

# Performing Christianity: Ritual and Identity in Pauline Baptism

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## *Introduction*

The notion of symbolic and social boundaries in biblical and early Christian studies, so prominent in the late 1970s, opened up for analysis the conceptual importance of relationality for the formation, maintenance, and development of Christian identity.<sup>1</sup> Relationality understands ‘identity’ as the product of fundamental intersubjective processes and the meanings constructed by social interaction among populations.<sup>2</sup> And yet, though the variegated nature of these processes engendered analyses of several substantive areas in biblical studies, such as exploring conceptions of power, beliefs, gender, ethnicity, ethics, and the various other strategies early Christians used to define themselves within their context in late antiquity, one means by which identity is formed has been largely marginalized or even ignored: the role of ritual.<sup>3</sup>

This analytical oversight is particularly perplexing given the *prima facie* complementarity between the constructive processes of identity and the generative significance of ritual. Commensurate with identity as the product of intersubjective relationality has been an analytical approach to ritual as *performance*. Performance theory is the scientific attempt to conceptualize ritual as a process by which acts and utterances are formalized into performatives, that is, kinds of concrete practice set apart from quotidian life and endowed with creative or generative qualities.<sup>4</sup> Performatives do not so much correspond to reality, as do the reporting nature of what Austin called “constatives,”<sup>5</sup> statements, or reports, the truthfulness of which being determined by the degree of correspondence to a reality objective and previous to the statements. Rather, performatives *generate* reality; they create a state of affairs the truthfulness of which is an inherent property of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); James Dunn’s 1983 essay which coined the phrase “the new perspective on Paul,” now published in James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1990), 183-206; David G. Horrell, “Social-Scientific Interpretation of the New Testament: Retrospect and Prospect,” in David G. Horrell (ed), *Social Scientific Interpretations of the New Testament*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 3-27.

<sup>2</sup> Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, 2002, 167-95; 169.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the otherwise exceptional study by Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Græco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), does not even have an entry for ‘ritual’ in its subject index. The massive work by Larry Hurtado on early Christian worship has been more focused on how early Christian *beliefs*, particularly those concerning a divine Christology, are most pointedly manifested in their devotional practices. See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Klause-Peter Köpping, *et al*, (eds), *Ritual and Identity: Performative Practices as Effective Transformations of Social Reality* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), 17.

<sup>5</sup> *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 3, *passim*.

utterance or act itself. Thus, to regard ritual as performance means to focus on the conditions and properties of this generativity.

Particularly evident in the work of Roy Rappaport (1926-1997),<sup>6</sup> one of the most important contributions of the theory of performance is the observation of how identity and ritual correlate. The cognitive environment that constitutes the structure or system of any culture is inseparable from the practicable media that give such cognitive structures their concrete enactment. The conjunction of cognitive structure and concrete practice takes place in ritualized performance. Ritualization thus reconstitutes time and space in accordance with the cognized environment of the community that reciprocally also has the effect of concretely ordering and structuring the cognized environment, without which understanding can only be fragmented and contradictory.<sup>7</sup> Identity in this sense, then, is a composite reciprocity of cognition and practice, ideal form and concrete content, conjoined in the ritualized performances that constitute and circumscribe the shared life-world of a community.

The purpose of this paper is to examine early Christian texts in light of this performative composite of structure and practice in order to advance our understanding of the generative processes behind the formation and maintenance of early Christian identity. As a case study, I shall limit myself to an examination of select baptismal texts in the Pauline epistles in light of the generative features of performance. This approach to early Christian baptism is markedly different from the dominant trends that interpret baptism texts either in light of a theological rather than ritual framework on the one hand, or in light of a rite of passage initiation framework on the other. I find that the former studies are often characterized by a condescending treatment toward ritualized activity, assigning to baptism an inherent artificiality in relation to spiritual realities experienced irrespective of ritualized behavior, an assignment indicative more of distinctly Protestant soteriological biases than an informed ritual analysis of the texts.<sup>8</sup> The latter, more recent trend of categorizing baptism as a rite of passage initiation, while not wrong in itself, has the potential to inadvertently reshape the baptism texts in accordance with the tripartite

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<sup>6</sup> Rappaport's formal analysis of ritual is most comprehensively presented in his posthumously published *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For an analysis of Rappaport's work in relation to an historical overview of ritual studies, see Ellen Messer and Michael Lambek, *Ecology and the Sacred: Engaging the Anthropology of Roy A. Rappaport* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 29-33.

<sup>7</sup> Roy A. Rappaport, "On Cognized Models," in *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979), 117.

<sup>8</sup> For example, even the most prominent exponent of the inextricable link between water and Spirit baptism, G.R. Beasley-Murray, nevertheless writes concerning the relationship between these two baptisms: "None of these spiritual *realities*, however, can be said to happen by the *mere* performance of appropriate symbolic actions..." ("Baptism," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993], 61, emphasis added). The two volumes edited by Stanley Porter and Anthony Cross overlook ritual theory altogether. See *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church*, ed. S. E. Porter and A.R. Cross, JSNTSup 171 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) and *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. by Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSS 234 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

structure of separation, transition, and incorporation, a sequential etic classification extrinsic to Paul's concerns.<sup>9</sup> My aim, rather, is to determine how performative features in the baptism rite transformed social reality by actualizing a cognized environment distinct to early Christian communities, thereby providing us a glimpse into the illocutionary processes by which a Christian identity was produced.

This aim requires a qualification. Christians were not only comprised of numerous and varied elements of population identities in the Mediterranean world, but they also lived in a variety of social-institutional contexts simultaneously. Christian identity, then, would have been an aggregate of multiple identities, with conceivably unbounded interactive potential that exceeds the limits of ritual generativity. In using the term, 'Christian identity', therefore, I have more in mind what definition theory refers to as monothetic (i.e. necessary) attributes, that is, delineated features that occur in every instance of the genus irrespective of any accompanying multivalence.<sup>10</sup> For my purposes, this limited sense entails identity as consisting of the cognitive frames of reference encoded in a distinctive ritualized praxis specific to early Christian faith-communities which Paul understood as irreducible to their identity in Christ.

### *Transformation*

Our first feature of performatives is perhaps the most obvious, that of *transformation*. For van Gennep, the transformative feature of ritual was integral to the sequential structure of ritual, particularly evident in initiation rituals, where the non-recurrent performance of the tripartite rite of passage structure of separation, transition, and incorporation effects a change in the initiate's status. Ritualized transformations involving boundary crossings are effected through the distinctive way in which ritual performances relate individual persons to superindividual structure, usually manifested in the individual participant's performative enactment of a mythological narrative important to the initiating group.<sup>11</sup> By performing acts and utterances specific to the community, the participant embodies the identifying verbal and conventional constituents of the community and is thus somatically transformed from *outsider* to *insider* by means of this individual/group reciprocity.

In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul's pronouncement of a benediction upon all those *in every place* (ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ) who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ

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<sup>9</sup> For a development of this point, see the critique of Wayne Meeks' treatment of baptism (in *The First Urban Christians*) in Richard E. DeMaris, *The New Testament in Its Ritual World* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 14-21. See, further, the studies by Anders Klostergaard Petersen, "Shedding New Light on Paul's Understanding of Baptism," *Studia Theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology*, Vol. 52, Issue 1, 1998, 3-28 and A. J.M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against Its Græco-Roman Background*, WUNT 44 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1987).

<sup>10</sup> J.A.M. Snoek, *Initiations: A Methodological Approach to the Application of Classification and Definition Theory in the Study of Rituals* (Pijnacker: Dutch Efficiency Bureau, 1987), vii-viii.

<sup>11</sup> See *Ritual and Identity, passim*; Mircea Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth: The Religious Meanings of Initiation and Human Culture*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958); M. Bloch, *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, 1992); J.A.M. Snoek, *Initiations*, 173.

(1:2) together with his recollection of participating in baptisms while he was in Corinth (1:14-16) are highly significant indicators for performance theory, since they suggest a disassociation of baptism from any locative specificity, a disassociation corroborated by Paul's acknowledgment of baptisms in Rome (Rom 6:3-4) and Galatia (Gal 3:26-28).<sup>12</sup> As Rappaport has noted, if a rite can now be performed anywhere and (presumably) anytime, then the efficacy of the rite can only be accounted for within the space generated by the intersubjective dynamics of the community, since disconnected from any specific site, there is nothing but the connotative import provided by the community to protect the baptism from dissipating into a mundane hygienic washing.<sup>13</sup> The suggestion of this reciprocal dynamic between individual and community is corroborated by three indicators in 1 Cor 1:12-16.

First, Paul alludes to a practice peculiar to early Christian communities, the invocation of Christ's name over the baptized, as per Paul's two-fold denial that the Corinthians were baptized in his name (1 Cor 1:13c, 15).<sup>14</sup> Against the backdrop of the linguistic identification between the divided Corinthian community in 1:12 with the divided Christ in 1:13a, baptism εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ identifies the participant with the key value, what Rappaport calls the 'ultimate sacred postulate',<sup>15</sup> of the community, bringing to bear upon the baptized the power of the exalted Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor 3:23; Gal 3:29), the very power that brought the Corinthian *ekklesia* into being (1 Cor 1:18, 25).

Secondly, in his call to social solidarity, Paul conceptually links baptism (1:13c) with the invocation of Christ's death for the Corinthians in 1:13b, which, developed within an apocalyptic two-age framework characteristic of early Judaism in vv. 18-31, provides the digital demarcation between the *ekklesia* and 'those who are perishing' (1:18), 'this age' (1:20), and 'the wisdom of the world' (1:21). By associating baptism with this social demarcation, baptism becomes the performed ritual medium that substantiates this cruciform distinction between the *ekklesia* and 'this age'. Hence, as Paul says in Rom 6:3-4, baptism is understood as that point in time when the participant 'died with Christ'.

The third indicator for this reciprocal dynamic between individual and community is the fact that early Christian baptisms involved at least *two* persons, the baptized and a

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<sup>12</sup> On the significance of place for synagogue worship and water purification in the Diaspora, see Anders Runesson, "Water and Worship: Ostia and the Ritual Bath in the Diaspora Synagogue," in Birger Olsson, *et al.*, (eds.) *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies*, ActaRom-40, 57 (Stockholm: Paul Åström, 2001), 115-29.

<sup>13</sup> *Ritual and Religion*, 209-15.

<sup>14</sup> Among the Hebrew Bible and the rest of Second Temple literature, the explicit combination of a ritualized washing with the recitation of a blessing is unique to the NT and Qumran. 4Q414 2-3 II 3-5 says that when one enters the water, he shall say in response, "Blessed are Y[ou ...] for from what comes out of your mouth [...] men of impurity [...]." Along with similarly recited water blessings in 4Q284 2 II 1-6 and 4Q414 13 1-10, these are the only Jewish blessings connected with water washings outside the NT texts. See Jonathan D. Lawrence, *Washing in Water: Trajectories of Ritual Bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 145.

<sup>15</sup> *Ritual and Religion*, 263ff.

baptizer (1:14-16), a feature unique to Christians among the various forms of ritual washing in Second Temple Judaism save for John the Baptist.<sup>16</sup> Since there is no baptizing oneself, early Christian identity was *received from another*, with baptisms thus exemplifying vividly the mutuality and dependence that Paul expects to characterize and unify the *ekklesia* (1:10; 12:25-27; 13:1-13).<sup>17</sup> The social nature of baptism is further exemplified by Paul's recounting of a household baptism in 1:16a, perhaps a ritualized expression of their corporate filial union as ἀδελφοί (1:1, 10, 11, 26; 2:1; etc) constituting them as τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ (1:2). The performance of the baptism rite can thus be seen as the faith-community in microcosm, the initial ritualized act constituting an extension and thus an anticipation of the customs and practices, the inner-life, shared by those 'called into fellowship with God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord' (1:9).<sup>18</sup>

Thus, 1 Cor 1:10-17 exemplifies a reciprocal dynamic of shared attributes between the individual person and intersubjective community. The communal identity, despite its troubles, provides the frames of reference by which the identity of the participant is ritually *informed* and thus *transformed* through baptism into a constituent of the community.

#### *Metaphoric Predication*

If our first feature of performance was transformation via the ritualized relation between persons and superindividual structure, a second feature of performance is the ritual media by which such a relation is effected. Van Gennepp originally recognized that rites of passage often involve iconicity or metaphor in identity construction, but it has been the subsequent work of James W. Fernandez that has examined in detail the logic behind the prominence of metaphor in ritualized identity formation. In the process he terms 'metaphoric predication', Fernandez observes that the acting and speaking of the ritual performers generate 'sign-images' which function to substantiate, to make palpable, abstract concepts which otherwise would have no reality. By substantiating sacred abstractions in their ritual performance, the inchoate participants are identified and thus predicated with those sacred abstractions, so that the participants "become the metaphor predicated upon them."<sup>19</sup> In other words, by identifying the performer with ritual media

<sup>16</sup> Joan Taylor *The Immerser: John the Baptist Within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 50.

<sup>17</sup> Absent any explicit information on qualification or authorization related to baptizers, we are left with little more than conjecture on these issues. It appears from our passage that, at the very least, baptism was associated with renowned figures in the *ekklesia* (Paul, Cephas, Apollo, etc.). See the discussion on 'party' leaders as baptizers in Stephen J. Chester, *Conversion at Corinth: Perspectives on Conversion in Paul's Theology and the Corinthian Church*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 293-4. The relationship between performative efficacy and authority/acceptance will be discussed below.

<sup>18</sup> See further DeMaris, *The New Testament*, 21-26, for a development of the ritual significance of baptism for ameliorating the social crises associated with kinship-breaking and -making in the Greco-Roman and Jewish world.

<sup>19</sup> "The Mission of Metaphor in Expressive Culture," *Current Anthropology* 15 (1974), 125.

that are themselves subsidiaries of a sacred focal point, s/he is transformed into a subsidiary of that sacred focal point and thus becomes inseparable from it.

A particularly apropos passage for the relationship between a tangible sign and intangible significatum is 1 Cor 12:13: “For in/by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> In the midst of his appropriation of the ‘body as society’ topos, Paul cites what form-critical considerations have identified as a baptismal formula explicating the purpose of the ritual: the establishment of a pneumatically unified community.<sup>21</sup> The question before us then is how the baptismal act functions as an appropriate ritual medium for both the predication of the Spirit on the inchoate participant and the generation of group solidarity.

Lacking any mention of water or ritual gesture by Paul, we are left inferring the relationship between Spirit and baptism based on what metaphoric predication refers to as their mimetic relationship, common attributes shared by the sign and the significatum (that which is signified). By this point in his epistle, Paul has established the presence of the Spirit in the midst of the *ekklesia* as that reality which now defines the Corinthians (1 Cor 2:10-14; 3:16; 6:11; 12:3, 7-13; 2 Cor 3:8). In so doing, Paul situates himself within the trajectory of a Jewish tapestry of prophetic-eschatological texts that associated the age to come with an outpouring of God’s Spirit (e.g. Joel 2:28-32; Isa 32:15-17; 44:3-5; *Testament of Levi* 18:7,9; *Testament of Judah* 24:1-3; etc.).<sup>22</sup> It is within this tradition that common attributes between water and Spirit intersect: as liquid (Isa 32:15; 44:3-4; Zech

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<sup>20</sup> The disputed issue over whether the preposition ἐν is to be translated ‘in’ or ‘by’ remains unresolved. Rather than the Spirit being the one who baptizes, the parallel passages in the NT suggest that “the element into which one is baptized is always communicated by the preposition “in” (ἐν), whether the element into which one is plunged is water or the Holy Spirit (see Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16)” (Thomas R. Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright [Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006], 71-2).

<sup>21</sup> On the rhetorical *topos*, see Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 92-4, 268 n. 15; Maude Gleason, “Mutilated Messengers: Body Language in Josephus,” in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 50-85. There are several reasons many scholars believe that Paul is here quoting a baptismal formula. Among the verbal and conceptual parallels between Gal 3:27-28, 1 Cor 12:13, and Col 3:10-11 are baptism into ‘Christ’ or ‘one body’, the listing of two or more pairs of opposites, and an appeal to unity. There are also parallels that stand out from their contexts. In 1 Cor 12:13, the terms ‘slave or free’ are not connected to the substance of Paul’s argument in chapters 12-14. Similarly, in Gal 3:28, the phrase ‘male and female’ (ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ) is not connected to any of Paul’s themes in the rest of Galatians. Moreover, there is a change from first person plural in Gal 3:25 to second person plural in verses 26-29, signifying a declaration to a group in contrast to the surrounding argument. See Pauline Nigh Hogan, “No Longer Male and Female”: *Interpreting Galatians 3:28 in Early Christianity*, 22-25; Wayne Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *History of Religions* 13 (1973), 165-208; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, Anchor Bible 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 373-83; Betz, *Galatians*, 181-5; Richard Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 155, 159; David G. Horrell, *The Social Ehtos of the Corinthian Correspondence*, 83-4; Stephen Chester, *Conversion*, 282-3; etc. The position represented by James D.G. Dunn, Ben Witherington, et al, that 1 Cor 12:13 and Gal 3:27 denote Spirit baptism and not the initiation ritual, remains a highly peripheral position among scholars.

12:10; Ezek 36:25-27; 39:29), as purification (Ps 51:1-2, 7, 10; 1QS IV 20-22; 1QH VIII 18-21), and as life (Jer 2:13; 17:13; Zech 14:8; CD A III 15-17). Situated within an overall apocalyptic epistolary concern in the Corinthian correspondences, the iconic significance of water and Spirit to Paul's theology can be found with reference to the new covenant allusions of Jer 31:31-34 through the pneumatic prism of Ez 36:25-27, where God promises, through the gift of his Spirit, to 'sprinkle clean water' upon his people. Paul's understanding of the Spirit currently experienced by the Corinthians is inextricably linked to his conviction that the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 has been fulfilled in Christ (1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:3, 6).<sup>23</sup> Thus, given the shared attributes, the mimesis, between water and Spirit provided by the Jewish imagination, we can see how baptism could have functioned to substantiate the arrival of the Spirit and palpably predicate such a pneumatic presence upon the inchoate identity of the participant.

But how did baptism contribute to social solidarity? The baptism formula, 'whether Jew or Greek, slave or free', was itself substantiated in the fact that both Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, males and females (though interestingly absent from the formula in 1 Cor 12:13), were incorporated into the *ekklesia* in the same way, through a sacred washing at the hands of another. The baptism rite is thus constituted by an action or series of actions that can transform states of social binaries into one of complementarity and unity.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, Gentiles *as Gentiles* and slaves *as slaves* become ritual media: their shared rite is a tangible manifestation of the dissolution of the social binaries of the dominant culture. Paul therefore explains that the Spirit is given "for the common good" (12:7), establishing an obligation toward mutuality (12:25-27), the essence of which is *agape* (13:1-13), further ritualized in the egalitarianism of the 'holy kiss' (φίλημα ἅγιος; Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26; 1 Pet 5:14).<sup>25</sup>

### *Time*

Entailed in the communal significance of ritual is a third feature of performance: the creation of a unique experience of time. Rappaport's analysis ascribes a high significance to the temporal dimensions of ritualization, particularly with regard to the ability ritualization has in imposing highly definite unambiguous experiences of time upon the ambiguities and vagueness inherent in quotidian life. To better understand this temporal phenomenon, we can conceive of time in terms of two distinct manifestations: analogic and digital. While analogic time is characterized by the ambiguity of the constancy of continuous infinitesimal gradations of time, such as the way we experience time at the personal and private level, digital time is characterized by discontinuous leaps of time commensurate with our experience of set definite times inherent in the public order.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought*, Society for New Testament Monograph Series 119 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 114.

<sup>23</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, "The 'Temple of The Spirit' As The Inaugural Fulfillment Of The New Covenant Within The Corinthian Correspondence," *Ex auditu* 12 (1996): 29-42, 30.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rappaport, *Ritual*, 268.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> "The Obvious Aspects," 184.

Rappaport notes that ritualized behavior, rooted in the public social order, is distinctly digital in its temporal significance and thus shapes our experience of time with highly pronounced definiteness. Ritual imposes on the complex of unobservable and fluctuating processes of conversion a single highly visible symbol of transfer, signaling unambiguously to the community that a person has not only reached a point at which s/he is prepared to leave the status of outsider and assume that of insider, but that s/he has in fact done so.

The parallel citation of 1 Cor 12:13 is Gal 3:26-28, where Paul situates baptism within an extended exposition of a redemptive historical narrative. In responding to the Galatians' 'turning away from the gospel', Paul rehearses the drama of the long-awaited messianic age, making clear that this time has now arrived through the death of Christ (2:15-21). The temporal significance of ritualization is thus highly intriguing with regard to how the baptism citation fits into this historical schema.

By grounding their participation in the new age in the baptismal formula (γὰρ, 3:27), Paul provides a highly visible unambiguous digital distinction between the 'present evil age' (constituted by mundane time; Gal 1:4) and 'new creation' (constituted by ritual time in the gathering of the *ekklesia*; 6:15). Thus, as the abstraction of being 'clothed with Christ' (Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε) was made both temporal and concrete at baptism, Paul is able to appeal to a *point in time* in the past (the aorist ἐβαπτίσθητε) as the foundation for their *current* status as 'sons of God' who have a new social identity (3:27). Their baptisms in the past mean in the present, 'There *is* neither Jew nor Greek ...' 'You *are* (ἐστε) one in Christ' (3:28). Vocalizations such as Αββα ὁ πατήρ and κύριος Ἰησοῦς (Gal 4:6; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3) indicate that they *now* know God (νῦν ... γνόντες θεόν; Gal 4:9; cf. 1 Thess 1:9), that the *time* "before faith came" when 'we *were* kept under the law' (νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα, Gal 3:23) has come to an end so that 'we *are* no longer (οὐκέτι ... ἐσμὲν)' under it (3:25), resulting in the adoption of sons and a new worldwide family of God made manifest at baptism (3:27-29). Hence, Paul can abstract the negated 'circumcised/uncircumcised' binary from the baptism formula and apply it explicitly to the dawning of the new creation (Gal 6:15).

The Galatians' baptism, therefore, was itself the visible spatio-temporal demonstration of the fulfillment of this eschatological drama for their lives. For the Gentiles to begin living as Jews would in fact render their own particular confirming disclosure of the messianic age obsolete and thus in effect return the world to its pre-messianic state and the national, social, and sexual binaries entailed therein (cf. 2:11-21; 3:28 with 1:4, 6-9; 6:12-15).

### *Ethical Obligation*

Our fourth and final feature of performance is the establishment of ethical obligation. Rappaport, following Austin, observes that the structure of ritual is "circular," in that the authority inherent in ritual and its generative constituents is ultimately contingent upon its acceptance by those presumably subject to it.<sup>27</sup> The operative principle in this reciprocity

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<sup>27</sup> Rappaport, *Ritual*, 430.

is ritual *embodiment*: by acting and uttering the constituent elements of a ritual, the cognized structures encoded in the ritual become indistinguishable from the performer, and because a performer cannot reject the cognized environment at the same time she or he performs it, the participant demonstrates an acceptance of that cognized structure encoded in the ritual performance.<sup>28</sup> This acceptance inherent in the ritualized body in turn entails the *obligation* to live in a manner consistent with the cognized environment encoded in the ritual order, and since the failure to meet one's obligations is universally stigmatized as immoral, the performance of ritual establishes unambiguously the participant's ethical identity.

The ethical significance of baptism is of course most pointedly explicated in Romans 6, and time does not allow justice to be done to the exegetical complexities of the passage. My interest, rather, is limited to the light performatives shed on the formal relationship between the indicative and imperative in Pauline ethics.<sup>29</sup>

Paul's flow of thought from Rom 6:2 to 6:3 entails that the 'death' experienced in baptism involves a transition from the initiate's original identification with the death brought about by the primeval Adam (Rom 5:12-19) into a new identification with the death of Christ, which is a transformative death to the reign or dominion of sin that leads to newness of life (cf. Rom 6:4-11).<sup>30</sup> The power of Christ currently experienced by the baptized is subsequently framed in terms of a triangular relationship between Christ's resurrection in the past, the church's resurrection in the future, and the believer's ethical life in the present. Paul supports his main proposition in v. 4 with v. 5 (γὰρ): the "glory of the Father" in v. 4 indicates that the power of God manifested in the resurrection of Christ has entered the present evil age through the believer by virtue of her or his union (σύμφυτοι) with Christ through baptism in anticipation of the glory to come in the future (τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα).<sup>31</sup> The believer *embodies* in the present the experience of Christ's resurrection in terms of the manifestation of God's power and is

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion and relevant literature on the indicative and imperative in Paul, see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 626-31.

<sup>30</sup> Most scholars describe Paul's use of ἀμαρτία in these verses as a power, dominion, or reign characteristic of the old cosmic order, picking up its significance from Romans 5. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 304; James D.G. Dunn *Romans 1-8* World Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 306; D.J. Moo, *Romans 1-8*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody), 374.; Alistair Campbell, "Dying with Christ: The Origin of a Metaphor?" in Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R.E.O. White*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 171 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 273-94. Sin enters the world through Adam and exercises its sway over all people (Rom 5:12-19), it "reigns" (ἐβασίλευσεν) in death (5:21), those outside Christ are "slaves" to sin (δουλεύειν; 6:6), but the baptized have been liberated from the enslavement of sin and are now enslaved to righteousness (6:16, 18, 20, 22). Thus, they must not let sin "reign" (βασιλευέτω) over them (6:12) since sin no longer "rules" over them (κυριεύσει; 6:14) (Schreiner, *Romans*, 304).

<sup>31</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 312. Cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 316 on σύμφυτοι as meaning simply 'united'.

thus enabled to walk in newness of life (which may have a counterpart in the crucifixion of the σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας of v. 6). Verse 5 therefore indicates that the glorious power of the resurrection-inaugurated eschaton is brought forward into time through baptism and substantiated, made *in res*, in the ethical life of the worshipping community, thereby obligating the baptized, by virtue of the acceptance inherent in their performative embodiment, to a life commensurate with such an ethical identity.<sup>32</sup>

But perhaps more important for our purposes is how the logic of ritual accounts for Paul's framing of this new life as a subjunctive or purposeful reality (cf.

περιπατήσωμεν, 6:4; καταργηθῆ, 6:6) rooted in the baptism indicative (ἠγέρθη Χριστός, 6:4; ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη, 6:6). While ritualized acceptance in principle obligates the participant to fidelity to the ritual cosmos s/he embodied, it cannot *fulfill* that entailed fidelity on the part of the performer. There is no guarantee that the obligation inherent in baptism will be honored by the initiate anymore than a marriage ceremony can guarantee that public vows will be honored by the newlywed. The primary function of ritual performance is not to control behavior, but rather to establish unambiguously the behavior that is expected of the participant. This highly visible definiteness distinctive to ritual means that whether or not participants follow through with such obligation is completely irrelevant to the fact that they have obligated themselves to do so.<sup>33</sup> If they do not, they have violated an obligation that they themselves have avowed.<sup>34</sup>

Baptism, therefore, provides for Paul the opportunity to foster what might be called an "eschatological consciousness" among his *ekklesiai*, in that as Pauline ethics are incessantly eschatological (rooted in the dawning of the new covenant and the gift of the Spirit), and that baptism establishes ethical obligation by virtue of acceptance inherent in performance, Paul appeals to baptism as that point in time when the overlapping of the ages became embodied by the initiates and obligated them to live in ethical accordance with the dawning of the new age (Rom 6:3-5; 1 Cor 6:11). As Rom 8:11 notes, because believers share in the very Spirit that is characteristic of Christ's resurrected body (cf. 1 Cor 6:14), the Christian body itself is in a state of transition by which it too will be resurrected (cf. Rom 6:5; 8:29; Phil 3:21; 1 Cor 15:49). As such, Christians are to glorify

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<sup>32</sup> Of this verse, Schreiner writes: "Here is a prime example of the already-not yet tension that permeates Paul's eschatology" (*Romans*, 313). There are a number of exegetical issues with this verse, most notably, Paul's eschatological reserve in failing to identify the Christian's resurrection as present reality. Most scholars reject the idea that ὁμοίωμα refers to baptism, instead appropriating τῷ ὁμοιώματι following σύμφυτοι as an associative dative indicating an analogous (i.e. not identical) death with Christ (cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 314-15; Dunn, *Romans*, 317-18; Moo, *Romans*, 385).

<sup>33</sup> Rappaport, *Ritual*, 123 (emphasis original).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the philosopher John Searle: "When one enters an institutional activity by invoking the rules of that institution one necessarily commits oneself in such and such ways, regardless of whether one approves or disapproves of the institutions. In the case of linguistic institutions like promising the serious utterance of words commits one in ways which are determined by the meaning of the words. In certain first person utterances the utterance is the undertaking of an obligation." *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 89.

God in their bodies (1 Cor 6:20), that is, live in the present in such a manner commensurate with the Christological identity of their future resurrected life that began with their initial palpable experience of the Spirit.

### *Conclusion*

This paper has explored the performative dimensions of ritual and identity in the Pauline epistles through a case study of early Christian baptism. Following the anthropological analysis of Roy Rappaport, we found that Christian identity emerged from the reciprocity between individual person and superindividual structure conjoined in ritual performance. Specifically, we found baptism into the *ekklesia* involved the ritualized predication upon the participant of a complex of social, eschatological, and ethical frames of reference that characterized a distinct Christian cognition. Our investigation examined how such frames of reference were encoded in Pauline baptism and identified somatically with the participant in ritualized performance, thus producing an identity and dispositions commensurate with such frames of reference. Baptisms into the *ekklesia*, as visibly definite rites, introduced pre-Christian identities, self-conceptions, and dependencies to the institutional support of the *ekklesia*, and by accepting the support of this new public order, pre-Christian attitudes were expected to transform in accordance with the intersubjective processes and meanings constructed by such social interaction. Our analysis of baptism has thus afforded us a historically fixed point for the emergence of the frames of reference constitutive of early Christian identity construction.