-gift of an expression of gratitude.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

In other words, grace is economic, but it is an unusual economy (or “marvelous exchange”) because “it functions outside the order of value.”\textsuperscript{63} Chauvet wants to free

\textsuperscript{58} Derrida, \textit{Given Time I: Counterfeit Money} (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 12.
\textsuperscript{59} Caputo, \textit{Prayers and Tears}, 160.
\textsuperscript{60} See Robyn Horner, \textit{Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology} (New York: Fordham University, 2001) on the dialogue between Marion and Derrida on gift and givenness.
\textsuperscript{61} Most notably in Chauvet, \textit{Symbol and Sacrament}, 99-109, 266ff.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 267. This discussion immediately precedes the characterization of the symbolic exchange of the sacraments as word/conversation critiqued in chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 100.
(symbolic) grace from the problems of the gift not by eliminating it from the cycle of economic exchange (as Derrida thinks necessary) but by constructing it as interpersonal, concerned with subjectivity rather than “use” or “price.” As feminist commentators have noticed, however,\textsuperscript{64} enshrining mediation favors the mediators; enshrining language empowers those who have controlled language; similarly, enshrining subjectivity seems to privilege those of high status: if the “liberality” of symbolic exchange “is really quite interested,” the interest “has to do first with the desire to be recognized as a subject, not to lose face, not to fall from one’s social rank, and consequently to compete for prestige.”\textsuperscript{65} Despite their association with subjectivity rather than cost, these considerations do not seem to be sufficiently divorced from self-motivations to apply to the “marvelous exchange” of God’s oikonomia. Must it be said that the competition for prestige (symbolic power) invalidates the gratuity of gift? Similarly, must one conclude that God, by giving gift, competes with humanity for power? Furthermore, Chauvet’s construction does not appear to evade Derrida’s critique; is his grace gratuitous?

Chauvet affirms that grace is itself gratuitous, but its entry into the human realm does implicate human beings in an obligatory exchange -- gratitude or charity between the brothers and sisters.\textsuperscript{66} The entry of the “no-thing” beyond value, it seems, purifies human exchange, so that symbolic exchange, practiced as response to the always-initiating gratuitous giving of God, escapes the bounds of the circle because it (a) does not repay the giver but gives itself outwards towards the other, (b) represents a (divinely-inspired) gift of self for the other, and (c) as gift owes itself to the originary gift of grace.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64} See e.g. Susan Ross, Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology (New York: Continuum, 1998), 144f, 157, 167 for cogent feminist arguments against the universal validity of Chauvet’s constructive theology.

\textsuperscript{65} Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 102.

\textsuperscript{66} See discussion in chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{67} Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 108f, 266f.
The criticisms offered against this construction of gift in chapter 2 still apply here; in sum, human gifts even when (ostensibly) purified by contact with God’s original gift all too often fail to give. If there is a sacramental gift in the anthropological realm, it cannot be motivated by a competition for prestige.68

Jean-Luc Marion is differently motivated: less concerned with the question of gift as a phenomenon,69 he is interested in how “givenness” -- i.e. the apparent passivity of intuition -- is revealed by the range of experiences of gift.70 He turns to Derrida’s paradox in order to expose the way that gifts which escape the trap of the economy emerge as “given,” or rather, emerge as paradigmatic experiences of “givenness,” of how gift “gives itself.”71 Marion argues the essential characteristic of the givenness of a gift is not presence, but loss:

the gift, as soon as it has appeared in its presence, disappears as given, since the given according to givenness is precisely not installed in permanence -- gift given as lost and never repaid on the part of the giver, given as never possessed and only conceded by the givee. But in thus disappearing as permanently present, the gift is not lost as given; it loses only the way of being -- subsistence, exchange, economy -- that contradicts its possibility of giving itself as such. In losing presence, the gift does not lose itself; it loses what is not suited to it, returning to itself. Or rather, it does indeed lose itself, but in the sense that it disentangles itself from itself . . . 72

There are two striking resemblances to the results of the case study here. First is the identification of givenness with a kind of loss of the gift, an idea which corresponds well to the assembly’s paradox of offering up/handing over the child (a renunciation of

68 Derrida’s work might suggest that Chauvet’s problem here is his reliance on Heidegger, which inscribes him in the Western, privileged, Greek transcendentalist tradition: see Caputo, Prayers and Tears, 167.
69 See “On the Gift,” 56.
70 Ibid., 70-1.
71 Jean-Luc Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness (Stanford: Stanford University, 2002), 74-83.
72 Ibid., 79.
authority over that child) and simultaneously finding its own (true) self in the body of the infant. Parallel to this is the observations on the economy which it entails: that the body of Christ, handed over, gives over to humanity the impossibility which sin desired (the role of the Father), thereby allowing the Spirit to break into the distance of sin (replacing it with filial distance). In this sense, if in no other, Jesus did die “in place of” the other -- not by releasing mortals from their own death, but by allowing them to participate in his irreplaceability. Redemption is not taking away the death of human beings, but in giving them (a share in) God’s death. Second, and equally importantly, the presence of the gift means the disappearance of givenness, in an inversion of the way that Christ had to become absent for the Holy Spirit to become present. The Spirit (givenness?) broke into the world to make Christ visible (gift) and his visibility had to withdraw in order for the Spirit to come into presence (invisibly, imperceptibly, in the self).

This does not mean, however, that Marion is doing trinitarian theology under cover of philosophy. Rather, one of the exciting things about Marion’s work from a theological point of view is precisely that it leaves space, one might wish to say, for the great, irreducible hiddenness of the Holy Spirit noticed above, in which the Holy Spirit seems to appear, or to be recognized by faith, precisely in disappearing into the human (and perhaps cosmic) realm. When defending his work as nontheological, he puts this very clearly:

75 Cf. ibid., 41.
76 Though many have accused him of such; see Horner, Rethinking God as Gift for an extended consideration of the various arguments (pp. 102ff). At the moment, whether what Marion is doing can, strictly speaking, be called “phenomenology” is not my interest (see “On the Gift,” 64-6).
you can describe an phenomenon as given without asking any question about the giver. And in most of the cases, there is absolutely no giver at all. I am not interested in assigning a giver to a given phenomenon. I am interested in saying that our deepest and most genuine experience of the phenomenon does not deal with any object that we could master, produce, or constitute, no more than with any being . . . . When [phenomena] appear to us as given, of course, we have to receive them, but this does not imply that we should claim God as the cause of what we receive.  

Not only atheists, but Christians should not rush to assume that the givenness of phenomena amount to gifts from God, in part because of the deep ambivalence about phenomena mentioned in chapter 2, but also because the Holy Spirit can only come to be present in phenomena (cosmic, perhaps, as well as cultural phenomena mentioned here?) inasmuch as identification with the Spirit is deferred, put off from knowledge to faith to hope.

With this background in mind, consider the ritual reading of infant baptism offered above. In what way are the phenomena of the rite of infant baptism, considered as phenomena, “given”? Do they rise to the character of “gift”? They are given in at least two ways: they are available to the senses of the infant baptizand (they are “there,” il y a) and they are so in a way that precedes the infant’s ability to desire their being there. At the same time, they are not present to the infant; they are characterized by withdrawal, because the infant’s developmental state makes it impossible to maintain (an illusion of) mastery. One may say, on the one hand, that they are “offered” to the infant, but it is difficult to say who offers: the parents defer their initiative in the process to the church (by bringing the child to church, ritually by the formal asking that the child be baptized); the church, on the other hand, presses responsibility into the hands of the parents (is this the real purpose of the stress on the parents’ responsibilities, in the face

77 "On the Gift," 70.

78 In chapter 3, the term chosen was, instead, “opened.”

of the rite’s blatant rejection of their capability to perform what they are required to promise?). Moreover, both undergo the rite on the assumption that the one who offers is, ultimately, God -- and yet God, according to the rite, is really only “present” to and for the community in (or on the skin of) the body of the infant, who is (paradoxically) the receiver of the gift. Even the blessing of the water is transient, cannot be maintained in the face of time. In other words, the rite may maintain that the phenomena of its practice are “gifts,” precisely by that unending deferral of giving. The rite “opens” the phenomena of the Christian world by refusing to “own” these phenomena, but finding them in the body of the one who is not yet a part of that world.

The gift of discovery. Marion suggests that this kind of givenness is more appropriate to (reduced) gift than the paradoxical definition Derrida adopts. Givenness, according to the reduction, consists in the receiver’s free (never secure) recognition of the given as gift: “[t]he gift character . . . comes from the suitability of what arises, or more exactly, from my admission of their suitability, from their recognition as given to me without me.”\textsuperscript{80} Thus the real gift consists not only in the gift itself, but in “the decision to identify who gives,” which belongs to the receiver.\textsuperscript{81} Moreover, Marion’s reduction according to the gift itself reveals that in a symbolic enactment of gift, love, shared life, and the gift of self cannot be symbolized by the nearest and most perfect resembling entity (the body of the lover) because the objectification of that body invalidates the gift of self as gift. Rather, a conventional (and thus arbitrary) sign is chosen:

The wedding ring . . . attests that the Other has given himself, through the bracketing of the giver, to me in giving me this object, and reciprocally; but the two gifts (the ring and the Other) never coincide . . . . By contrast, the ring attests the gift \textit{that I became in receiving} (that of) the Other

\textsuperscript{80} Marion, \textit{Being Given}, 100.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 101.
precisely because in reality it is not equal to it, but offers the symbolic index of this gift, without common measure with what is nevertheless shown in it.\textsuperscript{82}

This excellent example demonstrates that the symbolic reduction of the gift occurs because the gift does not (yet) exist: the gift of self enacted in the marriage ceremony and in the life of commitment to the partner cannot be made available to the receiver because it is not present to the giver. The self offered in marriage never exists when it is given. It can, perhaps, come to exist only because it has already been given.

Derrida, Chauvet, and Marion thus agree that the only gift worth being given, so to speak, is the gift of self. But because self-giving uniquely and irreversibly changes (not to say risks) the one being given, the giver never possesses the self he or she offers. The gift comes to be acknowledged as gift by the receiver’s recognition, yet that recognition can never quite exist in history, but rather in the future: the self which the Other is (in the process of) making will be gift for me; the self which I am trying to become is hereby offered to you. Gift is, then, an interpretation of a process which always escapes certainty because it is never finalized.

Moreover, the giver of the gift of self actually receives the gift of self from the one to whom he or she offers it: this is because the giver cannot possess a self-as-gift unless he or she is recognized by the receiver as offering a self-gift.\textsuperscript{83} The receiver is not obligated to a return-gift precisely because his or her acceptance of the gift erases the giver and leaves in place a new identity: one able to give the gift. In other words, the giver offers without being able to make good on his or her offer; he or she obliges oneself to deliver on a promise without being able to do so; it depends on the receiver to allow the gift to come into being -- but if there is a coming-into-presence, the one who offered the gift no longer exists. The self who offered has been transformed into the self who was

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 105. First emphasis mine, second emphasis Marion’s.

\textsuperscript{83} Cf. ibid., 100.
accepted. This transformation may be manipulative, coercive, or abusive; in fact, perhaps there is never a human relationship fully free of the economic cycle. Nonetheless, the cycle is actually very fragile, and its very enactment tends to fracture it.

The giver thus offers a gift of self, but cannot be the “cause” of the givenness of that gift; the receiver makes the givenness of self possible, but likewise cannot claim mastery of the self he or she receives. The self, as in process, withdraws. Infants provide a good example of this. A newborn infant, neither knowingly nor willingly (yet not unwillingly) delivers himself or herself into the hands of his or her caregivers. He or she does not immediately have a sense of self to be offered; moreover, by the time the sense of self develops, the care which has gone into its formation is already being forgotten. Parents receive from the infant the capacity to offer themselves in service to the infant, and these services will never be remembered. The infant, as is much more commonly recognized, also receives his or her capacity to exist from his or her parents, and this too is never remembered.

There are thus several levels of approximation of the recognition of gift. There is a zero level: an acknowledged “cash exchange” in which both participants agree that the exchange itself discharges all debts and transfers goods efficiently. This is, strictly speaking, an economic exchange. The first level of recognition of gift, then, is ingratitude or enmity: these recognize the gift insofar as it is given to them, but refuse to be bound by any obligation to a return (perhaps because the gift does not meet the suitability criterion for givenness). Marion recognizes that this, in a sense, frees the giver and the gift; but it also seems to fail in givenness for the receiver. The gift does not reenter the cycle of exchange so as to erase its givenness, but it erases itself as marked for the givee: it does not “arrive in the nick of time, at the right moment, save me just when I need it.”

84 Marion analyzes these as a bracketing of the givee (here called receiver): ibid., 88-91.
85 Ibid., 100.
Many material gifts, though perhaps preserved from the cycle of exchange, are instead destined for the dustheap of waste. The second level of approximation is gratitude and a conscious attempt to “make good” the gift by some level of reciprocation (perhaps by “paying it forward” to another recipient or to an anonymous receiver). In this case the gift emerges as for the receiver, but remains partially indebted to the cycle of economic exchange. It is worth noting that both these levels of approximation are possible responses to a gift of self, and both invalidate the gift to at least some degree, as the self which is offered cannot fully emerge under conditions of ingratitude and hostility and the attempt to “make good” the gift cannot be sustained as a strategy for self-gift in the long term.

The final level of approximation, paradoxically, is superficially similar to the first: the receiver does not express gratitude for the gift or feel obligated to repay it. Instead, he or she is so caught up in becoming the gift -- i.e. participating in the Other who offers a gift of self -- that he or she has forgotten the gift and all obligation. Another way of thinking of this is in terms of discovery: originally, the receiver does not know that he or she owns any obligation towards the (anonymous, unknown, reduced) giver, but only because he or she has not received any (worthy) gift. This reduction is fragile, however, in that any especially suitable gift (and those less suitable scarcely deserve to be designated gift) may provoke recognition, which threatens the givenness of the gift with a renewal of the cycle of exchange (suspended by ingratitude). The only retreat is a progression from amnesia into amnesia: an amnesia which forgets the gift transferred by becoming the gift. But this amnesia is itself another phase of discovery: the discovery that obligation has, all along, been an illusion; obligations are entertained only to point

86 This remains true whether the gift is in itself unsuitable or is merely refused acknowledgement by the receiver.
87 Recall Marion’s slogan from Being Given: “what gives itself, shows itself.”
toward joy -- and joy is the participation in the thing, the discovery that the obligation was meant only to discover in the law, spirit, and in the spirit, freedom.

There is one point at which this presentation of the gift becomes truly helpful, and that is with respect to (sacramental) theologies for women, children, and other historically marginalized groups. These peoples have historically been “obliged” to many things which actively harmed them and their brothers and sisters, in order to enrich the already powerful. In the light of the discovery of the gift, it is clear that the only obligations are those which lead to liberation -- not to oppression -- and the only purpose of obligation is to authorize and motivate the practices which allow one to discover joy in the obligation itself -- life, abundantly. In this authentic mediations of the Gospel can, in theory, be distinguished from inauthentic ones.

Infancy again offers an example: an infant has truly forgotten or, better, has failed to remember any obligation towards his or her parents. A parent’s case is more complicated: he or she is knowingly obliged to offer a gift of self -- and is thus incapacitated. He or she is trapped in a consciousness of obligation unless something can break the cycle, producing an amnesia with respect to obligation. In a word, one must be released by losing oneself in the gift, in joy. The infant in his or her naivete does not offer himself or herself, but rather offers a new self to his or her parents, who can thus offer a gift of self only by losing themselves in this gift. In a sense, the gift emerges independent of both parent and infant, because it is the freedom to lose both obligation and reciprocity by participation in a reality which does not owe its existence to either of them. No doubt families often fail to give the self-gift to which they are obliged. But if a parent does, for a moment, manage to give a gift of self -- a gift of time, a moment of unconditional love -- he or she will have received the possibility of so doing from the one who receives the gift he or she offers. Yet this gift that the parent receives does not obligate him or her to offer a self-gift: he or she owned this obligation before receiving
the capacity; indeed before the child existed to be loved, because human beings must love -- not only in justice to the other, but in order to exist, in order to flourish.

At this point it becomes possible to do justice to an observation which emerged in chapters 4 and 5, that baptism depends on and has resonances with the relationship between infants and their parents. One part of the disappropriation of the rite is intended to provoke the first level of approximation in parents: parents (and assembly) recognize that the secret of the trinitarian gift of baptism is that the baptizer has no gift to offer. Instead, the baptizand offers (unwittingly) a gift of self that enables the baptismal community to become the community of the Trinity. This is not verifiable phenomenally, it seems (which is why the trinitarian analysis could not take place in chapter 5), but is “known” in faith. The second level of approximation, however, suggests that the infant and the other participants become capable of being the gift they have offered (to one another and to the Trinity). This (fruitfulness) is the ultimate end of the sacrament, and cannot be affirmed even in faith, but only in hope. 88

This turn to hope is necessary because the full release from the obligatory function of obligation, and into the full participation in the joy it is meant to camouflage, occurs only in death. For death is the one, verifiable, fully deferred gift, the one phenomenon which one fully becomes as one forgets the promise to have become it. 89 It is the gift one offers another -- in fact all others 90 -- but it is the same time the only gift which, received, contains an amnesia about its necessity. All other gifts which one attempts to give, or to receive, or to find oneself obliged to, reduce themselves at last to at least this one. 91

88 See Balthasar, Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”? (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).
89 Derrida, The Gift of Death, e.g. 40.
90 Marion, Being Given, section on inheritance.
Can death be given before the phenomenality of death obliges one to it? It is impossible to say. It is, however, a trinitarian gift. Returning to baptism, consider the obligation to self-gift which is associated with the baptismal vocation, Chauvet’s ethical obligation. Is it possible that one is obliged to this gift on account of baptism, as if baptism opened a new ethical realm to which one was not (already) obliged by human existence? With regard to the general obligation of self-gift in charity to the human other, this obligation is, surely, already binding on all humankind. With regard to the specific obligations of the Christian cult, i.e. worship, etc., the case is more obscure -- but the fact remains that if God exists for Christians to worship, they are obliged to worship not because they are Christians, but because God is God. The purpose for the cultic obligations of baptism is to authorize the construction of a self who cannot see any reason not to praise God, who praises God for the joy of praise itself.

Baptism, then, does not bestow the obligation to a return-gift. It cannot, because any obligation that can exist -- if any relationship can be so described -- between humanity and God exists independent of the baptismal rite. Baptism, then, offers a new identity (in the ritual process mode: i.e. a cultural world is projected around the baptizand and he or she is encouraged to effectively engage within it so as to “practice” its relevant skills) which allows human persons to fulfill the obligation that they have found imposed on themselves. This obligation, “discovered,” is the true gift, in that it opens the eyes to the possibility of freedom and joy. Ritual allows the experience of egolessness which is crucial to the discovery of this givenness.

If Spirit is the “givenness” of the trinitarian oikonomia, moreover, it is not surprising that it is continually disappearing into the visible mission of the Son on the

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92 God, of course, does not need human offering or sacrifice.

93 On egolessness and the gift, see Marion, Being Given, 77.

94 Recall Rahner’s concern not to find trinitarian vestiges in contemporary theologies (Trinity, 13-4).
one hand and into the cultural life of humanity on the other. What is more, it cannot be
lured back from either place: if no one moment of Christ’s life can be decisively isolated
as “the pneumatic pivot,” no more can any one particular liturgical act be exclusively
seen as pneumatic (as opposed to Christic, ecclesial, etc.). Finally, the only “space” that
can be identified with the Spirit, is, paradoxically, the body, because the body is the only
true visibility for a gift of self. Thus in infant baptism the church is radically confronted
by the paradox that always threatens human confidence: when Christians wish to find
the Body of Christ they must go through the Spirit, and the Spirit can be identified with
the Church only through discipline and hope. In infant baptism, then, the Church
entrusts itself to the body of the infant, hoping against hope to find itself the Body of
Christ (again) in the Spirit.

The phenomenology of givenness, and the recognition of gift in the trinitarian
sacramental dynamic, then, allows a rapprochement of the trinitarian theology of
Rahner and Balthasar. If “what gives itself shows itself,” the trinitarian infinite gift,
which embraces humanity in finitude and fallenness, is also the self-communication by
which the Persons express themselves outside themselves. If this gift and expression
never exhausts its own reality (and thus goes beyond the realm of phenomenology), it
never fails to enter into the world (even the cultural world). It does not so much
transcend the world as stretch and break it.

95 Marion, Being Given, e.g. 4.
96 Ibid., 115.
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