

Baptism in Eastern Christian Tradition:
Ecclesial Context, Faith Content

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It is a joy to be here at The Catholic University of America, academic home of so many friends. From the North American Orthodox - Catholic Theological Consultation these include Fr. Joe Komonchak, Fr. John Galvin, Fr. Sidney Griffith, Msgr. Paul McPartlan, Prof. Robin Darling Young; and (from the Canon Law faculty), Fr. John Faris and Fr. Fred McManus of blessed memory. Friends from other ecumenical venues include Fr. John Ford, Msgr. Kevin Irwin, and Prof. Michael Root, whom I cite several times in my lecture. My sincerest apologies to those whose names I may have forgotten to mention!

It is a joy to be here and a great honor to receive this year's Johannes Quasten Award. I did not know Fr. Quasten, but the volumes of his *Patrology* have followed me from move to move throughout my adult life. We associate his name with patristics, but also important to him throughout his long career was pastoral liturgy. For example, at the invitation of Pope John XXIII he served on the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Liturgy as it prepared for Vatican II. Another Quasten volume that has followed me through the years is his *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, which was originally written as his doctoral dissertation in Germany. Liturgy, for Fr. Quasten, was what made immediate and powerful the message contained in the ancient Christian texts that he studied.

I am thankful that my own introduction to liturgy and ecumenism occurred when it did and as it did, in those exciting years leading up to Vatican II. I grew up in a small town in Minnesota, about sixty miles from St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, where I first met Fr. Godfrey Diekmann and Fr. Kilian McDonnell. Over the years I have had the good fortune to meet other Catholic pioneers in pastoral liturgy: Mark Searle (at Notre Dame), who left us far too young; and Fr. Aidan Kavanagh (at St. Meinrad's Abbey and at Yale). Certainly I also must mention Fr. Robert Taft, renowned for his liturgical studies and his ecumenical engagement with the Orthodox. His comments about his own Catholic Church as well as about the Orthodox were often pungent, but still deeply pastoral. May his memory be eternal!

Before getting into my lecture, I would like to mention recent work of the North American Orthodox - Catholic Theological Consultation. For several years we heard papers on the role of the laity in the church and also on the importance of baptism for ecclesiology. We were working toward an agreed statement, but we had difficulty pinning down exactly what we wanted to say, how to hold our thoughts together. Fortunately at our meeting last October, we did come to agreement on both a text and a title: "The Vocation and Ministry of the People of God." This breakthrough, one might call it, was due in no small part to a felicitous suggestion made by Msgr. Paul McPartlan. Referencing Pope Francis and Yves Congar, he suggested that what we really were talking about was a "total ecclesiology,'...

namely, one that treats the whole communion of the Church” – a total ecclesiology rather than reduction of ecclesiology to hierarchology, as so often happens both in our churches and in dialogue between them. I hope that my presentation today will help contribute to the development of such an ecclesiology.

As my point of departure, I would like to call attention to some phrases from the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed as used in the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches. (Please don't worry! I don't plan speak about the *filioque*, the debate about whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, or from the Father *and from the Son*. Those interested in the subject may wish to read the 2003 agreed statement of our North American Orthodox - Catholic Theological Consultation.) "I believe - *pisteuo*, I have faith - in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ...." Statements follow about who Jesus Christ is and what he has done "for us and for our salvation." Thereafter we continue, "And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the remission of sins. I await the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come."

I would like to concentrate on these last affirmations, which speak of the Holy Spirit, the one church and the one baptism, with some reference also to the awaited resurrection. They are not in close conjunction simply because they could not be fitted in neatly elsewhere in the creed. They can be found in close conjunction in other early Christian creeds - for example, in what is probably the oldest, the Old Roman baptismal symbol or Apostles Creed. There is an intimate connection between these affirmations, and also between them and the word that introduces the whole creed, *pisteuo*: "I believe," "I have faith."

Faith, and Christian faith

Let us consider first what is meant by *faith*. It is commonplace to distinguish between an objective aspect of faith and a subjective aspect, between "that which is believed" and "that by which we believe," faith understood as certain improbable propositions that are objectively true and faith understood as assent to such propositions on the part of individuals who find them in some way meaningful. But however faith is understood, we often take for granted that faith is something characteristic of religious people. We say "so-and-so is a person of great faith," by which we mean that "so-and-so holds strong religious convictions," whatever these may be.

In fact, faith is not unique to religious people. In a stimulating article on "Faith and Sacraments in the Conversion Process," Mark Searle sketched the work that developmental psychologists have done on this subject.¹ He cites the work of

¹ "Faith and Sacraments in the Conversion Process," in *Conversion and the Catechumenate*, ed. Robert

James Fowler, among others, who describes faith as a "human universal." According to Fowler, faith designates "a way of leaning into life... a way of making sense of one's existence. It denotes a way of giving order and coherence to the force-field of life. It speaks of the investment of life-grounding trust and of life-orienting commitment."² The point behind these words can be expressed more simply. As Searle observes, "Thus understood, faith is the basis of every human life." No one lives without faith, no one lives without some way of "leaning into life." Even when this is not fully articulated, as Searle notes, "it underlies all we say and do and manifests itself in our habitual actions and reactions." It is "embodied in our life and lifestyle ... before we even begin to reflect on our life and lifestyle."³

There is nothing specifically religious about faith thus understood, much less specifically Christian. While it is hard to imagine anyone living completely without faith, it is very easy to imagine someone living without *Christian* faith. Who or what is it that gives meaning and direction to our life and receives our commitment? In antiquity there were many false gods. One of the most pervasive forms of idolatry was emperor-worship, behind which stood the idea that Roman maintenance of "law and order" was an ultimate good. Idolatry, of course, is still with us. In my younger days, when I was learning the creeds of consumerism, advertising told me that "Buick is something to believe in," and that "General Electric brings good things to life." Our way of "leaning into life" often is formed by such notions. Our gods become financial security or status or power or successful personal relationships. How does one move from faith in such gods to Christian faith? In antiquity, how did one move from the culture of death that was epitomized in the gladiatorial arena to Christian faith, with its horizon of hope ("I await the resurrection of the dead" – what mysterious yet joyous words!); to Christian faith, with its affirmation of the Holy Spirit as "giver of life"? How did one move from the worship of the emperor and his global empire to the confession of "one Lord, Jesus Christ." How did one move from the various dualistic cults that preached liberation of the inner self from this visible world of meaninglessness to belief in "one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible"? We have many of the same questions today. In a world that lives by conspicuous consumption, where aggressiveness and competition are highly prized characteristics, where the only alternative seems to be death through suicide or drugs, can we really believe in the lordship of someone who preached humility, poverty, concern for creation, and love for enemies?

The shape of baptism: Linear or circular?

For an answer to such questions, we have to consider the meaning of another word, baptism. Baptism has been described as a "concertina" word: Its definition

Duggan (New York: Paulist, 1984), pp. 64-84.

² "Perspectives on the Family from the Standpoint of Faith Development Theory," *Perkins Journal* (Fall 1979), p. 7, as quoted by Searle, p. 66.

³ Searle, p. 66.

expands and contracts like an accordion.⁴ Sometimes the word is used in a narrow sense to refer to a triple encounter with water accompanied by invocation of the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But it also has a broader meaning. It refers to the whole of Christian initiation. For eastern Christians, as I am sure you know, the "sacrament of baptism" (understood in the narrow sense) is followed immediately by the "sacrament of chrismation" and very quickly by reception of the "sacrament of the eucharist." For this reason we like to call attention to the fact that we have preserved the unitary character of Christian initiation. But our understanding of Christian initiation - that is, baptism in its wider sense - should not be limited to these three particularly conspicuous "sacraments." For early Christians, baptism was a process of conversion. It began with first enrollment as a catechumen if not even earlier. It extended through a period of instruction in Christian teachings and practice in Christian living. It included exorcism of demons and rejection of false gods. It involved a reorientation of life and values. This process reached a climactic moment in baptism in the narrow sense, when the those being baptized made the church's faith their own, when in response to questions posed to them they were able to say "I believe ...", and not just "some folks believe" or "Christians believe." This process continued as the newly baptized exchanged the kiss of peace with their brothers and sisters in Christ and joined them in eucharistic fellowship. But even there it did not stop. Deepening of Christian faith continued through post-baptismal mystagogy, and it was renewed in reception of the eucharist, in prayer, and in ascetical struggle, so that the whole life of the baptized reflected their faith - the church's faith - in God's saving power.

Yet even if we consider baptism in this wider sense, certain misconceptions may arise. We speak of "Christian initiation" and use terms like "process" to underscore the unitary and dynamic character of baptism, but we still tend to divide this process into distinct, discrete moments that proceed in a linear way and whose meaning can be analyzed at each successive point. While we eastern Christians do not separate these moments temporally, our popularizing presentations of sacramental theology often do separate them conceptually. For example, like western Christians considering confirmation, we may feel obliged to explain what makes chrismation a distinct sacrament. We may identify it as *the* pneumatic moment in Christian initiation. Perhaps influenced by Dom Gregory Dix's old study of *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* (1953), we may explain chrismation's relationship to what has preceded it along the following lines: Aquatic baptism is to oleaginous chrismation as the Christ event is to the Spirit event, as Pascha is to Pentecost, as dying to sin is to the bestowal of new life.⁵ What really

⁴ James Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (= Studies in Biblical Theology, second series, 15; London: SCM, 1970), p. 5.

⁵ Gregory Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* (London: 1953). One can see this approach in some present-day Orthodox popularizations: "If baptism is our personal participation in Easter - the death and resurrection of Christ, then chrismation is our personal participation in Pentecost - the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us." (Fr. Thomas Hopko, on the website of the Orthodox Church in America, drawing on Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* [St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974].)

counts for being fully initiated is the positive aspect, chrismation, the perfecting of baptism by reception of the Holy Spirit. Such an approach suggests that the baptismal process is linear, one-directional, a series of steps or stages through which initiates pass, leaving one behind as they advance to the next. While this approach recognizes that early stages prepare for the later stages, there is little sense that the later stages themselves recall, revisit, reinforce and develop what earlier has been received.

When describing the shape of baptism, therefore, rather than a linear approach I would argue for a circular approach – one more like the theological approach of St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Peter of Damascus, and other ascetical fathers of the Christian East, who liked to introduce one aspect of the subject under consideration, often in the form of a pithy maxim, and then, without developing it fully, move on to other aspects, only to return to the initial aspect at a later point, from a slightly different and often higher perspective, in an ascending spiral of contemplation.⁶

The Holy Spirit in Christian initiation: Present and active at every point

As those familiar with the history of liturgy already will have noted, the shape of Christian initiation in the much of the Christian East in antiquity was different from the one presupposed by the linear approach that I have just sketched. In some parts of the East as in the West, the sequence was as I have just described it: immersion in water, anointing along with hand imposition, and then reception of the eucharist. But in many parts of the East - Syria, Cappadocia, and for a time possibly even Constantinople - the sequence originally was different. Anointing *preceded* the immersion in water, and there was no post-baptismal anointing; the next major action was reception of the eucharist.⁷ This sequence may be unfamiliar to us and strike us as rather odd. It is, however, very ancient. Anticipations may be found already in Acts, where the baptism of Paul is *preceded* by imposition of hands by Ananias (Acts 9: 17 -19), the baptism of Cornelius and his household is *preceded* by the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10), the baptism of the three thousand (Acts 2) is *preceded* by the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit, and with the baptism of Queen Candace's eunuch, the entire initiative is the Spirit's (Acts 8). One can see this sequence elsewhere in the New Testament as well - in 1 John 5:7, for example, which speaks of "the Spirit, the water, and the blood" in that order.

This sequence is not just a liturgical curiosity. Behind it lie some important theological insights. What is the relationship of Son and Spirit? On the one hand, the Son promises to send the Comforter; he sends the Spirit into the world; and in

⁶ Though we know little about his life, St. Peter Damascene's writings occupy more space in the *Philokalia* than those of any other writer save St. Maximus the Confessor. His work, says St. Nikodemos the Haghiorite, is "a recapitulation of holy watchfulness... a circle within a circle, a concentrated *Philokalia* within a more extended *Philokalia*."

⁷ For a succinct presentation of these two "aboriginal patterns" of Christian initiation see Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo, 1978), pp. 40-54.

the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the reconciling work of the Son continues. But the Holy Spirit, "who spoke by the prophets," also foreruns the Son, indwells him, fashions him even in his mother's womb, and manifests him in the Jordan precisely as the Christ, the anointed one. In this perspective there is no disjunction between Son and Spirit or subordination of one to the other. Rather, their relationship is reciprocal. They are "God's two hands," to use homely phrase of St. Irenaeus.

This insight has important implications for Christian initiation. This is what St. Gregory of Nyssa has to say about the appropriateness of anointing:

The notion of anointing suggests in a mysterious way that there is no distance between the Son and the Spirit. In effect, just as between the surface of the body and the unction of oil neither reason nor sensation knows any intermediary, so also the contact of the Son with the Spirit. And likewise, for him who would come in contact with the Son through faith, it is necessary to have experience of contact with the chrism. No member, as it were, can be left naked of the Holy Spirit. This is why confession of the Lordship of the Son is made in the Spirit by those who receive him, the Spirit in every respect forerunning those who approach in faith.⁸

The Holy Spirit "who spoke by the prophets" is also the one who enables us to understand their message, who enables us to really hear the Word and be animated by the Word. The Holy Spirit enables us to call Jesus Lord, to make the baptismal "I believe" our own. As the passage from St. Gregory of Nyssa suggests, the Holy Spirit, symbolized in anointing, is the medium in which and through which we touch Christ and are refashioned to become his body, to become anointed ones, Christians, even as he is the anointed one, the Christ. At every moment, Christian initiation reveals this continuing action in and of the Holy Spirit. Eastern liturgies call attention to this in many ways, mainly by multiplying pneumatic references, which occur again and again in the rites of initiation and elsewhere: insufflations, hand-impositions, anointings of several sorts, *zeon* (hot water) added to the eucharistic cup, etc. As those familiar with Eastern Christian worship know, for us more is more. One should be cautious, therefore, about identifying chrismation as *the* sacrament of the Holy Spirit as though that were the extent of the Spirit's presence and action.

Baptism's ecclesial context: The approach of St. Cyprian

Baptism rightly understood has important implications for ecclesiology, for our understanding of the "one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church" that we confess

⁸ *On the Holy Spirit*, PG 45:1321A-B. For further on the relationship between Christ and the Spirit see, among others, Boris Bobrinskoy, "The Indwelling of the Spirit of Christ: 'Pneumatic Christology' in the Cappadocian Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28.1 (1984), and his later book *The Compassion of the Father* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003).

in the creed. As Michael Root observes, baptism is at once the sacrament of our unity *with* Christ and the sacrament of our unity *in* Christ.⁹

Recognition of this ecclesial dimension of baptism has been developed in several ways in the course of Christian history. Consider St. Cyprian, in the third century, as he addressed the problem of the schism of the Novatianists, who split with the Church Catholic over certain questions of penitential discipline. The Novatianists were outside the church, Cyprian insisted, deprived of the Holy Spirit and therefore incapable of giving the Holy Spirit in baptism. Therefore those "baptized" among them, if they should seek to enter the church, must be baptized with the church's baptism, with real baptism. Cyprian's position at this point is fully consistent with his ecclesiology, an ecclesiology dominated by the idea of unity. "It has been handed down to us that there is one God and one Christ and one hope and one faith and one Church and one baptism appointed only in that one Church."¹⁰ Outside that one church, not even the martyr's "baptism of public confession and blood ... avails anything to salvation because there is no salvation outside the Church."¹¹ But still more can be said about Cyprian's ecclesiology. Consider how frequently he uses words like "inside" and "outside." Consider also his favorite imagery: The church is a walled garden, a sealed fountain, the ark of Noah well tarred to keep out the defiling waters of this world. Its charismatic and institutional limits coincide exactly. And as Andre d'Halleux has tartly remarked, "The Church which Cyprian imagines here is not the people which God has called to salvation but the institution through which he dispenses it to them."¹² In the midst of the walled garden preside the bishops, who "water the thirsting people of God by divine permission," who "guard the boundaries of the life-giving fountains."¹³ For Cyprian, then, the church is above all an institution, albeit a divinely founded institution, whose unity depends not so much on a common faith and sacramental life as on the unity of the episcopate.

Was Cyprian's baptismal practice and sacramental theology that of the early church as a whole? Self-styled Orthodox traditionalists today often assert this. According to them, Cyprian's position was that of the early church and should be ours today. In principle, they argue, all those baptized "outside the church" are unbaptized; if they seek to enter the Orthodox Church, we should rebaptize them; and if we have not done so in the past or choose not to do so now, this is simply a matter of economy (*oikonomia*), a concession to pastoral considerations and not because we recognize anything of spiritual significance in their previous baptism.¹⁴

⁹ In *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, ed. Michael Root and Risto Saarinen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 16-17.

¹⁰ Epistle 69.12.

¹¹ Epistle 73.21.

¹² Andre d'Halleux, "Orthodoxie et catholicisme: Un seul bapteme?" *Revue Theologique de Louvain* 11 (1980), pp. 416-52 at 435

¹³ Epistle 73.11.

¹⁴ On the subject of "economy" in modern Orthodox thought see, among many others, the older study of F. J. Thomson, "Economy: An Examination of the Various Theories of Economy Held within the

But in fact early church sources give only very limited support to this argument.

Certainly it is possible to find patristic texts that sound "Cyprianic." Writers as diverse as Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria indicate widespread rejection of heretic baptism. But it is important to keep in mind what these writers meant by "heretic." They had in mind chiefly the gnostics, who clearly did not confess the same God and the same Christ as Christians do. These must indeed be baptized with the church's baptism. But what about those who are not heretics in this radical sense of the word, those who might rather be described as schismatics? What, for example, about Novatian? As Cyprian's catholic opponents argued at the time, he "holds the same law as the Catholic Church holds, baptizes with the same symbol with which we baptize, knows the same God the Father, the same Christ the Son, the same Holy Spirit...."¹⁵ Against such arguments, Cyprian advances a counter-argument: The Novatianists are heretics; they falsify the faith professed at baptism, because "when they say, 'Do you believe in the remission of sins and life everlasting through the Holy Church?' they lie"¹⁶ According to Cyprian, the Novatianists are heretics every bit as much as the gnostics are, because they falsify the faith, and therefore they must be received baptism. But note how, for Cyprian, the focus of faith has shifted from the doctrine of one God, one Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, to the doctrine of church. The Novatianists are heretics precisely because they are "outside" that universal episcopal confederation which for Cyprian is the one church.

Baptism's ecclesial context: Correctives from St. Basil and the Christian East

If we examine patristic texts and early church practice more closely, we get a very different picture. Distinctions regularly are drawn between the forms that separation from the church can take and therefore between modes of reception. It is enough here to cite St. Basil the Great, who indicates with approval that "the

Orthodox Church, with Special Reference to the Economical Recognition of Non-Orthodox Sacraments," *Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 16 (1965), pp. 368-420; Abp. Pierre L'Huillier, "L'economie dans la tradition de l'Eglise Orthodoxe," *Kanon: Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für das Recht der Ostkirchen* 6 (1983), pp. 19-38; and John H. Erickson, "Sacramental 'Economy' in Recent Roman Catholic Thought," *The Jurist* 48 (1988), pp. 653-67. For a recent book-length presentation of the traditionalist position on baptism, see Peter Heers, *The Ecclesiological Renovation of Vatican II: An Orthodox Examination of Rome's Ecumenical Theology Regarding Baptism and the Church* (Simpsonville SC: Uncut Mountain Press, 2015); and for critical assessment of this position, see especially recent articles and papers by Paul Ladouceur, including "Neo-Traditionalism in Contemporary Orthodoxy," conference of the Orthodox Theological Society in America, on "Crete 2016: Post-Conciliar Reflections," Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (Brookline MA), September 29 - October 1, 2016. Unfortunately mainstream Orthodox theologians and churchmen seldom overtly challenge the historical claims and theological assertions of the traditionalists. One wishes, for example, that the Patriarchate of Constantinople would officially rescind its 1755 decree on heretic baptism, which prescribed rebaptism for Latin converts. But so far this has not taken place.

¹⁵ Epistle 69.7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

ancients" distinguished between heresies, schisms, and illegal congregations: "heresies, those who are completely broken off and as regards the faith itself alienated; schisms, those at variance with one another for certain ecclesiastical reasons and questions that admit of a remedy; illegal congregations, assemblies brought into being by insubordinate presbyters or bishops, and by uninstructed laymen."¹⁷ As examples of heretics, St. Basil gives Montanists, Manicheans, and various gnostic groups whose understanding of God and of God's relation to creation was at variance with the Christian faith and who signaled this (Basil asserts) by using a falsified baptismal formula. Such baptisms the ancients quite properly rejected. On the other hand, Basil notes that the ancients accepted the baptism not only of those coming from illegal congregations but also of schismatics - and in Basil's understanding his category included many groups, such as the Novatianists, who differed with the church on some serious issues of teaching and discipline but nonetheless were "of the church" (to use St. Basil's expression). In time the term "heretic" did come to be applied to many of these groups, in part so that civil legislation against heretics could be enforced against them. But the practice of the church, as set forth in a long series of liturgical and canonical texts, continued to distinguish between heretics in the earlier sense of the word, who were to be received by baptism, and baptized persons who were to be received by anointing with chrism or simply by profession of faith.¹⁸

In Christian history, then, we see at least two ways in which the ecclesial implications of baptism have been worked out, two positions, the Cyprianic and the "Basilian." Of these, the Cyprianic has always had a certain appeal, and it certainly does today in some traditionalist Orthodox circles and also, with differences in articulation, in some Catholic integralist circles. Among other things, it satisfies a psychological need to define clearly the limits of the church. We like drawing lines, though where we draw them may shift a bit. We like to be able to say who "belongs to the church" and who does not. We like to know who is a "member" and who is not. We like the assurance of being part of an elite group, of knowing that we are "inside" the one true church, "outside" of which there is no salvation. The Cyprianic position also fits rather well with the linear approach to the interpretation of Christian initiation that I described earlier. It allows us to say that at one point someone is "outside" the church but at a subsequent point, "inside." However, this position fits less well with the approach to Christian initiation that we find in Eastern liturgy and with the understanding of the Holy Spirit that underlies Eastern liturgy and theology. Here the Basilian position corresponds better to the nature of the church itself. For the church is not just an institution, *instituted* by Christ long ago but thereafter on its own, free to do what it wishes, to make and break its own

¹⁷ In Epistle 188.1, his first "canonical epistle," which has since been included in the basic *corpus canonum* of the Orthodox Church.

¹⁸ For a survey of the canonical and historical dossier see John H. Erickson, "Divergencies in Pastoral Practice in the Reception of Converts," in *Orthodox Perspectives on Pastoral Praxis*, ed. Theodore Stylianopoulos (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1988), pp. 149-77; and for some of the present-day confusion in North America, see John H. Erickson, "Reception of Non-Orthodox into the Orthodox Church: Contemporary Practice," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 41 (1997), pp. 1-17.

rules until Christ comes again in glory. The church is also being *constituted* by the Holy Spirit at each new moment in history, in each new context, and therefore the church is obliged to heed the promptings of the Spirit, to discern where the Spirit is at work even now forming the body of Christ, even if this means looking outside the institutional limits of the church as we perceive them.

Baptism is at once initiation into the mystery of Christ and initiation into the church. And this clearly is but one initiation, one sacrament. But what is the relationship between these two aspects of baptism, between its faith content and its ecclesial context? The problem with the Cyprianic position is that it tends to forget that the church, like the person being baptized, is a "receiver." The church is a "dependent reality," with its fundamental marks or attributes - unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity - a gift of God, not a human achievement.¹⁹ Like the Christian, the church lives by grace through faith. It depends on Christ who shed his lifeblood for her, and on the Holy Spirit, the "giver of life." The problem with the Cyprianic position is that, by concentrating on the institutional context of baptism rather than on its faith content, it tends to substitute faith in the church for faith in God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

While maintaining a "high" ecclesiology, Cyprian and his self-appointed heirs in fact end up with an impoverished understanding of the church. Consider Cyprian's favored imagery for the church: walled garden, sealed fountain, ark of Noah.... These are static images, exclusive images, images suggesting no possibility of growth and development. His approach stands in contrast to the rich variety of imagery that we find in the Bible and patristic literature. Here we find a wide variety of direct images - the church as temple, vine, paradise, body - and an even greater variety of types of the church: Eve, Mary, but also Tamar, Rahab, Mary Magdalene, the Canaanite woman, Zacchaeus.... In other words, we find in the Bible and the church fathers not just images of achieved perfection, which might incline us to hold a triumphalist and exclusive view of the church, but also images of repentance, conversion, and striving. Such images should be kept in mind when we consider baptism. In baptism, the church is built up not just in the sense that a new member is added, that someone who was "outside" now is "inside." The church is built up because in the person being baptized, the church sees herself, sees her own conversion, sees her own paschal faith.

Baptism's faith content: Christ and Him crucified

In addition to what we mean by "church," we must consider what we mean by "the mystery of Christ." As I already have complained, a linear approach to the interpretation of Christian initiation runs the risk of suggesting that what happens at early stages is basically preparatory in nature, something that will be transcended when we pass from "outside" to "inside," to participation in the eucharistic assembly. I need not remind this audience of the centrality of the eucharist for

¹⁹ See once again Michael Root, *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, p. 18.

ecclesiological reflection both Catholic and Orthodox since the mid-twentieth century. As developed by Nicholas Afanasiev and Henri de Lubac and further refined by John Zizioulas and many others, eucharistic ecclesiology has dominated ecumenical discussion and has influenced church life in ways not always sufficiently appreciated. As well as many blessings, eucharistic ecclesiology has brought some temptations and dangers, both individual and corporate. We may arrive “inside” filled with false expectations, imagining that we have passed beyond the “not yet” of the preparatory stages to the “already” of the messianic banquet, free at last from the dark struggles we faced when we were “outside.” Or we may become excessively self-congratulatory, spiritual narcissists enamored of the heavenly beauty of our worship or the purity of our doctrine or the friendliness of our community coffee hour. Among the Orthodox at least, popular presentations of the eucharist so often speak of it as the banquet of the kingdom, the point at which history intersects with the *eschaton*, that we may lose sight of its proleptic nature. We forget that the eucharist is a foretaste of the kingdom, not its final realization. And then, this tendency towards a realized eschatology begins to creep from the eucharist into other aspects of church life. The church *qua* church comes to be seen as perfect in every respect. Its dependence on Christ, and him crucified, is forgotten. In the end we succumb to the delusions of triumphalism or slip into dull indifference, joylessly fulfilling religious obligations while leading lives notably untransformed by grace.

As I suggested earlier, a “circular” understanding of Christian initiation may offer a corrective at this point. What happens in the “early stages” of Christian initiation is not something that is then surpassed, at least not in this earthly life. The paschal content of baptism - understood in its full sense – must inform every aspect of our Christian life, including the eucharist. In his book *The Shape of Baptism*, Aidan Kavanagh put the matter very beautifully:

The whole economy of becoming a Christian, from conversion and catechesis through the eucharist, is the fundamental paradigm for remaining a Christian. The experience of baptism in all its paschal dimension, together with the vivid memory of it in the individual and the sustained anamnesis of it in every sacramental event enacted by the community at large, constitute not only the touchstone of Catholic orthodoxy but the starting point for all catechesis, pastoral endeavor, missionary effort, and liturgical celebration in the Church. The paschal mystery of Jesus Christ dying and rising still among his faithful ones at Easter in baptism is what gives the Church its radical cohesion and mission, putting it at the center of a world made new.²⁰

²⁰ *The Shape of Baptism*, pp. 160-63. Kavanagh continues: "To know Christ sacramentally only in terms of bread and wine is to know him only partially, in the dining room as host and guest.... Two main forces among others have traditionally balanced this tendency, and checked its spread. The first has been the attempt at keeping the notion of 'eucharist-as-meal' in tension with a notion of 'eucharist-as-sacrifice.' ... The second force that has traditionally balanced and checked the spread of an attenuated Eucharistic knowledge of Christ has been baptismal."

But let us be very clear about what the paschal content of our baptismal faith is. It is focused on those articles of the creed that I quickly skipped over at the beginning of my lecture, the articles that speak of Jesus Christ, who was "crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried," and who "on the third day rose according to the Scriptures." And while Jesus "on the third day rose," we who are baptized into him still "await the resurrection of the dead." In this life, even after baptism, even in the midst of the eucharistic feast, we still hear Christ's words, "If anyone would be my disciple, let him take up his cross daily, and follow me." The mystery of baptism, of union with Christ in his redeeming suffering and death, is a life-long reality. So are the demands that flow from it, the earnest striving that should be ours. As the late Byzantine theologian Nicholas Cabasilas observes, "The life in Christ originates in this life and arises from it. It is perfected, however, in the life to come, when we shall have reached that last day."²¹ My friends, we have not yet reached that last day.

²¹ *Life in Christ* 1.1, trans. C. J. de Catanzaro (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), p. 43.