

LUKE 3:1–4:15 AND THE RITE OF PASSAGE IN
ANCIENT LITERATURE: LIMINALITY AND TRANSFORMATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Notre Dame
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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December 2007

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Abstract

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This study explores ways in which the anthropological model of rite of passage is useful for interpreting the portrayal of Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience in Luke 3:1–4:15, and for considering the place of this account in the narrative of Luke-Acts. Such a ritual approach to the passage is demonstrated to be particularly promising based on the prominent role that ritual is shown to play in the literary structure of Luke-Acts, where Luke 3:1–4:15 holds a pivotal place among a series of ritual accounts.

After considering recent interpretations of the place of the passage in the work of Luke-Acts, a review of the last one hundred years of rite of passage studies and their application to biblical text provides the groundwork for establishing the approach of the study. The chosen methodology takes as its starting point Victor Turner's still-insightful process for rite of passage analysis, modifying it in conversation with more recent critiques and developments. This process is applied first to three other ritual accounts from contemporary Greco-Roman narrative in order to provide a context for the study of the Lukan passage. These are: (1) Lucius' initiation into the mystery cult of Isis in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*; (2) Josephus' ritualized passage to adulthood in the *Vita*; and (3) Saul's transformation from persecutor to witness in chapter 9 of Luke-Acts itself.

Luke 3:1–4:15 is treated in two chapters, reflecting the two interlocked rituals there depicted. These two rituals, the baptism of the many in 3:1–21a and Jesus' singular anointing and wilderness testing in 3:21b–4:15, are connected by the shared baptism of Jesus and the people in 3:21. It is shown that these baptisms function as important beginnings in the narrative of Luke-Acts, and are used as a foundation for the portrayal of the course of Jesus' ministry and the subsequent ministry of the church.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	VI
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	X
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 LUKE 3:1–4:15 IN THE THEOLOGY OF LUKE-ACTS: RECENT INTERPRETATIONS	7
1.1 LUKE 3:1–4:15 IN RECENT INTERPRETATION.....	9
1.1.1 The Beginnings of Redaction Criticism	9
1.1.2 A Turning Point in Salvation History.....	11
1.1.3 The Holy Spirit as Focal Point	18
1.1.4 New Creation Typology and New Exodus Typology	21
1.1.5 Part of the Structural Parallels of Luke-Acts	23
1.1.6 The Beginning of Eschatological Fulfillment.....	27
1.1.7 The Anointing of the Messiah.....	28
1.1.8 A Declaration of Sonship.....	30
1.1.9 A Rite of Passage	34
1.2 A NEXT STEP IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF LUKE 3:1–4:15	37
CHAPTER TWO THE RITE OF PASSAGE IN CONTEMPORARY THEORY	42
2.1 DEVELOPMENT AND EXPLICATION OF RITE OF PASSAGE THEORY	43
2.1.1 The Rite of Passage from van Gennep to Turner	44
Arnold van Gennep.....	44
Victor Turner.....	49
2.1.2 Liminality.....	53
2.1.3 Communitas and Anti-Structure.....	57
2.1.4 Interpretation of Rites of Passage.....	61
The Ritual in Its Context.....	61
The Ritual Symbols	62
The Ritual System	67
The Ritual in Literature.....	68
2.2 RECENT CRITICISM AND REFINEMENT OF RITE OF PASSAGE THEORY	70
2.2.1 Defining Ritual.....	71

2.2.2 The Rite of Passage Process.....	78
2.2.3 The Function of Ritual.....	82
Excursus: The Fathers of Structuralism Talk Back	86
2.2.4 Ritual Interpretation and Turner’s Overarching Theory.....	91
2.3 USEFUL CONCEPTS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF LUKAN NARRATIVE	98
CHAPTER THREE BIBLICAL STUDIES APPLICATIONS OF RITE OF PASSAGE THEORY	106
3.1 MILESTONES IN USE AND METHODOLOGY	107
3.2 ISRAEL’S WILDERNESS SOJOURN	111
3.3 OTHER ASPECTS OF JEWISH TRADITION AND WRITINGS.....	117
3.4 THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JESUS.....	121
3.5 BAPTISM AND WILDERNESS	125
3.6 THE EARLIEST CHRISTIAN CHURCH	134
3.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE USE OF RITE OF PASSAGE THEORY IN BIBLICAL STUDIES	137
CHAPTER FOUR RITES OF PASSAGE IN THE NARRATIVE LITERATURE OF THE FIRST- AND SECOND-CENTURY GRECO-ROMAN WORLD	141
4.1 AN OVERVIEW OF RITES OF PASSAGE IN THE WORLD OF LUKE	150
4.1.1 Life Cycle Rites.....	150
4.1.2 Rites of Commissioning	155
4.1.3 Voluntary Religious and Philosophical Associations.....	158
4.2 INITIATION IN APULEIUS’ <i>METAMORPHOSES</i>	164
Apuleius and His <i>Metamorphoses</i>	165
4.2.1 The Ritual Field (Books 1.1–11.21)	166
4.2.2 Lucius’ Initiation into the Cult of Isis	170
A Formal Separation.....	170
The Deepest Point of Limen	171
Reincorporation	172
Apuleius’ Initiation as a Rite of Passage	172
Further Initiations	175
4.2.3 The Significance of Lucius’ Initiation in <i>Metamorphoses</i>	176
4.3 JOSEPHUS’ PASSAGE TO ADULTHOOD IN THE <i>VITA</i>	180
Josephus and His <i>Vita</i>	181
4.3.1 The Ritual Field (1–9)	184
4.3.2 The Transition from Paidei,a to Politei,a as a Rite of Passage	187
Separation and Liminality—First Movement	187
Separation and Liminality—Second Movement	191
Reincorporation	194
Vita 10–12 as a Rite of Passage	196
4.3.3 The Significance of Josephus’ Ritualizing in the <i>Vita</i>	199

4.4 LUKE-ACTS AND THE RITE OF PASSAGE.....	203
4.4.1 Attention to Ritual in the Gospel of Luke.....	204
4.4.2 Baptism as the Dominant Ritual in Acts.....	214
The Foundations of Christian Baptism Grounded in the	
Baptisms of Luke 3:1–4:15	216
The Institution of Christian Baptism in Acts 2	219
Other Instances of Baptism in Acts	222
4.4.3 Saul’s Call and Commissioning in Acts 9	225
The Ritual Field.....	226
Saul’s Transformation to Christ Follower	228
The Significance of Paul’s Acts 9 Transformation in Acts	234
Conclusions on Rite of Passage in Greco-Roman Literature.....	238
CHAPTER FIVE THE RITUAL OF THE MANY: JOHN’S BAPTISM IN	
LUKE 3:1–21A	240
5.1 THE RITUAL FIELD: THE NARRATIVE CONTEXT OF JOHN’S	
BAPTISM RITUAL.....	241
5.1.1 Spatial Dimensions of the Ritual Field.....	243
Socio-Political Space	243
Unsocialized Space.....	244
Transcendent Space	250
5.1.2 Temporal Dimensions of the Narrative Context	251
The Point in Time	251
The Characteristics of the Times.....	252
Narrative Time	254
5.1.3 Social Dimensions of the Narrative Context	255
The Structures of Dominance and Their Representatives	255
God, the True Ritual Director	257
John, the Ritual Elder	258
The People, Ritual Participants	260
5.2 THE OPERATIONS FIELD: THE RITUAL OF THE MANY	
(LUKE 3:2–21A)	263
5.2.1 Movement 1: The Word of God Comes upon John (3:2b).....	264
5.2.2 Movement 2: John Comes (3:3–6)	268
The Introductory Precip (3:3).....	268
The Isaiah Quote (3:4–6).....	273
5.2.3 Secondary Action: The Multitudes Come Out	
to be Baptized (3:7)	276
5.2.4 Movement 3: John Speaks (3:7b–18).....	278
John’s First Speech: The Coming Wrath (3:7–9).....	280
The Dialogue (3:10–14).....	282
John’s Second Speech: The Mightier One to Come (3:15–17)..	286
5.2.5 Narrator’s Aside: Herod Locks up John (3:19–20).....	293
5.2.6 Secondary Action: The People are Baptized (3:21a)	296

5.3 JOHN’S BAPTISM AS A RITE OF PASSAGE	297
5.4 PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN’S BAPTISM IN LUKE-ACTS.....	301
CHAPTER SIX THE RITE OF THE MIGHTIER ONE: JESUS’ BAPTISM AND ANOINTING IN LUKE 3:21B–4:15	305
6.1 THE RITUAL FIELD: THE NARRATIVE CONTEXT OF THE RITUAL.....	306
6.1.1 Additional Social Dimensions of the Narrative Context.....	306
Jesus	306
The Devil.....	309
6.2 THE OPERATIONS FIELD: THE RITE OF THE MIGHTIER ONE (LUKE 3:21–4:15)	310
6.2.1 Secondary Action: Jesus is Baptized (3:21a).....	310
6.2.2 Movement 1: Jesus is Anointed (3:21b–22)	315
“Heaven Opened” (Ἀνεωχθῆναι).....	315
“The Holy Spirit Descended” (Καταβῆναι).....	316
The Spirit’s Descent in Luke 4:18–19	319
The Spirit’s Descent in Acts 10:37–38.....	323
The Spirit’s Descent in Acts 4:26–27.....	324
The Spirit’s Descent in Light of Acts 7	327
The Descent of the Spirit in Luke-Acts	328
The Symbol of the Dove.....	330
“A Voice Came” (Γενέσθαι)	331
Scriptural Echoes in the Words of the Heavenly Voice	335
6.2.3 Narrator’s Aside: Jesus’ Age and Genealogy (3:23–38).....	339
6.2.4 Movement 2: Jesus is Led by the Spirit in the Desert (4:1–13)....	344
An Ordeal in the Desert	345
The Three Ultimate Temptations	352
6.2.5 Movement 3: Jesus Returns to Galilee (4:14–15)	354
6.2.6 Jesus’ Baptism and Anointing as a Rite of Passage	357
6.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS’ BAPTISM AND ANOINTING IN LUKE-ACTS	360
CONCLUSIONS.....	369
APPENDIX A: THE SYMBOL OF THE DOVE AND THE LUKAN AUDIENCE...375	
WORKS CITED	381

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1QM	<i>Milhamah</i> or <i>War Scroll</i>
1QS	<i>Serek Hayahad</i> or <i>Rule of the Congregation</i>
1QSa	<i>Rule of the Congregation</i> (Appendix a to 1QS)
11QMelch	<i>Melchizedek</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>Agricola</i> (Tactus)
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De Lege agrarian</i> (Cicero)
<i>Alc.</i>	<i>Alcibiades</i>
<i>Alex.</i>	<i>Alexander</i>
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>Ant. rom.</i>	<i>Antiquitates romanaep</i>
<i>Apoc. Ab.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i>
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologia</i> (<i>Pro se de magia</i>)
<i>Ars.</i>	<i>Ars poetica</i>
<i>Art.</i>	<i>Artaxerxes</i>
<i>Ath. pol.</i>	<i>Athēnain politeia</i>
<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Divus Augustus</i>
<i>Bapt.</i>	<i>De baptismo</i>
<i>b. Ketub.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud Ketubbot</i>
<i>Bapt.</i>	<i>De baptismo</i>
<i>Bar.</i>	<i>Baruch</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BDAG	Bauer, W., F.W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3d ed. Chicago, 1999.
<i>Bell. Cat.</i>	<i>Bellum catalinae</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>Brut.</i>	<i>Brutus</i> or <i>De claris oratoribus</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>C. Ap.</i>	<i>Contra Apionem</i>
<i>Cael.</i>	<i>Pro Caelio</i>
<i>Cal.</i>	<i>Gaius Caligula</i>
<i>Cat. Min.</i>	<i>Cato Minor</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>

<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De cherubim</i>
<i>Civ.</i>	<i>De civitate Dei</i>
ContBNT	Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
<i>Contempl.</i>	<i>De vita contemplativa</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>De Decalogue</i>
<i>Demetr.</i>	<i>Demetrius</i>
<i>Descr.</i>	<i>Graeciae description</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidari solet</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogus cum Tryphone</i>
<i>Diatr.</i>	<i>Diatribai (Dissertationes)</i>
<i>Elc.</i>	<i>Eclogae propheticae</i>
<i>Elc. Proph.</i>	<i>Eclogae propheticae</i>
<i>En.</i>	<i>Enoch</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>Exp.Luc.</i>	<i>Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam</i>
<i>Fam.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad familiares</i>
<i>Fast.</i>	<i>Fasti</i>
<i>Flam.</i>	<i>Titus Flamininus</i>
<i>Fr. Luc.</i>	<i>Fragmenta in Luca</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>Galb.</i>	<i>Galba</i>
<i>Geogr.</i>	<i>Geographica</i>
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>De gigantibus</i>
<i>Gnom.</i>	<i>Gnomologium</i>
<i>Hell.</i>	<i>Hellenica</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i>
<i>Hipp. maj.</i>	<i>Hippias major</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Hom. Luc.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Lucam</i>
<i>Hor</i>	<i>Horizons</i>
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>Hypoth.</i>	<i>Hypothetica</i>
<i>Is. Os.</i>	<i>De Iside et Osiride</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
<i>LS</i>	<i>Louvain Studies</i>

LSJ	Liddel, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones, A Greek-English Lexicon. 9th ed. With revised supplement. Oxford, 1996.
LXX	Septuagint
<i>Lyc.</i>	<i>Lycurgus</i>
<i>m. ʾAbot</i>	<i>Mishnah ʾAbot</i>
<i>m. ʿEd.</i>	<i>Mishnah ʿEduyyot</i>
<i>m. Meg.</i>	<i>Mishnah Megillah</i>
<i>m. Nid</i>	<i>Mishnah Niddah</i>
<i>m. Pesah.</i>	<i>Mishnah Pesahim</i>
<i>Mart. Ascen. Isa.</i>	<i>Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah</i>
<i>Midr.</i>	<i>Midrash I</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i>
<i>Men.</i>	<i>Menippus (Necyomantia)</i>
<i>Metam.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>Morb. sacr.</i>	<i>De morbo sacro</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Mosis</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
<i>Mut.</i>	<i>De mutatione nominum</i>
<i>Nat. d.</i>	<i>De natura deorum (Epidromē tōn kata tēn Hellēniken theologian paradedomenōn)</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Noct. att.</i>	<i>Noctes atticae</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>Num.</i>	<i>Numa</i>
<i>Numen</i>	<i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i>
<i>NV</i>	<i>Nova et veteran</i>
<i>Off.</i>	<i>De officiis</i>
<i>Pesiq. Rab.</i>	<i>Pesiqta Rabbati</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Caini</i>
<i>Prom.</i>	<i>Prometheus vinctus</i>
<i>Protr.</i>	<i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>Prov.</i>	<i>De providentia</i>
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
<i>Pyrrh.</i>	<i>Pyrrhus</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutions in Genesin</i>
<i>Quint. frat.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Quinctum fratrem</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>Resp.</i>	<i>Respublica</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
<i>SAC</i>	<i>Studies in Antiquity and Christianity</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini</i>
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satirae</i>
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
<i>SBT</i>	<i>Studies in Biblical Theology</i>

<i>Serm.</i>	<i>Sernones</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>Somnium (Vita Luciani)</i>
SP	Sacra pagina
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus</i>
ST	<i>Studia theologica</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata</i>
StuNeot	Studia neotestamentica
<i>Superst.</i>	<i>De superstitione</i>
<i>T. Mos.</i>	<i>Testament of Moses</i>
TBT	<i>The Bible Today</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.</i> Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976
<i>Thes.</i>	<i>Theseus</i>
<i>Tib.</i>	<i>Tiberius</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	<i>De virtutibus</i>
<i>Vit. Apoll.</i>	<i>Vita Apollonii</i>
<i>Vit. Caes.</i>	<i>Vita Caesaris</i>
<i>Vit. Pyth.</i>	<i>On the Pythagorean Way of Life</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no way to adequately thank those who helped to make the completion of this dissertation possible. The two who sacrificed most are my husband, John Reeve, who set aside his own agenda for several months to give me the chance to finish, and our daughter Madeleine who spent the first six years of her life watching Mommy write. Mary Rose D'Angelo went far beyond the call of duty as a dissertation director in reading, commenting, suggesting, and encouraging. The rest of the committee—Jerry Neyrey, Blake Leyerle, and Patrick Gaffney—have been unfailingly helpful and patient, as have my own colleagues in the New Testament Department at Andrews University who never once complained at the length of the process. I am also awed and humbled by my church friends, Thesba Johnston and Jan Foster, who brought weekly meals that kept us going during the most difficult months of the process, and by the many others who brought food, prayers, and encouragement just when I needed it most. Finally I would like to thank my graduate assistant, Evelyn Tollerton, for her peerless and committed formatting work and copy editing.

INTRODUCTION

The events surrounding the baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:1–4:15) hold a prominent place in the two-volume work of Luke-Acts. Although this account is preceded by the birth narratives (Luke 1:1–2:52), which introduce the person of Jesus and his work, it nevertheless opens with an impressive historiographical dating formula (3:1–2) of the sort widely used to mark the formal beginning of a narrative. And in contrast to Mark's account where John's imprisonment stands between Jesus' wilderness experience and the actual launching of his ministry (1:14; cf. Matt 4:12), in Luke Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience are directly connected with the opening of his ministry. Indeed in 3:23 the narrator speaks of the opening of his ministry while the heavenly voice still echoes at Jesus' baptism, and he is portrayed in 4:14–15 as beginning upon his public work in Galilee immediately following the devil's temptations.

The importance of the baptism events as the opening of Jesus' ministry is particular emphasized in the second volume of Luke-Acts where Jesus' followers begin upon their own ministry by looking to replacing Judas with a man who had been with them "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John" (Acts 1:22). Later both Peter and Paul are said to speak of John's baptism as a foundational beginning point for the gospel. Peter opens his speech to Cornelius and his household by reminding them of "the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed" (10:37). And Paul, in a speech set in a Pisidian Antioch synagogue, declares that God has

brought a Savior to Israel, “after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel” (13:23–24).

The descent of the Spirit at Jesus’ own baptism is given particular attention in Luke-Acts as forming an essential basis for his ministry. For immediately following the Spirit’s descent at his baptism (3:22) and the leading of the Spirit in the wilderness (4:1), Jesus is described as returning to Galilee and engaging in his ministry in the power of this newly received Spirit (4:14). The central importance of the Spirit’s descent is further underlined when, in his opening words in Nazareth, Jesus applies to himself the words of Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor . . . to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (4:18–19; cf. Isa 61:1–2; 58:6). In Acts this descent continues to be treated as foundational, for there Peter reminds Cornelius of this Jesus whom God anointed “with the Holy Spirit and with power” (10:37–38), and the believers pray to God about the Messiah “whom you anointed” (4:26–27).

Luke-Acts, then, adjusts and expands significantly upon the suggestion of the opening words of Mark, ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, which preface the account of John the baptizer and the baptism of Jesus. This emphasis on the baptism account in Luke 3:1–4:15 raises the question “Why?” “*What purpose do the baptism events, and the descent of the Spirit in particular, serve within the narrative of Luke-Acts?*” and “*Why does Luke-Acts continually point back to these events to mark the opening of Jesus’ ministry, rather than, say, the inaugural sermon, the arrest of John, or the calling of the first disciples?*”

In consideration of the ritual nature of the events, this dissertation will explore these questions using the anthropological model of rite of passage. This model seeks to

describe and understand the processes by which diverse societies and groups, both ancient and modern, mark the passage of individuals or groups from one state or position in life to another. For the baptism of John has often been identified as just such a ritual, and the discussion of the events of Jesus' baptism in Luke-Acts suggest a further unique but interlocked rite marking his passage from a private life in Nazareth in subjection to his parents (2:51) to a complex and divinely appointed public role (4:14–30). *It is the thesis of this dissertation that the methodology and insights of rite of passage theory can shed light on this account of Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience, illuminating a number of aspects of the narrative and of its place in the overall work of Luke-Acts.* The exploration of this model and the method and value of its application to Greco-Roman narrative texts, in particular the text of Luke 3:1–4:15, will make up the body of this work.

Directions and Delimitations

Chapter 1 will explore recent interpretations of the place of Luke 3:1–4:15 within the overall work of Luke-Acts. Chapter 2 will then go on to explore the contours, contributions and challenges of rite of passage theory, concluding with a consideration of the methodology to be used for its application to the Lukan narrative. A brief consideration of the previous applications of rite of passage theory within the field of biblical studies will then follow in chapter 3, noting those approaches that have been demonstrated to be useful and considering how their example and explication can inform the current study.

With chapter 4, attention shifts to the ancient Greco-Roman world in which Luke-Acts was written and received. Rather than tacitly assuming that authors and audiences in this world would have used the cognitive terms and categories of modern rite of passage

theory, the chapter begins with an overview of the broad variety of rites of passage they would have known and experienced and that provided the background drawn upon in the crafting and reception of the narrative ritual accounts explored in the rest of the chapter. To provide a literary context for reading Luke 3:1–4:15 as a ritual account, three accounts, selected from contemporary Greco-Roman narrative literature, will be examined briefly using the methodology developed in chapters 2 and 3: Lucius’ initiation into the cult of Isis in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*; Josephus’ ritualized transition to adulthood described in his *Vita*; and Luke-Acts’ own account of Saul’s transformation from persecutor to witness in Acts 9.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the core of the study—a careful exegesis of Luke 3:1–4:15 exploring ways in which the passage is laid out along ritual lines and considering how it functioned to further the purposes of the text. As Luke 3:1–4:15 actually deals with two distinctly different but interlocked rites of passage joined by the shared symbolic action of baptism, each of these rites will be considered in a separate chapter. The first ritual, portrayed in Luke 3:1–3:21a, is the baptism John proclaimed (3:3) which is presented in terms of a fleeing “from the wrath to come.” The second rite, portrayed in Luke 3:21b–4:15, is interpreted in Luke-Acts as centering upon a rite of anointing which takes place at the time of Jesus’ baptism.

Certain assumptions and delimitations are made to keep this cross-disciplinary study to a manageable size. While recognizing value in considering the historical development of a text, the Greco-Roman narratives studied here, including that of Luke-Acts, will be approached from the standpoint of literary criticism, limiting investigation to the text as it stands in its current form. At the same time it is recognized, based on Luke-Acts’ own testimony (1:3), that a number of sources were used—evidently

including Mark and a source or sources shared with Matthew. A consideration of the current shape of the text will necessarily include the presence of Luke 1 and 2, although the possibility exists that these chapters were not present in the first draft of the manuscript.

In consonance with most current Luke-Acts scholarship, the narrative unity of Luke-Acts will be assumed. The scope and content of this two-volume work suggests that its basic genre category is history, a broad designation which Gregory Sterling convincingly narrows by demonstrating its affinities with other contemporary works of apologetic historiography.¹ Such a genre fits well with the declared purpose in Luke 1:4, “that you might know the certainty of the things you have been told.” It also allows for a rather broad audience, for an apologetic may be directed towards insiders (Christians) or outsiders (Romans or Jews) as Sterling has pointed out.²

The projected audience implied within the narrative of Luke is represented by the most excellent Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1) who is Greek-speaking and therefore a subject or perhaps even a citizen of the Roman empire, an elite male with whom the audience is invited to identify.³ He is already knowledgeable about Christianity and likely a Christian himself (Luke 1:4), and thus already acquainted with the rite of baptism.⁴ The vast number of LXX allusions implies that a significant portion of the audience is well-

¹ Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).

² Sterling, *Historiography*, 378-86.

³ See Mary Rose D'Angelo on the exemplary nature of the representation of elite masculinity in Theophilus and Luke-Acts as a whole (“Imperial Masculinity and Christian Asceticism in the Pastorals, Hermas and Luke-Acts,” *New Testament Masculinities* [ed. J. C. Moore and J. C. Anderson; Atlanta: SBL, 2003], 265-96).

⁴ Sterling, *Historiography*, 375.

versed in the LXX, suggesting an audience that is at least partially Jewish-Christian, although the presence of explanations for non-Jews and the mixed nature of many of the churches as represented in Acts argues that Gentile-Christians, especially former God-fearers, also formed an important part of the audience.⁵

Beyond these basic assumptions other important background issues will be dealt with as they arise, beginning with the overview of recent interpretation of Luke 3:1–4:15 in the following chapter.

⁵ Sterling, *Historiography*, 374-78.

CHAPTER 1

LUKE 3:1–4:15 IN THE THEOLOGY OF LUKE-ACTS: RECENT INTERPRETATIONS

*Au commencement fut le Baptême. L'événement du Jourdain constitue l'acte premier de la vie publique de Jésus, son avènement comme Messie . . . Le quatre Évangiles accordent au Baptême du Christ une place que les théologiens, il faut bien le reconnaître, n'ont pas su lui trouver.*⁶

The interpretation of the events surrounding Jesus' baptism in Luke 3:1–4:15 has undergone a major shift in recent years. Historically, much of the attention has been directed toward issues of dogma such as the importance of the example his baptism set for his followers, or the question of why he, as the sinless one, would undergo John's baptism of repentance. With the advent of critical scholarship, the focus shifted to the attempt to unearth the sources, forms, and traditions behind the various aspects and versions of the baptism account, and to the question of what portion of these events can plausibly be regarded as historical. It has only been since the introduction of redaction criticism in the middle of the last century, and of the array of other diverse approaches which soon followed, that significant attention has been given to the Lukan text as an integral unit presenting its own purposeful shaping of the baptism tradition.

This development took its first major stride forward with the work of Henry Cadbury who, in 1927, pointed out the pivotal place of the baptism accounts in Luke, identifying the passage as marking both the beginning of the principal narrative and also the opening of Jesus' ministry within that narrative. In 1953 it then received its vital

⁶ Daniel Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain: Le Baptême de Jésus dans la tradition judéo-chrétienne* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1992), 11.

impetus from Hans Conzelmann who added that the baptism is also placed as a major transition point in salvation history marking the movement from the Period of Israel to the climactic Period of Jesus. In the years since, the place of this passage in the two-volume work of Luke and Acts has been interpreted as having numerous other focal points. For a number of commentators, the passage is all about the descent of the Holy Spirit, with some focusing on the Spirit's equipping of Jesus for ministry, and others emphasizing the descent as a designation of Jesus to a prophetic or, alternatively, a Messianic role. For other scholars the passage is of interest primarily for its play on the typologies of a new creation or a new Exodus, with Jesus thereby understood either as a second Adam or a second Moses. The passage has been seen as the opening of a great eschatological fulfillment, and also as part of an overarching structure paralleling events in Luke with those in Acts and thereby demonstrating a continuity between Jesus and his church. A more recent interpretation has centered upon the declaration of Jesus as son of God. It has been only rarely, beginning with a mention by Alfred Loisy in 1924, that significant attention has been given to the ritual nature of the interlocked set of baptisms portrayed in Luke 3:1–4:15, and the meaning of this factor explored.

This chapter will provide an overview of these various arguments regarding the place of Luke 3:1–4:15 in the work of Luke-Acts. This will be done in roughly chronological order, isolating the main motifs in scholarly thought, but placing them in the general order in which each came to the fore. This approach is taken in order to clearly highlight the major trends, although it is recognized at the same time that such an isolation is somewhat artificial due to the large amount of overlap in these motifs and in the breadth of views of the scholars who propounded them.

1.1 Luke 3:1–4:15 in Recent Interpretation

1.1.1 The Beginnings of Redaction Criticism

Henry J. Cadbury, who led the move beyond source and form criticism of Luke with his groundbreaking 1927 work, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, recognized the baptism as an important transition point in the Lukan narrative.⁷ Cadbury, who coined the term *Luke-Acts* as a representation of its fundamental unity, pointed out that at those points where the career of Jesus is summarized in Acts, the baptism of John and the death of Jesus on the cross are designated as “the two termini of that career” (Acts 10:37; 13:24).⁸ Although in general he eschewed attempts to analyze the work “into sections and sub-sections” as “not in accord with the manner of one who thinks and writes continuously,” Cadbury noted that the elaborate dating formula of Luke 3:1–2, when read in the context of the strongly similar dating formulae marking the “real starting-point” of Greco-Roman historical works, clearly marks the baptism as the place where the principal narrative of Luke begins.⁹ He also demonstrated that the dating formula found at the beginning of a number of Old Testament prophetic books and oracles, often accompanied by the phrase, “the word of the Lord came to . . . ,” further reinforces his assertion (Gen 15:1; 1 Sam 15:10; Isa 38:4; Jer 1:1–3; Ezek 1:1–3; Hag 1:1–3; Zech 1:1).

Because Cadbury focused primarily on the process involved in the literary production of Luke-Acts, he did not give sustained attention to the place of the baptism

⁷ Cadbury was among the first to consider the particular characteristics and interests of Luke as an author in his own right.

⁸ Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1961), 11, 26. In general, Cadbury saw the narration of the events of Jesus’ life as peripheral in early Christian thought.

⁹ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.284; *idem*, *Ant.* 20.257; Thucydides, 2.2.1; Cadbury, *Making of Luke-Acts*, 204–09. Cadbury considered the general plan of Luke-Acts to be obscure and claimed that “modern efforts to detect a subtle plan in the author’s arrangement are doubtless misplaced.” He suggested instead that “such plan as he had was largely suggested by the material available to him,” set down “in a simple and natural manner” (*Making of Luke-Acts*, 325). On page 349, Cadbury explains that this “obscurity of general plan” can be seen as normal when one compares “him with his own time rather than our own.”

events in this work.¹⁰ He did, however, note that Luke accepted John's traditional role as Christ's "predecessor and the real starting point of Christianity," suggesting that in Luke John, "is the end of the old order, quite as much as the beginning of the new."¹¹ Cadbury understood Luke's further development of John to function as "foil and contrast to Jesus," as exemplified by the subsidiary place he believed was given, in both volumes, to John's baptism in contrast to the "'second experience' mediated by apostles" and bringing the Holy Spirit.¹² The Spirit's coming upon Jesus in bodily form (Luke 3:22) he saw to be presented as "an inward grace for Jesus, and an outward sign for the spectators," in accordance with the Christian community's own experience of the Spirit's coming.¹³ Cadbury recognized Luke as the first to interpret this descent of the Spirit as God's literal anointing of Jesus "with the Holy Spirit and with power," noting how it further established the key theme that Jesus is indeed the real Messiah, the Anointed One.¹⁴

Approaching early Christianity from the viewpoint of the history of religions school as another mystery religion, Alfred Loisy, the forward-thinking French commentator, was among the first to read Luke's baptism and wilderness account in terms of a rite of initiation. Writing near the same time as Cadbury (1924) but from a very different angle, Loisy interpreted the baptism narrative as, in one sense, the foundation myth of Christian baptism borrowed from the initiatory rite of baptism by

¹⁰ Cadbury, *Making of Luke-Acts*, 1–11.

¹¹ Cadbury, *Making of Luke-Acts*, 47.

¹² Cadbury, *Making of Luke-Acts*, 47.

¹³ Cadbury, *Making of Luke-Acts*, 46–47.

¹⁴ Cadbury, *Making of Luke-Acts*, 276–77.

which John had initiated followers into his own sect.¹⁵ Secondly, Loisy also recognized Jesus' baptism in Luke as portraying the initiation of the Christ himself to his proper ministry, a ministry further identified by the genealogy which, in extending from Christ to Adam, united the earlier-mentioned idea of a Savior (2:10) with that of a universal salvation.¹⁶ As part of this initiation of Jesus to ministry, Loisy understood the sojourn in the desert as a messianic probationary period in which was demonstrated the victory of the luminous God over the power of darkness, a probation repeated and finalized when the devil returned at Gethsemane, before Jesus' death.¹⁷ The connection between the baptism and the temptations he saw to be emphasized in Luke's remark that, as Jesus entered the desert, he was "filled with the Spirit."¹⁸

1.1.2 A Turning Point in Salvation History

It was nearly thirty years after Cadbury and Loisy that Hans Conzelmann made the crucial step beyond the dominant methodology of source and form criticism with his pioneering redaction-critical work, *Die Mitte der Zeit* (1953), which set the terms of discussion for the next forty years of Lukan studies. Conzelmann understood the account of Luke 3:1–4:13 to occupy a fundamental place not only, like Cadbury, in the formal literary structure of Luke and Acts, but also in Luke's conceptual re-structuring of the whole history of salvation. Because Conzelmann believed Luke was primarily concerned with helping the church deal with the continuing delay of the parousia which Jesus and his earliest followers had thought to be imminent, he sought to extend their understanding of the history of God's work of salvation to include not two but three distinct stages—

¹⁵ Alfred Loisy, *L'Evangile Selon Luc* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1924), 142. The origin of Christianity in the mystery religions is a view shared by ritual studies pioneer Arnold van Gennep (Wouter W. Belier, "Arnold Van Gennep and the Rise of French Sociology of Religion," *Numen* 41 [1994]: 73–84).

¹⁶ Loisy, *L'Evangile Selon Luc*, 142, 144.

¹⁷ Loisy, *L'Evangile Selon Luc*, 148, 152.

¹⁸ Loisy, *L'Evangile Selon Luc*, 147.

The Period of Israel, The Period of Jesus (The Center of History), and The Period of the Church. In this schema, the events at the Jordan were seen to make up the pivotal point marking the transition from the Period of Israel to the Period of Jesus.¹⁹

Conzelmann gave particular attention to his argument that the passage clearly separates the ministry of the Baptist, which he saw as ending conclusively in 3:20 with the conclusion of the Period of Israel, from the Period of Jesus which began in 3:21. He found this division evidenced in Luke's removal of any statement regarding John baptizing Jesus or preaching the kingdom, as well as in Acts' emphasis on the inferiority of John's water baptism. He also saw it as directly stated in Jesus' words, "The law and the prophets were until John, since then the kingdom of God is preached" (Luke 16:16; cf. 7:28). Thus, he argued, Luke no longer saw John as the eschatological forerunner and sign of a new aeon's arrival portrayed in Mark, but more restrictively as the final act in the Period of Israel, preparing the way for Jesus and the new epoch while remaining firmly within the previous period as its terminal figure. At the same time, Luke's understanding that Christianity is the true continuation of Israel was demonstrated for Conzelmann in the account of the leaders' rejection of John's baptism (7:20; cf. 3:21).²⁰

Conzelmann found particular evidence for the separation between John and Jesus in Luke's use of geography.²¹ Arguing that the lack of geographical detail in this passage pointed toward the appropriateness of a symbolic interpretation of the events and places involved, he noted that Luke places Jesus' new-era ministry in the region of Galilee and later in Judea and Jerusalem while confining John to a vague border region around the Jordan which he spoke of as "the region of the Baptist, the region of the old era."²²

¹⁹ Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. Geoffrey Buswell; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 7–17, 22.

²⁰ Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 146–49, 57.

²¹ Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 22–27.

²² Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 20, 25–27.

According to Conzelmann, the desert where Jesus is tempted forms a temporal and geographical buffer which separated Jesus from the Jordan, a place Conzelmann claims he never again visited.²³

The Period of Jesus, which in Conzelmann's view formed the center of salvation history, was seen to begin with Jesus' baptism in 3:21 when Jesus' entered a time of transition to ministry that extended until the close of the desert temptations. Jesus' prayer at this time was the initial demonstration, for Conzelmann, of the important *topos* of prayer in the Lukan life of Jesus, marking the baptism as one of the three major turning points in his life, together with the Transfiguration and the Agony in the Garden, each of which depict Jesus engaged in prayer before encountering a heavenly revelation.²⁴ Importantly, then, for Conzelmann, the baptismal rite of passage marked a point of transition on two levels, within Luke's presentation of the life of Jesus, and within the history of salvation.

Conzelmann also notes that, following the baptism, Luke described Jesus as receiving the Holy Spirit "in bodily form." As a result, he acquired the power to vanquish the devil and to take over his position as master over the evil spirits.²⁵ (Like Loisy and others, Conzelmann believed that the devil then departed from Jesus until Gethsemane. He thus spoke of Jesus' ministry as a "period free from Satan . . . an epoch of a special kind in the centre of the whole course of redemptive history."²⁶) Jesus is the only one

²³ Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 25–27. According to Conzelmann, Luke mistakenly saw the Jordan as on the border of Galilee and Judea. He explained Luke's omission of the mountain in 4:5 based on its stylized quality in Luke as "the place of prayer, the scene of secret revelations, of communication with the unseen world. No temptation can take place on it nor any public preaching" (*The Theology of St. Luke*, 29).

²⁴ Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 180.

²⁵ There is no suggestion in Luke that Jesus is "under" or "subordinate to" the Spirit (Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 180–83).

²⁶ Cf. Augustine, *Serm.* 284.5; Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 28; cf. 170, 188. M. D. Goulder, along with many others, disagreed, arguing that Luke, more than the other gospels, regarded Jesus' entire ministry as a time of temptations (cf. Luke 2:28) (*Type and History in Acts* [London: S.P.C.K., 1964] 142–43).

during this Period to receive the Spirit, in contrast to Zechariah, Mary, and others who were directed by the Spirit at the end of the Period of Israel, and to the disciples upon whom Jesus would bestow the Spirit at the beginning of the Period of the Church after Jesus' ascension (Luke 24:49). For Conzelmann, who considered Luke 1 and 2 a later accretion, it was at the baptism that God is portrayed as both 'anointing' and conferring upon him Sonship.²⁷ Conzelmann's work was extremely influential, especially in regard to the periods of salvation history. Most later work on Luke either relied on or reacted against his assertions.

In the following year, Conzelmann's attention to salvation history in Luke was echoed by his countryman Eduard Lohse in a brief article entitled "Lukas als Theologe der Heilsgeschichte" (1954).²⁸ Opinion is mixed as to whether Lohse wrote independently of Conzelmann. Whatever the case, Lohse, too, spoke of John's baptism as a turning point in salvation-history, arguing that it was at this point that the time of the old covenant was brought to an end. Like Conzelmann, Lohse based this largely on the argument that, in contrast with Mark, Luke concludes his account of John—the last of the old covenant prophets—before going on to describe the baptism of Jesus. Lohse, however, particularly stressed that what follows, beginning with the appearance of Jesus for his mission after being filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, was an Era of Fulfillment of old covenant promises.²⁹ Further, Lohse saw Luke's careful dating of John's appearance in 3:1–2 as stressing the actual historical nature of the baptism and

²⁷ Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 174.

²⁸ François Bovon argues, contra Wilckens and Marshall, that Lohse must have known at least Conzelmann's initial explorations on the topic (Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-Five Years of Research (1950–2005)* [Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006], 29; Ulrich Wilckens, "Interpreting Luke-Acts in a Period of Existentialist Theology," in *Studies in Luke-Acts* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966], 66; I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian & Theologian* [3d ed.; New Testament Profiles; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998]).

²⁹ Eduard Lohse, "Lukas als Theologe der Heilsgeschichte," *EvT* 14 (1954): 266.

subsequent events in the life of Jesus.³⁰ *In diesen Erfüllungen*, Lohse concluded, *hat Gott seine Zusagen eingelöst und schenkt damit den Glaubenden die Gewißheit, daß er den Gang der Heilsgeschichte mit sicherer Hand bis an das verheißene Ende lenken wird.*³¹

Helmut Flender, too, looked at the baptism and wilderness account in relation to salvation history, but asserted in his complex treatise, *St Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History* (English title, 1967), that Conzelmann lacked “a clear grasp of the real presuppositions of Luke’s thought.”³² What Flender saw as fundamental in Luke was an underlying distinction between God’s salvation and human history. This distinction he believed to be portrayed in the narrative by a dialectical structuring of the earthly and heavenly modes of Christ’s existence through various parallelisms which prevented “his kerygmatic offer of salvation in Christ as a present reality from being merged into history and thus becoming a purely human word.”³³ The parallelism of the baptism and genealogy, thus, portrays the voice from heaven (at center stage in 3:21–22) declaring Jesus to be Son of God as standing in contrast with the genealogy which demonstrates his earthly descent.³⁴ The temptations, further, set the two spheres in a fundamental tension between Jesus as unique prototype and Jesus as example.³⁵

Flender, on the other hand, found a *complementary* parallelism between Jesus’ baptism and the announcement of his birth by the Spirit in 1:35, guarding on one side from the idea that Jesus was born with a “non-human supernatural kind of body” and on

³⁰ Lohse, “Lukas als Theologe der Heilsgeschichte,” 261.

³¹ Lohse, “Lukas als Theologe der Heilsgeschichte,” 275.

³² Helmut Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History* (trans. Reginald H. Fuller and Ilse Fuller; London: S.P.C.K., 1967), 6; trans. of *Heil und Geschichte in der Theologie des Lukas* (Munich: Kaiser, 1965).

³³ Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History*, 4–5, 56–57; 161–162.

³⁴ Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History*, 50–55.

³⁵ Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History*, 55 n.1–2.

the other from the idea that Jesus' was elected God's Son only at his baptism.³⁶ John's relation to Jesus is categorized as a *climactic* parallelism suggesting a two-part periodization of the Old and the New in place of Conzelmann's three parts, with John providing continuity with Israel and her prophets but also with the church and the apostolate of the Twelve. Jesus, in this view, stands outside all as divine.³⁷

Another scholar who early recognized the key place of the baptism account in the Lukan gospel was Leander Keck, in his 1967 article, "Jesus' Entrance Upon His Mission: Luke 3:1–4:30." Keck followed Cadbury in recognizing this passage as "the real introduction to the narrative," and, though he found Conzelmann's interpretation regarding John "overly subtle" in many details, agreed that John is the climax of the Law and the Prophets, and that he does not thereby fulfill Scripture but is simply attested by it.³⁸ (This argument stirred up by Conzelmann regarding the exact place of John in salvation history has continued to be taken up by many more commentators than can possibly be pursued here. Two representative examples are Walter Wink (1968) who, after reassessing Conzelmann's evidence, countered that John's ministry is rather a period of preparation at the beginning of the second main era (the period of fulfillment), and I. Howard Marshall (1998), who generally agreed with Wink but suggested that it would best be looked at as "a bridge between the old and the new eras."³⁹)

Keck also went on to add several divergent interpretations to the discussion. Of John's work in Luke, he argued that it was not meant to be seen as a success, for John's

³⁶ Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History*, 136.

³⁷ Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History*, 122–25.

³⁸ Liander E. Keck, "Jesus' Entrance upon His Mission: Luke 3:1–4:30," *RevExp* 64 (1967): 470–71.

³⁹ Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968): 51–55; Marshall, *Luke: Historian & Theologian*, 145–47; cf. Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (JSNT Sup 62; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 68; and François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (ed. Helmut Koester; trans. Christine M. Thomas; Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 2 who agree with Marshall.

actual place in the narrative is meant as “a foreshadowing of the dialectic of fulfillment/rejection.”⁴⁰ He pointed to the existence of this same dialectic in the Nazareth scene (4:14–30), as giving “the hermeneutical key to Jesus’ work.”⁴¹ Keck also insisted that Luke’s main message in the baptism is to be found in the words from heaven, “You are my beloved son” (3:22), which he saw as declaring Jesus to be God’s Son “from this time forward” and as a reality that the church has continually thereafter struggled to explain.⁴² Such an interpretation is, for Keck, strengthened by the alternate ending of this declaration in 3:22, “Today I have begotten you” (cf. Ps 2:7), which he prefers as the original. Further, in Keck’s view, becoming ‘Son of God’ at the baptism did not mean for Luke becoming a divine man, a *theios aner*, but simply “a specially equipped bearer of the Gospel,” “Spirit-empowered and divinely-legitimated.”⁴³ The genealogy was similarly seen by Keck as presenting Jesus as “Son of God by virtue of Adamic-descent” emphasizing his “universal humanity.”⁴⁴

The temptations which followed, according to Keck, are not about Jesus’ “messianic program,” but neither are they about his exemplary moral character. Rather, for Keck, the temptations, too, represented a “repudiation of divine-man perspectives for understanding Jesus” by demonstrating that “what applies to every man applies also to him.”⁴⁵ Keck suggested that Luke, who used many sources with diverging Christologies, saw no real conflict between this “post-baptismal anointing for mission” and the Spirit’s agency in his birth (1:35). Rather, in Keck’s view, he likely viewed them as

⁴⁰ Keck, “Jesus’ Entrance upon His Mission,” 466.

⁴¹ Keck, “Jesus’ Entrance upon His Mission,” 467, 470–72.

⁴² Keck, “Jesus’ Entrance upon His Mission,” 473.

⁴³ Keck, “Jesus’ Entrance upon His Mission,” 475.

⁴⁴ Keck, “Jesus’ Entrance upon His Mission,” 474.

⁴⁵ Keck, “Jesus’ Entrance upon His Mission,” 475.

complementary, with the Annunciation likewise suggesting no super-human connotations.⁴⁶

1.1.3 The Holy Spirit as Focal Point

G. W. H. Lampe's 1955 article, "The Holy Spirit in the Writings of St. Luke," gave primary attention to the Holy Spirit, a focus that was to recur in various forms in the succeeding decades. Lampe argued that the operation of the Spirit is "the connecting thread which runs through both parts of St. Luke's work."⁴⁷ In harmony with Conzelmann he suggested that "the descent of the dove at the baptism denotes a Messianic anointing with the particular divine power necessary for his mission."⁴⁸ But Lampe also spoke of this Spirit-anointing as standing alongside Jesus' previously stated conception by the Spirit (1:35) as a "twofold activity of the Spirit in relation to Jesus."⁴⁹ Recognizing Jesus' conception by the Spirit as an unparalleled event, he suggested that Jesus' later anointing by the Spirit may have involved "the same energy of the Spirit which his followers were to receive at Pentecost for the missionary task to which they had been appointed."⁵⁰

Lampe believed that this endowment with the Spirit had been an important characteristic of Israel's messianic hopes, and pointed out that in Luke-Acts the Messianic anointing of Jesus by the Spirit is not only highlighted in Luke 3:21–22 but "is

⁴⁶ Keck, "Jesus' Entrance upon His Mission," 473, 475–76. William S. Kurz also believes that the baptismal declaration complements the declaration to Mary, but explains 3:22 as a "view from below" contextualizing the title *son* from an historian's perspective while 1:32–33, 35 is understood as a view from above of his divine sonship (*Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993], 48).

⁴⁷ G. W. H. Lampe, "The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (ed. D. E. Nineham; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 159, cf. 200.

⁴⁸ Lampe, "The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke," 168.

⁴⁹ Lampe, "The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke," 168. Conzelmann ignores 1:35 along with the rest of Luke 1–2 as a later accretion.

⁵⁰ Lampe, "The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke," 168.

a cardinal point in the speeches which are put into the mouth of the early apostolic preachers.”⁵¹ Going beyond Loisy’s recognition of the Spirit as a link between the baptism and temptations, Lampe pointed out Luke’s particular emphasis on the continuing presence of the Spirit in Jesus’ overcoming of the forces of evil in the desert, in his return to Galilee, and in his presentation of himself as the Spirit-anointed prophet of Isa 61:1, which Lampe recognized as introducing the whole of the rest of Luke’s work.⁵² Lampe believed that in Luke’s Jesus “the Spirit of God is so fully embodied that his entire life and actions constitute a mode of the Spirit’s operation.” Further, he suggested that Luke understood Jesus’ baptism as “an act of prophetic symbolism” foreshadowing Jesus’ death and exaltation through a symbolic “descent into the abyss of death and his ascension to receive the promise of the Holy Spirit.”⁵³

Lampe believed that this involvement of the Spirit naturally suggested Jesus to be “a prophet-like figure,” recalling many of the features of the greatest of the prophets before him.⁵⁴ More than this however, he states, Jesus was “the climax of the prophetic tradition, heralded by the last and greatest of the prophets of the old order.”⁵⁵ He argued that Jesus’ union with the Spirit was much closer than the external and sometimes spasmodic relation of the Spirit in the rest of the prophets, and that the coming of the

⁵¹ This is suggested already in Deutero-Isaiah’s uniting of “the ideas of Spirit-possession and Covenant relationship . . . in the person of an individual redeemer” (Isa 42:1, 6; 49:8), but becomes most evident in “certain post-canonical writings (En 62:2; 49:3; Pss. Sal. 17:42, 18:8)” (Lampe, “The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke,” 163, 169).

⁵² Lampe, “The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke,” 170–71.

⁵³ Lampe, “The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke,” 168, 171–72. Lampe suggests however that the symbolism of death and ascension is stronger in Mark.

⁵⁴ Lampe, “The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke,” 170–72.

⁵⁵ Lampe, “The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke,” 168.

Holy Spirit in bodily form in Luke is “in a manner wholly unlike the often transient inspiration of an ordinary prophet.”⁵⁶

Although this consideration of Jesus as prophet in Luke is not a clearly stated motif in the baptism and wilderness account itself, and thus did not generally receive primary attention in discussions of this passage, it did continue to receive mention. It becomes important, for example, in later discussions of Jesus as a new Moses in conjunction with the new Exodus motif, and the consideration of the kind of Messiah he would be. It also arises in the suggestion, supported by Jeremias, that Jesus’ baptism and the associated visionary experience was traditionally understood in terms of a formal prophetic call narrative.⁵⁷ In response to this suggestion, Heinz Schürmann (1969) argued that such a reading is not supported in either Mark’s or Luke’s accounts, and a number of others supported this assessment.⁵⁸ R. F. Collins (1976), for example, argued that the account is missing both the communication of a prophetic message and the command to proclaim it found in prophetic call accounts, while Fitzmyer (1981) pointed to the lack of details regarding Jesus’ inner experience, and of a commission or a reply.⁵⁹ Marshall (1978), on the other hand, saw no reason to reject an understanding of it as “an event similar to a prophetic call,” in a more general sense, and Tannehill (1996) adds that there

⁵⁶ Lampe, “The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke,” 168.

⁵⁷ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 55–56.

⁵⁸ Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium, Erster Teil. Kommentar zu Kap. 1, 1-9, 50* (Freiburg: Herder, 1969), 197; cf. Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. John E. Alsup; vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 41; Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 247–49.

⁵⁹ R. F. Collins, “Luke 3:21–22, Baptism or Anointing?,” *TBT* 84 (1976): 824, 826; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1,1–9* (AB 28; New York: Doubleday, 1981), 480; cf. C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (ed. Howard Clark Kee and Dennis Nineham; London: SCM Press, 1990), 246.

was a mission implied in the consecration by the Holy Spirit, though it is not spelled out until 4:18–19.⁶⁰

1.1.4 New Creation Typology and New Exodus Typology

A. Feuillet, between 1958 and 1988, wrote a series of articles addressing Jesus' baptism, the symbolism of the dove, the genealogy, and the temptations. Though Feuillet's primary interest was in the origin and development of the Gospel traditions related to the baptism and wilderness account, he often specifically addressed Luke's redaction of the passage.⁶¹ While Feuillet found in the Lukan account allusions to the Exodus, which he saw as being received from the tradition, he argued that Luke primarily understood these events to allude to the opening of Genesis and the idea of a new creation.⁶² The coming of the Spirit, which Feuillet saw as the central act of the baptism, is interpreted in terms of the "hovering" action implied by the Hebrew term רָחַף in the Genesis 1 creation story (1:2). This new creation imagery, Feuillet argued, did not signal an inward transformation of Jesus but rather the establishment of the new creation of the church in the person of Jesus, a creation which was brought to completion at Pentecost.⁶³ For the words of the heavenly voice in 3:22 Feuillet, too, preferred the variant reading from Ps 2:7, "You are my son, today, I have begotten you," seeing it as casting Jesus both

⁶⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 151; Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 84.

⁶¹ A. Feuillet, "Le symbolisme de la colombe dans les récits évangéliques du baptême," *RSR* 46, no. 1958 (1958): 524–44; idem, "Le récit Lucanien de la Tentation (Lc. 4:1–13)," *Bib* 40 (1959): 613–31; idem, "Le baptême de Jésus," *RB* 71 (1964): 321–52; idem, "Vocation et mission des prophètes, baptême et mission de Jésus. Etude de christologie biblique," *NV* 54 (1979): 22–40; idem, "Observations sur les deux généalogies de Jésus-Christ de saint Matthieu (1,1–17) et de saint Luc (3,23–38)," *Esprit et vie* 98 (1988): 605–08.

⁶² Feuillet, "Le symbolisme de la colombe," 532; idem, "Le récit Lucanien de la Tentation," 613–16; cf. Joachim Jeremias, "Adam," *TDNT* 1:141–43.

⁶³ Feuillet, "Le symbolisme de la colombe," 538; idem, "Le baptême de Jésus," 333. Feuillet cites Lagrange and a number of scholars as arguing that the dove symbol is based on Gen 1–2. For Lagrange's arguments cited by Feuillet see Marie Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Marc* (Paris: 1942), 13; discussed in Feuillet, "Le symbolisme de la colombe," 529–530.

in Adamic terms as a ‘new creation’ who had received through Mary a human body, and at the same time as truly the son of God, not “as was supposed, of Joseph.”⁶⁴

The placement right after the baptism of a genealogy reaching back to Adam further suggested, for Feuillet, the identification of Jesus as the starting point for a new humanity, recalling Adam’s failure.⁶⁵ (This though he acknowledged that Luke does not develop new Adam typology elsewhere.⁶⁶) The temptations of Jesus, addressed to the Son of God but met as an ordinary man and successfully resisted, are seen to resemble those to which Eve fell, for they likewise offer things: (1) good to eat; (2) agreeable to see; and (3) useful for acquiring knowledge.⁶⁷ The temptations, thus, are not concerned with Jesus messianic program, but rather provide to Luke’s Christian audience a promise of victory over temptation.⁶⁸

The importance of Adamic typology has continued to be argued by others including Flender, who claims that Feuillet ignores a tension here between Jesus as model and as unique prototype, and Jerome Neyrey, who sees a further parallel in three temptations he finds within Luke’s Gethsemane account where Jesus’ death is in ironic contrast to Adam’s, “the result of his fidelity and obedience to God.”⁶⁹ Others, on the other hand, have argued that the Adamic motif is far from certain, noting that the genealogy ends with God not Adam, that the correspondences between Adam’s and

⁶⁴ Feuillet, “Le récit Lucanien de la Tentation,” 617, 625; idem, “Observations sur les deux généalogies.”

⁶⁵ Feuillet points back to ancient works such as Justin’s *Dial.* 103.6, who he says often associate Luke’s accounts of the baptism and genealogy (“Le récit Lucanien de la Tentation,” 624).

⁶⁶ Feuillet, “Le récit Lucanien de la Tentation,” 626.

⁶⁷ Feuillet, “Le récit Lucanien de la Tentation,” 618, 624.

⁶⁸ Feuillet, “Le récit Lucanien de la Tentation,” 628.

⁶⁹ Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History*, 55 n.1, 2; Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Absence of Jesus’ Emotions—the Lucan Redaction of Lk 22, 39–46,” *Bib* 61 (1980): 163–65; cf. Petr Pokorný, “The Temptation Stories and Their Intention,” *NTS* 20 (1973–74): 126; Tannehill, *Luke*, 86.

Jesus' temptations are not at all clear, and that Luke does not develop this motif elsewhere as Paul does.⁷⁰

Like the emphasis on the events of Jesus' baptism as initiating a new creation, the idea of Jesus as a new Israel is one that has roots going all the way back to the church fathers and branches stretching forward to the present day.⁷¹ G. H. P. Thompson, in 1960, saw Luke as stressing, in chapters 3 and 4, both Jesus as the new Adam who "breaks Satan's dominance in this world, and inaugurates the new age of the new humanity," and also the idea of Jesus as a new Israel.⁷² Thompson however places much more emphasis upon the many parallels with Deuteronomy that show Jesus, like Israel, as called, or "commissioned," by God's voice, sealed in the waters of the Red Sea/baptism and tested in the wilderness. In his unswerving obedience, Jesus thus became the true representative of Israel, renewing and extending the covenant to all people, and providing an example as well.⁷³

1.1.5 Part of the Structural Parallels of Luke-Acts

M. D. Goulder, in his *Type and History in Acts* (1964), took a typological understanding of Luke and the baptismal account several steps further. Goulder saw Jesus' life in the Gospel of Luke as fulfilling the Torah, both in types such as Moses and

⁷⁰ E.g., Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies: With Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 234–52; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 498.

⁷¹ In the fathers, see for example, connecting Jesus to Adam, Prudentius, *The Divinity of Christ*, 1001–1018; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 4.7–14, 33–34; Origen, *Fr. Luc.*, 96.

⁷² G. H. P. Thompson, "Called–Proved–Obedient: A Study in the Baptism and Temptation Narratives of Matthew and Luke," *JTS* 11 (1960): 8; cf. Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke* (trans. David E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 80–81.

⁷³ Thompson, "Called–Proved–Obedient," 1–12. Others who emphasized the parallels with Israel's testing include David Tiede and Robert Brawley (David L. Tiede, *Luke* [ACNT; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988], 98; and Robert L. Brawley, "Canon and Community: Intertextuality, Canon, Interpretation, Christology, Theology, and Persuasive Rhetoric in Luke 4:1–13," in *SBLSP 1992* [Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1992], 420). Fitzmyer also noted this, but saw it as much less important in Luke than in Matthew (Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 510).

Elijah and in the arrangement of the books of Moses, seeing Luke 1–2 as the new Genesis, Luke 3–5 a new Exodus, and so on. In Goulder’s view, Acts functions to demonstrate that Christ lives on in his church, making this point by means of a series of four cycles of paralleled events involving the apostles (the Jerusalem church), the deacons, Peter, and Paul, and thereby suggesting the fulfilling of the Torah more and more completely in the life of the church until the End.⁷⁴ Each of these cycles begins similarly and, like the events after Jesus’ baptism in Luke 3:21–4:30 involve a choosing, a descent of the Holy Spirit, and a kerygma/proclamation.⁷⁵

Like Lampe, Goulder believed that “the receiving of the Holy Spirit by Jesus at his baptism marks the beginning of his public ministry in the same way as the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the church is the beginning of his public ministry in Acts,” arguing that without the Spirit nothing can be accomplished (Acts 1:8).⁷⁶ Goulder added that these two baptisms (at the Jordan and at Pentecost) do not merely correspond in Luke’s mind, but “for him in each case the baptism initiates all that follows.”⁷⁷ Goulder also rejected Conzelmann’s assertion that Luke devised a three-part separation of redemption history in response to the delay of the parousia. Finding no definite line in Luke between the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new (or between the geographical regions as argued by Conzelmann), Goulder suggested instead that it would be more accurate to understand Luke 1:5–4:30 as a “take-over period” in which John the Baptist, as the tail end of the old covenant, also acted in the role of forerunner to Jesus (7:27).

⁷⁴ M. D. Goulder, *Type and History in Acts*, 172, 204–05, 521.

⁷⁵ Goulder, *Type and History in Acts*, 16–33, 74. Goulder’s list continues with: a baptism of believers (in Acts), mighty works, persecution, a gathering of the church, the confounding of false disciples, a passion, and even a resurrection.

⁷⁶ Goulder, *Type and History in Acts*, 54. On the following page, he says that both Luke and Acts begin “with the same two vital matters, Jesus’ transition into a new world, and the descent of the Holy Spirit to empower all that is to follow.”

⁷⁷ Goulder, *Type and History in Acts*, 55.

While he makes some valuable suggestions, Goulder's work also often illustrates the possible excesses of the recognition of parallels in Luke-Acts' structure. One who has brought much wider acceptance to this approach is Charles Talbert, beginning with his 1974 work, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*.⁷⁸ Talbert believed that attention to structural patterns could help to fill in the weaknesses of redaction criticism's overemphasis on the unique aspects of the Gospel. Talbert not only found evidences of a layering of parallels in the text of Luke-Acts, but also demonstrated that such formal parallels, based on the principle of balance, were abundant in both classical and Near Eastern literature.

Talbert found Luke's baptism and wilderness account to be important on a number of levels. First, he understood Luke 3:1–4:15 as the third of three cycles of parallels (covering 1:5–4:15) subordinating John to Jesus. This set of John-Jesus parallels is also then interwoven into two further sets of remarkable parallels embracing the whole of Luke-Acts: those between Jesus and his church, and those between the Twelve and Paul. For Talbert, these parallels demonstrate that Luke sought not only to subordinate John to Jesus, as Conzelmann suggested, but also to portray a continuity running from the Jewish people through Jesus to the apostolic and post-apostolic, largely Gentile, church.⁷⁹

Within the specific account of Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience, Talbert, like Lampe, saw events as linked structurally together by the repeated mention of the Holy Spirit (3:22; 4:1, 14). This is interpreted by the words, "When he began His ministry" (3:23), which point forward to 4:18 where his ministry actually begins, and connect this giving of the Spirit with Jesus' necessary anointing and empowering for a

⁷⁸ Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974).

⁷⁹ Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 104–07.

servant's role and work (Luke 3:22a; 4:18; cf. Acts 10:37–38).⁸⁰ The events of Luke 3:21–4:15 are also seen to be linked structurally by the two attestations of Jesus as Son of God in the baptism and genealogy, as well as by the two questions regarding his sonship in the temptations. This account was, in Talbert's 1974 view, shaped to counter docetic tendencies by an emphasis on the physical reality of events, on anointing for service rather than on divine begetting, and on Jesus participation in humanity.⁸¹ Talbert agrees with Feuillet that the temptations, in their order and nature, parallel those of Adam, underlining his participation in humanity and, in his career, his reversing of "the decisions of Adam."⁸²

In a later (1980) article, Talbert argued further that 3:1–4:15 (and 1:5–4:15 as a whole) made up an example of an ancient Mediterranean "genre" of the pre-public careers of great men. Like other examples Talbert gives of this proposed genre, Luke is said to demonstrate Jesus' future greatness through supernatural occurrences, building on a prevailing assumption in Luke's day that a person's destiny followed a pre-determined plan made evident from the beginning of their lives. Specifically in 3:1–4:15 Talbert pointed to: (1) a prophecy of the mightier one who is coming (3:16–17); (2) a prophetic event "followed by a verbal interpretation" (3:21–22); (3) a display of Jesus' spiritual prowess (4:1–13); and (4) the tracing of his lineage back through the royal line to God himself (3:23–38).⁸³

⁸⁰ Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 117; idem, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 41, 44.

⁸¹ Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 46, 118, 123.

⁸² Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 47, 50, 118, 123.

⁸³ Charles H. Talbert, "Prophecies of Future Greatness: The Contribution of Greco-Roman Biographies to an Understanding of Luke 1,5–4,15," in *The Divine Helmsman* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel; New York: Ktav, 1980).

1.1.6 The Beginning of Eschatological Fulfillment

Heinz Schürmann, in his highly regarded 1969 commentary, emphasized an eschatological framework to explain Luke's main purpose in the baptism account, finding in the three events of 3:21b–22 the emphasis that "Nun ist endzeitliche Offenbarungszeit: Gott manifestiert sich wieder und spricht wieder."⁸⁴ Though Schürmann, like Conzelmann, saw Luke as dealing with the delay of the parousia, Schürmann sees Luke as handling this delay by demonstrating that the time of Jesus was a time of eschatological fulfillment which continues present in the Church. Schürmann understood the baptism of Jesus as a historically pivotal beginning, on one level providing the power for Jesus' own ministry through the Spirit-anointing and pointing forward to the fulfillment of the eschatological prophecies in the outpouring of the Spirit upon God's people in the church.⁸⁵ On another level, the baptism immediately made evident the messianic time of salvation in a great manifestation from heaven before all the people, thus presenting Jesus to Israel as the beloved Son and promised One.⁸⁶ Like Feuillet, Schürmann stressed that the descent of the Spirit did not cause any change in Jesus but rather manifested and empowered him.⁸⁷ Schürmann's eschatological understanding of the baptism events is also held Talbert, who describes John as an ethical and anticipatory prophet and also, with Schürmann and against Conzelmann, as more than a prophet in that he was the one to announce "God's great eschatological act of deliverance."⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium, Erster Teil*, 190.

⁸⁵ Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium, Erster Teil*, 187, 189, 193–95.

⁸⁶ Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium, Erster Teil*, 188–89, 192; cf. Petr Pokorný, *Theologie der lukanischen Schriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 114.

⁸⁷ Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium, Erster Teil*, 192–93.

⁸⁸ Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 46–48, 104; cf. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 48; François Bovon, *Luke 1*, 143.

1.1.7 The Anointing of the Messiah

R. F. Collins' article "Luke 3:21–22: Baptism or Anointing?" which appeared in the journal *The Bible Today* (1976), rejected, along with a number of other interpretations, this idea that the account marks the beginning of a new eschatological era.⁸⁹ Collins argued instead that Jesus' baptism in Luke was, above all, his *messianic* anointing, as had been put forth by Cadbury in 1927. He based this conclusion upon Jesus' pronouncement of his mission in 4:18 in terms of an anointing (following Isaiah 61:1-2), and also upon the coupling of John's prediction that the Messiah would give the Spirit with Luke's emphasis in 3:21–22 downplaying of Jesus' actual baptism in favor of an emphasis on his reception of the Spirit.⁹⁰ Collins argued that the Lukan version of the baptismal event must therefore be looked upon "as a preparatory narrative whose perspective dominates the description of Jesus' ministry still yet to come."⁹¹

Collins further argued that the genealogy and temptations are linked literarily to Jesus' baptism by the use of the title *Son of God*. Based on his belief that the title *Son of God* had already been associated with that of Messiah in first-century "apocalyptic and rabbinic circles," Collins argues that these events are meant to reinforce the theme of messianic anointing, further emphasizing the anointing of Jesus as Messiah by his father, and pointing to the meaning of that messiahship.⁹² Collins, who saw the genealogy as traced through Nathan the prophet, argued that Jesus' was also thereby demonstrated to

⁸⁹ Collins, "Luke 3:21–22," 825–26.

⁹⁰ Bultmann speaks of Jesus' baptism in general as the "consecration of the Messiah" (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 248).

⁹¹ Collins, "Luke 3:21–22," 829. Collins notes that in addition to the schematization of history, the absence of John allows simply for God to stand as "the primary actor in the baptismal event" ("Luke 3:21–22," 823).

⁹² Collins, "Luke 3:21–22," 831. This view of the declaration of Jesus as Son of God being also an unmistakable declaration of his messiahship had been earlier argued in some detail by Gerhard Voss, who saw the declaration of sonship as equivalent to a declaration of him as kingly Messiah and the baptism as his royal enthronement (*Die Christologie der lukanischen Schriften in Grundzügen* [StudNeot, Studia 2; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965], 83–97).

be God's son as "the heir of the prophets, the one to whom the prophetic tradition points as to its culmination."⁹³

Mark Strauss, in his 1995 monograph, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, also took up the understanding of Jesus' baptism in terms of the role of davidic messiah, making it the focus of his study. Setting other issues largely to one side, Strauss sought to demonstrate contrary to common belief that Jesus' messiahship, understood in a royal-Davidic sense, continued to be a leading theme *throughout* the Gospel of Luke, with the events of Luke 3 and 4 presented as the inauguration period of this royal-messianic ministry.⁹⁴ These events begin with a narrative foreshadowing, as John points to a Coming One in response to the people's question as to whether he himself might be the Messiah.⁹⁵ Strauss saw the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus in Luke-Acts as a royal anointing with empowerment for his messianic task, just as the Spirit came upon David at the time of his anointing (1 Sam 16:13), and in Isa 11:2 was prophesied to rest upon a future king.⁹⁶ This is further attested by the heavenly voice which makes allusion to Ps 2:7 and its royal setting.⁹⁷ In the genealogy, Strauss states, Luke "establishes the legitimacy of his messianic (i.e., Davidic) ancestry," as well as his saving work for all mankind "as son of Adam" and, "as son of Abraham," his part in God's salvation-

⁹³ See Marshall Johnson for further discussion on the idea that Luke traced Jesus' lineage through Nathan (*Purpose*, 240–52). Few commentators have accepted this hypothesis, e.g., Fitzmyer (*Luke 1, 1–9*, 495).

⁹⁴ Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* (JSOTSup 110; Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1995), 197–98. Donald Juel too saw the baptism testifying Jesus to be the promised king (*Luke-Acts: The Promise of History* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1983], 27).

⁹⁵ Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 200.

⁹⁶ Cf. Acts 4:25–26; 10:36–38. Strauss cites also Pss. Sol. 17.37; 18.7; 1QSb 5.25; 4Q161, pIsa^a 8–10 III, 11–25; cf. 1 En. 49.2–3; 62.1–2 as evidence of the close link between Davidic messiah and Spirit in the OT and Judaism (*The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 203); cf. Michael Dömer who also cites the equipping of Jesus with the Spirit at his baptism as the demonstration that Jesus was the Messiah (*Das Heil Gottes: Studien zur Theologie der lukanischen Doppelwerkes* [Bonner biblische Beiträge 51; Köln: Hanstein, 1978], 48–49).

⁹⁷ Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 201–09.

historical work through the nation Israel.⁹⁸ The temptations with their new exodus theme, Strauss agrees, link Jesus to Moses who himself ruled Israel and led them to their promised salvation. (He finds this theme also suggested in the introduction of John the Baptist in Luke 3:4–6/Isa 40:3–5.) The devil’s temptation of worldly authority, in particular, offers a shortcut to royal privilege in place of the submission and servanthood evidenced in the wilderness and also likely alluded to in the words of the heavenly voice (cf. Isa 41–42).⁹⁹ It may be, Strauss suggests, that in chapters 3 and 4 Luke is responding to questions about the non-traditional aspects of Messiahship in his teaching and healing and his suffering by expanding his portrait of Christ in those areas to demonstrate that they are indeed messianic, and do not detract from Jesus’ messiahship.¹⁰⁰

1.1.8 A Declaration of Sonship

Conversely Joseph Fitzmyer, in his authoritative 1981 commentary, strongly denied any direct connection in pre-Christian Judaism either between a “future, expected Messiah” and the title Son of God, or between this Messiah and the descent of the Spirit, though he agreed that Acts *interprets* the baptism of Jesus as a messianic anointing.¹⁰¹ Fitzmyer declared the main purposes of Jesus’ baptism scene to be the announcing of “the heavenly identification of Jesus as ‘Son’” (and indirectly as God’s Servant), and the preparation for his ministry through the descent of the Spirit.¹⁰² Jesus’ sonship he understood as representing in Luke not just an adoptive title but a unique sense of

⁹⁸ Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 209, 213–15.

⁹⁹ Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 206, 209, 217. Joel B. Green, too, speaks of an *eschatological* new exodus intimated already in John’s ministry, an exodus he sees as moving out from the current structures of godlessness and oppression represented by the power figures listed in Luke 3:1, 2 (*The Gospel of Luke* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 170).

¹⁰⁰ Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 259–60.

¹⁰¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 481–482, 206.

¹⁰² Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 481.

filiation with Yahweh (though not necessarily with all the implications of divinity later read into the account.)¹⁰³ Fitzmyer noted significant similarities between the baptism and the transfiguration scene which in 9:35 again stresses the relation of Jesus to his Father just before an important phase of his ministry begins.¹⁰⁴ The genealogy, which relates this new Period of Jesus (inaugurated by John's ministry) to the whole course of human history, also is said by Fitzmyer to stress this identification of Jesus as the Son of God, while the temptations are seen to "correct a false understanding of his mission as Son."¹⁰⁵

Charles Dennison's 1982 article, "How is Jesus the Son of God? Luke's Baptism Narrative and Christology," interprets Jesus' baptism and his title Son of God as specifically underscoring both his uniqueness and his union with the people.¹⁰⁶ In the separation of John from Jesus, in the marvelous nature of the events, and in his identification as beloved/unique Son, the baptism of Jesus, like his birth, is "utterly different."¹⁰⁷ Yet in his baptism he also enters into union with the people for their salvation, and the coming of the Holy Spirit in response to prayer is also a blessing passed on to the church. While gathering some support from Luke, particularly by connecting the physical reality of the dove to the dove of Noah in the "new creation" at the flood, Dennison primarily draws in the theological concepts of Paul and others to make his case that "In his union with the creature, Jesus is the fullness of the title 'Son of God,' of everything between Adam and himself. He is new Adam and new humanity."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1-9*, 481, 206-08

¹⁰⁴ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1-9*, 481.

¹⁰⁵ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1-9*, 477, 498, 509.

¹⁰⁶ Charles G. Dennison, "How is Jesus the Son of God: Luke's Baptism Narrative and Christology," *CTJ* 17 (1982): 6-25.

¹⁰⁷ See C. H. Turner, for the argument for interpreting ὁ ἀγαπητός as meaning *unique* ("O YIOS MOY O AGAPHTOS," *JTS* 27 [1926]: 113-29).

¹⁰⁸ Dennison, "How is Jesus the Son of God," 21.

Robert Tannehill's 1986 work, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, also places an emphasis on sonship, suggesting that Jesus only gradually came to an understanding of his sonship. Luke 2:41–52 displays Jesus' first recognition of that sonship, and the events surrounding the baptism lead him to a fuller understanding of what it means to be God's son.¹⁰⁹ The descent of the Spirit, which Tannehill sees as initiating the central sequence of events dominating both Luke and Acts, is directly accompanied by a powerful affirmation of Jesus' unique relation to God, a relation which also entailed a specific mission to be fulfilled. "Although," he says, "Luke 3:21–22 is not explicitly a commissioning scene, since no mission is described there, consecration with the Holy Spirit does imply a mission"—a mission later described in 4:18–19 in conjunction with reference back to this scene.¹¹⁰ The mission is to some degree worked out in the struggles with the devil where one understanding of what it means to be the Son of God anointed with the Spirit is rejected in favor of obedience to the understanding which Jesus presents in the Nazareth synagogue.¹¹¹

Luke Timothy Johnson, in his 1991 commentary, gives a similar assessment, but focuses on the Lukan audience, seeing Jesus' baptism experiences in Luke as answering two questions important to understanding the Lukan narrative. To the question "Who is Jesus?" the answer is given, "He is God's son" (Luke 3:21–38) and to the question "What kind of son?" the temptation account declares "an obedient son" (4:1–13).¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (2 vols.; vol. 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 53–60. Tannehill, also, continues the dialogue with Conzelmann with regard to the ministry of John, demonstrating how the significance of John and his baptismal ministry, far from being isolated to the period before Jesus, parallels Jesus' own ministry and rejection and carries throughout Luke-Acts (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 47–53).

¹¹⁰ Tannehill, *Luke*, 84–85.

¹¹¹ Tannehill, *Luke*, 87–89.

¹¹² Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (ed. Daniel J. Harrington; vol. 5; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 70. The account of Jesus' first proclamation is then said to answer a third question, "What kind of Messiah is he to be? A prophetic Messiah (4:14–30)."

Like Johnson, Jack Dean Kingsbury, in his study of *Conflict in Luke* (also in 1991), also underlines the place of obedience in the unique sonship that was reiterated at the Jordan.¹¹³ This relationship, which Kingsbury characterizes as perfect love of the Father with heart, soul, strength, and mind, is threatened by the devil who, in the temptations, is shown to entice Jesus to sacrifice this relationship on the altar of self-concern.¹¹⁴ Kingsbury sees the announcement of sonship as coupled, both in the declaration of Gabriel (1:32–33, 35) and in Jesus’ baptism (3:21–22), with the presentation of Jesus as “the Messiah-King from the house of David.”

The filial dimensions of sonship are also explored by Richard Rohrbaugh who considers Luke’s use of the title from a socio-cultural perspective in his 1995 article, “Legitimizing Sonship—A Test of Honor.”¹¹⁵ Rohrbaugh argued that Jesus enters the scene with little honor, and that the use of the term *Son of God* ascribes to him high honor through the societally important avenues of kinship and patronage. “In publicly acknowledging a boy to be his son, that is a member of his genealogical tree,” Rohrbaugh states, “a father not only accepted responsibility for him and made him his heir, he determined his status (honour) in the community as well.”¹¹⁶ By stating that he was pleasing to God, the declaration also gives him *acquired* honor gained through obedience. By this attributed and acquired honor, Jesus gains authority to speak and be heard. The genealogy provides the necessary public record to substantiate this claim, being understood culturally to both signify and determine character. In the wilderness this

¹¹³ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Jesus Christ in Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Proclamation Commentaries; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 42–45.

¹¹⁴ Marshall also sees the declaration of sonship here as not only having a messianic element but also as conveying a close filial relationship, noting the likely connections with Isaac the beloved son in Gen 22:2, 12, 16 (*The Gospel of Luke*, 155).

¹¹⁵ Richard L Rohrbaugh, “Legitimizing Sonship—A Test of Honour: A Social-Scientific Study of Luke 4:1–30,” in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (ed. Philip F Esler; London: Routledge, 1995), 183–97.

¹¹⁶ Rohrbaugh, “Legitimizing Sonship,” 189.

stunning claim is verified on a cosmic plane as Jesus successfully meets the honor challenges fielded by the devil, not on his own terms but by loyal recourse to the tradition of his own family through quoting his Father's own words.

1.1.9 A Rite of Passage

It was Mark McVann who, in a brief 1991 article, first developed the idea first brought out by Loisy that Luke 3:1–4:30 may be understood as a ritual process, arguing that it “narrates the transformation of Jesus from private person at Nazareth to public prophet in Israel.”¹¹⁷ Noting the widespread recognition that this passage portrays Jesus' preparation for ministry, McVann declared that examining the account from the viewpoint of ritual analysis “sharpens that general insight by attending to the change of status that Jesus' achieved at the Jordan and in the wilderness, and by narrating how it was effected” in relation to Luke's goal of establishing “the legitimacy of Jesus' public activity.”¹¹⁸ Jesus' change of status is, for McVann, centered in a rite of passage to prophethood, a role which in Luke's mind must be narrated and legitimated. With an assiduous adherence to Van Gennep's theory of *rite de passage*, McVann looked to John as the ritual elder who oversees this ritual, arguing that he provides to Jesus, his follower, an explicit model of what a prophet should be. John was also seen by McVann as endorsing Jesus' candidacy for prophethood and as the one who baptizes him, thus passing on his own mantle of prophecy to Jesus and legitimating Jesus' own prophetic vocation.¹¹⁹

After outlining the basic ritual theory of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner, McVann looked briefly at the ritual's main symbols, and then traces the ritual process in

¹¹⁷ Mark McVann, “Rituals of Status Transformation in Luke-Acts: The Case of Jesus the Prophet,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 351.

¹¹⁸ McVann, “Rituals of Status Transformation in Luke-Acts,” 359.

¹¹⁹ McVann, “Rituals of Status Transformation in Luke-Acts,” 343–46. Fitzmyer makes a similar point about John, but in regard to the historical Jesus (*Luke I, 1–9*, 482).

each of its three theoretical stages. He argued that Jesus is progressively *separated* from home and crowd and from ordinary historical time before entering into a time of *liminality* and *communitas* where he submits with others to John's baptism. He also faces an ambiguous time of testing in the wilderness where he willingly accepts the task of demonstrating the legitimacy of his new role in ritual confrontation.¹²⁰ Jesus' *aggregation* back into society after his commissioning is seen in the general movement from chaos back to order, as well as in Jesus transition from student to teacher, follower to leader, and passivity to power as he enters his new role of public prophet. McVann describes Jesus as going on to carry out the expectations of this role singleheartedly in the Spirit, confronting demons, penetrating hidden things, comforting the weak and challenging the comfortable, and finally like the prophets being rejected.¹²¹

Daniel Vigne, in his 1992 monograph, *Christ au Jourdain: Le Baptême de Jésus dans la Tradition Judéo-Chrétienne*, sought likewise to consider Jesus' baptism "non seulement sur le plan des idées, mais sur le terrain des rites."¹²² Vigne takes a different approach from that of McVann, examining baptism accounts and allusions throughout the various gospels, pseudepigrapha, and church fathers and making little use of ritual theory. Vigne argues that the three axes of Luke's work are each inaugurated by a birth: his private life, by the nativity (Luke 2:11); his public life, by the baptism (3:22); and his glorified life, by the resurrection (Acts 13:33). He notes also that each of these "births" is prolonged by a sacred period of forty days which recalls the waiting time of an actual birth (presentation Luke 2:22; cf. Lev 12:1–4); (temptation Luke 4:2); (ascension Acts 1:3).¹²³ Vigne argues that this understanding of the baptism as a birthing scene is

¹²⁰ McVann, "Rituals of Status Transformation in Luke-Acts," 348–53.

¹²¹ McVann, "Rituals of Status Transformation in Luke-Acts," 355–56.

¹²² Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain*, 14.

¹²³ Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain*, 127.

supported by what he believes to be the original reading of Luke 3:22, “Today I have begotten you,” explaining that the Ebionites interpreted this reading too flatly as his only birth and thus the early church fathers had to condemn it.¹²⁴ In considering the use of the ritual symbols of water and the Jordan in the various baptism accounts, Vigne also stated that, “Comme le Jourdain auquel il est lié, le Baptême de Jésus se présente effectivement comme un point de passage: du désert à la Terre Promise, de l’Ancien au Nouveau Testament.”¹²⁵

Joel Green, in his 1997 commentary, built on McVann’s insights, noting at the same time that McVann “has allowed the demands of his model of status transformation to overrule the details of Luke’s narrative.”¹²⁶ Green sees Luke 3:1–4:13, in its narration of John’s work of preparation and Jesus’ status transformation, as further establishing for the audience the *probability* of Jesus’ mission as Son of God.¹²⁷ He notes that John’s baptism, as well, is a rite of passage for in this baptism the people are portrayed as separating from ordinary life, undergoing a conversion of loyalties marked by their repentance-baptism, and, according to Green, joining in a new, ritual, kinship where social relations and expected behaviors are radically realigned with the purposes of God.¹²⁸

For Jesus, Green states, the transition at the baptism is not any sort of status reversal, but a status transformation moving him from the designation as God’s son by his “extraordinary conception”, to embracing the identity and vocation it entails, while asserting his true sonship which—as expected in ancient culture—is then demonstrated

¹²⁴ Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain*, 21–24, 107–32.

¹²⁵ Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain*, 11.

¹²⁶ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 161 n.2.

¹²⁷ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 160.

¹²⁸ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 164, 165 n. 8, 173.

through active obedience and service on his father's behalf.¹²⁹ At the baptism, according to Green, Jesus receives his divine commission and his empowerment by the Spirit, after which he explores its meaning in "the vulnerability of hostile testing" in the wilderness, before taking up his public ministry in 4:14 "readied to perform in ways that serve God's gracious aim."¹³⁰ The baptism, thus, makes up part of a whole "constellation of motifs related to his larger concern with plotting the fulfillment of the divine purpose to restore Israel."¹³¹

1.2 A Next Step in the Understanding of Luke 3:1–4:15

While the observation of Daniel Vigne quoted at the beginning of this chapter concerning the relative general neglect of the baptism accounts continues to be true of Lukan studies as well, much has been accomplished in the study of Luke-Acts' account of Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience in the eighty years since Cadbury led the way. Today few would dispute that this narrative marks, in Luke, the starting point of the main body of the narrative, of Jesus' public ministry, and even of a new era in salvation history. The presence of some link to Moses, and possibly even Adam, is generally allowed, as are selected parallels with Luke's sequel in the book of Acts. It is also commonly agreed that Luke-Acts presents Jesus here, at least in part, as an obedient and beloved son whose reception of the Spirit at the baptism is central to what follows.

While each of these is an important feature of the baptism accounts of Luke 3 and 4, they do not recognize or treat these events on the basis of their integrated structure as a rite of passage marking the transition of Jesus (3:21b–4:15) as well as the people (3:1–3:21a) from one state or stage in life to another. Such an approach gives the promise of

¹²⁹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 184.

¹³⁰ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 184.

¹³¹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 172; cf. G. B. Caird, *Saint Luke* (PNTC;UK: Penguin Books, 1963), 36; N. Richardson, *The Panorama of Luke: An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Epworth, 1982), 18; Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke*, 92–93.

bringing together the best of the above interpretations into a coherent whole and offering out additional insights into the shape and purpose of these accounts, and their place in the overall narrative of Luke-Acts.

Because Luke and his audience were steeped in diverse forms of rites of passage, marking the transition of individuals, for example, into adulthood, public office, or voluntary associations, it is reasonable to consider that his account of the baptisms in Luke 3–4 may likely have been put together with reference to such ritual experiences. (At the same time it is important not to assume that they categorized and viewed such experiences in the same way as modern observers of these practices.) Such a ritual approach to the passage is suggested within Luke-Acts itself, beginning at the opening of the account in Luke 3:3 where Luke places a summary of John’s work which declares him to have come “proclaiming a baptism” (3:3). For Luke’s audience who had already been informed of the Christian way (κατηχήθης Luke 1:4), this symbolic ritual act of baptism was well-known in its Christian form, but it would also have been understood within the context of the many other rites of passage known and practiced in their day. Luke’s juxtaposition of this ritual-centered description of John’s ministry with Isaiah’s prophetic call to “Prepare the way of the Lord” (3:4), implies further that the fulfillment of God’s ancient plan involved precisely the enactment of this ritual. That the people accepted this symbolic ritual act as part of God’s plan is demonstrated by the fact that they are said to begin arriving in crowds “in order to be baptized by him” (3:7).

Further the events of Jesus’ own baptism are interpreted by Luke-Acts by reference to a second ritual, identifying the descent of the Spirit as an *anointing* and thereby linking it with the various ritual accounts in the LXX where a symbolic *anointing* is central to the ritual inauguration of an object or person to serve in a new and sacred role (see chapter 4). The audience’s knowledge of rituals of immersing and anointing, as well as other sorts of rites of passage would thus have inevitably shaped the way in which

they read this ritual account and understood the numerous ritual signals found within the passage, drawing them to interpret the events of Jesus' baptism by reference to rites of passage which were a part of their own world. "Thus," as Frank Gorman has suggested of such texts, "a full appreciation and understanding of the narrative requires that the ritualizing features be identified and analyzed."¹³²

Today, with the development of the discipline of ritual studies developed in the last third of the twentieth century by Victor Turner, Ronald Grimes, Catherine Bell and others, tools and insights are available to make this an especially productive study. Yet, although a number of contributions in the literature reviewed in this chapter have suggested directions for such an approach, an in-depth consideration of the passage as a ritual account has not yet been completed.

Loisy's notice, in 1924, of the similarity between Luke's account and those initiations practiced in the mystery religions of the Greco-Roman world, opened this process. Following this, Cadbury's observation of the literary transition made here in the Lukan narrative, and Conzelmann's recognition the transitional nature of this account in the life of Jesus and in the history of salvation in the text of Luke, have also pointed in the direction of understanding these events in terms of a transitional passage. On another plane, a number of commentators, though they have largely ignored the ritual connotations of their designations, have spoken of Jesus' baptism in Luke in manifestly ritual terms, describing it as, for example, a *consecration*, *inauguration*, *call* or *commissioning*.¹³³ As well, the symbolic nature of the Lukan account, which figures

¹³² Frank H. Gorman Jr., "Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies: Assessment of the Past; Prospects for the Future," *Semeia* 67 (1994): 13–29.

¹³³ The terminology of consecration can be found in Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke* (ed. Samuel Rolles Driver, et al.; 4th ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901; repr., 1997), 100; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 480–83; Tannehill, *Luke*, 84. The term *inauguration* is used by Fitzmyer, Juel, Vigne, and Strauss and *commissioning* by Thompson, McVann, Squires, and Green (Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 477; Juel, *Luke-Acts: The Promise of History*, 27; Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain*, 127; Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 219; Thompson, "Called–Proved–Obedient," 6, 9; McVann, "Rituals of Status Transformation in Luke-Acts," 346; John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 112–13; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 184).

importantly in most rites of passage, has been pointed out in Conzelmann's discussion of the symbolic meanings of the desert and, with Vigne, of the Jordan, and in the many considerations of specific symbols such as that of the dove. Likewise the symbolic meaning of the baptism itself—in Lampe's reading, a symbolic death and resurrection, and in Vigne's, a birth—offer possible interpretations of the primary symbol of the ritual.

While these suggestions have provided a helpful framework and some starting points for considering Luke's account as a ritual text, it was Mark McVann who first made deliberate use of the growing field of ritual studies to analyze Luke's account of Jesus' baptism experience. McVann offered a number of foundational steps, looking at a number of the ritual symbols, and considering the account from the perspective of the three stages that generally characterize rite of passage: separation, liminality, and reincorporation. McVann also put forward a probable purpose for Luke's use of rite of passage allusions, suggesting that they function as part of the account's attempt to "establish the legitimacy of Jesus' public activity." Joel Green has picked up and popularized further McVann's suggestions in his widely available NICNT commentary on the Gospel of Luke, and has considered the baptism of John, as well, in terms of rite of passage theory. Green, at the same time, has also critiqued what he recognized as McVann's over-dependence on ritual theory to the twisting, at times, of the Lukan text.

The value of McVann's work has indeed been limited, as Green has noted, by his close adherence to the declarations of ritual theory, sometimes to the exclusion of the evidence in the Lukan text, as for example in his insistence that John acted as ritual elder to Jesus, passing his prophetic mantle on to Jesus and thereby establishing Jesus' own legitimacy as a prophet. In numerous places McVann also fails to carefully separate between what a twenty-first century ritual theorist might assign to the account, and what would have been seen there by a first-century author and his audience. From Green's brief comments on the subject it appears that he has been more careful of these challenges. Yet he too seems to have read his own assumptions into the Lukan account

when suggesting that those baptized by John not only made a personal ritual transition but also entered a new state of ritual kinship marked by transformed social networks. Most importantly, both McVann's and Green's exploration of the ritual aspects of the passage have been severely limited in scope, being restricted to a brief article by McVann and to Green's even briefer commentary comments. Neither McVann nor Green have given attention to the development of rite-of-passage theory since Victor Turner, or to its previous applications in the field of Biblical studies. Neither have they explored the use of rite of passage in other Greco-Roman narratives from a similar time-period.

What is now needed is a more thorough and also more nuanced exploration of ritual aspects of this Lukan text which will explore the usefulness of such an approach in interpreting NT narratives, and will delineate the particular ways that it illuminates Luke 3:1–4:15. The next step necessary to such a ritual consideration of this passage is to make a careful investigation of ritual theory as it has developed in the last hundred years with relation to rites of passage. This exploration is the topic of chapter 2.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RITE OF PASSAGE IN CONTEMPORARY THEORY

It was almost a century ago that folklorist Arnold van Gennep first wrote of a remarkably distinctive ritual process by which societies of the past and present have often facilitated the transition of an individual or group from one state or stage in life to another. This process van Gennep spoke of as a *rite de passage*. In the 1960s the concept received further development under the term *transformation ritual* by anthropologist Victor Turner who recognized its aptness for describing certain African tribal rituals he was then observing. Turner continued to study such rituals of transition, both in traditional tribal societies and in more open and industrialized ones, for the rest of his life refining and bringing widespread attention to van Gennep's observations, with particular attention to the quality of liminality characteristic of the central stage of the ritual. Since Turner's death in 1983, the rite of passage model has continued to be subject to criticism and refinement as theorists have pointed out the breadth of detail and circumstance exemplified by these societal practices, and the complex ways in which they both serve, and interact with, the goals of the society and its participants. As a result of their work, rite of passage theory has grown into a sophisticated anthropological model with great promise for enhancing the understanding of ancient Biblical text.

It is the purpose of this chapter to give an account of this theory as developed by van Gennep and Turner and to explore the most important of the recent criticisms and refinements which give promise of aiding in the interpretation of Luke 3:1–4:15. For, although the category of rite of passage must be recognized from the beginning as a construct created by modern theorists, and the conscious analysis and terminology

developed in the past century would have been completely foreign to Luke and his audience, evidence suggests that such processes and practices as Turner and others described were often implicitly and even powerfully experienced by them. To augment our understanding of such experiences and to point toward ways in which they might have been used in texts such as Luke-Acts, the following chapter will explore the pertinent observations made regarding rites of passage, their characteristics, and their function. (To delimit this task to a manageable amount of data, most of the vast array of ritual theory not directly commenting on rite of passage has been left aside.)

2.1 Development and Explication of Rite of Passage Theory

In a “classic” example of the many sorts and degrees of rituals considered within this category, Victor Turner once described the following rite of passage practiced by a traditional tribal society in the installation of a new chief.

A small hut of leaves was constructed for the rite about a mile away from the capital village. After avoiding sexual contact for several days, the chief-elect of the Ndembu with his senior wife were called to the hut just after sunset by the ritual leader, Kafwana, chief of the long-subjected Mbwela tribe. Clad only in waist cloths the chief and his wife were led to the hut, where they crouched in a position of modesty while being washed with medicines made from a mixture of auspicious plants and river water.

Making a cut on the underside of the chief-elect’s left arm, Kafwana packed it with medicine and pressed a mat against the upperside of the arm before seating the couple roughly. Then he began to scold and insult the chief-elect, accusing him of selfishness, meanness, and murderous and adulterous behavior and advising him to change his ways. The reviling of the chief and his wife went on throughout the night with the participation of anyone who wished to join in, while Kafwana periodically splashed them with medicine and insultingly bumped his buttocks against them. The couple were to listen in humility with downcast head and to perform menial tasks given to them

intermittently during the night. The chief-elect was expected to show no resentment or retribution against those involved, either then or at any time afterwards.

On the following day the public installation of the chief, or Kanongesha, took place with great pomp and ceremony. Central to these ceremonies was the bestowal, by Kafwana, of the “supreme symbol of chiefly status”, the sacred lukanu bracelet which Kafwana had the role of caring for and medicating. To this bracelet, made from human genitalia and sinew and soaked in the sacrificial blood of slaves, the chief would bring daily invocations for blessing, although it could also be used to curse. Upon completion of the rite, the chief stood at the highest point of the Ndembu political hierarchy, as the symbolic representation of the whole Ndembu people, their land, and their resources.¹³⁴

2.1.1 The Rite of Passage from van Gennep to Turner

Arnold van Gennep

It was in his 1909 book, *Les Rites de Passage*, that Arnold van Gennep first developed the concept of the rite of passage and explored the role such rites played for the individuals and institutions of a particular society. Van Gennep noticed that, “wherever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next” is often accompanied by special acts such as weddings, funerals, ‘puberty’ rituals, and initiations into secret societies or priestly positions.¹³⁵ He also considered calendrical rituals, such as those marking the cyclical progression from one season to another, to be rites of passage. Van Gennep likened these transitional acts to the crossing of a physical threshold such as a doorway or a national or tribal boundary, places which, in ancient and primitive belief, were thought to be sacred and inhabited by spirits, and the crossing of which, even today, often requires special ceremonies. He noted that

¹³⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 102–05.

¹³⁵ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (trans. Monika B Vizedom and Gabrielle L Caffee; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 2–4, 178–88.

the special acts involved in such rituals were generally organized into three major phases: rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation.¹³⁶ Such rites of passage, he suggested, function to reduce the harmful effects to the individual and to society of such changes which must inevitably take place in human lives.¹³⁷

Although Van Gennep regarded these three phases to be present in every ritual he observed, he did not believe that each of the phases received equal and separate emphasis among all peoples or in every rite of passage.¹³⁸ In a funeral, for example, rites of separation generally occupy the central place, and in many rituals individual rites may become tangled or doubled, as in betrothal and marriage, where the incorporation at the end of the betrothal coincides with the beginning of a new separation, transition and incorporation in the marriage. Van Gennep states,

Thus, although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated.¹³⁹

Van Gennep recognized the transition, or liminal, phase of the *rites de passage* as being of particular importance, as can be seen in his occasional reference to the three stages as preliminary, liminary, and postliminary phases.¹⁴⁰ He argued that an essential element of the liminal stage is a suspension of the usual rules of living in which the candidates are freed from societal barriers, with some rituals going so far as to allow even stealing, pillaging, or the enjoyment of sexual license without threat of reprisal.¹⁴¹ Van

¹³⁶ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 15–18. Van Gennep seems to use the terms rites and rituals interchangeably to refer to both the entire ritual and its component pieces.

¹³⁷ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 11.

¹³⁸ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 11–14.

¹³⁹ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 11.

¹⁴⁰ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 20–25. The term *liminal* is derived from the Latin *limen* meaning ‘threshold’.

¹⁴¹ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 115.

Gennep, however, eschewed the practice, common to anthropologists of the day, of focusing upon one single aspect in isolation from the rest of the ritual, insisting that it is the pattern, or sequence, of the ritual in its context which gives it meaning.¹⁴² He commented,

Our interest lies not in the particular rites but in their essential significance and their relative positions within ceremonial wholes—that is, their order. . . . Beneath a multiplicity of forms, either consciously expressed or merely implied, a typical pattern always recurs: *the pattern of the rites of passage*.¹⁴³

The scholarly field of anthropology was slow to recognize and make use of Van Gennep's contributions. Durkheim's functionalist circle, which reigned in anthropology at the time, excluded the maverick van Gennep, having little interest in folklore or in the importance of dynamic process and experiential meaning and the individual, topics which van Gennep pursued.¹⁴⁴ Marcel Mauss, for example, wrote a strongly critical review of *Les Rites de Passage* in *L'Année sociologique* criticizing him (with some truth) for mixing observations of divergent times and cultures, accusing him of seeing rites of passage behind every bush, and arguing that in fact all ritual is about some type of transition from sacred to profane and vice versa.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the neglect was not continued “by the world community of scholars in the ‘human studies’” and van Gennep's work slowly gathered a small but growing

¹⁴² Solon T. Kimball, in his introduction to the English translation of *Les Rites de Passage* suggested that the word translated *pattern*, might better be translated *dynamic* to encompass Van Gennep's interest in both structure and process (introduction to *The Rites of Passage* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960], 7).

¹⁴³ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 190–91.

¹⁴⁴ Kimball, “Introduction,” 10–16; Victor W. Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience* (ed. Edith Turner; The Anthropology of Form and Meaning, ed. J. David Sapir; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 210; Nicole Belmont, *Arnold Van Gennep: The Creator of French Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 2–3, 62–63, 125; Wouter W. Belier, “Arnold Van Gennep and the Rise of French Sociology of Religion,” *Numen* 41 (1994): 125, 143–49. Durkheim's school emphasized the determining power of culture on the individual. In reality, Van Gennep's use of the comparativist method was to compare superficially similar facts in order to show how they often have *different* meanings.

¹⁴⁵ Belier, “Arnold Van Gennep,” 156.

following.¹⁴⁶ In the 1940s and 50s, two thinkers in particular incorporated aspects of van Gennep's *rite de passage* theory into their own popular works.¹⁴⁷ Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), used van Gennep's observations concerning the *rite de passage* in an extremely metaphorical sense to illustrate his own Jungian psychological theories, teaching that as the mythological hero in his journey passed through the stages of separation, initiation-adventure, and return, so the individual too must battle past the crisis points of "personal and local historical limitations" and to be reborn "to the generally valid, normally human forms."¹⁴⁸ More importantly for the purposes of this study, Campbell spoke insightfully of rites of passage as "serving to translate the individual's life-crises and life-deeds into classic, impersonal forms. They disclose him to himself, not as this personality or that, but as the warrior, the bride, the widow, the priest, . . ." one part of a imperishable living unit, and as such enhanced, enriched, and supported.¹⁴⁹

History of religions scholar, Mircea Eliade, surveyed what he called "rituals of initiation" from various "primitive" cultures. He saw such initiations in narrow sense as taking just two forms: (1) the puberty rites by which adolescents become *human beings* and (2) specialized initiations in which certain individuals transcend the human condition and come into special relationship with the supernatural. At the center of these initiations he particularly noticed the themes of death and rebirth, accompanied often by the practices of communication of sacred knowledge and of severe ordeals. Eliade, too, used the concept metaphorically, likening initiation to the passage from the natural man to one

¹⁴⁶ Victor W. Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush*, 210.

¹⁴⁷ Susan Ackerman, "Why is Miriam also among the Prophets? (And is Zipporah among the Priests?)," *JBL* 12, no. 1 (2002): 64.

¹⁴⁸ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Bolligen Series 17; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 10–20.

¹⁴⁹ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 383.

who has been spiritually transformed, having found the “center,” or “zone of the sacred,” through an arduous “rite of the passage from . . . yesterday’s profane and illusory existence . . . to a new . . . life that is real, enduring, and effective.”¹⁵⁰ He saw this process as also essential to any genuine human life in the modern world, chiefly accomplished through literature and other artistic creations.¹⁵¹

In 1962, shortly after *Les Rites de Passage* was translated into English, a book of essays was published discussing the ritual theories discussed by van Gennep. Max Gluckman, an anthropologist from the University of Manchester, wrote an introduction to this volume, speaking of van Gennep’s rite of passage theory as “a major, very important, discovery” and a “tremendous contribution.”¹⁵² Gluckman further informed readers that, subsequent to the book’s appearance in South Africa in the 1930s, he had observed a notable improvement in the way ethnographers reported ritual.

While van Gennep’s approach is limited by its exclusive reliance on written sources and is dated in its universalizing tone and in the patronizing manner in which it speaks of “primitive” cultures, it is helpful in its recognition of the widespread use of such events by societies to guide individuals and groups through life transitions and in conceiving of these rites in terms of a wholistic process which logically involves a separation, a liminal period, and a reincorporation. As has been noted, writers such as Campbell and Eliade may, however, have been overeager in their sweeping generalizations from van Gennep’s observations. Nevertheless Campbell’s observation regarding the ability of rites of passage to help the individual see personal experience in

¹⁵⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History* (Bollingen Series 46; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 17–18.

¹⁵¹ Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (trans. Willard R Trask; New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

¹⁵² Max Gluckman, “Les rites de passage,” in *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations* (Manchester, UK, 1962), 1.

terms of larger and lasting forms is worthy of consideration, as is Eliade's exploration of the prevalence of symbolic death and rebirth within rites of passage.¹⁵³

Victor Turner

It was Victor Turner, an English anthropologist, who most fully developed van Gennep's theory of *rites de passage*. Turner came out of a structuralist-functionalist background, which focused on understanding the structures of a particular society and how the various aspects of the society functioned to accomplish its goals. During his field work with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, an organization aiming to improve colonial relations with the natives of Southern Africa, Turner found himself dissatisfied with the structural-functional paradigm as an explanation for the complex rituals he observed among the Ndembu of Zambia.¹⁵⁴ Yet, upon his return to England in the early 1950s, Gluckman, his supervisor, insisted that he do his dissertation on the structural aspects of the Ndembu society claiming, "Until you've mastered that, you're in no position to analyze ritual."¹⁵⁵ Although he grew well beyond a strict functionalist understanding of ritual, Turner never departed from this emphasis on the importance of understanding social structure.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 105.

¹⁵⁴ In anthropological terms, *functionalism* may be understood as a focus on the way in which various practices serve to conserve the existing social order. *Structuralism* gives priority to a consideration of static underlying frameworks—in the case of the British structuralist-functionalist school, the underlying structures of society and how relationships and practices support/interact with these structures. (The French structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss addresses the underlying structures of myth and of human thought in general). In practice there is not a clear line between the functionalist and the structuralist schools and there is frequently disagreement as to whether a particular theorist or concept should be assigned to one approach or the other.

¹⁵⁵ Edith Turner, "Prologue: From the Ndembu to Broadway," in *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*, by Victor W. Turner (ed. Edith Turner; The Anthropology of Form and Meaning, ed. J. David Sapir; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 2–8.

¹⁵⁶ Don Handelman, "Is Victor Turner Receiving His Intellectual Due? (Book Review)," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 7, no. 2 (1993): 117–18.

Turner's dissertation and initial research examined how society, exemplified by the Ndembu he had observed, dealt with social conflict through a four step *social drama* process of: (1) *breach* of normal relations; (2) mounting *crisis*; (3) attempt at *redressive action* (which if unsuccessful may begin a cycle of crisis and redressive actions); and (4) *reintegration* or *schism* of the contesting parties.¹⁵⁷ He came to believe that ritual is, along with political and legal-judicial processes, one of the possible redressive actions for resolving crisis, and that rites of passage attempt to deal with such crises in advance by either looking back on or anticipating the danger of a serious social breach and navigating around it through ritual action. He wrote,

Insofar as it is 'dramatic,' ritual contains a distanced and generalized reduplication of the agonistic process of the social drama. Ritual, therefore, is not 'threadbare' but 'richly textured' by virtue of its varied interweavings of the productions of mind and senses."¹⁵⁸

An English copy of *Les Rites de Passage*, picked up in a public library in 1963 in the midst of his own eventful passage to the teaching of anthropology at Cornell University in America, gave the young anthropologist a new framework with which to understand his previous work with the Ndembu and set the course for his future life's study. Giving the title "transformation ritual" to van Gennep's *rite de passage*, he also added to van Gennep's two major subcategories (the life-crisis ritual and the calendrical ritual) a third type, the ritual of affliction which is concerned with remedying illness, misfortune, deviation, or conflict by healing breaches in social bonds and assuaging the supernatural powers involved.¹⁵⁹ Turner argued that social relationships should be seen as an important factor in these rites, for they "not only concern the individuals on whom

¹⁵⁷ Victor W. Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush*, 215–21.

¹⁵⁸ Victor W. Turner, "Social Dramas and the Stories about Them," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 161–62.

¹⁵⁹ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 7, 45; idem, *The Ritual Process*, 94, 167–71; idem, "Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media," *Religion* 15 (1985): 206–08. Victor Turner also at times spoke of calendrical ritual as *ceremony* rather than *ritual*, because of its predictable, cyclical and confirmatory nature (*Forest of Symbols*, 7, 45).

they are centered, but also mark changes in the relationships of all the people connected with them by ties of blood, marriage, cash, political control, and in many other ways.”¹⁶⁰

He noted that such rites are particularly prominent in stable kin-centered societies governed by an assumed tradition of values, norms, and symbols based in a consistent cosmology “where change is bound up with biological and meteorological rhythms and recurrences rather than with technological innovations.”¹⁶¹ Turner noted specifically that, beginning as early as “city-states on their way to becoming empires (of the Graeco-Roman type),” the traditional rite of passage became increasingly a matter of choice, based largely in limited sociocultural subsystems.¹⁶² With the modern development of contractually-based societies divided into classes and encompassing an ever-shifting diversity of ethnicities, ideas, and voluntary associations through inter-linked transportation, communication, and trade, many other forms of ritual and non-ritual processes arose which involved some passage from “before” to “after” in which participants pass through an interim of liminality where they are separated from the normal demands of society into a between-time full of potential for change.¹⁶³

In such societies, including our own, these liminal-like, or *liminoid*, phenomena came to predominate over ritual liminality.¹⁶⁴ Turner, who became increasingly interested in this phenomena in his later work, coined the term *liminoid* to refer to such activities, which are as diverse as pilgrimage, literature, painting, and the performance arts, sports,

¹⁶⁰ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 7.

¹⁶¹ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbol*, 93.

¹⁶² Victor W. Turner, “Process, System, and Symbol: A New Anthropological Synthesis,” *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 72; idem, “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media,” 213–14.

¹⁶³ Victor W. Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas, Parts I & II,” *Worship* 46 (1972): 398–99; idem, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (ed. Victor W. Turner; Symbol, Myth, and Ritual Series; Ithica NY.: Cornell University Press, 1974), 13–14; idem, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology,” in *Play, Games, and Sports in Cultural Contexts* (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1983), 127.

¹⁶⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 274; idem, “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media,” 211–12.

and theoretical hypotheses and utopias. Although these are not part of a formal process ushering individuals from one state or stage in life to the next, they are analogous to rituals in that they help the individual step for a time outside of ‘the normal rules of living’ and to “play with the factors of culture,” assembling them at times into “random, grotesque, improbable, surprising combinations.”¹⁶⁵ Further, these activities, in contrast to the truly liminal, are freely chosen by the individual from among a marketplace of ideas and products, are more generally secularized, and tend to be developed along the margins of society by myriad groups and individuals.¹⁶⁶

In considering ritual accounts in the Greco-Roman narrative world and specifically in the text of Luke-Acts, it is worth considering this understanding of ritual and social drama suggested by Turner, asking whether and why a particular rite might be depicted as helping a society navigate around a potential social crisis, and examining the changes marked in the various relations of the ritual subjects. While Turner specifically noted that Greco-Roman society had already begun to move away from a reliance on traditional rites of passage, organized and sponsored by the central structures of society, the society in which Luke-Acts was immersed was still a great distance from the highly complex modern society to which Turner gave his later attention. Thus the application of the theory requires thoughtful questioning as to whether and how the apparent rite of passage accounts under study fit into the liminal, or liminoid, paradigm.

¹⁶⁵ Victor W. Turner, “Comments and Conclusions,” in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (ed. B. Babcock; Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 282; cf. Victor W. Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Lectures on the History of Religions; New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 3–4, 253. Victor and Edith Turner recognize that there are liminoid zones even in tribal cultures in the work of storytellers and woodcarvers and others (Victor W. Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 45).

¹⁶⁶ Victor W. Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 231. Victor W. Turner gives a summary of the differences between liminal and liminoid phenomena in several places including (“Variations on a Theme of Liminality,” in *Secular Ritual* [ed. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff; Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977], 43–45; idem, “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media,” 213–16).

2.1.2 Liminality

The quality of a rite of passage which most interested Victor Turner was the “liminality” particularly associated with the middle, transitional phase. Turner argued that liminality includes few or none of the attributes of the previous or future states, and that the features of liminality are ambiguous—that is, they are outside of all society’s standard classifications.¹⁶⁷ Liminal beings, in effect, have nothing—“no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows. Their condition is indeed the very prototype of sacred poverty.”¹⁶⁸ During the liminal movement between states, the individual finds herself “betwixt and between” positions normally assigned by law, custom, convention, and ceremony, where she experiences a suspension or reversal of the normal rules of living.¹⁶⁹ For Turner, this release from normal constraints came to represent the essence of liminality, making possible “the deconstruction of the ‘uninteresting’ constructions of common sense . . . into cultural units which may then be reconstructed in novel ways, some of them bizarre to the point of monstrosity.”¹⁷⁰

Often the liminal separation from former and future ways of life is reflected in a physical removal from the familiar places and people of their former life, and in a sense of being outside of the ordinary flow of time.¹⁷¹ The “spatial separation from the familiar and habitual . . . may” he states “have punitive, purificatory, expiatory, cognitive, instructional, therapeutic, transformative, and many other facets aspects, and

¹⁶⁷ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 94.

¹⁶⁸ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 237.

¹⁶⁹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94–95.

¹⁷⁰ Victor W. Turner, “Process, System, and Symbol,” 68.

¹⁷¹ Victor W. Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty,” 399; idem, “Liminal to Liminoid,” 128.

functions.”¹⁷² This liminal time of threat and promise is also generally considered to be sacred and is protected from secularity, as secularity itself is protected from liminality, by taboos.¹⁷³

Many of the symbols involved in the liminal process such as death, being in the womb, invisibility, darkness, wilderness, movement, and eclipse of the sun or moon echo this experience of temporary separation.¹⁷⁴ Animal, plant and other natural objects abound in these situations where the mores and expectations of society have been set aside leaving only the objects and symbols of nature in their place.¹⁷⁵ Symbols of filth and of earthly and bodily processes such as menstruation may also be involved, for they are considered to represent dissolution and are, like liminality, ambiguous, generally being considered unclean because of their unclear, contradictory place in relation to the body.¹⁷⁶

Participants may also be, in a sense, ground down in the liminal experience through ordeal, circumcision, hazing, endurance of heat and cold, and impossible physical tests.¹⁷⁷ By encountering liminal symbols joined in the form of paradox, oxymore and ambiguity, “of being both this and that”—both living and dead, ghosts and babies, humans and animals, male and female—“ideas, sentiments, and facts that had been hitherto for the neophytes bound up in configurations and accepted unthinkingly”

¹⁷² Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 196.

¹⁷³ Victor W. Turner, “Metaphors of Anti-Structure in Religious Culture,” in *Changing Perspective in the Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), 64.

¹⁷⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

¹⁷⁵ Victor W. Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty,” 411; idem, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 25.

¹⁷⁶ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 96–98, 236. Victor Turner adopted this concept of impurity from Mary Douglas.

¹⁷⁷ Victor W. Turner, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* (The Anthropology of Form and Meaning; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 49–50.

are broken down into their component parts.¹⁷⁸ Disproportionate and monstrous representations may appear, stimulating participants to dissociate and reflect upon the place and relation of their various grotesque or exaggerated parts, and what is repressed into the unconscious may reappear, either in veiled form or explicitly acted out.¹⁷⁹

In addition, Turner observes liminality to often be a “time of marvels” during which gods, ancestors, or other supernatural powers may appear in grotesque or beautiful forms.¹⁸⁰ In a sense, these liminal monsters and dragons “have the pedagogical function of stimulating the liminars’ powers of analysis and revealing to them the building blocks from which their hitherto taken-for-granted world has been constructed.”¹⁸¹ Witches, demons, and ghosts which personify the dangerous and unpredictable can be exorcised or remolded to fit these cosmic designs.¹⁸² From the above conditions an element of play enters liminality, but a serious play that involves improvisation with symbols and innovation of ideas through dreams and trances, riddles and tasks, and the tribal arts.¹⁸³

Such a complete disintegration and rearrangement of social and cultural mores carries an element of danger, but “the liminal space is not abandoned to chaos or negativity—it is refilled, so to speak, from the essence of the social.”¹⁸⁴ With the deconstruction of most standard classifications in liminality, one status structure

¹⁷⁸ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 105; idem, “Metaphors of Anti-Structure,” 78; idem, *Blazing the Trail*, 49–50.

¹⁷⁹ Victor W. Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty,” 483–84; idem, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 257.

¹⁸⁰ Victor W. Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty,” 399.

¹⁸¹ Victor W. Turner, “Process, System, and Symbol,” 69.

¹⁸² Victor W. Turner, “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media,” 210–11.

¹⁸³ Victor W. Turner, “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media,” 210–11. Victor Turner notes that Huizinga pointed out the element of play, or the ‘ludic,’ in the construction and negotiation of meaning in culture, from children’s games to philosophical dialectic and judicial process. In traditional societies, he argues, this play is often reserved for authentically liminal times and places (“Process, System, and Symbol,” 68).

¹⁸⁴ Victor W. Turner, “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media,” 210–11.

remains—that of the instructors, whose authority is absolute. Neophytes “must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint.”¹⁸⁵ The rebuilding process generally takes place by means of “instruction, partly in practical skills, partly in tribal esoterica and proceeds by both verbal and nonverbal symbolic means.”¹⁸⁶ The authority of the instructor Turner understands to be based, in reality, in their representation of certain particularly axiomatic values and traditions of the group, as is evident in situations such as the native American vision quest where the liminal experience is solitary and where traditions of prayer, fasting, and visionary guidance hold absolute authority, even though no one is present to instruct or observe.¹⁸⁷

The sharing of a central cluster of *sacra*—symbolic objects, actions, and instructions held sacred within the bounds of the ritual—teaches neophytes how to think about their culture, acting as a nonlogical symbolic template of the system of beliefs and values of a culture.¹⁸⁸ The communication and experience of these *sacra* is believed to change their nature from one kind of human being into another. Such experiences,

prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society.¹⁸⁹

Such symbols also serve to arouse initiative, to incite people to action as well as to thought, for the close association of traditional norms with strong emotion aroused by symbol is capable of moving people at many different psychological levels simultaneously.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

¹⁸⁶ Victor W. Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 49–50.

¹⁸⁷ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 98–99, 237.

¹⁸⁸ Victor W. Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty,” 399; idem, *Forest of Symbols*, 102–09, 239.

¹⁸⁹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 103.

¹⁹⁰ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 30; idem, *The Ritual Process*, 128–29.

Turner's work on liminality is filled with insights valuable to keep in mind as one examines the ritual accounts of Luke and other contemporary Greco-Roman authors. The recognition of an ambiguous "betwixt and between" period where the ritual subject stands apart from the identifiers of both the previous and the coming state is foundational. And Turner's descriptions of the attributes and symbols of the phase of liminality are ones that show up repeatedly in ancient text and ritual and are worthy of consideration as to how they may participate in the event of ritual transformation. The same is true of the guidance of a ritual instructor, or elder, who is generally expected but not invariably present in ritual.

2.1.3 Communitas and Anti-Structure

According to Turner, one significant condition that often arises among those undergoing the liminal phase of a rite of passage is the experience of *communitas*—"an intense comradeship and egalitarianism, a sense of the generic human bond between all members of society . . ." without which there would be no society.¹⁹¹ *Communitas*, which may be engendered by the ritual leveling and shared humiliation which takes place during the liminal phase, is spontaneous, immediate, concrete, full of affect. It is not brought about by cultural norms, and is neither institutionalized nor abstract.¹⁹² Normally involving relationships between individual human beings, it may also at times encompass the relationship between humans and God.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95–97, 226–27.

¹⁹² Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 128; idem, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 274; idem, "Metaphors of Anti-Structure," 64–65. Victor Turner spoke of three types of "communitas": (1) an actual spontaneous and unconstructed type; (2) a normative communitas which represents the attempt to capture and preserve spontaneous communitas within structure in ritual, etc.; and (3) even more derivative, ideological communitas, the formulation of remembered attributes of spontaneous communitas into a utopian blueprint (Victor W. Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 58–59). He understood communitas as involving the relationship between individual human beings, but also at times encompassing the relationship between humans and God ("Passages, Margins and Poverty," 391).

¹⁹³ Victor W. Turner, "Passages, Margins and Poverty," 391.

Communitas, Turner recognized, is not certain to occur during the liminal phase for although liminality often provides favorable conditions for communitas, the absence of structure may instead have the reverse effect, leading to a war of “all against all” or an anarchy of individuals “doing their own thing.” Neither was Turner under the illusion that communitas was limited to the liminal phase of a tribal ritual for he saw it also in phenomena as diverse as good Samaritans, millenarian movements, holy mendicants, small nations, and monastic orders.¹⁹⁴ Turner hypothesized that, besides appearing in passages between positions in the societal structure in *liminality*, communitas could also be found “breaking out”: (1) beneath structure in *inferiority*—the permanently or transiently sacred attributes of low status or position such as the simpleton, jester, or stranger or those in millenarian movements; (2) between structural positions in *marginality*, (which Victor Turner came to understand as the state of those whose participation in two or more distinct and unmergeable societal groups placed them, unlike liminars, permanently ‘betwixt and between’ the positions of structure); and (3) outside of structure in *outsiderhood* either voluntarily or by ascription, as in the case of “shamans, diviners, mediums, priests, hippies, hoboes, and gypsies.”¹⁹⁵

In certain cases, Turner stated, the experience of communitas in a rite of passage, may result in the transformation of what is essentially a liminal or extra-structural phase into a permanent condition of sacred ‘outsiderhood.’ [Such a person] assumes a statusless status, external to the secular social structure, which gives him the right to criticize all structure-bound personae in terms of a moral order binding on all, and also to mediate between all segments or components of the structured system.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 125.

¹⁹⁵ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 109–12, 125–28. In 1969, Victor Turner recognized the categories of liminality, inferiority, and marginality—which he defined as being set outside the structural arrangements of society, but by 1974 he seems to have added the category of outsiderhood to describe this condition and referred to redefined marginality as described above (*Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 231–34, 243).

¹⁹⁶ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 116–17.

Later in the same document, Turner noted that prophets and artists, in particular,

tend to be liminal and marginal people, ‘edgemen,’ who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination.¹⁹⁷

This concept of ongoing liminality, or sacred outsiderhood, is particularly tantalizing when viewed in the context of the Lucan Jesus account with its emphasis on Jesus’ disdain for rank and status, his concern for the marginalized, and his critiques of established cultural mores. Such correspondences raise the question of how such a position with regard to society may have come about, and support the validity of investigating Luke 3:1–4:15 for other rite of passage correspondences which may help to bring an answer to that question.

Turner often spoke of the conditions of liminality and *communitas* together as forming *anti-structure*, that is, the antithesis to the “more or less distinctive arrangement of mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of social positions and/or actors they imply” which he understood as *structure*.¹⁹⁸ While he recognized a continuous tension to exist between these two poles of structure and anti-structure, Turner declared them to be, in actuality, complementary rather than contradictory, for a person is “both a structural and an anti-structural entity, who *grows* through anti-structure and *conserves* through structure.”¹⁹⁹ In fact, he said, no society can function adequately without this dialectic which releases men “from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 128.

¹⁹⁸ Victor W. Turner, “Metaphors of Anti-Structure,” 63–64. “This is not to say that everyday social structure is essentially static, for it is constantly being influenced and modified by antistructure, just as antistructure is continually being curbed and penetrated by structure which sets limits on its capacity for experimentation and critical reflection” (Victor W. Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 133).

¹⁹⁹ Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 298; idem, “Metaphors of Anti-Structure,” 65.

²⁰⁰ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 129.

In tradition-governed kinship-based societies the “potentially subversive character of liminality” is prevented from overflowing into structural change.²⁰¹ However, in more complex societies liminal experiences and paradigms, found for example in liminoid activities such as dramas, folk tales, carnivals, and so on, may make the system as it exists tolerable but also has “a chance of influencing those who exercise power over the work structure of society and of modifying that structure . . . ; and may even revolutionize it.”²⁰² In this way anti-structure represents a very real danger to structure, especially when structure becomes increasingly rigid and oppressive, for out of the overlooked margins where *communitas* thrives anti-structure may burst forth with a new and embracing idea. Eventually, this new idea, too, will itself become hardened into structure and institution as the exaggeration of leveling in *communitas* again leads to despotism and over-bureaucratization.²⁰³ And when the pendulum swings large, the rigidification and abuse of structure may eventually be challenged by “pathological manifestations of *communitas* outside or against ‘the law.’”²⁰⁴ This close relationship between liminality and structure caused Turner to echo Gluckman’s concern for understanding societal structure, stating that “It has sometimes been forgotten by those caught up in the first enthusiasm for processualism [in ritual] that process is intimately bound up with structure and that an adequate analysis of social life necessitates a rigorous consideration of the relation between them.”²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Victor W. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 84; idem, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 275.

²⁰² Victor W. Turner, “Comments and Conclusions,” 281; idem, “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media,” 213.

²⁰³ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 111–13; idem, “Metaphors of Anti-Structure,” 78.

²⁰⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 129; idem, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 245, 254.

²⁰⁵ Victor W. Turner, “Process, System, and Symbol,” 65.

Outside of the ideal case, the manifestations of *communitas* and *antistructure* may show up in a variety of intensities and forms in the ancient world. Turner's observations in this area suggest the possible value of considering the way in which Luke sets up the actors and events of Luke 3:1–4:15 with relation to the surrounding societal structures.

2.1.4 Interpretation of Rites of Passage

In the method Turner developed for interpreting ritual, an approach he sometimes referred to as *processual symbolic analysis*, the context in which the particular ritual took place is first examined as broadly as possible. Second, he investigated the symbolic aspects of the ritual itself; after which he explored how that ritual fit into the society's entire ritual system.²⁰⁶

The Ritual in Its Context

The specific context for a particular ritual enactment must be considered first, for no ritual actually exists as pure theory apart from specific circumstances which give rise to its performance. Prior events—whether in the world of nature or of social action—and also current economic, technological, and developmental conditions in the lives of the group influence the timing, execution, and purposes of the ritual. Further, the individuals and groups actually taking part in the ritual have their own ongoing experiences, concerns, and inter-relationships which may or may not coincide with each other or with those of the controlling structure, and which affect the ritual process and outcome.²⁰⁷

An approach that Turner found helpful for examining both the basic beliefs and practices of a generic ritual form and the specific setting and enactment of a particular ritual was the field theory developed by Kurt Lewin. Lewin did not draw a clear line between “the individual” and “the environment,” but rather studied them as a unit which

²⁰⁶ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 45–46; Victor W. Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 243.

²⁰⁷ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 45–46.

he called a *field*, recognizing that things acquire their meaning from the context, or social field, in which they are found.²⁰⁸ Following Lewin, Turner sought first to identify the specific spatial and temporal limits of the *ritual field* (or power field) on which a particular rite is played out and to discover its characteristics and structural properties—including the relationships and hierarchies of the individuals and groupings it originates from, sets up, and emphasizes.

When the ritual actually takes place, this potent “power field” becomes an active *operations field* (or force field) where two types of goals are simultaneously played out—the overarching goal of maintaining unity and traditional structure for the good of the group as a whole, and the goals of individuals and subgroups in pursuit of their own various benefits from a pool of scarce resources.²⁰⁹ Thus the actual movements of the actors in the ritual field can be examined against both the general principles of organization governing the relations between such persons and groups, and the current imbalance of power relations between the particular players within the ritual under consideration.²¹⁰ In the case of the Greco-Roman narrative accounts, the context to be considered is very much limited by that presented at the discretion of, and for the purposes of, the author. These purposes too must be taken into account.

The Ritual Symbols

Once the context of the particular rite has been examined, Turner’s method turns to an examination of the ritual symbols, exploring the ways in which people understand and behave toward these symbols within the particular context of the specific rite. For

²⁰⁸ Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 27; idem, “*Mukanda*, Boys’ Circumcision: The Politics of a Non-Political Ritual,” in *On the Edge of the Bush* (ed. Edith Turner; The Anthropology of Form and Meaning, ed. J. David Sapir; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 55; Stephen G. Wieting, “Myth and Symbol Analysis of Claude Levi-Strauss and Victor Turner,” *Social Compass* 19, no. 2 (1972): 145.

²⁰⁹ Victor W. Turner, “*Mukanda*, Boys’ Circumcision,” 54–63.

²¹⁰ Victor W. Turner, “*Mukanda*, Boys’ Circumcision,” 67–69.

Turner, a symbol was understood to be an object, word, or action which expresses, through analogy, a relatively unknown or unexpressible unit of meaning which is nonetheless recognized or postulated to exist.²¹¹ (This is in contrast to a sign, which is an analogous or abbreviated expression of a *known* thing.) Turner saw symbols as the “molecules” of ritual, that is, the smallest units of ritual which still retain the specific properties of ritual behavior.²¹² Like the molecule, the ritual symbol cannot be reduced to, or explained by, any particular object or behavior which makes it up, but must somehow be grasped in its own specific essence.

Further, a ritual symbol is a living dynamic force—not a static object or corpse but an independent force “which is itself a product of many opposed forces”—which creates and molds reality and produces action.²¹³ Symbols, when used in ritual,

operate culturally as mnemonics . . . not about pragmatic techniques, but about cosmologies, values, and cultural axioms, whereby a society’s ‘deep knowledge’ is transmitted from one generation to another.²¹⁴

Turner also recognized, in line with Clifford Geertz’s famous statement that symbols are both “models of” and “models for” reality, that “Symbols may well reflect not structure, but anti-structure, and not only reflect it, but contribute to creating it.”²¹⁵

Within a ritual, there is a “dominant symbol” (or group of symbols) which stands as a fixed point referring to axiomatic values and which is a means to the fulfillment of the avowed purposes of the ritual, and “instrumental symbols” which may be variable

²¹¹ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 26–27; idem, “Process, System, and Symbol,” 63.

²¹² Victor W. Turner, “*Mukanda*, Boys’ Circumcision,” 19; idem, “Symbols and Social Experience in Religious Ritual,” in *Worship and Ritual in Christianity and Other Religions* (ed. Mariasusai Dhavamony; *Studia Missionalia*; Rome: Gregorian University, 1974), 1.

²¹³ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 22, 44; idem, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 270.

²¹⁴ Victor W. Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty,” 399.

²¹⁵ Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 270.

according to the wider context and purpose of the rite.²¹⁶ Dominant symbols often represent a paradox—one need think only of the Christian cross as a symbol of shame and glory, death and new life—condensing and unifying the contradictions of social life in a single representation.²¹⁷ Dominant symbols are not only seen as means to fulfill the avowed purpose of the ritual, but also refer to values that are ends in themselves.²¹⁸

Ritual symbols have several additional properties which are not generally found in other symbols. Turner describes the first as the property of *condensation*, referring to the fact that a symbol's rich and multi-vocal meaning concentrates things that matter so that many things and actions may be represented by a single symbol. The obverse is also true, for the property of *unification of disparate significata* allows similar themes to run through a number of different symbols united by the common possession of analogous qualities or sometimes by apparently random associations. Ritual symbols and systems also show the property of the *polarization of meaning* for at one pole—the ideological pole—ritual systems of symbols may refer cognitively to norms and values associated with harmony and with the moral and social order, while at the other pole—the sensory pole—these symbols also refer, through deep roots in the unconscious, to natural and to grossly physiological elements associated with desires and feelings and uncovering conflicts and ambivalences.²¹⁹ These emotional and physiological referents may, in fact, become associated with the ethical and normative referents of the ideological pole so that

²¹⁶ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 20–22, 31–32, 45.

²¹⁷ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 43–44, 99.

²¹⁸ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 20.

²¹⁹ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 27–34, 245. Victor Turner adds that the anthropologist is to explore the meanings associated with the ideological pole, but that beyond recognizing and valuing the general emotions evoked on the other, sensory pole, anthropology does not supply the skills to evaluate the sources of these feelings and the behaviors associated with them (*Forest of Symbols*, 36).

what is obligatory is also made desirable.²²⁰ When the bond between these two poles is broken, for whatever reason, Turner saw a process of deritualization as the result.²²¹

Descriptive data concerning a ritual symbol may be collected using three types of methods: the exegetical, the operational, and the positional.²²² *The exegetical, or interpretative, approach* looks at what indigenous participants and observers say about a symbol. Information may be gathered from the whole corpus of explanations, past and present, of a ritual symbol.²²³ Modes of explanation may include myths, piecemeal interpretation, doctrine and dogma.²²⁴ Meaning here is built up from analogies and associations with the name given to the ritual symbol, from the natural and material properties of the symbol, and from the way the symbol has been adapted with reference to the ritual.²²⁵ But interpretation must not be restricted to the verbal explanations of native exegetes.

The operational approach pays attention to how the ritual symbol is used and what the participants in a particular ritual do with it.²²⁶ Attention is given to the individuals, groups and roles that act, or do not act, with reference to the ritual symbol,

²²⁰ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 29–30.

²²¹ Victor W. Turner, “Symbols and Social Experience,” 9.

²²² Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 27; idem, *Drums of Affliction*, 17; idem, “Symbols and Social Experience,” 11–17.

²²³ Information gained must then be classified and understood with reference to social characteristics of the informants (age, sex, status, religious role, degree of esoteric knowledge . . .) (Victor W. Turner, “The Syntax of Symbolism in an African Religion,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B 251, no. 722* (1966): 295; idem, “Symbols and Social Experience,” 11).

²²⁴ Clear exegesis is more likely to be available in the case of peoples of different cultures being in frequent contact, of myth in societies with “deep traditions of continuous residence,” doctrine and of dogma in literate societies (Victor W. Turner, “Symbols and Social Experience,” 11–12).

²²⁵ Victor W. Turner, “Symbols and Social Experience,” 13–14.

²²⁶ Victor W. Turner, *Drums of Affliction*, 17.

considering both their actions and their attitudes in this regard.²²⁷ Because a symbol is an expression of an *unknown* thing, considerable discrepancy can exist between interpretations offered by informants, and behavior exhibited in situations dominated by the symbolism. Turner believed that the anthropologist should be able to use her “objective” view of the whole ritual field and structure to make the better interpretation.²²⁸

The positional approach explores the position of the symbol in relation to the various clusters of symbols in which it is found within the ritual. The way symbols are arranged in space often gives clues as to the particular meaning of a symbol, and to the principles, values, and structures of the culture which are being expressed.²²⁹ Likewise, symbols must be examined as part of a larger temporal progression, for they are essentially involved in a specific social process.²³⁰ And, in partial agreement with French structuralist Lévi-Strauss, symbols must be examined with reference to their meaning-position relative to other symbols in a symbol structure. Like Lévi-Strauss, Turner recognized that symbols may be hierarchically arrayed in binary oppositions such as good/evil, light/dark, death/life, but adds that they may also be found in other groupings including asymmetrical pairings, and solar-system like arrays, showing the prominence of one, or several, symbols.²³¹ Turner also considered a symbol’s meaning position in relation to the subsystem of rituals to which it belongs and to the overall ritual system,

²²⁷ Victor W. Turner, “The Syntax of Symbolism in a Ndembu Ritual,” in *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition* (ed. Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs Maranda; University of Pennsylvania Publications in Folklore and Folklife, ed. Kenneth S. Goldstein; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 130; idem, “Symbols and Social Experience,” 12.

²²⁸ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 25–27.

²²⁹ Victor W. Turner, “Symbols and Social Experience,” 15–16.

²³⁰ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 20.

²³¹ Victor W. Turner, “Symbols and Social Experience,” 12–13, 17.

and noted its uniqueness or dominance in relation to the symbols in the these larger systems.²³²

The Ritual System

Finally, once the ritual and its symbols are understood in their particular context, the ritual is examined as a segment of an entire ritual system to discover how it interrelates with the other segments and with the dominant articulating principles of the total system. The significance of each symbol of the ritual can only be properly understood when it is examined in relationship to their meaning in the total ritual system.²³³ Turner adds that the anthropologist “may even find it profitable, where the same symbol is found throughout a wide culture area, to study its changes of meaning in different societies in that area.”²³⁴ In regard to the dominant symbols of a ritual he goes even farther, examining them also with reference to cross-cultural understandings.²³⁵ Among other benefits, such practices help to uncover relationships between overt and submerged, and between manifest and latent meanings, of the particular ritual.

Turner insisted that the understanding of ritual not be a narrow single-disciplinary enterprise, stating,

What seems to emerge from this brief glance at some of the cultural apparatus of liminal rituals, symbols and myths is that all these phenomena exhibit great depth and complexity. They emphatically do not lend themselves to being reduced to the terms of practitioners of a single discipline or subdiscipline, such as the various and opposed schools of psychology, emotionalist or intellectualist, the various schools of sociologicistic reductionism from the followers of Radcliffe-Brown to those of Lévi-Strauss, or philosophers and theologians who may tend to neglect the contextual involvement of these phenomena with the social structure, history, economy, and ecology of the specific groups in which they occur. What we do not want is a Manichean separation of what is purely intellectual or

²³² Victor W. Turner, “The Syntax of Symbolism in a Ndembu Ritual,” 132.

²³³ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 46; idem, *Drums of Affliction*, 2.

²³⁴ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 43.

²³⁵ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 291.

spiritual in such pivotal religious phenomena from what is material and specific.²³⁶

The likely connections between a particular rite and the other rituals within a social system is an important consideration which has been given little consideration in the interpretation of Luke-Acts and other Greco-Roman narratives and is deserving of further attention.

In an overall sense, Turner spoke also of the need to consider rituals with respect to meaning structures evidenced within them. These include: (1) a *value structure* in which crucial values and ideological structures of the community are communicated by means of processes of ritual segments containing specific arrangements of symbols; (2) a *telic structure* in which each ritual segment has an explicit aim and works toward the ultimate purpose of the ritual; and (3) a *role structure* as the “product of interaction between human actors of roles” and having reference as well to “ultra-human entities or persons.”²³⁷

The Ritual in Literature

One of the largest challenges for using the insights of ritual theory in interpreting Greco-Roman narrative is in the challenge of interpreting ritual within and as part of an integral text with purposes and processes of its own. In 1976, Turner wrote an article entitled, *African Ritual and Western Literature*, addressing the question of how the methods and understandings gained in a study of African ritual might be applied to rituals known only through their descriptions in various Western literatures, as well as to the interpretation of literature as a whole. Recognizing the challenges inherent in attempting such an interpretation, he noted that problems arise because the experience of ritual through literature is a sedentary, one-way process of thoughtful reflection, whereas

²³⁶ Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 257–58.

²³⁷ Victor W. Turner, *Drums of Affliction*, 1–5.

experiencing ritual is active and interactive, sensory and open. The act of writing and reading a text imposes a linear and hierarchical form which differs markedly from the act and process of ritual that may have several vortices of action taking place at the same time like the proverbial three-ring circus.”²³⁸

Turner suggested that a written text be approached as a sequence of multivocal symbols, listing “all the objects, proper nouns, persons, actions, relationships, attributes, topographical features, and so on, which could be shown to have a symbolic value . . . beyond their literal sense” and then proceeding to look for exegetical help from other parts of the same work or other works of the same author before consulting outside works and commentators.²³⁹ He found Levi Strauss’s French structuralist approach of identifying binary oppositions, including those in the spatial, temporal, and religious spheres, particularly helpful for application to a literary text. In addition he emphasized the value of examining symbols with particular attention to the properties of unification of disparate *significata*, condensation, and polarization. This approach to the dominant symbols in the literary work, and the ancillary symbols they organize, was for Turner the preferred way of approaching lived ritual through written text, for such symbols provide the fixed points and designate the major themes both of the literary and ritual systems and of “the cultures for which they are supreme modes of expression,” sometimes also critiquing or providing new themes for these cultures.²⁴⁰ Following Turner’s advice, the analysis of symbols and their properties and oppositions will figure importantly in this study’s analysis of Greco-Roman narrative, particularly Luke 3:1–4:15.

²³⁸ Even the transmission of ritual is accomplished orally and learned through practice (Victor W. Turner, “African Ritual and Western Literature: Is a Comparative Symbology Possible,” in *The Literature of Fact: Selected Papers from the English Institute* [ed. A. Fletcher; New York: Columbia University Press, 1976], 66–67, 77).

²³⁹ W. Turner, “African Ritual and Western Literature,” 78.

²⁴⁰ W. Turner, “African Ritual and Western Literature,” 80–81.

2.2 Recent Criticism and Refinement of Rite of Passage Theory

There is no question that Victor Turner was one of the most important voices in ritual theory in the twentieth century. Turner was a master communicator with an uncommon devotion to his subject. His broad and enthusiastic work on rite of passage and liminality and their place in human society has inspired a multitude of scholarly studies in areas as diverse as religion, history, literature, and the arts, and has made the concepts of rite of passage and liminality a common part of popular speech and culture. He has been praised both for “the ethnographic richness of his ritual analyses” and “for his theoretical innovations.”²⁴¹

Criticisms of Turner’s work have of course also been provided, in diverse and sometimes conflicting forms, due in part to the changing progression of interests and commitments among social scientists, but also due to the very qualities that first made Turner’s work so available and attractive to a broad spectrum of people.²⁴² More a poet than a systematizer, Turner wrote (quite voluminously) for many different audiences—both popular and scholarly—applying rite of passage theory to a wide array of topics, using different manners of speaking and angles of approach without always attempting to ensure that terminology and conceptualization was consistent.²⁴³ The breadth of Turner’s

²⁴¹ Mathieu Deflem, “Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 1 (1991): 21.

²⁴² As Don Handelman suggests, Victor Turner often oversimplified his work to get it to as many audiences as possible, resulting in oversimplistic applications by many of those who attempt to use it; Thus Turner is used too facilely and nowhere carefully critiqued and rethought “A critical retrospective infused with prospective vision is overdue” (Handelman, “Is Victor Turner Receiving His Intellectual Due?,” 122–23).

²⁴³ While being an excellent logician, Victor Turner was in fact, according to Frederick Turner his son and professional colleague, philosophically opposed to the fiction of constructing a seamless conceptual system, often quoting Walt Whitman’s words, “Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself” (Frederick Turner, “‘Hyperion to a Satyr’ Criticism and Anti-Structure in the Work of Victor Turner,” in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology* (ed. Kathleen M Ashley; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), 148–52). Bobby C. Alexander, for example, notes that he blurs his own distinctions in his discussions, using one term and then the other calling theatre a ritual in one place and a liminoid phenomena in another (*Victor Turner Revisited: Ritual as Social Change* [AAR Academy Series 74; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991], 21; Victor W. Turner, *From*

interests has also confused the issue, as he gradually shifted from traditional ritual to modern manifestations of liminality, mixing insights from fields as widely separated as neurology and experimental theater in order to test and enrich his theories using thought and practice from across the disciplines.²⁴⁴ Like any good scholar his theory evolved and matured over the years, with his practical application not always keeping pace with the advancing maturity of his theory, and vice versa. His work also naturally reflected his own volatile era in which even the most fundamental ways of understanding ritual, the social sciences, and human thought in general was subject to question.

Criticism and refinement of Turner's work varies widely in theme, as well as in the critics' theoretical background and basic grasp of Turner's work. Those criticisms that pertain most specifically to rite of passage theory, particularly as it may shed light on rites of passage in an ancient text, are treated here within four basic categories: defining ritual, the ritual process, the function of ritual, and ritual interpretation and methodology.

2.2.1 Defining Ritual

The struggle to adequately define what is and is not ritual is an ongoing one in which ritual theorists have not come to any degree of mutual satisfaction. Early on, Turner defined ritual as "*prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers.*"²⁴⁵ Turner never substantially modified this definition, and the critiques that have been leveled at this definition of ritual typify the scholarly disagreement with regard to the definition of ritual.

Ritual to Theatre, 117; Edith Turner, "Prologue," 10). (Of course, anthropology itself has not always done such an impressive job of using terms, such as 'functionalist,' or 'structuralist' in a clear and consistent way.)

²⁴⁴ Victor W. Turner, "Passages, Margins and Poverty," 484.

²⁴⁵ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 19.

Ronald Grimes, a leader since the 1980s in the new interdisciplinary field of ritual studies, describes Victor Turner's fieldwork and theory as rich and nuanced, and his work in general as having a positive effect on general understandings of ritual, particularly among those groups who in recent history have looked upon ritual as dry, formalistic, and meaningless.²⁴⁶ He remarks, however, that "if he had adhered to his own definition" he would never have noticed "most of what he argued was distinctive about ritual."²⁴⁷ Critiquing Turner's definition of ritual, phrase by phrase, Grimes insists that Turner's narrowly bounded definition, which was forged primarily in relation to traditional tribal ritual, lagged behind his real sense and theory of what ritual is all about.²⁴⁸

1. "[P]rescribed formal behavior": Grimes agrees that ritual often is prescribed, but suggests that it can also be newly created, in fact is "always in the process of being created."²⁴⁹ It might be noted that Grimes also argues that ritual may be composed of *de*-formalizing, as well as formal, behavior, as Turner recognized in his later work.²⁵⁰

2. "[F]or occasions not given over to technological routine": Grimes points out that in some senses ritual does involve technological routine. For example, shamans have been called 'technicians of the sacred' because they follow formulas in healing rituals that are thought to achieve specific transformational results.²⁵¹ Nevertheless Grimes

²⁴⁶ Grimes states that "Turner unshackled the Western scholarly imagination, which had been able to conceive of ritual only in terms of its more staid features" (*Deeply Into the Bone*, 123).

²⁴⁷ Ronald L. Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing: Ritual in Fictive, Liturgical, and Public Places* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1993), 7.

²⁴⁸ Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 12–13; idem, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing*, 7.

²⁴⁹ Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing*, 8–10.

²⁵⁰ Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (rev. ed.; Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1995), 59; Alexander, *Victor Turner Revisited*, 19–20, 151–52.

²⁵¹ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 12–13.

recognizes that rites are differentiated from ordinary behavior by the members of the group(s) involved.²⁵²

3. “[H]aving reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers”: Grimes points out that ritual can move between cultures without any beliefs attached, and can be participated in without a firm or even an explicable belief structure.²⁵³ Defining ritual in such a way, as Alexander also argues, completely excludes the possibility of ritual among highly secularized people.²⁵⁴ These critiques are more appropriate to modern than to ancient applications of the term but are helpful to keep in mind. Gluckman, on the other hand, lamented that Turner often gave *too little* attention to this criteria in his work, complaining that he was thereby blurring “the distinction between formal activities that address and move the spirit world [which he called ritual] and formal activities that do not.”²⁵⁵ Anthropologist Elizabeth Evans suggests that Turner’s definition be broadened by using a term such as Clifford Geertz’s “uniquely real,” which he used to describe a religion, cosmology, or dominant ideology.²⁵⁶

Due to the challenges he finds in Turner’s ritual definition, Grimes shrinks from the idea of defining ritual too closely. Instead he proposes a list of “family characteristics” which typify ritual including:

performed/embodied	collective	adaptive/functional
formalized/differentiated	patterned/standardized	repetitive
valued highly/deeply felt	condensed/multilayered	traditional
perfected/idealized	dramatic/playlike	symbolic/referential
mystical/transcendent/cosmic	paradigmatic	conscious/deliberate

²⁵² Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 28.

²⁵³ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 12–13.

²⁵⁴ Alexander, *Victor Turner Revisited*, 151–52.

²⁵⁵ Mary Gluckman and Max Gluckman, “On Drama and Games and Athletic Contests,” in *Secular Ritual* (ed. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff; Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1977), 242.

²⁵⁶ Elizabeth S. Evans, “Ritual,” in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* (ed. David Levinson and Melvin Ember; New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 1123; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

Grimes argues that such a list displays more possible characteristics than can be fit into a simple definition, while at the same time recognizing that no one quality or group of qualities may be thought of as definitive.²⁵⁷ He suggests that, “When these qualities begin to multiply, when an activity becomes dense with them, it becomes increasingly proper to speak of it as ritualized, if not a rite as such.”²⁵⁸

Like Grimes, Catherine Bell, a ritual studies theorist and Grimes’ later contemporary, also insists that ritual may involve a range of activities ritualized to greater or lesser degrees, rather than necessarily being isolated and monolithic “activities inherently different from daily routine action and closely linked to the sacralities of tradition and organized religion.”²⁵⁹ Bell suggests six categories that might be used as an “initial lexicon for analyzing how cultures” flexibly and strategically “ritualize or deritualize social activities.” These ritual-like activities involve a “style of doing” often characterized by *formalism*, which enforces strict limits according to a narrow and rigidly organized code of speech and gesture, and by *traditionalism*, which creates legitimation through incorporating links with a mutually accepted past. Ritual-like activities commonly evidence the qualities of *invariance*, requiring precise discipline and repetition of certain actions, and also evidence other forms of *rule-governance*. Some sort of *sacral symbolism* may also be often seen in ritual-like activities, setting certain key symbols apart from the ordinary, evoking an experience of a “greater, higher, or more

²⁵⁷ Later however, Grimes did appear to single out the characteristic of “differentiated, even segregated from ordinary behavior,” and the acceptance as rite by group consensus, as essential definitional aspects of a rite (*Deeply Into the Bone*, 28).

²⁵⁸ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 14. As Frank H. Gorman, Jr., notes, the emphasis of the ritual studies school which Grimes typifies is “on moving away from reductionistic definitions to a focus on the quality of actions, the nuances of gesture, the positioning of the body, the strategies for enacting the self in specific situations” (“Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies: Assessment of the Past; Prospects for the Future,” *Semeia* 67 [1994]: 25).

²⁵⁹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 138.

universalized reality.”²⁶⁰ Such activities regularly appear as self-conscious *performance* of highly symbolic actions creating a condensed world of its own.²⁶¹ Bell observes cogently that “the degree activities are ritualized . . . is the degree to which the participants suggest that the authoritative values and forces shaping the occasion lie beyond the immediate control or inventiveness of those involved.”²⁶²

The criticisms of Grimes and Bell, although at times appearing to descend to mere nitpicking, provide an important caution against using a definition as a hard and fast rule for separating ritual from non-ritual. They also underline the need for some flexibility in considering whether an event would usefully be considered from the viewpoint of ritual. Turner’s definition does, however, provide a rough and ready sketch to go by, which may, when necessary, be refined by reference to Grimes’ rather unwieldy “laundry list” of possible ritual characteristics and Bell’s lexicon for analyzing ritualizing. Though some of these suggestions appear to have in mind modern ritual practice, Turner has made the point that Greco-Roman society was already moving away from traditional tribal structure and ritual, and it will be valuable to consider this text in the light of both traditional and modern ritual practice.

Grimes refines the language Turner used to refer to ritual, replacing this single term with four separate terms: “rite,” “ritual,” “ritualizing,” and “ritualization.” He speaks of a “*rite*” as a specific enactment, located in a concrete time and place, and recognized by members of that culture as “other” than ordinary experience.²⁶³ A “*ritual*,” on the other hand, is “the general idea of which a rite is a specific instance.”²⁶⁴ The third

²⁶⁰ Bell, *Ritual*, 159.

²⁶¹ Bell, *Ritual*, 138–69.

²⁶² Bell, *Ritual*, 169.

²⁶³ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 9–10.

²⁶⁴ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 10.

term, '*ritualizing*,' is used by Grimes to refer to "emergent or newly constructed ritual. Ritualizing is the activity of incubating ritual; it [is] the act of constructing ritual either self-consciously and deliberately or incrementally and editorially, as it were."²⁶⁵ Grimes sees ritualizing as tending to take place in the margins, rather than being initiated and supported by the central structures of a society, and becoming rite only when intentionally practiced and widely recognized by members of a group.²⁶⁶ Others, such as Elizabeth Evans add that the ability of a ritual, through its formal properties, to make "anything" sacred or traditional, makes possible even a ritual which may be only a one-time event.²⁶⁷ (It might be noted that much of Grimes' criticism of Turner's definition of ritual would more aptly apply to this category.) '*Ritualization*,' finally, "refers to activity that is not culturally framed as ritual but which someone, often an observer, interprets as if it were potential ritual."²⁶⁸ Grimes, also, addresses the term '*ritual criticism*,' speaking of it as "the interpretation of a rite or ritual system with a view to implicating its practice."²⁶⁹ Ritual criticism might address a variety of questions including: how a ritual is developed and adjusted, what may be its politics, ethics, and aesthetics, how the ritual affects the participants and observers, and how it does or does not achieve certain conscious or unconscious goals. Grimes' terms, *rite* and *ritualizing*, are particularly helpful in refining the general designation *ritual*, and will be used thus in rest of this study.

²⁶⁵ Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing*, 5; see also idem, *Ritual Criticism*, 10.

²⁶⁶ Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 28.

²⁶⁷ Evans, "Ritual," 1121–22.

²⁶⁸ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 10.

²⁶⁹ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 16.

Grimes is also concerned with several ways in which misconceptions of ritual have skewed the understanding of ritual in Western culture in general.²⁷⁰ One problem, particularly relevant to this study, is the assumption that ritual is a *collective* enterprise, which though often true ignores those ritual practices which have been enacted and even developed by individuals. Grimes responds by stating that, “Theories that deny the possibility of individual ritual are too undialectical in their conception of the relation between self and society.”²⁷¹

Classicist H. S. Versnel (1990) approaches the question of identifying ritual differently, looking at it from the standpoint of historical studies—an approach particularly relevant to this study. Versnel recognizes a pitfall often affecting classical and history of religion scholars who have too incautiously used the descriptions of transition in particular ancient myths to make the claim that these myths originated in an ancient and no-longer extant ritual, such as a new year’s festival or puberty initiation. He demonstrates, in response to such attempts, that the presence of a transition or symbol in a myth does not certify its basis in ritual, nor does the identification of a coherent pattern into which everything seems to fit nicely necessarily demonstrate the truth of a theory.²⁷² Rather, he insists, while a connection between myth and ritual may be plausible it must not be accepted as actual unless: (1) the reference is accompanied by an immediate ritual counterpart; (2) “the signals point specifically to one type of ritual;” or (3) “the story could solely and exclusively be interpreted as the reflection of this specific (and not of any other) ritual.”²⁷³ Aimed at deciphering ritual in ancient text, Versnel’s suggestions

²⁷⁰ Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing*, 7.

²⁷¹ Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing*, 10–12.

²⁷² H. S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion* (ed. H. S. Versnel; vol. 2 of *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual*; Studies in Greek and Roman Religion; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 64–67.

²⁷³ Versnel, *Inconsistencies*, 71.

underlining the importance of clear ritual markers in the text not just evidence of transition, are particularly *apropos* to this study.

2.2.2 The Rite of Passage Process

Grimes applauds Van Gennep for giving to ritual studies the concept of rite of passage which has allowed subsequent observers of ritual to recognize the important connections between various rites having to do with life transition. Similarly to Van Gennep and Turner, Grimes has understood rites of passage as rites used for negotiating the turning points of the human life cycle and consisting typically of three basic phases: separation, “transition into an especially formative time and space”, and reincorporation.²⁷⁴ Along with others, Grimes is, however, deeply critical of any tendency to make these three phases of rite of passage universal, insisting that, while there is a certain usefulness in its simplicity, the rite of passage model must be recognized as imposed from the outside rather than being an actual characteristic of every rite of passage. Therefore, Grimes makes the crucial point that the model must not be allowed to control or consume the exploration of ritual, stating, “There is nothing wrong with either inventing or prescribing, provided we know what we are doing. . . . Just as we use theories to question rites, we should also use rites to question theories.”²⁷⁵

Anttonen notes that Van Gennep himself had written a century earlier of the fluid and intermeshing nature of these phases yet likewise cautions that one must continue to beware of making the cycle the scholar describes determine the meaning of the ritual acts

²⁷⁴ Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 107. Jens Peter Schjodt commends Victor Turner for being the first to distinguish the special nature of the liminal state, but suggests using the designation “initiation” as best representing the passage (and indeed irreversible transformation) of an individual or group to something higher and qualitatively different (Jens Peter Schjodt, “Initiation and the Classification of Rituals,” in *Temenos: Studies in Comparative Religion* [Helsinki: Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion, 1986]).

²⁷⁵ Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 107. On pp. 102–07 Grimes demonstrates the connections between Van Gennep’s three phases and Eliade’s mystical death, return to origins, and spiritual rebirth that is part of his idea of initiation as a revelation of the sacred, and Joseph Campbell’s (invented) separation, initiation, and return in the myth of the hero.

rather than the reverse.²⁷⁶ He argues that the whole process of a rite of passage is essentially liminal, incorporating a series of liminal experiences some of which may also signify a certain separation or incorporation. He warns accurately, “If one, in a rather positivistic manner, regards the ritual pattern as a one-level series of successive phases, one obscures the multivalent and polysemous character of rites, the multiple meanings of social acts, and the multiplicity of transitional levels.”²⁷⁷ Since all social life is in continuous transition, Anttonen states, there is in reality “no ‘normal order’ from which one occasionally steps into the liminal state.”²⁷⁸ While this critique is true in a general sense, if applied *carte blanche*, it would negate the ability to perceive and interpret any of the more or less subtle shifts within human social behavior. Thus it continues to be helpful for examination’s sake to recognize and study those movements that are more patterned and pronounced, while retaining full recognition of the particular ongoing changes of which the pattern we call ritual is only a part.

Regarding the effects of rite of passage, anthropologist Monica Vizedom, the translator of Van Gennep’s *Les Rites de Passage*, pointed out in 1976 that such rites did not necessarily go hand in hand with actual changes in role and status. Although, she argued, ritual was more likely to be used in closed societies than in open societies, in neither case was ritual necessarily relied on to effect changes of identity. Rather the

²⁷⁶ Pertti J Anttonen, “The Rites of Passage Revisited: A New Look at Van Gennep’s theory of *The Ritual Process* and its Application in the Study of Finnish-Karelian Wedding Rituals,” in *Temenos: Studies in Comparative Religion* (Helsinki: Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion, 1992), 17–19, 33–41; Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 11, 192–94.

²⁷⁷ Anttonen, “Rites of Passage Revisited,” 47–48.

²⁷⁸ Anttonen, “Rites of Passage Revisited,” 49.

attitude “varied with the nature of the society and could not be inferred simply from the presence of a rite.”²⁷⁹

Vizedom’s assertion was supported by Vincent Crapanzano’s 1981 anthropological field work with Moroccan circumcision rites. Crapanzano found that, although the society enacting the ritual chose to see—and desired for the participants to experience—the ritual as transitional in the lives of the young boys being circumcised, many of the boys were still so young that they could not, in actuality, be treated as the men the rite declared them to be. Crapanzano warns of the danger for analytically oriented scholars of the “ritual illusion,” that is,

the assumption that what the ritual is said to do is in fact what it does. . . . Ritual exegesis—and the exegetical method in ritual-analysis—frequently (if not inevitably) promote the illusion of continuity and mask both discontinuities and dissonant experiences.²⁸⁰

Historian, Caroline Walker Bynum, in a 1984 study of the experience of women saints of the Middle Ages, offered a different critique of rite of passage expectations. Bynum found no evidence that liminality, particularly in terms of status reversal, played a meaningful part in the accounts of these women’s lives. Instead, she argues that these women’s stories are more about continuity than about turning points or reversals. She goes on to suggest that women *and other non-elites* who live their lives in a state of *communitas* and statuslessness, may find little value or meaning in the liminal escape from the structures of status.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ H. S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion: Rites of Passage and Contemporary Anthropology* (vol. 4 of Sage Research Papers in Social Sciences; Cross Cultural Study Series 9-027; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1976), 26. The term “closed society” in this sense would refer to a society governed by tradition and engaging in little interaction with others outside their own tradition. An “open society” would be one which experiences a high degree of pluralization and participates in interaction with other ideas and ways of thinking.

²⁸⁰ Vincent Crapanzano, “Rite of Return: Circumcision in Morocco,” in *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society* (ed. Werner Muensterberger and L. Bryce Boyer; vol. 9; New York: Psychohistory Press, 1981), 17.

²⁸¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, “Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality,” in *Anthropology and the Study of Religion* (ed. Robert L Moore and Frank E

Turner's differentiation between the liminality of a classic rite of passage and that of what he called modern liminoid phenomena," has been a fruitful designation in many ways. Roberto DaMatta, for example, demonstrated that liminality in complex societies (the soccer game, carnival, drama, . . .) allows individuals to temporarily satisfy their need to become part of "something larger and more inclusive," while in smaller kin-centered societies "to be in limen is to be individualized"—that is, isolated from the regular kin-grouping into a different sort of category such as age, before being returned once again to the kin group.²⁸² Grimes and others, however, warn that the distinction may too easily result in a dualism of ancient-primitive and modern-industrial. Pertti Anttonen (1992), in particular, is critical of the 'liminoid' designation, arguing that Turner's use of the term creates an exoticized and primitivized *Cultural Other* by dichotomizing modern and 'traditional' societies. Grimes suggests replacing this evolutionary-based paradigm by instead analyzing the degree of "ritual" or "ritualizing" of a particular event apart from any judgment about the complexity or development of the originating culture, a suggestion that is adopted in this dissertation.²⁸³ In addition, Alexander suggests an approach developed by Mary Douglas which considers whether a ritual event is a part of the creation of a central consistent "universe" or acts to multiply less homogeneous "subworlds."²⁸⁴

The critiques in this section apply as well to the examination of Greco-Roman narrative literature as to any other study and might be summed up as an insistence on the recognition that the model of rite of passage must not be allowed to control observations

Reynolds; Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1984); cf. the work of history-of-religions scholar Bruce Lincoln, whose work includes ancient Greek ritual (*Emerging from the Chrysalis: Studies in Rituals of Women's Initiation* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991]).

²⁸² Roberto DaMatta, "Ritual in Complex and Tribal Societies," *Current Anthropology* 20, no. 3 (1979): 590.

²⁸³ Ronald L. Grimes, "Ritual Studies: A Comparative Review of Theodor Gaster and Victor Turner," *Religious Studies Review* 2, no. 4 (1976): 23; idem, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 55.

²⁸⁴ Bobby C. Alexander, "Correcting Misinterpretations of Turner's Theory: An African-American Pentecostal Illustration," *JSSR* 30 (1991): 23.

regarding the individual rite or event under examination. Among other things, this involves resisting the temptation to force an event into the mold of three distinct phases, and being aware of results of the ritual event that are more, less, or simply different, from those intended or proposed. In critiquing an ancient text the suggested approaches of Grimes and Douglas will replace Turner's outdated liminal/liminoid dichotomy for evaluating the *degree* of ritualization and centralization of a ritual and to appreciate the place of an individual rite relative to other rituals.

2.2.3 The Function of Ritual

One of the contributions for which Turner has been most highly lauded in recent years is the important part he played in anthropology's movement beyond the domination of the functionalist-structuralist perspective with its belief that ritual (like many other cultural manifestations) has one very specific purpose within a society: that of expressing and reinforcing its structural and cultural systems. Many theorists take a primarily functionalist view of rites of passage. Vizedom, for example, described the rite of passage as a rite of access into a new situation, controlled and guarded by authorities who grant access through the infliction of some transformation on the novices by means of task, ordeal, and/or learning.²⁸⁵ And Karen Pechilis argued that the liminal experience of modern pilgrimage (in contrast to Turner's own study focusing on *communitas* and anti-structure in pilgrimage) is highly controlled by centralized authority to preserve and enhance the social structure.²⁸⁶

R. Girard regarded all ritual as derived from ritual sacrifice as a cathartic substitution for societal violence and strife. Noting the metaphorical violence followed by unity that is staged in many sorts of ritual, he argued that a loss of differentiation—of

²⁸⁵ Vizedom, *Rites and Relationships*, 44–51.

²⁸⁶ Karen Pechilis, "To Pilgrimage It: Pilgrimage as Ritual Category in V. W. Turner's Work," *JRitSt* 6 (1992): 71–79; cf. Donald A. Messerschmidt and Jyoti Sharma, "Hindu Pilgrimage in the Nepal Himalayas," *Current Anthropology* 22, no. 5 (1981): 571–72.

identity and order—always involves violence and must also be restored through violence. In the case of a rite of passage, the person in passage is isolated as dangerous and undergoes often highly metaphorical tests and ordeals which have the function of redirecting the violence generated by the threat of undifferentiation, and warning of the consequences of transgression, thereby making possible the rebirth of differences.²⁸⁷

Turner, however, moved beyond this paradigm, in effect, according Ronald Grimes, reinventing ritual. According to Grimes,

the effect of Turner's theory of ritual on the field of ritual studies has been to break the stranglehold of conservatism. The vast majority of definitions and theories had been functionalist, emphasizing the extent to which ritual conserves the status quo and resists change. . . . Turner painted another picture, that of a cultural agent, energetic, subversive, creative, socially critical.²⁸⁸

A number of critics, including Theodore Schwartz, Mary Collins (with regard to the structure-anti-structure dialectic), and Caroline Bynum, have accused Turner of remaining a functionalist to the end—and there is no doubt that there was a strong functionalist component in his writings.²⁸⁹ For Turner did indeed—particularly in the years most closely following his African fieldwork—write forcefully of the way in which ritual, by means of its liminal, anti-structural components, could function to protect and reinforce social structure. Yet by the 1970s and 80s, as psychologist Barbara Boudewijnse noted in 1990, he had moved beyond a purely functionalist view to emphasize also “the transformative qualities of ritual, its capacity to change not only

²⁸⁷ R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1977), 98, 119, 281–85.

²⁸⁸ Ronald L. Grimes, “Victor Turner's Definition, Theory, and Sense of Ritual,” in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology* (ed. Kathleen M Ashley; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), 144; idem, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing*, 6.

²⁸⁹ Theodore Schwartz, “Review of Turner's *The Ritual Process*,” *American Anthropologist* 74, no. 4 (1972): 905–06; Mary Collins, “Ritual Symbols and The Ritual Process: The Work of Victor Turner,” *Worship* 50 (1976): 341; Bynum, “Women's Stories,” 73–74; see also Andrea Fisher, “The Relationship of Individual and Society in Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process*,” *Journal of Anthropology* 1, no. 1 (1978): 40.

individuals but social structure itself,” and had come to deny that there is one singular cohesion and consensus in society but rather a multitude of competing norms.²⁹⁰

The majority of recent critics have taken a more nuanced view, recognizing the development and breadth of Turner’s work across time.²⁹¹ Anthropologist Uri Almagor, noted two basic aspects of liminality in Turner’s writings—a simultaneously “destructured and prestructured” form that is not antithetical to structure, and a subversive anti-structural element—which Almagor felt Turner failed to clearly and consistently distinguish.²⁹² Alexander demonstrated that even in the early stages Turner recognized ritual’s potential to challenge the existing social order and contribute to change by separating participants temporarily from normal social structure and creating a liminal atmosphere conducive to *communitas*—a danger recognized and responded to by tribal leaders through taboos and prohibitions.²⁹³ And on the other hand, C. Clifford Flanigan, a specialist in medieval studies, underlined that Turner also “never denied that rituals mirror, reinforce, and ultimately reestablish the social structures” recognizing that ritual may indeed participate in creating society’s self-understanding.²⁹⁴

Turner was not alone in continuing to give credence to the functional and structural aspects of ritual. Catherine Bell, for example, wrote in 1997 that rites of

²⁹⁰ Victor W. Turner, “Comments and Conclusions,” 281; cf. idem, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 52; idem, “Metaphors of Anti-Structure,” 78; H. Barbara Boudewijnse, “The Ritual Studies of Victor Turner: An Anthropological Approach and its Psychological Impact,” in *Current Studies on Rituals: Perspectives for the Psychology of Religion* (ed. Hans-Günter Heimbrock and H. Barbara Boudewijnse; International Series in the Psychology of Religion, ed. J. A. van Belzen and J. M. van der Lans; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 2–4.

²⁹¹ Uri Almagor, “Long Time and Short Time: Ritual and Non-Ritual Liminality in an East-African Age System,” *Religion* 15 (1985): 219.

²⁹² Almagor, “Long Time and Short Time,” 219.

²⁹³ Alexander, “Correcting Misinterpretations,” 27–29; idem, *Victor Turner Revisited*, 19, 149–52.

²⁹⁴ C. Clifford Flanigan, “Liminality, Carnival, and Social Structure: The Case of Late Medieval Biblical Drama,” in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology* (ed. Kathleen M Ashley; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), 48; Brian Morris saw V. Turner as simply contradicting himself (*Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987], 261).

passage, by attaching cultural values to natural biological processes cause a society's worldview to appear to be

nonarbitrary and grounded in reality. . . . Human life is given organization and direction when people participate in a cycle of passages that links generations and roots the value system with people's most intimate experiences of living and dying.²⁹⁵

Bell notes, however, that in most societies rituals do not have just one message or purpose but that "frequently some of these messages and purposes can modify or even contradict each other" while still emphasizing the interrelated nature of things.²⁹⁶

Another movement beyond functionalism in which Turner participated, was the growing interest in the *meaning* of ritual. Anthropologist Robert Segal in 1983 noted that Turner, along with Clifford Geertz and Mary Douglas, broke with Durkheim in his interest not only in a ritual's function but also in its meaning.²⁹⁷ Catherine Bell describes Turner as one who, like Mary Douglas and Edmund Leach, attempted to synthesize the functional-structuralist perspective (which deals with questions of function), with this symbolic-culturalist perspective (which deals with questions of meaning).²⁹⁸ The meaning of various rites of passage Turner pursued largely through the flexible application of his *processual symbolic analysis*.

The point that is most useful to keep in mind, in considering these various ritual theories is made by Bell when she suggests that they do not make up a simple evolutionary sequence from primitive and out of date to superior and autonomous with the result that the symbolic-culturalist understanding of ritual must, for example, replace all preceding explanations. Rather, she states,

²⁹⁵ Bell, *Ritual*, 135–36.

²⁹⁶ Bell also states, "It appears that ritual is used in those situations in which certain values and ideas are more powerfully binding on people if they are deemed to derive from sources of power outside the immediate community" (*Ritual*, 136).

²⁹⁷ Robert A Segal, "Victor Turner's Theory of Ritual," *Zygon* 18 (1983): 332–33.

²⁹⁸ Bell, *Ritual*, 62.

The lack of any definitive winner in the history of theory does not mean that scholarship on ritual has not forged useful tools for analysis and reflection. Ritual as the expression of paradigmatic values of death and rebirth; ritual as a mechanism for bringing the individual into the community and establishing a social entity; or ritual as a process for social transformation, for catharsis, for embodying symbolic values, for defining the nature of the real, or for struggling over control of the sign—these formulations are all tools that help us to analyze what may be going on in any particular set of activities. They are also vivid reflections of the questions that concern us and indicate, therefore, something of the way in which we who are asking the questions tend to construe the world, human behavior, meaning, and the tasks of explanation.²⁹⁹

Excursus: The Fathers of Structuralism Talk Back

Both Max Gluckman (1911–1975), the leader of the British structuralist school of anthropology, and Claude Lévi-Strauss (b. 1908), the father of French structuralism, took issue with certain aspects of Turner’s move beyond the functionalist-structuralist perspective. Gluckman was not in full agreement with van Gennep who he saw as hampered by his comparativist approach and by his lack of a clear theoretical model of *the nature of society* which kept him from fully developing his concept of the rites of passage.³⁰⁰ And, believing that Turner underestimated the importance of social structure, he insisted that *communitas* is really only significant “within an established structure which is asserted again afterwards, and which indeed is asserted during the liminal period itself, by inversion.”³⁰¹ He argued that a portrayal of the deep underlying conflicts in the structure of society was an inseparable aspect of both drama and ritual, and that ritual

²⁹⁹ Bell, *Ritual*, 89.

³⁰⁰ Max Gluckman, “Rites de passage,” 11–13.

³⁰¹ In response, Mathieu Deflem agrees that Victor Turner is justly criticized for at times overestimating the powers for change of liminal phenomena and passing over the ways the social structure may respond and even neutralize this. He maintains, however, that Turner’s main theoretical advance was to show how rituals are more than just social glue for the maintenance of the social order, providing also an important alternative to the often all-too-static social-structural analyses (“Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion,” 18–22).

differed from drama in its belief in and interaction with the spirit world, a belief which drama and other formal and ceremonial activities do not share.³⁰²

Lévi-Strauss, an anthropologist who devoted his life-work to exploring the underlying structures of mythology, argued that Turner, because of his lack of perception regarding the difference between myth and ritual, misunderstood how ritual actually functions to patch the holes and stop the gaps which “the fluidity of the real,” finds in the structure, or grid, of meaning that mythology has placed upon experience. In other words, ritual seeks (vainly) to reunite the continuity of human life which mythology has cognitively divided into concepts and categories for the sake of rational meaning.³⁰³ Lévi-Strauss insisted that Turner ought to carefully separate myth from ritual, limiting ritual to gesture, manipulation of objects, and sacred formulae meaningful in the ritual as action performed correctly not as verbal communication, and thereby excluding, as a fragmentary form of myth, any more than formulaic language that may occur within a ritual.³⁰⁴

In response to a Turnerian criticism of the strongly cognitive emphasis in his interpretation of symbols, Lévi-Strauss argued that Turner’s belief that symbols also rouse and channel strong emotion “may be true but does not explain how ritual brings about its ‘fine results.’”³⁰⁵ Lévi-Strauss insisted that,

When Turner . . . states that religious rites ‘create or actualize the categories by means of which man apprehends reality, the axioms underlying social structure and the laws of the moral or natural order’, he is not fundamentally wrong, since ritual does, of course, refer to these categories, laws or axioms. But ritual does not create them, and endeavours rather, if not to deny them at least to obliterate,

³⁰² Max Gluckman, “Rites de passage,” 232–42.

³⁰³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man* (trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman; vol. 4 of *Introduction to a Science of Mythology*; New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 626, 674–75, 679–80; cf. idem. *Structural Anthropology* (trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), 232–41.

³⁰⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *Naked Man*, 671–74.

³⁰⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *Naked Man*, 668–70.

temporarily, the distinctions and oppositions they lay down, by bringing out all sorts of ambiguities, compromises and transitions between them.³⁰⁶

Turner responded both directly and indirectly to Lévi-Strauss's assertions. He had in fact already provided an explanation of how ritual works through liminal experience and symbol. Leveling his own critique at Lévi-Strauss, Turner went on to pointedly suggest that the "'concrete logic' of mythical narratives may not so much provide clues to fundamental cognitive constraints as represent a convenient and simplistic coding of items of common sense knowledge." He pointed instead, for a representation of the depth of human representations of reality, to Van Gennep's understanding that "the processual form of ritual epitomized the general experience in traditional society that social life was a sequence of movements in space-time . . ."³⁰⁷ And he pointedly singled out Lévi-Strauss in his statement that liminal rituals, symbols, and myths, "exhibit great depth and complexity. They emphatically do not lend themselves to being reduced to the terms of practitioners of a single discipline or subdiscipline, such as . . . those of Lévi-Strauss, . . ."³⁰⁸

Turner did however greatly appreciate certain aspects of Lévi-Strauss's thinking. Thus, he used and appreciated Lévi-Strauss's methodology with regard to binary oppositions and suggested that *communitas*—with its space for reflection upon combinations and oppositions of thought about the deep structure of culture and of the universe—has more in common with Lévi-Strauss's idea of the deep structure of mythology than it has with any social idea of structure.³⁰⁹ Too, both Lévi-Strauss and

³⁰⁶ Lévi-Strauss, *Naked Man*, 680.

³⁰⁷ Victor W. Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush*, 158.

³⁰⁸ Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 257–58.

³⁰⁹ Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 236–41.

Turner shared a deep interest in a cross-disciplinary approach to their work, as exemplified, in Turner's case, by his long-standing interest in Freudian theory.³¹⁰

A number of comparisons of Turner and Lévi-Strauss appeared in the anthropological literature in and around the 1970s. Theodore Schwartz, for example, noted Turner's superior foundation in his own rich field data and praised Turner's pairing of both an ideological and a sensory pole of meaning within symbolism which dissociated him from "Lévi-Straussian intellectual reductionism."³¹¹ Aylward Shorter, too, commends Turner's approach to ritual symbolism as allowing a fuller exploration of the context of symbols than that of mythological symbolism, while Mary Collins speaks of Turner's processual analysis of individual rites as a post-structural improvement on Lévi-Strauss's universalizing approach.³¹² Mathieu Deflem, in 1991, added that the approaches of Lévi-Strauss and Turner are not mutually exclusive, even though they do diverge in the above-mentioned ways, as well as in Turner's emphasis on single dominant symbols and also on "the efficacy of symbols in action" rather than a static representation of the structures of human thought. Rather, he suggested, Lévi-Strauss and Turner "represent different angles from which to study the same ritual symbols," by taking "into account not only what is said about ritual, but also the relationships among ritual performances, myth and religious belief; the manner in which ritual symbols are manipulated and handled by the ritual subjects."³¹³

³¹⁰ Wieting, "Myth and Symbol Analysis," 47–49; Victor Turner's interest in Freudian theory is noted by B. R. Scharf, in "Freudianism Today and Some Anthropological Approaches to Religion," *Religion* 9, no. 2 (1979): 172.

³¹¹ Schwartz, "Review of Turner's *The Ritual Process*," 904–07; cf. Collins, "Ritual Symbols," 343; cf. Scharf, "Freudianism Today," 166.

³¹² Aylward Shorter, "Symbolism, Ritual and History: An Examination of the Work of Victor Turner," in *The Historical Study of African Religion* (ed. T. O. Ranger and I. N. Kimambo; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 141; Collins, "Ritual Symbols," 340–41.

³¹³ Deflem, "Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion," 11, 21.

Edmund Leach gives one such thoughtful integration of the ideas of Lévi-Strauss with those of Turner, as well as of Mary Douglas. Leach has been called by some “the English prophet of Lévi-Strauss,” and he did do much to explain and explore Lévi-Strauss’s structural framework and methodology.³¹⁴ Yet he also accepted and built upon the ritual work of van Gennep and Turner, speaking of the *rite de passage* as a particularly clear illustration of the transformations which occur within every myth or ritual sequence.³¹⁵ Leach, like Turner, came under criticism from Lévi-Strauss for making the “mistake,” of confusing the study of ritual with the study of mythology.³¹⁶ In fact, Turner cites Leach in support of his argument that verbal communication is a legitimate and important part of ritual symbolism.³¹⁷ In Catherine Bell’s words, Leach “re-described van Gennep’s basic points in a Lévi-Straussian fashion” explaining that ritual makes it possible for the categories of society—such as child/adult, or sacred/profane—to remain distinct and synchronic, and for the system as a whole to retain its integrity by mediating transformations in the liminal space betwixt-and-between these categories.³¹⁸

Lévi-Strauss’s recognition that ritual can act to restore a framework created to satisfy the human search for meaning is similar to the functionalist perspectives of theorists such as Girard and Gluckman and should be considered one of the possible purposes, or effects of ritual and ritual text, ancient or modern. However this dissertation accepts Turner’s argument that it does not necessitate the separation of all meaningful

³¹⁴ Belier, “Arnold Van Gennep,” 147; see for example, Edmund R. Leach, *Genesis as Myth* (London: Cape, 1969), 10–12.

³¹⁵ E.g., Edmund R. Leach, “Kimil: A Category of Andamanese Thought,” in *The Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition* (ed. Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs Maranda; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 23, 34, 37, 43.

³¹⁶ Edmund R. Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic By Which Symbols Are Connected* (ed. Jack Goody and Geoffrey Hawthorn; Themes in the Social Sciences; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 34–35, 52, 77–78; Lévi-Strauss, *Naked Man*, 668.

³¹⁷ Victor W. Turner, *Drums of Affliction*, 2.

³¹⁸ Bell, *Ritual*, 44.

language from the interpretation of ritual, or the loss of Turner's emphasis on movement, paradox and sensory and emotive involvement.

2.2.4 Ritual Interpretation and Turner's Overarching Theory

In the area of ritual interpretation, Turner has been praised for his conceptual apparatus as well as for his distinctive, far-reaching, and fruitful mode of ritual analysis.³¹⁹ By far the majority of his writing on this methodology was devoted to the interpretation of symbol, a much debated issue in twentieth-century philosophy and social sciences, where his work was unusual in its ability to bring together diverse observations about the nature of symbol and its interpretation. On the positive side, anthropologist Bruce Kapferer in 1984 found valuable Turner's concept that a symbol's meaning is not based only on its use and on its position in relation to other symbols but also on the multitude of perspectives of the people involved.³²⁰ And psychologist B. R. Scharf (1979) praised Turner for his recognition that Freudian and Jungian psychology may be helpful in exploring the nature of the sensory pole of symbolism, although he is disappointed that Turner avoids delving into this psychological area himself.³²¹ He suggests, for example, that Turner's understanding of the polarization of meaning in symbols might be enhanced by Freud's theory regarding the strong emotions associated with attitudes toward authority and social norms, which suggests that strong emotion can often derive not only from the sensory pole but from the ideological pole as well.

³¹⁹ Deflem, "Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion," 21; Margaret Mary Kelleher, "Hermeneutics in the Study of Liturgical Performance," *Worship* 67 (1993): 312.

³²⁰ Bruce Kapferer, "The Ritual Process and the Problem of Reflexivity in Sinhalese Demon Exorcisms," in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (ed. John J. MacAloon; Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 205.

³²¹ Scharf, "Freudianism Today," 164–68. For example, Scharf points out that Victor Turner notes the neo-Freudian Bruno Bettelheim's suggestion that puberty rites such as circumcision are "efforts of the young, or of society, to resolve the antithesis between child and adult, between male and female" such as the males' desire to share in the female fertility ritual by bleeding, but that Turner declines to comment on something out of his specialty. (Bettelheim's suggestion is cited from Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male*. [Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1954]).

Crapanzano argued even more strongly that, while Turner was quite open to the complex and even contradictory nature of ritual symbols, his focus on the social, and his bracketing of the psychological, prevented him from seeing ways in which disjunctions created by innate drives and individual experience also affected the workings of ritual in centrally important ways.³²² Henri Geerts, an experimental psychologist, in 1990 specifically noted a contradiction between Turner's recognition that the interpretation of the symbol must take into consideration both the psychosocial history of the group and the life and personal history of the individuals involved, and his argument that symbols *naturally* represents something which implies a "direct" connection between the symbol and the sensory nature of the individual.³²³

Grimes' concern, with regard to symbols, was that Turner seemed to assume that symbols alone are the 'building blocks' of ritual while, even if it can be assumed that symbols do 'refer' rather than merely 'evoke', the focus on symbols leaves out "the stuff between the big vortexlike symbols" such as pauses, facilitating and unprescribed gestures, and the non-sacred, ordinary or non-symbolic objects and actions.³²⁴ Grimes argues against the common idea that participation in ritual necessarily results in the ability to *explain its meaning*, pointing to Dan Sperber's argument that symbols (of which rituals are made) do not carry a clear interpretable meaning but are an evocation (like smell) of things which are essentially tacit, and must thus be explored by means of creative reinvention.³²⁵

³²² Crapanzano, "Rite of Return," 20–22.

³²³ Henri Geerts, "An Inquiry in the Meaning of Ritual Symbolism: Turner and Pierce," in *Current Studies on Rituals: Perspectives for the Psychology of Religion* (ed. Hans-Günter Heimbrock and H. Barbara Boudewijnse; *International Series in the Psychology of Religion*, ed. J. A. van Belzen and J. M. van der Lans; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 20, 26, 27. Geerts suggests that Victor Turner's theory could be enhanced in this area by a consideration of the semiotic theory of C. S. Peirce.

³²⁴ Grimes, "Victor Turner," 144.

³²⁵ Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing*, 19–22; Dan Sperber, *On Anthropological Knowledge*. (trans. Alice L. Morton; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). Edmund R. Leach and others have

These observations, particularly the emotive power of cognitive values and authority, the social and the tacit nature of symbolic meaning, and the importance of the whole breadth of processes and symbols within a ritual, are helpful suggestions for improving the application of Turner's *processual symbolic analysis*.

Victor Turner's overarching theory came also to be both criticized and commended with respect to his understanding and integration of the postmodern understandings of the constructedness of human explanations of experience. Although some critics applauded him for avoiding the temptation to turn metaphor into scientific law, others complained that Turner apparently seemed to assume "that all rituals and institutions together form a coherent pattern, . . . so that from them universal conclusions can be drawn."³²⁶ Grimes, for example, felt that Turner unwisely used initiation as the quintessential rite of passage and the liminal phase of the rite of passage as "definitive of ritual."³²⁷ Stephen Foster (1990) goes farther, calling "naive" Turner's continued attempt to find definitive meaning at the bottom of the multi-faceted depths of symbolism, noting that Turner himself had begun to recognize his work as an attempt to explain the unexplainable, to represent what cannot be represented, referring to his work subjectively as his "voyage of personal discovery."³²⁸ And Don Handelman, in 1993, suggested that Turner failed to understand that convention and reality are simply rhetorical tactics used to negotiate relations of power.³²⁹ C. Clifford Flanigan, however, noted in a 1990

made a similar point suggesting that "ritual does not communicate concepts, it produces signs in structure patterns that trigger experiences that reproduce concepts in the minds of the participants" (Bell, *Ritual*, 69).

³²⁶ Jerry D. Moore, *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1997), 229; contra Fisher, "Relationship of Individual and Society," 37–38.

³²⁷ Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 122.

³²⁸ Stephen William Foster, "Symbolism and the Problematics of Postmodern Representation," in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology* (ed. Kathleen M Ashley; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), 133–34.

³²⁹ Handelman, "Is Victor Turner Receiving His Intellectual Due?" 120.

examination of structural and anti-structural elements in medieval Biblical drama, that in some senses Turner is actually in agreement with postmodern theories, pointing out the similarity between Turner's theory and Jacques Derrida's idea that each construction social institutions use to make sense of life contains elements subversive of the meaning they are trying to put forth, and with Mikhail Bakhtin's recognition of the intense subversiveness always present in public events such as festivals. Flanigan argues that interpretation of textual cultural manifestations such as dramatic text, must involve recognizing inconsistencies in and between text and theory, social context, and ideological analysis.³³⁰

Bell warns that the relatively modern category of rite of passage, when applied to other cultures and historical periods, has the potential to skew our understanding of what is actually taking place within the culture. She suggests using methodologies which minimize the amount of "preliminary framing of the data in terms of such powerful categories as ritual, religion" and technology by taking into account a multiplicity of purposes, strategies, and structural components, recognized through both general theories of ritual and the historical context of the specific culture.³³¹ With Turner and Grimes, she also emphasizes the importance of taking into account the other rituals, gestures, and embodiments practiced in the life of the person and the community.³³² She suggests a "reconstructed phenomenology" which systematically includes the scholar and her project within the sphere of the phenomena under scrutiny, an approach Turner advocates under the title *reflexivity*.³³³

³³⁰ Flanigan, "Liminality, Carnival, and Social Structure," 42–43.

³³¹ Bell, *Ritual*, 88, 266.

³³² Bell, *Ritual*, 171; cf. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 90.

³³³ Bell, *Ritual*, 265–66; Turner, "Liminality and the Performative Genres" in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*. (ed. J. J. MacAloon; Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 23-26.

A further critique of Turner's methodology involves his assumption of certain dichotomies, such as formal/informal, sacred/profane, *communitas*/structure, specific/universal, which are now seen by many theorists to be oversimplified and misleading. DaMatta argued that fitting ritual into such *a priori* categories tends to blur the uniqueness of each ritual and called instead for a grammar of ritual that gives a way of entering the ritual world without such categorization.³³⁴ DaMatta suggested that the study of ritual itself "not be a search for the essential qualities of a peculiar and qualitatively different event, but a way of examining how trivial elements of the social world can be elevated and transformed into symbols, categories, and mechanisms which, in certain contexts, allow the generation of a special or extraordinary event."³³⁵

Turner has been also accused of practicing a subject-object dichotomy by assigning to himself, as theorist, the final and authoritative interpretation of the rite under observation.³³⁶ It has been noted in his defense however that Turner, more than most theorists, refused to draw a clear line between himself and the ritual participants, often participating in the rituals himself rather than standing to the side as the traditional ritual observer.³³⁷

Turner's most often-criticized dichotomy is the one he explicitly creates between structure and anti-structure, sometimes seeming to imply the existence of only these two alternatives which he saw as representing separateness and exploitation versus love and

³³⁴ Roberto DaMatta, "Constraint and License: A Preliminary Study of Two Brazilian National Rituals," in *Secular Ritual* (ed. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff; Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977).

³³⁵ DaMatta, "Constraint and License," 259.

³³⁶ Catherine Bell, "Discourse and Dichotomies: The Structure of Ritual Theory," *Religion* 17 (1987): 110.

³³⁷ Bennetta Jules-Rosette, "Decentering Ethnography: Victor Turner's Vision of Anthropology," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 24 (1994): 177-78.

mystical union.³³⁸ In Flanigan's view, Turner came to place an almost naive emphasis on the power and preferability of anti-structure, speaking of it with a religious-like fervor not as a heuristic device, but as "truth."³³⁹ Andrea Fisher and H. Barbara Boudewijnse both argued that Turner tended to give attention to only those rituals and institutions that support this dichotomy, when in actuality *communitas* can also take place in relationships within the social structure.³⁴⁰ Further anti-structure is no guarantee of an ideal *communitas* but can involve instead more frightening conditions such as anarchy or a *communitas* which, like Nazism, is violently destructive to everything outside its own boundaries.³⁴¹

Catherine Bell sees the structure/anti-structure dichotomy as part of a deeper thought/action, or body/mind, dichotomy and warns that a homology can thereby be created in which "ritual is first differentiated as a discrete object of analysis by means of various dichotomies that are analogous to thought and action; subsequently, ritual is elaborated as the very means by which these dichotomous categories are reintegrated," thereby constructing "a persuasive and apparently logical body of discourse."³⁴² Turner's approach of handling language and gesture together in ritual, in contrast to Lévi-Strauss' isolation of myth from ritual action, actually goes some way toward ameliorating such a dichotomy.

Though sometimes overdrawn, the postmodern recognition of the constructed nature of the ritual concept and its underlying dichotomies is an important corrective to the temptation to assume the reality of the ritual label, which is particularly problematic

³³⁸ Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion*, 254–58.

³³⁹ Flanigan, "Liminality, Carnival, and Social Structure," 52, 56–57.

³⁴⁰ Fisher, "Relationship of Individual and Society," 37; Boudewijnse, "Ritual Studies," 15–17.

³⁴¹ Boudewijnse, "Ritual Studies," 15–16; Handelman, "Is Victor Turner Receiving His Intellectual Due?" 121.

³⁴² Bell, "Discourse and Dichotomies," 97–99.

when dealing with ancient text. An eye to the subversive elements within the text itself, and even an awareness of the multiple theories of ritual, can also be of help.

In a 1990 work entitled “The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power,” Bell argues that ritual interacts with a non-dualized body/mind to construct ‘social beings’ through “the internalization of basic schemes and values,” while at the same time this socialized body itself gives rise to dispositions that generate its own structured and structuring practices. Ritualization, Bell states,

is a way to generate privileged contrasts between the acts being performed and those being contrasted or mimed so as to produce ritualized bodies—actors imbued with the dispositions to engender practices structured by such privileged contrasts—which are perceived in turn to promote the restructuring of the larger cultural milieu.³⁴³

“The body” according to Bell, “thus ‘mediates’ all action.”³⁴⁴ Bell makes use of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Jean Comaroff, arguing here, similarly to Lévi-Strauss, that ritual addresses a perceived experience of contradiction between the current historical experience and the cultural order by redefining and addressing the contradiction in terms of a fundamental dichotomy. This dichotomy is understood not by means of conceptualization and articulation but by the creation of a “ritualized body” upon which is inscribed—through the interaction of a body and a structured ritual environment—specific *instinctive* schemes for perception and evaluation of the situation.³⁴⁵ Whether enacted by institutional structures for the purpose of establishing power (as Foucault suggests), or by outsiders enacting modes of cultural resistance (as Comaroff emphasizes), ritual practice produces a particularized sense of identity, inscribing new

³⁴³Catherine Bell, “The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power,” *JRitSt* 4, no. 2 (1990): 304–05.

³⁴⁴ Bell, “The Ritual Body,” 301; Bell citing Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 6.

³⁴⁵ Bell, “The Ritual Body,” 310.

configurations upon the dispositions of the social body.³⁴⁶ With this approach, ritual is seen to be particularly effective in the very fact that “it is able to embody and produce these schemes without bringing any of the operations to the level of explicit discourse.”³⁴⁷

2.3 Useful Concepts for the Interpretation of Lukan Narrative

The work of Victor Turner, with its insights into ritual process and its thoughtful attention to methodology, continues to provide a valuable foundation for the exploration of the ritual aspects of ancient text and, in particular, of Luke 3:1–4:15. Turner’s wide-ranging studies of rites of passage and the associated condition of liminality, as well as his exploration into the ways in which such processes may interact and function in various settings and conditions, provide a rich quarry of materials from which to select in seeking to enhance understanding of the Lukan text. His theory has the potential to make contemporary interpreters more sensitive to central aspects of ancient experience and to the ways ancient authors evoked these experiences in writing. Turner’s work, however, no longer stands alone, and the further developments and considerations brought forward by Grimes, Bell, and others in the emerging field of ritual studies, will also form part of the framework of the present study.

To enhance the clarity of this dissertation as it seeks to explore Luke 3:1–4:15 from a rite of passage perspective, the anthropological terms it most commonly uses are here described, while other, less commonly-used terms, will be defined as they arise in the course of this study. The term *rite of passage* has been chosen as most straightforwardly describing those activities sometimes also spoken of as transformation rituals, initiations, or *rites de passage*. A *rite of passage* will here be understood, in terms adapted from Turner and subsequent ritual theorists, as *a formal process, set apart from the pragmatic routines of everyday life, which accompanies the transition of an*

³⁴⁶ Bell, “The Ritual Body,” 306–09; Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*, 6–9.

³⁴⁷ Bell, “The Ritual Body,” 304, 308–11.

individual or group from one state or station in life to another. With respect to ancient narrative texts, a rite of passage will be expected to be set apart, by either a social group within the narrative world or by the text under study, as such an event of transition.

In addition, because the rite of passage is not an isolated entity but a constructed way of understanding related activities within a continuum of human behavior, other indicators of reference to rite of passage which go beyond the definition formulated above will also be considered. In ancient cultures, such a *process/pattern of behaviors* is likely to be *formalized* in a way which is particularly tradition-based, rule-governed, patterned and (particularly in text) idealized. It is often *distinguished from ordinary activity* by the use of specialized terminology or symbolism, by a particular emphasis on embodied and performative actions, and/or by reference to higher powers or principles. The *transition* it accompanies may involve a marked change in any social or physical location such as occupation, task, age-grouping, status, or role, and is often considered to be in some sense transformative. Allowing for such a flexible approach is particularly important to this study, because it describes a period of change and new beginnings on a number of levels, including: (1) a transition to the main narrative of the gospel as Luke builds on Mark's conception of the Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (Mark 1:1; Luke 3:1, 2); (2) the opening of Jesus' public ministry (Luke 3:23); and (3) the origins of baptismal practices central to the religious life of Luke and his audiences, and which, though they represented something new, could and indeed needed to be grounded in the ancient scriptures.

To add precision to the discussion, the term *rite* will be used, as Grimes has suggested, to refer to *a specific enactment of ritual, located in a concrete time and place*, in contrast to a *ritual* which refers to the theoretical construct in general or to one of its abstract types. *Ritualizing* will indicate “*the act of constructing ritual either self-*

*consciously and deliberately or incrementally and editorially . . .*³⁴⁸ *Ritual-like activity* will be used of those *behaviors which may not meet every one of the criteria above but which do exemplify some of the characteristics of ritual behavior*. Further, as this dissertation deals with narrative texts having purposes and subtleties of their own, *ritual allusions* and *metaphorical uses of the rite of passage*, will be discussed in which the text does not depict a literal purposeful social activity, but rather uses symbols and descriptors which draw upon the audience's own experience of rite of passage in order to further their own ends of implicitly transferring meaning and affect from the experienced rites of passage to a portrayed act or concept of transition within the text.

Common sense indicates that any movement from one location to another will involve such a general process of separation, transition (*limen*), and reincorporation. Recognition of the place of a particular action within this process may contribute to the understanding of its meaning and function. Thus, in examining a text concerned with an apparent rite of passage, three general stages, will be looked for: a *separation* stage in which the ritual participant is separated in some way his or her former life, a *liminal* stage in the boundary or margin between the two states, where one experiences an ambiguous position "betwixt-and-between" the former and future place in life, and a stage of *reincorporation* in which they rejoin society in their new state in life. It will not be supposed, however, that these aspects of the process will necessarily be clearly differentiated or will follow one another in perfect order.

The liminal stage, in particular, is of importance for understanding the workings of a rite of passage. Thus the Lucan, as well as the Greco-Roman, narratives will be examined for the presence and function of the various liminal-type activities identified by Turner and others including: deconstruction of standard classifications such as status, property, position, and behavioral expectations; symbolism of death and rebirth, of

³⁴⁸ Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing*, 5; idem, *Ritual Criticism*, 10, emphasis added.

nature, and of natural processes; paradox, ambiguity, ordeal; monstrous or supernatural appearances, bodily enactments and a central cluster of symbolic sacra. The guiding presence of a ritual instructor(s) is common, but may be replaced, as Turner notes, by traditions and internalized expectations powerful enough to guide the process. Although Turner suggests that liminality is a prime place for the emergence of *communitas*, “an intense comradeship and egalitarianism, a sense of the generic human bond between all members of society . . . ,”³⁴⁹ it will not be assumed to be guaranteed. However, where liminality and the associated condition of *communitas* do occur, they do upon occasion manifest themselves not only within the liminal stage of the ritual, but persist long past the conclusion of the ritual becoming characteristic of the daily life and interactions of the individual or individuals involved. This condition will be referred to as *permanent liminality*, or *sacred outsiderhood*.

Turner’s theory of anti-structure also suggests watching for how the events of a particular rite are seen to affect the subject’s relations both to the *societal_structures*, defined as the “more or less distinctive arrangement of mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of social positions and/or actors they imply,”³⁵⁰ and to the *cultural, or meaning, structures* which form the underlying structures of human thought shared by a group. A variety of social functions have been suggested for ritual-type activities. A rite of passage may work toward the portrayal and conservation of structure by navigating around a potential social crisis, repairing a cultural grid of meaning, or restructuring the individual into community through ordeal, instruction, riddle, or liminal release. It may revive structure through the stimulation of *communitas*. Or it may subvert structure and provide a process for social transformation and even

³⁴⁹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95–97, 226–27.

³⁵⁰ Victor W. Turner, “Metaphors of Anti-Structure,” 63–64. “This is not to say that everyday social structure is essentially static, for it is constantly being influenced and modified by antistructure, just as antistructure is continually being curbed and penetrated by structure which sets limits on its capacity for experimentation and critical reflection” (Victor W. Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 133).

revolution through the energy and creativity brought about by the deconstruction and rearrangement of cultural symbols. The examination of Luke 3–4, and of the Greco-Roman narratives, will consider these and other possible functions being portrayed in the rites.

Guiding the study of Luke 3:1–4:15, and of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 11 and Josephus' *Vita* 10–12, will be Turner's method of processual symbolic analysis, with its careful attention: (1) to the *ritual field*, which is the spatial, temporal and relational context in which a particular rite is about to be played out; (2) to the *operations field* which is the actual movements and relations among the actors and objects, including the interaction of personal goals with the needs of the group within the rite itself; and (3) to the *symbolism* of that rite. In the case of texts, each of these steps involve two levels, considering how these factors are variously placed within the narrative world, and also how the text itself manipulates and positions them in order to influence, and even invoke the participation of, its audience. Thus the symbolism of the text must be considered not only with reference to those objects and actions of an obviously symbolic nature within the narrative world, but also to the specific symbolic meanings invested in the wide array of language manifested in the particular text. The *dominant symbol(s)* and its associated *primary instrumental symbols* will be given particular attention, in keeping with Turner's observation that they both shape and manifest the underlying structure of the text. These will be considered with regard to the exegetical, positional, and operational indicators of meaning as suggested by Turner, considering both what is stated explicitly within the text and also assumptions that would be shared between narrator and audience within the particular historical-cultural situation. Where they are evident, binary oppositions and their relationships within the text will also be considered. This consideration of symbols will be tempered by reminders of the social and the tacit nature of symbolic meaning, and the importance of the whole breadth of processes, silences, and symbols within a ritual or ritual account. Finally the place of the ritual in the larger ritual system will also be

considered, as well as in the ongoing and dynamic structure of the world depicted in the narrative and of the text itself. In the end, consideration will be given to how these findings integrate with previous commentary on the passage.

Certain general principles for the interpretation of cultural phenomena, whether gathered from field observation or textual evidence, have been emphasized in this chapter's discussion of rite of passage theory. These must be kept as guides for the exploration of the Lucan account. As Turner increasingly realized, and as contemporary discourse insists, the attempt to apply rite of passage theory to the interpretation of the text of Luke 3:1–4:15 must be shaped by the recognition that such an anthropological theory is a construct rather than an absolute description of reality or of an actual entity with a unitary and independent existence outside the minds of its interpreters.

Recognizing that experience is more complex and multi-leveled than any theory is able to represent underlines the importance of giving primary consideration to the rich array of data within the text itself as understood within its first century context.

Thus, aspects must also be allowed to appear which may contradict ritual theory or appear disjunctive to other trends within the text, for these have the potential: to reveal underlying or conflicting messages in the text; to improve, adjust or reject the use of the theory in particular aspects or in whole; or to provide openings into other interpretations and understandings that may enhance the use of this model. In keeping with the recognition that texts by necessity flatten the multi-variance of affect and experience inherent in real-life situations, the text under study must be allowed to recreate its own full-bodied imaging of the narrative world created both by the more direct statements, symbolisms and strategies of the text and also by its allusions and silences. This imagining must be disciplined, and the allusions and assumptions filled in, by a knowledge of the world of Luke and his intended audience, but its shape and texture is to remain determined, above all, by the text itself.

Turner's dichotomy between the rituals of tribal and industrial societies is now recognized as inadequate to fairly represent the diversity of ritual phenomena in either ancient or modern times. Instead differentiations will be considered based on the recognition that there is not always a clear distinction between ritual and "not-ritual," but rather a range of more or less ritual-like activities, incorporating anyone from the whole of a society under the direction of its institutional structures, to an individual or marginal subgroup. Understanding a phenomena thereby as more or less ritualized makes it possible to understand Luke 3–4 and other ancient narratives of transition in a more subtle way by considering how these ritual-like activities or narrative markers may be acting toward the purposes of individuals or structures of the narrative world and also of the text itself.

Although Turner has noted ways ritual within "Greco-Roman city-states" came to differ from earlier more traditionally-centralized ritual counterparts, and he and others, including Bell, have given some consideration to the challenge of interpreting those texts which describe or allude to ritual, ritual and ritualization in ancient text has received little attention by ritual theorists in general.³⁵¹ There is however a growing number of biblical studies scholars who, along with anthropologist Edmund Leach, have experimented with the application of rite of passage theory to Biblical text. Such applications are of particular interest: for what they have found valuable in existing theory; for the ways in which they have applied that theory to biblical text; and for any further considerations

³⁵¹ Victor W. Turner, "African Ritual and Western Literature"; Catherine Bell, "Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy," *HR 27* (1987): 366–92; cf. Gillian Feeley-Harnik, "Is Historical Anthropology Possible? The Case of the Runaway Slave," in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982); Flanigan, "Liminality, Carnival, and Social Structure."

and approaches they may have developed for dealing with the challenges of recognizing and interpreting rite of passage usages with ancient text. This work will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

BIBLICAL STUDIES APPLICATIONS OF RITE OF PASSAGE THEORY

As part of the growing interest in, and understanding of, ritual and rite of passage described in the previous chapter, scholars representing a wide variety of disciplines have sought to apply the ideas generated to their own particular fields. Among these, a growing number of biblical studies scholars have attempted to make use of rite of passage theory for understanding biblical texts. While it would be impractical to look at all attempted applications of this theory, it is essential to understand the use and development of rite of passage theory within the field of biblical studies and the associated fields of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity in order to provide an advanced starting point for the efforts of this dissertation.

These applications span a broad range of topics and for simplicity's sake are here organized into five basic areas: Israel's Wilderness Sojourn, Other Aspects of Jewish Tradition and Writings, The Life and Death of Jesus, Baptism and Wilderness, and The Earliest Christian Church. After first overviewing a number of milestones in the use of rite of passage theory in the study of biblical texts, these five areas will be addressed in turn, considering the questions: "How have others used, critiqued, and adjusted, rite of passage theory for applications similar to that of this study's purpose of understanding Luke's use of it in the baptism and wilderness account? What of value can be gathered? and What less valuable approaches can be avoided?"

3.1 Milestones in Use and Methodology

Before turning to the topical treatment of rite of passages studies in the biblical field, it is important to point out two key influences in the development of the use of rite of passage by biblical scholars. The first is the work of anthropologist, Edmund Leach, who very early demonstrated that anthropological and ritual theory have valuable insights to contribute to the interpretation of Biblical texts. In a 1969 article entitled *Genesis as Myth*, Leach argued that in mythological systems, biblical and otherwise, “all important stories recur in several different versions” (e.g., the biblical creation story, or the Gospels) and set up opposing (binary) categories. He noted that, for the believer, this redundancy confirms belief and clarifies what is essential, but for the anthropologist it instead increases complexity.³⁵²

Leach’s most influential contribution came in 1980, when he was invited, in response to a growing interest in this field of study, to give an address to the Society of Biblical Literature an address which he entitled, *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of the Bible in the Twentieth Century*.³⁵³ While much of his address treated more general anthropological subjects, Leach’s demonstration of the value of a rightly chosen anthropological approach also made specific reference to the crossing of boundaries and rites of passage. Critiquing J. G. Frazer’s *Folklore in the Old Testament*, which included a compendium of apparently trivial data on the sacred-taboo nature of thresholds like that of the Jerusalem temple with little discussion of the reasons for this phenomena, Leach highlighted the value of van Gennep’s theory that societies place taboos upon those places and entities which fall in the margins between their categories of meaning in order

³⁵² Edmund R. Leach, *Genesis as Myth* (London: Cape, 1969), 7–10.

³⁵³ Edmund R. Leach, “Anthropological Approaches to the Study of the Bible during the Twentieth Century,” in *Humanizing America’s Iconic Book: SBL Centennial Addresses 1980* (ed. Gene M Tucker and Douglas A Knight; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982).

to protect themselves from the uncertainty of the ambiguous.³⁵⁴ Based on his assumption that the Bible is almost wholly fictional, Leach argued that the preoccupation with explaining inconsistencies in the text through attention to its historical development should be set aside in favor of an approach that treats the text synchronically as mytho-history, with both manifest and subliminal theological meaning(s).³⁵⁵ He turned to Victor Turner's association of *communitas* within the marginal places of liminality and antistructure to argue that the Biblical text leads audiences subtly into this sought-after *communitas* experience by juxtaposing clusters of stories, or variations on a theme, in which inherent paradoxes and contradictions between the stories come into play. It is precisely these contradictions, Leach insisted, that bring to light the Bible's underlying theological meaning by making apparent the basic categories and the varieties of mediations between them.³⁵⁶

In addition to this address for the Society of Biblical Literature, Leach also wrote a number of articles applying anthropology to Biblical studies including one on the baptism in Mark which will be discussed below. In doing so, he has brought a new level of interest and respectability to the use of this approach for biblical interpretation. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to explore contradictions and oppositions between various baptism accounts, Leach's recognition that ambiguities and paradoxes within texts can lead audiences themselves into an experience of liminality and *communitas* is an important key to understanding Luke's account of Jesus' ritual experience in 3:1–4:15 and how it functioned.

³⁵⁴ James G. Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend, and Law* (3 vols.; 2d ed.; London: Macmillan, 1918); Leach, "Anthropological Approaches," 81–82.

³⁵⁵ Leach, "Anthropological Approaches," 74–77, 87–89. Leach warns, however, against interpreting biblical texts simply "by direct comparisons with modern ethnographic evidence" ("Anthropological Approaches," 85–87).

³⁵⁶ Leach, "Anthropological Approaches," 89–94; cf. idem, "Kimil: A Category of Andamanese Thought," in *The Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition* (ed. Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs Maranda; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 23.

A second influential landmark in the development of the use of rite of passage by biblical scholars was the devotion of an entire 1994 volume of the journal *Semeia* to ritual approaches to biblical texts which was edited by Mark McVann. In addition to a number of articles exploring ritual approaches to particular texts which will be discussed under the appropriate topic below, this volume contains two important essays focused on the methodology of such applications. The first, an introductory article by Frank Gorman, draws on a variety of recent voices in ritual studies to discuss the dichotomy in Western thinking that has privileged mind over body, thought over experience and the universal over the specific. Besides its other effects, this dichotomy has, he believes, kept Biblical scholars from a serious exploration of ritual. Drawing from Grimes, Bourdieu, and other theorists, he argues that the ritual world must be understood in and through the perceptual experience of ritual (in smells and sounds, etc.) and “cannot be encompassed by or understood solely on the basis of linguistic, symbolic, and narrative models.”³⁵⁷

Gorman calls upon scholars to understand this tendency and to use the recent insights of the ritual studies field to approach ritual texts not only with a scholarly language-oriented study of the historical situation, but with “an imaginative construal” of both the embodied enactment of the rituals depicted and the concrete context within which the ritual activity takes shape. At the same time Gorman advocates cultivating an awareness of the complex relationship between reader, text, and ritual and calls for new models of interpretation to be “constructed and imagined” that recognize the challenges of working with text as opposed to fieldwork, and that deal with ritual texts as their own genre requiring particular methods of analysis and interpretation.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Frank H. Gorman, Jr., “Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies: Assessment of the Past: Prospects for the Future,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 22.

³⁵⁸ Gorman, “Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies,” 13–29. Gorman suggests questions such as: What does the text expect of the reader? What does the reader bring to the text? Is the text actually a ritual text that has been placed in a narrative context or a narrative text to which has been “positioned around” a ritual text? (“Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies,” 21–22).

An afterword by Bobby Alexander in the same *Semeia* volume reiterates that it is time for biblical studies to take seriously ritual texts and to develop means to more wholistically interpret them. Alexander strongly emphasizes the need for recognition of the open-ended and subversive possibilities of ritual explored by Turner. To Biblical researchers faced with the hermeneutical gap involved in attempting to interpret ritual within ancient text, he makes several concrete recommendations including: using “thick description” which disallows adherence to one universalizing theory; giving primacy to bodily enactment in ritual; dramatically reenacting a textualized ritual in order to gain some measure of ritual participation; and engaging in reflexive analysis of what they themselves are bringing to the particular interpretation.³⁵⁹

The contributions of Gorman and Alexander in *Semeia* underline the value of a specialized approach to understanding ritual activities in which meaning is bound up more in movement, evocation, and bodily participation than in verbal and analytical frameworks. Interpreting such an event through the filter of ancient text presents a particular challenge in response to which, in addition to becoming aware of the special nature of ritual and its conservative as well as its subversive workings, their most helpful suggestions involve intentional efforts to reimagine the perceptual experience with particular attention to bodily involvement.

One other discussion of methodological issues is that of Robert Wortham, in his 1999 book, *Social-Scientific Approaches in Biblical Literature*. Wortham points out the need to distinguish between what he calls *ritual* rites of passage and *symbolic* rites of passage, and demonstrates the usefulness of ritual theory in considering a symbolic rite by examining Phil 2:5–11’s use of Christ’s servanthood and exaltation as a model for believers. Wortham takes Leach’s arguments regarding the liminal effects of text on

³⁵⁹ Bobby C. Alexander, “An Afterword on Ritual in Biblical Studies,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 209–25.

audiences another step, arguing that the text—as a formal symbolic structure—functions as a symbolic rite of passage aimed at transforming the audience by involving them in a liminal tension between their own world and the world described in the text.

Wortham recommends with Turner, therefore, that an “anthropological exegesis” of any text should involve the exegetical, operational and positional levels of symbolic interpretation, and should be both multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural, using a diverse set of diagnostic, or hermeneutical, tools to assess the text’s social and cultural context and meaning.³⁶⁰ Noting that literature is made up of a network of determinants, including formal, artistic, content, cultural, social and real world determinants, he suggests that “An anthropological exegetical method would focus on the interaction between a text’s surface structure (stylistic, syntactic dimensions) and its deep structure (cultural, social, environmental and semantic dimensions,” and in addition it would consider “how a text preserves the universal and particular expressions of a group’s shared experiences.³⁶¹

3.2 Israel’s Wilderness Sojourn

While earlier Hebrew Bible scholars such as Alfred Haldar (1950) used various hypotheses concerning the historical relationship of ritual to the accounts of Israel’s wilderness passage, the first major Biblical Studies scholar to consider this narrative as a rite-of-passage was Shemaryahu Talmon, in 1966.³⁶² Talmon’s primary concern was to demonstrate that the desert life was neither, as many scholars of his day would have it,

³⁶⁰ Robert A. Wortham, *Social-Scientific Approaches in Biblical Literature* (Lewiston, UK: Edwin Mellen, 1999), 19–23, 37. This idea is also put forth in the anthropological literature, for example in Pertti Anttonen’s statement that: “Thus, narratives of passage are themselves rites of passage through which one transforms one’s own status, and other people’s statuses as well” (“The Rites of Passage Revisited: A New Look at Van Gennep’s theory of the Ritual Process and its Application in the Study of Finnish-Karelian Wedding Rituals,” in *Temenos: Studies in Comparative Religion* [Helsinki: Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion, 1992], 21).

³⁶¹ Wortham, *Social-Scientific Approaches*, 17.

³⁶² Haldar wrote an historical-critical study connecting the origins of Exod 1–15 to cult legend springing from ancient New Years ritual. The wilderness experience of Israel is of particular importance to the topic of this dissertation and thus will receive more detailed attention than some of the other sections.

portrayed in biblical literature as an ideal time in which God showed His love for His people, nor as a social ideal to which Israel should return. Rather it was spoken of as a time of punishment and also an unavoidable, and admittedly recurrent, transition period meant to prepare Israel “for the ultimate transfer from social and spiritual chaos to an integrated social and spiritual order.”³⁶³ Talmon cites Eliade in comparing the biblical representation of the wilderness to a primeval state of chaos, and speaks of it in terms of a “creation ex nihilo” through which the Israelites were brought in a *rite de passage* for the purpose of purification.³⁶⁴

Fifteen years later, in 1981, Robert L. Cohn provided a more focused application of ritual theory, seeking to “interpret the wilderness narrative with Turner’s categories and to assess their usefulness,” with the expectation that through such a process the singular features of the wilderness passage would come into sharper focus.³⁶⁵ Cohn analyzed the wilderness journey in terms of van Gennep’s three phases of *rite de passage*, assigning the exodus from Egypt as far as the crossing of the Red Sea to the *separation* phase, the forty years of wandering to “*limen*,” and the Jordan crossing, the conquest, and the settlement to *reincorporation*. Cohn also explored the symbolic meaning of “wilderness” in the Hebrew Bible, finding it to represent a site of divine protection and favor, but at the same time also “an ambiguous place and time” of difficulty, desolation, and chaos which he saw in binary opposition with the desirable attributes of security, fertility, rest.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif’ in the Bible and in Qumran Literature,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (ed. Alexander Altmann; vol. 3 of *Philip W. Lown Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies, Studies and Texts*; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 37.

³⁶⁴ Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif,’” 34–54. Talmon did recognize that post-exilic Biblical writers, did tend to obscure the *rite de passage* aspect in their desire to emphasize divine benevolence in their own now-completed “wilderness experience” (“The ‘Desert Motif,’” 43, 54).

³⁶⁵ Robert L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies* (AAR Studies in Religion 23; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1981), 9.

³⁶⁶ Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space*, 14.

Cohn picked up on a number of liminal aspects evident in the Scriptural accounts of the wilderness experience, considering such things as ordeals (in the hunger and thirst, snakes and scorpions, fires and desert nomads); inexplicable miracles; and sacred instruction received at Sinai. He suggested that, while for the early writers and editors the wilderness period (in keeping with liminality's characteristic of negative emotion and insecurity) seemed more a punishment than a rite of passage, for the generation of the exile (in their own condition of 'betwixt and between') the account functioned as a reassurance that they too were being purged and primed and would successfully come to the end of their own "terrifying journey."

Cohn not only adopted Turnerian categories but thought critically about them, negatively evaluating, as did a number of other theorists, Turner's opposition of structure and *communitas* in light of his own work. Cohn argued that in the Biblical view, in which the law and the social order are divinely ordained, "structure is not opposed to *communitas* . . . but rather completes it."³⁶⁷ One aspect in which Cohn considered rite of passage theory to be helpful was in showing a possible degree of historicity to the wilderness narrative by demonstrating how a 'revolution', or transformation, in ways of experiencing the world could indeed have taken place between the structure of Egypt and the social and religious values of later times.

Frank Gorman, in later speaking of this hypothesis by Cohn, suggested that rather than ritual theory supporting the historicity of the account, ritual experience likely rather inspired the account, arguing,

The presence of such ritualizing features in the narrative indicates that ritual has helped to generate the narrative as it now exists. Thus, a full appreciation and understanding of the narrative requires that the ritualizing features be identified and analyzed. The study indicates the importance of ritual categories in the generation and production of texts.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁷ Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space*, 19.

³⁶⁸ Gorman, "Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies," 26.

Several other theorists have used rite of passage theory in attempting to elucidate smaller aspects of Israel's wilderness experience. In 1989 Ronald S. Hendel pointed out, in the covenant sacrifice described in Exod 24:3–8, a variety of what he called “symbols of unity” that he believed corresponded with aspects of *communitas*/social unity found by Victor Turner within the liminal process of pilgrimage. Hendel argued that Exod 24:3–8 might be recognized as the end of Israel's own liminal phase and the beginning of its reaggregation, and that it may possibly also reflect an ancient tradition of pilgrimage to Sinai carried out in earliest times.³⁶⁹ Dianne Bergant, in the 1994 *Semeia* volume dedicated to ritual, purposed to study the social function of the Passover Supper performance as described in Exod 12:1–20 by beginning with “thick description” instead of attempting merely to fit the account into, or measure it by, a single heuristic model.³⁷⁰ Bergant concludes that the Passover described was “clearly a rite of passage,” entered and departed from through “the sacred portals of the Sabbath.” Significantly for the current study, the rite also moved the participants from their state of settledness into the state of homeless journeyers.³⁷¹ She argued that the ritual functioned to actively create and identify as well as to maintain meaning. It also is seen to have “actively forged and insured” the self-perception of being “set apart from all other people.”

Paula McNutt, in the same issue of *Semeia*, explored the marginal nature of the Kenites, Midianites, and Rechabites in relation to the Israelites—and how such marginal peoples played a role in Israelite life. She hypothesizes that the Kenites served Israelite needs through the ‘mysterious’ and ambivalent role of metalworking. She also discusses

³⁶⁹ Ronald S. Hendel, “Sacrifice as a Cultural System: The Ritual Symbolism of Exodus 24,3–8,” *ae* 101 (1989): 376–77.

³⁷⁰ Dianne Bergant, “An Anthropological Approach to Biblical Interpretation: The Passover Supper in Exodus 12:1–20,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 43–46, 58–59. Bergant labels this “meaning-in-context” rather than “meaning-in-general.”

³⁷¹ Bergant, “An Anthropological Approach,” 53, 56. She also argues, though without reference to the rite of passage model that Israel's self-perception of being “set apart from all other people” and “was actively forged, and insured, not passively observed, by means of the Passover ritual” (“An Anthropological Approach,” 57).

the in-between mediatorial role played by Midianites in Israel's rite of passage in Egypt and the wilderness—pointing to the Midianite traders who initiated the liminal stage by transporting Joseph to Egypt, as well as Moses' father-in-law in Midian who gave him hospitality and later assisted him in facilitating the Israelites' reincorporation from liminality in Egypt to their place in the Promised Land.³⁷² Bobby Alexander, in the response which is apart of each article in this 1994 *Semeia* volume, suggests in response to McNutt that such an approach should consider not only the nationalistic use of this rite of passage to depict a transition from tribe to nation, but also the possibility of “latent anti-structural features” in a vision of human community that transcends nationalistic claims.³⁷³

In his 1999 Anchor Bible Commentary on Exodus, William H. Propp noted previous comparisons of Israel's journey with a rite of passage and tried his own hand at ritual categorizing, suggesting that the three phases may have: (1) begun on the night of the *Pesach* when Israel left Egypt thus marking an initial change of social status from slavery to freedom; (2) moved into the transitional phase at the crossing the Red Sea where they began 40 years in a liminal huge place (or no-place); and (3) begun reaggregation at the Jordan where they experienced symbolic rebirth “followed by another paschal rite” before going on to conquer the land. Allowing his reading of ritual theory to dictate his reading of the text, Propp argued that in a normal rite of passage the initiate returns to his starting place and thus it would actually be more accurate to think of the liminal period as comprising the entire time of their absence from Canaan—including their time in Egypt which the Bible speaks of as a “crucible in which Israel is refined.”³⁷⁴

³⁷² Paula McNutt, “The Kenites, the Midianites, and the Rechabites as Marginal Mediators in Ancient Israelite Tradition,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 122–25.

³⁷³ Alexander, “An Afterword on Ritual,” 219.

³⁷⁴ William H. Propp, *Exodus I, 1–18*. (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 35–36; Not widely available is Walter Vogels' little book, which, without entering mentioning these earlier works, covers much of the same ground, describing the previous state in Egypt and final state in Canaan, and the aspects of liminality in between (*L'Exode: Un rite de passage* [Beauport, Québec: MNH, 2000]).

A different application of the idea of liminality to the wilderness period appears in Susan Ackerman's 2002 article, "Why is Miriam also among the Prophets?" Ackerman uses rite of passage theory thoughtfully to address the question of why Moses' sister Miriam was at times spoken of as a prophet, when this role was one not normally given to women. Using the Turnerian theory of liminality and antistructure along with her analyses of the historical and cultural backgrounds of the passage, Ackerman comes to the conclusion that Miriam's prophethood was possible only because it took place during a liminal time of egalitarian anti-structure. Ackerman also weighed in on the debate over the precise beginning and ending point of each of the three phases of Israel's "rite of passage" in the wilderness, agreeing with Propp that Israel's liminal period began with Israel's entry into Egypt. She understood this liminal period to end, however at the time suggested by Hendel—at the covenant at Sinai—which helpfully explains how Miriam's came to be "deposed" from her position in the episode of Num 12.³⁷⁵ The foregoing battles over the precise beginning and ending moments of each of the three stages of Israel's rite of passage is interesting but illustrates the importance of not insisting on exactly three precisely differentiated phases in these rites.

The application of rite of passage theory to Israel's wilderness experience is of particular interest for a study of Luke 3–4 not only because of the methodology it models but also because of Luke's own allusions to this period in this passage. Talmon and Cohn's explorations of the liminal aspects of wilderness provide a rich background for the study of John and Jesus in the wilderness, and Cohn's notice of the varied perceptions of this transition by different generations is particularly valuable. Gorman raises an important point in his suggestion as to how experience of ritual may shape the production of texts such as these, in some cases inspiring the placement of ritualizing features into an

³⁷⁵ Susan Ackerman, "Why is Miriam also among the Prophets? (And is Zipporah among the Priests?)," *JBL* 12, no. 1 (2002): 47–80. Ackerman saw the ordeals which took place after Sinai as part of the reincorporation being characterized by Israel's own actions of putting God on trial.

account. Of interest for the interpretation of Luke 3–4 is Bergant’s study of how aspects of the ritual of the Passover supper relate to the initiation of a state of homelessness and to the creation of a self-perception of being set apart. With regard to function, Bergant’s focus on rite of passage as both forging and maintaining meaning is well augmented by Alexander’s reminder to look for antistructural features in the text itself which may contravene the intentions of the dominant structures of text-production. Such features are particularly clear in Ackerman’s notice of Miriam’s opportunity to act as prophet within the liminal period of wilderness wandering.

3.3 Other Aspects of Jewish Tradition and Writings

Although Israel’s wilderness sojourn has thus far received the majority of the attention given to rites of passage in Jewish tradition, several other interesting areas have also been explored. In 1981, Leo Perdue made use of Turner’s rite of passage theory to illuminate the social dimensions of Hebrew wisdom literature. In studying those few Near Eastern wisdom instructions with attached narrative, what Perdue almost invariably found was a liminal situation in which a dying “father” passes on authoritative instruction to a son (either biological or appointed) in preparation for the “son’s” approaching elevation to the father’s role and/or status position. He surmises that such a liminal situation may have been at the basis of much of the wisdom instruction for which there exists no attached narrative. He also suggests that in these situations not only authoritative instruction, but even ontological transformation, might be expected to have taken place.³⁷⁶

Others in the 1980s attempted to find rite of passage, literal or metaphorical, standing also in the background of certain narrative texts. Karlheinz Keukens, in 1982, used the basic concept of rite of passage to briefly explain a difficulty in the translation of

³⁷⁶ Leo G. Perdue, “Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Instructions,” *ZAW* 93, no. 1 (1981): 114–26.

על in the story of Jephthah's daughter in Judg 11:37–38. Keukens found the Hebrew construction to suggest that the daughter's expressed desire for lamentation related not to the premature loss of her life or to her virginity, but to a transition ritual normally celebrated by young women approaching marriageable age.³⁷⁷ Alan Aycock, in an article for a 1983 book he co-authored with Edmund Leach entitled *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth*, asserted that Lot's journey from Sodom to the hills should be seen "as a metaphorical rite of passage from an old society to a new one." Aycock saw this story as depicting Lot's wife as being suspended in a permanently liminal status, similar to the permanent liminal status he attributed also to Noah, Isaac, and Jesus.³⁷⁸

In 1988 Rees Conrad Douglas explored the story of Joseph and Aseneth and found evidence—contrary to the findings of Caroline Bynum and Bruce Lincoln—that textual narratives, at any rate, do at times portray women experiencing liminality in a rite of passage. Douglas demonstrated that Aseneth, in her conversion experience, passed through all three ritual stages, experiencing humility and then transformation after an angel appears giving Aseneth promise and evidence of her new status as a valued member of the Jewish community of God. Douglas noted that rite of passage theory can be particularly helpful in recognizing a text's emphasis both on the maintaining of boundaries by a group conscious of its own identity, and on the overcoming of those boundaries by members apparently determined to do so.³⁷⁹

In Frank Gorman's 1990 ritual study of the priestly cult of ancient Israel, one aspect he addressed was the intended purpose for depicting the rite of passage that inducted Aaron and his sons into priestly status. Gorman suggested that rather than being

³⁷⁷ Karlheinz H Keukens, "Richter 11,37f: Rite de passage und Übersetzungsprobleme," *BN* 19 (1982): F41–42.

³⁷⁸ Edmund R. Leach and D Alan Aycock, *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 116–17.

³⁷⁹ Rees Conrad Douglas, "Liminality and Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth," *JSP* 3 (1988): 31–42.

intended as a model for future ordination rituals, intertwined as it is with the consecration of sacred space and the founding of institution under the leadership of Moses, the account is best understood as part of a ritual of founding.³⁸⁰ In this ritual of founding, Gorman suggests, Aaron and sons are given safe passage, by means of the ram's blood placed on their extremities, to be mediators between death and life and between the holy and the not-holy. They are thus placed in a permanent liminal state where they serve to restore and maintain the order of creation.³⁸¹

Mieke Bal's 1990 article, "Experiencing Murder: Ritualistic Interpretation of Ancient Texts," further tested the possibilities of applying the concept of *ritual* to the interpretation of ancient texts. Bal adapted ritual theory to complement her complex ideological criticism of the problematic story of Yael and Sisera, arguing that the concept of ritual is indispensable for dealing with the gap between the framework of the observer and the context of the ancient text. Moving backward from the symbols of the text to the rituals from which they appear to be derived, Bal suggests that the twin accounts concerning Yael and Sisera in Judg 4:17–24 and 5:24–31 incorporate a number of rituals including: (1) an expected ritual of hospitality that is violated by Yael—according to the male voice of the epic narrator—thereby drawing the audience, which is participating in the ritual of a literary event, into experiencing and reacting against the shame and dishonor of this death by the hands of a woman; and (2) a metaphorical rite of passage hoped for by Sisera from marginality back to full integration in the adult world, but which for Yael and the lyric voice of Deborah became a subversion from being to non-being. In Bal's reading this text *functions as a ritual* in order to strengthen the male-dominated social order, it is *about a ritual* as it expresses a violated ritual of hospitality,

³⁸⁰ Frank H. Jr. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* (JSOTSup 91; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 103, 106; cf. Frank H. Jr. Gorman, "Priestly Rituals of Founding: Time, Space, and Status," in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes* (JSOTSup 173; ed. M. P. Graham, et al.; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 59–64.

³⁸¹ Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 131–35, 138–39.

and it *integrates* various bits of ritual (such as that of war and sexuality) into the language of the text—thus giving to these fragments an implicit and multivalent symbolic context. Bal argues that the use of the concept of ritual in such metaphorical ways is not problematic as long as one thus distinguishes between the different levels of meaning it generates.³⁸²

In a return to a more basic use of rite of passage theory, Paul Kruger, in 1996, explored as a rite of passage a levirate marriage provision in the Deuteronomic law (Deut 25:7–9) first noted by van Gennep himself. This law, which Kruger argues institutes a literal rite of passage, provided for the needs of a widow whose dead husband’s brother refused to accept her as wife. In this rite, transition from her old life to her new freedom to marry again is symbolized by the removing of the sandal of the uncooperative brother and spitting in his face.³⁸³

A number of the studies in this section underline the importance of considering the degree of ritualizing in either a literal or even a metaphorical rite of passage, before making surmises based on one or two similarities. This group of studies also illustrates, in various ways, the need to distinguish between literal and metaphorical rites of passage in order to discuss their implications accurately. Douglas’ study may suggest a further option in a personal and heaven-supervised rite of passage that falls somewhere between those accounts depicting a literal rite of passage supervised by a social group and those which may have metaphorical rite of passage allusion. Both this and Douglas’s further suggestion that a rite of passage may at the same time both preserve the boundaries of a group and allow particular individuals a special experience may be pertinent to Luke’s account of Jesus’ baptism and wilderness experience. Once again Gorman provides a

³⁸² Mieke Bal, “Experiencing Murder: Ritualistic Interpretation of Ancient Texts,” in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism* (ed. Kathleen M Ashley; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990).

³⁸³ Paul A. Kruger, “The Removal of the Sandal in Deuteronomy xxv 9: ‘A Rite of Passage’?,” *VT* 46 (1996): 534–39.

particularly provocative and useful view by looking to a rite of passage embedded within a larger ritual as having the purpose of placing subjects in a permanent liminal state where they act to *conserve* society's institutions.

3.4 The Life and Death of Jesus

The life, and the death, of Jesus of Nazareth has been the focus of a number of explorations using rite of passage theory. These studies will be considered in two sections. In order to give particular attention to those studies particularly related to Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience, such studies have been separated out and will be considered last. Those related to other aspects of Jesus' life and death are considered immediately below.

An early use of rite of passage to interpret Jesus and the gospels was a 1980 article by anthropologist André Droogers. Its particular concern was the way in which the symbols of marginality he found described in the writings of Victor Turner and in his own fieldwork with the Wagenia could also be seen in the *accounts* of the lives of Jesus and six other pivotal religious and secular innovators: Waldes, Booth, Kimbangu, Buddha, Mohammed and Marx. Droogers briefly examined, in the accounts of each life, the presence of these symbols including travel and provisional lodging (vs. a sedentary life), nonviolence (vs. violence), *communitas* (vs. hierarchy), hardship and ordeal (vs. comforts), dirt (vs. purity), poverty (vs. wealth) and fasting (vs. eating). He argued that, at least with regard to the more modern innovators where more accurate historical records are available, these symbols were not just a literary artifice but actually a part of their lives. Droogers also noted, with interesting connections to the Lukan account, that a majority of these figures are said to have had a decisive experience in their thirties. He

commented, in a rather universal manner, that this age-span forms “perhaps a period of transition in a man’s life.”³⁸⁴

Mark McVann’s 1988 article on Mark’s account of Jesus’ passion is the first of several he wrote between 1988 and 1994 on rite of passage in the Gospels. McVann argued that the passion events as depicted in Mark, which were widely seen by the early church as preparatory to Jesus’ glorification, “were constructed precisely as a description of a symbolic ritual process,” and also as “a rite of passage, . . . to which Christians must also submit to prove themselves faithful followers of Jesus.”³⁸⁵ McVann neatly divided Mark’s passion narrative into the three phases with: (1) a separation portrayed by Jesus’ arrest; (2) a liminal stage in which Jesus is the ‘model initiand’ both under abuse and in the *communitas* he shared with characters such as the centurion; and (3) an aggregation in Jesus’ exaltation at his resurrection, which he includes within his consideration of the account. He suggested that the liminality-*communitas* portrayed in the account “is viewed by Mark as the foundation of authentic discipleship”.³⁸⁶ McVann also, at least at one point, anachronistically attributed knowledge of Turner’s model to Mark and/or to Jesus, stating: “Jesus understands that he is about to enter into a ritual process with its three steps of separation, liminality and aggregation.”³⁸⁷

Carol LaHurd, in 1990 combined ritual considerations with a deliberate reader-response approach in an examination of the Mark 5 account of the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac. LaHurd, who called McVann’s article a step in the right direction, helpfully delineated three ways in which ritual content in literature may occur:

³⁸⁴ André Droogers, “Symbols of Marginality in the Biographies of Religious and Secular Innovators: A Comparative Study of the Lives of Jesus, Waldes, Booth, Kimbangu, Buddha, Mohammed and Marx,” *Numen* 27, no. 1 (1980): 118.

³⁸⁵ Mark McVann, “The Passion in Mark: Transformation Ritual,” *BTB* 18 (1988): 96.

³⁸⁶ McVann, “The Passion in Mark,” 101.

³⁸⁷ McVann, “The Passion in Mark,” 98.

as description of ritual enactments (the spoken words of an exorcism formula), inclusion of ritualistic elements (the journeying of Jesus and the disciples in Mark 4–5), and re-creation of ritual experience in which the reading or listening audience participates to some extent (the repetition of ‘commissioning’ endings for healing and exorcism events).³⁸⁸

She then explored the ritualistic elements in Mark 5 as it guides the first audiences through the ‘liminality’ of the unclean and chaotic graveyard setting after a life-threatening night on the sea, the further ambivalence created by hearing such things as a ritual exorcism formula in the mouth of the devil, a positive usage of impure pigs, and the commissioning of a demoniac. LaHurd hypothesizes that such an experience on the part of the audience carried the potential to bring about a rethinking, or transition, of their normal expectations and responses toward a more faithful discipleship. LaHurd calls for further study of the impact of textual ritual elements—such as liminality, ritual purity, and use of the commissioning form—on modern ‘actual’ readers and for consideration of how such an impact might vary according to particular reading and hearing experiences.

K. C. Hanson, in the 1994, *Semeia* issue, like Droogers, also took a diachronic approach to Jesus’ life but, recognizing the literary character of the evidence, limited his study to the Gospel of Matthew. Hanson examines the ritual place that mountains play in this Gospel, exploring the symbolic meanings of ‘mountain’ in the ancient world and seeking to use Turnerian theory to move beyond a merely cognitive interpretation of this focalizing symbol. Hanson attempts this by examining a series of five key mountain experiences narrated by Matthew, which he calls the mountain of initiation-ordeal, the mountain of instruction, the mountain of healing, the mountain of epiphany, and the mountain of commissioning, in order to substantiate his argument that for Matthew the mountain is the place “where ‘ritual transformation’ takes place.” Hanson finds this to be true both for Jesus’ own disciples as depicted in Matthew, and also for Matthew’s audience which is moved by their engagement in the narrative “through the process of

³⁸⁸ Carol J. Schersten LaHurd, “Reader Response to Ritual Elements in Mark 5:1–20,” *BTB* 20 (1990): 154

formation as *disciples*.”³⁸⁹ In each account, Hanson asserts that Jesus and his disciples are shown to pass through the phases of a rite of passage, which Hanson adjusts and elaborates with an extra stage in order to fit the particular narrative of Matthew. These four stages he entitles: (1) separation *and ascent*, (2) liminality/transformation, (3) *disciples’ mimesis and community consequences*, and (4) aggregation. He concludes by stating that, “for Matthew, Jesus’ deeds are paradigmatic for the community; mimesis is fundamental for identity, action, and relationship. *Ritual becomes the creative medium which mediates mimesis.*”³⁹⁰

Philip Esler in his response to Hanson’s article countered that, rather than focusing “on any transforming experience of discipleship,” many of these mountain narratives in Matthew focus more on Jesus’ status and accomplishments. Esler did however see a transformation portrayed on the Mountain of Healing where the miracles resulted in glory to God, and also on the Mountain of Epiphany in the terror of the disciples and the subsequent instruction to follow Him.³⁹¹

Jerome Neyrey, in 1995, used Turner’s occasional differentiation between ceremony—as confirmatory and cyclical—and ritual—as transformational and irregular—in an analysis of the narrative of Jesus’ footwashing in John 13:6–20. Neyrey finds this distinction particularly valuable for understanding this passage, arguing that two very separate things are taking place in the narrative. The main event of the footwashing described of Jesus in vv. 12–20 was directed toward the whole group of disciples, among whom Jesus commanded a regular ceremony to be enacted in order to confirm their role as servant-leaders. He argues that in addition, however, Jesus in vv. 6–

³⁸⁹ K. C. Hanson, “Transformed on the Mountain: Ritual Analysis and the Gospel of Matthew,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 149, 155. Would the Garden of Gethsemane experience on the Mount of Olives be considered a failed ritual transformation because of the disciples’ recalcitrance?

³⁹⁰ Hanson, “Transformed on the Mountain,” 167–68, italics in the original.

³⁹¹ Philip Esler, “Mountaineering in Matthew: A Response to K. C. Hanson,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 173.

11 enacted a transformation ritual specifically directed at Peter, which is set apart by the personal conversation between Jesus and Peter. In this dialogue, Peter alone is demonstrated as beginning a transition in which he is “fully cleansed” for a new and special role with Jesus.³⁹²

The articles in this section provide further evidence of the need to address the question of metaphorical and literal rites of passage and suggest the need to attempt to distinguish between a metaphorical rite of passage displayed for the purposes of the text itself, deliberate rite of passage allusions, and one in the mind of the modern reader. LaHurd gives a valuable example of how this might be done. And while somewhat overstated, Hanson’s examination of “the mountain” as focalizing symbol points to the importance the symbolism of place can play in ritual.

3.5 Baptism and Wilderness

Working from a statement by anthropologist Monica Wilson that ritual reveals the deepest values of a group, Michael Lawler in 1980 sought to explore the symbolism of the “sacrament of baptism” in the early church, as well as that of confirmation and eucharist, in order to interpret the original theology lying behind each.³⁹³ Lawler argued that pre-Christian proselyte baptism had already reached the status of a rite of passage ushering individuals between two sets of cultural conditions—the state of being a Gentile to that of being Israelite. Within this pre-Christian ritual, Lawler interpreted the liminal phase of immersion as a return to invisibility in the primal womb as symbolized by water, basing this not on any of the scant mentions in the early Jewish literature but on Biblical symbolism of water as the source of death (flood and Red Sea) as well as of all life

³⁹² Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Footwashing in John 13:6–11,” in *The Social World of the First Christians* (ed. Michael White and O Larry Yarbrough; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 198–213. Neyrey considers this transition of Peter to be completed only at the conversation on the seashore reported in John 21.

³⁹³ Cited in Michael G Lawler, “Christian Rituals: An Essay in Sacramental Symbolisms,” *Hor* 7, no. 1 (1980): 8.

(Creation and Exodus). The first (Jewish) Christians, Lawler suggested, reached back to this symbolic water rite to find a passage by which they could follow Jesus through the separation of death, the liminality of the tomb, and the aggregation of his raising. The multivocality of symbols allowed these early Christian participants to understand their baptism at the same time as a rebirthing, as a cleansing from sin, and as a participation in the Spirit of God, aspects which are testified to by the writings of the New Testament and by the fathers of the early church.

Wayne Meeks also briefly explored early Christian baptism from a rite of passage perspective in his 1983 historical-cultural study, *The First Urban Christians*, noting that the liminal symbols “nudity, symbolic death, rebirth as a child” were very early associated with baptism.³⁹⁴ After describing this baptism as an initiation into a marginal community, Meeks gives an excellent example of adapting his use of the model to the realities of the historical text, pointing out that in the case of Christian baptism the antistructural aspects of sacredness, homogeneity, unity, love, equality, humility normally expected in liminality are attached here instead to the reincorporation phase of the ritual.

Anthropologist Edmund Leach, whose methodological contributions are discussed above, sought to demonstrate his own “personal style of biblical exegesis” in a 1987 study, “Fishing for Men on the Edge of the Wilderness” which addressed Mark’s account of Jesus’ baptism and wilderness experience together with the calling of the first disciples (Mark 1:9–20). In addition to pursuing the symbolism of fishermen and pairs of brothers, Leach noted that this group of pericopes is particularly concerned with initiation—that of Jesus by John, and of the four disciples by Jesus. Describing rite of passage as a way of dealing with the discontinuities of social time and space within the continuously flowing reality of the physical here and now, he argued that the timelessness and abnormality of the in-between (liminal) phase is generally set apart as sacred, the place of the

³⁹⁴ Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 153–57.

metaphysical Other, and commonly involves egalitarian communitas and death-and-rebirth symbolism. In literature, he states, these marginal aspects are woven into the plot. He pointed out that, in the initiations of both Jesus and the disciples, water is involved, and that in the case of Jesus wilderness enters in as well. He went on to treat these two symbols as of primary significance in his interpretation of the passage using his earlier-stated principle that the Bible is not a history book but a mythology, with “a symbolic congruence between any one part of the Bible and any other.”

Leach found, in the story of Moses, two such “van Gennep sequences” having “symbolic congruence” with the Markan passage. There, in Moses’ movement from lowly child to prince, and from prince to prophet, “Egypt stands for the here and now while the ark in the river and the Wilderness both represent the Other.”³⁹⁵ Leach compared this with the account in Mark 1, noting that the wilderness Jesus entered following his baptism, like the prototypical Biblical wilderness of Israel’s Exodus wandering, represents the “altogether Other”—“the exact converse of the profane world that is familiar”—separated off symmetrically at either end by the presence of water.³⁹⁶ He found congruences, too, in Elijah’s movements between Jordan and desert regions. A particularly clearly congruence, according to Leach, is the sequence of Elisha’s initiation involving Elijah’s miraculous dividing of the Jordan, the wilderness experience of the Other including the chariot of fire, and Elisha’s return in which he himself now miraculously divides the Jordan and, Moses-like, purifies a well. Leach here moves seamlessly from literal rites of passage, which he terms initiations, to more metaphorical passages having a similar sequence and symbols, which he labels “van Gennep sequences.”

³⁹⁵ Edmund R. Leach, “Fishing for Men on the Edge of the Wilderness,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1987), 585.

³⁹⁶ Leach, “Fishing for Men,” 587.

In a pair of articles published in 1989 and 1993 McVann, whose 1991 article on rite of passage in Luke 3:1–4:15 is discussed in chapter 1, used rite of passage theory to explicate this same episode as it is reported in Matthew.³⁹⁷ After declaring that Matthew in chapters 1 and 2 portrays Jesus in the role of Son of God, McVann argued, as in his study of Luke 3–4, that in the baptism and temptations of chapters 3 and 4 God assigns to Jesus the role of prophet, a role Matthew builds on in later chapters. The stages of the rite are divided somewhat differently than in the article on Luke with: *separation* said to be taking place in Jesus’ journey to the Jordan, baptism, and journey to the wilderness; *liminality-communitas* in the fasting and tests in the wilderness; and *aggregation* in the appearance of angels and in the opening evidence of his prophetic status. McVann argued that in the testing Jesus, having obtained the necessary sanction by the established prophet John, submits to the “grotesque monsters” of Turnerian liminal theory which challenge him to reexamine the factors of his culture.

McVann also published an article in the 1994 *Semeia* volume dedicated to ritual, where he discusses the role of honor challenges in relation to baptism in the Gospel of Mark. Arguing that these honor challenges followed a rite of passage form, McVann states that “ritual makes order” and that honor challenges follow this pattern in order to draw boundaries in social space.³⁹⁸ McVann looks to 11:27–33 for an example, where in Jesus’ rebuttal of the leaders’ challenge to his authority in assaulting the honor of the temple, Jesus response challenges the leaders’ own authority by implying the crucial nature of the baptism in which they themselves had refused to partake.

McVann then goes on to consider honor in relation to baptism, arguing that Mark emphatically called his audience to embrace through baptism, as well as discipleship, the

³⁹⁷ Mark McVann, “The Making of Jesus the Prophet: Matthew 3:13–4:25,” *Listening* 24 (1989): 262–77; idem, “One of the Prophets: Matthew’s Testing Narrative as a Rite of Passage,” *BTB* 23 (1993): 14–20.

³⁹⁸ Mark McVann, “Reading Mark Ritually: Honor-Shame and the Ritual of Baptism,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 180.

arrest, abuse, and execution of Jesus Christ. For in this Gospel, which according to McVann was written to be used as part of an initiation for those about to be baptized, their baptism represents a ritual reenactment of Jesus' experience of passion, death, and resurrection, a connection which was, for Mark, the greatest honor on earth.³⁹⁹ Thus Mark stands the ancient concern for honor on its head by making most honorable what his audience would naturally consider most shaming. He also finds this 'root metaphor' of baptism recurring (in tandem with honor-shame concerns) at the three most crucial points in the book: the baptism of Jesus in ch. 1 which functioned to affirm his honor and authority; the homily about the cross in 8:27–9:1 which he understands as the crux of this book written for Christian neophytes; and in the young man in white (baptismal garments) at Jesus tomb in 16:5.

Carol LaHurd, who wrote the formal response to McVann's paper, points out that although honor challenges involve liminality, not all liminality need be ritual in origin. Jesus' "status transformations" in Mark, she argues, actually emphasize the revelation not the transformation of his status, and thus do not fit well into the function of example for Christian baptismal candidates. She also suggests that McVann's reading of Mark dilutes Mark's emphasis on the salvation God accomplished through the death of Christ, and on the aspect of repentance in baptism. LaHurd again points up the importance of recognizing both degrees of ritualization, and also the change of role or status involved in a literal rite of passage, when she asks,

When the Markan text invites readers to move beyond the disciples' apparent lack of understanding and respond to the 'mystery of the cross' (Matera: 63–64), are they experiencing a ritual status transformation or primarily achieving a cognitive and attitudinal change?⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ McVann, "Reading Mark Ritually," 179–98.

⁴⁰⁰ Carol J. Schersten LaHurd, "Exactly What's Ritual About the Experience of Reading/Hearing Mark's Gospel?" *Semeia* 67 (1994): 206.

Richard Ascough draws partially on the work of McVann in a brief 1994 analysis of the baptismal ritual as represented in the *Didache*. From previous social science investigations of antiquity, Ascough distills three steps for such a study: (1) the outlining of the model; (2) investigation of the literary evidence in light of the model; and (3) use of the model to “highlight the values, social structures, and conventions of ancient society.”⁴⁰¹ (This third step is the most distinctive in comparison with other Biblical and early church usages, which tend to ignore the model’s original primary emphasis on understanding the society as a whole.)

Ascough understands the apostles and prophets (11.4), along with the bishops and deacons (15.1), to be placed in the role of ritual elders, and identifies a phase of separation, a barely touched on phase of liminality, and a phase of aggregation involving participation in the eucharistic meal. He notes the particular attention given to the separation phase, which involves movement with regard to people (through the instruction of the two ways), place (through removal to a location with water), and time (in the period of fasting). Ascough suggests that the rather open-ended prescription of only two sacral symbols, the water and the baptismal formula, makes of central importance “that the people of the community be baptized, and that they be baptized ‘in the Lord’s name.’” He assumes that the many symbols not discussed must have been considered either well-known or insignificant.⁴⁰²

In the 1994 study of Matthean mountain experiences discussed above, the first mountain analyzed by Hanson is the scene following Jesus’ baptism when the devil invites Jesus to fall down and worship. As the final and highest plane in Matthew’s “ritualized initiation” of Jesus where the most difficult test is successfully undergone,

⁴⁰¹ Richard S. Ascough, “An Analysis of the Baptismal Ritual of the *Didache*,” *Studia Liturgica* 24, no. 2 (1994): 201–13. (The generalization to all of ancient society is symptomatic of Ascough’s general approach.)

⁴⁰² Ascough, “Analysis of the Baptismal Ritual,” 212.

Hanson calls this *the mountain of initiation-ordeal*. He points out remarkable links between this account and that of Deut 8:2–5 and others in the Hebrew Bible as well as to ordeals undergone as a part of initiation in a wide variety of cultures, and argues that Matthew here calls on the Christian community to successfully complete their own ordeals in the life of discipleship.⁴⁰³ Hanson argues that, like each of the mountain-passages, this account opens with an indication to the reader of “Jesus’ qualifications to make the next ritual move,” evidenced here in God’s declaration that, “This is my beloved Son.”⁴⁰⁴ This ritual is said to end only after Jesus settles in Capernaum and takes up a new existence, status and mission.

Luke Timothy Johnson’s groundbreaking 1998 work, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity*, devotes one chapter to Christian baptism as an initiatory ritual, using it as a test case for his exploration of the human experience of specifically religious phenomena. After a succinct reconstruction of what can be known of earliest Christian baptism and its symbolism, Johnson devotes his attention to one specific experience of baptism—that of the believers in Galatia and Colossae. In the situation addressed by the letters of Paul, these believers were apparently being tempted to go beyond their baptismal initiation by engaging in the rite of circumcision. Using rite of passage theory along with descriptions of initiation practices in Greco-Roman mystery cults and Philo’s conceptualization of aspects of Hellenistic Judaism in these terms, Johnson argues that the “imprint” from these believers’ experience with the successive levels of initiation in the mystery cults brought about a very predictable interest in the ritual of circumcision, which they saw as a means of “status elevation” advancing them beyond baptism and further along the path of perfection. In response, Paul insisted that following Christ meant remaining in the *communitas* state of love, meekness, and mutuality into which they had

⁴⁰³ His source on initiation is Jean La Fontaine, *Initiation* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985).

⁴⁰⁴ Hanson, “Transformed on the Mountain,” 156.

been inaugurated at baptism, thus recognizing the superior inheritance they had all already received in Christ. Their hope of achieving a higher level through an initiation “into Moses” was especially unacceptable because it was thereby treated as superior to the baptismal initiation into Christ himself.⁴⁰⁵

Richard DeMaris, in 1999, applied to Corinthian baptismal practice the concern of Turner, Bell, and Grimes for looking closely at the cultural and social context of a specific ritual. Citing a note by van Gennepe of a common thread running through rites of birth, coming of age, marriage, death, etc, DeMaris examines the malleability of Roman funerary practice and the metaphorical transference of such practices to other occasions that sought to particularly ritualize a separation or transition—a funeral’s most basic underlying issue. He then argues that in Corinth, baptism, which he assumes to be fundamentally an initiation rite, may have been practiced also for the dead as a separation rite signaling the “movement of the deceased community member into the world of the dead.”⁴⁰⁶

DeMaris also recently (2002) applied ritual criticism to the question of the historicity of Jesus’ baptism experience. He suggests that the use of a “ritual critical” approach turns “the scholarly consensus about the historicity of Jesus’ baptism and vision upside down,” refuting the standard idea that while Jesus’ baptism may have taken place, the vision is highly to be doubted.⁴⁰⁷ DeMaris does this by arguing that altered states of consciousness and visionary experiences are common results of ritual activity in cultures—such as those of Israelites and early Christians—in which a tradition of such visionary experiences occurs, noting that the sequence presented in Mark and the

⁴⁰⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 69–104.

⁴⁰⁶ Richard E. DeMaris, “Funerals and Baptisms, Ordinary and Otherwise: Ritual Criticism and Corinthian Rites,” *BTB* 29 (1999): 29.

⁴⁰⁷ Richard E. DeMaris, “The Baptism of Jesus: A Ritual-Critical Approach,” in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 138.

synoptics fits a common pattern of spirit possession triggered by ritual activity. What actually *cannot* be established, DeMaris asserts, is whether the act of baptism was, in reality, the ritual that brought on this experience, if indeed there even was a ritual directly associated with it.

J. Albert Harrill, also in 2002, used the Roman *toga virilis* coming-of-age ritual to bring a fresh and broadly-informed approach to understanding Paul's interpretation of baptism.⁴⁰⁸ Harrill suggests that Paul, in Gal 3:26, interprets the prior idea of baptism into Christ as "putting on Christ" in terms of the widely known and practiced *toga virilis* ritual. In this ritual Roman boys don the adult toga for the first time as part of a familial ceremony marking their passage to manhood. In the concerns and advice evidenced in classical literature about how young men should handle their increasing freedoms, Harrill finds a connection with Paul's paraenetic language in Galatians dealing with a baptized believer who has put on Christ should act with responsible freedom. Harrill's work demonstrates the value of considering metaphorical references to contemporary ritual within ancient text. In his analysis of the toga virilis ceremony he also argues for the need to nuance the concept of liminality by recognizing its variable intensity and time span.

The topic of baptism in the earliest church, has thus received a variety of thoughtful approaches which make use of ritual theory and demonstrate the value of viewing this practice in terms of an initiation, or rite of passage. Various symbolic meanings have been suggested for this rite that can be watched for in the account of Luke, including death and rebirth, a reenactment of Jesus' passion, cleansing, and participation in the Spirit. Also with possible implications for the Lukan account of Jesus' baptism is the observation by both Meeks and Johnson of the state of marginality, or *communitas*, in which initiates were expected to remain following baptism. Ascough picks up on the place of ritual in society, reminding of how the model may be used to

⁴⁰⁸ J. Albert Harrill, "Coming of Age and Putting on Christ: The *Toga Virilis* Ceremony, Its Paraenesis, and Paul's Interpretation of Baptism in Galatians," *NovT* 44 (2002): 252–77.

highlight the values and structures of society. McVann's reminder that "ritual makes order," drawing boundaries in social space, might be applied both to the world portrayed in the narrative, to the world projected by the narrative, and to the ordering of the text itself. Leach's interpretation of Mark's baptism account exemplifies an intentional but seamless movement between literal and metaphorical rites of passage in biblical text accomplished through attention to Mark's own particular use of symbolism in wilderness and in water.

3.6 The Earliest Christian Church

Applications of rite of passage theory to other aspects of the early church, outside of interpretations of accounts of the life of Jesus and of baptism, have been few in number. Two subject areas, however, have received some attention: the experience of Paul, and the experience of the early church in an overall sense.

An application of Turner's theory of social drama to the emergence of Christianity (as anti-structure) from Judaism (as structure) was attempted by George Worgul in 1979. Worgul believed that early Christianity followed the steps of social drama fleshed out by Turner beginning with a *breach* brought about by Jesus' teachings regarding law, purity and worship (despite the fact that Jesus never considered himself anything other than a Jew); moving into *crisis* with the increasing messianic expectations that surrounded him; being answered with verbal and finally fatal *redressive action* in the killing of Jesus and the further persecution of his followers; and concluding with a *reintegration* in which Christianity gradually came to find its own place separate from Judaism. In this process, the antistructural entity of Christianity developed its own structure with rituals such as the Last Supper taking the place of the Passover, and rearranging traditional symbols around the new root metaphor of a risen Jesus who, by his resurrection, has triumphed over death.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁹ George S. Worgul, "Anthropological Consciousness and Biblical Theology," *BTB* 9 (1979): 3–12.

Ten years later, in 1989, Warren Carter sought to explore the liminal situation in which he believed the earliest Syro-Palestinian believers found themselves as they awaited the vindication of the υἱός τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Examining several early sets of logia from the canonical Gospels, Carter found each set to be characterized by a sharp tension existing (betwixt and) between the pull to participate in society and care for family ties, and the pull to separate from society and maintain a “permanent state of outsiderhood.”⁴¹⁰ Carter concludes that these “*logia* express liminality as the foundation of the [Syro-Palestinian Jesus Movement]’s existence”, expressed in the necessity of preserving the movement’s transitional nature of separation from the world and of preparation for the Day of the υἱός τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Carter wonders (but does not here attempt to answer) whether this liminal state was the actuality or simply the ideal.

Jerome Neyrey approached the study of Paul from the general standpoint of culture and anthropology in his 1990 book, *Paul, in Other Words*. One chapter of this work is devoted to the use of ritual and related theories to explore the character of Paul and his work. Neyrey gives careful attention to Turner’s distinction between ritual which is particularly concerned with distinguishing and maintaining boundaries, and ceremony, which has the function of confirming and preserving the common values and structures within those boundaries. He argues that Paul found the boundary lines “marking role and status” to be unstable and constantly under threat in the Christian communities he addressed, as evidenced by the various crises and troubles Paul encountered in the enactment of ceremonies, like meals, collections, and pilgrimage.⁴¹¹ In response to these problems, Neyrey argues, Paul focused his attention on rituals, such as baptism and excommunication, to delineate and reaffirm the shaken boundaries.

⁴¹⁰ Warren Carter, “The Earliest Christian Movement: Sectarian, Itinerant, or Liminal Existence?” *Koinonia* 1 (Fall 1989): 103. Carter examined logion relating to: the rendering to Caesar and to God; involvement with the family; and apocalyptic expectation.

⁴¹¹ Jerome H. Neyrey, *Paul in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 81.

Neyrey delineates a number of liminal characteristics of the boundary-guarding ritual of baptism in Paul, noting the marginal situation in which Christian neophytes found themselves before the actual baptism ushered them across the boundary into the community of Christians. He also notes several oppositions in Paul's discussion of baptism, which include dying/rising, death/life, descending/ascending, burial/enthronement, flesh/spirit, sin/holiness, stain/purity, and the idols, demons, and rulers of this world/the living God and Jesus Christ, the Lord.⁴¹²

In a 1999 book, adapted from his dissertation and entitled *Die liminale Theologie des Paulus*, Christian Strecker uses Turner's work on liminality to explore the theology of Paul. After a discussion of the use of anthropology and rite of passage theory in New Testament studies, Strecker argues that the descriptions of Paul's transformation on his journey to Damascus are best understood in terms of a rite of initiation, an initiation in which Paul is left in a permanent condition of liminality. Strecker suggests that Paul saw his experience of transformation and ongoing liminality as in many ways typifying the believers' own experience at baptism.⁴¹³ Paul's portrayal of Christ's abasement, death, and exaltation, in Strecker's view, evidences the stages of separation, liminality, and re-aggregation. In the initiatory experience of baptism believers take part in the death, entering into a *communitas*, or being in-Christ, which extends until their own final exaltation at his coming.⁴¹⁴ He points to 2 Cor 4 and Phil 3 as the strongest evidence for this ongoing liminality in the thought of Paul. Strecker goes on, in successive chapters, also to develop his view of the Christian community from the standpoint of liminality theory.

⁴¹² Neyrey, *Paul in Other Words*, 87–88.

⁴¹³ Christian Strecker, *Die liminale Theologie des Paulus: Zugänge zur paulinischen Theologie aus kulturanthropologischer Perspektive* (FRLANT 185; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 155–57.

⁴¹⁴ Strecker, *Liminale Theologie des Paulus*, 211. Strecker finds this especially evident in Phil 2:6–11 and Rom 6:3–4.

The work of Neyrey and Strecker extend the consideration of baptism as ritual to the accounts of Paul's life and thought with its emphasis on transformation, or movement across boundaries, symbolized by dying and rising, burial and enthronement. Carter and Strecker find further evidence of the idea of a permanent outsiderhood, or extended liminality, in documents as diverse as Gospel logia and Pauline epistles.

3.7 Implications for the Use of Rite of Passage Theory in Biblical Studies

While an increasing number of studies have emerged in recent years applying rite of passage theory to Biblical studies, as detailed above, much remains to be done. Jonathan Schwiebert has pointed out, in a 2004 examination of a sample of recent scholarly works on the New Testament, that such studies are still at the periphery of the main stream of New Testament Studies. Even when giving attention to anthropological aspects of exegesis, Schwiebert suggests, NT scholarship has most often continued to subordinate ritual as something less "real" than the "solid ground" of ideas and belief systems. Schwiebert's call to New Testament scholars to a higher valuation and a more intense discourse on ritual in the early Jesus movement, together with a movement beyond the now-classic theories of Turner and Mary Douglas, is one this dissertation finds itself addressing.

For the most part, the studies explored in this chapter do not show a great deal of explicit critical reflection upon the relative usefulness of the model for biblical studies applications, either in whether or how it can best be used. Rather those aspects of rite of passage theory considered useful have generally been described and applied without critical comment. The most common of these have been van Gennep's and Turner's identification of the three stages of rite of passage and of Turner's descriptions of the various characteristics of the liminal stage. Such considerations have proven to be most helpful when significant attention has been given not only to listing the congruences between rite of passage theory and biblical text, but also to ways in which the text under

study both diverges from theoretical expectations and also builds upon, or is subverted by, the various aspects of liminality and rite of passage manifested therein. The more nuanced readings, such as those of Leach, have also considered the purpose for which a particular text may be portraying a rite of passage. Little consideration has yet been given to the aspects of movement and bodily participation pointed out by Gorman and Alexander, or to the range of ways in which ritual effects come about, from evocation to consciously expressed interpretation, or to how these might be interpreted.

A number of observations have been made which will be particularly valuable for further investigation with regard to their applicability to the text of Luke. The explorations of Israel's wilderness passage provide a rich background against which to study Luke's use of wilderness in Luke 1–4. Ascough has reasserted the value of considering what the ritual account conveys regarding the values and structures of an ancient society. Such applications need to be applied in a more nuanced way, recognizing that the society thus described is the society of the narrative world and not necessarily a historical one, and considering how the depiction is shaped by the narrative purposes of the text. Various symbolic meanings have been attached to the ritual of baptism which can be considered for their possible use in the baptism accounts of Luke 3:1–4:15 and the larger context of Luke-Acts. McVann has suggested that in the wilderness Jesus was shown to be led to rethink the building blocks of his cultural framework, although he leaves open the specific adjustments that may have been made. And a diverse array of scholars, including Meeks, Johnson, Neyrey, and Strecker have considered ways in which the New Testament calls early Christian believers to an ongoing liminality through the ritual of baptism.

Gorman's call for new models of interpretation to be constructed that recognize and deal with the challenges of working with ancient text rather than fieldwork, continues to be important. A further differentiation needs to be made, for example, along the lines explored by Gorman and Hanson, in distinguishing between the experiences,

understandings and goals of the characters and structures within the narrative world with regard to a rite metaphorical or literal, and those of the text which may be similar or vastly different. Related to this, commentators, such as LaHurd and Hanson, are becoming increasingly aware of the narrative's audience, recognizing that the audience too may participate vicariously in the liminal effects of a narrated experience through elements such as juxtaposition, ambiguity, and contradiction. Their work suggests that the audience may even be led to join the characters in their own separation and movement to a new conceptual and even social location, thus making their interaction with the text itself a ritual experience.

One challenge that has become increasingly clear is the need to distinguish between literal rites of passage clearly portrayed in the text and recognized as such within the narrative world or by the narrative text, and more isolated ritual-like behaviors or metaphorical allusions to rite of passage processes which are made within the text for the purpose of calling upon affect or meaning associated with rite of passage in the experience of the audience. For as Gorman states, both the production and hearing of texts may be influenced by previous experience of ritual. It also must be recognized that while in some cases textual references to ritual may be explicitly expressed and demonstrably recognized as such, in many other cases ritual correspondences may be expressed outside of the conscious awareness of either author or audience, thus exerting their influence in more subtle, symbolic, and diverse ways. Because the identification of such implicit ritual allusions is rather subjective, it will at times be proper to recognize that links may be identifiable/recognized only in the mind of the modern analyst, and while they can be useful for textual interpretation, are not a factor in the behaviors and intentions of characters and texts. Leach has demonstrated a means of moving between these various levels, approaching them by means of the shared symbols by which they are linked. The study of ancient text in this chapter has made clearer the importance of this differentiation.

With these challenging observations in mind, it is time to take up the theory suggested in chapters 2 and 3 and consider it first briefly in relation to several narratives of ritual, or ritualized, transitions produced around the time of the Gospel of Luke. Thus, after examining the diversity of rite of passage experience on which such authors and audiences had to draw, three narratives will be considered, using the methodology developed above. By thus pointing up ways in which rite of passage depictions and allusions were being used by other narratives, this analysis will make possible a more informed and sensitive analysis of Luke 3:1–4:15.

CHAPTER FOUR
RITES OF PASSAGE IN THE NARRATIVE LITERATURE
OF THE FIRST- AND SECOND-CENTURY GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

The formalized symbolic events we today speak of as rites of passage were a common feature of the Greco-Roman world of Luke's day, and thus stood within the range of experience both author and audience might draw on in writing and interpreting narrative text. In addition to their own experience, storytelling about the gods and about long-ago worlds, would have exposed them to even more elaborate and devout practices of ritual within their own cultural tradition. Myth and history, official records and descriptive accounts, inscription and art all witness to the place of rite of passage in the Greco-Roman culture. In fact, a number of narratives are extant from the literature of Luke's own day that do this very directly, incorporating into their story a description of a ritualized transition in the life of the protagonist. Other narratives of the time make use of rites of passage in more metaphorical ways, linking an event or concept in the story more or less implicitly with rites of passage within the experience of their audiences.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the range of rites of passage known in Luke's world, with the recognition that an awareness of these events may give clues as to how a particular portrayal of, or allusions to, rite of passage may have been understood by the audience of the narrative. Three such narrative uses of rite of passage will then be briefly explored, with attention to how they use rite of passage to further their own particular literary purposes. The first, the initiation of Lucius in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, provides an example of a highly ritualized initiation into a mystery religion, an

initiation to which Loisy compared Luke 3–4. Josephus’ tale of his passage from youth into public life in the *Vita* represents a less formalized transition which nonetheless shows distinct ritual features, and also bears comparison with Jesus own transition to public life in Luke. Finally the tale of Paul’s transition from persecutor to Christ-follower within Luke-Acts itself will be examined, in order to place the attention given to baptism and ritual in Luke 3 and 4 into the context of their treatment in the rest of the work. The methodology developed in chapters 2 and 3 will be applied to these accounts in order to sample the various ways in which rites of passage are portrayed and made to function in these particular Greco-Roman texts, and how rite of passage theory may illuminate such texts. Because the focus of this work is Luke 3:1–4:15, this will be done in a rather brief and succinct way with the goal of discovering starting points for the application of such an approach to events narrated by Luke surrounding the baptisms of John and of Jesus.

While the term *Greco-Roman world* is a convenient label for referring to the large and unwieldy array of peoples influenced by Hellenization and governed by the Roman Empire, such a label must, of course, be understood as a generalization—or useful fiction—applied only for the sake of simplicity. Rather than a single homogeneous society with one integrated structure of institutions, groups, and relationships, Greco-Roman society was a conglomerate of many more or less assimilated smaller societies spread across a vast area. Much of native tradition and belief remained beneath, and in mixture with, the growing influence of Greek and Roman religion and culture.

Although these societies in general found themselves increasingly syncretized culturally, rites of passage that developed in a particular region or polis seem to have remained largely within the *polis* or region in which they were developed, sometimes differing significantly even from those in the regions standing nearest to them. This is particularly true of those rites which were administered by the community or city government such as “puberty” rituals. While a Greek of first-century Sparta may have continued to experience an extensive puberty ritual, young men of nearby Delphi may

have participated in no such ritual and the young of Athens may have been expected to meet only small set of perfunctory requirements. Initiations into the mystery cults, on the other hand, spread across large regions of the Greco-Roman world carrying with them a wide array of customs and practices as they went, and attesting strongly to the syncretism of the time.

Within any particular region, the practice and memory of ritual also varied by social “class” and occupation. The breadth of awareness of rite of passage that could be expected of the average nonliterate member of the Luke’s audience is most difficult to document, since they did not read or produce text. They did, however, observe public ritual involving rites of passage, pass on tradition and knowledge and hearsay from home and abroad through a thriving oral culture, and engage in the complex patterns of the transfer of ideas between and among lived experience, oral interpretation and read or reported text.

Due to the growing cosmopolitan atmosphere in the cities of the Empire under the Pax Romana through the increase of travel, trade, and commerce, the various rites of passage that individuals had known from different societies and cultures would have often been viewed and evaluated in juxtaposition with each other. This is exemplified in a lament by Philo of Alexandria in which he names, for example, calendrical rites centered around “fabulous fictions” (myths) and also rites of passage such as wedding feasts. Philo spoke of these festivals as “all tending to no other object than to excite vain pride in various nations” (*Cher.* 91.). In his attention to the function of ritual in this analysis, Philo sounds remarkably like Durkheim, while his consideration of the structures of power recall also Foucault and Bell. He goes on to describe these events in terms reminiscent of Turner’s description of liminality as “betwixt and between” positions normally assigned by law and convention where participants often experience a suspension, or reversal, of the normal rules of living, speaking of,

violent acts of insolence, practices of intemperance, indulgence of folly, . . . sleep by day when it is the proper time to be awake, a turning upside down of the laws of nature. At such a time virtue is ridiculed as a mischievous thing, and vice is caught at as something advantageous. Then actions that ought to be done are held in no honor, and such as ought not to be done are esteemed (*Cher.* 92–93).

A particular challenge for the consideration of ancient rites of passage is also posed by the cosmopolitan nature of many of the cities of the empire. For rite of passage theorists have considered such rites to take their purest form in traditional tribal cultures with comparatively little change or contact with the outside world, a condition uncommon in the first- and second-century Roman Empire except in the furthest outlying districts. Though such village life would have largely continued to be governed by the traditions of the ancestors, conditions within the more urban experience of Luke and most of his audience were much more fluid. Victor Turner understood this development, which he saw to be already taking place in the classical Greek city states, as an early stage in an evolutionary transition from the socially mandated rites of passage of “primitive” kin-based societies to the optional rites and voluntarily chosen (*liminoid*) activities of modern cosmopolitan societies. Grimes and others, however, offered important critiques of such a dichotomizing approach with its value-laden terminology and flattening of the diverse spectrum of cultural types and suggested instead that the variations between societies with regard to ritual be handled rather by studying each society on its own terms, observing and studying its own unique blend of ritual, ritualizing, and ritual-like activities. In doing so one must avoid insisting upon conformity to a too-rigid definition of rite of passage and remain alert to events which may not contain each of the identifying characteristics of the classic rite of passage, but which may nonetheless mark a transition of an individual or group from one life stage, or state, to another.

The most basic challenge, however, in exploring the rites of passage practiced in Luke’s world is on the temporal level. The vast distance between the 1st century and the 21st century C.E. has buried, or at least obscured, most of the original data that could have aided in understanding ancient rites of passage, cutting off any possibility of oral

communication, destroying the majority of documents, and crumbling artifactual and environmental evidence. Even where documents or archaeological evidence remain, the picture is fragmentary, and further, may date from much earlier periods, with no certain indication of how these constantly changing and adapting rituals were modified between the time of the record and the 1st and 2nd centuries. In addition, it is difficult to know whether the legitimate rites of passage that have been found and described are representative of the whole or merely a few odd specimens which actually skew the picture of the way in which rites of passage really functioned during this time.

For any knowledge of rites of passage in this period so distant from ourselves, modern research is dependent upon text, sometimes augmented by artifacts, and what is available is only a small sampling of the very texts and artifacts that were available to audience of Luke. Such audiences would have had available to them some of these textual and artifactual markers as well as some remaining to them from more ancient times. However, much of their knowledge of earlier times would have remained within the cultural memory through oral tradition alone.

One marker of rite of passage references within a text is the use of language normally associated with, and even derived from full-fledged rites of passage. In the Greek language which united the empire, a variety of terms are associated with rite of passage themes, but three main families of Greek words may be identified as being particularly common in such an association—those related to the verbs *μύω*, *ἐποπτέω*, and *τελέω/τελειόω*.⁴¹⁵ Interestingly, although they could be, and were, used with a variety of ritual-type references well before the 1st century C.E., they primarily arose from a single type of rite of passage—initiation into the mystery cults.

Günther Bornkamm suggests that *μυστήριον* and related terms were very early associated particularly with mystery cults and only later derived a “secular” usage, but

⁴¹⁵ Other terms were also used with reference to ritual and rite of passage, such as *ιεροφαντέω* and *ιεροφάντης*, which have a similar range of meaning to the *μύω* family.

Burkert points out that one of the earliest Mycenaean usages of the verbal root μυ(σ)- seems to refer to the initiation of an official.⁴¹⁶ Although it came to have a wider use, μυστήριον was the general term used of the many ancient mystery cults which proliferated in the time of Luke, as well as of the sacred rites and initiations which were integral to these mysteries. The initiation necessary to become a participating member of one of these cults was referred to as the μύησις or μυστᾶγωγία and the action of initiating, μυέω or μυστᾶγωγέω.⁴¹⁷ The term μύστης referred to one who been initiated into one of these mystery cults, and μυσταγωγός to the director of the initiation who was often, as in Eleusis, descended from a specialized family.⁴¹⁸ Burkert states that it was the common Latin translation of the word family of μυέω into *initiare* that “brought the word and concept of ‘initiation’ into our language.”⁴¹⁹

Though the literal meaning of the ἐποπτεύω family has to do with overlooking or watching, as in references to Zeus, Augustus, and the Jewish priesthood as ἐπόπται, it is often used of initiation to the higher grades of the mysteries.⁴²⁰ Thus Plutarch describes Alcibiades’ impeachment for allegedly “mimicking the mysteries and . . . wearing a robe such as the High Priest wears . . . hailing the rest of his companions as μύσται and ἐπόπται” (*Alc.* 22). According to Kern, derivatives of this root, such as ἐποπτεία (the highest grade of initiation at the Eleusinian mysteries) and ἐποπτικός (of or for an

⁴¹⁶ G. Bornkamm, “μυστήριον, μυέω,” *TDNT* 4:803–11; Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 8. The term μυστήρια itself gave its name, from ancient times, to the great Athenian festival *Mysteria* associated with the cult of Eleusis (Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 8–9).

⁴¹⁷ Plutarch, *Thes.* 30.5; Heraclitus, 14; 3 Macc 2:30; The NT uses μυέω only once, metaphorically, in Phil 4:12.

⁴¹⁸ “Μύστης,” LSJ 1156; “μυσταγωγός,” LSJ 1156; Aristotle, *Ath. pol.* 56.4; Xenophon, *Hell.* 2.4.20. Μύστης could also be used as an adjective, meaning “mystical” as in Pausanias’ description of a sanctuary of the “mystic” Dionysus (*Descr.* 8.54.5) and Aristophanes’ reference to “mystical” dances (*Ran.* 370).

⁴¹⁹ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 7.

⁴²⁰ Plutarch, *Dem.* 26.1; idem, *Alex.* 7.3; Josephus, *C. Ap.*, 2.187. The ἐποπτεύω word family is applied only to God in the Septuagint (Esth 5:1; 2 Macc 3:39; 7:35; 3 Macc 2:21; 4 Macc 5:13) and in Philo (*Hypoth.* 7.9).

ἐπόπτῃς), appear to be used quite exclusively in relation to mystery initiations.⁴²¹ The use of a word from this family may also carry rite of passage connotations, as in 2 Pet 1:16 where Peter and the apostles in their witness of Jesus’ “transfiguration” are referred to as “ἐπόπται of His majesty.”⁴²²

The large array of terms related to τελέω and τελειόω likewise generally convey a broader meaning, related to the idea of being “complete, mature, perfect.” Many however are also used, at times, with unmistakable reference to rites of passage, often in combination with the μύω family.⁴²³ Yet while the the μύω family generally relates specifically to the mystery cults, the τελέω family seems more broadly applicable. For example, Plutarch uses the term to describe Artaxerxes’ installation as king, stating, “A little while after the death of Darius, the king went out into Pasargadae, in order that the royal initiation (τελετήν) might be performed (τελεσθείν) by the Persian priests.”⁴²⁴ And the Septuagint uses the term τελείωσις; in Exod 29 and Lev 8 with reference to the ordination of priests; in 2 Macc 2:9 related to the dedication of the temple, and in Jer 2:2 possibly of a young girl’s marrying. Philo uses these terms to describe both actual initiations into the mystery cults and also to metaphorically speak of the initiation of an individual to the “mysteries” of God.⁴²⁵ Such metaphorical uses of these ritual terms assumes that audiences would recognize the allusions to rites of passage, and suggests the diverse and flexible ways in which shared rite of passage experiences could be used in ancient literature.

⁴²¹ Kern, “ἐπόπτῃς,” PW 6/11.248–49.

⁴²² Note this early Christian witness to the transfiguration (2 Pet 1:16–18) as, at least metaphorically, a rite of passage when discussing rites of passage in Luke. Εποπτεύω is used elsewhere in the NT only in 1 Peter of those observing the believers (1 Pet 2:12; 3:2).

⁴²³ G. Bornkamm, “μυστήριον, μύω,” TDNT 4:804 n. 10.

⁴²⁴ Plutarch, *Art.* 3.1; see also idem, *Flam.* 2.1; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 9.

⁴²⁵ Philo, *Spec.* 1.319; 3.40; idem, *Decal.* 41; idem, *Mos.* 1.62; idem, *Contempl.* 25. See also Josephus, *Ant.* 19.30.

Τελ-words receive a lot of usage in the Gospel of Luke where they very often refer to the completion of a significant series of days or events. A number of the words from this family are almost always used in connection with the completion of a ritual or liminal period (L) such as the use of συντελέω at the completion of Jesus' wilderness fast and of his subsequent testing by the devil (Luke 4:2, 13; cf. Act 21:27). Luke, like Philo, also uses this language to speak metaphorically with reference to the rite of passage experience, for Jesus looks forward in Luke 12:50 to a baptism still to be completed, "stating I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished (τελεσοῦν)!". This baptism seems to be associated with his death and glorification, for Jesus comments in 13:32, "I am casting out demons and performing (ἀποτελώ) cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I *reach my goal* (τελειοῦμαι, which might in this context better be translated *consecrated* or *initiated*.) The verb τελειόω, in fact, is used only two other places in Luke-Acts, in Luke 2:43 in connection with ritual connected with Jesus' visit to the Passover at twelve, and in Acts 20:24 in a ritualized account of Paul's farewell to the elders of Ephesus at the conclusion of his missionary journeys. Τελέω, as well, is used in Luke-Acts only of the completion of the ritual and ritualized events—at the completion of Jesus' circumcision and presentation in the temple (Luke 2:39), and in reference to these final events of Jesus' life (Luke 18:31; 22:37; Acts 13:29). These rite of passage uses in Luke will be considered in more detail in later sections of this dissertation.

While artifacts, texts, and vocabulary may suggest a rite of passage connection, the fragmentary nature of the evidence which remains often leaves researchers with only a story in a myth or brief reference to a narrated event which, although not including all of the characteristics expected of a rite of passage, does suggest tantalizing possibilities. Classicists in the past two centuries have diligently catalogued such reconstructed evidences of early ritual, following confidently, at first, in the footsteps of those such as James Frazer who, in *The Golden Bough*, argued that a broad range of ancient myths

actually had their origin in a common pattern of New Years ritual. More recently, Jane Ellen Harrison, H. Jeanmaire, and A. Brelich have also found behind many myths various ancient initiation rituals.⁴²⁶ It has been suggested for example, that a myth involving the marginal adventures of a young hero such as Odysseus may give evidence of an underlying puberty ritual in more ancient times which passed, with the demise of tribal cultural and its more ancient practices, into a perfunctory ceremony or abstract myth.⁴²⁷

Versnel has pointed out the flaws in such an approach, noting that rite of passage characteristics such as marginality can be found in almost every aspect of society and that ancient myths are most often lacking the specificity necessary to connect them unmistakably to one particular ritual. He argued tellingly that even when a plausible ritual connection is based on an aggregate of such factors, this in no way guaranteed the accuracy of such a connection.⁴²⁸ Versnel's cautions with regard to assuming "a rite of passage behind every myth" must be taken seriously. As noted in chapter 2, Versnel points out that such "plausible" theories of ritual origins behind myths must not be accepted as actual unless: (1) the reference is accompanied by an immediate ritual counterpart; (2) "the signals point specifically to one type of ritual;" or (3) "the story could solely and exclusively be interpreted as the reflection of this specific (and not of any other) ritual."⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ H. S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion* (ed. H. S. Versnel; vol. 2: Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual; Leiden: E J Brill, 1993), 20–250; James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (3d. ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935); Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1962); H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes* (ed. W. R. Connor; Ancient Religion and Mythology; New York: Arno Press, 1975); A. Brelich, *Paidés e parthenoi* (Rome: 1969).

⁴²⁷ On Theseus see: Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes*, 243–45; 338–63; John B. Wilkins, "The Young of Athens: Religion and Society in the *Herakleidae* of Euripides," *CQ* 40 (1990): 329–39. On Odysseus, J. N. Bremmer, "Heroes, Rituals and the Trojan War," *SSR* 2 (1978): 5–38.

⁴²⁸ Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion*, 64–68. Versnel himself found most convincing a biological, rather than a ritual, basis for such myths, following the suggestions of Walter Burkert (*Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979]).

⁴²⁹ Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion*, 71.

4.1 An Overview of Rites of Passage in the World of Luke

Within the limits of this document it is, of course, impossible to make a full exploration of even the rites of passage which can, from our distant vantage point, be demonstrated to have been practiced in the 1st and 2nd centuries in the Greco-Roman world. In any case, what is necessary is not an exhaustive list, but a general context in which to place the account of Luke 3–4 and of the other three ritual narratives about to be examined. Below is provided a brief sampling of such rites in this period and of how these rites were celebrated and understood, recognizing that such rites practiced in Luke's day represented neither a completely static set of customs passed down from distant antiquity nor a highly structured set of mechanisms which governed all parts of a particular society. Instead what can be observed is a continuously evolving array of rites shifting across time and place, often voluntary rather than prescribed, and subject to continual adjustment in response to the flood of new cultural input and to the experience and innovation of practitioners. These rites will be considered in three categories—life cycle rites, rites of commissioning, and mystery religions and other voluntary associations—with one example of each receiving more careful examination.

4.1.1 Life Cycle Rites

Considered by many to be the most fundamental type of rite of passage, are those which have been spoken of as *life cycle rites*. The cultures of Luke's time, like every other, marked off the lives of members into successive life stages, which varied in number and significance according to the experience and values of each particular society.⁴³⁰ Evidence suggests that rites of passage accompanying transition between these life stages had been prevalent and diverse in earlier times but by Luke's time had in many cases been forgotten or diluted, losing much of their ritual significance and often being

⁴³⁰ Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, *Growing up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome: A Life Course Approach* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3–4.

blended with outside customs. Nevertheless certain life cycle rites continued to be practiced, some—surrounding birth, marriage, and death—quite commonly, though with varying intensity, and others more sporadically.

Both Greeks and Romans had, from ancient days, marked the birth of a child with a series of rites signifying, among other things, the child's acceptance into the family.⁴³¹ Romans of the day, for example, placed the newborn on the earth, checking it for deformities, before it was lifted up and held in the arms of the father to indicate acceptance into the *familia*.⁴³² On the eighth day, for girls, or the ninth day, for boys, there was a purification rite accompanied by a non-blood sacrifice, a party for the family with gifts and at this time the child was named and was given the *bullā*, a protective pendant which was a sign of freebirth.⁴³³ For Jews, regulations in the law (Lev 12) prescribed a purification sacrifice after the mother's period of uncleanness, and also a circumcision for males to be done on the eighth day. Some continuation of such a practice is suggested in Luke's account of Jesus' parents bringing him to the Jerusalem temple to present him to the Lord and offer a sacrifice "when the days for *their* purification . . . were completed" (2:22–24).

Formal betrothals before marriage were common across a broad array of cultures in Greco-Roman times. Among the wedding rituals known, Plutarch records a liminal reversal once practiced in ancient Sparta where a girl's hair was cut off and she was dressed in man's clothes and shoes and made to lie down alone on a mattress in the

⁴³¹ See Jenifer Neils and John H. Oakley for the related rituals of ancient Greece (*Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003], 144).

⁴³² Neils and Oakley, *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece*, 144; Karen Stears, "Death Becomes Her: Gender and Athenian Death Ritual," in *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* (ed. Sue Blundell and Margaret Williamson; London: Routledge, 1998), 119.

⁴³³ Augustine (quoting Varro in) *Civ.* 4.11; Suetonius, *Nero* 6; Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 39–40, 42.

dark.⁴³⁴ The traditional Roman wedding is described by Harlow and Laurence as involving an elaborate ritual in which the bride wore particular pieces of clothing woven by her own hand that carried symbolism of virtue, fertility, chastity, and of binding to her husband. Following sacrifices in her home and the formalization of contracts and of dotal and dowry arrangements, the formal recognition of the marriage occurred when the bride was led by three boys, and by someone carrying a distaff and spindle, in torchlight procession to her new home while guests shouted out congratulations and obscene songs. After anointing the door she was lifted over the threshold by her attendants and offered fire and water by the groom, before the sexual initiation of the wedding night marked the final stage of the ritual.⁴³⁵ Jewish weddings, too, seemed to have involved a procession, followed by feasting (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.20; Matt 22:2; 25:10; Luke 14:8; John 2:1–3).

Funerals generally made up the final rite of passage of the ancient life cycle, providing proper honor to the deceased. A funeral of a leading man in Rome would involve a procession with death masks of famous ancestors, a eulogy by the eldest son, followed by a period of mourning, while a child would be cremated at night and interred before daybreak.⁴³⁶ Josephus tells Apion that the typical Jewish funeral is, by law, simple with obsequies by the nearest relatives and all who pass by expected to accompany the funeral and join in the lamentation (*C. Ap.* 2:205). Elsewhere he describes the funerals of the rich and powerful filled with gold and ornamentation.

⁴³⁴ Plutarch, *Lyc.* 15.3; Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 60, 71–72; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “The Black Hunter and the Origin of the Athenian *Ephebeia*,” in *Myth, Religion, and Society* (ed. R. L. Gordon; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 155.

⁴³⁵ Cicero, *Quint. frat.* 2.6.2; Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 1.9; Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 60–64.

⁴³⁶ Polybius, 6.53–54; Dio Cassius 56.34–42; 58.2; Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.17; Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 138–40; cf. Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (London: Duckworth, 1985); Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (Aspects of Greek and Roman Life; London: Thames & Hudson, 1971); J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Aspects of Greek and Roman Life; London: Thames & Hudson, 1971).

The life cycle ritual that has probably received the most attention by classicists and anthropologists is the rite of puberty, which often marked the young person's transition to adulthood.⁴³⁷ Plutarch's *Lycurgus* gives evidence that the series of puberty initiations of Sparta were still remembered and to some degree practiced. Their initiation involved cult games and mock battles and the separation of young men into the mountains where, with few weapons or conventional societal expectations, they were hardened and prepared for adulthood in the famously disciplined and military Spartan society.⁴³⁸ Athenians are also argued to have initiated young men, in the early development of what later became a more straightforward military training of young ephebes, by sending them into the wilderness to live in a liminal manner the exact opposite of what would later be expected of them as hoplites.⁴³⁹ Paul Monroe quotes an Athenian inscription from about 100 B.C.E. in which the ephebes "of last year" are commended for their exemplary conduct at their matriculation in the sacrifices and offerings, religious processions, and torch-races. For this along with their hard work during their education, the Senate voted to honor them "in their first year of their adult life."⁴⁴⁰

The story of Theseus, a hero who provided a mythical paradigm for the ephebes and who is generally portrayed as a beardless youth, is told by Plutarch.⁴⁴¹ Immediately

⁴³⁷ Brelich, *Paides e parthenoi*. This Italian volume is probably the most complete compendium of ancient puberty rites.

⁴³⁸ Plutarch, *Lyc.*; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (trans. John Raffan; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 262–63; Nigel M. Kennell, *The Gymnasium of Virtue: Education & Culture in Ancient Sparta* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 23–25; 146–48; Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion*, 56–57; Vidal-Naquet, "The Black Hunter," 181–82.

⁴³⁹ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 263; Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion*, 314–16; Vidal-Naquet, "The Black Hunter," 147–48; 174–77; cf. Neils and Oakley, *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece*, 153.

⁴⁴⁰ Paul Monroe, *Source Book of the History of Education for the Greek and Roman Period* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 302.

⁴⁴¹ Ruth B. Edwards, "The Story of Theseus," in *The Quest for Theseus* (ed. Anne G. Ward et al.; New York: Praeger, 1970), 22; Wilkins, "The Young of Athens," 334.

after the customary ritual sacrifice of his long hair of childhood at the age of sixteen, Theseus makes a pair of journeys through ambiguous untamed places of land and sea besting formidable foes before he returns to Athens, inadvertently causing his father's death.⁴⁴² This is celebrated, as Plutarch notes, in the festival of Oschophoria, with a procession led out of the city by young boys dressed as girls and returning to the city with a footrace of the ephebes.⁴⁴³

Well-born Romans of the time had a several stage process from childhood to adulthood over the course of which young men were considered to be in a marginal state called *adulescentia* that was considered dangerous both to the state and to themselves.⁴⁴⁴ The formal transition began at the time the father decided the young man was ready, (sometime before the beginning of military service at seventeen and often on the festival of *Liber*), when the boy would dedicate his childhood bulla to gods of household, put on the adult *toga virilis*. He would then signify his loyalty to father and state by accompanying his father to the forum with father, after which there was great feasting.⁴⁴⁵ This ritual was practiced across Italy and also in the provinces, and was best attested between the second century B.C.E. and second century C.E.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² Plutarch, *Thes.* 5–23; cf. Pausanias, 1.27; 6–9; C. J. Gianakaris, *Plutarch* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), 431; Henry John Walker, *Theseus and Athens* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 131.

⁴⁴³ Plutarch, *Thes.* 23.2; Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion*, 56–58; Vidal-Naquet, “The Black Hunter,” 156; Walker, *Theseus and Athens*, 100–01.

⁴⁴⁴ Dio Cassius 52.20; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.12–14; Horace, *Ars.* 156–58; Cicero, *Cael.* 42; Plutarch, *De Recta Ratione Audiendi* 1.37; idem, *Cat. Min.* 3.1. Fanny Lyn Dolansky, “Coming of Age in Rome: The History and Social Significance of Assuming the Toga Virilis” (M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1999); J. Albert Harrill, “Coming of Age and Putting on Christ: The Toga Virilis Ceremony, Its Paraenesis, and Paul’s Interpretation of Baptism in Luke-Acts” *NovT* 44 (2002): 252–77; Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 165, 69–72.

⁴⁴⁵ Ovid, *Fast.* 3.771–90; Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.116; Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* (2 vols.; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1:50–51; Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 165–73.

⁴⁴⁶ Dolansky, “Coming of Age in Rome,” 22–25.

Further stages toward full adulthood and out of the excesses of youth were marked by the shaving of the first beard, the entry into the senate at twenty-five and finally the eligibility for praetorship at thirty.⁴⁴⁷ The significance of this transition-point in Luke's day is evidenced by its frequent mention in the narratives of the day, often made more notable by evidences of generosity, power, or divine favor.⁴⁴⁸ Suetonius, for example, states that Galba, "when he assumed the gown of manhood" dreamt of the goddess Fortune who said "she was tired of standing before his door, and that unless she were quickly admitted, she would fall a prey to the first comer" (*Galb.* 4.3). Albert Harrill argues that Paul alludes to the *toga virilis* ritual in his statement that, in being baptized, the Galatians have clothed themselves with Christ.⁴⁴⁹

4.1.2 Rites of Commissioning

In the Roman world, advancement to higher position such as senate offices and local magistracies normally involved special rites that played a part in the transition. Such advancements may be spoken of in the sense of commissioning for they involve the designation of a particular person for a role or task, and the bestowal of the power and authority necessary to complete that task. Suetonius, for example, records that in Luke's own day the accession of Nero was timed according to the omens so that at precisely the fortuitous moment he went forth and was hailed emperor on the steps of the Palace, was then carried in a litter to the praetorian camp where he addressed soldiers, and to the House where he was offered great honors (*Nero* 6.8). Many memories also remained of earlier rites of commissioning such as those of the Roman Numa and the "barbarian" Artaxerxes recorded by Plutarch. Numa the second king of Rome is said to have accepted the kingship only after ascending the Tarpeian Hill and waiting with the chief augur's

⁴⁴⁷ Dio Cassius 52.20; Juvenal, *Sat.* 8.166; Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 173–78.

⁴⁴⁸ Nicolaus of Damascus, *Vit. Caes.* 4.8–10; Suetonius, *Aug.* 8.1; idem, *Cal.* 10.1; idem, *Galb.* 4.3; idem, *Tib.* 9.1

⁴⁴⁹ Harrill, "Coming of Age and Putting on Christ," 252–77.

hand upon his veiled head until a positive omen came from the south in the flight of auspicious birds (*Num.* 7.3–8.3). Artaxerxes, upon becoming king, was also said to have been initiated as priest, a rite which involved entering the goddess' sanctuary and putting on the robe of Cyrus the Elder, eating a cake of figs and chewing on turpentine-wood, drinking a cup of sour milk, and other doings unknown to outsiders (*Art.* 3.1–2).

In the LXX, traditional rites of commissioning for both priest and king centered upon a rite of anointing. The word used for anointing, χρίω, translated from the Hebrew מָשַׁח has no previous ritual connotations in Greek. It is the same word used in Luke to describe Jesus' baptism experience as an anointing. The anointing of Aaron and his sons as priests is the first anointing portrayed in the LXX (*Exod* 28–29; 30:22–25, 30; *Lev* 8–9). After sacrifices are brought to the doorway of the tabernacle, Aaron is washed (λούω/γָחַל) with water (along with his sons) and dressed in specially prepared garments. He is then anointed on (ἐπὶ/עַל) his head with specially prepared holy oil. Afterwards Aaron's sons, too, put on special garments and the items presented earlier are sacrificed. Blood is placed on the horns and base of the altar, and some of it mixed with the anointing oil and sprinkled on the altar, the new priests and their garments. (Various parts of the flesh are burned or eaten by Aaron and sons.) The altar and the tabernacle with its contents are also then anointed and consecrated and Aaron and his sons remain at the doorway of the tabernacle for seven days and nights to complete the installation. Following more sacrifices, the glory of the Lord appears and fire comes down from heaven consuming the sacrifices.

Further along in the LXX other high priests are also portrayed as receiving such an anointing (*Lev* 4:3; 16:32; 21:10; *Num* 3:3; 35:25; *Judg* 21:5). Often this anointing ritual is spoken of in an overall sense as a consecration, or initiation, generally of the hands, using the related terms τελειώω or τελείωσις (*Exod* 29:9, 29, 31, 35; *Lev* 8:22, 33;

cf. 1 Kgs 13:33; 2 Chr 13:9).⁴⁵⁰ The LXX also attests to the importance of the ritual in the cultural memory nearer Luke's time in Sirach's statement regarding Aaron's anointing which Sirach described as "an everlasting covenant for him and for his descendants as long as the heavens endure, to minister to Him, at the same time also to serve as priest and to bless his people in his name" (Sir 45:15).

The LXX speaks much more regularly of an anointing ritual for the kings of Israel, apparently conveying the same basic message of God's choice and empowerment. This ritual, however, is not described in as much detail as was Aaron's. Israel's first king, Saul is said to be anointed at God's instruction by his servant Samuel and, in accordance with Samuel's promise, the Spirit of God then falls upon Him (ἤλατο ἐπ' αὐτὸν πνεῦμα θεοῦ). Days later, Saul is also anointed in the presence of the people of Israel (1 Sam 9:16; 10:1). Later David is likewise anointed by Samuel at God's command, an anointing followed once again by the coming of the spirit of the Lord (ἐφῆλατο πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπι Δαυιδ) which at that point leaves Saul. Much later David, too, is anointed by the people of Judah and the elders of Israel (1 Sam 16:12–13; 2 Sam 2:4; 5:3; cf. Sir 46:13). Subsequent kings also are said to be anointed, either by a prophet or a priest or by the people as a whole (2 Sam 19:10; 1 Kgs 1:34–45; 1 Chr 29:22; 2 Kgs 11:12 || 2 Chr 23:11; 2 Kgs 23:30 || 2 Chr 36:1 [LXX]). (There is no mention in these instances, however, of a subsequent arrival of the Spirit of the Lord.)

Kings who have been thus anointed at God's command were spoken of as (ὁ) χριστὸς κυρίου (or θεοῦ) or as χριστὸς αὐτοῦ (e.g., 1 Sam 12:3, 5; 16:6; 2 Sam 1:16; 23:1; 2 Chr 6:42; 22:7; Ps 18:50; Lam 4:20; Sir 46:19; cf. 1 Sam 2:10). Much closer to Luke's time, χριστός was used at times in an absolute construction to look forward to a future hoped-for anointed one, understood to be promised in Scripture. The first extant records

⁴⁵⁰ The term ἀγιαζῶ/שִׁׁקֵּ is also sometimes used of this installation (e.g., Exod 28:1, 21, 44; Lev 8:12) while the term πληρόω representing the Hebrew מִלֵּא, often of the hands, represents other initiations/consecrations (e.g., 2 Chr 29:31).

seems to be in Psalms of Solomon 17:21, 32 of a “king, the son of David” whom the Lord will raise up for them and who will be the Lord Messiah (χριστὸς κυρίου). The Similitudes of Enoch also mentions a messiah, who is a preexistent heavenly figure apparently patterned on the “son of man” figure in Dan 7, as do a number of Hebrew texts from Qumran and elsewhere.⁴⁵¹

Two other rarely-mentioned uses of the anointing ritual are of interest. In 1 Kgs 19:16, Elijah is told to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place, an act which Sir 48:8 points back to as having been completed. The Dead Sea Scrolls also testify to the occasional application of מָשַׁח to prophets.⁴⁵² Isaiah 61:1 and 11QMelch speaks similarly of the anointing of a servant-herald of God. Although as Hesse suggests, such anointings are not presented as a traditionally observed ritual, the fact that they are described suggests the adaptability allowed for the anointing rite.⁴⁵³ For prophets, as extra-structural figures appointed directly by God outside of the societal structure, a much more common signification of their consecration to a divine task is the ritualized literary description of the prophetic call. This call often included a divine confrontation, an introductory word, a commission, an objection from the one called, a divine reassurance, and a sign of God’s blessing.⁴⁵⁴

4.1.3 Voluntary Religious and Philosophical Associations

Among the most widely-spread and elaborated rites of passage in the Greco-Roman world are the vivid initiations by which a person received membership, or higher rank, in one of the various “mystery cults.” However, a number of other voluntary

⁴⁵¹ E.g., 1QS 9.2; cf. the reference to “Messiah the Prince” in Dan 9:25–26. John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

⁴⁵² CD 2.9; 1QM 11.7; John Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 102–35.

⁴⁵³ Grundmann et al., “χρίω,” *TDNT* 501.

⁴⁵⁴ Norman C. Habel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” *ZAW* 77 (1965): 297–305.

religious and philosophical groups of the time also required some type of initiation before allowing full participation in the group. Falling into this category is the initiation most familiar to Luke's audience and the one most central to the interests of this dissertation, the rite of baptism, which originated in Jewish practice, was refined and adapted by John, and became the required means of initiation into the community of Jesus' followers. This baptismal rite of passage will be explored in the course of the following chapters.

Though suggestions that the Qumran sect which flourished in Palestine during the three centuries before the writing of Luke practiced a kind of baptism are rather interpretive, they did indeed practice an initiation which, though not likely well-known by Luke's Greco-Roman audience, might be thought to have had some influence upon Luke's sources and on the understandings of their Palestinian audiences. The *Rule of the Community* (1QS) 6.13–15 describes an initiation process in which volunteers were initially tested by the "Instructor" with regard to their insight and deeds and then subjected to a two year process of gradual incorporation and repeated testing at the end of which, if successful, they gained full membership and participation in the Community and their belongings were fully entrusted to the hands of the "Many" (6.13–23).

Philosophical schools, although like mystery cults representing more or less closed groups with centralized beliefs, seem seldom to have practiced a formal initiation into their ranks. The philosophical school of Pythagoras, however, is said by the third-and fourth-century (C.E.) writer Iamblichus to have practiced a rigorous initiation process for candidates, subjecting them to a rigorous scrutinization, a three year testing, and a five year period of complete silence. Using the language of the mystery religions, Iamblichus states that only upon successful completion of the initiation would they be allowed to study with Pythagoras personally or participate in "ritual celebrations (ὄργιασμοὺς) and initiations (μυσήσεις) by so many mathematical sciences, and such great and mighty cleansings (ἀπορρύψεις) and purifications (καθαρμοὺς) of soul and traveling ahead by so many kinds of theorems (or *sights* or *spectacles*, θεωρημάτων)." Those who did not

succeed in becoming full-fledged members of the group were rejected as unworthy and counted as dead by members of the group (*De vita Pythagorica*, 17.71–74). Whether or not Iamblichus' description attests to an actual practice of the Pythagoreans as known by the audience of Luke, it gives evidence of a continuing memory and use of rite of passage experience in describing human behavior.

Greco-Roman mysteries, although widely varied in many aspects of their belief and practice, are thought to share in common an emphasis reaching beyond public allegiance to the gods to the inward life of the individual who hoped thereby to receive assistance with, and achieve a reality beyond, the banality and suffering of daily existence.⁴⁵⁵ Some of these cults, such as those of Eleusis and Dionysus-Bacchus, had been practiced in Greece for many centuries while others such as Isis (from Egypt) and Meter, or Magna Mater, (from Asia Minor) adapted gods and goddesses and cultic practices of the “Eastern” cultures.⁴⁵⁶ By the time of Luke these, along with many other cults, had spread clear across the Roman Empire. For example, knowledge of the Eleusinian cult, which is thought to have had a “seminal role” in the “institution and designation of mysteries,” is evidenced in iconography and abundant literature reaching out from its centralized local sanctuary near Athens to southern Russia, Italy, and Egypt.⁴⁵⁷ Isis and Meter (and other cults of mother goddesses) had spread from Egypt and Asia at least as far as Rome, and Dionysiac fellowships existed by this time not only in Greece, but also in Egypt, Asia Minor, Italy, and Rome (where in 186 B.C.E. they were banned for a time because of scandalous behavior).⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁵ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 287; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 12–29, 114; Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 4.

⁴⁵⁶ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 2–3.

⁴⁵⁷ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 8–9, 37–38.

⁴⁵⁸ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 5–6, 34. In Pompeii, for example, a building remains containing frescoes depicting Dionysiac ceremonies.

Like the baptism of John, initiation into a mystery cult was not, in Luke's time, prescribed by culture or by family but was a voluntary activity among the array of options within current polytheistic religion.⁴⁵⁹ People engaged in mystery practices alongside the more common aspects of local cults, in fact among many of the mystery cults it was possible to worship and participate in some of the cult's activities without undergoing an initiation.⁴⁶⁰ Even in Athens, where the cult of Eleusis originated as a civic cult, only a fraction of the citizens at the time of Luke were initiated into the cult.⁴⁶¹ Apuleius depicts "men and women of every rank and age" making up the crowd of initiates in the procession on Isis' holy day (*Metam.* 11.10).

Little is known for certain about the events that took place during the actual initiation rituals, for they involved the deepest of the secret mysteries revered by these cults.⁴⁶² The initiations tended to take place on chosen holy days, and were often preceded by public celebrations including processions and, in the case of Isis, even carnivals. Purification rites such as fasting, abstinence from sexual intercourse, and ceremonial washings also often preceded the initiation, along with prayers, sacrifices, and libations.⁴⁶³ The few symbolic objects and actions anciently attested as part of initiation rituals often leave the modern scholar guessing as to their purpose and meaning. The initiation of Eleusis, for example, is probably most clearly described in Clement of Alexandria's cryptic statement, "I fasted, I drank the *kykeon*, I took out of the chest, having done the act I put again into the basket, and from the basket again into the chest" (*Protr.* 2.21). And from the various paintings and artifacts witnessing to the initiation of

⁴⁵⁹ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 10.

⁴⁶⁰ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 10. In fact, the mystery cults with their optional initiations were seen as threatening by those who sought greater state or family control.

⁴⁶¹ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 286; idem, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 10–11.

⁴⁶² Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 7.

⁴⁶³ Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries*, 9–10.

Dionysius—the irrepressible god of wine and ecstasy—little can be interpreted beyond the presence of drinking and dancing and the use of a liknon, or basket, containing symbols such as fruit and a phallus.⁴⁶⁴ One of the highly diverse initiations of the Mother Goddess is known to involve a *taurobolium* in which the initiand crouched in a pit over which a bull (or in the case of a poorer person, a ram) was slaughtered, drenching the initiand in the bull's blood.⁴⁶⁵ The most complete literary description of a mystery initiation is that of Lucius in the *Metamorphoses* which will be examined in the next main section of this chapter.

An inkling of their impact on the actual participants, and their resulting use for literary purposes, may be observed in Plutarch's depiction of a mystery initiation (likely of Isis) as a way to describe the process of dying.⁴⁶⁶ Plutarch compared dying to mystery initiations which he suggests involve:

Wanderings astray . . . walkings in circles, some frightening paths in darkness that lead nowhere; then . . . panic and shivering and sweat, and amazement. And then some wonderful light . . . and meadows, . . . sounds and dances and solemn sacred words and holy views; and there the initiate . . . set free . . . walks about, crowned with a wreath, celebrating the festival together with the other sacred and pure people . . .⁴⁶⁷

And Dio Chrysostom uses such initiations and their capacity to transform people's thoughts and life course to suggest the even greater wonders of the cosmos, writing:

If one would bring a man, Greek or barbarian, for initiation into a mystic recess, overwhelming by its beauty and size, so that he would behold many mystic views and hear many sounds of the kind, with darkness and light appearing in sudden changes and other innumerable things happening, and even, as they do in the so-called enthronement ceremony [*thronismos*]⁴⁶⁷—they have the initiands sit down, and they dance around them—if all this were happening, would it be possible that

⁴⁶⁴ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 95–97; Joscelyn Godwin, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 132–43.

⁴⁶⁵ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 6.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. Plutarch, *Flam.* 10.322–23.

⁴⁶⁷ Plutarch *frg.* 168 Sandbach = Stobaeus 4.52.49 cited from Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 91–92. Burkert says in n.11 p. 162,

such a man should experience just nothing in his soul, that he should not come to surmise that there is some wiser insight and plan in all that is going on, even if he came from the utmost barbarity? (*Dei Cogn.* [*Or.* 12].33).

These few examples give a glimpse of the highly varied experience of rites of passage engaged in by the mystery religions and which seem to have been available in most of the major cities of the Roman Empire by the 1st and 2nd centuries. Since in these cities holy day processions and festivities may have been viewed by all, it seems likely, especially in view of the metaphorical uses of mystery initiation language described above that the associated initiations would also have been widely known.

Philo of Alexandria gives further evidence of the widespread knowledge of mystery initiations put to literary use in his portrayals of Moses as both recipient and director of mystery initiations, a *topos* found in a variety of works across the Philonic corpus. On one level, Moses is presented as “a mind more perfect and more thoroughly cleansed, which has undergone initiation into the great mysteries (τα μεγάλα μυστήρια μνηθείς)” (*Leg.* 3.100–01), in *De vita Mosis* 1.61–62 likening his experience with shepherding to being initiated (τελεσθῆναι) into the lesser [mysteries], schooling him in dealing with tame animals before taking on the *kingship* as a shepherd of people. Later, in *Mos.* 2.71, Moses is also depicted as being “initiated (ἐμυσταγωγείτο) and instructed in all the [mysteries] of his *priestly* duties.” On another level Philo also speaks of Moses being “a sacred guide (ἱεροθάντης)” who does not need to hang about the outer court of the Holy Place as a μύστης (*Post.* 173), but who initiates Israel into the mysteries (μυσταγωγῶν) with instruction and exhortation (*Virt.* 178; cf. *Sacr.* 62), who “initiating his brother and nephews, guided them in the mysteries (ἱεροθάντων αὐτόν τε καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφιδοῦς ὠργιάζεν)” of the priesthood (*Mos.* 2.143), and who (along with Jeremiah) initiated (μνηθείς) Philo himself into the greater mysteries (τα μεγάλα μυστήρια *Cher.* 49).

Philo’s interpretation of Moses in terms of rite of passage imagery is of significant importance for understanding Luke’s account of the events surrounding Jesus’

baptism, in demonstrating how a Hellenistic Jewish interpreter of the time used rite of passage allusions to interpret biblical themes, and also in his focus on Moses, a figure also alluded to in the Lukan account. A number of other narrative uses of rite of passage are also evident in the extant literature of Luke's time, which can also give clues regarding Luke's own use of such narratives. Two of these will be examined below, the initiations of Lucius which culminate his wild adventures in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, and Josephus' account of his own passage from childhood to public service described in the *Vita*, before turning to Luke's own narrative use of rite of passage accounts and motifs outside of Luke 3 and 4. In this investigation it will be considered: How does ritual theory help to illuminate the use of rite of passage within the text? and In what ways and for what purposes did narrative texts of Luke's day make use of rite of passage accounts or allusions?

4.2 Initiation in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

Your day has come, the day that you have been praying for with ceaseless desire, the day on which, at the divine command of the goddess of many names, you will be introduced by these very hands of mine into the holiest secrets of our cult. Metam. 11.22

With these words Mithras, the high priest of Isis, introduces one of the best-known rites of passage in Greco-Roman literature. This initiation, and the two which follow, complete the bawdy tale of Lucius, a wealthy young man of Patrae, who is mistakenly turned into an ass and suffers many unfortunate adventures before finally being returned to his human shape by the Egyptian goddess, Isis, to whom he gratefully devotes himself for service. Written in first-person style in Latin by Apuleius of Madauros, North Africa, in the mid to late 2nd century C.E., this narrative has long been a

magnet for scholars of classical history and religion, for it concludes with what Walter Burkert calls the most extensive mystery text available from pagan antiquity.⁴⁶⁸

Formal rites of passage marking the transition of Lucius from one state in life to another occur three times in the last book of this text, forming its climax and providing an important drawing card for audiences curious to know the well-kept secrets of the mysteries. Rite of passage-like elements also echo throughout the text, building up to this central point. Within the narrative world, these initiations effected for Lucius, not a change in character, but an elevation in status and also in role.

Apuleius and His *Metamorphoses*

A rhetorician and writer of poems, satires, histories, and speeches, Apuleius preferred to present himself primarily as a philosopher (with a Middle Platonic bent) although it has been suggested that his philosophical writings might be more accurately thought of as the work of a rhetorician or sophist who dabbled in philosophy rather than as a philosopher in the “ideal” sense of the word.⁴⁶⁹ The story of the adventures of a Lucius-turned-ass does not appear to have originated with Apuleius, for two similar works with the same basic storyline are known from antiquity. One of these, entitled *Lucius, or The Ass* was written in Greek, ostensibly by Lucian, in the 2nd century C.E. around the time of Apuleius own writing. This work, however, differs from Apuleius’

⁴⁶⁸ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 6; Apuleius was born around 125 C.E. and traveled through Rome, Greece and Egypt before settling in Carthage (Elizabeth Hazelton Haight, *Apuleius and His Influence* [London: George G. Harrap, 1927], 24–36).

⁴⁶⁹ Apuleius’ philosophical writings, which are comprised of at least *De deo Socratis* and possibly *De Platone et Eius Dogmate* and *De Mundo*, show his affinity for the middle Platonic thought which was then in vogue. A collection of what seem to be prologues to twenty-six of his orations, the *Florida*, displays the wide range of his interests, dealing with topics as wide-ranging as natural science, rhetoric and history (*Metam.*ix; Carl C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself* [Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992], 11; James Tatum, *Apuleius and The Golden Ass* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979], 130). Very likely Apuleius was influenced by earlier strictures against rhetoricians/sophists in Plato and in Roman law; although by Apuleius’ time this was generally considered a distinguished position (Haight, *Apuleius and His Influence*, 69). Despite his self-designation, however, Apuleius seems more adept at satisfying the tastes and abilities of a general audience, than at delving into the metaphysical depths of Platonic philosophy (Tatum, *Apuleius and the Golden Ass*, 18, 130–31).

version in that it lacks the meeting with Isis and the mystery initiations, as well as some of Lucius' adventures and all of the stories narrated by the characters. Instead of climaxing with the initiations it ends with Lucius accidentally stumbling, by mere happenstance, upon the rose-leaf antidote and at last being returned to human form. A third and earlier work also written in Greek and bearing the title *Metamorphoses* was spoken of by the Byzantine scholar, Photius, who asserted that that Lucian's *Lucius, or The Ass* was a summary of this *Metamorphoses* (now lost), and that Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* also was based on this same work. This fits with the picture of Apuleius as not so much an original thinker but rather skilled rhetorician with wide interests and likely also particular philosophical and theological commitments. It also places particular emphasis on book 11 and the initiations which form the most significant part of Apuleius' own original work.

4.2.1 The Ritual Field (Books 1.1–11.21)

As discussed in chapter 2, the ritual field is made up of the spatial and temporal factors which will come into play in a given rite, as well as the various relationships and motives of ritual participants as they enter into interaction at the beginning of the rite. In a narrative the ritual field is selectively set up by the author in order to provide the audience with the information, and to elicit memories and assumptions, which the author wishes them to bring to their experience of the narrative. In *Metamorphoses*, all of books 1.1–11.21 contribute to setting up, both in the literary structure and the narrative world, the particular ritual field out of which arise the initiations of 11:22–30. This ritual field can only be considered briefly here.

The *Metamorphoses* is immediately revealed to belong to the basic genre of fiction, opening with an introductory message from the narrator to his reader(s) declaring the narrator's aim "to caress your ears into approval with a pretty whisper," and to *amaze* them with his portrayal of "men's forms and fortunes transformed into other shapes and

then restored again in an interwoven knot” (*Metam.* 1.1).⁴⁷⁰ Of the narrative to come, he promises the reader(s) a work in “that Milesian style of yours,” likely referring to the “Milesian tales” which were a loosely connected sequence of stories infamous throughout the Hellenistic world for their scandalous comic and erotic content.⁴⁷¹ This reveals, as well, something of the interests of the projected audience, interests which in the final section of the book are assumed to include a glimpse into the secrets of the Isis cult, about which they are assumed to know nothing.

Apuleius’ tale goes on to fulfill the stylistic expectations he has set up, portraying (in the first-person) Lucius’ journeys, beginning with a simple though adventure-filled business trip through northern Greece. Lucius’ travels are soon extended in unforeseen and catastrophic ways when his disastrous curiosity for things magical and his overwhelming desire for sexual pleasure result in his accidental transformation into the form of a donkey. The unfortunate experiences of this Lucius-*cum*-donkey fill books 3–10 as Lucius, already marginalized from human society by his form and his loss of speech, is kidnapped by a band of robbers and separated from his friends, family, and possessions. This is followed by an interminable series of incredible events in which he experiences all manner of degradation and oppression at the hands of blind Fortune.

Also reported by Lucius are a number wondrous and horrible tales he overhears as an apparently witless donkey. Among these is the very long telling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche. This first full presentation of this story from antiquity is highly influenced by Apuleius’ favored middle-Platonic philosophies, and has been inserted at the exact midpoint of the work (*Metam.* 4.28–6.24).⁴⁷² Scholars have devoted intense, and

⁴⁷⁰ All quotations of *Metamorphoses* are taken from Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*.

⁴⁷¹ Tatum, *Apuleius and the Golden Ass*, 94–103.

⁴⁷² A. Scobie, “The Structure of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*,” in *Aspects of Apuleius’ Golden Ass* (ed. B. L. Hijmans, Jr., and R. Th. van der Paardt; Groningen: Dijkstra Niemeyer, 1978), 54. Tatum has well demonstrated the particular correspondences between the Psyche tale and Platonic philosophy (*Apuleius and the Golden Ass*, 53–61).

sometimes overzealous, scrutiny to the parallels between the stories of Lucius and Psyche, who is incited to look with curiosity upon her divine lover, Cupid, despite previous warnings and is therefore forced to endure many misfortunes and trials before she is ultimately saved by, and united with, the divine.⁴⁷³ Of particular interest here are the similarities both between the tasks that Psyche was to perform to regain divine favor and the tasks of an initiate, particularly the unmistakable parallel between Psyche's visit to Proserpine in the underworld and Lucius' approach to her threshold in her initiation, and between the descriptions of the resulting union with the divine which follows the 'initiation' experiences.⁴⁷⁴ These underscore the importance Apuleius placed on Lucius' initiation and on the elevation it entailed.

With the opening lines of book 11, the reader emerges into a world no longer ruled only by faulty and undesirable human beings, but open to a view of the divine. The narrator's attitude of detachment and cynicism alters with this scene, and as Lucius awakens to the glorious rising of a full moon—which he understands as “the august image of the goddess”—he purifies himself in the sea and prays to this as yet unknown divinity for deliverance (*Metam.* 11.1). In response Isis, (well-known in Apuleius' day as an Egyptian goddess and center of an important mystery cult), appears in a dream telling Lucius that, in exchange for his “assiduous obedience, worshipful service, and determined celibacy,” he would the next day find his antidote of roses in the hands of a priest who was part of the ritual celebration at the Isiac festival of navigation.

⁴⁷³ Both P. G. Walsh, “Apuleius and Plutarch: Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* Relation to Plutarch's *Deisicle*, *Moralia*, *De Genio Socratis*,” in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honour of A. H. Armstrong* (ed. H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus; London: Variorum, 1981), 25, 30; and Carl Schlam critique the excessive efforts of Merkelbach in this area (*The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 125).

⁴⁷⁴ J. Gwyn Griffiths, “Isis in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius,” in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (ed. B. L. Hijmans, Jr., and R. Th. van der Paardt; Groningen: Dijkstra Niemeyer, 1978), 149; Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 95–96.

All comes about as Isis promises. The priest offers Lucius the roses in obedience to a vision given him the previous evening, and when Lucius miraculously regains his own appearance, warns Lucius to forsake his pursuit of “slavish pleasures” and “ill-starred curiosity” and dedicate himself to the “savior goddess” who has, alone, emancipated him (*Metam.* 11.15). Lucius, overwhelmed with joy at his newly regained human form, enters into contemplation at the temple of Isis. Soon Isis repeatedly urges him in vision to be initiated, expressed by the Latin verb *initio*, used throughout this work to refer to admission by means of introductory rites. After some uncertainty Lucius entreats the priest again and again to initiate him. The priest underlines the grave necessity of awaiting the goddess’ direct orders by informing Lucius’ that “both the gates of death and the guardianship of life [are] in the goddess’s hands, and the act of initiation [is] performed in the manner of voluntary death and salvation.” Even those, he added, “who had finished their life’s span and were already standing on the very threshold (*limene*) of light’s end,” if worthy of being entrusted with the Isiac mysteries, were frequently reborn into the course of new life (*Metam.* 11.21). Despite his council of patience, however, he does advise Lucius to begin his preparations by abstaining “from unholy and unlawful foods.”

As Lucius approaches the rite of passage, he has already been depicted by Apuleius (apparently following to some degree a previous text) as separating himself from his home, friends, and family. He has seen his separation involuntarily extended to include his possessions and even his human form. He has also been shamed as the object of derision in a mock murder trial and as a much-abused ass has lost the signs of his former status. Now, as the Apuleian text turns the focus to Lucius’ initiation, the marginality of outsiderhood is shown to be deepening into a marginality of passage as Lucius enters a new level of separation, removing himself exclusively to the worship of Isis. As a devotee in Isis’ temple he awaits his initiation in an already liminal state, in a state of reversal with no rank or identity, no longer an ass but no longer the confident

worldly business man either. The beginning of this movement is marked by another ritual, the Isiac festival of navigation, and by a possible allusion to puberty rites in the priest's interpretation of his rescue by Isis as a transformation from the slippery paths of "headstrong youth" under the grip of blind Fortune (11.19). In addition, along with the grotesqueness of the donkey form and of the sights he has endured, a supernatural being has now appeared with the potential to stimulate Lucius, and the audiences who observe, to consider and question previous assumptions related to the values and expectations of their culture.

Within the narrative world, the ritual field has been set by Apuleius, in the lead-up to Lucius' initiation, upon the backdrop of Cenchreae near Corinth, in a betwixt-and-between spot on the narrow isthmus "washed by the Aegean Sea and the Saronic Gulf" (*Metam.* 10.35), and also more narrowly upon the sacred precincts of the temple of Isis peopled anonymously by her devoted followers. The characters of central importance are the supreme divine goddess Isis herself, her servant the chief priest who has assiduously sought and obeyed her will, and Lucius himself who has listened and obeyed both the priest and the goddess, with the one overriding and increasing "desire to receive the rites" which has caused him to approach "the high priest time and time again with urgent entreaties . . ." (11.21).

4.2.2 Lucius' Initiation into the Cult of Isis

A Formal Separation

On the goddess-appointed day, each step is accomplished in accordance with the rules and traditions of the cult. After the daily morning ceremony of ritual and sacrifice, the priest reads from ancient and mysterious books the preparations which must be made for his initiation (*teletae*, a transliteration from the Greek). Lucius purchases the supplies in accordance with the specific directives of Isis and proceeds to the baths, accompanied by an escort of devotees and by the priest who, after the customary bath, also cleanses

him 'with purificatory sprinkling.' Upon their return to the temple the priest secretly gives Lucius instructions 'too holy for utterance', then publicly orders him to restrain his 'pleasure in food' for ten days, avoiding both animal food and wine. This purification and fasting can be seen as a final necessary stage of separation in preparation for the holy mysteries to come.

The Deepest Point of Limen

At the end of these ten days, crowds gather at sunset bringing gifts. After the uninitiated crowds take their leave, Lucius is wrapped in a never-used linen robe and led to the inner part of the sanctuary where the most secret rites are to take place. Here the narrator becomes deliberately vague, warning of the guilt incurred both by "unholy talkativeness" and by "unbridled curiosity." The events at this central portion of the rite are only hinted at, with these words,

I came to the boundary of death and, having trodden the threshold (*limene*) of Proserpina, I traveled through all the elements and returned. In the middle of the night I saw the sun flashing with bright light. I came face to face with the gods below and the gods above and paid reverence to them from close at hand (*Metam.* 11.23).

In this liminal part of the account, exegesis and even a full account, of symbols is purposely avoided. Much of the effect of this description on both participants and audience is in its secrecy, in what is not said, recalling the tacit power of ritual silence. In addition movement, with its unsettled nature, is emphasized. Lucius *comes* and *treads* on the *limen*-threshold at the boundary of death, *travels* through the elements and *returns*, apparently, to his starting point. This cosmic plane with its face-to-face encounters with supernatural beings and the paradox of the sun flashing against the darkness of midnight, recall the suspension of the normal rules of living and the experience of paradox noted by Victor Turner and identified as a stretching and shifting of the building blocks of reality preparing the initiand to let go of his former reality in order to assume his new role or

state in life.⁴⁷⁵ On the level of the audience, its riddle-like nature draws the reader back again and again to puzzle upon the clues it contains to the mysteries.

Reincorporation

At dawn on the following day after these unspeakable experiences, Lucius comes forth in a publicly performative re-entrance “decorated in the likeness of the Sun,” wearing twelve elaborately embroidered sacred robes signaling his consecration. He stands on a wooden platform before Isis’ statue where all assembled can view the marvelous creatures stitched on his Olympian stole, the flaming torch in his right hand and the sun-like crown of jutting leaves on his head. Afterwards, his further *reaggregation* proceeds with the celebration of his ‘birth into the mysteries’ with a banquet and celebration and, three days later, a final sacred breakfast which brings an official conclusion to the ritual (*teletae*).

Lucius’ new status is thus brought forward into public view by means of exalted garments and honoring banquets which demonstrate that he has moved across the boundaries into the in-group who share in the secrets of Isis. Again here, just as in the priest’s statement to Lucius when he was pressing anxiously for initiation (11.21), this passage to new status is spoken of in terms of a new birth.

Apuleius’ Initiation as a Rite of Passage

In the ritual description of Lucius’ initiation, Apuleius displays vivid visual symbols set within complex movements involving a there-and-back-again journey to other worlds and accomplishing a passage from his former place as hopeful worshiper to a new place in life as a member of the blessed circle of the initiates of Isis (11.24–26). Even before the immediate circumstances of the initiations themselves, images of such transitions are introduced from the very first lines of the narrative where the narrator

⁴⁷⁵ Walter Burkert suggests that this is a ‘purification’ by the ‘elements’ of water, air, and fire, as Servius points out’ (*Ancient Mystery Cults*, 98).

states, “I would like to tie together different sorts of tales for you . . . so that you will be amazed at men’s forms and fortunes transformed into other shapes and then restored again in an interwoven knot” (1.1). Indeed, the overarching plot of *Metamorphoses* itself reinforces and expands on this theme of transition and transformation, depicting the obvious physical transformation from human to donkey form and back again, but also an inner transformation in which Lucius moves beyond his past as a headstrong youth to become an initiate and priest of Isis and Osiris.

This change of state in conjunction with a there-and-back-again experience is foreshadowed by the earlier tale of Psyche whose reinstatement after her expulsion and ordeals involved advancement to divine status, and also by the Isiac festival blessing vessels and sailors embarking on their own dangerous voyages in the hopes of returning all the richer (a festival occurring in conjunction with Lucius’ transformation from ass back to human at the beginning of book 11). Stavros Frangoulidis notes that not only Lucius, but also most of the major characters portrayed in the book constantly change roles, suggesting that “the narrative of the *Metamorphoses* revolves around a series of transformations of a simple basic unit.” He goes on to suggest that “In the last book, however, the goddess Isis allows Lucius to leave the world of appearances and enter a world that is essentially uniform, thus providing a stark contrast with what has preceded.”⁴⁷⁶ In doing so his rite of passage functions not in an antistructural way but moves him into an extra-structural position which is presented as preferable.

Further, in Lucius’ case the transformation effected by the initiation is not portrayed primarily as an internal change in character, but a social one of status and group membership in which he is transitioned from eager supplicant to blessed initiate. It

⁴⁷⁶ Stavros Frangoulidis, *Roles and Performances in Apuleius’ Metamorphoses* (Drama: Beiträge zum antiken Drama und seiner Rezeption; Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2001), 1–2.

is not that he has not changed, as some claim.⁴⁷⁷ Though there is little moralizing in the tale and Lucius' never expresses "repentance," Lucius' formerly indulged *curiositas* (*Metam.* 1.2, 12; 2.1, 4, 9; 3.19; 9.12–13) is in book 11 condemned both by the priest of Isis who hopes that unbelievers will see how Isis has blessed him and "recognize their errant ways" (11.15). His *curiositas* is also condemned by Lucius himself (11.23), and the celebration of sexual gratification (which only brought danger and ruin) ends with Lucius' dedication to the chaste religion of Isis.⁴⁷⁸

But these changes can already be seen to be taking place after the night on the beach in Cenchreae when Isis appears to him and places her claim upon his life. At the time of the initiation(s) there is no instantaneous or dramatic change in Lucius' character portrayed. In this sense, it might be suggested that the initiation itself was a completion and ratification of what had already begun to happen to Lucius physically and spiritually under the blessing of Isis. The transition brought about by the initiations might also be described to a certain degree as accomplishing those social and cognitive changes necessary to complete the physical and behavioral transformations which were already strongly in evidence since the initial meeting with Isis and the return to human form which she accomplished for him.⁴⁷⁹

The dominant symbolism of this initiation seems to be that of voluntary death, threshold experience (*limen*) and salvation/rebirth (11.21, 23). Yet there is little evidence that the symbolic death involves repentance for no longer acceptable ways of life and a fresh rebirth to a lifestyle of piety as one might expect, and as with John's differently-

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. James Gollnick, *The Religious Dreamworld of Apuleius' Metamorphoses: Recovering a Forgotten Hermeneutic* (Editions SR 25; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 138; Frangoulidis, *Roles and Performances*, 166–67.

⁴⁷⁸ The symbolism of the ass itself was "a common folk symbol of lust, curiosity and grossness," appropriate to the behavior of the youthful Lucius (Gollnick, *The Religious Dreamworld*, 133); Ovid, *Metam.* 1.238–40; Plato, *Phaedo* 81D–82A; Tatum, *Apuleius and the Golden Ass*, 28–33; Walsh, "Apuleius and Plutarch," 23–24.

⁴⁷⁹ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 66.

symbolized baptismal rite of passage. Rather, through crossing the boundary of death into a cosmic plane and experiencing the sacred mysteries by the favor of Isis, participants are represented as passing through death and returning with the renewal of life itself. Among the primary instrumental symbols, the sun and the other elements, and the closely interlocked in binary opposition with the symbols of light and darkness, stand prominent. The rite as a whole is highly traditional and rule-bound, and has a definite performative aspect of playing to an audience, both in the text's carefully released descriptions of ritual secrets, and in the successive inclusion and exclusion of uninitiated observers from the rite within the narrative world. Though the central liminal experience is spoken of as a solitary experience, *communitas* among initiates may be seen in the larger rite in shared ritual activities and in the giving of gifts. After the rite, as well as the two that followed, Lucius remains in a liminal situation with respect to the larger culture, yet is apparently though not emphatically surrounded by the *communitas* of an in-group of other similarly marginal initiates.

Further Initiations

The mentions of Lucius' second and third initiations are brief. Lucius recounts that, after a brief visit to his ancestral home, Isis sends him to the holy city of Rome where, after only a year, she urges him again toward initiation. His puzzlement overcome by a vision of an initiate carrying "thyrsi and ivy and certain objects that must not be named," and by the sudden realization that he has not yet been initiated into the mysteries of the supreme god Osiris, Lucius sells his clothes to pay the expenses and again undergoes the ten-day avoidance of meat. Of the actual initiation, he states only, "Then I was illumined by the nocturnal mysteries of the foremost god, and in full confidence practised the holy service of this kindred religion" (11.28).

The description of the third initiation is even more terse. After a dream confirms the value of this unheard-of third rite, Lucius avoids meat even beyond the traditional ten

days and procures the necessary equipment (with ease this time thanks to the blessings of heaven). Of the initiation itself there is no mention. The narrative concludes with Osiris' subsequent appearance to Lucius in a dream, enlisting him in the college of the *pastophori*, the highest ranks of his priests, as well as in the board of directors, promising him his continued blessings. The last glimpse of Lucius shows him going proudly about with shaved head, joyfully carrying out the duties of that ancient priesthood.

While certain elements of separation and reincorporation are again in evidence, the most interesting aspect of these passages is the transformations apparently associated with them: both to an increasingly prosperous economic and social status in the larger society, and to leading priest and director of the cult. It should be noted that the supernatural encounter and role changes associated with the third initiation happens following the initiation rather than within a central, liminal stage as is generally expected. The unusual addition of a second and even third initiation have caused some to wonder whether Apuleius is being satirical, ignorant, or simply carried away with an abundance of enthusiasm.⁴⁸⁰

4.2.3 The Significance of Lucius' Initiation in *Metamorphoses*

As this is a fictional text written by one not known to have been initiated into the mystery cult of Isis, it is not certain how accurately the actual historical process of Isiac initiation is represented.⁴⁸¹ The text does, however, reveal ways in which one ancient author portrayed such an event within a narrative world and how they utilized the depicted rite toward the purposes of the narrative. Burkert notes that ancient romances “not infrequently introduce elaborate scenes of religious ritual, presenting some of the

⁴⁸⁰ John J. Winkler suggests that the addition of the second and third initiation is odd—possibly subversive of the first (*Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985]). Beard, North, and Price on the other hand, insists they are simply evidence of Apuleius's over enthusiasm. Some of the mystery cults did have a graduated series of initiations (*Religions of Rome*, 287–88).

⁴⁸¹ Apuleius, *Apol.* 55; Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 12.

most vivid depictions of ancient religion, but it is difficult to decide whether these are just for literary effect or indicate some deeper involvement . . .”⁴⁸² To understand what Apuleius had in mind concerning the rites of passage in book 11, it would be helpful to have a clear idea of what he was doing in the work as a whole. Unfortunately, this long series of sardonic and often graphic tales, unexpectedly concluding with the hushed and reverent tones of faithful devotion to Isis, the *Metamorphoses* has long confounded critics who seek to understand its meaning and purpose.

Apuleius opens the work by stating that he will caress our ears with a “merrily whispered narrative” yet his tales consist mainly of gloom and ugliness ending with an apparently solemn account of religious experience. The narrator and main character, Lucius, goes from being a lustful seeker after magic to being a chaste *mustes* in the temple of Isis who has “long been destined for her rites” (11.19). Yet he shows no apparent regrets for his previous behavior, and the bystanders at his return to human form even make a speech (possibly ironically) proclaiming him to be an innocent and faithful man (11.16). Was Apuleius writing merely an entertaining tale or a more apologetic work of religious devotion?

A number of scholars have argued that Apuleius is concerned only with what is claimed by the narrator, that is, the telling of an entertaining (and titillating) tale, thoughtful perhaps, but held together by no overarching and purposeful rendering of abstract truths.⁴⁸³ On the other extreme, others have argued that the work is a carefully crafted and pious tale in which Lucius learns his lesson and turns from his wicked ways to dedicate his life to religious devotion, with some going so far as to treat the work as an ancient *Pilgrim’s Progress*.⁴⁸⁴ A growing consensus of interpreters understands both

⁴⁸² Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 66.

⁴⁸³ Haight, *Apuleius and His Influence*; cf. Gollnick, *The Religious Dreamworld*, 19; Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 1, 6–9.

⁴⁸⁴ See Gollnick for a fuller discussion of these differing views (*The Religious Dreamworld*, 128–29).

sides to carry some validity. The work is clearly entertaining (if in a dark and sardonic sort of way), nevertheless, it also evidences a careful structure and a serious concern with the portrayal of the Isiac mysteries.⁴⁸⁵ Considering the question from the standpoint of the initiations alone—which are the special focus of this study—Apuleius’ thoughtfully crafted addition of both the initiation and the more venerable myth of Psyche’s readmission to divine circles which foreshadows, solemnifies, and helps to interpret it, demonstrates Apuleius’ special interest in the desirability of divine piety and blessing. Whether Apuleius was interested more specifically in promoting the mystery cult of Isis must be left a matter of debate.⁴⁸⁶

With the understanding that *Metamorphoses* is meant both as an entertaining tale and a call to appreciate the presence of the gods, the scenes of initiation appear to serve several purposes in this narrative of Apuleius. In a narrative sense, they provide a climactic conclusion to the tale, giving just enough tantalizing hints to carry forward the interest of his readers while at the same time giving some respect to the strong cultural mores against revealing such secrets. The main initiation account would have appealed to uninitiated audiences who were denied access to cultic rites and secrets, while initiates would have been gratified by the strong sense of piety that is exuded in book 11. Structurally, the story of Lucius’ initiation is just one part of a remarkable transformation in book 11 of both the behavior of the protagonist and of the character of the writing,

⁴⁸⁵ Tatum, *Apuleius and the Golden Ass*, 158, 160. Tatum’s careful analysis of the literary structure of the work supports this view, demonstrating, for example, how Apuleius carefully crafted Lucius’ speech to Isis to contain exactly the same number of words (166) as Psyche’s two prayers to Ceres and Juno. The broad interests and abilities of Apuleius, as evidenced in his other writings, suggest that he would have no trouble with bending genres and mixing topics as it suited his interests. Tatum points out that such an approach is advised by Apuleius’ contemporary, Aulus Gellius, who argued that a salutary tale should not be told “in the austere and dictatorial manner of philosophers,” but rather as an entertaining and witty fable that commends wholesome ideas to its listeners by enticing them effortlessly to hear the truth (*Noct. att.* 2.29).

⁴⁸⁶ Walsh notes that “Apuleius exhibits concern in all his works with the separation of man from the divine and with the search to bridge this chasm” (“Apuleius and Plutarch,” 21); however, it should be noted that Photis in *Metam.* 3.15 suggests Lucius had apparently claimed to have been already initiated into many cults; cf. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 11, 19, 28.

which finds its climax in these initiations. At the beach in Cenchreae, a seemingly unending series of murders, deceptions, and sexual adventures ends in the light of the goddess on the beach of Cenchreae. The narration of the events of book 11 that follow, instead of stumbling from one unrelated scene to another, now flow effortlessly out of Lucius' newfound devotion to Isis—a devotion which Isis herself insists must culminate in the ritual of initiation.

On another level the series of three initiations do demonstrate for audiences great benefits in Lucius' devotion to Isis. After already being saved from his ass-like form, he is transitioned through the initiations from business man-*cum*-ass to privileged initiate, and then leading priest, of Isis. His status rises within his newly-joined cultural group from wannabe to initiate to the inner circle of cult leaders, with a corresponding series of increased riches and success in the larger world (11.28, 30). The initiation also served to underscore the seriousness and solemnity of a decision to devote oneself to Isis. Although the *communitas* and liminality evidenced are not portrayed in an anti-structural relation to the hierarchies of empire or local government, or of the cult by which it was practiced, they may have been intended, in their view of the world of the divine in stark contrast to the random crudity and ugliness of books 1–10, to provoke susceptible readers to question the structure of values and lifestyle in the “popular” culture in which they were immersed. Plutarch portrayed the rites of Isis as having such a positive effect on piety, stating that she infused into her “most holy rites portrayals and suggestions and representations of her [previous difficult] experiences, and sanctified them, both as a lesson in godliness and an encouragement for men and women who find themselves in the clutch of like calamities” (*Is. Os.* 27 D, E). Interestingly, to the more “worldly” orientation of readers, on the other hand, the rest of Lucius' life with its constant ministry of service (*Metam.* 11.15, 21) may have looked decidedly uninteresting, thus acting subversively, whether purposefully or not, to other trends in the text.

Whether Apuleius intended that his audience seriously consider initiation into the cult of Isis or possibly a more general message of piety toward the divine, the initiations, in the fascinations of both their mysterious nature and their liminal riddlings as well as in their promise of being part of an in-group with the divine, draw readers both to the story and to a reevaluation of their own relation to the divine. For it completes Lucius' transformation from immature youth, to ass, and back again by Isis' mercy, by signifying a change in status from simple worshiper to initiate whose life is devoted to and protected by Isis. (In this status, Lucius, enters in certain ways into a liminal position with respect to the surrounding culture, as he had been, in various ways throughout the account, but now under the care of the divine and in *communitas* with an ingroup of other initiates.) The initiations which follow continue to enhance his status, marking a role change to leading priest and director of the Isiac cult.

4.3 Josephus' Passage to Adulthood in the *Vita*

Josephus' *Vita* is worlds away from the *Metamorphoses* in setting, style, and intent. Whereas Lucius undergoes his adventures mainly in the rowdy underclass world of an apparently timeless northern and central Greece, Josephus operates in the aristocratic and priestly circles of a Jerusalem and Galilee under the cataclysm of world-changing and clearly datable historical events. In contrast to Apuleius' loose and florid assemblage of colorful tales climaxing in a life-changing encounter with a divine goddess, Josephus relates his own experiences, in the earliest surviving complete autobiography of the ancient world. In it a hasty and often confusing tangle of political events is recounted in a manner designed to enhance and defend his reputation as a model Jew, a loyal Roman citizen, and an accurate historian.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁷ Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (vol. 8 of Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 101; Steve N. Mason, *Life of Josephus: Translation and Commentary* (vol. 9 of Flavius Josephus; Leiden: Brill, 2001), xlvi–l; also Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship (1937–1980)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), 381.

Like the *Metamorphoses*, however, the *Vita* is written in narrative form and focuses on a single period in the life of an individual living in the eastern portion of the Roman Empire close to the time of the writing of the Gospel of Luke. Most importantly for this discussion, both works tell of important transitional experiences in the lives of the protagonists and describe the ways in which these passages came to pass. In *Metamorphoses*, the transition—Lucius’ initiation to Isis—is well-known to his audience as a formal and rule-governed ritual by which a person becomes an official member of the cult of Isis and carrier of its secrets. This induction forms the climax of the entire book. Josephus’ transition from schoolboy to adult and public citizen in *Vita* 10–12, on the other hand, is dictated by no known socially-prescribed pattern for such a passage within his native society. Rather, in the space of these few brief sentences, Josephus represents his passage across the threshold of puberty with an assemblage of literary tropes, social customs, and rite of passage allusions shaped to appeal to the knowledge and experience of his audience. By connecting with his readers’ experiences of such a passage in this act of literary ritualizing, Josephus builds a bridge from his childhood to his adult exploits, and provides one more powerful assurance that he was indeed a model Jew in every way.

Josephus and His Vita

To explore this narrative of transition from παιδεία (training) to πολιτεία (citizenship), it is first necessary to understand a little of the work in which it is recorded. Though it is generally spoken of as Josephus’ *Vita*, or *Life*, and does open with his ancestry and childhood, the greater part of the work is taken up with his conduct in the Jewish war of rebellion against Rome in 66–70 C.E. The *Vita* was not originally written as a separate work, but as an inclusion at the end of his twenty-volume *Antiquities* which describe the history and constitution of the Jews. As late as the time of Eusebius in the 4th century, the *Vita* continued to be spoken of not under a separate name but as the final part

of the complete work of the *Antiquities*.⁴⁸⁸ Although, there is controversy about the exact date, the *Vita* is now generally thought to have been completed near the end of Josephus' career in the mid-90s C.E., twenty years later than his seven-volume work on the *Jewish War*, whose material it often duplicates (though with notable adjustments in detail), and also after the completion of the *Antiquities*.⁴⁸⁹

Like the *Antiquities*, the work we now call the *Vita* was likely written in Rome and directed to a patron by the name of Epaphroditus and to other Greco-Romans who, Josephus says, were interested in Jewish history who urged its writing (*Ant.* 1.8). This is evident, for example, in Josephus' explanations of various Jewish terms and concepts that might be unfamiliar to the audience. At the very beginning of the *Vita* he explains the Jewish priesthood (1–2). He further recasts his own career in Greek terms, for instance by equating the Jewish αἱρέσεις with the main Greek philosophical schools, and particularly by comparing the Pharisees to the Stoic school of philosophy (12).⁴⁹⁰

From a twenty-first-century perspective it is possible to classify the *Vita* as an autobiography, in keeping with Josephus' own description of it as containing τὰ πεπραγμένα μοι διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου (*Vita* 430). It must be kept in mind, however, that in Josephus' day such a generic category did not exist.⁴⁹¹ This is not to say, however, that accounts similar to that of Josephus were not being written. “Autobiographical” accounts had begun to appear, particularly in the last years of the Roman Republic, both as separate works by men such as Nicolaus of Damascus and Lucian, and as more subtle

⁴⁸⁸ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.10.8–11. Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2002), 13.

⁴⁸⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 17.28; 18.128, 145–54; 20.143–46, 189–96, 211–18. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, 170–80; Mason, *Life of Josephus*, xv–xix.

⁴⁹⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* 13.171–298; 18.11–24; *J. W.* 119–166.

⁴⁹¹ *Autobiography* is not a Greek term, but first appears, in German and English, near the end of the eighteenth century Georg Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 5.

insertions such as those of Cicero, Sallust and Ovid who slipped them into their writings on other topics.⁴⁹²

Shaye Cohen identifies in Josephus' *Vita* the typical Greek *bios* which, he found, commonly dealt with the subject's pedigree, education, and activities, as well as his character and virtues. In the case of the *Vita* the focus falls on his deeds and accomplishments, with little direct explication of the character and virtues. Josephus himself points this out in *Vita* 430, declaring, "These are the actions of my life (τοῦ βίου) let others judge my character from them however they wish." Steve Mason emphasizes the importance of recognizing that such ancient *bioi* differ from modern biographies in that they assumed the subject's character to continue in essentially the same stable course across the life-span, while modern biography assumes change and development and seeks to discover those points of real psychological or spiritual change.⁴⁹³

A different approach to the *Vita*'s genre, derived directly from Greco-Roman *progymnasmata* (rhetorical handbooks), is argued by Jerry Neyrey who identifies the work as an encomium, or speech of praise. This genre was widespread across Greek and Roman literature, in keeping with a culture which held honor as the highest good. Within Josephus' *Vita*, Neyrey points out each of the four main elements of the encomium prescribed by the *progymnasmata*: (1) Origin and Birth; (2) Nurture and Training; (3) Accomplishments and Deeds (including deeds of the body, the soul, and of fortune, not necessarily in chronological order); and (4) a Comparison with his peers.⁴⁹⁴ As Cohen notes, it can be seen that "The distinction between a biography and an encomium was

⁴⁹² Nicholas of Damascus (in Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* [15 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993], 2.90 frg. 131–39); Lucian, *Somn.* Tacitus, *Agr.* 1.2–3; Cicero, *Brut.* 88.301–97.333; Sallust, *Bell. Cat.* 3–4; Ovid, *Tristia* 1.10, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* inscription. These accounts are listed and discussed by Mason, *Life of Josephus*, xiii, xliii; and Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, 177–338.

⁴⁹³ Mason, *Life of Josephus*, xli.

⁴⁹⁴ Jerome H. Neyrey, "Josephus' *Vita* and the Encomium: A Native Model of Personality," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 25, no. 2 (1994): 177–206.

never very clear.”⁴⁹⁵ However, one value in recognizing the encomiastic qualities of Josephus’ *Vita* is that it can help to make modern readers aware of both the stages assumed and the laudatory tone expected, or allowed for, by ancient readers of Josephus’ work.⁴⁹⁶

4.3.1 The Ritual Field (1–9)

Verses 1–9 of Josephus’ *Vita* create a brief backdrop demonstrating for the audience the kind of person they can expect Josephus to be. At the same time this opening section also sketches out what is to be understood about the ritual field within which the events of Josephus’ ritualized transition to adulthood will be played out. One goal of the narrator (the older Josephus) immediately demonstrated on behalf of the main character in the ritual field (the younger Josephus), is that of honor, as shown in each of the section’s two main topics: his illustrious lineage, which receives the majority of the space, and his superiority in learning.

As was essential in any *bios* of the times, Josephus gives careful attention to his ancestry, just as Luke does for Jesus in the context of Jesus’ own transition to public life. In *Vita* 1–7, Josephus points to the nobility and splendor of his family in his descent from both the most preeminent priestly line and also from the royal house of the Hasmoneans. In keeping with this ascribed honor of Josephus’ august ancestry, the lineage concludes by noting his own father’s prominence in Jerusalem, where he was held in particularly high esteem on account of his righteousness.

Building upon the unassailable foundation of his noble ancestry, the single aspect of his childhood chosen for mention, his brilliance in mental endeavors, demonstrates

⁴⁹⁵ Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, 101–04.

⁴⁹⁶ A point made by the unabashed Cicero about the drawbacks of writing about oneself, “if there is something to be praised, authors are obliged to write about themselves with a certain reserve; if something is deserving of censure, they must pass over it. Besides which, it is less convincing, less impressive. . . .” (*Fam.* 4.12.8). This may suggest why Josephus did not go so far as to follow the pattern of the *bioi* in creating a summary of his own character and virtues.

Josephus' own personally achieved worthiness for honor. It also brings into play another high value apparent in the actions of the young Josephus and those around him. For although Josephus leaves the actual content of his education largely to the imagination of the reader, he emphasizes his applauded love of letters and his marked understanding of Jewish law. Though a significant part of Josephus' education likely involved a traditional Jewish education in law and Scripture, as suggested by the applause he won in this area, his brevity allows his Greco-Roman readers to fill in the gaps with their own expectations of what the ideal aristocratic education should be. For to those of a Greek mindset, Josephus' mention of his love of letters would have been particularly impressive, while his ability with the law would have been worthy of note to the Romans.⁴⁹⁷

Vita 9 goes on to describe how at the age of fourteen his achievements in learning were so impressive both in sheer knowledge and in depth of insight (σύνεσις) that, despite his youth, even the priests and elders of Jerusalem came to consult with him on matters of law. This display of intellectual achievement was a common theme in *bioi* of the day, appearing in contemporary lives as diverse as those of Abraham, Moses, Alexander the Great, Augustus, the Lukan Jesus, and Apollonius of Tyana as well as in the autobiographical accounts of Ovid and Nicolaus of Damascus.⁴⁹⁸ In fact, the term προκόπτω which Josephus uses to describe his own great advancement in learning, is the same used by Luke to summarize Jesus' advancement "in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:52) following his own youthful display of insight (σύνεσις) before the teachers in Jerusalem. Together these stories of Josephus' origins and training serve to establish

⁴⁹⁷ Mason, *Life of Josephus*, 12–14; Rajak, *Josephus*.

⁴⁹⁸ *Jub.* 11.23–24; Philo, *Mos.* 1.20–24; Plutarch, *Alex.* 5.1–6; Luke 2:41–52; Suetonius, *Aug.* 8; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 1.7; Ovid *Tristia* 4.10.57; Nicolaus, *F Gr. Hist* 90 F 132.1. Scholars dispute whether the reports of the early precocity of Jesus and Moses in first-and second-century literature find their motivation in a Greco-Roman or a Jewish milieu for the writing, a debate with direct bearing on Josephus' own report. (Cf. Rajak, *Josephus*, 27–28.)

Josephus as a young man of note, indisputably worthy of reckoning on two of the major value scales of his day: those of ancestry and intellectual achievement.⁴⁹⁹

The dynamic ritual field in which Josephus is about to begin his transition to adulthood is, then, laid out by the narrative on the spatial plane of Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish world. Although the distinct historical character of the period comes into play immediately after Josephus' passage to adulthood, the *Vita* at this point gives no notice to the temporal aspects of the ritual field, creating instead a timeless aura around the playing out of the ritual action. On this spatial and temporal plane, it is the young Josephus who receives the preeminent position, for it is he alone who is the named character active in the field.

Of the wilderness, the space on which the second movement of his transition will take place, Josephus has, naturally enough, made no mention as yet. For the wilderness in its basic unsocialized nature is the inverse of the complex social structures upon which Josephus seeks to advantageously place himself. Yet echoing in the memory of the audience are the wilderness of the *Antiquities* and of Moses and Israel's wandering.

All characters other than the young Josephus take supporting roles, with kingly and priestly ancestors and even his own parents and brother falling into the background, along with the teachers hinted at in the terms *συμπαιδευόμενος* and *παιδείας*, and the chief priests and first men of the city who came to hear his insight into the law. They wait in the wings, providing a silent backdrop of approval as Josephus enters upon the events of his transition.

From the vantage point of the audience it is impossible to distinguish completely the degree to which either the young Josephus or these other characters in the narrative shared in the motivation toward high honor evident in the work of the narrator, although

⁴⁹⁹ John R. Bartlett, *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Josephus, Aristeeas, The Sibylline Oracles, Eupolemus* (ed. P. R. Ackroyd et al.; Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World 200 BC to AD 200; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 72; cf. Paul's report of his youth in Gal 1:14 using the term *προκόπτω*.

shared cultural understandings would have ranked it highly in general. More clearly demonstrated within the constructed ritual field itself is the value of learning, both for the young Josephus with his love of learning (φιλογράμματος) and for the other characters who aided and honored him in that learning. In Josephus' depiction of them elsewhere in terms of philosophical schools, the three αἱρέσεις could be assumed to share in this valuation. His final teacher Bannus, on the other hand, arises in the midst of the events as a mystery like the wilderness he inhabited.

4.3.2 The Transition from Paideia to Politeia as a Rite of Passage

In *Vita* 10–12, following his portrayal of his origins and training which make up the literary ritual field, Josephus describes for his readers his transition from the status of a prodigious child under the tutelage (παιδεία) of his elders to the status of an adult aristocratic Jewish male with an active role in the public affairs of his city and nation (πολιτεία). In the previous scene (8–9), Josephus is a mere youth (ἀντίπαις) being educated alongside his brother (συνπαιδευόμενος). At the end of the scene, by contrast, he informs his audience that: “being nineteen I began to take part in public affairs” (12) and his next narrated act is a delicate embassy to the emperor in Rome where he successfully negotiates the release of political prisoners (13). Between these two positions of promising παιδεία and eminently contributing πολιτεία, the narrative portrays Josephus passing through a process of transition that bears resemblances to other such passages in the tradition and experience of his audience.

Separation and Liminality—First Movement

περὶ δὲ ἑκκαίδεκα ἔτη γενόμενος ἐβουλήθην τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν αἱρέσεων ἐμπειρίαν λαβεῖν τρεῖς δ' εἰσὶν αὗται Φαρισαίων μὲν ἢ πρώτη καὶ Σαδδουκαίων ἢ δευτέρα τρίτη δ' Ἑσσηνῶν καθὼς πολλάκις εἶπομεν οὕτως γὰρ ὤμην αἰρήσεσθαι τὴν ἀρίστην εἰ πάσας καταμάθοιμι σκληραγωγήσας οὖν ἑμαυτὸν καὶ πολλὰ ποιηθεὶς τὰς τρεῖς διήλθον. *Vita* 10–11

Josephus' transition begins with his personal determination (βούλομαι) to gain experience (ἐμπειρία) with the three major Jewish parties—the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. His choice is completely in keeping with the aptitude for learning he had displayed as a παιδεία, yet it is now portrayed as carried out fully on his own initiative, and done for the purpose of choosing, for himself, the best of the αἵρεσις. This represents an important break with his earlier συμπαιδευόμενος which his audience would have understood, in the traditional way, as taking place at the direction of father and/or teachers, and in which his only appropriate initiative would have been to learn well and to distinguish himself highly. In acting on his own initiative, Josephus portrays himself as initiating a separation from his former status of childhood and the associated roles of obedient son and student.

It is likely not by accident that Josephus here notes his age as περὶ ἑκκαίδεκα δὲ ἔτη γενόμενος, for sixteen was the average age at which his adopted city of Rome formally celebrated the beginning the transition to adulthood of a free-born boy. The *toga virilis*, or gown of manhood, donned at this point, symbolized a young man's increased freedom of choice as well as the beginning of his participation in public affairs which generally involved a period of military training.⁵⁰⁰ Greeks of the time also recognized the age of sixteen as pivotal, for it was at this time that aristocratic youth finished their primary education, with some going on to advanced rhetorical training or philosophical studies and others beginning a period of civic and military training which had been associated in Sparta, and likely in long-ago Athens and others cities, with more elaborate puberty initiations.⁵⁰¹

The term Josephus uses for the three Jewish parties (αἵρεσις) is a term also regularly used of the Greco-Roman philosophical *schools*. Narratives in which a young

⁵⁰⁰ Suetonius, *Aug.* 8.1; Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 169–72.

⁵⁰¹ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 263; Kennell, *The Gymnasium of Virtue*, 38; Henri I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956), 194; Mason, *Life of Josephus*, 15; Vidal-Naquet, "The Black Hunter," 147–48, 173, 177, 181–82.

man would spend time with several of these schools before selecting the system by which he would govern his own future life, are not uncommon among Greco-Roman authors. Nicolaus of Damascus, growing up less than a century before Josephus in a neighboring region, claims that after completing his *paideia* he studied all branches of philosophy before becoming a ζηλωτής of Aristotle.⁵⁰² Philostratus depicts Apollonius of Tyana choosing to move with his new tutor to Aegae at the age of fourteen or fifteen, where he interacted with Platonists, Peripatetics and Epicureans before joining the Pythagorean school at sixteen (*Vit. Apoll.* 1.7). Justin Martyr claims to have considered the Peripatetic, Pythagorean and Platonist schools before choosing Christianity (*Dial.* 2), and Galen at the age of fourteen sat at the feet of a Stoic, a Platonist, a Peripatetic, and an Epicurean philosopher, before deciding that he was not yet ready to commit himself to a single school of thought.⁵⁰³

By depicting himself as having likewise moved into a period of intense philosophical study at the end of his boyhood years, Josephus creates links with similar puberty transitions within the cultural memory and experience of his Greco-Roman audience. Whether an experience of this kind was a normal part of the transition to public life for young men of his age and station in Jerusalem at the time (either from their Hebrew roots or through Hellenistic influences), or whether he is here simply aligning himself with a Greco-Roman topos, cannot be determined, either from Josephus or from other available historical evidence. The statement that he was “about” sixteen is likely meant to appeal to Roman traditions. The opinion of R. Judah b. Tema that sees fifteen as the age at which a boy is ready for Talmud may also have been shaped by Roman views of the life-cycle (*ʿAbot* 5.21).⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² Nicolaus of Damascus, *F Gr. Hist* 90 F 2 in Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 90 fgr. 132 line 15; Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, 106–07.

⁵⁰³ Galen, *On the Diagnosis and Cure of the Soul’s Passions* 8; cf. also Lucian’s satire, *Vit. auct.*

⁵⁰⁴ R. Judah b. Tema was from the end of the second century, and therefore close in time to the Mishnah. Cf. *m. Nid.* 5:6.

Beyond asserting his own self-determination in making this transition, Josephus pointedly emphasizes that his experience involved training himself harshly (σκληραγωγήσας . . . ἑμαυτὸν) and learning many things by toil (πολλὰ ποιηθεὶς). Both of these verbs are often used with reference to raising children or education, σκληραγωγέω of bringing up children austerely and πονέω of being trained or educated. The use of πονέω with its literal sense of great toil is intensified by being coupled with σκληραγωγέω, emphasizing the great hardship he went through in his pursuit of understanding.⁵⁰⁵ This claim to severe hardship and toil adds to the sense of separation from the normal routines of his past life and is closely associated with the ideas of testing and ordeal, conditions often associated with the liminal stage of a rite of passage. Though Josephus apparently describes here an educational experience, the use of σκληραγωγέω and πονέω also cast it in terms of athletics and military training which, in the Greco-Roman context, often occurred in relation to the passage to adulthood. As Steve Mason notes, such an emphasis would have impressed adherents of Greek philosophies that counseled a turning away from one’s physical needs and desires, and been particularly impressive to his Roman audience for whom philosophy was suspect while austerity and toughness, generally gained through military training, were primary virtues for statesmen.⁵⁰⁶

In declaring himself to have thus successfully passed through (διέρχομαι) the planned experience of the three αἰρέσεις, Josephus uses for a second time the word ἐμπειρία (10, 11) which implies a bodily experience and an active engagement in the groups, not just a theoretical education.⁵⁰⁷ The term διέρχομαι is a general one and no indication is given of any formal “graduations” or initiations such as the process he

⁵⁰⁵ “Πονέω,” LSJ 1447; “σκληραγωγέω,” LSJ 1612.

⁵⁰⁶ Mason, *Life of Josephus*, 15, 18.

⁵⁰⁷ Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship*, 81–82.

elsewhere describes as practiced by the Essenes (*J. W.* 137–142). At this point the liminal nature of Josephus’ described passage betwixt-and-between childhood and adulthood focuses on the trope of philosophical learning, yet it emphasizes bodily participation in a successfully overcome educational ordeal.

Separation and Liminality—Second Movement

Καὶ μηδὲ τὴν ἐντεῦθεν ἐμπειρίαν ἱκανὴν ἑμαυτῷ νομίσας εἶναι
πυθόμενός τινα Βάννου ὄνομα κατὰ τὴν ἐρημίαν διατρίβειν ἐσθῆτι μὲν
ἀπὸ δένδρων χρώμενον τροφήν δὲ τὴν αὐτομάτως φυομένην
προσφερόμενον ψυχρῷ δὲ ὕδατι τὴν ἡμέραν καὶ τὴν νύκτα πολλάκις
λουόμενον πρὸς ἀγνείαν ζηλωτῆς ἐγενόμην αὐτοῦ *Vita* 11

Despite his hardship and toil Josephus asserts that, upon the completion of these experiences, he has not found them to be sufficient . He does not directly state the nature of his dissatisfaction, but instead goes on to narrate his resulting choice of actions. By declaring that he became a devoted adherent (ζηλωτῆς) of Bannus, he lets it be known that he undertook a radical separation from society. For his habitation was in the wilderness, a deserted place, and in taking up clothing from trees and eating cold food that produces itself, Bannus and his disciple Josephus reject the products of human labor which distinguish them from the beasts. Josephus further emphasizes the element of austerity by ignoring any theoretical content of Bannus’ teaching leaving the whole focus upon the severity of his lifestyle. The separation indicated in the rejection of clothing made by human hands is also reminiscent of Lucius’ ritual wearing of a never-used linen robe (*Metam.* 23).

Although Luke does not incorporate Mark’s similar depiction of John as wearing skins and eating locusts and wild honey, Luke 7:24–26 contrasts the richly clothed individuals living in king’s palaces with John in the wilderness who is thereby emphasized to be a prophet and more than a prophet. This and Jesus’ fasting in the wilderness not long before his prophetic claims in the Nazareth discourse (4:16–30), as well as the prophetic claims of marginal individuals such as Theudas who promised to

lead his followers across the Jordan raises the question as to whether Josephus is hereby suggesting his own future prophethood.⁵⁰⁸ However though other of his works suggest a prophetic aspect to his personae, the *Vita*, as Tessa Rajak suggests, presents a much more pragmatic Josephus, not even mentioning his prophetic episode with Vespasian after his capture (*J. W.* 400–407).⁵⁰⁹ It may be that Josephus deliberately played down the prophetic aspect before his implied audience of aristocratic Romans, or possibly that he desired to project some sense of subtlety in contrast to false prophets such as Theudas who claimed prophethood for themselves.

While an ascetic desert experience would have appealed to the Greek philosophical emphasis on hardening oneself to bodily desires, and to the Roman values of toughness and austerity, widespread references to retreats to the wilderness by first century Jews suggest deep roots also in the Biblical wilderness tradition. In his adherence to austerity and to ritual bathing, Bannus resembles and even surpasses the Essenes with whom Josephus had just sought experience, and whom he elsewhere describes as living a simplified lifestyle characterized by ritual bathing (*J. W.* 119–61).⁵¹⁰ For Bannus sets himself outside all of the normal patterns of society by using for food and clothing only that which nature itself directly offered. By his location in the wilderness he cut himself off even from regular human association, rather than living within a framework of institutionalized *communitas* such as that by which the Essenes governed their lives (*J. W.* 2.119–61). Bannus thus appears as a pure type of the sacred outsider, acting for Josephus in the role of ritual elder, guiding and accompanying him through the final and most liminal portion of his chosen transformation toward adulthood.

⁵⁰⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 20.97–98; cf Acts 5:36.

⁵⁰⁹ Rajak, *Josephus*, 37–38. For example, the account of Josephus as prophet is notably lacking in the *Vita*.

⁵¹⁰ The similarity between Bannus and the Essene ἄρεισις is often noted by commentators (Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship*, 82, 627). It is possible that Bannus was an Essene renegade or independent, although Josephus does not class this experience with his Essene ἐμπειρία. cf. John Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 196–199; Rajak, *Josephus*, 37–38.

Josephus' choice of the wilderness as the place to complete his transition to adulthood, also echoes ancient Israelite traditions of passage previously recorded by him in the *Antiquities*. In *Ant.* 2.323, Josephus stated that one of the reasons for the route through the wilderness that Moses chose for Israel's passage to their new position of freedom in the land of Canaan, was that "he wished to cross over into Canaan (ἠθέλησεν ἐμβαλεῖν εἰς τὴν Χαναναίαν) after accomplishing a great journey (πολλὴν ἀνύσας ὁδὸν) and suffering hardship (καὶ κακοπαθήσας)." Possibly even more important to Josephus, as Steve Mason suggests, is the example of Moses' flight through the wilderness from which he returned to an illustrious public career as leader of his people (Exod 3–4; cf. *Ant.* 2.255–56, 264–78).⁵¹¹ Reinhold von Mayer's and Christa Möller's suggestion that such a time of seclusion may even have served regularly as a symbolically rich preparation for a political profession in Jerusalem in Josephus' day is interesting, but impossible to substantiate.⁵¹²

In joining Bannus in the wilderness where he rejects all food and clothing produced by human means, Josephus has at this point separated himself fully from his society. And as a ζηλωτής of Bannus, the bodily involvement of his earlier ἐμπειρία and its associated hardships becomes even more intense. The symbolism of wilderness and of purely natural objects and of ordeal is typical of liminality—both the liminality of outsiderhood lived by Bannus, and the liminality of a life passage such as Josephus is here enacting. And the ritual character of his abstentions is underlined by his repeated ablutions. This liminal location of wilderness suggests plenty of evocative space and time in which to wrestle with concrete physical hardships as well as with the internal conflict between traditional culture and Bannus' chosen lifestyle, along with the conflicting input he had received from the three αἱρέσεις.

⁵¹¹ Steve N. Mason, "Was Josephus a Pharisee: A Re-Examination of Life 10–12," *JJS* 40 (1989): 40. For a more thorough discussion of wilderness symbolism, see chapter 5 of this dissertation.

⁵¹² Reinold von Mayer and Christa Möller, "Josephus—Politiker und Prophet," in *Josephus-Studien* (ed. Otto Betz et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 272.

Reincorporation

καὶ διατρίψας παρ' αὐτῷ ἐνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν τελειώσας εἰς τὴν πόλιν ὑπέστρεφον ἐννεακαιδέκατον δ' ἔτος ἔχων ἠρξάμην τε πολιτεύεσθαι τῇ Φαρισαίων αἰρέσει κατακολουθῶν ἢ παραπλήσιός ἐστι τῇ παρ' Ἑλλησιν Στωϊκῇ λεγομένη *Vita* 12

The experience with Bannus is at last judged by Josephus, in contrast to his previous experience, to be a “sufficient” one, for Josephus tells us that after three years in Bannus’ company he at last completed his purpose (τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν τελειώσας) and returned to Jerusalem.⁵¹³ (The word τελειόω, used in conjunction with the completion of this important transition in his life, recalls its common usage with reference to more formal and societally prescribed rites of passage as described at the beginning of this chapter.) Following this completion, his return (ὑποστρέφω) signals the end of the separation into the wilderness, marking it as a liminal, betwixt-and-between time which ends with his reincorporation into the social life of the πόλις. For while his time with Bannus apparently satisfied his desire, Josephus does not suggest any possibility of remaining in his company. Rather this experience of separation is presented as a temporary one, clearly of great importance to Josephus, but important specifically in its particular position between his boyhood παιδεία and his adult πολιτεία.

In returning to Jerusalem, Josephus did not return to the same status in society which he had left. Instead, being—or more likely *since* he was—nineteen (ἐννεακαιδέκατον δ' ἔτος ἔχων) he returned with adult status. He thereby also began to take on a new and public role.⁵¹⁴ ἠρξάμην τε πολιτεύεσθαι τῇ Φαρισαίων αἰρέσει κατακολουθῶν has been read most often as a single clause, translating πολιτεύεσθαι in the

⁵¹³ The historical problems associated with fitting Josephus’ intensive experience with the three αἰρέσεις and the three years spent with Bannus is beyond the purview of this dissertation. It is well explored however in R. J. H. Shutt, *Studies in Josephus* (London: SPCK, 1961), 1–2; Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, 106–07; Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship*, 81–82, 89, 341; Folker Siegert, Heinz Schreckenberg, and Manuel Vogel, eds., *Flavius Josephus Aus meinem Leben (Vita) Kritische Ausgabe, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Münsteraner Josephus-Arbeitskreises; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 27; Rajak, *Josephus*, 35–36.

⁵¹⁴ Mason, “Was Josephus a Pharisee,” 240.

general sense of “conducting oneself” so that it is understood to mean that upon his return he took up life as a Pharisee.⁵¹⁵ Steve Mason, however, has convincingly demonstrated that in general usage, as well as in Josephus’ own works, πολιτεύεσθαι carries the clear connotations of citizenship and participation in public affairs.

Thus what Josephus is stating here is that at this point he began to live as a citizen (ἡρξάμην . . . πολιτεύεσθαι), the word ἡρξάμην clearly signifying that something new had begun, and the word πολιτεύεσθαι indicating that it involved a new role—in Josephus’ case, the civic privileges and duties societally expected of an adult upper class Jew of priestly and royal lineage. Indeed the Stoics, whom Josephus here notes the Pharisees to be like, are the acceptably Roman branch of philosophy precisely because they take responsibility. Mason further suggests that the clause τῆ Φαρισαίων αἰρέσει κατακολουθῶν be understood as a secondary and dependent clause, conveying only that he had chosen to abide by the rules of the publicly influential Pharisaic party.⁵¹⁶

In the scene immediately following (13–16), Josephus goes on to demonstrate that, by the age of twenty-six, he has moved fully into this new civic role as he embarks upon a perilous journey to Rome in which he courageously overcomes shipwreck and demonstrates impressive diplomatic skills in successfully securing the liberation of several Jewish priests who had been unjustly imprisoned. Thus, like Lucius, he finds his way (briefly foreshadowing here his more permanent residence later) to the center of the ancient world, the city of Rome, where Lucius completed his reincorporation after his ritual separation in *Metamorphoses* and similarly demonstrated his ability in the noble role of advocate.

⁵¹⁵ E.g., Josephus, *Vita* 12 (Thackeray, LCL).

⁵¹⁶ Mason, “Was Josephus a Pharisee,” 41–45; cf. H. W. Attridge, “Josephus and His Works,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. M. E. Stone; CRINT 2:3, ed. W. J. Burgers et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 186; Siegert, Schreckenberg, and Vogel, *Flavius Josephus Aus meinem Leben*, 27.

Whether Josephus' additional mention of the ages of 19 and 26 were of significance in the Jewish world of Jerusalem at the time of Josephus is, again, unverifiable. In Roman society of the time, however, it was established practice for a young man, after the donning of the *toga virilis*, to move gradually from the supervision of tutors and guardians to the full freedoms and responsibilities of a well-bred Roman citizen, only gaining complete legal independence and a place in the senate in their mid-twenties.⁵¹⁷ This final allusion to Roman puberty rites of passage suggest that Josephus has now been reincorporated into adult status, while giving convincing evidence that he is playing his role in an exemplary manner and taking his place successfully as an important public figure on a "national" and "international" scale.

Vita 10–12 as a Rite of Passage

While there is no certain evidence that such transitional experiences were a part of a prescribed and formal rite of passage among the Jewish aristocracy of Jerusalem in the mid-first century C.E., Josephus' account does appear to correspond with traditional patterns and forms found in both current Greco-Roman puberty rites and transitions in the storied past of the Jewish people. The temporal markers of this ritualizing account—the age of sixteen when Josephus' transitional activities are said to begin and the ages of nineteen and finally twenty-six when they end—correspond to those of young men experiencing similar transitions in the Roman world. And in correspondence with the general pattern expected in such passages, Josephus presents himself as separating from his former place in life as a child in the affluent house of his father in the cosmopolitan city of Jerusalem, spending several years outside the boundaries of both his former and subsequent life wrestling with ideas and undergoing hardships, and finally being reincorporated into Jerusalem society as a rising young leader in the public affairs of the

⁵¹⁷ Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 65–78.

nation. These experiences of separation and liminality occur, however, not in a simplistic order but in two distinct movements of increasing intensity.

Although at the completion of his passage, Josephus' status changes from child to adult, and he assumes in an exemplary way the new role of citizen and public servant, no significant internal change is evidenced within Josephus in the depiction of this "rite." Rather he displays further, within the rite, the theme of intellectual brilliance already evidenced in his childhood and in the decisiveness and fortitude in hardship with which he began his transition. With regard to the surrounding social structures, the events described in 10–12 are depicted primarily in a conserving role ushering a young man safely into a productive adult life.

The only apparent link with the larger ritual system of Josephus' native tradition is the washings (λούω) of Bannus which recall those prescribed for the unclean in Lev 14–17 and the promises of a future cleansing and renewed covenant in Isa 4:2–6 and Ezek 36:23–27.⁵¹⁸ As Josephus evinces no interest elsewhere in eschatological and apocalyptic themes, it would seem that this action is connected rather to a more general participation in ritual cleanliness valued highly in the Jewish world and also part of ritual purification in Greco-Roman rites such as the initiation of Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. More important in understanding how Josephus meant his passage to be viewed are the numerous links with the Greco-Roman ritual system that can be seen in the likeness of this description to that of Roman puberty rites.

The resonant dominant symbol of wilderness, where he reaches the ultimate completion of his ritual under the direction of Bannus, is positioned in complete opposition to that of the πόλις to which Josephus returns in *Vita* 12, standing as an ideal liminal environment outside the structures of everyday life. It operates as an ideal place for hardship, where Josephus receives satisfactory direction which, he says, fulfills his

⁵¹⁸ These cause Mayer and Möller to suggest that Bannus was likely part of a growing trend of baptismal practice ("Josephus—Politiker und Prophet").

desire. The likenesses to Moses', and to Israel's, own ritualized passage through the wilderness juxtaposed with the Greco-Roman links, present riddles that operate at the level of experienced text, if not of the historical experience of Josephus. The rich instrumental symbols of tree, natural growth, and water, and the experience of hardship and suffering, austerity and purification, with their own powerful connotations in the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds, also are given their place in drawing a ritualized time apart and shaping Josephus' portrayed experience and the responses of the audiences who read his account.

Even while connecting to traditional rites of passage, Josephus also reveals an emphasis on his own initiative (ἐβουλήθη, ὤμην, σκληραγωγήσας ἑμαυτοῦ, . . .) which though at first apparently appearing to militate against the common expectation that a rite of passage must be socially ordained, may have been viewed as appropriate for the years of liminal freedom which young men in Rome experienced between the donning of the *toga virilis* and the assumption of the full responsibilities of adulthood. Josephus' ritualization in his evident personal shaping of this rite of passage, whether literary or historical, also reflects the growing importance of personal choice in the cosmopolitan Greco-Roman world where people, particularly in the cities, found themselves increasingly separated from the dictates of family and tradition ties which had in the past structured their life-stage transitions along with every aspect of their lives.⁵¹⁹

In comparison with the initiatory rite of passage of Lucius in the *Metamorphoses*, Josephus' ritualized account of passage is much less formal, presented as personally chosen rather than societally ordained. It is also remarkably less mystical and otherworldly, more pragmatic and concrete. In fact, no mention of God arises until *Vita* 15 when God's providence rescues him from shipwreck in the course of his subsequent embassy to Rome. Like that of Lucius, Josephus' account includes the participation of a

⁵¹⁹ Victor W. Turner, "Process, System, and Symbol: A New Anthropological Synthesis," *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 72; idem, "Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media," *Religion* 15 (1985): 213–14.

sacred guide, or ritual director, though one much less explicitly connected with the deity. Though both thereby entered upon a new role as a leader in their respective spheres, Josephus' account portrays a solitary ritualized transition into an, albeitly aristocratic, society-wide status of adulthood, while that of Lucius initiates him into a tightly controlled inner circle evidencing some ongoing *communitas*. Both transitions, however, eventually lead to new roles with associated behavior changes more apparently associated with the societal recognition received through the passage than with a core change in character.

Josephus' account also bears intriguing similarities to Jesus' transition to public life in Luke which, like that of Josephus, narrates: a brilliant showing before the teachers in Jerusalem, an emphasis on his age at the beginning of his public life, a righteous teacher from the desert practicing symbolic water immersion, and an ordeal of austere hardship inscribed upon the protagonist's body in the wilderness. Josephus, lacking the numerous supernatural portents surrounding Jesus' birth and transition, accomplishes a similar forecasting of his future greatness, in conjunction with the opening emphasis on the nobility of his genealogy, by the well-rounded and self-chosen experiences with leading structural and anti-structural entities of his day.

4.3.3 The Significance of Josephus' Ritualizing in the *Vita*

The very presence of a ritualized passage to adulthood in this brief volume, which skips over so many aspects of Josephus' life, suggests that these scenes are included for a purpose. The conventions of the *bioi* and *encomia* with which the audience was familiar did not demand the narration of a transition to adulthood, and any consideration of some deep psychological impact on the young Josephus is too speculative to be useful. Rather, although Josephus is not explicit about what the events of *Vita* 10–12 signified in his life, their inclusion here demonstrates that he somehow expected them to be significant to his audience, advancing his purposes in the *Vita*. Thus an examination of their place in the

volume can both shed light on these purposes and also receive clarification by being considered in the context of previous investigations of the *Vita*'s purpose.

Structurally, the account of Josephus' passage to adulthood can be seen to function as a bridge, if not in Josephus' actual historical experience certainly in his narrative world, between his impressive showing as a child scholar and his adult life as a wise and heroic Jewish general. In echoing Greek and particularly Roman rites and literary tropes surrounding the passage to adulthood, it also functions as a bridge between Josephus as a foreign "barbarian" general, and the dominant culture upon whose good will and favor he was dependent for the patronage that allowed him to live free and admired in his adopted land. But its relation to the primary purpose(s) of the *Vita* as a whole is more difficult, largely because there is little agreement as to what these may have been. As Neyrey has argued, the account is clearly encomiastic, functioning to honor its author and main character as a brilliant and heroic general who acted loyally for the public welfare of his country and who thus deserved the honor he thereafter received from the Romans.⁵²⁰ Such claims are supported in a general way by the intentionally rigorous nature of Josephus' rite of passage, and by his deep study with all three ἀιρέσεις as well as with Bannus, thus enlisting behind himself both the recognized authority of the structural leaders shaping the thought of his society, and also the liminal energy and wisdom collected at its margins.

Beyond this rather general function, Josephus is a subtle enough author, in a complex enough situation, that a single primary purpose is difficult to identify. Josephus' defensive outbursts against a number of accusers, particularly Justus and his rival history of the Jewish war, suggests that he did not feel secure enough, even at this late date, to be able to ignore their barbs (*Vita* 32–42, 175–78, 336–67, 390–93). Yet the longstanding opinion that the *Vita* was written primarily as a defense against Justus seems to be belied

⁵²⁰ Tessa Rajak has argued that Josephus needed to justify himself before his aristocratic Jewish peers (*Josephus*, 153–55).

not only by such evidences as the apparently sloppy contradictions with his earlier works, as Steve Mason points out, and by the normal expectation of such comparisons in the formal genre of encomium, but also by its inability to explain Josephus' deliberate inclusion of his ritualized passage to adulthood.⁵²¹ Neither is the presence of this passage explained by the suggestion that the work was primarily written to defend the necessity of the Jewish war.⁵²²

Shaye Cohen's suggestion that Josephus was seeking in this work to identify himself with the increasingly influential Pharisees, is also more contradicted than aided by *Vita* 10–12 with its expressed lack of satisfaction regarding his experience with the Pharisees and the other ἀἱρέσεις.⁵²³ Nevertheless, Josephus' choice to include the Bannus episode suggests some interest in impressing his fellow Jews, for there is little evidence of any interest in actual retreat to the wilderness in the Greco-Roman culture.

Two other recent observations regarding the *Vita*'s purpose show more promise for explaining the presence of *Vita* 10–12. Per Bilde has argued that the *Vita* was written to certify Josephus' reliability as author and as historian of the Jews.⁵²⁴ Josephus himself strongly suggests such a purpose at the end of the *Antiquities*, immediately before introducing the *Vita*, lauding the work he has just completed and claiming for himself first place in Jewish learning and also a carefully acquired knowledge of that of the Greeks (*Ant.* 262–66). In connection with the account of his genealogy and youthful

⁵²¹ Benedictus Niese, "Der jüdische Historiker Josephus," *Historische Zeitschrift* n. F. 40 (1896): 227; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (3 vols.; Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1890), 1.65–67, 92; Richard Laqueur, *Der jüdische Historiker Flavius Josephus: ein biographischer Versuch auf neuer quellenkritischer Grundlage* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), 56–95; *contra* Mason, *Life of Josephus*, xiii–xix.

⁵²² Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, 152–60.

⁵²³ Josephus, *Vita* 12, 21, 190, 193–96; Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, 144–47; cf. 140, 169–70, 237–39, 241–42; cf. Steve N. Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees: A Composition-Critical Study*, (New York: E. J. Brill, 1991), 342–356.

⁵²⁴ Per Bilde, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life His Works and Their Importance* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 110–13.

brilliance (*Vita* 1–9) that immediately follows, the ritualized account of his transition to adulthood can be seen to continue this emphasis on his knowledge qualifications, demonstrating the thoroughness with which he grounded himself in the “philosophies” of his people, and also playing on the literary trope of ritualized passage in the Greco-Roman world through experimentation with the leading philosophies of the day. The emphasis on Josephus’ dedication to learning is clear, and may be understood to contribute to the confidence his audience might place in his works as well as to his more general claim to respect and honor and patronage in the city where he sought to make his way as an alien.

The theory, however, that seems to bring *Vita* 10–12 into best focus with the rest of the work is Steve Mason’s recent suggestion that the *Vita* was intended as “the final exhibit” in the *Antiquities*’ account of Israel’s great figures.⁵²⁵ In keeping with the *Antiquities*’ display of the superiority and antiquity of Jewish tradition and “philosophy,” Josephus moves directly at the end of the *Antiquities* into an account of his own vital connection, through genealogy and learning, to this history. In *Vita* 10–12 his dedicated study of the philosophies is displayed, but as noted above it is presented not simply as an intellectual exercise but as a physical experience with emphasis on the rigor and hardship involved. Together with the even more demanding period of wilderness preparation with Bannus, the emphasis suggests allusions to the kind of devoted physical training expected not of scholars but of great men of action like Moses, the heroes and military leaders of Israel’s past. Along with this, Josephus also includes enough links to coming of age in the contemporary Greco-Roman society to impress upon his audience the thoroughness and appropriateness of his preparation. After going on to spend the greater part of the volume displaying his exemplary conduct of the war, Josephus’ conclusion to the *Vita* points at to Ephaphroditus that he has now at last given him “the whole record of the antiquities”

⁵²⁵ Mason, *Life of Josephus*, xix, xlvi–l. Mason’s argument that Josephus’ also sought in the *Vita* to demonstrate through his own life the greatness of the Jewish constitution put forth in the *Antiquities* is not so evident here as it may be elsewhere.

(*Vita* 430), suggesting that his own life is indeed the most recent, if not the latest and greatest, in a long line of Jewish heroes.⁵²⁶

While it is unnecessary to reject most of the other suggested purposes as unimportant to the *Vita*, understanding it as written not simply in self-defense, but primarily to portray himself as a man of honor and worthy representative of the ancient heritage of Judaism, provides a particularly satisfactory background for understanding the factors that went into his portrayal of his transition to public life in *Vita* 10–12. Although the accounting of this ritualized passage may not have done much to assist in any desperate attempt at self-defense, such a narrative does find an important place in a life presented as an example of Jewish excellence. The opportunity to demonstrate the high standards of preparation sought by him as a Jewish youth and to once again bring attention to the existence and overarching importance of the Jewish “philosophical schools,” made the inclusion of such a coming-of-age scene, with its resonances to the audience’s own literary and personal experiences of such passages, irresistible for an author with such deeply held convictions to put forth. By means of the hardship and testing in the liminal spaces outside of his previous and his later life, Josephus is demonstrated to be outstandingly prepared for his new adult state and his role of πολιτεία as a Jewish aristocratic male in Jerusalem.

4.4 Luke-Acts and the Rite of Passage

Much more often than either the *Vita* or the *Metamorphoses*, the two-volume work of Luke and Acts makes deliberate reference to formal rites of passage. Repeatedly, at points of transition in the lives of its characters, this text describes distinct and formalized events which accompany, emphasize, and even facilitate their passage, creating a bridge between the old and the new and grounding the new in socially

⁵²⁶ Mason, *Life of Josephus*, xix, xlvii–l.

approved forms and in traditions stretching back to ancient times. As a time when humans approach the divine in a period set apart from the concerns of daily life, ritual also provides in Luke a setting where miraculous events are most likely to occur.

In the Gospel of Luke, these formalized new beginnings are naturally clustered within the first few chapters, although several further rites are suggested in connection with later transitions. Repeated attention to rites of passage is also given near the beginning of the book of Acts, but here a single rite of passage—the ritual of baptism—predominates, marking a number of important new beginnings. Among these many references to baptism in Acts, the most extensive description of the context of an individual baptism is the portrayal of Paul’s transformation to Christ-follower and member of the Christian community in chapter 9. In the section below, Luke-Acts’ overall use of rite of passage will be surveyed, ending with a brief analysis of Paul’s transformation in Acts 9.

4.4.1 Attention to Ritual in the Gospel of Luke

Rites of passage are particularly evident in the infancy narratives of Luke’s Gospel, where Luke alone among the canonical Gospels gives attention to the ritual aspects of John’s and Jesus’ birth. Here they contribute to the atmosphere of venerable tradition surrounding Luke’s extended portrayal of the momentous beginnings of the gospel (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Mark 1:1) which, in Mark, begin only at the baptism.

The narrative of Luke-Acts opens, in fact, in the midst of a ritual—the twice-daily incense offering in the Jerusalem temple, a calendrical ritual which held a central place in the ancient Jewish ritual system (Exod 30:7–8). Though not a rite of passage according to the current definition, this ritual, like most, contains its own liminal moments. For while the whole multitude of the people (πάν τὸ πλῆθος . . . τοῦ λαοῦ) stand outside praying, Zacharias approaches the threshold of the presence of God in the Holy of Holies to burn incense. It is at this moment, before he returns to the people, that God’s emissary Gabriel

arrives with the announcement of a son about to be born who would set the events of Luke-Acts in motion (Luke 1:5–25).

The beginning of John’s life is, likewise, marked by the appropriate carrying out of ritual tradition, as joyful neighbors and kin gather after the traditional waiting period of eight days for the rite of circumcision (Luke 2:57–59; cf. Lev. 12:3). In Luke, as in the long history of Judaism in general, the circumcision ritual was understood to be of vital significance, marking not only the child’s passage from birth into life but also entrance into the covenant people of God (Gen 17:11–14; 21:4; Acts 7:8; 21:21).⁵²⁷ The conclusion of Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin in Acts testifies to the symbolic significance of this rite, as he declares his hearers’ distance from God by telling them that they are “stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart” (Acts 7:51).

Although a rite of naming was not anciently a part of the Jewish circumcision ritual and is not attested again in Jewish practice until several centuries later, this narrative detail would have been particularly appreciated by Luke’s audience, for Romans also celebrated a rite of naming on the eighth or ninth day after birth.⁵²⁸ It is this rite of naming—celebrated in conjunction with the circumcision ritual—that forms the focal point in this account of John’s beginnings, where Zacharias confirms Elizabeth’s declaration of John’s unexpected name and, immediately afterward, regains his power of speech. After emphasizing the wonder occasioned among the people by these events, Luke brings the ritual account to a climax with another divine visitation, this time by the Holy Spirit through whom Zacharias prophesies of the soon coming of the Lord for whom his son was to prepare (1:58–79).

⁵²⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1,1–9* (AB 28; New York: Doubleday, 1981), 376. This ritual is also attested of adult proselytes in Luke-Acts, with the same symbolic meaning (Acts 15:1, 5; 16:3).

⁵²⁸ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 380.

In the parallel beginning of the birth of Jesus, a similar rite of naming and circumcision is specifically mentioned. This repeated notice given to the rites of passage of infancy is particularly significant as such rites are generally assumed rather than mentioned in historical and biographical narratives of the time. Luke places the naming first, with its formal recognition and bestowal of identity, and emphasizes that as with John the name, and thus the identity bestowed, is commanded by divine authority (1:31; 2:21). The circumcision which follows, signifying the incorporation of Jesus into Israel, is suggested by Fitzmyer to be particularly important because “Luke will be at pains at the end of his two-volume work to show that Christianity is a logical outgrowth of Judaism. Those who inaugurate it and found it must be shown to be part of Judaism.”⁵²⁹

In Jesus’ case the rites of naming and circumcision are immediately followed, in Luke’s account, by a further pair of passage rites which demonstrate again the characters’ faithful obedience to the Law and include a supernatural manifestation through prophetic utterance. These rites, which return the narrative to the Jerusalem temple, the spatial center of Judaism, are again a composite of two separate traditions, a purification rite and a rite concerned with God’s claim to all firstborn males. “When the days of their purification” are fulfilled, according to Luke, Jesus’ parents bring him up in order to present him to the Lord, in an action bearing echoes of Hannah’s presentation of Samuel to the Lord in 1 Sam 1:24–28.

By a direct reference to Exod 13:2 and 12, Luke 2:23 interprets this action as a response to God’s command at the first “Passover” that every firstborn male, human or creature, be set apart as “holy to the Lord.” No requirement of such a temple presentation is anywhere recorded in connection with this command, however, either in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX, or the Mishnah. In fact sons not of the tribe of Levi were to be exempted from the command by the payment of a five shekel redemption price (Num 3:47–48;

⁵²⁹ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 376.

18:15–16). Luke’s specific mention of this ritual presentation, then, may suggest a formal enactment of Gabriel’s declaration that Jesus would be a set-apart or “holy child,” while the omission of the redemption payment suggests the belief that Jesus was thereafter expected to remain, in a particular way, holy and sacred, the possession of the Lord.⁵³⁰ The accompanying sacrifice of two turtledoves or young pigeons is apparently related to the completion of the days of purification following birth. Although the Law required purification only for the mother in this case (Lev 12:2–8), Luke generalizes the requirement by speaking in the plural of “their” purification [τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ αὐτῶν]. It is possible, as Bovon notes, that Luke alludes here not only to the ritual of purification for the mother, but also to the similar sacrifice to be offered in certain cases for the ritual purification of a Nazirite, one who, like Jesus, has been set apart as holy to the Lord (Num 6:1–12).

This rite of passage, like the previous rites, also becomes the occasion of divine in-breaking as two righteous individuals—Simeon and Anna—approach the family and speak prophetic words of exaltation regarding the child. Luke connects these miraculous prophecies with the rites just described by reiterating that Simon arrived at the temple at the time when Jesus’ parents came “to do for him the customs of the Law” (Luke 2:27). The account concludes with the use of the ritual term τελέω reaffirming that “all things had been (ritually) completed (ἐτέλεσαν) according to the law of the Lord” (2:39).⁵³¹

In the next and final pericope of the Lukan infancy narrative, the narrative of Jesus’ birth and childhood is concluded just as it was begun—with an account of events based in a calendrical ritual celebrated at the temple. In faithful observance of this Passover ritual, Jesus’ parents come to Jerusalem bringing along Jesus who has now turned twelve (Luke 2:41–52; cf. Exod 23:15; 34:18–23). Once again, Luke’s prime

⁵³⁰ François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (ed. Helmut Koester; trans. Christine M. Thomas; Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 99; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 425–26.

⁵³¹ See the discussion in chapter 3 of the ritual usage of the Greek word τελέω.

interest is not in the ritual itself but in an event—in this case Jesus’ remarkable display of youthful wisdom (τῆ συνέσει καὶ ταῖς ἀποκρίσεσιν αὐτοῦ Luke 2:47) which, as with Josephus (μνήμη τε καὶ συνέσει *Vita* 8–9), occurs in the context of ritual.⁵³² The ritual leading up to this event is not described, but rather summarized with the phrase τελειωσάντων τὰς ἡμέρας (Luke 2:43), with the use of the term τελειόω indicating, as with Josephus in *Vita* 12, the successful consummation of a ritual. In place of the direct divine intervention that brought each of the previous ritual descriptions to a portentous conclusion, here it is Jesus himself who draws the connection to the divine Father (οὐκ ἤδειτε ὅτι ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου δεῖ εἶναί με) in response to his mother’s questioning (Luke 2:49).

In addition to the calendrical celebration of the Passover ritual, this account may also bear allusion to the passage of Jesus from childhood to young manhood. For after stating in verse 41 that Jesus’ parents attended Passover annually, verse 42 emphasizes specifically that this going up took place “when Jesus became twelve,” and reiterates that this was “according to the custom of the feast” (κατὰ τὸ ἔθος τῆς ἑορτῆς). The emphasis on custom in connection with the age of twelve recalls certain traditions recorded in the Mishnah which suggest that boys of twelve were given special instruction toward a coming transition, at the age of thirteen, into a standing of full responsibility before God.⁵³³ Twelve also is the age at which Josephus records Samuel as beginning his

⁵³² Also portrayed in Greek and Jewish biography as displaying precocious intelligence around the age of twelve are Cyrus (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.2.8), Epicurus (Diogenes Laertius 10.14); Samuel (Josephus, *Ant.* 5.348); Solomon (1 Kgs 2:12 LXX). de Jonge also lists several others mentioned in later Christian times but which may be influenced by the Luke story. Henk J. de Jonge, “Sonship, Wisdom, Infancy: Lk 2, 41–51a.” *NTS* 24 (1977–78): 322–23.

⁵³³ *m. ’Abot* 5:21; *m. Nid.* 5:6; cf. *m. Meg.* 4:6; *b. Ketub.* 50; Str-B 2.144–147; Frédéric Manns, “Luc 2, 41–50 témoin de la Bar Mitswa de Jésus,” *Mar* 40 (1978): 344–49; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978); cf. Fitzmyer, who suggests more narrowly that regulations concerning the expectation of full Torah observance beginning at the age of thirteen were somewhat applicable by Jesus’ time, along with a custom of pious Jews accustoming them to this pilgrimage at twelve (*Luke* 1, 1–9, 440); *contra* François Bovon, *Luke* 1, 111. (There is no evidence at this time of the terminology or characteristic practice of Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13)

prophetic ministry (*Ant.* 5.348), a detail not mentioned in the LXX or the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, it must be noted that though Luke suggests a new step in maturity in the movement from the use of παιδίον, or young child, for Jesus in 2:40, to the more mature παῖς in 2:43, the designation remains that of a child.⁵³⁴ Further, the literary trope of youthful wisdom is not one commonly associated directly with transition to manhood or other rites of passage.

Whether the Lukan account combines this literary trope with either a known formal rite of passage or with a self-directed, or divinely-directed, transition event such as that of Josephus is not certain. The account however is clothed in familiar motifs which suggest that an important transition in the story of Jesus takes place here: in the journeying, in the symbolism of twelve which traditionally indicates fullness, in the separation from his parents and liminal between-time in the sacred precincts of the temple, in instruction and exchange with ritual elders, and in his reincorporation after three days displaying a new sense of understanding and independence (though he is explicitly said to submit for the time to the leadership of his parents).⁵³⁵ Further, as Fitzmyer notes, the episode itself clearly stands in a transitional place between the stories of Jesus conception and birth, and the beginning of his public ministry.⁵³⁶ Joel Green points out that as the scene closes, in contrast to his earlier passive part in the story as a child, “*he went to Nazareth accompanied by them; he has become the subject of the verbs.*”⁵³⁷

⁵³⁴ “Παιδίον,” LSJ 1287; “παῖς,” LSJ 1289; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 127.

⁵³⁵ Twelve in Luke-Acts includes twelve disciples (Luke 6:13; 22:3; etc.), years of suffering and of life (8:42–43), baskets of leftovers (9:17), tribes of Israel (Luke 22:30; Acts 26:7), patriarchs (Acts 7:8); and men of John’s baptism baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (19:7).

⁵³⁶ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 435.

⁵³⁷ Joel B.Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 156.

As the main body of the Gospel of Luke opens, a new rite of passage comes to the fore in John's preaching of baptism and in the divine manifestations at Jesus' own baptism. Taking up the next chapter and a half of the gospel of Luke, this account chronicles both the beginnings of Jesus' ministry and the beginnings of the Christian ritual of baptism which would play an increasingly important role in the later parts of Luke-Acts. The importance of this ritual is underlined in a narrator's comment in Luke 7:29–30 where it is presented as accomplishing a separation, or setting apart, of God's true people in which, though all the people and tax-collectors are said to have been baptized by John, the Pharisees and Law-experts are said to have rejected John's baptism, and thereby also to have rejected the will of God for themselves. A detailed analysis of the baptism of John with particular reference to Jesus' baptism will be made in chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation, following a consideration (below) of their presentation in the early Christian church as witnessed in the book of Acts.

Following the important beginnings chronicled in the infancy narratives and in the baptism and wilderness narrative of chapters 3 and 4, Luke moves on to the ministry of Jesus. In these remaining chapters, though the period of formal beginnings for Jesus is largely complete, Luke does give attention to one further rite of passage, initiated this time by Jesus on behalf of others: the choosing of the twelve, mentioned by all three Synoptic Gospels. In this choosing, as described in Luke 6:12–16, Jesus carries out a formal commissioning rite promoting twelve of his disciples to the special rank of apostleship. The choosing of twelve recalls the twelve tribes of Israel and suggests the constituting here the beginnings of new Israel.⁵³⁸ At the time of their commissioning however, no mention is made of exactly what their task would be beyond the giving of the title, ἀπόστολοι.

⁵³⁸ Bovon, *Luke 1*.

Though Luke devotes the least number of verses to the account (cf. Mark 3:13–19; Matt 10:1–42) in the Synoptic Gospels, it is Luke alone who tells of the setting apart of Jesus into a sacred space and time in Jesus’ nightlong prayer on the mountain. It is also Luke alone who mentions Jesus’ subsequent formal bestowal upon the twelve of the role designation ἀπόστολοι and the continuing importance of this title.⁵³⁹ The new apostles do not, in Luke, immediately take up their appointed role of “sent ones,” but continue in a liminal position in intensive interaction with Jesus who acts as their ritual elder (8:1) until their initial empowerment, instruction, and sending in 9:1–6.

Even after this first sending their role continues to be ambiguous in relation to society, and their reincorporation seems to relate to the smaller group of apostles and other disciples around Jesus. Indeed, they remain most of the time with Jesus until his departure and the arrival of the Spirit in Act 2, and even afterwards their primary role as ἀπόστολοι keeps them in an awkward outsider position with regard to society, though in full authority over the growing band of Jesus’ followers. Such a formalized commissioning ritual serves Luke’s purposes by anchoring the designation of the twelve apostles within the life of Jesus.⁵⁴⁰ The passage is also commonly recognized as beginning a new stage in the gospel itself, with Fitzmyer, for example declaring, “Luke’s account of Jesus’ ministry now moves into a new phase . . . as it presents Jesus fashioning for himself a small group of special disciples and giving samples of his preaching to the crowds.”⁵⁴¹

While the commissioning of the apostles is the last formal rite of passage recorded in the Gospel of Luke, there are at least three other accounts of transition in the Gospel which give evidence of rite of passage allusions. Each of these stands at a point of

⁵³⁹ In comparison Matthew and Mark use the term “apostle” only once each, Matthew when he lists the names of the twelve (Matt 10:2) and Mark only after the twelve return to Jesus at the end of their first mission (Mark 6:30).

⁵⁴⁰ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 207.

⁵⁴¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 613.

transition between major sections in the Lukan text: the first in chapter 9 at the transition from his Galilean ministry to his journey to Jerusalem, the second at the transition from that journey to his ministry in Jerusalem itself, and the third at the climax and conclusion of the book in Jesus' passion and exaltation.

The first of these ritualized narratives of transition in Luke 9 falls at the point of the jolting transition for Jesus and his disciples from a powerful, though not unopposed, ministry in Galilee to a journey into what Jesus warned in 9:22 would be certain death in Jerusalem (cf. 9:43–45; 19:31–34). Like Jesus' baptism (3:18) and his commissioning of the twelve (6:12), it opens with Jesus set apart to God in prayer (9:18), a separation immediately deepened by Peter's recognition of Jesus' messiah-hood and Jesus' warning of the suffering and loss of life both he and his disciples must be subject to. Following Jesus' further withdrawal with three disciples to a mountain to pray, the liminal manifestation of Jesus' transfiguration occurs, with Jesus suddenly gleaming white and Moses and Elijah appearing in glory. The topic of their conversation is given by Luke alone, who portrays them as discussing "the ἔξοδοσ he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem," thereby shaping his audience's interpretation of Jesus' coming movement to Jerusalem and subsequent death and ascension by allusion to the ritualized account of Israel's own passage through the wilderness to the promised land.⁵⁴² The subsequent words, "This is my son, my chosen one. Hear him," heard by the disciples from the midst of the cloud surrounding them, link this event to an even more distinct and less metaphorical rite of passage, echoing the source and phrasing of the words heard at Jesus' earlier ritual of baptism.⁵⁴³ Both evocations of ritual here are presented as divinely initiated and may be seen to serve the purpose of preparing Jesus and a small coterie of his apostles for the

⁵⁴² For a succinct overview of the possible meanings of the ἔξοδοσ see Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 800.

⁵⁴³ Indeed the later document of 2 Peter uses the term ἐπόπτης of the disciple-witnesses, (1:16–18) suggesting a possible early Christian link between these event and a mystery initiation.

next stage in his life, which he initiates immediately by descending from the mountain and setting his face toward Jerusalem (9:37, 51).

A second ritualized account may be seen as Jesus enters Jerusalem in a transition from the healing and teaching of the travel account to a last stand in the Jerusalem temple where he teaches and meets the determined attacks of those threatened by his presence (19:28–48). The disciples’ honoring action of mounting Jesus on the donkey and spreading their coats on the ground before him, along with Luke’s special emphasis on “the king” in the disciples’ joyous shouts of praise, emphasize the likeness to the ritual entrance of a king arriving to lay claim to his city, though in the meek manner of the messianic king suggested in Zech 9:9.⁵⁴⁴ His subsequent claim to just such authority in the cleansing of the temple—an action that seems to have at least partially provoked the confrontation which followed—underlines this transition (20:1–8).⁵⁴⁵

A third ritualized narrative is suggested in the account of Jesus’ passion, death, and exaltation which spills over into the book of Acts. A ritual interpretation of this ultimate life transition is made by Jesus himself, who had earlier spoken of these events in terms of a metaphorical baptism, lamenting to his disciples, “I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished (τελέσθη)” (Luke 12:50; cf. Mark 10:38–39).⁵⁴⁶ The opening, once again, of this final period of transition with Jesus withdrawing to a mountain for prayer completes a Lukan pattern that has been often noted, of which Bovon states, “[T]he times at which Jesus prays are again and again

⁵⁴⁴ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 711, 714–16; Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and Its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; JNSTSup 110; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 314.

⁵⁴⁵ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 724.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. Mark 10:38. This further “baptism” may correspond with the baptism by fire mentioned in 3:16. For Jesus has already undergone a “baptism” of the Spirit, and the LXX repeatedly refers to this type of experience with the metaphor of fire (Prov 17:3; Sir 2:4–5; Zech 13:9; Mal 3:3).

connected to a decisive stage of the new age of salvation . . .”⁵⁴⁷ It can now also be noted, as demonstrated above, that even where these crucial points of transition do not involve a new rite of passage, as in the commissioning of the disciples, Luke juxtaposes them with the rite of passage of baptism, as in the transfiguration and the passion, thus signaling even before the opening of Acts the ongoing importance and multivalent symbolic nature of this ritual. In this final transition in Jesus’ earthly life, a liminal period of severe ordeal follows as Jesus is arrested, tried, and tortured, before entering the ultimate otherness of death. (Interestingly, like the mention of Jesus’ ἑξοδος in Luke 9:31, the ritual celebration of Passover at the same time, again draws in allusion to the ancient wilderness passage of Israel and links it to the new ritual instituted at the last supper he shared with his disciples.) Jesus’ ultimate reincorporation, following his resurrection, is only hinted at in 24:50–53, but is expanded in Acts 1:9–11 and further in 2:32–33 where Peter proclaims his exaltation to God’s right hand.

4.4.2 Baptism as the Dominant Ritual in Acts

In the book of Acts, as in the Gospel of Luke, a number of formal rites of passage center around beginnings. Unlike those at the beginning of Luke however, these rites neither fulfill a requirement of the Law, although they make use of strands of biblical precedent, nor are they accompanied by startling manifestations of the divine, though they incorporate the involvement of the divine through prayer. Rather, more in keeping with the commissioning of the twelve, they accomplish a needed change in role.

Recalling Jesus’ commissioning of the twelve, the first ritualized account separates Matthias from other believers, in the set-apart place of the upper room in 1:15–26, and reincorporates him into the vacant position of twelfth apostle. This is accomplished not only by a logical consideration of the appropriate apostolic

⁵⁴⁷ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 208; cf. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. Geoffrey Buswell; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 180.

qualifications but by a movement outside of routine human-controlled events through prayer and the drawing of lots. In 6:1–6, the “seven” who are selected to ameliorate the perceived injustice in the distribution of food are commissioned for their new “table-serving” role through prayer and the formal laying on of hands (προσευξάμενοι ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας)—an ancient and symbolic bodily action recorded in the LXX in the commissioning of Joshua and of the Levites before him.⁵⁴⁸ The later setting apart (ἀφορίζω) of Barnabas and Paul, initiated directly by the Holy Spirit in the already liminal atmosphere of worship and fasting, involved again the practice of prayer and laying on of hands (13:1–3), suggesting a growing ritualization of the practice (though cf. 14:23). Each of these commissionings accompany and legitimate role changes, and do so partially through the demonstration of their founding in previous rites of passage.

Other ritualized passages in Acts are connected with endings, though like the ritualized passion account in Luke they also carry hints of new beginnings. Thus the account of Stephen’s trial and ritual stoning is modeled after Jesus’ own passion in, for example, his repetition of two of Jesus’ own dying phrases (Acts 6:8–7:60; cf Luke 22:69; 23:34, 46), and concludes with his sight of Jesus standing where he has been reincorporated at God’s right hand.⁵⁴⁹ And Paul’s ritualized farewell speech (last will and testament) to the Ephesian elders used to mark the end of his missionary journeys, includes commendation to God who is able to give them the inheritance of the sanctified (Acts 20:17–38).⁵⁵⁰ As so often in Luke-Acts, the ritual completion of what seems to be a Nazarite vow in 21:17–27 (cf. Num 18:1, 8; 6:2–21), where Paul pays the expenses at James’ instruction of four men just completing the liminal period of the vow, is marked

⁵⁴⁸ Num 8:10; 27:18–23; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 351.

⁵⁴⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Daniel J. Harrington; SP 5; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992).

⁵⁵⁰ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 674–76. Healings rituals too, in both Luke and Acts, take a ritualized form and have been identified by van Gennep and Turner as rites of passage.

with a τελ-word, describing Paul's "arrest" as taking place "when the seven days [of the final purifications] were about to be completed (συντελεῖσθαι)."⁵⁵¹

*The Foundations of Christian Baptism Grounded in the Baptisms
of Luke 3:1–4:15*

The predominant rite of passage described in Acts, however, is certainly that of baptism. This ritual came to be the decisive act of a new believer's allegiance to Christ and initiation into the Christian community, as is repeatedly evidenced in Acts. Luke's Hellenistic audience, who had been already instructed in the Christian way (Luke 1:4), would have been familiar with water baptism through their own experience of baptism, as well as through their reading of the Luke 3 and 4 which is assumed in Acts (and which will be discussed in the next two chapters of this dissertation).⁵⁵² But they would also have brought understandings regarding this term from their larger cultural experience of similar rituals. The term βαπτίζω itself, literally means "to dip, or plunge, in water" carrying the idea of full immersion, and could be used metaphorically of drowning, or of sinking into debt or some other distress.⁵⁵³ One aspect with which almost any Lukan audience would likely have associated this act is that of cleansing for, in keeping with the universal use of water as cleaning agent, it symbolized cleansing and purification in both Jewish and Greco-Roman circles.⁵⁵⁴ In the Greco-Roman world of Luke's audience,

⁵⁵¹ Cf. Acts 18:18; Roger Tomes, "Why Did Paul Get His Hair Cut? (Acts 18.18; 21.23–24)," in *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (ed. C. M. Tuckett; JSNTSup 116; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 188–97. The use of συντελέω to refer to the completion of Jesus' ritual actions in the wilderness in Luke 4:2, 13 will be discussed in chapter 6 of this dissertation.

⁵⁵² Joel B. Green, "From 'John's Baptism' to 'Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus': The Significance of Baptism in Luke-Acts," in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross; JSNTSup 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 159–60, 165.

⁵⁵³ Of literal drowning see Josephus, *J. W.* 3.525; of being overwhelmed, or drowned, by troubles or passions see Philo, *Spec.* 3.18; idem, *Det.* 176; idem, *Migr.* 204; idem, *Prov.* 67–68); of debt, Plutarch, *Galb.* 21.2; or of distress, Philo, *Det.* 176; "βαπτίζω," LSJ 305; "βαπτίζω," BDAG 164–65.

⁵⁵⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation* (ed. Maxwell E. Johnson; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), 52–53.

ritual purification was practiced in connection with initiations into the mystery cults, such as that of Lucius in *Metamorphoses* 11.23 and the young man initiated into the Bacchic rites in Livy, 39.9.4, as well as in other traditions.⁵⁵⁵

In the LXX tradition, the priest, the unclean, and others were commanded to bathe, or wash, in order to achieve ritual cleanliness before God, and such washing comes to be used metaphorically in the Psalms and the Prophets to refer to a cleansing of human hearts (λούω Isa 1:16; πλύνω Ps 50:9).⁵⁵⁶ Ezekiel 36:24–27 further speaks of a future cleansing (ῥαίνω) at a time when God would put his spirit within His people.⁵⁵⁷ By the time of Luke-Acts, various sorts of ritual cleansings in water had become increasingly widespread as suggested by such evidences as the prevalence of *miqvaot* in the archaeological record and, in literature, the bathings at Qumran (1QS 3.4), Josephus' mention of Bannus' day and night washings (*Vita* 11), the *Sibylline Oracles*' call to "wash your whole bodies in perennial rivers" in connection with repentance (4.165), and certain references to the washing of proselytes to Judaism (*m. Pesah* 8.8; *m. 'Ed.* 5.2).⁵⁵⁸ By the time of Luke such ritual washings were often described using the actual term βαπτίζω (cf. Sir 34:24, 29; Jdt 12:7, 8; Luke 11:38||Mark 7:4; Luke 16:24).

Acts does not begin by detailing the baptism of Christian believers, but rather by drawing audiences' minds back to the baptism of John, and to Jesus' own baptism. Acts

⁵⁵⁵ See also Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 4.3.1; George F. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 96, 224–85, fig. 70. Ritual cleansings are sometimes characterized as superstitious as in Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.522ff.; and Plutarch, *Superst.* 166a; See A. Oerke for other literature and also reliefs depicting ritual washings ("Βάπτω, Βαπτίζω," *TDNT* 1:530–32).

⁵⁵⁶ Λούω is the term generally used of this water washing, as in Lev 8:6; 16:4, 24, 26, 28; 14:8–9; 15:5–27; 17:15–16; 22:6.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. the LXX of Lev 14:51; Num 8:7; 19:13, 18–20; Ezek 36:25 for examples of ῥαίνω used of ritual cleansing by water.

⁵⁵⁸ On proselyte baptism, cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.9.19–21. As Adela Collins notes, it is difficult to separate ordinary ritual cleansings of proselytes from the use of immersion as the central rite in a proselyte initiation ceremony. The initiatory use of immersion is not suggested in Philo or Josephus or any other source of Luke-Acts time. Ritual ablutions as a whole, Collins states, were however "growing in importance in John's time" (Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," 41–47).

opens by grounding its account of the origins of early Christian belief and practice in “all that Jesus *began* (ἤρξατο) to do and teach” (1:1), a *beginning* that Luke 3:23 (ἀρχόμενος) has identified as occurring in conjunction with Jesus’ own baptism.⁵⁵⁹ Following this, Acts 1:2 speaks of the Holy Spirit by which Jesus gave instruction, a Spirit emphasized in Luke as coming upon him at his baptism (Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18). This subtle recalling of the baptisms of Luke 3:1–4:15 is made explicit in Acts 1:5 where the risen Jesus draws together the past water baptisms in Luke with a still-future baptism central to the book of Acts stating, “John baptized with water (Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι), but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit . . .”

John’s baptism as a time of transition and new beginnings within the narrative world of Jesus and the disciples is explicitly emphasized just a few verses later in 1:21–22 where Peter cites it as the definitive beginning point of Jesus’ public work, insisting that the new twelfth apostle must have been with them, “during the whole time Jesus went in and out among us, *beginning* from the baptism of John (ἀρχάμενος ἀπὸ τοῦ βαπτίσματος Ἰωάννου) . . .” As with Jesus, Luke avoids a direct statement that Peter and the apostles were baptized by John. However in the context of Luke 7:29–30, with its categorization of those who had rejected this baptism as rejecting God’s will for themselves, this emphasis on the apostles’ presence at John’s baptism suggests that they had indeed been so baptized.⁵⁶⁰ And Peter’s insistence that every apostle have been part of the group around Jesus from the time of this baptism foreshadows the importance of baptism in the community that would grow up around belief in Jesus in the book of Acts.

Peter’s later speech to Cornelius in Acts 10:34–43 extends the conception of John’s baptism as beginning point into a broader historical realm when he connects the

⁵⁵⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 195.

⁵⁶⁰ Though it is possible that this refers specifically to Jesus’ baptism *by* John, it seems to speak in a more general sense, especially in the light of the other references to John’s baptism as a beginning point (C. K. Barrett, *A Critical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles I* [ed. J. A. Emerton et al.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994], 101; Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 226).

wonderful works Cornelius knew of, “*beginning* (ἀρξάμενος) from Galilee after the baptism which John proclaimed,” with the availability of forgiveness through his name for everyone who believes (v. 43). Paul’s speech to a synagogue congregation in Pisidian Antioch in 13:16–41 further expands on the historically pivotal nature of John’s baptism, for there it is stated that the latest and greatest stage in God’s work for Israel, and ultimately for everyone who believes (vv. 38–39) came when God, according to promise, brought to Israel Jesus, descendant of David, as Savior, “after John proclaimed, before his entrance, a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel” (v. 24).

Starting in Acts 1, each of these three speeches tightly link John’s baptismal rite of passage to new beginnings, placing baptism historically as a point of separation and transition from what went before, not only for Jesus but for all who would follow after him. In this way Luke-Acts expands on the opening declaration of the Gospel of Mark in which the ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου is connected with John and his baptism fulfilling the ancient prophecy of Isaiah (40:3–5). Adding to the Lukan audiences’ familiarity with baptism in their own experience as the essential beginning of living the life of a Christ follower, and their observation of the importance given to this baptism in the gospel of Luke, these texts in Acts reiterate the place of baptism at the very origins of the gospel events, and also ground them in the words of the prophets (Luke 3:4–6; Acts 10:43; 13:23). In each case, the baptism of John is presented as a separation from what is old and a beginning, but only a beginning, of something brand new.

The Institution of Christian Baptism in Acts 2

It is only after the carefully staged recollections of John’s baptism in Acts 1 places the reception of the Holy Spirit by the apostles in the context of baptism that the purposeful practice of Christian baptism is introduced at the close of Peter’s first sermon under the influence of the newly bestowed Holy Spirit. As his hearers cry out in dismay at their former collective beliefs and actions regarding Jesus, Peter shows no hesitation as

to the proper course they should take, pointing them in 2:38 toward baptism, which he places in the context of repentance and the forgiveness of sins (μετανοήσατε, [φησίν,] καὶ βαπτισθήτω . . . εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν). While the lack of any directly declared continuity between John’s baptism and Christian baptism in Luke-Acts is notable, Luke-Acts presents no other source or origin for Christian baptism and this declaration is an unmistakable echo of Luke’s characterization of John’s ministry and baptism in Luke 3:3 (ἦλθεν . . . κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν), which also emphasized separation from one’s former life.⁵⁶¹ The separation already evident in Peter’s call to baptism is then augmented in a similar way as John’s call to “flee from the wrath to come” with Peter’s exhortation to “Be saved from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40; cf. Luke 3:7).

Peter did not advocate, however, simply a baptism of separation in a general preparation for the coming of the Lord, but also a specific incorporation in which dedication, or allegiance to the name of Jesus Christ, was indicated (βαπτισθήτω . . . ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Acts 2:38).⁵⁶² Those baptized were thereby also immediately “added” to the group of believers, according to 2:41, becoming a part of a community of teaching and *κοινωνία* characterized by the very ethics of sharing John had advocated and by prayer and praise to God (Acts 2:42–47; cf. 4:31–35; Luke 3:10–14).⁵⁶³ Some reincorporation into society, too, is suggested here in the believers’ daily presence in the temple and favor with the people, but is subordinated to the shared meals and property within the *κοινωνία* of believers. Here the *socialized body* emerging from the ritual can be seen to act in accordance with observation of Catherine Bell that the effect of ritual on

⁵⁶¹ This is in contrast to the origins of Christian baptism reviewed by Adela Collins in “The Origin of Christian Baptism,” 49–50.

⁵⁶² G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 100.

⁵⁶³ Adela Collins, “The Origin of Christian Baptism”; Green, “From ‘John’s Baptism,’” 164–65.

social groups often gives rise to dispositions that generate its own structured and structuring practices.⁵⁶⁴

This first mention of Christian baptism in Acts 2 also involved the promised reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit which had been promised by John in Luke 3:17 (“I baptize you with water; but . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”), echoed by Jesus in Acts 1:5 (“John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 11:16) and finally poured out upon the apostles and other believers beginning in Acts 2:1–11.⁵⁶⁵ Moving beyond the liminal aspects already present in this ritual through separation and transition in the act of a watery immersion, the association of a Spirit baptism adds the element of the supernatural, bringing power for witness (Luke 24:47–49; Acts 1:8) through bold speech (Acts 2:4; cf. 4:31) and wondrous signs (2:4; cf. 7:55).

Talbert and others have pointed out the parallels between the baptism experience of Acts 1–2 and that of Luke 3–4, which demonstrate through shared ritual the carrying on of the action and ministry of Jesus in the work of the church. For just as Jesus prayed at his baptism (Luke 3:21) the disciples pray as they await their baptism by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14, 24); just as the Spirit descends in physical form following Jesus’ prayer (Luke 3:22) the Spirit also descends with tongues of fire after the disciples’ prayer (Acts 2:1–13); and just as Jesus’ ministry following his baptism opened with a programmatic sermon concerned with the end-time fulfillment of prophecy and the rejection of Jesus (Luke 4:16–30) so also the ministry of the church opens with just such a sermon (Acts 2:14–40).⁵⁶⁶ In addition might be noted the forty days of liminal separation (Luke 4:1–2;

⁵⁶⁴ Catherine Bell, “The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power,” *JRitS* 4, no. 2 (1990): 301.

⁵⁶⁵ Robert L. Webb reads the repetition of the same quote from John in Acts 11:16 as implying that Jesus reference to the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:5 was not for the apostles alone (*John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* [JSNTSup 62; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991], 68).

⁵⁶⁶ Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (SBLMS 20; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974), 16; cf. Green, “From ‘John’s Baptism’,” 164–65.

Acts 1:3), the liminal engagement in both a water and spirit baptism, and the ongoing empowerment of the Spirit for witness and ministry. Adela Collins has pointed out, “reenactment of a foundational story and the identification of the participant with the protagonist of the story are strikingly reminiscent of what is known about the initiation rituals of certain mystery religions.”⁵⁶⁷ Luke however never speaks of the anointing of apostles or the church, reserving that term for Jesus alone.

Other Instances of Baptism in Acts

While it is outside the purview of this dissertation to consider the baptisms reported in Acts in any great depth, certain insights into the ritual aspects of Christian baptism in the rest of Acts are worthy of note. Although the details of the baptism ritual receive no systematic attention in Acts, and Acts does not go out of its way to directly mention the enactment of the baptism in every possible instance, this ritual *is* presented as the unquestioned physical means by which, coupled with the internal action of faith, new believers are to respond to the gospel (8:12–13; 36–38; 16:33–34; 18:8). This central importance of participating in Christian baptism is underlined in Acts 19:1–6 where some disciples, who had been baptized only into the baptism of repentance John proclaimed to Israel, are baptized a second time into the name of the Lord Jesus, and receive the Holy Spirit. Notably, rather than presenting a gradual *ritualization* through which baptism is shaped and developed, however, the baptisms of Acts 3–28 largely illustrate the basic paradigm presented in Luke and in Acts 1 and 2, adding only a detail here and variation there.

As with Acts 2:37–47, the primary catalyst for the *separation* integral to the baptismal rite in the rest of Acts is portrayed as the preaching of the gospel (8:12, 35; 10:36–48; 16:14–15, 32–33; 18:4–8), which can be recognized as a type of ritual instruction preceding the central liminal moment of baptism. Although Acts does not

⁵⁶⁷ Adela Collins, “The Origin of Christian Baptism,” 55.

again explicitly speak of the separation of repentance in direct connection with the baptism after Acts 2:38, it is an action regularly called for in the preaching (e.g., 3:19; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). Indeed, Acts' coupling of the subsequent response of belief in Jesus with the baptism which followed, either by declaration (8:12; 11:17; 16:31–33; 18:8; 19:4) or demonstration (2:37; 8:36; 16:14–15; 9:18; cf. 26:18), implies just such a separation from incompatible beliefs, values, and ways of the past. In fact, in Acts' final baptism episode, Ananias identifies the baptism itself as an act of separation, counseling Paul to "Rise up, be baptized, and wash away your sins" (22:16), thus explicitly connecting it to the natural and intimate biological process of washing—a natural type of connection which, as Bell notes, helps rites of passage and the worldview they represent to appear "nonarbitrary and grounded in reality."⁵⁶⁸

The changed behavior of the Philippian jailer who washed Paul's and Silas' wounds (16:33) even before his baptism, gives evidence of the actuality of this separation. But it also, like the actions of the newly baptized in Acts 2:41–47 and Lydia's offer of hospitality following her baptism (16:15), is typical of the *communitas* found in the *liminal*, or transitional, phase of a rite of passage. Thus separation flows into liminality in Acts' baptism episodes with no clear differentiation between the two. This is particularly apparent because Acts gives almost no attention to the administration of the baptism itself, only noting, in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip in 8:38, that they "went down into the water and he baptized him." In this resulting focus on the specific physical act of baptism, it is a simple physical act upon the body that completes the separation and transition begun by the act of hearing in the internalization of the new faith in Jesus.⁵⁶⁹ It has been argued that the believer's baptism "into the name of Jesus" in Acts (8:16; 10:48; 19:5) indicates a formula repeated at the baptism, but this is far from

⁵⁶⁸ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 135–36.

⁵⁶⁹ Bell, "The Ritual Body," 301, emphasis added; cf. Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5–6.

certain and likely is used in a more general sense to indicate the believer's new allegiance to Jesus.⁵⁷⁰

The already-promised baptism of the Holy Spirit, often explicitly depicted as being poured out in conjunction with the water-baptism, deepens the liminal distance from ordinary life with accompanying signs such as speaking in tongues and prophesying (19:6). Even the hope and the uncertainty of God's timing and means of this heaven-directed event may have increased this sense of liminality.⁵⁷¹ For the book of Acts evidences that the manner and timing in which the Holy Spirit is given is not under the control of human choice as is the water baptism, but may come with no fanfare as in the account of the new believers at Pentecost (2:38–41), or with sound of wind and tongues of fire (2:2–3). It may precede (10:44–48; 11:15–17), follow after an interval and a laying on of hands (8:14–17), or even occur without Christian baptism.⁵⁷² This latter is apparently the case with the apostles and the rest of the 120 who gathered with them in the upper room, and possibly also of Apollos, who showed up in Ephesus with only John's baptism but already witnessing and "boiling with the Spirit" (18:24–28).⁵⁷³ In fact Simon Magus's attempts to receive the Spirit by his own means and for his own purposes resulted in the most severe chastisement (8:13–24).

Almost completely ignored after Acts 2:41–47 is any *reincorporation* of the newly baptized believers into the larger society. Acts, in general, turns to a new scene and new characters immediately after each baptism scene except in the case of Paul, whose

⁵⁷⁰ Beasley-Murray, Fitzmyer, and Collins summarize the unresolved discussion on the exact meaning of this phrase (Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 100–02; Fitzmyer, *Luke I, 1–9*, 266, 400; and Adela Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," 50–51).

⁵⁷¹ That the baptism of the Holy Spirit was emphasized to be at God's discretion, and not poured out in a formulaic fashion is emphasized in Acts 8:16–17 and 10:44–48.

⁵⁷² Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 116–20; Green, "From 'John's Baptism'," 170.

⁵⁷³ According to Fitzmyer, who is ambivalent, this reading is preferred by Dibelius, Käsemann, Polhill, and Weiser. Loisy, Zahn, Bruce, and Marshall prefer "of fiery temperament" (Fitzmyer, *Gospel According to Luke*, 639).

more extensive baptism account will be considered below, and of Lydia, whose action of *communitas* models, rather, incorporation into the Christian community itself. The incorporation signaled to be most important by the baptism itself is the movement, in the rite of baptism, into a new state of being as a forgiven Jesus-follower. This movement is emphasized by the common use of the preposition εἰς in referring to baptism “into the name of Jesus” (8:16; 19:5). The *incorporation* within a community of like-minded believers, recalled in Lydia’s hospitality, receives little direct mention after its detailed portrayal in 2:41–47, but is frequently evident in the group behavior of Christian communities. Further the portrayal of individuals as not immersing themselves but being baptized by others, (and not necessarily the group leader 10:48), testifies to the community focus of Christian baptism (2:41; 16:15, 33; 19:5), and the ongoing presence of the Spirit, suggesting both a shared community experience and a continuing element of separation from society as a whole.

The further experiences of Paul and the other preachers of the gospel demonstrate that baptism, though it might ideally have ushered all of society across the threshold of repentance and reformation into a new life lived in Christian community in the name of the Lord Jesus, came to be placed in a marginal position in relation to society. For society in general continued on in its old pathways, and baptism represented a gateway available to all people into an alternative society which, though embattled and rejected, represented the true divine structure of God’s sovereignty.⁵⁷⁴

4.4.3 Saul’s Call and Commissioning in Acts 9

The most extensive description of events surrounding the baptism of a single individual in Acts is the experience of Saul recounted by the narrator in 9:1–20, an event

⁵⁷⁴ Green, “From ‘John’s Baptism’,” 172. Beverly Roberts Gaventa lists assumptions about conversion that might be generalized from this narrative as: its basis in divine initiative; its existence not as an end in itself but as assisting in the growth of the gospel; and the combined individual and corporate nature of the event (*From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* [ed. Walter Brueggemann and John R. Donahue; OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 92).

so important that it is twice recounted in later speeches of Paul (22:3–21 and 26:2–23). Acts 9, the fullest of the accounts, displays numerous characteristics of a rite of passage comparable both to other rites of passage in Luke-Acts and to those of *Metamorphoses* 11 and *Vita* 10–12. While the later speeches focus on Saul’s role change to witness to the Gentiles, this account, variously labeled elsewhere as Paul’s call, conversion, or commission, represents above all the reorientation, or transformation, of Paul’s state in life from *enemy* to *witness of the Lord Jesus*.⁵⁷⁵

The use of this concept of *transformation*, commonly used in ritual studies to describe changes effected by means of a rite of passage, is suggested by NT scholar Beverly Gaventa to represent in this account a radical shift in Saul’s perspective differentiated both from a *conversion* which is generally understood as involving a rejection of the past, and from an *alternation* defined as an experience that grows out of the past.⁵⁷⁶ In its breadth this description no doubt reflects many aspects of early Christian experience, particularly in the account of Acts 9, but its triple repetition and the unique aspects there portrayed mark this account as much more than a paradigmatic believer’s baptism. Indeed the ritual account of Acts 9 functions within the book as a whole to introduce the earthly protagonist of the last half of the book, much as Jesus’ baptism introduced the protagonist in the Gospel of Luke.⁵⁷⁷

The Ritual Field

The ritual field upon which Saul’s transformation is about to take place is portrayed spatially as the Syrian city of Damascus and its environs, where enough Jews

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 65. Charles W. Hedrick, unusually, sees Acts 9 as a miracle story, and the mention of Saul’s mission to the Gentiles as added later to harmonize with Acts 22 and 26 (“Paul’s Conversion/Call: A Comparative Analysis of the Three Reports in Acts,” *JBL* 100 [1981]: 415–32).

⁵⁷⁶ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 10–12; cf. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 422.

⁵⁷⁷ Saul alone, for example, encounters Jesus himself, experiences blindness, and is the subject of a prophecy.

reside to populate a number of synagogues and among them a number of followers of “The Way” (Acts 9:2). This ritual field is located temporally, not according to the reckoning of calendar or empire, but within the ongoing saga of the infant church in the face of persecution. In this saga, the three characters who play the leading roles approach the ritual with markedly opposing goals and relationships.

The characterization of Saul leading up to the events of 9:1–21 is exclusively focused on Saul’s growing antipathy to the followers of Jesus and their proclamation of him. Saul enters the narrative in Jerusalem as an accessory to Stephen’s stoning (7:58; 8:1), moves directly into active attacks on the church through aggressive house-to-house searches (8:3), and finally in chapter 9 initiates a pursuit of those belonging to “the Way” outside Jewish territory in order to extradite them back to Jerusalem.⁵⁷⁸ Saul is not represented as alone in his antagonism toward the church, but is a particularly zealous example of the already demonstrated wishes of many of the structural leaders of his society to stamp out this threat to their hegemony (4:5, 10, 15; 5:17, 21; 6:12).⁵⁷⁹

As the episode begins, the church, distinctly traumatized by persecution, has been almost wholly scattered across Judea and Samaria and even as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (8:1; cf. 11:19). At the same time these believers have shown their resilience and commitment by preaching the word wherever they went (8:4–5, cf. 11:19–20).⁵⁸⁰ These followers of “the Way” will be represented, in the ritual account itself, by the disciple Ananias, the only named earthly character in the narrative other than Saul, who personifies these characteristics of trauma and faithfulness.

The third character involved in the ritual account is the “Lord Jesus” whose ascension opens Acts (1:1–14). Jesus plays in the narrative as an exalted figure at God’s

⁵⁷⁸ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 54–57.

⁵⁷⁹ Dissenting voices also are portrayed in Acts 5:34, 39; 6:7.

⁵⁸⁰ Daniel Marguerat, “Saul’s Conversion (Acts 9, 22, 26) and the Multiplication of Narrative in Acts,” in *Luke’s Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (ed. C. M. Tuckett; JSNTSup 116; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 139; Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 67.

right hand (2:33; 5:31; 7:55–56) who is the active agent in pouring out the Holy Spirit (2:33). The primary goals that Acts has attributed to him, as the ritual account begins, are the spread of the gospel through the Holy Spirit (1:8) and, ultimately, the granting of “repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel” and indeed to all the nations (Acts 5:31; cf. Luke 24:47). In Jesus’ name and through the power of the Spirit great signs and wonders have been done which carry forward these goals (Acts 3:6; 4:29–30), although he has not appeared personally to them since his ascension.

The spatial location of the action in Acts has shifted with the passing of time from Jerusalem to Samaria and southwards to the Gaza road before turning north to the Syrian city of Damascus where Saul, Ananias, and the Lord Jesus, each motivated by their own conflicting goals, are now about to meet. Saul’s pursuit of Jesus’ followers to this location takes him far outside the center of structural power in Jerusalem, both spatially and temporally. Yet even here, in Gentile territory outside the borders of Judea or Galilee, power relations seem from an earthly perspective to be skewed in Saul’s favor. For he bears letters declaring his authority to act in the name of the highest authorities of the culture of which both Saul and the synagogues of Damascus are a part.

Saul’s Transformation to Christ Follower

In Saul’s position far from home and headquarters in Jerusalem, his separation is made evident from the beginning of the account. This sense of separation is deepened by the setting of the first scene outside the safety and regularity of human habitation as Saul is journeying and approaching Damascus (Acts 9:3). In this marginal position between two cities, Saul is halted by a liminal experience in which, in a brief moment, he is met with supernatural manifestations, paradox, and a reversal which place him on the threshold of an unexpected and divinely guided rite of passage. For in a narrative movement directed from heaven above, Saul finds himself suddenly separated from the

high position signified by the high priestly letters, and flat on the ground like a dead man in the presence of a heavenly light.⁵⁸¹

The voice he next hears does not immediately identify itself, but places Saul in suspense and even greater discomfiture with an interrogation challenging him with the world-shaking charge that his zealous persecution of the lowly Christians has actually and paradoxically been directed against a being of obviously heavenly status. Saul's reply is a stunned question, "Who are you Lord," and even after the speaker identifies himself as "Jesus whom you are persecuting," Saul is left in a state of uncertainty concerning his possibly perilous fate. For the only further information he receives from the voice is the nebulous command to rise (ἀνίστημι) and enter the city where, it is said, he would be told what he must do.

Thus in one liminal moment Saul is separated from his important status, from the task he had come for, and from his control over his own future and life. The use of the adversative ἀλλὰ to introduce the command also suggests the hope that better things were in store, as Beverly Gaventa has noted.⁵⁸² This hopeful note is augmented by the use of the term ἀνίστημι used commonly both in the Lord's commands to his faithful ones (Luke 17:19; 22:46; Acts 8:26; 9:11; 10:13, 20), and in reference to rising from the dead (Luke 9:19; 16:31; 18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 2:24; 10:41; 13:34; 17:3, 31). Peter will use it in 9:40 in exactly the same form (ἀνάστηθι), in calling on Tabitha to rise from the dead. Saul is left in a state in some ways similar to that of Lucius awaiting the command of Isis for his initiation (*Met.* 11.19, 21), but with Saul there is no assurance of mercy or sure indication of the initiation awaiting him.

⁵⁸¹ Marguerat, "Saul's Conversion," 141.

⁵⁸² Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 58.

As he enters the city Saul's humiliation and liminal status continue, placing him in this sense in the position of the crowds who heard the vituperous preaching of John in Luke 3:7–18. He is further ground down by his blind condition which places him in complete dependence on his fellow-travelers, who lead him by the hand. Contrasting with the blinding heavenly light he has just experienced, his blindness and inability to find his own way are reminiscent of Plutarch's description of mystery initiations as involving "wanderings," "frightening paths in darkness," "then some wonderful light."⁵⁸³ Plutarch, however, places these in the opposite order. Though Saul has risen, he now moves into a new kind of separation, in the city yet not of it, an alien in a city not his own, without sight and apparently alone in the darkness in a womb-like experience of liminal waiting.⁵⁸⁴ He abstains from eating and drinking entirely, going beyond the ritual action of Lucius who abstains from meat and wine (*Metam.* 11.22), and of Josephus who with Bannus eats only what grows of itself (*Vita* 11). Whether the three days he remains there allude to the three days of Jesus' time in the tomb, the number is often used of liminal waiting times in Luke-Acts, most interestingly of Jesus' three days in the temple in his transitional experience at the age of twelve, and of the time Stephen pictures the infant Moses spending in his father's home before emerging to his life as grandson of the Pharaoh and deliverer of Israel (Acts 7:20–21). In Josephus' *Vita*, three years was the time he reports spending with Bannus (*Vita* 12).

Saul's blindness continues during these three days not only in a physical sense, but metaphorically in his uncertainty of what lay ahead of him.⁵⁸⁵ Though unlike Lucius

⁵⁸³ Plutarch frg. 168 Sandbach = Stobaeus 4.52.49 cited from Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 91–92. Burkert says in n.11 p. 162,

⁵⁸⁴ Carol J. Schersten LaHurd points out Paul's status as an alien in Damascus ("The Author's Call to the Audience in the Acts of the Apostles" [Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1987], 198).

⁵⁸⁵ "Though physically blind, Saul's eyes are being opened spiritually." (Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 426). Hans Conzelmann notes that Saul's blinding is not to be viewed as a punishment, but an indication of the great persecutor's sudden helplessness (*Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* [Hermania; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987]).

in the *Metamorphoses* (11.21, 23) Saul does not receive the brilliant light and vision of the “gods” at this point, Ananias is told that Saul has seen a vision of him coming to lay his hands upon him for healing. This brings some assurance of hope for things to come, yet three days in blindness and prayer leave plenty of time and impetus for the liminal activity of examining, adjusting, and even exchanging some of the building blocks of his former culturally-shaped ways of thinking in dialogue with the true ritual director before the new revelation that Jesus is indeed risen and Lord.⁵⁸⁶ Further emphasizing the dramatic distance between this period and the normal routines of life, his setting aside of the natural bodily needs of eating and drinking shows similarity to the ritual experiences of both Lucius (*Metam.* 11.23, 28, 30) and Josephus (*Vita* 11), and also of Jesus in his wilderness temptations (Luke 4:1–2).

With Saul so thoroughly removed from any sense of control over the situation, the Lord who had spoken to him from heaven outside Damascus continues to shape and direct events toward a ritual conclusion. Selecting Ananias from among the growing community of disciples to do his bidding, Jesus enacts for him a ritual of commissioning which bears distinct similarities to LXX prophetic calls.⁵⁸⁷ Ananias at first expresses strong reluctance to carry out this apparently ill-conceived and suicidal mission, demonstrating in his temerity the widespread and overwhelming nature of the fear generated among the Christian community by Saul’s role in the persecution (Acts 9:13–14). But upon the revelation of the Lord’s divine plan for Saul’s life, Ananias is, nevertheless, moved to obedience. In Acts 9 this revelation of Saul’s future mission to bear the Lord’s name “before Gentiles and kings and also the people of Israel” carries

⁵⁸⁶ There is no evidence here of a “psychological conversion” in which Saul completely disposed of all of his former beliefs, or of a previous load of guilt. Cf. Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *HTR* 56 (1963): 199–215. While he disposed of the conception of Jesus as threat, and Christian as enemy, he also continued on as a devoted servant of the God of Israel.

⁵⁸⁷ Marguerat, “Saul’s Conversion”, 143 who cites Habel, “Form and Significance” and R. F. Collins, “Paul’s Damascus Experience: Reflections on the Lukan Account,” *LS* 11 (1986): 115-116; cf. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 62.

primarily this aim of convincing Ananias, as well as giving clues to the Lukan audience, for its communication to Saul is never mentioned. In his obedience Ananias is placed, despite his initial uncertainties, in the position of human ritual elder in a role similar to the priest for Lucius (*Metam.* 11.22–24) and Bannus, to some extent, for Josephus (*Vita* 1.11). Though Ananias’ emphasis on the harm done to “your saints” and the authority to bind all those who call on “your name” underlines his expectation that the Lord would want to position himself as far away as possible from this man, yet this heavenly character shows himself unwilling to accept such human-made boundaries.

The still-blind Saul remains in a totally emptied, betwixt-and-between state as Ananias—paradoxically one Saul had considered an enemy—approaches as the Lord’s emissary of liminal completion and reincorporation. Entering the house in obedience to the Lord’s command to “lay [his] hands on him, so that he might regain his sight” (Acts 9:12), Ananias enacts a deeply symbolic bodily action associated in Luke-Acts and ancient tradition with the movement of healing power (in 2 Kgs 5:11; Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 28:8), but also with the transferal of representation and authority (Num 8:10–12; 27:18, 23; Acts 6:6; 13:3) and of the Spirit (Acts 8:17, 19; 19:6; cf. Deut 34:9).

Upon arrival at Saul’s residence Ananias moves immediately into action, not announcing the purpose of his entrance until he places his hands upon him according to the Lord’s command (Acts 9:11–12, 17). At this point Saul’s spiritual vision clears further as Ananias proclaims the good news that what Saul faced from this Lord who had appeared to him on his (misguided) way was not retribution or punishment but sight and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Immediately upon this combined ritual action of hand and word Saul’s literal sight is also restored with the falling of the “scales” from his eyes which, like the dove in bodily form upon Jesus avers the physical divinely-caused reality of this ritual event.⁵⁸⁸ One acquainted with the story of Paul would expect that with the

⁵⁸⁸ Cf. Tob 11.13; Norman C. Habel, “Form and Significance,” 76.

solving of the riddle of his immediate fate, the riddle of his future destiny would also be addressed. But this question is left, for the purposes of this narrative, still a riddle, even though Ananias and also the audience already know of it. Rather than directly speaking of faith in Jesus, as often done in the baptism narratives, Saul's belief is next demonstrated through his actions.

For the first time since he was led into Damascus, Saul now acts of his own volition, with his rising (*ἀναστὰς*, 9:18) this time betokening a more full return to new life. The rite of baptism which immediately follows thus seems to confirm, or complete, a transition already nearly accomplished, following as it does the movement into Damascus, the entrance of Ananias, the speech and laying on of hands, and the regaining of Saul's sight and his subsequent rising up. As is the norm in Acts, this act of baptism is spoken of in the passive voice, allowing the enactment of the rite to be ascribed to the will of the Lord enacted through his community in general. The succinct nature of the statement allows the focus to remain on the symbolic meaning of cleansing and new beginnings which the audience already understood from past experience and previous indications in the text. The Spirit's arrival is promised by Ananias and attested by Saul's subsequent witness, acting out the very task for which Luke-Acts portrays it as being given (Luke 24:46–49; Acts 1:4–8). Like many of the other baptisms in Acts, however, the Spirit's coming is not specifically described. The symbolic end of Saul's liminal separation, like that of Lucius (*Metam.* 11.24), is represented in the taking of food, which renews his strength.

As Saul moves into the new world of the physically *and* spiritually sighted and partakes at Ananias' instruction in the embodied ritual act of baptism, Saul is already moving toward his *reincorporation* into the Christian community. His reincorporation is signaled as complete both by the notice of his presence amongst the Christian community of Damascus' disciples and by his immediate declaration in the synagogues of his new faith in Jesus. Acts emphasizes the transformation which has taken place in this series of

ritual events through the *topos* of the hearers' amazement (ἐξίσταντο, ἀκούοντες, ἔλεγον) stimulated by Saul's reversal as one who had so recently been Jesus' enemy and is now seen glorifying him. But Saul is not reincorporated into his former social context. Rather his former allies plot to do away with him, first in Damascus and then in Jerusalem, and he is forced repeatedly to flee (Acts 9:26–30). In fact his lack of full reincorporation into any earthly society is evidenced in his constant movement from this time forward, and his open association with anyone who crossed his path.

The Significance of Paul's Acts 9 Transformation in Acts

In its historical style and three-fold repetition, as Gaventa argues, the story of Paul's transformation in Acts is demonstrated to be "definitive or constitutive of Paul."⁵⁸⁹ This repeated emphasis on Paul's transformation in Luke-Acts not only gives evidence of its importance in the text, but also allows for a diverse and developing revelation of its meaning in the two defense speeches: in Acts 22 before angry Jews intent on stoning Paul, and in Acts 26 before the cosmopolitan Jewish king Agrippa.⁵⁹⁰ While a complete comparison of the three accounts is outside the purpose of this dissertation, the similarities and marked differences between these two speeches and the more objective historical style used in Acts 9 have an important contribution to make in clarifying the significance of the Acts 9 account.⁵⁹¹

While all three accounts speak of the commissioning of Paul to go to the Gentiles, the most obvious difference between them is in the attention devoted to communicating the details of Saul's call and commission. In Paul's Acts 22 defense speech before his angry countrymen, a devout Ananias explicitly announces to Paul, even before his

⁵⁸⁹ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 92.

⁵⁹⁰ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 68.

⁵⁹¹ As Marguerat points out, "repetition—at least in written communication—is never the return of the same" but "with its play of similarity and dissimilarity, allows one to signify *both* continuity *and* displacement, change *and* identity" as well as "optimum reception of a message" ("Saul's Conversion," 132–33, 137).

baptism, his mission as witness to all men of his vision of the risen Christ (22:14–15). A further climactic vision of the Lord, received while he prays in the Jerusalem temple (22:17–21), informs him that Jerusalem will not accept this message and that he is being sent instead to the Gentiles.⁵⁹² Similarly, in the briefer summary in the generalized defense speech before the more disengaged Agrippa (Acts 26), Paul receives from the Lord himself, as he lies on the ground outside Damascus, his call and commission to be a servant and witness to the Gentiles (26:16–18).⁵⁹³ (This last commission, in which Paul is said to be sent [ἀποστέλλω] by God to open the eyes of the blind with the goal of bringing freedom from the authority of Satan and forgiveness-release [ἄφεσις], is strongly reminiscent of Jesus' own appropriation of Isaiah 61:1 in Nazareth following his own baptism [Luke 4:18–19; Isa 61:1–2]).

In Acts 9, by contrast, Paul is never explicitly told of his mission; instead it is communicated to Ananias alone as part of the Lord's insistence that he should indeed carry out the command and lay his hands upon Paul. It is true that Acts 9 does certainly point toward Paul's future mission, both here and in the Lord's incompletely fulfilled promise in 9:6 that Paul would be told "what it is necessary for [him] to do." And he does indeed begin immediately after his baptism to proclaim Jesus. However Acts 9 reserves full focus on the commissioning of Paul to the later speeches, and instead gives particular attention here to the details of Paul's transformation from persecutor to witness through the characteristically liminal experiences that are portrayed.⁵⁹⁴ It is Acts 9 alone that stresses the humiliation and separation stretching through three days of darkness and fasting in a strange city; Acts 9 alone that promises the Holy Spirit; and Acts 9 alone that

⁵⁹² Gaventa argues that the temple scene is the climax of the Acts 22 account (*From Darkness to Light*, 75).

⁵⁹³ The characterization of the speech as a whole and of Agrippa's relation to it is Gaventa's (*From Darkness to Light*, 79).

⁵⁹⁴ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 65.

emphasizes his reincorporation into the Christian community which overrode the initial reluctance, both in Damascus (9:13–14, 19) and later in Jerusalem (9:26–28).

Thus while the content of the speeches of Acts 22 and 26, with their emphasis on the rite of passage as a commissioning for a new role, are appropriate to the defense Paul needed to make and to the growing understanding of Paul the text seeks to convey, Acts 9 sets the stage for all this with a richly detailed account of the ritual events that accompanied this change in roles. Leaving this role change incomplete contributes to the narrative suspense of Acts' plot, introducing Paul in Acts 9 and marking him with the miraculous portents and the supernaturally ordained rite of passage as someone to watch, then setting aside his story, before taking it up and making it central beginning with the local commissioning carried out by the community leaders in Antioch (13:1–3). Thus it anticipates dramatically the transition in the text itself to the main focus on the ministry of Paul. Ananias' own call and commission to bring the Lord's transformation to Paul stands in counterpoint to Paul's transformation, moving Ananias as a representative of the Christian community into willingness to make the natural concern for the safety and security of oneself and one's social group secondary to the command of the Lord to serve.

The various similarities with the initiation of Lucius and to some degree with Josephus' ritualized account, give demonstration of some of the patterns in which ritual transitions and transformations were seen to work in Greco-Roman society. For Lucius too is given a heavenly vision of the divine figure Isis, who appears while Lucius is still in his unchanged form as an ass, and who calls him to lifelong service (11.6). And Lucius too is transformed after a period of liminal waiting, water purification, and fasting, through which he passes with the ministrations of the priest whom Isis has chosen to be ritual director. The period of liminal set-apartness, and the purification and fasting, are shared by Josephus as well (*Vita* 11), as is the final spatial location in Rome with claims

to a role of some importance on the world stage (*Metam.* 11.26; Acts 28:14; *Vita* 422–423).

Much more important, however, for understanding the significance of this transformation in Luke-Acts are the congruences between it and the baptismal rite of passage which opened Jesus' ministry and to which it bears more likeness than to any other baptism in Acts. For as in Paul's rite of passage, there is in Luke 3:1–4:15:

- an emphasis on physical separation (Luke 3:3; Acts 9:3);
- a voice from heaven that announces his true status before God (Luke 3:22/Acts 9:4–5);
- the statement that they were led (ἤγετο ἐν Luke 4:1/εἰσήγαγον Acts 9:8) to an experience of further separation;
- a time of fasting (Luke 4:2/Acts 9:9); and
- a subsequent proclamation of Jesus in the synagogues (Luke 4:15–16/Acts 9:20) resulting in amazement followed by the threat of murder (Luke 4:22, 28–29/Acts 9:21, 23) presaging how the stories of both characters would end following their wandering ministries.

These ritual congruences are only partly explainable by reading Paul's baptism as a reflection of early Christian experience, and as in turn influencing Luke's depiction of the experiences of Jesus in the context of his baptism. Rather they point also to a deliberate paralleling of Paul with Jesus demonstrating how, as all three accounts emphasize, he becomes the model witness of the second generation taking up the task that Jesus had begun.⁵⁹⁵ These parallels, at the same time, are far from complete, for Acts seeks to deal with the tension of comparing servant and Lord by depicting in Jesus' experience, for example, no blindness or momentous transformation, a positive rather than a negative assessment from heaven, a longer and more extreme liminal period, and no incorporation into a community of those who had gone before.

Interestingly, a further similarity can be seen between Jesus and Paul in the fact that, as with the account of Jesus' baptism experience in Luke 3 (and also with the commissioning of the apostles in Luke 12), Paul's task is not explicitly communicated to him in this account of his commissioning but is communicated more fully as the narrative

⁵⁹⁵ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 132.

progresses (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38; Acts 22:14–15; 26:14–18). This triple occurrence, in Luke-Acts, of the designation of an individual or group for a role or task not at that time explicitly explained to them in the account, along with the bestowal of the authority and/or power necessary for its completion, suggests that such commissionings should be added to the analysis of commissioning forms in Luke-Acts recognized by Benjamin Hubbard and Terence Mullins.⁵⁹⁶

In the text of Acts then, the rite of passage emphasized in chapter 9 demonstrates Paul's essential and appropriate preparation for the task that lies ahead. This involves a demonstration of the Lord's power and willingness to accomplish this transformation from model persecutor to model witness and thus as Daniel Marguerat points out, "the power of the Risen One as a transforming force within history" on a much broader scale than just the life of Paul.⁵⁹⁷ Further, though his transformation moves him into an incorporation with the Christian community, Acts 9 does not emphasize this movement. Rather it emphasizes the transformation of inner state from one dedicated to opposing Jesus to one who seeks every opportunity to proclaim him. Building upon this demonstration of inner transformation, the role change emphasized in Acts 22 and 26 becomes more understandable for the Lukan audience.

Conclusions on Rite of Passage in Greco-Roman Literature

In the Greco-Roman world of Luke's day a wide variety of rites of passage were known and practiced which marked and often assisted in accomplishing the transition from one stage, role, or status in life to another. As markers of significant life transitions, such rituals implied not only a titular change designated from without but an accompanying internal change of purpose and allegiance as well as an external change in

⁵⁹⁶ T. Y. Mullins, "New Testament Commission Forms, Especially in Luke-Acts," *JBL* 95 (1976): 603–14; B. J. Hubbard, "Commissioning Stories in Luke-Acts: A Study of Their Antecedents, Form and Content," *Semeia* 8 (1977): 103–26.

⁵⁹⁷ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 155; cf. Ronald D. Witherup, "Functional Redundancy in the Acts of the Apostles: A Case Study," *JSNT* 48 (1992):79–80.

the styles and routines of one's life. Though many of these rites are generally so routinized that they do not often show up in the biographical literature, they were reported in cases where something out-of-the-ordinary happened, where it was necessary to demonstrate that proper procedure was followed, or where the transition is an out-of-the-ordinary one not expected of one in the state and station of the character involved.

Each of these reasons is evidenced in the three main narrative accounts of rite of passage examined in this chapter. For Lucius, the first initiation acted within the narrative world to accomplish his transition to initiate of Isis while the second and third accomplished also a role change making him a priest and director of her cult. In the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, the initiations form the climax of the work playing on the fascination of the audience with the secret mysteries, and demonstrating (whether seriously or tongue-in-cheek) how one might achieve the blessing of the divine. For Josephus, the ritualized passage accompanying his transition to public life within the narrative world demonstrated a change of status from child to adult and of role to that of citizen. The rite was important in the *Vita* as part of his resume demonstrating both his great intelligence and wisdom and also the model nature of his preparation for public life according to the standards of his day. Finally, for Saul, the rite of passage accomplishes first, a transformation to a new state in life, and later also a role change, while it functions in the text to introduce a transition to a new main character who carries into the second generation the witness to Jesus and God's kingdom begun by Jesus himself. In the final two chapters of this dissertation, the focal passage Luke 3:1–4:13 will now be considered in some detail in the context of these rituals, to discover the place of these baptismal rites of passage in the work of Luke-Acts and the insights that might be gained by considering these events from a ritual perspective.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RITUAL OF THE MANY: JOHN'S BAPTISM IN LUKE 3:1–21A

For Luke and his audience, like the rest of the Greco-Roman world of which they were a part, rites of passage were an inevitable part of life's progression, from rituals that accompanied birth to the funerary rites following a person's death. Rites of passage facilitated significant changes in role or status and marked the entrance into a voluntary association such as a philosophical or religious group. Though their very ubiquity caused them to be often assumed and ignored in the narrative literature of Luke's day, a rite of passage entered into the text when it involved a particularly significant event (as in Luke 1–2) or major turning point in an individual's life path (as with Lucius and Paul), and/or carried weight in itself that would advance the purposes of the text (as with Josephus).

It is within this context that Luke's account of the events near the Jordan at the beginning of Jesus' ministry can most profitably be interpreted, for the associated memories, values, knowledges/beliefs, and emotions would have been prominent among the tools by which the audience interpreted the text. And, like the other biographers and historians of his day who reported such rites, Luke had his reasons for including this account in the form in which he narrated it. It is these ritual associations and the purposes for which the text aroused them that are the concern of the next two chapters of this dissertation.

Within Luke 3:1–4:15 two primary rites of passage are enacted in a complex and interlocking arrangement: the ritual of John's baptism and the anointing of Jesus which itself grows out of a baptism ritual. Each of these is portrayed as a formalized process

accompanying the transition of an individual or group from one status or role in life to another. It is also clearly distinguished in its presentation from the pragmatic routines of everyday life, contains echoes of similar events in ancient tradition, includes the use of significant symbolism and, most importantly for Luke, the involvement of higher powers.

For the sake of manageability, each rite will be addressed in a chapter of its own. Moving chronologically, John's baptism—the ritual of the many—will be explored first, beginning with a consideration of the *ritual field* set up by Luke upon which the events of the ritual are about to be played out. The analysis will then proceed by considering each major movement, or action, in the text, before addressing in a preliminary way the place of this ritual in the narrative world of Luke and in purposes of the text. The anointing of Jesus—the ritual of the mighty one—will then be explored in a similar way. In this process an attempt will be made to keep in mind the rich breadth and primary contours of the text while at the same time focusing on the ways in which the text calls upon, or contravenes, ritual associations. To expedite the discussion of symbols, such as the wilderness, the baptism, and the dove, the Lukan audience's experience of each symbol will be considered at the point it is first introduced in the text. Later mentions of the same symbol will then not repeat this information but only explore the ways in which the text further shapes the audiences' understanding of the symbol in this specific context.

5.1 The Ritual Field: The Narrative Context of John's Baptism Ritual

The narrative world as sketched out in Luke's first two chapters and in the opening verses of chapter three provide a framework which shapes the audience's conception of the events of John's baptism which follows.⁵⁹⁸ Through brief evocations of a rapidly receding place, time and people, the text elicits and informs the audience's own emotions and understandings as it uniquely portrays the auspicious events and prophecies surrounding, first, the miraculous conceptions and, then, the portentous births of two

⁵⁹⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 49.

boys, one heralded as forerunner and prophet, the other as God's son and anointed one.⁵⁹⁹ Arranged in two sets of parallels, these accounts demonstrate the meticulous providence of God and, in their asymmetrical arrangement, emphasize the priority of Jesus over John.⁶⁰⁰ In Luke 3:1–3 the text then moves on to provide the introductory details necessary to shape the audience's understanding of the third and final parallel between the two as, now grown to manhood, they are commissioned and turn to their tasks, with John completing his work and fading from the scene while Jesus' ministry is only beginning.

More than any other gospel, Luke shows a particular interest in locating the events of the baptisms in the wider contexts of a particular place, time, and social structure. This is evidenced, for example by the triple use of dating formulas, or synchronisms, which inform the audience of the particular time, place, and/or political realm in which these events of the narrative should be understood to take place.⁶⁰¹ It is within this helpful framework that the various aspects of what Turner call the *ritual field* can be seen to come into focus for the audience. Comprised of the spatial and temporal planes upon which the ritual is about to be played out, along with the dynamic concerns and interrelationships observable among the characters as the ritual action begins, the ritual field differs with every enactment of a ritual. The analysis of this ritual field, though it must be recognized as increasing the distance and static appearance of Luke's own literary "flattening," is important for it has the value of bringing more clearly into view the particular factors that will influence the subsequent playing out of the specific

⁵⁹⁹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; rev.ed.; Reading the New Testament; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 15–17; cf. idem, "Prophecies of Future Greatness: The Contribution of Greco-Roman Biographies to an Understanding of Luke 1,5–4,15," in *The Divine Helmsman* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel; New York: Ktav, 1980).

⁶⁰⁰ Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (JSNTSup 62; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991).

⁶⁰¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1,1–9* (AB 28; New York: Doubleday, 1981), 164.

interlocked rites to be examined here. Such markers of space, time, and social relations in Luke 1:5–3:6 will now be examined briefly, in conjunction with what can be known of the shared assumptions of author and audience, in order to display the dimensions of the narrative world at the commencement of the events of Luke 3:1–21a. Only thus can the intentions and implications of the movements of the passage be properly understood.

5.1.1 Spatial Dimensions of the Ritual Field

That the Gospel of Luke uses geography to structure the story and to accomplish its goals is broadly acknowledged.⁶⁰² The relation of place to social relations, and thus to narrative text, is underlined by Kevin Hetherington who points out that understandings of space both shape and, in turn, are shaped by social and power relations, and that these understandings may be multiple and contested.⁶⁰³ As the Gospel of Luke opens, this relationship is immediately in evidence, as Luke identifies the king together with the realm in which the events of the narrative take place. Most of Luke's audience would have known Judea from the stories they had heard of Jesus, from the LXX, and from imperial propaganda about its rebellion and subjection. Jewish Christians may have visited Jerusalem in the past to attend a feast. The narrative of chapters 1 and 2, which should be assumed to have expanded their knowledge significantly, treats in markedly different ways the socio-political, unsocialized, and transcendent spaces which form a backdrop to the ritual action of 3:1–22.

Socio-Political Space

In the “birth narratives” of chapters 1 and 2, Luke plays on the two main politically-defined regions of the Gospel as the spotlight swings three times from the

⁶⁰² Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (SP 3; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 114.

⁶⁰³ Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 20.

province of Judea *down* to Galilee and back *up* to Judea, lighting on three specific “cities:” Nazareth in Galilee, and in Judea, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Luke immediately recognizes and makes use of space to evoke power and authority as he opens the narrative with Zachariah in the holy place of the Jerusalem temple, the sacred center of Judaism, and also of Luke’s gospel which both begins and ends there.⁶⁰⁴ Each of the three cities named is intimately connected with the story of Jesus, who is portrayed, in Luke alone, as journeying twice to Jerusalem during this time—once after his birth in Bethlehem when he is presented to the Lord in the temple, and again when he is taken to the feast of the Passover at twelve and claims his place in his Father’s house. Jesus’ location in these first two chapters is, in fact, consistently the constructed space of Nazareth home and Jerusalem temple. This socialized space is also naturally the place of the structural leaders and of the crowds who would come at John’s call.

Unsocialized Space

While the social-political spaces of the text are present only in the background of the events at the baptisms, it is the *unsocialized space* that is the stage upon which these ritual events are about to be played out. In contrast to the socio-political space in which Jesus’ story originates, the spatial placement of John is within this realm of unsocialized space, where referents to topography and physical landscape replace those to human borders and habitations.⁶⁰⁵ For, after placing John’s birth in the hill country of Judah in an unnamed city (1:39), the rest of his youth is said to be spent in the wilderness (ἔρημος) where he remains until the day of his presentation (ἀνάδειξις) to Israel (1:80; cf. 3:2–

⁶⁰⁴ Luke 1:5; 9:51–19:41, 45; 24:53; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 15; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 165, 168, 314.

⁶⁰⁵ Contra Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness: The Wilderness in the Second Gospel and Its Basis in the Biblical Tradition* (London: SCM, 1963), 147.

3).⁶⁰⁶ The Jordan region too, where most of the events of the rituals then take place, may be recognized as almost completely within the realm of unsocialized space.

Although the substantival adjective ἔρημος, and the related noun ἐρημία, refer to a non-socialized space, uncultivated, desolate, and uninhabited, this does not mean that the idea of wilderness was empty of cultural meaning in the circles of Luke and his audience.⁶⁰⁷ Rather, wilderness is an important instrumental symbol in the rituals of Luke 3:1–4:15, eliciting a rich and complex set of evocations. The ἔρημος existed physically on the margins of human experience and held in its depths the threats of chaos and the unknown as well as of the more nameable terrors of hunger, thirst, and fearsome beasts.⁶⁰⁸ At times it functioned as a place of refuge in extremity, yet this role too often served to increase its fearsomeness with the presence of bandits and other threatening fugitives from society's laws.⁶⁰⁹ In both Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts the wilderness stands on the threshold of transcendent space, for capricious gods and other nonhuman entities were suspected to lurk there exacting their punishments and exerting their whims upon any who crossed the boundaries from the social spaces.⁶¹⁰ Some isolated marginal individuals, such as the Greek Atalanta, who lived in the unwomanly mode of virgin hunter always under arms, or the Jewish Bannus, with his tree clothing

⁶⁰⁶ Although the wilderness plays a part in Luke's careful differentiation between John and Jesus, it does not constitute the total separation between their respective spheres that Conzelmann suggested, for Jesus later is led by the Spirit in the wilderness (4:1) and travels through it in the course of his ministry to Jericho, etc (Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 170).

⁶⁰⁷ “Ἐρημος,” LSJ 686–87; C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (ed. Howard Clark Kee and Dennis Nineham; 1st ed; Trinity Press International New Testament Commentaries; London: SCM Press, 1990), 234.

⁶⁰⁸ Strabo, *Geogr.* 7.3.14; 11.7.2; 11.11.8; Num 16:12–13; 20:1–4; Deut 8:15; Job 1:19; 1 Sam 25:14–16; Isa 21:1; Jer 2:6–7; Ezek 19:13; 29:5; 34:25; Hos 2:3; Heb 11:38.

⁶⁰⁹ Judg 20:42–47; 1 Sam 23:14–15; 2Sa 15:23; 1 Kgs 17:4–5; 19:3–8; 1 Chr 12:8; Ps 55:7; 1 Macc 2:29–38; Rev 12:6, 14; Apuleius, *Metam.* 4.6; Robert W. Funk, “The Wilderness,” *JBL* 78 (1959): 211.

⁶¹⁰ Isa 13:21 (LXX); 34:13–14 (LXX); Tob 8:3; Luke 8:29; Rev 17:3. The god Prometheus was taken there to be punished for sharing fire with humans (Aeschylus, *Prom.* 2.20), and Louis Gray notes the wilderness location of the unconventional Pan with his compatriots, the satyrs and Sienoi, Maenads and Bacchantes, who contrived special perils for any who entered his domains (Louis Herbert Gray, *The Mythology of All Races* [13 vols.; New York: Cooper Square, 1964], 267–69).

and constant bathing, chose the ἔρημος as a suitable home where they were able to live in ways opposite to or at the extremes of human cultural dictates.⁶¹¹

At the same time the ἔρημος was also felt to be a space with the power to evoke positive change, or transformation. Philosophers from Plato and Pythagoras onward turned to the solitudes as the place most suitable to seek understanding and to achieve inward preparation for daily life.⁶¹² Babrius, at the end of the 2nd century C.E., tells a fable of Truth abandoning the cities and dwelling in the wilderness (ἐρήμια) as falsehood spread among humankind.⁶¹³ Philo, voicing similar sentiments, held up as an example the Therapeutae who sold all they had and lived a contemplative life in the wilderness meditating on God and nature.⁶¹⁴ More importantly in *De Gigantibus* 54–55, he speaks of Moses who, by pitching his tent outside the camp and thus establishing his mind unwavering, becomes an initiate and even a hierophant of the most sacred mysteries. It was in the wilderness, too, that angels and even God himself, according to the LXX, often brought messages that shaped the course of human actions (Gen 16:7; 20:14–17; Exod 3:1–2; 19–20; 1Kgs 19:4–8; Ps 29:8; Acts 7:30, 38). In a rite of passage recorded in Greek mythology Gaea, the earth goddess, after feeding Zeus in a cave on nectar and ambrosia, sends him forth into the wilderness to turn savage and then grow into a man, a transformational passage imitated by a number of Greek cults.⁶¹⁵ Luke itself notes that Jesus “was often withdrawing to the desert and praying” (Luke 5:17).

⁶¹¹ Josephus, *Vita* 1.11; Apollodorus *Library* 3.9.2.

⁶¹² Plato, *Hipp. maj.*, 295a; Pythagoras at least in the tradition recorded by Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* 96–100; Derwas E. Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1966), 4.

⁶¹³ Babrius, “Fable 126,” in *Babrius and Phaedrus* (ed. and trans. B. E. Perry; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

⁶¹⁴ Philo, *Abr.* 85–87; idem, *Decal.* 1.2–18; idem, *Contempl.* 18–25; cf. *Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 1–5; Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 54–55.

⁶¹⁵ Hans Peter Duerr, *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization* (trans. Felicitas Goodman; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 21, 186 n. 32.

But in no tradition of Luke's day did the ἔρημος find a more central role than in the wilderness sojourn of the Israelites on their way to the promised land. So central to the Jewish faith was God's deliverance in and through this wilderness experience, that Ulrich Mauser could suggest (with some overstatement) that the very mention of the word "wilderness" in Scripture was most often intended to conjure up images of this seminal event rather than of any particular geographic location.⁶¹⁶ In the memories recorded in the LXX of this wilderness experience, and specifically recalled by Luke in Acts 7:30–44; 13:17–18, two conflicting aspects predominate: Israel's constant rebellion resulting in divine judgments, and God's faithful graciousness in nevertheless providing repeated and full deliverance from its terrors.⁶¹⁷ A number of prophetic texts in the LXX, particularly in Deutero-Isaiah, also look forward to a future deliverance in the wilderness by echoing motifs from the original exodus.⁶¹⁸ These prophecies are most immediately fulfilled in the return of the exiles from Babylon, but in the first century the connection of numerous prophets and Messianic figures to the wilderness in both the New Testament and Josephus attest to a continued expectation of a deliverance that would arise there for God's people.⁶¹⁹ This is particularly evident in the writings of the Qumran sect, who saw themselves as the exiled of the desert who would prepare a way for the Lord in the

⁶¹⁶ Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 14–16.

⁶¹⁷ On danger, rebellion and judgment, see Pss 78:10–41; 95:8–11; 106:9–33; Ezek 20:10–22; Amos 5:25–26; 1 Cor 10:1–13; Heb 3:7–4:13; Acts 7:39–43; on God's deliverance, see Deut 1:31; 2:7; 8:15; 29:5; 32:10; Neh 9:9–21; Pss 78; 107; 136:16; Hos 13:5; Acts 13:16–42. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 20–21, 32, 36; Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (ed. A. Altman; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966); Michael V. Fox, "Jeremiah 2:2 and the 'Desert Ideal'," *CBQ* 35 (1973): 441–51; Robert L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies* (AAR Studies in Religion 23; Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1981), 20; Michael DeRoche, "Jeremiah 2:2–3 and Israel's Love for God during the Wilderness Wanderings," *CBQ* 45 (1983): 364–65.

⁶¹⁸ Isa 40:1–6; 43:19–20; 48:20–21 (LXX); 55:11–13; Ezek 20:34–38; Hos 2:14–16; cf. Isa 32:15–16; 35:1, 6; 41:18–19; 50:2; 51:3; Jer 31.

⁶¹⁹ Josephus, *J. W.* 2.258–260 || *Ant.* 20:167–8, 188; idem, *J. W.* 2.261–263; idem, *Ant.* 20.169–172; Acts 21:38; Matt 24:24–26; Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 336.

wilderness (cf. Isa. 40:3–5), and would then usher in salvation by defeating the sons of darkness in apocalyptic conflict.⁶²⁰

Thus the idea of wilderness had the power on one hand to arouse fear, horror, and anxiety while on the other it was associated with positive values of truth and right thinking and was thought to represent the ideal environment to reorder one's thinking and to commune with God. Such powerful ambivalences are often noted by ritual theorists as characteristic of ritual symbols. Along with the wilderness's place outside the margins of everyday human life, the conflicting ideas and emotions thus aroused made it a particularly potent location for rite of passage, with the power to produce change and action in the ritual participant and even the observer. For participants, immersion in wilderness space provided, as well, a variety of other *liminal* experiences and symbolisms that held further potential to subvert and reorder the normal ideas and expectations of culture and society, making room for the changes necessary to prepare them for their new state or role.⁶²¹ Indeed, a number of modern scholars, beginning with Shemaryahu Talmon and including Edmund Leach, have pointed out that Israel's wilderness passage accounts in Scripture structure the event as a divinely conducted rite of passage, complete with a separation from their old life, *liminal* ordeals and instruction in the wilderness, and *reincorporation* into a new status as a nation in possession of a land.⁶²²

⁶²⁰ 1QS 8.12–16; 9.17–20; 1QM 1.1–5.

⁶²¹ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "Recipes for Greek Adolescence," in *Myth, Religion, and Society* (ed. R. L. Gordon; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 172; Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space*, 14; James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert* (SAC; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999), 26; Edmund R. Leach, "Anthropological Approaches to the Study of the Bible During the Twentieth Century," in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book: SBL Centennial Addresses 1980* (ed. Gene M. Tucker and Douglas A. Knight; Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1982), 16; Edmund R. Leach and D. Alan Aycock, *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 37; Paula McNutt, "The Kenites, the Midianites, and the Rechabites as Marginal Mediators in Ancient Israelite Tradition." *Semeia* 67 (1994): 125.

⁶²² Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif,'" 50; Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space*; Edmund R. Leach, "Fishing for Men on the Edge of the Wilderness," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1987). Later scholars have disputed exact point of time at which the separation and/or reincorporation began (McNutt, "The Kenites," 122–25; William H. Propp, *Exodus 1,1–18*. [AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999], 35; Susan Ackerman, "Why is

Even as the scene of the ritual moves to the Jordan region, Luke indicates, by referring to John as the φωστής . . . ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ of Isa 61 (Luke 3:4), that his baptism is to be understood as continuing within the liminal evocation of the wilderness realm. This indication is also reinforced later in 7:24 where Jesus asks the crowds, “What did you go out into the *wilderness* (ἐρημον) to see?”⁶²³ In the experience of Luke’s audience, river regions such as the Tiber, the Nile, or the Orontes, were made up of uninhabited and often uninhabitable wilderness spaces interspersed to a greater or lesser degree by the socialized space of towns and villages with a marginal border area of fields and roads. The Jordan region, with its banks covered by untamable brush and its surrounding uncultivable regions, was particularly desolate, as witnesses to the region like Josephus, would attest.⁶²⁴

This primary location of the ritual actions of 3:3–22 was likely also near the marginal space of roads and fords where people could gather. The marginal nature of this ritual space is emphasized in the Jordan’s socio-political role as a political borderline between Israel/Judah and neighboring nations through much of its history (Num 34:2, 12; Ezek 47:18), a role which is particularly underlined, in an ancestral sense, by the place of

Miriam also among the Prophets? [And is Zipporah among the Priests?]” *JBL* 12, no. 1 [2002]: 67–69, 76–78; Ronald S. Hendel, “Sacrifice as a Cultural System: The Ritual Symbolism of Exodus 24,3–8.” *ZAW* 101 [1989]: 376–77). This illustrates Ronald L. Grimes’ contention that it is artificial to expect rituals to always fall neatly into these three clear-cut stages (*Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000], 107; cf. Pertti J Anttonen, “The Rites of Passage Revisited: A New Look at Van Gennep’s Theory of the Ritual Process and Its Application in the Study of Finnish-Karelian Wedding Rituals,” in *Temenos: Studies in Comparative Religion* [Helsinki: Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion, 1992], 33–41).

⁶²³ The wilderness is also the explicitly stated location of John’s preaching in both Mark (1:4) and Matthew (3:1). Funk sees it as established that the regions around the Dead Sea and the Jordan River valley were traditionally described as ‘the wilderness’ (“The Wilderness,” 209–10). Other commentators are divided on the subject: Fitzmyer and Marshall seeing John as continuing to be in the wilderness while Bovon and others understand him to have left the wilderness (Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 459, 513; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978], 135; François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* [ed. Helmut Koester; trans. Christine M. Thomas; Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], 121).

⁶²⁴ In the words of Josephus, the Jordan after it passes through the Lake Gennesaret; “runs a long way over a desert (ἐρημίαν)” before making its exit into the Dead Sea (*J.W.* 3.515); Menashe Har-El, “The Pride of the Jordan: The Jungle of the Jordan,” *BA* 41 (1978): 65–75; cf. Nelson Glueck, *The River Jordan* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968). Only one major city, Jericho, is located remotely near the Jordan.

the Jordan in Israel's passage from Egypt, where it stood as the threshold between the wilderness and the Promised Land. As Pierre Vidal-Naquet states, "For [a] ritual to operate at the level of conceptions of space, it must itself be broken up: 'human' space in which social life is lived, against 'marginal' space, which may be a symbolic sacred area, 'the bush' whether literal or figurative, forest or mountain—it hardly matters, provided it be perceived as *other*."⁶²⁵

Transcendent Space

A third realm that must be considered to carry a spatial aspect in Luke is transcendent space as is evident in 2:13–15 when the angels of the heavenly host, after serenading the shepherds in the marginal space of the fields, are said to have "departed from them into heaven." The visits of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias and Mary in the socialized spaces of temple and home (1:9, 11, 28) represent a crossing, this time from transcendent into social space, though the temple, where Jesus' parents are said to come specifically "to present him to the Lord" (2:22) is presented as intersecting to an important degree with the heavenly realm. The Holy Spirit, however, appears to move freely without spatial limits for he is said to be present with John in the wilderness (1:15, 80) and with Simeon in the sacred space of the temple (2:25, 27), and to come to Elizabeth and to Zachariah in their home (1:41, 67). According to the portrayal of Luke, then, it is from this supernatural realm that the opening events of the narrative are initiated, from the miraculous announcement of John's and Jesus' birth (1:13, 35) to the welcome given Jesus by shepherds and, likely, city dwellers (2:27, 36–38), and as ritual events begin, to the coming of the $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ upon John in the wilderness (3:3).

In 3:1–2, as the narrative moves toward the opening of the ritual, each of the three spatial planes discussed above come together to form a vast backdrop for the rites of

⁶²⁵ Vidal-Naquet, "Recipes for Greek Adolescence," 172.

passage to come. For in the third and most formal and elaborate of the three synchronisms in the opening section of Luke, opens with an evocation of the vast Roman Empire in the mention of its emperor Tiberius, and accompanies its listing of current rulers with politically-defined designators of place highlighting areas of particular Jewish influence. In the same breath it then alludes to the confluence of socio-political and heavenly realms represented by the Jewish high priesthood before finally narrowing to the lone figure of John, still in the wilderness and just taking center stage near the Jordan where multitudes are coming out to be baptized by him.⁶²⁶

5.1.2 Temporal Dimensions of the Narrative Context

The temporal dimensions of Luke may be considered from three dimensions, identifying: the specific points and spans of *time* reported in the narrative; the characteristics of the *times* reported in the narrative, and the pace and movements of *narrative time*.

The Point in Time

The dating of John's preaching to "the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar" and to the reigns of other political and religious leaders (3:1–2), is the most exact date given in either Luke-Acts or the New Testament and places the subsequent narrative precisely in the flow, not only of Palestinian but also, of Roman history. Together with the opening date, "In the days of Herod . . ." (1:5) and the reference to the census of Caesar Augustus and Quirinius (2:1–5) it reinforces the explicit claim that the deeds recorded in Luke-Acts were actually "fulfilled among us" (1:1), not in some misty heroic past or in the abstract

⁶²⁶ Neither Ituraea nor Trachonitis nor Abilene is mentioned again in the text of Luke or Acts. The reason for the inclusion of these is uncertain, but they seem to be representative of the furthest reaches of "Jewish" governance under Herod Agrippa I (41–44 C.E.) and II, which would have been in the recent past for the audience although not yet fully a reality at the time the events of the narrative took place (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.214–15; *Ant.* 19.274–75). It is also possible that the four divisions may be used in order to complete the logical idea of the four-part tetrarchy, although the term no longer necessarily referred in Luke's time to the fourth part of a realm. Bovon argues that the exclusion from the list of Perea, Samaria, and Gaulanitis, which are part of the setting of the Lukan narrative, suggests that the list is only representative, with the focal point being the rulers who represent that time (*Luke 1*, 119–20).

realm of metaphor and allegory.⁶²⁷ At the same time, the mention of Caesar Augustus evokes the times of the foundation of the empire, which ushered in a time of relative peace much appreciated by many.

The commitment to historical specificity evidenced in the dating formulas is also manifest in the careful attention given here to precise times and periods including days (1:23, 59; 2:21–22, 43, 46), months (1:24, 26, 36), and years (2:42), thus placing the early and often amazing accounts of Jesus and John within the form of an historical narrative such as might be used to report any everyday series of events. This specificity will be seen to stand in contrast to the treatment of time in 3:2b–4:15 where time—like the boundaries and location of wilderness—is undefined and fuzzy. Such a movement outside the normal flow of time is typical of the sacred time of vision and ritual, placing the associated events on a cosmic scale with a meaning above and beyond the mundane associations of everyday events.

The Characteristics of the Times

By the time the audience had read the opening verses of Luke 3, they would have gained from the text a growing understanding of how they were to view the *times* as they existed in the narrative world when John sprang into action to proclaim a baptism. While some understanding of these times could be assumed of the audience, either from their own experience from afar or from the reports of elders or historians who were able to give more localized accounts, the Lukan texts also acts to shape the understanding of the audience in a number of important areas.

1. *Times of Fulfillment.* The primary message of the opening chapters of Luke is that the long-awaited time has at last come for the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, weaving the great prophecies of promise and fulfillment layer upon layer into the action

⁶²⁷ Modern questions regarding the accuracy of the description and dating of the were not apparently a problem for the original author and audience (cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 392–93, 399–405).

and the dialogue of the birth narratives.⁶²⁸ This time of fulfillment is shown to have been eagerly expected through the testimony of Zachariah, Simeon, and Anna, particularly in Anna's proclamation of Jesus' birth "to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38). The Savior Messiah, Luke 1–2 announces, is here!

2. *Times of Piety and Disobedience.* The explicit story world of Luke is drawn close around the religious sphere particularly highlighting, in the opening chapters, a strand of piety displayed in each of the main characters.⁶²⁹ These, though low in status, receive astonishing revelations from God and react with such an amazement and praise as might legitimately be expected to overflow to the audience itself.⁶³⁰ At the same time hints can be found in the prophetic pronouncements suggesting longstanding conditions of disobedience, as in Gabriel's promise that John would, "turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God" (1:16–17; cf. 1:77–79; 2:34–35) alluding to one of the great meta-narratives of Jewish Scripture—the deliverance and repeated rebellion of God's people which climaxes in the great time of God's intervention.

3. *Times of Oppression.* Though economic and political conditions receive little explicit attention in the Lukan text, certain hints give a clue to conditions. A negative attitude toward the general experience of Jewish subjugation is expressed in pious Zacharias' rejoicing at the coming of "salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us" (1:71); and more famously in Mary's song which generically celebrates God's bringing down rulers from their thrones and sending the rich away empty-handed while giving help to Israel, his servant (1:51–54). A more subtle possible critique may be found in the contrast between Augustus, the acclaimed savior of the world, who

⁶²⁸ See, e.g., Luke 1:32–33 in fulfillment of 2 Sam 7:13, 16 and Dan 7:13–14; Luke 1:72 alluding to Lev 26:42, Ps 106:45; Luke 2:25–26 alluding to Isa 40:1; 49:13.

⁶²⁹ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 32.

⁶³⁰ Fitzmyer calls them "the real Israel" placed in stark contrast to the elders, chief priests, and scribes depicted later in the book (*Luke 1, 1–9*, 188).

inadvertently plays a part in the advent of the world's true savior through his decree of a census.⁶³¹ Yet in the context of the revolts after the death of Herod, the early protests against renewed Roman taxation and the institution of an “unholy” census, and, closer to Luke's time, the accelerated unrest culminating in the great rebellion of 66–70 C.E., Luke's portrayal of the period is remarkably peaceful.⁶³²

Narrative Time

After leaping rapidly from the one hundred eighteen verses devoted to events surrounding the births of John and Jesus, across their childhood with only three verses of summary (1:80; 2:40, 52) and the eleven verse account of the boy Jesus' Passover precociousness telling of events therein, narrative time—that is, the amount of time devoted by the narrator to various events within the narrative—again slows abruptly as chapter 3 begins, suggesting the importance of the actions about to be narrated. The synchronism of 3:1–2 also marks a distinct shift in narrative time, for in literature either known to or contemporaneous with Luke, such synchronisms not only provide a means of indicating dating, but also act as structural markers. As such they are used to open books and to introduce a main section of the narrative both in Jewish prophetic books and in a number of Greco-Roman historical works.⁶³³ Such pronounced attention to this single point in the Lukan narrative suggests its importance in the structure of the Gospel as marking the beginning of a main section of narrative and suggests the likelihood that it also marks a more theological transition point such as Conzelmann's point of transition

⁶³¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 175–76, 393–94.

⁶³² J. Massyngberde Ford, *My Enemy is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984), 67–68; Green, *The Gospel*, 163–64.

⁶³³ Dan 7:1; Ezek 24:1; Hag 2:10; Zech 1:7; 7:1. Thucydides 2.2; Polybius 1.3; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 9.61.

into a new age of salvation history.⁶³⁴ This possibility is strengthened by the recognition that the Gospel of Luke often marks an important beginning in the narrative by means of a ritual account such as the upcoming baptism of John which is about to be narrated (cf. 4.4.1 above).

5.1.3 Social Dimensions of the Narrative Context

For each of the individuals and groupings that are given explicit roles in the narrative of John's baptism ritual in 3:1–21a, an analysis of Luke's presentations is given below, with particular attention to what is said or assumed of their (1) values, (2) immediate purposes and concerns, and (3) roles and interrelationships at the point the ritual account begins. To follow the lead of the text of Luke as closely as possible, these characters and groups will be considered in the order introduced in Luke.

The Structures of Dominance and Their Representatives

Both the narrative of Luke, as a whole, and the introduction to the baptism sequence, specifically, begin with a reference to representatives of the dominant governing structure of the era—the Roman Empire. Indeed, most of the main structures and their representatives are highlighted, as Joel Green notes, in the synchronism of 3:1–2, peopling the backdrop with the names of a Roman emperor, a governor, an assembly of tetrarchs mostly Herodian, and a pair of high priests. The recitation of these names and titles lead the audience to enter into the ritual account with these institutions looming powerfully in the background.⁶³⁵

⁶³⁴ Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. Geoffrey Buswell; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 168. Bovon supports this with the statement that, "On a literary level, the synchronism first introduces a new section; but in a historical opus, it also introduces a new stage of the account" (*Luke I*, 120). Thomas L Brodie's contention that the synchronism is modeled on that of the Chronicler at the beginning of Ezra, evidencing Luke's further rewriting of Israel's history, must be regarded as only a possibility ("A New Temple and A New Law: The Unity and Chronicler-based Nature of Luke 1:1–4:22a," *JSNT* 5 [1979]: 118).

⁶³⁵ Green, *The Gospel*, 166–68.

Outside of the synchronisms, the imperial order and its local representation are largely treated as peripheral in the universal story of God as related in Luke 1–2. With the exception of the census, they do not enter into the action of the text in any direct way, and the brief mention of their names are each time placed in juxtaposition with ones who are shown to be truly great in the eyes of God (Zacharias and Elizabeth in 1:5–6; Jesus in 2:1–7; John in 3:1–3). Nevertheless they are present below the explicit level of the text, where they serve as a contrasting foil to God’s emerging plan: in the songs of Mary and Zacharias as noted above (1:52, 71); in the miraculous events of Jesus’ birth which rival those reported of Augustus;⁶³⁶ and in the implicit challenge of the arrival of a rival king and savior from the lineage and throne of David who will bring peace and deliverance from the enemy (1:69, 74, 79; 2:11; 3:4–6).

Further, although with the notable exception of Herod (Antipas) they do not enter directly into the playing out of the ritual, their goals and the power they wield in relation to the other characters in 3:1–21 will be important in the ritual events as reported in Luke. Luke 3:1–2 introduces them not as individuals but with reference to their role in the social systems, emphasizing that their importance with regard to the ritual is in their structurally-determined concerns to protect the hegemony and the related economic and political rewards of the structure they serve, and with it their own security and advantage. This motivation is evident in the census of Augustus in Luke 2:1, with its aim of extending a firmer grip over subjects for taxation and military purposes while demonstrating Roman dominance over the “inhabited world”.⁶³⁷ The mention of the names, Pontius Pilate, and, Herod, evokes their roles in the deaths of Jesus and John and places the coming ritual under a shadow of foreboding.⁶³⁸ The same proves to be true of

⁶³⁶ Suetonius, *Aug.* 94; Talbert, “Prophecies of Future Greatness.”

⁶³⁷ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 83; Green, *The Gospel*, 122–23.

⁶³⁸ Green, *The Gospel*, 168.

Annas and Caiaphas, who are listed separately from the others as leaders, ostensibly, of a divine rather than an imperial order.

God, the True Ritual Director

Although God does not appear in the introductory words of the ritual account of 3:1–21, it is he that is about to initiate the ritual action and it is his sovereign will that is behind the major movements of the text thus far. In the opening of Luke’s story world, it is God who is spoken of as initiating the announcements of Gabriel and the births of John and Jesus (1:13, 26, 35) upon which the rest of the Gospel depends. In each of the actions God takes in Luke 1 and 2, he is shown to have acted in faithfulness to his ancient promises.⁶³⁹

Of the motivations which might be expected to shape the actions of this God as the ritual begins, the audience must assume that they are congruent with what has already been revealed of him in the writings of the Law and the Prophets. This assumption is supported in chapters 1 and 2 where his goals for his people include a continued emphasis on his laws (1:6–9; 2:22–24) and his mercy (1:50, 54, 58, 72, 78), and his favor to those who fear Him (1:25, 28, 30, 38, 48, 50; 2:8).

Chapters 1 and 2 also reveal much concerning God’s specific purposes for the work of John which was about to get under way in ritual action. In conjunction with the revelations concerning Jesus, Luke also presents God’s declared purpose for John, which is shown to be in keeping with his will previously revealed in Scripture. According to Gabriel, it was God’s plan that John would go before the Lord after the manner of Elijah, turning fathers toward their sons and the disobedient to righteous wisdom “in order to prepare a people who have been made ready for the Lord” (1:16–17). Later Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit adds that, as a “prophet of the Most High” his prophetic

⁶³⁹ See, e.g., Luke 1:32, 54–55, 69, 72–75; 2:11. Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 315.

mission would be to prepare the way of the Lord, he would, in his work of preparation, “give to his people a knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of their sins” (1:76–77).

John, the Ritual Elder

When John reappears on the scene in 3:3 following his absence in chapter 2, he is about to step into the role of ritual elder, “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” As a qualification for this role, he is presented as a prophet. This is introduced first by Gabriel who states that he will be “filled with the Spirit” from the womb, building on the LXX tradition that the prophets are those upon whom God puts his Spirit (Num 11:29; Neh 9:30; cf. 1 Sam 10:10; 19:20). Gabriel compares John’s work with that of the prophet Elijah (Luke 1:17) and likely alludes also to the prophet Samuel who in the LXX was, like John, to drink no wine or strong drink (1 Sam 1:11).⁶⁴⁰ John’s prophethood is more directly stated in 1:76 where Zacharias prophesies that he would be called “a prophet of the Most High.” Later in the Gospel Jesus, too, speaks of John as “a prophet” and even “more than a prophet” (7:26).

The primary purpose of John as prophet is three times identified specifically as preparing the way of the Lord (1:76; cf. 3:4; 7:27), recalling for the audience the messenger of the ancient prophecy of Isaiah 40:3 which looks forward to a glorious coming of the Lord on behalf of his people.⁶⁴¹ At the same time the comparison in 1:17 of John with the Elijah-figure of Malachi 3:23 (LXX) places the work of John also in the context of a judgment of his own people (3:19–23). John’s task of preparation was also spoken of in terms of making ready “a people prepared for the Lord,” turning them back to God, as Elijah had himself accomplished such a turning among God’s people (1:16–

⁶⁴⁰ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 326–327; Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 42–45. Wink points out that although Luke does not emphasize a typological or eschatological connection between John and Elijah in the manner of other gospels, Elijah still is important in Luke for comparative purposes.

⁶⁴¹ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 30; for the contrary views, see Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, 72–79.

17). His was described in Zacharias' prophecy as giving "knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins" (1:77). This information given in advance cues the audience as to what to expect from John in chapter 3, giving them the means to understand the ritual of baptism and John's participation in it. By prophecy, parallel and portent, Luke 1 and 2 also prepares the audience to recognize that Jesus is the one for whom John prepares.

Chapters 1 and 2 also give hints regarding John's own preparedness for such an exalted task and for his carrying it out by means of ritual. As Talbert suggests, the portentous nature of his annunciation and birth point to his future greatness. His character is early forecast by the piety of his family (1:6) and his leap for joy in the womb at his lord's approach (1:42). This is built upon in 1:80—in a summary of childhood modeled after similar summaries of other great lives in Jewish literature— where it is said that John "grew and became strong in spirit."⁶⁴² This statement chronicles not only his ongoing physical and spiritual growth but also recalls the angel's promise that he would "be filled with the Holy Spirit" (1:15) and thus under the leading of God.⁶⁴³

John's preparedness to direct a God-ordained, extra-structural ritual is also signaled in a number of ways. As has been discussed in chapter 4 above, the exemplary ritual aspects of John's beginnings are evidenced in his annunciation at the incense burning ritual and the appropriate carrying out of his naming and circumcision.⁶⁴⁴ The command that he should drink no wine or strong drink suggests also that he lived the set-apart life of the Nazirite vow (1:15).⁶⁴⁵ In the wilderness, John apparently spurned not only wine and liquor as commanded by Gabriel (1:15; cf. 7:33), but also at least much of normal human society. In John's wilderness location and emphasis on washings, he bears

⁶⁴² Gen 21:8; Judg 13:24–25; 1 Sam 2:26; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 388.

⁶⁴³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (vol. 1; 2 vols.; Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; ed. Moisés Silva; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 194.

⁶⁴⁴ Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 62; cf. Section 4.4.1 of this dissertation.

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. also, Luke 5:33; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.116–19.

some resemble to Bannus, to whom Josephus went to complete his ritualized passage to adulthood. Such a choice of location may have been inspired by the images of wilderness contained in the LXX passages such as Isa 40:3 with which his ministry is introduced.

Living in the wilderness and with his aged parents likely long dead, there is no one evident in the narrative to which he owed submission and—having apparently paradoxically set aside his priestly ministry in Jerusalem—no groups he can be expected to favor. Thus, more than most John is presented as independent from the rulers and religious hierarchy, for one who already lives outside the system has little to gain or lose from it. As depicted in Luke he is apparently a clean slate, unsullied by alliances with any individual or institution other than the one all-encompassing relationship with God through the indwelling Holy Spirit (1:15). In the wilderness, as well as in the position of outsider which wilderness dwelling entailed, the leveling and humbling Turner saw as making possible a sense of *communitas*, (that is a “generic human bond between all members of society”) would have been a daily reality for John.⁶⁴⁶

In terms of his role in the narrative thus far, then, the figure of John commands attention based on the singular circumstances of his birth and life and on the prophecies of what he would do and be. At the same time, he is presented as an inferior figure compared with Jesus, a background figure whose task is preparation for something greater to come. As he enters upon his task the audience is already well aware of what God has called him to do, and only lacks the details of how he will attain this purpose.

The People, Ritual Participants

As is so often reported of Jesus later in Luke, John’s message is said to attract multitudes (ὄχλοι) whose only stated goal is “to be baptized by him” (3:7, 10).⁶⁴⁷ Whether or not the Lukan audience would have understood the text here to clearly

⁶⁴⁶ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 95–97, 226–27.

⁶⁴⁷ Paul S. Minear, “Jesus’ Audiences, According to Luke,” *NovT* 16 (1974): 84–88.

emphasize the common people over and against the Jewish leaders, it certainly emphasizes the great numbers who went out to hear him. The importance in Luke of the fullness of the response of God's people to John's baptism is further emphasized later in the narrator's statement that, in contrast to the Pharisees and law-experts, "all the people (ὁ λαός) and tax-collectors . . . acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John" (7:29) and in the priests' and scribes' concern that they would be stoned for speaking negatively of John's baptism, because "all the people (ὁ λαός) . . . are convinced that John was a prophet" (20:6). In these passages it also becomes clear that this ὁ λαός represents, in general, the common people as they are contrasted with the Pharisees, chief priests and other structural leaders who are said to reject John's baptism.

Following the first part of John's preaching, Luke shifts from the term ὄχλοι to the noun phrase ὁ λαός, which is used thereafter, as the text portrays the people wondering if John is the hoped-for Messiah (3:15); receiving the good news of the mightier one to come (3:16–18); and finally (all) being baptized by him (3:21). Though this shift could possibly indicate a refining of the original crowds to those who had remained despite the difficulty of John's message, or who had already been baptized by him, the phrase ὁ λαός has been shown by Paul Minear to carry particular connotations in the LXX and in Luke-Acts denoting the "specific historical community which has been set apart by God" by means of the covenant.⁶⁴⁸ This usage is already evident in the statement that the whole multitude of ὁ λαός were praying outside the temple in Luke's opening narrative (1:10, 21), and is again suggested in the repeated statement that *all* ὁ λαός had been baptized by John (3:21; 7:29). But is clearest in Acts, in the statement that Paul would be rescued from "ὁ λαός and from the Gentiles" to perform his mission (26:17).

⁶⁴⁸ Minear, "Jesus' Audiences," 82.

Luke never specifically narrows the audience of John’s preaching to those from a specific locale as do Mark and Matthew; rather the focus of John’s preaching was the whole society of God’s people living within range of his call. In the opening narrative of the Gospel, ὁ λαός are represented as reaching out to God in prayer (1:10), and in 2:38 there is a reference to “all who were looking for the redemption of Israel” (2:38). In every other use of ὁ λαός in chapters 1 and 2, God is depicted as in some way reaching out to them (1:21–22, 17, 68–69, 77–79; 2:10–11).⁶⁴⁹ Despite this generally positive portrayal of ὁ λαός, Luke also allows that all is not as it should be among God’s people. This is evidenced in Zacharias’ depiction of ὁ λαός as “sitting in darkness and the shadow of death” in need of forgiveness (1:77–79) and also setting the stage for the deliverance Jesus would bring (4:18–19). Gabriel’s statement to Zacharias that the task of John would be to “turn back *many* of the children of Israel to the Lord . . .” in order to make ready “a people (λαός) prepared for the Lord” (1:16–17; cf. Mal 3:19, 23 LXX), suggests the possibility that from the divine perspective there was not only a need to return in righteousness, but also that this future λαός would not be a group exactly equivalent to the entire Jewish nation but would be made up of those who would turn and prepare.⁶⁵⁰

Thus Luke portrays ὁ λαός as sinful and in need of reversal, and yet still reaching out to God and, as the ritual begins, intent upon the goal of responding to the message of baptism preached by God’s prophet. It is the single relationship with God and preparation for his coming that they apparently seek, as they gather (and with them in heart the audience of Luke) to respond to God’s reaching out by partaking in John’s baptism.

⁶⁴⁹ See S. G. Wilson concerning Luke 2:10–11 (*The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* [Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1973], 34–35).

⁶⁵⁰ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 37.

5.2 The Operations Field: The Ritual of the Many (Luke 3:2–21a)

As the full attention of the narrative turns to the pivotal events of Luke 3:1–4:15, the various interacting relations, goals, and motivations just analyzed swing into life upon the spatial and temporal stage of the ritual field. The actions now played out upon the stage of the wilderness and the Jordan region may be labeled the *operations field* which will be examined next, in conversation with the insights of modern ritual theory. For just as the fourth chapter of this dissertation has demonstrated the special attention given by other Greco-Roman narrative works and by the larger work of Luke-Acts to the various transitional events we today call rites of passage, so the next two chapters will demonstrate that in this account Luke also speaks from the common experience of *rite of passage*.

Set apart in spatial terms by the coming of the word of God *to* John in the ἔρημος in 3:2, and the return of the Son of God *from* the ἔρημος in 4:14–15, the two interlocked rituals of John's baptism and Jesus' anointing serve to affirm the completeness of God's preparation for Jesus' introduction to public life in the complex role that he would play. The first highlighted ritual, which will be examined in this chapter, involves crowds of people and is thus here termed *the ritual of the many* in contrast to *the ritual of the mightier one* which will follow. It is described in Luke 3:2b–21a as being comprised of three major movements defined by the commencement of a significant new action within the text: (1) the coming of the word of God (3:2b); (2) the introducing of John's ministry (3:3–6); and (3) the preparing of the way by John (3:7–18). Two secondary actions noted in passing are important to the exploration of the ritual: the going out of the crowds (3:7a) and the baptism of all the people (3:21a). In addition, a *narrator's aside* interrupts the chronological sequence (3:19–20), effectively separating this ritual from the one to follow.

The discussion of each of these movements will begin by considering the ways in which the narrative keys into the various symbolic and ritual understandings of its

audience. This will be followed by an exploration of additional insights to be gained by applying to these the questions and insights of ritual studies. In order to deal efficiently with the key symbols, the general cultural understanding of each symbol will be discussed at the point of its first mention in the Lukan text, while subsequent mentions of the same symbol will note only additional information there provided, whether through direct explanation, through the operational use of the symbol in the narrative, or through its positioning in relation to the other aspects of the text and its symbols. As the chapter concludes the rite of passage will be reviewed in an overall sense and its significance in the larger work of Luke-Acts will be considered in a preliminary way, looking forward to a fuller consideration at the completion of the second part of this interlocked pair of rituals.

5.2.1 Movement 1: The Word of God Comes upon John (3:2b)

... ἐγένετο ῥῆμα θεοῦ ἐπὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν Ζαχαρίου υἱὸν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ.

In 3:1–2 the spotlight swings again dramatically to the action of God himself. In this brief clause, God breaks in again, as he has done so often in the narrative of Luke 1 and 2, from the heavenly sphere at the head of an alternate and dominant structure not under any earthly control but whose threat to the current hierarchy has already been repeatedly hinted at (1:51–53, 71, 74; 2:8–11, 34). Coming in the form of a ῥῆμα θεοῦ, this action ultimately sets in motion the ministries of both main actors within the solemn cadences of two tradition-grounded rites of passage.⁶⁵¹

Luke alone, among the gospels, portrays the arrival of the ῥῆμα θεοῦ that initiates John’s ministry, forming thereby a prelude to the voice from heaven that initiates the ministry of Jesus (Luke 3:22 || Mark 1:11). In the context of the explicit prophecy of Luke 1:76 that he “would be called the prophet of the most high,” the cryptic ῥῆμα θεοῦ

⁶⁵¹ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 67.

can be seen to recall the introductions of a number of biblical prophets.⁶⁵² Notably this is the only NT use of such an introduction. As used here, this introduction is particularly close in form to those of: (1) Elijah (ἐγένετο ῥῆμα κυρίου πρὸς Ηλίου 1 Kgs 17:2), with whose spirit and power John had already been prophesied to Act (Luke 1:17); and (2) Jeremiah (τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ ὃ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ Ιερεμιαν τὸν τοῦ Χελκίου Jer 1:1), who like John was a preaching prophet chosen by God before his birth and whose call to repentance brought him into life-threatening conflict with the ruling powers (Jer 37–38).⁶⁵³

Though some prophetic books narrate a formal prophetic call (e.g., Isa 6:1–13; Jer 1:1–10; Ezek 1:1–3:15), for John and others the bestowing of the prophetic gift initiating the prophet to his new role is signaled simply by the arrival of the word of God (1Sam 3:1–14; 1 Kgs 17:1–5).⁶⁵⁴ In John’s case, this initiatory action has been presaged by Luke’s declaration that John’s liminal wilderness sojourn (1:80; 3:2) was to continue until his ἀνάδειξις, a term that, in contemporary Greek usage, often referred to the proclamation or inauguration of one elected to office and suggests John’s investiture to the office chosen for him by the Lord as “prophet of the most High” (1:76, cf. 1:17).⁶⁵⁵ In its very brevity, this initiation of John to his prophetic ministry can be seen, in the light of Luke-Acts’ extensive attention to rite of passage already demonstrated, as a suitably

⁶⁵² Cf. Luke 1:15 which promises that “he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb.” Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1961), 207–08; Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 62. ῥῆμα θεοῦ (or ῥῆμα κυρίου) is also used to refer to the specific contents of a message from God, generally spelled out in the following verses, as for example in: Exod 9:20; Num 11:24; Deut 5:5; 1 Sam 3:1; 9:27; 1 Kgs 17:2; 2 Chr 36:22; Isa 66:5; Lam 2:17.

⁶⁵³ Cf. also the account of Samuel’s call in 1 Sam 3:1–14.

⁶⁵⁴ H. Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium Erster Teil. Kommentar zu Kap. 1, 1–9, 50* (HTKNT 3; Freiburg: Herder, 1969), 152 nn.36–37. Fitzmyer and L. T. Johnson both read this as a prophetic call (Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 452, 458–59; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 17, 67).

⁶⁵⁵ “Ἀνάδειξις,” LSJ 108; “ἀνάδειξις,” BDAG 62; H. Schlier, “ἀνάδειξις,” *TDNT* 2:31.

subdued parallel prelude to the greater and more elaborate ritual commissioning of Jesus soon to take place.⁶⁵⁶

Luke underlines John's location in the ἔρημος, a marginal figure in a blatantly marginal space, but one who is "great in the sight of the Lord" (1:15). With Mark, he leaves this deeply symbolic space unbounded in contrast to Matthew's specific socio-political designation, "ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τῆς Ἰουδαίας" thus leaving open to the audience the full ambivalence of the wilderness symbol. Though, unlike the ῥῆμα θεοῦ, the ἔρημος location has no precedent in prophetic introduction formulae, the explicit relating here of ὁ ἔρημος to the coming of a ῥῆμα θεοῦ places the ritual leadership of John in the storied tradition of God's wilderness communication with Israel in the course of their own wilderness passage. With the subsequent quotation of Isa 40:3–5, it also recalled the hopes currently circulating for a new day of divine deliverance for Israel when God would once again lead his people in a passage to victory and freedom through ὁ ἔρημος.⁶⁵⁷ Thus the more negative and elemental aspects of the wilderness symbol, in its evocations of fearsomeness and chaos and in the memories of rebellion against God (cf. Acts 7:36–44), are here downplayed as confidence and interest in John is built through association with wilderness tradition.⁶⁵⁸

In the particular context of the preceding series of socio-political designations in Luke 3:1–2, John's marginal ἔρημος location can also be seen to stand in binary opposition to all the political designations of place created by the structures of human society, further emphasizing its ideal ritual setting as a *place apart*, unencumbered and

⁶⁵⁶ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 389; Compare Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke* (trans. David E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 68; Bovon, *Luke 1*, 77.

⁶⁵⁷ Cf. also Isa 43:19–20; 48:20–21 (LXX); 55:11–13; Ezek 20:34–38; Hos 2:14–16; cf. Isa 32:15–16; 35:1, 6; 41:18–19; 50:2; 51:3; Jer 31. The coming of the word of God to the wilderness may have recalled also the prophet Elijah who encountered God in the wilderness (1 Kgs 17:6; 19:12–18) and whose expected eschatological coming (Mal 4:5–6) was connected to John in Luke 1:17.

⁶⁵⁸ See above in section 5.1.1 for a fuller description of the meaning of the wilderness symbol as understood in Luke's day. Interestingly, Saul's call too came in a region outside the socialized spaces as he approached Damascus (Acts 22:6).

unbounded by human expectation or control. Further, the placement of the coming of the ῥῆμα θεοῦ upon John in this context bypasses, as so often with biblical prophets, the authority figures established by these same societal structures, in favor of a *person apart*, an outsider with little connection or obligation to the societal structures and values of his day. For although John is the son of a priest, Zacharias, he is no high priest and, in fact, his liminal vocation as a Nazirite (1:15) emphasizes his outsider position. The juxtaposition of the high priests being mentioned in the list of “secular” rulers, immediately followed by John being said to receive the word of God is the only signal until much later in Luke (20:1–8) of the tension between John and the religious leadership.

This juxtaposition of the no-name John with the biggest names in the social structures of his day correlates with the observation that ritualizing, or ritual-making, emerges most often from the margins (both spatially and figuratively). It also cues the audience to the possible anti-structural potential, pointed out by ritual theory, of the paired rituals about to take place, which are destined to change the course of society forever.⁶⁵⁹ For the emperor, the governor, the tetrarchs, and the high priests are first listed, and then set to the side, as a desert recluse receives heaven’s own supernatural authority.

Finally, by introducing the ῥῆμα θεοῦ in the ἔρημος apart from competing earthly structures, the opening movement of Luke’s baptism and wilderness account asserts that it is God, not any human or institution, who is fully in charge of the ritualizing that is about to take place. Even John, while strongly affirmed here in preparation for his role as emerging prophet and ritual leader, is shown by the coming of the the ῥῆμα θεοῦ to be one under orders rather than fully in charge. For as the supernatural sphere is brought

⁶⁵⁹ Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 6; Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 9–10; idem, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 29; Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 111–13; idem, “Metaphors of Anti-Structure in Religious Culture,” in *Changing Perspective in the Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), 78.

once again into intersection with the earthly, John is shown to be an emissary playing a prophetic role deeply rooted in Jewish scriptural tradition. Like Isis in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, who chooses Lucius and instructs the priest regarding the timing and significance of his initiation, it is God who, in Luke 3 and 4 ultimately makes the ritual decisions.⁶⁶⁰

5.2.2 Movement 2: John Comes (3:3–6)

καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς πᾶσαν [τὴν] περίχωρον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, ⁴ ὡς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ λόγων Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου· φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ· ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ· ⁵ πᾶσα φάραγξ πληρωθήσεται καὶ πᾶν ὄρος καὶ βουνὸς ταπεινωθήσεται, καὶ ἔσται τὰ σκολιὰ εἰς εὐθείαν καὶ αἱ τραχεῖαι εἰς ὁδοὺς λείας· ⁶ καὶ ὄψεται πᾶσα σὰρξ τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ.

The Introductory Precip (3:3)

With the coming of the word of God John, unlike Josephus' mentor Bannus, moves into an active role in Luke's narrative. Front and center in Luke's description of John's work is the assertion that John's mission was "proclaiming a βάπτισμα μετανοίας." This central importance of this βάπτισμα is repeatedly emphasized in the rest of Luke-Acts, for after Luke describes the ensuing crowds as "going out *in order to be baptized*" (3:7), he later declares that the Pharisees and the lawyers "rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John" (7:29–30), and reports Jesus bringing up John's baptism in his dialogue with the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders (20:3–4). In Acts the βάπτισμα of John is repeatedly spoken of as the definitive beginning of the events of the gospel story.⁶⁶¹ As Marshall underlines, recognizing this primacy placed on

⁶⁶⁰ Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.1–22.

⁶⁶¹ Acts 1:22; 11:16; 13:24; 18:25; 19:3–5, 34. In fact, *every single use* of βάπτισμα in Luke-Acts refers to the βάπτισμα of John, except the metaphorical βάπτισμα of Luke 12:50.

baptism is foundational to an accurate understanding of John's mission in the Gospel of Luke.⁶⁶²

Luke gives few details regarding the physical nature of this βάπτισμα, beyond incidentally affirming that it involved the use of water (3:16) into which, as the term suggests, the individual must have been immersed.⁶⁶³ Such an immersion in water would have evoked for the Lukan audience the rituals of cleansing widely known and practiced in both Jewish and Greco-Roman culture as in the washings of Lucius (Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.23) and Josephus (*Vita* 11). Even more, however, the use of the specific term βάπτισμα, never found outside of Christian texts, would certainly have cued the audience, who knew and had likely even experienced Christian baptism (Luke 1:4), to interpret it also in terms of their own experience (see 4.4.2 above).

In its symbolic nature as a βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (Luke 3:3), and in its presentation as embodied (3:16) and performative (3:4–6; Isa 40:3–5), tradition-grounded (Jewish and Greco-Roman, see 4.4.2 above) and repeated in a formalized way by many (Luke 3:21; 7:29), John's βάπτισμα may be understood from a modern perspective as very clearly in the category of a ritual activity. Despite its highly ritualized nature however, this βάπτισμα appears to be newly created for, in its association with forgiveness and changed life, it does not conform fully to any of the similar rituals known from that time.

Rather, John may be understood to be *ritualizing* out of the building blocks of earlier tradition. Such a high degree of ritualization has been observed, in ritual theory, to have the power to implicitly convince participants, whether the Lukan audience or the crowds around John, that the “authoritative values and forces shaping the occasion”

⁶⁶² Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 135.

⁶⁶³ For such a definition see “βαπτίζω,” LSJ 806.

actually stand “outside the immediate control or inventiveness of those involved.”⁶⁶⁴ For the “watching” audience the cue has already been provided, in the coming of the ῥῆμα θεου of Luke 3:2, to recognize that the authoritative force behind this ritual is the will of God himself (cf. 20:1–7).

The Lukan narrator provides a succinct exegesis of John’s βάπτισμα ritual using Mark’s introductory precis, κηρύσσω βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. While κηρύσσω comes to be used generically in the NT of Christian preaching, the literal meaning *to act as a herald*, attested in the Septuagint, evokes the performative aspect of the βάπτισμα call of the pre-Christian John, overlapping images of the long-foreseen prophet brought out in Luke 1 and 2 with the immediacy of a herald’s message and the role-playing aspect of the ritual leader.⁶⁶⁵ Who he proclaimed to is not stated, but is inferred in the following Isaiah quote to be the whole nation of Israel who worship the Lord (3:4).

The βάπτισμα that John, as herald, announces is described as a baptism of μετάνοια (cf. Acts 13:24), thereby associating this ritual of immersion with an accompanying change, or transformation, of mind and heart.⁶⁶⁶ This idea of μετάνοια involves both a *transformation from* as well as a *transformation to*, although as Marshall

⁶⁶⁴ Stated in Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 169.

⁶⁶⁵ Gen 41:43; 2 Chr 24:9; Esth 6:9, 11; 1 Macc 10:63–64; *Pss. Sol.* 11:1; of prophets Hos 5:8; Mic 3:5; John 1:2; 3:2–4; Isa 61:1; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 235. This despite Alfred Plummer’s assertion that the use of κηρύσσω in the rest of the NT simply means to “proclaim openly” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke* [ed. Samuel Rolles Driver et al.; 4th ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901; repr. 1922], 186).

⁶⁶⁶ “Μετάνοια,” LSJ 1115; “μετάνοια,” BDAG 640. Despite the opposition created here by many commentators between purpose (so Fitzmyer) and result (so Evans) in interpreting the εἰς, it is unnecessary to separate here the intended and the received result of responding appropriately to John’s proclamation (Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 459; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 236). Bruce Chilton, *Jesus’ Baptism and Jesus’ Healing: His Personal Practice of Spirituality* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1998), 23–29.

points out Luke-Acts tends to emphasize its separation aspect.⁶⁶⁷ As such it stands as a point of threshold or *limen* on the internal level, much as the act of baptism represented this transition on the physical level. Such a change of direction associated with ritual was well-known to Luke's audience through their knowledge of Christian baptism as in the extreme case of Paul in Acts 9, but it is also suggested elsewhere as in the priest of Isis' advice to Lucius before his initiation to "leave the slippery path of headstrong youth" and to "enlist in this holy army" and "dedicate yourself today to obedience to our cult" (Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.15).

In this summary of John's message, the liminal crossing of a threshold signaled by this ritual βάπτισμα μετανοίας leads into the new state of ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν. Though some have argued that this mentioned forgiveness was not accomplished until the coming of Jesus, the forgiveness of God is certainly not unknown to Luke's audience knowledgeable of the LXX, where it is ritually represented in the sanctuary/temple service administered by the priests.⁶⁶⁸ Here it is the one Luke emphasizes as the son of a priest (Luke 1:5; 3:2) who enacts the ritual. The parallel phrasing of this baptism εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν with Christian baptism εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (Acts 8:16; 19:3) is also worthy of consideration.

In proclaiming this βάπτισμα, John ἦλθεν εἰς πᾶσαν [τὴν] περίχωρον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, entering a space defined by its proximity to the river Jordan. Even more than most other important rivers, the Jordan itself wended its way amongst dense natural vegetation bordered by desert-like open spaces, providing room for great crowds and

⁶⁶⁷ Ἐπιστρέφω, is more often use to emphasize the aspect of "transformation to" a new state of belief in God (I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian & Theologian* [3d ed.; New Testament Profiles; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998], 194).

⁶⁶⁸ Ἀφίημι is used of God's forgiveness, e.g., in Exod 32:32; Num 4:19–20; Ps 24:18; Isa 55:7; cf. Ezek 36:25. The centrality of forgiveness in the temple service is clearest in the description of the sin offering in Lev 4:1–5:7.

water for baptism, and perfectly consistent with John's wilderness calling.⁶⁶⁹ Its use for baptism recalls Israel's ancient crossing at which the priests, after the people had consecrated themselves, dipped (βάπτω) their feet and the waters parted so that the children of Israel could cross over and take possession of a new homeland (Josh 1:11; 3:5, 15). Josephus' tale of Theudas, who promised to part the Jordan for his followers, attests to the continuing importance of this memory (*Ant.* 20.97–98, Luke itself does not speak of John crossing the Jordan.) The multivalence, or multi-faceted nature, of this ritual symbol is also evidenced in story of Namaan the Syrian where, in a rare LXX usage of the term βαπτίζω, he is said to have dipped (ἐβάπτισατο) seven times in the Jordan "and was clean" (2 Kgs 5:14).

Interestingly, Luke does not mention the river itself, nor does he speak of the other physical aspects of the baptism. It is true that Luke's audience is rather well-informed about baptism in general, yet Luke describes many other things the audience can be expected to be familiar with if they are important to his message. This suggests that Luke's emphasis here falls on the interpreted meaning of the baptismal actions rather than on sacralizing any particular physical component of the ritual.⁶⁷⁰ It may also be that in this he appeals to the fascination engendered by secrecy as evidenced in response to the secret aspects of the mystery initiations.

Luke emphasizes that John went "into all the region around the Jordan," staying within its marginal associations while reaching as many as possible with his proclamation. With no suggestion of a home base, John functions as an itinerant preacher,

⁶⁶⁹ Har-El, "The Pride of the Jordan"; Glueck, *The River Jordan*.

⁶⁷⁰ Luke may have sought to avoid sacralizing the Jordan as a preeminently holy site for Christian baptism, possibly to avoid eliciting pagan associations with river deities as part of his audience's experience of the baptism ritual. See, for example, Harry Brewster, *The River Gods of Greece: Myths and Mountain Waters in the Hellenic World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 2, 4; Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, "ποταμός," *TDNT*, 6:596–600; H. J. Rose, *Religion in Greece and Rome* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 26. Such associations did indeed become attached to the Jordan and the baptism in later Christian depictions, and may have already threatened to be problematic at the time of Luke (Robin Jensen, "What Are Pagan River Gods Doing in Scenes of Jesus' Baptism," *BRev* 9 [1993]: 34–41, 54–55).

with “no place to lay his head.”⁶⁷¹ In his homelessness, as in his movement to the edge of the wilderness and the boundaries of human space, John and his ritual are located “betwixt and between” the normal designations of human life and culture.⁶⁷²

The Isaiah Quote (3:4–6)

Before moving from this introductory precis to a closer account of the ritual events, Luke first grounds John’s βάπτισμα proclamation solidly in ancient tradition by citing the prophetic words of Isa 40:3–5 (LXX) which, like John’s message, are associated with the ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ (Isa 40:8). Luke’s juxtaposition of the preceding precis,

“John came . . . proclaiming a baptism,”

with Isaiah’s prophecy,

“a voice crying . . . prepare the way of the Lord,”

not only emphasizes John’s performative and prophetic role of heralding the imminent coming of the Lord, but also gives to the βάπτισμα ritual the grounding of Scriptural tradition and divine mandate by associating John’s baptism with Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the preparation for the long-awaited restoration of Israel.⁶⁷³ Earlier references to Jesus as Lord in Luke 1:43 and 76 have prepared the audience to associate this coming of the “Lord” with the coming of Jesus. Such an inference is made even more apparent by the omission of the words, “of our God,” shifting Isaiah’s next words: “Make straight the paths of our God” to “make straight his paths.”

⁶⁷¹ Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 19; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 459.

⁶⁷² Conzelmann suggests that Luke, with his lack of knowledge of geography in Palestine, saw John to be in a “border” region between Galilee and Judea (*The Theology of St. Luke*, 120).

⁶⁷³ Isa 40:3–5; cf. 41:17–20; 43:19–21; 44:3–5; 48:17; 49:9–10; 52:11–12; 54:11–13. This coming is already presaged in Luke 1:17, 32–33, 68–79. See also the uses of Isa 40:3–5 in 1QS 8.12–15; 9.19–20; Bar 5:7; cf. *T. Mos.* 10.3–4; *Pesiq. Rab.* 29/30 A; 29/30 B 3; 33; *Midr. Lev.* 1.14.

The locative phrase, ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, further reinforces the sense of separation and otherness already sensed by the Lukan audience as they cross, through recalled prophecy, into a deeply sacred time and space. Luke’s association of this φωνὴ . . . ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ with John’s preaching in the regions of the Jordan suggests that the ritual space of the upcoming baptisms not only incorporated the marginal associations of the Jordan region, but also continued within the liminal evocation of the wilderness realm. Luke, in fact, later reinforces the wilderness nature of John’s location in Jesus’ question to the crowds, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see?” (Luke 7:24–26; cf. Matt 11:7). Such repetition and interconnection of key sacral symbols, as often observed in ritual activities and texts, has the potential to set them apart from the ordinary, evoking an experience of a “greater, higher, or more universalized reality.”⁶⁷⁴

Luke extends his quotation of Isaiah beyond that of Mark to include Isa 40:4–5. The insertion of this symbol-rich text adds to his earlier precis a long series of condensed, multivalent images that resist resolution into simple one-to-one correspondences. In the immediate context of John’s heralding of a βάπτισμα μετανοίας in 3: 3, the filling and lowering, straightening and smoothing, called for in the Isaiah quotation are suggested to relate to the arduous task of μετανοία John describes. For both represent a significant change or turning of the sort which may be conveyed in the liminal phase of a rite of passage, the first suggesting a personal act and the second providing a physical representation. But other echoes of these same symbols of raising and lowering also resound from the beginning to the end of Luke with liminal messages of the dissolution of privileged positions (in the reversal of the rulers and the lowly in Luke 1:52–53), religious hierarchies (in the parable of the Pharisee and Publican 18:14), and social stratifications (in the beatitudes and woes of 6:20–26 and the rearranged table fellowship of 14:10–11). Such echoes of communitas, emphasizing the shared worth of basic

⁶⁷⁴ Bell, *Ritual*, 159.

humanness, would have repeatedly reinforced the message that this μετανοία with its accompanying ritual would have structural effects far beyond the personal level.⁶⁷⁵

The Lukan audience would have also been drawn into its own liminal place by a number of other aspects within Luke's Isaiah quote. Within the common liminal metaphor of the epic journey accomplished by the Lord in 3:4 and 6, ravines, mountains, and hills are encountered, natural objects hostile to the encroachment of society and culture. Yet in preparation for the Lord's coming these immense landmarks are to be mysteriously filled and leveled, confronting the audience with a puzzling riddle nonsensical on the literal level. Further, the switch from the imperatives of 3:4 to the passive voice and prophetic future tense of 3:5–6 builds ambiguity, leaving the reader in doubt as to whose action is expected to bring these things about.⁶⁷⁶ Each of these sets of binary oppositions, the ravine-mountain/hill, crooked-straight, rough path-smooth path, represent spatial oppositions that promise to be mediated before the audience's very eyes, in mediations culminating with the arrival of God's salvation visible to all flesh.

Like the previous declarations of this Isaiah prophecy, salvation has a precedent in the precis of John's work in 3:3 which speaks of the object of the βάπτισμα-preparation as the forgiveness of sins. Such a connection between forgiveness and salvation in relation to John has already been made in 1:77, where Zacharias prophesies that John will "give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins." While forgiveness is associated with the baptism of John, the metaphor and future tenses of 3:5–6 leave the nature and timing of this future salvation indeterminate. Later in Luke however, Jesus is said to announce that *salvation* has come to the house of Zaccheus in

⁶⁷⁵ Mark Allan Powell, "Narrative Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 249. Though ancient Mediterranean society may have been primarily group-centered, the seeking of the crowds to escape the wrath to come (Luke 3:7), and stories such as the publican justified by his prayer (18:14), demonstrate that there was also a concern with salvation on an individual basis.

⁶⁷⁶ In the passive voice this may refer to the work of God (as in a new Exodus, e.g., Isa 42:15–16) or to that of the voice crying in the wilderness or his audience (e.g., Isa 43:19; 57:14).

response to his repentant action (19:8), while after his exaltation his apostles declare that *salvation* is available, through repentance and forgiveness (Acts 2:38, 40; 5:31), to all who call upon his name (Acts 2:21; cf. 10:43), an act there associated with Christian baptism (22:16).

5.2.3 Secondary Action: The Multitudes Come Out to be Baptized (3:7)

(Ἔλεγεν) οὖν τοῖς ἐκπορευομένοις ὄχλοις βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ . . .

Into the non-social space of the Jordan region, now infiltrated by the heavenly, pour the crowds (ὄχλοι), coming out (ἐκπορεύομαι) for the express purpose of being baptized by John.⁶⁷⁷ Their arrival is essential to the narrative and the participle with which it is described contributes to an understanding of the ritual aspects of this passage.

The separation suggested by ἐκ with πορεύομαι is typical of the opening scenes of a rite of passage, and evokes the crowds’ movements out from the culturally bounded security and familiarity of their homes and villages, the routines of their daily lives, and their assigned places in the social hierarchy. Although Mauser suggests that “the march out into the wilderness *is* the repentance to which John calls,” this leaves out essential aspects of the separation which are still to come.⁶⁷⁸ The omission of the geographical origins of these crowds in Luke (vs. Mark 1:5 || Matt 3:5) allows the focus to lie instead on their action of separation. The continuing action implied by the present participle, ἐκπορευομένοις, leads the audience to imagine waves of people traversing the dangerous roads leading to the region, some possibly taking days and even weeks to make the journey. In the process of their coming, the spatial and social structures that have shaped their thoughts and actions are left behind, and this people raised on pilgrimages to the socially-constructed space of Jerusalem now move into a marginal edge-zone where river

⁶⁷⁷ The reference to the crowds “coming out” further confirms John’s continued connection to the wilderness suggested in Luke 3:4.

⁶⁷⁸ Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 88 (italics present in the original text).

and wilderness meet, and which is the scene of some of the most powerful stories shaping their culture.

The Jordan river region identified by Luke could be accurately imagined to provide numerous settings in the wilderness apart from towns (Luke 7:24; cf. Mark 1:4 || Matt 1:1) where crowds could gather and baptisms could take place. In this sacred and inhospitable space the normal everyday markers of the person such as place, possessions, and work which marked out society's standard classifications would have been largely left behind, leaving the prospective ritual participants in an ambiguous, or liminal, state, ready for the deconstruction and rearrangement necessary in the preparation for new things to come. Here, distant from the centers of cultural and societal authority, conditions are left to the discretion of God himself. Such a conception is witnessed in the thought-world of Luke and his audience by Philo's previously-mentioned allegory of Moses' pitching his tent outside the camp and only there receiving his own rite of passage in initiation (*Gig.* 54).

Concurrently with their coming out (ἐκπορευομένοις), the crowds also enter into sacred time. In the temporal distance of their coming, they cross the boundary from one mode of experiencing time, measured by the day-to-day routine designed to meet the most basic needs of life, to another, liminal, mode, unbounded by experiences of normality where their routine is shaped instead around the preaching of John, the experience of an unprecedented ritual, and the shared anticipation of the long-foreseen and the unforeseen. In such conditions, sights and sounds and the whole flow and measurement of time take on a different level of meaning.⁶⁷⁹ And, in the annals of ritual, such time set apart by ritual and set apart to God, is often marked by prophetic inspirations and supernatural appearances.

⁶⁷⁹ On sacred time, see Edmund R. Leach, "Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time," in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* (Series B, vol. 251, no. 772; London: Royal Society Publishing, 1966).

The single purpose, or motivation, of the crowds that is directly expressed is βαπτισθῆναι, thereby demonstrating that they have responded appropriately to the stated central message of John's proclamation.⁶⁸⁰ Ritual dippings they could be expected to have already known, and likely participated in.⁶⁸¹ But what would bring multitudes of ordinary people on foot far outside their normal boundaries of time and travel for a ritual bath? Luke answers this question for his audience not only with the promise of forgiveness (3:3), but also by allusion to the hopes for a renewed deliverance of Israel found in John's wilderness and Jordan locations, in the quotation from Isaiah (Luke 3:6; Isa 40:5), and in the subsequent speech of John where Luke provides an interpretation of the βάπτισμα ritual. The assertion that they came in crowds to be baptized signals a rapid ritualization in the conception of John's baptism from a maverick practice with *claims* of divine origin (3:2), to a popularly sanctioned ritual testifying to the charismatic (crowd-bestowed) authority of John and his message.⁶⁸²

Thus this brief mention of the crowds only sets up for Luke's main interest: the message of baptism John had to share.

5.2.4 Movement 3: John Speaks (3:7b–18)

Ἔλεγεν οὖν . . . γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς; ⁸ ποιήσατε οὖν καρποὺς ἀξίους τῆς μετανοίας καὶ μὴ ἄρξησθε λέγειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς· πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ. λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγείρει τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ. ⁹ ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀξίνη πρὸς τὴν ρίζαν τῶν δένδρων κείται· πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιῶν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται. ¹⁰ Καὶ ἐπηρώτων αὐτὸν οἱ ὄχλοι λέγοντες· τί οὖν ποιήσωμεν; ¹¹ ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· ὁ ἔχων δύο χιτῶνας μεταδότω τῷ μὴ ἔχοντι, καὶ ὁ ἔχων βρώματα ὁμοίως ποιείτω. ¹² ἦλθον δὲ καὶ τελῶναι βαπτισθῆναι καὶ εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτόν· διδάσκαλε, τί ποιήσωμεν; ¹³ ὁ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς

⁶⁸⁰ In depicting such a response by crowds of people, Luke underlines the immediate acceptance, by a significant portion of society, of this wilderness prophet and the ritual he proclaimed. (There is no discernible difference between the use of the singular or plural of ὄχλος [Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 138]).

⁶⁸¹ See Luke 11:38 and section 3.4.2 above.

⁶⁸² That it was never sanctioned by the structural leaders becomes clear in Luke 7:29–30.

αὐτοῦς· μηδὲν πλεόν παρὰ τὸ διατεταγμένον ὑμῖν πράσσετε. ¹⁴ ἔπηρώτων δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ στρατευόμενοι λέγοντες· τί ποιήσωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς; καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· μηδένα διασεύσητε μηδὲ συκοφαντήσητε καὶ ἀρκείσθε τοῖς ὄψωνίοις ὑμῶν. ¹⁵ Προσδοκῶντος δὲ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ διαλογιζομένων πάντων ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν περὶ τοῦ Ἰωάννου, μήποτε αὐτὸς εἴη ὁ χριστός, ¹⁶ ἀπεκρίνατο λέγων πᾶσιν ὁ Ἰωάννης· ἐγὼ μὲν ὕδατι βαπτίζω ὑμᾶς· ἔρχεται δὲ ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου, οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανὸς λῦσαι τὸν ἱμάντα τῶν ὑποδημάτων αὐτοῦ· αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ. ¹⁷ οὗ τὸ πτύον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ διακαθαῖραι τὴν ἄλωνα αὐτοῦ καὶ συναγαγεῖν τὸν σίτον εἰς τὴν ἀποθήκην αὐτοῦ, τὸ δὲ ἄχυρον κατακαύσει πυρὶ ἀσβέστῳ. ¹⁸ Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἕτερα παρακαλῶν εὐηγγελίζετο τὸν λαόν.

With the Lukan audience satisfactorily coached regarding the essence and significance of John's proclamation and the purpose of the crowds in coming, a glimpse is given of what took place when John and the crowds arrived in the Jordan region. As mentioned earlier, rather than describing the physical movements and concrete symbols of the βάπτισμα ritual which stood at the very center of this proclamation, the focus of Luke rests upon John's preaching. This preaching is not separate from or insignificant to the ritual but an integral part of the ritual process, bearing out Victor Turner's argument, in opposition to Lévi-Strauss, that speech cannot be separated out from the analysis of ritual.⁶⁸³ Further giving prime attention to John's words, the Gospel of Luke records the one aspect of the ritual that the Lukan audience could also participate in through the verbal medium of text. For this focus on John's preaching not only guides them in the interpretation of the βάπτισμα ritual which John has announced as central, but also allows them to participate to some degree in its liminal effects.

Luke's depiction of John's ritual interactions with the people may be seen to fall into three distinct sections.⁶⁸⁴ The first (3:7–9) and the last (3:15–17) convey prophetic speeches of John nearly identical to those narrated in Matthew and therefore presumably from Q. These two speeches, to some degree, mirror each other, engaging the crowds and

⁶⁸³ Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (ed. Victor Turner; Symbol, Myth, and Ritual Series; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), 257–58.

⁶⁸⁴ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 464.

the Lukan audience in a discomfiting experience of separation and liminality. The second speech, however, also adds the climactic announcement of the coming of the mightier one and his relation to the message and baptism of John. Between them, Luke has inserted a dialogue which clarifies in very practical terms the kind of transformation which this turning of repentance must lead to (3:10–14).⁶⁸⁵ Luke also adds a summary statement (3:18), identifying the words just reported as only a representative sample of the many other (ἕτερος) exhortations given by John as he preached the good news.

John's First Speech: The Coming Wrath (3:7–9)

John's opening speech, though almost an exact duplicate of that reported in Matthew, differs markedly in that it is not directed toward a small group of religious leaders but toward the crowds as a whole, thus allowing his words to take their place as a part of the rite of passage itself. As Fitzmyer notes, these words of John give "an explanation of the 'repentance' (*metanoia*) of v.3 and an eschatological motivation for it," expounding on the call to separation from the former life given in 3:3–5. But his words also reach far beyond the conscious cognitive level, acting as metaphors of a fearful separation in his depiction of a fleeing from the wrath to come and of the imminent chopping of unproductive trees (lives). They thereby act to spur, on a spiritual and affective level, the separation begun in the physical journeying which brought John's audience to his feet.⁶⁸⁶ For, while John recognizes their arrival for baptism as an attempt to flee from the coming wrath, he also confronts them with the reality that there is further separating to be done from their sinful and unproductive lives if they themselves are not to be separated from the hope of life.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁵ This dialogue is reminiscent of formal interchanges likely practiced in the early Christian church in connection with their own baptism ritual

⁶⁸⁶ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 464.

⁶⁸⁷ As Josephus, in *Ant.* 18.116–118, also insisted.

At the same time, the ritual participants also find themselves in the betwixt-and-between threshold region at the center of the rite of passage where signs of liminality abound and hallowed conceptions are ground down and reconfigured through a challenging series of interwoven images.⁶⁸⁸ Words of insult cast all of the ritual participants as “offspring of vipers,” casting doubts on the sincerity or effectiveness of their flight from the wrath to come. They are further humiliated by an attack on their cultural heritage and the assumption that their fruits are not good, bringing into question everything they had relied on for their security before God and their place in the universe. Compared to this, the mention by the priest of Isis prior to Lucius’ initiation in *Metamorphoses*, of his “headstrong youth” and “slavish pleasures” for which he reaped a “perverse reward,” is a mild rebuke (Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.15). Closer in degree is the humbling of Paul before his baptism evidenced physically in his falling to the ground at the revelation of Jesus and his three days of blindness and fasting.

John’s instruction deconstructs cherished beliefs regarding what the crowds were apparently tempted to regard as their fundamental rights as descendants of Abraham. They are also threatened, for John warns them of an ax that will sever and a fire which will burn up. Here in the ambiguous liminal phase, common sense cultural constructions are rearranged in novel and bizarre ways.⁶⁸⁹ Curious riddles and paradoxes are thrown down in a challenging mix of images where “vipers” seek baptism, rocks may become children, and later, baptisms are accomplished by spirit and fire. Compounding the physical ordeal of separation and survival in a strange environment, these multiple symbols grind away at participants’ assumptions of who and what they are, and challenge

⁶⁸⁸ Victor W. Turner, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* (The Anthropology of Form and Meaning; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 49–50. The blending of separation and liminality confirms Grimes observation that Van Gennep’s three stages of separation, liminality, and reincorporation cannot always be so clearly distinguished (Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 107).

⁶⁸⁹ Victor W. Turner, “Process, System, and Symbol: A New Anthropological Synthesis,” *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 68.

them with the assertion that in themselves they are no more special than the rocks that litter the Jordan valley floor.⁶⁹⁰

But ritual process not only breaks down. It also seeks to bring together a new social being out of the fragments of the old, in the case of John reconstructing the crowds' understanding of what is involved in being the people of God, safe from the coming wrath (Luke 3:7–8). For John directs the crowds towards the good fruits God requires, which they have been lacking and which must grow out of their engagement in this ritual of a repentance baptism. On a more elemental level, these very experiences also create favorable conditions for the common experience of *communitas*, that “intense comradeship and egalitarianism” accompanied by “a sense of the generic human bond between all members of society” that very often arises within the liminal stage of ritual.⁶⁹¹ For there is no one who escapes the harshness of the environment or John's sharp indictments.

The Dialogue (3:10–14)

Luke, in particular, gives special attention to the practical aspects of this rebuilding by inserting the ethical dialogue of vv.10–14 into the center of an account Matthew treats as an uninterrupted speech. At this point the crowds move from a passive role under the hand of the ritual elder to an active questioning regarding the practical implications of his instruction, as their minds turn, under the barrage of John's words, toward their coming *reincorporation* into everyday life. Their query, “What then shall we do?” demonstrates the appropriateness of their response to this ritual experience, with the use of the imperfect tense of ἐπερωτάω emphasizing the pervasiveness of their desire to make an active response.

⁶⁹⁰ Luke 3:8; Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 103.

⁶⁹¹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95–97, 226–27.

John's answer, in keeping with the law and the prophets who came before him (Luke 16:19), stresses lives of justice and concern for those in need (e.g., Lev 19:10, 15; Deut 15:7–8; Isa 58:6–12; Amos 8:4–6; Zech 7:9–10). John makes this life of *communitas* his singular emphasis, consistently (imperfect tense of λέγω) urging the crowds to extend their *communitas* experience beyond the boundaries of the ritual to an entire life lived in egalitarian comradeship and bondedness. For, in this single interchange, every person with clothing or food suddenly finds him or herself responsible to shed concerns for self and any illusion of superior right or entitlement in order to share on an equal basis with the one who has none. This theme of *communitas* continues to be a central one in Luke-Acts, as evidenced in Luke's form of the sermon on the plain which emphasizes *communitas* living (and where John's imagery of the tree and its fruit is echoed) and in the actions of the earliest church as described in Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–5:12. It is also worked out in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the direct context of Jesus' reference to the Pharisees of the pivotal nature of John's ministry, "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it" (Luke 16:16).

Set syntactically apart from the rest of the crowds by the use of δὲ . . . καὶ (indicating "and also" or "and even"), Luke gives special attention to the queries of tax collectors and soldiers. The text focuses not on the precise identities or motivations of either group, but instead treats them as easily recognizable types illustrating the degree to which the *communitas* of John's βάπτισμα ritual would extend and the manner in which it would be extended.⁶⁹² τελῶναι—the agents who did the dirty work of collecting the tolls, duties, and customs on behalf of the chief collectors (ἀρχιτελώνης)—existed in the margins between societal categories shunned by the political hierarchy and the people

⁶⁹² Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 143.

alike.⁶⁹³ They lived as social outcasts despised by all as dishonest and exploitative, as they apparently generally were. Yet even among such hated individuals as tax-collectors the offer of repentance baptism is seen here to be made available and is taken seriously.

The soldiers, whose ethnicity and military assignment is left unspecified by Luke, were also in many ways outsiders to mainstream society, isolated in camps and companies and governed by military ways.⁶⁹⁴ Indeed, even Jewish soldiers would have found themselves caught in the margins between governmental structures and the culture of their homeland, while others would have faced the anger of those whose land they occupied, an anger which the Greco-Roman audiences of the later 1st century would certainly have assumed of the Jewish audience of John.⁶⁹⁵ Like the tax-collectors, though they had potential to do great harm for the sake of greed or malice (3:14; 23:11), Luke acknowledges their vices but also treats them quite positively, as faithful recipients of Jesus' mercy (7:1–10) and just rescuers of Paul in Acts (21, 23, 27).

In affording particular attention to these two types, Luke demonstrates that John's call to repentance and *communitas* reached far beyond the main-stream of society, to the most isolated and often the most undeserving of outsiders. Interestingly, it is among just such people—of marginal, outsider, or inferior status—that Victor Turner found

⁶⁹³ E.g., Lucian, in *Men.* 11, classes them with adulterers, pimps, and informers as those who stir up great confusion, while the question of the Pharisees and their scribes in Luke 5:27–30 summarizes Jewish attitudes toward them (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 12.160–220). John R. Donahue, “Tax Collectors and Sinners: An Attempt at Identification,” *CBQ* 33 (1971): 39–61; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 241; Ford, *My Enemy*, 66; Fitzmyer, *Luke I, 1–9*, 470.

⁶⁹⁴ The *καὶ ἤμεῖς* seems to connect the soldiers with the tax collectors “either as knowing they were unpopular, or as expecting a similar answer” (Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 92).

⁶⁹⁵ The identification of these specific soldiers was not apparently a concern of Luke's and was not likely to have been known by Luke's Greco-Roman audience. The most that can be said is that Luke neither limits them to a Jewish identity nor explicitly identifies them as Gentile, leaving this issue to be dealt with more directly in the book of Acts. They may have been a part of: a theoretical temple guard, Herod Antipas' troops (so Meier), the Roman garrison in Jerusalem or elsewhere, or even a group of soldiers lent to the tax-collectors as enforcers. Some such as Fitzmyer and Meier argue that they were Jewish, while others like Bovon consider them to have been Gentile (Fitzmyer, *Luke I, 1–9*, 470; John P. Meier, “John the Baptist in Josephus: Philology and Exegesis,” *JBL* 111 ([1992]: 237).

communitas most often breaking out, even outside the liminal stage of a rite of passage.⁶⁹⁶

John's instruction to these tax-collectors and soldiers is couched in language apparently benign to the political and cultural structures they served.⁶⁹⁷ As Fitzmyer notes, no suggestion is made that either tax-collectors or soldiers cease their activities on behalf of corrupt and occupying powers.⁶⁹⁸ Rather what John advocated were the basic virtues of mutual assistance, honesty, and equity, also advocated by the best of Roman and Greek philosophers and Roman imperial intent and certainly consonant with the goals of just governance.⁶⁹⁹ The observation of such just and moral behavior among government representatives would have only made for increased peace and good-will among the people it governed.

At the same time, there were circumstances in which these very laudable behaviors also carried the potential for anti-structural effects, not in any direct conflict with the Roman government as a whole but rather in relation to more localized social structures. Hollenbach suggests, for example, that strictly following John's directive would at times have required of soldiers a dangerous insubordinance in the face of a superior officer who demanded a not-unheard-of act of injustice against the civilian population.⁷⁰⁰ As W.R. Farmer observes, if implemented on a large scale,

The requirement that tax collectors refrain from collecting more than was appointed to them would have . . . resulted in a radical reduction in their standard

⁶⁹⁶ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 109–12, 125–28.

⁶⁹⁷ Conzelmann argues that John's ethical instruction to Roman military and government personnel upheld Rome's own moral values and thus supported Luke's claim that Christianity posed no threat to the Empire (*The Theology of St. Luke*, 138).

⁶⁹⁸ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 465; cf. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 70.

⁶⁹⁹ Brent Kinman, "Luke's Exoneration of John the Baptist," *JTS* 44 (1993): 595–98.

⁷⁰⁰ Paul Hollenbach, "Social Aspects of John the Baptizer's Preaching Mission in the Context of Palestinian Judaism," in *ANRW* (ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase; vol. 19.1; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 873.

of living and necessitated serious economic and social readjustments on the part of their families. Furthermore, . . . once the prospect of becoming rich has been removed, few would want to continue the onerous duties of collecting unpopular taxes from a resentful people. Especially so when the money directly or indirectly supported the (Roman) occupation forces and the concomitant collaborating (Jewish) bureaucracy.⁷⁰¹

Nevertheless, John insists, neither the security of possessing a surplus of clothing and food, nor the justifications and apparent necessities brought on by the most extreme of working conditions, can be allowed to deter one from acting with justice, or *communitas*, toward every individual, regardless of rank or power.

John's Second Speech: The Mightier One to Come (3:15–17)

Luke presents John's second speech as a response to the people's speculation, as to whether he might be the *Christ*, the *Messiah* or *anointed one*. At the same time it also, in many ways mirrors the first speech. Here Luke shifts, for the remainder of the pericope, from speaking of John's audience as the ὄχλοι to referring to them as ὁ λαός, the term often associated with the people of God in the LXX, and in Luke 1–2.⁷⁰² It is possible, that this shift suggests that John speaks to those who have now been baptized (cf. 3:21). But if so, he does not emphasize this.

Like the first, John's second speech contains a barrage of symbols which, as noted earlier, have the potential to both unsettle and reorient the unwary audience. These ritual symbols shift and blend into one another through their characteristic features of *distribution of meaning*, which allows multiple symbols (such as both tree and grain) to represent the same idea, and *condensation of meaning*, which assigns multiple ideas to a single symbol (such as baptism).⁷⁰³ Yet beneath the surface lies a relatively simple set of

⁷⁰¹ W. R. Farmer, "John the Baptist" in *IDB*, 2:960 quoted by Hollenbach, "Social Aspects," 871.

⁷⁰² See section 5.1.3 above.

⁷⁰³ Victor W. Turner, who identified these two features, called them, respectively, *unification of disparate significata* and *condensation* (*Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967], 27–34, 245).

interlocking binary oppositions which can be uncovered using the insights developed in great complexity by Lévi-Strauss for application to mythology, and applied much more simply to ritual by Victor Turner. These multiple binary oppositions, (e.g., the fruitful and unfruitful trees 3:8–9) provide clues to the more fundamental opposition which is not generally explicitly stated but which the entire ritual acts to address.⁷⁰⁴ While the concrete and bodily action of a ritual serves to mediate the underlying fundamental opposition on a physical and kinesthetic level, the various binary oppositions address the heart and mind by symbolically replacing the fundamental opposition with a series of oppositions that are more easily reconcilable. (In this usage, the terms *mediate* and *mediation* refer to a symbolically-achieved narrowing of the perceived gap between the two poles of a fundamental opposition.) A consideration of such a series of paired oppositions may thus allow the ritual analyst to understand more clearly the nature of both the underlying fundamental opposition and the solution offered within the ritual.

In Luke 3:3–17, these complex symbols can also be recognized as part of a series of oppositions placed in an interwoven pattern revealing both the fundamental opposition being addressed and the less drastic oppositions by which it is mediated. In general, such sets of oppositions can be diagrammed by placing them in a schema with the fundamental opposition on the left and the successive mediating oppositions placed in an array to the right showing the progression from distant to near. So for example the schema of the main oppositions in the ritual of John's baptism might be diagrammed thus:

⁷⁰⁴ See for example Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963); and the explanations in Edmund R. Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols Are Connected* (ed. Jack Goody and Geoffrey Hawthorn; Themes in the Social Sciences; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

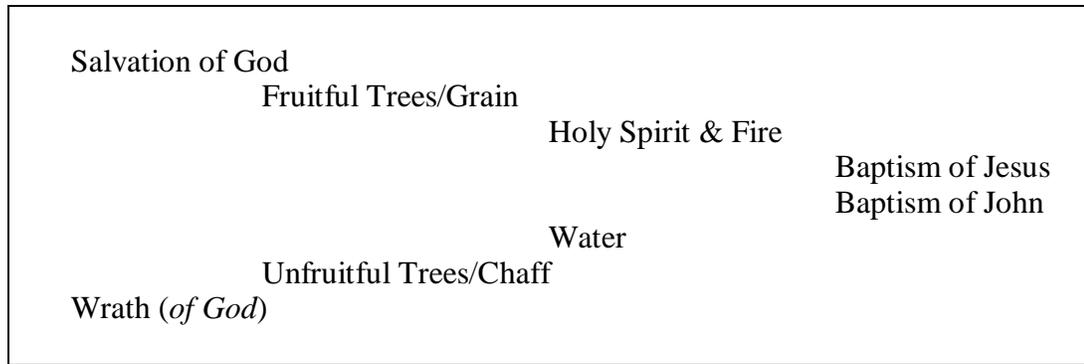


Figure 1: A Schema of Luke 3:3–17

In Luke 3:2–18, however the oppositions are clearly laid out on either side of a central axis in which either side mirrors the other, illustrated in fig. 2 below. By means of these symbolic oppositions, operating at both the cognitive and subconscious levels, John’s (and Luke’s) dismantling and reconstruction of the audience’s underlying worldview is further facilitated.

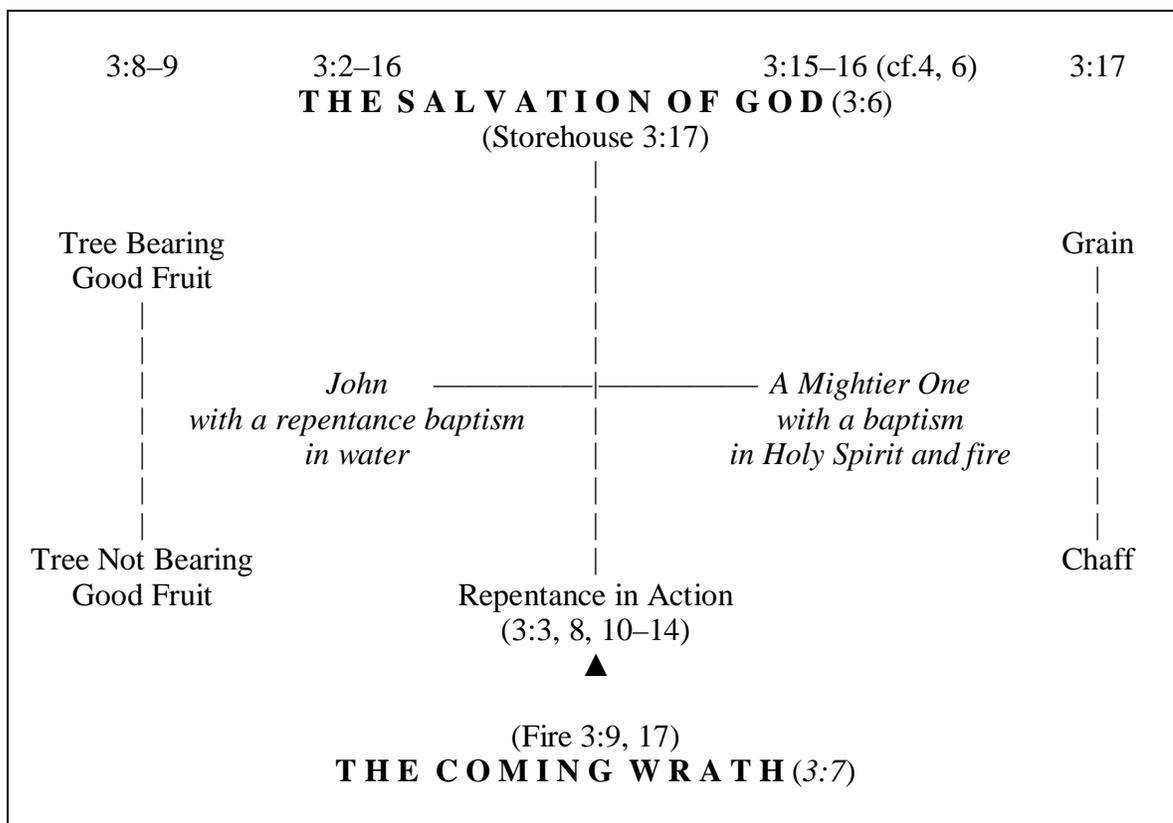


Figure 2: A Schema of Luke 3:3–17 Reflecting the Mirroring in the Text

As expected in ritual action as well as in myth, the fundamental opposition underlying the ritual is not stated explicitly in the Lukan text, but rather becomes clear only as the other symbolic oppositions are recognized and examined. One pole of the opposition is introduced at the beginning of John’s speech, in *the coming wrath* about which he heckles the crowds (3:7). The other side of this opposition is most clearly stated in the finale of the Isaiah quotation in the phrase, *the salvation of God* (3:6), a concept which Luke elsewhere associates with forgiveness from sin (1:71; 3:3; cf. section 5.2.2 of this dissertation). The accuracy of placing this postulated opposition as the fundamental opposition underlying the ritual must be tested and demonstrated by consideration of the clearer *mediating* oppositions which structure the whole of John’s speech. These terms *wrath* and *salvation* are fundamentally opposed and emotionally powerful abstract nouns, creating a chasm in hope and logic that begs to be bridged. For the sake of consideration,

the two proposed poles of this fundamental opposition have been centered opposite each other at the top and the bottom of the diagram in fig. 2 above.

The oppositions that will serve to mediate the two poles of this fundamental opposition are laid out by John in 3:8–17 in the form of three sets of binary oppositions.⁷⁰⁵ The first is in John’s opening speech, where the fundamental opposition is mediated in terms of a contrast between productive and unproductive fruit trees (as recorded on the far left of the diagram). This mediating opposition recasts the fundamental, and apparently unbridgeable opposition of *wrath* and *salvation* by means of a metaphor, calling on hearers to avoid the wrath to come, represented as fire (πῦρ). To avoid being cast into the fire, listeners are urged to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (3:8–9).

This opposition is mirrored at the end of the final speech (3:17) by a second opposition in the form of another agricultural metaphor—in this case a threshing floor (depicted on the right side of the diagram). Here again the chaff, which like the unproductive trees is without fruit, is burned with fire. But this time the future of the grain (fruit), too, is pictured as being gathered and saved in a storehouse (ἀποθήκη), in keeping with the *salvation of God* looked forward to in 3:6. As the action here is on the one whom John has just introduced, and who accomplishes both of these actions, the necessity for enacted repentance is not reiterated. It is however strongly emphasized in the immediately preceding dialogue of 3:10–14 which stands like a fulcrum between the two mediating oppositions.

The introduction of the one who would cleanse the threshing floor brings to the fore a third and different sort of mediating opposition in 3:15–17. For here John, like Ananias for Paul in Acts 9 is the only one in the scene who has been given a hint of Jesus’ future destiny. He responds to the people’s Messianic expectations by contrasting

⁷⁰⁵ An even more fundamental underlying opposition would underlie this one in the Gospel as a whole, but does not come to the surface in Luke 3:1–4:15.

himself and his ministry with this one who is to come, a mightier one (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός) who is far worthier than he.⁷⁰⁶ In the context of John’s baptism ritual, the focus of the contrast falls on the mightier one’s baptism, which is said to be “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ). John’s water baptism, mentioned first in this comparison, has already been introduced 3:2–6 as the center of John’s message and ministry. Described as a baptism of repentance, it introduces the function of the ritual, marking the transformation of God’s people to this life of active repentance John has been describing.

Although John’s baptism of repentance is said to be “for the forgiveness of sins” (3:3), it is the mightier one who will enact the ultimate salvation, for it is he who gathers the grain into his storehouses before the burning of the fruitless chaff (3:16). And his baptism, with the Holy Spirit and fire, also is said to be the greater one, though Luke leaves it at this point without explanation.⁷⁰⁷ As expressed in the visual schema above, then, the oppositions on either side of the central fulcrum of the ethical dialogue progressively mediate the fundamental opposition of 3:3–17, but the mediations given in the second speech (on the right) are the more final and complete. Thus across the chasm

⁷⁰⁶ The title “the mighty one” (ὁ ἰσχυρός) is given only to God and only in the LXX (e.g., 2 Sam 22:31–33 [ὁ ἰσχυρός] and 23:5 [ἰσχυρός]; Job 22:13; 33:29; 34:31 [ὁ ἰσχυρός]); while it is used as a descriptor also of other individuals in the case of heroes (Jdg 6:12; 1 Kgs 11:28; 1 Chr 5:24; 1 Macc 2:66) and occasionally kings (Ezra 4:20; Isa 8:7). It is never used of prophets.

⁷⁰⁷ Though the baptism of the Spirit is clearly referred to in Luke-Acts, there is major disagreement on what fire is referred to by Luke in 3:16: (1) the tongues of fire at the “baptism of the Spirit” at Pentecost (E. E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* [2d. ed.; London: Oliphants, 1974], 90; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 146–47); (2) the end-time fire that completely destroys the chaff in 3:17 (Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 24; C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* [London: S.P.C.K., 1947], 125–26.); (3) the refining fire suggested in such LXX passages as Zech 13:9 and in 1QS 4.20–21 (Fitzmyer, *Luke I, 1–9*, 473–74.); or (4) a single baptism of Holy Spirit-and-fire which accomplishes both refining and judgment (James D. G. Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire Baptism,” *NovT* 14 [1972]: 81–92; Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* [JSNTSup 110; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 201). A single interpretation of this fire in 3:16 is not at all essential in a ritual context where symbols regularly carry multiple meanings. Further all three are directly associated with the baptism ritual, including option 3, for not only is it in keeping with a symbolic usage in the LXX (cf. also Prov 17:3; Sir 2:4–5; Mal 3:3), but it is associated directly with baptism in Luke 12:50, where Jesus declares “I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and how hard-pressed I am until it is accomplished!”, a statement generally understood as referring to the events of his suffering and death in Jerusalem.

between *wrath* and *salvation*, as Luke declares in 3:3, John's repentance baptism serves as a symbolic bridge over which ritual participants may pass into a forgiven life characterized by repentance in action.⁷⁰⁸

As a symbol of this repentance, the act of water baptism stands as the *dominant symbol* of John's proclamation and of the ritual as a whole, "a fixed point referring to axiomatic values and which is a means to the fulfillment of the avowed purposes of the ritual." In its function as the physical acting out of the turning of repentance, it also plays a part in the organization of the ancillary symbols, such as tree and grain, water and spirit.⁷⁰⁹ As has been demonstrated, the meanings and relationships within this cluster are not spelled out in the text in propositional terms, but rather are, to some degree, a "nonlogical template of beliefs and values" highlighting not only the major tensions of John's βάπτισμα but also an important motif in the literary system of Luke.⁷¹⁰

As Luke thus moves on to tell of the end of John's ministry, he leaves the crowds, and the Lukan audience, in a liminal place of decision pondering the announcement of the one yet-to-come and not yet having clearly undergone the βάπτισμα at the center of the ritual. For although it is the focal point of John's preaching according to 3:3 and is hinted at here and in John's answer regarding the Christ (ἐγὼ μὲν ὕδατι βαπτίζω ὑμᾶς 3:16), Luke, unlike Mark or Matthew, confirms the actual baptism of the people only incidentally after the account of John's preaching is complete and the scene is being set

⁷⁰⁸ For another view of the oppositions in Luke 3:1–18, see Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Acts* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 182–87.

⁷⁰⁹ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 20–22, 31–42, 45. For Turner such symbols were the preferred way of approaching lived ritual through written text, for such symbols provide the fixed points and "may be regarded irrespective of their order of appearance in a given ritual as ends in themselves" (31–32).

⁷¹⁰ Victor W. Turner, "Passages, Margins and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas, Parts I & II," *Worship* 46 (1972): 399; idem, *Forest of Symbols*, 102–09, 239; idem, "African Ritual and Western Literature: Is a Comparative Symbology Possible," in *The Literature of Fact: Selected Papers from the English Institute* (ed. A. Fletcher; New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 80–81.

for the events of Jesus' baptism (βαπτισθῆναι ἅπαντα τὸν λαὸν 3:21). Neither does Luke give direct attention to the actual results of the ritual in the lives of the people, rather they will vanish from the scene at the introduction of Jesus. At the same time, the hope for the *mightier one* and the greater baptism he would bestow leaves the people, as it leaves the Lukan audience, to look ahead for the fuller βάπτισμα to come.

5.2.5 Narrator's Aside: Herod Locks up John (3:19–20)

Ὁ δὲ Ἡρώδης ὁ τετραάρχης, ἐλεγχόμενος ὑπ' αὐτοῦ περὶ Ἡρωδιάδος τῆς γυναικὸς τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ περὶ πάντων ὧν ἐποίησεν ποιηρῶν ὁ Ἡρώδης, ²⁰ προσέθηκεν καὶ τοῦτο ἐπὶ πᾶσιν [καὶ] κατέκλεισεν τὸν Ἰωάννην ἐν φυλακῇ.

With the announcement of the imminent coming of the mighty one, John's purpose in the narrative is complete, and Luke efficiently removes him from the scene by leaping ahead chronologically to narrate his imprisonment. Located here only in Luke, this scene has long drawn speculation regarding the reason for its out-of-sequence placement in the text. Scholars point to: (1) an historiographical device separating the period of the prophets from the period of Jesus; (2) an avoidance of allowing the lesser John to baptize the mightier Jesus; and (3) the logical conclusion of John's side of this final parallel; a ritual perspective contributes additional insights by turning attention to the information Luke here conveys about the way the ritual and its leader affected, and was affected by the greater society.⁷¹¹

In an immediate sense, as Green notes, the return of Herod to the narrative recalls to the reader's awareness the dominant figures of the socio-political structure highlighted at the beginning of the chapter but markedly absent from the scene of repentance at the Jordan.⁷¹² Luke thereby recalls the juxtaposition between John and the hierarchy of

⁷¹¹ A typical representative of each view is: Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 21, 26 (historiographical); and Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 148–49 (structural).

⁷¹² Green, *The Gospel*, 183.

structure represented by these figures, a juxtaposition now augmented by the addition of ὁ λαός whom John has led into a condition of liminality and *communitas* through his preaching of baptism. At this point, however, the response of Rome's appointed local tetrarch Herod (Antipas) stands alone in signifying the reception given John by structural authority, for any other possible response from either the imperial or high priestly circles is left outside the purview of the Lukan text.⁷¹³

In Luke's portrayal of the ritual events, John had focused on justice not subversive action, even avoiding the title Messiah, with its possible connotations of deliverance from Roman oppression, even though the people themselves were using it. By extending his call for repentance living even to this highest local representative of the structural elite John did, however, grossly overstep culturally and institutionally established honor expectations. Luke does not emphasize the immorality of Herod's relationship with Herodias as does Mark (6:18). Instead he adds the statement that John's rebuke was directed toward "all the wicked things that Herod had done." Here John's behavior exemplifies the anti-structural aspect of the liminality characteristic of cultural outsiders, and of ritual which arises outside the structural boundaries of society, which tends to ignore the cultural and structural mores guarding the authority of a society's power figures. John's reproof of Herod was, however, fully in keeping with the egalitarian values of *communitas*, for it extended the same expectations of justice-righteousness to Herod as had been earlier upheld before the people. It was also in keeping with the spirit of earlier prophets who were also cultural outsiders, including "the spirit of Elijah" (Luke 1:17), who rebuked Ahab for numerous evils including his injustice to Nabal at Jezebel's instigation (1 Kings 21:17–24; cf. 17:17–18).

⁷¹³ The narrator's comment in Luke 7:30, "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John" though suggesting a likewise negative reaction from certain religious structural factions, do not give information about the reaction of the highest structural levels of the high priestly circle.

By dismantling conventional cultural boundaries of rank and worth, and by arousing the people with talk of judgment and the imminent coming of a mighty one, John had already unsettled the status quo upon which Herod's power depended. Possibly he had also been informed of the tax-collectors and likely the soldiers, people from his own power-base, who were going out to listen to this message.⁷¹⁴ Now in Luke 3:19 John focuses the spotlight of his attention also on Herod himself. Such an antistructural infringement of the expected rights and authority of the tetrarch leads inevitably to a readjustment of the balance between structure and anti-structure at the expense of John's own freedom. Even more than in the other Synoptics, this representative of the societal structure appears in Luke uniformly as a scoundrel—a caricature of arbitrary executions, idle curiosity, and cruelty.⁷¹⁵ And Herod's response to John's liminal refusal to give regard to his societally-legitimized status and power is one of harsh efficiency as John, who had committed no crime, is removed from the scene to a Herodian prison.

Thus part of what Luke conveys in this brief scene is the friction that arose between the highest structural authority of the Jordan region and this outsider prophet and his ritual. John here evidences more than anywhere else that his wilderness background and his commissioning by the ῥῆμα θεοῦ have left him in a state of permanent liminality as a sacred outsider “external to the secular social structure,” impelled to “criticize all structure-bound personae in terms of a moral order binding on all.”⁷¹⁶ But the *destruction* of structure in itself, however, was not John's motive. Rather Luke depicts John as seeking the reinstatement of a higher and more legitimate structure based in God's own rights and expectations. And John's representation of God's higher structure is not presented as an empty claim or as simply John's personal opinion, for it was at the

⁷¹⁴ Meier, “John the Baptist,” 237.

⁷¹⁵ Luke 3:19; 9:7–9; 13:31; 23:7–12.

⁷¹⁶ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 116–17; cf. 128.

coming of the ῥῆμα θεοῦ that John arrived in Herod's territory around the Jordan with his message (cf. 7:30). Nothing of John's personal characteristics or motivations is revealed in Luke 3 that might distract from God's purpose in sending the ritual proclamation. God's heavenly structure reigns supreme in the story of John and, in face of the coming wrath upon human failure, the called-for response is participation in the ritual of repentance baptism and the associated works of justice. The result is forgiveness of sins.

5.2.6 Secondary Action: The People are Baptized (3:21a)

Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ βαπτισθῆναι ἅπαντα τὸν λαόν

Only after the announcement of John's imprisonment is it directly stated that the people are baptized, and that only in a temporal clause leading up to the events of Jesus' baptism. While it is no doubt assumed to have taken place during the time of John's preaching, it is explicitly announced only here, and rather awkwardly, in a position that emphasizes its connection with, and subordination to, the ritual of the mightier one. This connection will be discussed in chapter 6. Here it is important to notice particularly that, though the ἅπαντα should not be taken too literally as including every last individual, Luke here suggests that John has successfully carried out his task of calling ὁ λαός, that is God's covenant people, to prepare for the coming of the Lord (Luke 3:4; cf. 1:16). As Minear has pointed out, this people, for those steeped in the Septuagint, will be understood to refer to the Jewish people (cf. Acts 3:23; 15:14; 26:17) to whom the call to prepare for the Lord's coming is most directly aimed.⁷¹⁷ Yet Gabriel's prediction that John would, in turning "*many* of the sons of Israel" back to God, "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" suggests that a more specific narrowing may also be here in view.

⁷¹⁷ Minear, "Jesus' Audiences," 81–109.

5.3 John's Baptism as a Rite of Passage

While the baptism John practices in Luke and the other gospels is often recognized as a rite of passage, it should now be clear that it is not only the act of immersion itself that is important to this ritual, but also the setting and events that surround it. These factors, in fact, become so important in Luke that, though 3:3 emphasizes that John came “preaching a baptism,” the accomplishment of the actual physical act is relegated to a subordinate clause later in the chapter.

Looked at as a whole, it can be recognized that these ritual elements of John's baptism place a particular emphasis on the aspect of *separation*. This begins with the setting itself, for the wilderness and the marginal Jordan region reflect, even more intensely than the average ritual setting, a *separation* from normal life. It continues as well in the verbal call for a baptism of repentance, with its representation as a fleeing from the “coming wrath” that was apparently to fall even upon the children of Abraham.

Even as this separation deepens further into *liminality*, in the humbling treatment by which John deconstructs his audiences' former assumptions and in the people's eventual participation in John's baptism of repentance, the aspect of separation remains strong. For, while the message of repentance living and the quotation from Isa 40 demonstrates continuity with traditions of Scripture, the humiliation acts also to challenge and drive them from their former misconceptions and mistaken values and assumptions. Further the act of baptism itself recalls the traditional symbolism of baptism as purification, or separation from uncleanness, represented in the narratives of both Lucius (Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.23) and Josephus (*Vita* 11). At the same time the privileged knowledge of the mighty coming one also helps to place the ritual in a liminal context with the expectation of a supernaturally endowed being bringing the spirit and judgment in a purification accomplished by fire.

The *reincorporation* of the baptized ones into society, and the after-effects of their ritual experience, is given no attention in Luke (nor in Mark), for the spotlight turns

away from them at the moment of their baptism to focus on the arrival of Jesus.⁷¹⁸ Luke did however point specifically to what was *expected* in such a reincorporation, in the particular emphasis on John's repentance as not only an internal or cognitive act, but something to be lived out in merciful and just actions extending the *communitas* of ritual liminality into the every day life. The act of baptism addresses the problematic dualization of mind versus body by coupling inner repentance and obedient action in the performance of ritual, giving birth, as Bell points out, to a new social body through "the internalization of basic schemes and values" associated with the ritual act.⁷¹⁹

Contrary to Green's suggestion, there is no hint in Luke of a reincorporation into any new ritual kinship such as awaited Lucius or Paul following their ritual experiences.⁷²⁰ Only the call to extend *communitas* behavior toward all. Beyond this, in the mention of the mightier one to come, notice is given that they were to expect a yet greater baptism with Holy Spirit and fire (cf. Acts 19:4), thereby leaving them, in a sense, in a state of extended separation and liminality which would help to explain the lack of attention to their reincorporation.

The βάπτισμα ritual as a whole is apparently preached to all who would hear and is described particularly inclusively in Luke, specifically including tax collectors and soldiers among the generic crowds with whom John interacts. Thus it marks a passage meant for a whole society away from the danger of the wrath to come, through repentance, toward the forgiveness of sins. For the individual member of God's ὁ λαός who chose to participate fully in this baptism, the choice to be baptized represented a

⁷¹⁸ There is only the single suggestion of a positive ongoing influence in 7:29–30 (following Jesus' statements about John) which contrasts "the people and the tax collectors" who had "been baptized with the baptism of John" with the Pharisees and law experts who in refusing John's baptism had "rejected God's purpose for themselves."

⁷¹⁹ Catherine Bell, "The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power," *JRitSt* 4, no. 2 (1990): 301, 310.

⁷²⁰ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 164, 165 n. 8, 173.

transformation in the state and direction of one's life.⁷²¹ In this it bears some similarity to the rites of passage of both Apuleius and Paul who also are portrayed as undergoing a transformation of status and life direction through the ritual experience of humiliation and symbolism, as well as actual (rather than promised) divine encounters.

In Luke John's baptism is, thus, neither a "conversion" entailing the rejecting of past beliefs, nor some type of permanent purification, nor an initiation into a new sect, but rather a cleansing associated with a return to righteousness (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.117).⁷²² At the same time, John's baptism is differentiated from the traditional uses of water immersion/βάπτισμα as a means of ritual cleansing, in both meaning (by its association with the wrath and the mightier one to come) and promise (in forgiveness and salvation). Thus it acts, as ritual often does, as,

a way to generate privileged contrasts between the acts being performed and those being contrasted or mimed so as to produce ritualized bodies—actors imbued with the dispositions to engender practices structured by such privileged contrasts—which are perceived in turn to promote the restructuring of the larger cultural milieu.⁷²³

As Luke 7:29–30 and 20:4–5 will show, the societal leaders recognize this dynamic, for these largely nameless representatives of the social structure reject his baptism. For John's baptism acts to subvert structure and thereby endanger their own structural positions. And he does so, most dangerously, by appeal to the very Scripture and ritual tradition of cleansing on which the structure itself is based.

⁷²¹ The fact that Luke does not specifically limit the home locations of those who come leaves it open to the possibility that Gentiles too might hear and respond to John's baptism message, whether within the narrative through baptism, or in the Lukan audience through recognition and serious consideration of his message leading to their own, Christian, baptism.

⁷²² Cf. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 197–202; Edward R. Burrows, "Baptism in Mark and Luke," in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross; JSNTSup 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 100. For similar views about the historical John see Bruce Chilton, *Jesus' Baptism and Jesus' Healing: His Personal Practice of Spirituality* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1998), 23–29.

⁷²³ Bell, "The Ritual Body," 304–05.

In bringing such a challenging message, it was essential that John's authority as ritual prophet be strongly affirmed for the Lukan audience.⁷²⁴ For this was no societally-ordained rite, bestowing smoothly the new life and destiny proclaimed by John. Rather, it originated with an outsider in the wilderness margins and depended on the audience's own voluntary repentance and action. Further, as Conzelmann points out, "Because of John's baptism a split runs through the Jewish people, separating the penitent from the impenitent."⁷²⁵

Yet Luke does not describe John as demonstrating for the crowds any of the supernatural manifestations or even personal qualities which Weber argues to be integral to the success of the charismatic prophet. The essential conviction of his authority is established by Luke through the attestation that John is under the direction of God himself (1:13–17, 67–79; 3:2) and acts as his prophet (1:76; 3:2–3). It is also established by association with the culturally axiomatic values and concepts he appealed to—including ritual cleansing, judgment, repentance, and good works. These values recall the preaching of the long line of the revered prophets of the past who had proclaimed similar messages and to whom John is connected (3:2–3).⁷²⁶ The motivation of the crowds to submit to John's authority is further elicited by his fearful proclamation of "the wrath to come" (3:7) the promises of the "forgiveness of sins" (3:3) and the "salvation of God" (3:6) and the strong hope of many for the imminent Messiah John promised (3:16).⁷²⁷

⁷²⁴ As Collins has noted, John's apocalyptic call to action argues against classifying John as simply an *oracular prophet*, but suggests something more like Webb's *popular leadership prophet* (Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation* [ed. Maxwell E. Johnson; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995], 41, 47 n. 36; Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*). Cf. Richard A. Horsley, "Like One of the Prophets of Old: Two Types of Popular Prophets at the Time of Jesus," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 435–63.

⁷²⁵ Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 146.

⁷²⁶ Cf. Isa 1:3; Hos 4–5; Amos 5–6.; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 238; cf. Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 98–99, 237.

⁷²⁷ Alfred Plummer suggests that they were seeking baptism as a substitute for repentance, or as a magical rite that would confer benefit independent of moral condition; this is certainly possible in general terms in view of the way John chose to address them (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 88).

The enactment of ritual too, played a part in establishing the authority of John, by grounding it in the symbolism of nature and natural processes, both in the wilderness images of vipers, stones, and barren trees and in the more domesticated images of water washings and fruit trees, threshing floor, and barn. According to Catherine Bell, symbols that evoke the solidity of “natural biological processes,” cause the associated teachings to appear “nonarbitrary and grounded in reality.”⁷²⁸ In this way John, who stands in a position of liminal outsider to society, is nonetheless demonstrated to be a trustworthy messenger and ritual elder.

5.4 Preliminary Thoughts on the Significance of John’s Baptism in Luke-Acts

Despite the attention given to verbal communication in Luke 3:2–18, the baptism ritual has been demonstrated to stand as the center and summation of the task of John in Luke (3:3, 16). With the note that all ὁ λαός have been baptized (3:21a), the preparatory mission of John is shown to be complete and his disappearance from the scene, appropriate. But despite this ending, John’s baptism here, and even more specifically in Acts (1:22; 10:37; 13:23–24), is spoken of as a time of beginnings. An understanding of the full nature of these beginnings awaits a consideration of *the ritual of the mightier one* in the following chapter. However some important points can already be observed.

As noted in chapter 4, Luke-Acts as a whole—beginning from the opening narrative of Zacharias’ incense burning in the temple presaging the climactic conceptions of John and Jesus—is distinctive in marking each of its important transitions and new beginnings by means of ritual based in Scripture and ancient tradition. In this way Luke has demonstrated that each change in the life of the Jesus and his church has been grounded in appropriate seeking and finding of divine guidance and has the weight of ancient tradition behind it. John’s baptism ritual, too, fits into this framework, for by it “many of the sons of Israel” are turned “back to the Lord their God . . . so as to make

⁷²⁸ Bell, *Ritual*, 135–36.

ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:16–17), a preparation looked forward to in the LXX in Isa 40:3–4 and also Mal 3:1, 22–23. Thus John’s baptism marks a beginning of the constitution of a people prepared for the long-awaited coming of the Lord.

Yet, despite John’s declared task of turning Israel back to the Lord, Luke pays almost no direct attention to the ongoing effects of the baptism after the preaching is portrayed and the people’s baptism has been announced. Once their baptism is completed in 3:21—though ὁ λαός are depicted in a generally positive way as seeking out Jesus, acting as the ongoing witnesses of the acts of God, and often unwittingly protecting him from their leaders—there is almost no indication that these actions of the people relate directly to their baptism. The single exception is in 7:29, and even here the recognition of God’s justice by the baptized ones has to do with Jesus’ words specifically about the John they revered. Further it is evident throughout Luke-Acts that while many of ὁ λαός accepted the Lord he proclaimed others also rejected him. Worse, in Luke 23:13, 21, 23, ὁ λαός are said to join their leaders in demanding Jesus’ crucifixion, while Acts ends with the famous pronouncement from Isa 6:10, “The heart of this people (τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου) has become dull . . . otherwise they might . . . understand . . . and return, and I would heal them” (Acts 28:27).

While all of this agrees with the observations of Vizedom and Crapanzano that rites of passage and actual changes in role and status do not necessarily go hand-in-hand with ritual, it also demonstrates that Luke’s purpose in the account of John’s baptism is something other than to show that he has produced a perfected people, all ready to do the Lord’s bidding.⁷²⁹ For although John certainly calls for a changed society in the transformation of his hearers, it is evident, both from Luke-Acts and the prophets, that the coming Lord too has a work of teaching and transforming to do. (Nevertheless, the

⁷²⁹ M. Vizedom, *Rites and Relationships: Rites of Passage and Contemporary Anthropology* (vol. 4 of Sage Research Papers in the Social Sciences; Cross-Cultural Study Series 9-027; Beverly Hills, Cal.: Sage, 1976), 26; Vincent Crapanzano, “Rite of Return: Circumcision in Morocco,” in *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society* 9 (ed. Werner Muensterberger and L. Bryce Boyer; New York: Psychohistory Press, 1981), 17.

insistence in Acts 1:22 that all the apostles have been with Jesus since the baptism of John may allude to the necessity of the apostles having chosen to take part in this ritual of transformation and new beginnings.)

Although a transformed society was not achieved, it would not be correct to conclude, as does Keck, that John failed.⁷³⁰ For throughout the rest of Luke-Acts it is demonstrated that John's work laid the foundations for both the essential teachings of John and his practice of baptism as rite of passage. The teachings of John on an ethical plane, derived from the prophets, are repeated and magnified both by Jesus himself (Luke 12:33–34; 14:33) and later by the church which put them into practice (Acts 2:44–46; 4:32–35), while the central emphasis of his message, active repentance, is at the very core of the teachings of Jesus (Luke 5:32; 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10) and the church (Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20).

But it is his baptism that makes the most distinctive mark on the future church, for it provides the beginnings, or foundations, for Christian baptism. John's association with the ancient prophets, and the association of his repentance baptism with the roots of baptism in the ancient purification rituals of Jew and Gentile alike, gave to the newly-adapted Christian baptism which followed it the founding in tradition necessary for its legitimization. When people began to come to a belief in Jesus in Acts, the apostles turned to the same physical act of baptism they had seen John practice, using it, like John, as the centre of a rite of passage into a new status and direction in life. And like John's baptism of repentance, the early church associated this baptism with repentance and the washing away of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Yet Luke-Acts as a whole also makes clear that while the teaching and baptism of John is a significant beginning, it is incomplete. This is directly declared in Luke 3:17–18 where John speaks of the mightier one to come who would give a greater baptism,

⁷³⁰ Liander E. Keck, "Jesus' Entrance upon His Mission: Luke 3:1–4:30," *RevExp* 64 (1967): 466.

baptizing them in Holy Spirit and fire. Later, following the coming of this mightier one and his baptism, the incompleteness of John's work is underlined in Acts 18:24–25 with the correction of the eloquent Apollos, who knew only John's baptism, and in 19:3–6 where other disciples who knew only John's baptism are baptized into the name of Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. In contrast with this Christian baptism, which most of Luke's audience would have already known, the emphasis in John's baptism, as in the Isaiah prophecy quoted in Luke 3:4–6, rests particularly on the repentance-separation-preparation aspect of the rite.⁷³¹ In contrast, Christian baptism in Acts goes beyond an act of repentance to incorporate also this very calling upon (22:16), faith in (8:12; 16:31; 18:8), or dedication to (ἐπὶ 2:38; ἐν 10:47; εἰς 19:5) Jesus' name, and includes as well an incorporation into community (2:41–42) and reception of the Holy Spirit (2:38; 8:13–15; 10:47; 19:5–6).⁷³²

⁷³¹ As Green notes, "Later references highlight the pivotal role of repentance/embracing God's will in John's baptismal ministry (cf. Luke 7.29–30; Acts 13.24; 19.4)" ("From 'John's Baptism' to 'Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus'" in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church* [ed. Stanley Porter and Anthony R. Cross; JSNTSup 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 164).

⁷³² See 3.4.2. above. This understanding of dedication is discussed in G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 100.

CHAPTER SIX
THE RITE OF THE MIGHTIER ONE:
JESUS' BAPTISM AND ANOINTING IN LUKE 3:21B–4:15

Chapter 5 has considered Luke's description of John's baptism as a ritual account portraying a rite of passage marking the repentance-transformation by which John called God's people to prepare for the coming of the Lord. Although Luke's presentation of this *rite of the many* involves both verbal and physical aspects, it is the verbal aspects which are emphasized, for it is these that have the power to best bring the impact of the ritual experience to the Lukan audience. Through riddling, humiliation, and symbol, audiences are ushered through the liminal transition toward a changed life of active repentance living.

In keeping with Luke-Acts' structural use of rite of passage, John's baptism marks a number of beginnings: the beginning of the proclamation to all of the imminence of the Lord's coming, the beginning of a changed life in the repentance transformation of those who responded, and also the beginning of the practice that would eventually become Christian baptism. But as Luke emphasizes, John's work is only a beginning, emphasizing separation, repentance, and preparation. And though John has faithfully carried out his task, and *all* the people (ἅπαντα τὸν λαόν Luke 3:21) have been baptized, this baptismal action is meaningful in that it looks forward to the coming of a messiah and mightier one who brings a greater baptism, one accomplished with Holy Spirit and fire.

What follows next is the *rite of the mightier one*, which is the subject of this chapter. The investigation will proceed much as in chapter 5, considering first any

additions to the ritual field before observing the movements in the operations field. Luke presents the action in three major movements. Jesus' baptism, mentioned only in a subordinate clause, serves as an introduction setting the scene for the first major movement, Jesus' anointing (3:21–22). A narrator's aside pronouncing Jesus' age and genealogy (3:23–38), both closes this scene and forms a bridge to the next. In the second movement Jesus is led in the desert by the Spirit (4:1–13). The ritual action concludes with a third movement, Jesus' return to Galilee (4:14–15).

6.1 The Ritual Field: The Narrative Context of the Ritual

The main components of the ritual field—spatial, temporal, and social—have already been introduced and developed in chapter 5.

6.1.1 Additional Social Dimensions of the Narrative Context

Two additional characters, however, appear on the scene in this second of the two interlocked rituals: Jesus and the devil. They will be introduced below.

Jesus

Although Jesus' baptism marks his first adult appearance in Luke and his first-ever appearance in the text of Mark, Jesus has been the focal point throughout Luke 1 and 2, for even the sections on John eventually point to Jesus and his future role. These two chapters, which are largely unique to Luke, focus on making clear to the Lukan audience Jesus' fundamental identity as, in a unique way, Son of God from birth (1:32, 35; 2:49), as well as his destiny as Christ (2:11, 26), Lord (1:43; 2:11), Savior (1:69; 2:11, 30) and Redeemer (1:68; 2:38), and eternal Davidic king (1:32–33) long foretold by Israel's prophet (1:55, 70). As Charles Talbert has pointed out, Luke also demonstrates in these chapters a wealth of the signs and portents Greco-Roman audiences expected to point forward to the destiny of a great man, giving in the space of these two short chapters: two angelophanies (1:26–38; 2:8–20); three prophecies (1:67–79; 2:25–35; 2:36–38); and a

portent with prophetic interpretation (1:41–45) which anticipate Jesus' future greatness.⁷³³

At the same time, Luke also highlights Jesus' distance from the structural centers of power and wealth in the repeated mention of his manger-cradle (2:7, 12, 16), his welcome by shepherds (2:8–20), the characterization of his offering of the poor-person's sacrifice at the temple (2:24), and his oft-mentioned childhood and youth in Nazareth (1:26; 2:4, 39, 51). More conventional are the summaries of 2:40 and 52, which set forth Jesus' appropriately developing strength/stature and wisdom, and the favor in which he was held by both God and humans. But it is one pericope in particular that sets forth what Luke chooses to display of Jesus' personal characteristics and his values and motivations.

Although placed directly before the baptism in narrative time, this single report from Jesus' childhood took place about fifteen years before the baptism when, as a boy-turning-youth, he is inadvertently left behind in Jerusalem. In this first and only independent action attributed to Jesus before his baptism in any of the four Gospels, Jesus spends his time in the temple where he seats himself among the teachers at the temple, listening and asking questions. Similarly to Josephus' consultations with the high priests and leaders of the city (*Vit.* 1.8), Jesus amazes everyone with his understanding (σύνεσις) and his answers (Luke 2:46–47). In this scene Luke also may be seen to prepare the audience to understand coming events by displaying Jesus' gravitation toward the temple, the center of God's sacred presence on earth, and his choice, both at this point and apparently regularly in the past, to increase his understanding through the study of the law.

⁷³³ Charles H. Talbert, "Prophecies of Future Greatness: The Contribution of Greco-Roman Biographies to an Understanding of Luke 1,5–4,15," in *The Divine Helmsman* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel; New York: Ktav, 1980). As Talbert also points out, Nock noted the Greco-Roman expectation for such signs much earlier in Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Brown Classics in Judaica; Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988), 240.

Jesus' answer to his mother's consternation upon finally locating him, "Did you not know that I must be ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου" stakes a claim in relation both to the temple and to God's reign. As Fitzmyer suggests, it reveals that he at this time understood, and wished for his parents to understand, that "his relation to his heavenly Father transcends all natural family ties."⁷³⁴ The tension raised between the piety thus attributed to Jesus and this single incident of unexpected independence in challenging the rebuke of his mother and thus the obedience expectations of his society does not suggest a change in his values, but instead acts as a prefiguring of where his path would soon lead as he crosses the expectations of his society in following the will of his Father. Luke stresses that from that point he "continues in obedience to them," thus highlighting Jesus' obedience to his parents which is an expectation not only in the LXX (e.g., Exod 20:12) but also evidences the *pietas* expected of a well-bred son in Roman society.

As Jesus joins in the ritual of baptism then, Luke has already clued his readers in to who Jesus is and would be through the repeated use of titles which harken back to the ancient promises his audience would know from the LXX. He has also repeatedly demonstrated an abundance of the kinds of signs and portents that would help to convince a Greco-Roman audience that Jesus would indeed be someone very great. Of Jesus' own personal interests and motivations Luke 2:41–50 showcases his interest in learning and his understanding much as Josephus has demonstrated his own σύνεσις before the ritualized account of his passage to adulthood and to active participation in public affairs. More than this, this pericope demonstrates Jesus' own knowledge of his special relationship with his Father along with his conscious intent to act in congruence with that relationship. His subsequent faithful submission to Mary and Joseph demonstrates his proper sonship at a human level (2:51). Of other relationships, Luke gives no

⁷³⁴Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I, 1–9* (AB 28; New York: Doubleday, 1981), 443, 447. The primary possible interpretations are, "about my Father's business" or "in my Father's house" with the second being currently favored. The openness of the answer suggests the possibility that Jesus' question encompassed both ideas.

indication—either with the common people or with John. The people themselves have heard nothing of him since the reports of the shepherds, of Simeon, and of Anna, approximately thirty years ago. His sole contact with the ruling structures has been at the level of the teachers in the temple who are amazed by his answers (2:47). The promises of his future kingship and deliverance of Israel from their enemies suggest, however, the likelihood of more and higher level contacts in the future.

The Devil

Ὁ διάβολος, a substantive use of the Greek adjective meaning *slanderer, accuser*, or *adversary*, is the term regularly used by the LXX to translate the Hebrew יָצָוּרִית or “adversary,” often an accuser at law in both earthly and heavenly realms.⁷³⁵ When used by the LXX to refer to a non-human being, ὁ διάβολος is there depicted as an adversary and tempter of God’s people (1 Chr 21:1; Job 2:7) as well as their accuser in the heavenly realm (Job 1–2; Zech 3:1–2).⁷³⁶ Luke-Acts uses it as a synonym of ὁ σατανᾶς, the simple transliteration of the Hebrew term, employing each seven times.

The encounter of ὁ διάβολος with Jesus in the wilderness is the devil’s first appearance in Luke. Thus Luke’s audience would have known of this figure from these mentions in the LXX, and perhaps also from Jewish folklore where he is depicted variously, but particularly as “the one who tries to disrupt the relation between God and man.”⁷³⁷ In Luke-Acts, the action of the devil is that thwart the purposes of God.⁷³⁸ Luke-Acts’ use of ὁ διάβολος demonstrates a view of the devil which is similar to that of the LXX both in Luke 8:12 where he takes away the seed of the word to prevent people from

⁷³⁵ “Διάβολος,” LSJ 390; W. Foerster and G. von Rad, “Diabolos,” *TDNT* 2:73–75.

⁷³⁶ C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (ed. Howard Clark Kee and Dennis Nineham; 1st ed.; TPINTC; London: SCM Press, 1990), 257.

⁷³⁷ Foerster and Rad, *TDNT* 2:76–77.

⁷³⁸ Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1987).

believing and being saved, and in Acts 13:10 where Paul calls Elymas a deceitful “son of the devil” who is an enemy of all righteousness. Significantly, in the only other reference to ὁ διάβολος in Luke-Acts outside of Jesus’ wilderness temptations, Acts 10:38 speaks directly of Jesus’ anointing “with the Holy Spirit and with power,” stating that Jesus “went about . . . healing all who were being oppressed by ὁ διάβολος because God was with him.” Luke-Acts use of the term ὁ σατανᾶς is similar, portraying him as an oppressor and tempter (Luke 13:16; 22:3, 31; Acts 5:3; 26:18) whom Jesus sees falling from heaven after the mission and return of the seventy (Luke 10:18), but also reveals Luke’s view of him as the ruler of the demons (11:18).

Thus as the devil appears on the scene, the Lukan audience can be immediately expected to view him as a troublesome enemy, just as Luke-Acts clearly depicts him in the ongoing narrative though Luke will soon demonstrate that he is a defeated enemy. As he approaches Jesus in the wilderness in 4:2 to test him, he does so also in the context of the “courtroom” scenes of Job 1–2 and Zech 3:1–2.

6.2 The Operations Field: The Rite of the Mightier One (Luke 3:21–4:15)

6.2.1 Secondary Action: Jesus is Baptized (3:21a)

Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ βαπτισθῆναι ἅπαντα τὸν λαὸν καὶ Ἰησοῦ βαπτισθέντος καὶ προσευχομένου . . .

With John’s ministry now decisively concluded, Jesus suddenly comes into view, already on the scene and undergoing the rite of baptism. The introductory words ἐγένετο δὲ, marking the opening of a new stage in the narrative, recall the thoughts of Luke’s audience from the prison cell of John, while the words which follow turn their attention back to the events at the Jordan.⁷³⁹ A series of three temporal clauses set the stage for the

⁷³⁹ François Bovon states, “ἐγένετο δὲ (‘now it happened that,’ v.21) suggests a transition: the main concern shifts from John to Jesus” (*Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* [ed. Helmut Koester; trans. Christine M. Thomas; Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], 118).

main events of this complex sentence of Luke 3:21–22 by locating these events in the chronology of the narrative and by setting up relationships between the ritual participants. With no baptizer identified, no other actor here detracts from the juxtaposition of the baptisms of Jesus and the people.

In the first two of these clauses the baptism of the people (βαπτισθῆναι ἅπαντα τὸν λαόν), now at last directly declared, is announced alongside the baptism of Jesus (καὶ Ἰησοῦ βαπτισθέντος), inextricably interlocking the two scenes across the chronological gap of the out-of-place narrative of John’s imprisonment.⁷⁴⁰ This juxtaposition underlines the already-established centrality of this physical action of baptism by making it the single specified connecting point between the two ritual experiences.⁷⁴¹ By sharing the same ritual act and also apparently standing as observers at each other’s immersions, the people and Jesus are placed in solidarity “around God’s purpose.”⁷⁴² The fate of the baptized ones is interwoven with that of Jesus and their baptism of repentance is pointed

⁷⁴⁰ The exact sequence of people’s baptism, Jesus’ baptism, and ensuing events—whether contemporaneous or contiguous—is a matter of some debate with some such as C. F. Evans and I. Howard Marshall who declare, based on the aorist infinitive, that the people’s baptism was complete before Jesus’ baptism began (Evans, *Saint Luke*, 247; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978], 150). (Alfred Plummer, in fact, argues that most of the crowds had already gone home [A *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke* (ed. Samuel Rolles Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Augustus Briggs; 4th ed; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901; repr., 1922), 98]) Others, on the other hand have argued, based on the ἐν τῷ preceding the aorist infinitive (βαπτισθῆναι) and the aorist participle (βαπτισθέντος) that matches it, that the events occurred at the same time (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996], 595; cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* [SP 3; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991], 68.) The most likely translation seems to be “And it came to pass that when all the people were baptized Jesus also was baptized, and while he was praying . . .” What is clear is that Luke has purposefully associated Jesus with “all the people” and their baptism, in contrast to Mark and Matthew who distinctly separate the two baptisms by placing between them a description of John’s physical appearance and preaching.

⁷⁴¹ R. F. Collins reminds readers that, “In the Lukan writings, the *laos* . . . does not simply mean the crowd of the populace. Rather frequently (e.g., Luke 1:68; 2:32) *laos* has a technical meaning; it refers to the people of God, Israel itself. This technical meaning is present in Luke’s mention of the baptism of the people in 3:21” (“Luke 3:21–22, Baptism or Anointing?” *TBT* 84 [1976]: 823–24).

⁷⁴² As Joel Green notes, “The initial dependent clauses lead into the focal point of this pericope by stressing Jesus’ solidarity with those who had responded positively to John’s message; by participating in the ritual act of baptism, we may recall, they (he) communicated their (his) fundamental orientation around God’s purpose” (*The Gospel of Luke* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 185; cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* [London: Macmillan, 1962], 100).

toward a future completion. As Jesus joins in their ritual action, he is also united, in a sense, into the experience of status-leveling *communitas* already encouraged among the people by John's abrasive call to repentance living (3:7) and strengthened by their liminal position in space and time. Indeed, though Luke gives no information regarding his presence during the preaching of John, he too has separated himself from home and daily life and participates with them in the vulnerability of a shared enactment practiced by another upon their bodies in baptism.⁷⁴³ The juxtaposition of the two baptisms also suggests a certain interweaving of the symbolic implications of each ritual experience, for as the later chapters of Luke evidence, Jesus joins his fellow initiands by also taking on the task of producing the fruit of justice-*communitas* (4:18–19; 7:22).

Yet important distinctions are made between the two baptisms. The baptism ritual of John is separated from Jesus' experience at the baptism by the story of John's arrest. For while the ritual of the many find its focal point in the baptism, the rite of the mightier one is, in Luke, merely introduced or set in motion by his baptism. While Luke's description of the ritual of the many has focused on ritual instruction, the rite of the mightier one focuses on divine events. Further, the actions and symbols differ. Those of the ritual of the many emphasize general repentance to be lived out in one's life, while the portrayal of the rite of the mightier one point to a particular identity and role.⁷⁴⁴ This baptism of the people is the final scene in "the ritual of the many, completing their "going out" and representing the conclusion of the preaching of John and his instructional dialogue. At the same time it is also placed here in juxtaposition with Jesus' baptism (the

⁷⁴³ Contra Walter Wink's idea that βαπτισθῆναι is a middle voice and that Jesus' baptized himself (*John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* [London: Cambridge University Press, 1968], 83).

⁷⁴⁴ James D. G. Dunn suggests that the enactment of repentance in John's baptism (and its successor, Christian water baptism,) was preparatory for, and antithetical to Spirit-baptism which brings entry into a new age and a new covenant. For him Jesus participation was both an identification with the people's sins and commitment to his work (*Baptism in the Holy Spirit* [SBT; London: SCM, 1970], 35–37).

“rite of the mightier one”), which in contrast forms only the prelude of greater ritual events to come.

Another important distinction between the two rituals is the removal of John as ritual director. Indeed, the abrupt disappearance of John from active leadership in this rite clears the way for God himself to come to the fore as ritual director.⁷⁴⁵ His leading role in the baptism ritual has been hinted at from the beginning, for John’s proclamation of the ritual of the many began only with the arrival of the $\rho\acute{\eta}\mu\alpha$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ (3:2; cf. 7:29–30; 20:3).⁷⁴⁶ Now, in 3:21–22, heaven is about to become the direct agent in the rite of the mightier one.

These distinctions may explain Luke’s lack of concern that the baptism implies that Jesus, like the people, was in need of repentance (contrast Matt. 3:14–15). In ritual, symbols are regularly used in a condensed way to represent a broad variety of meanings. As Bell notes, “frequently some of these messages and purposes can modify or even contradict each other” while still emphasizing the interrelated nature of the things they represent.⁷⁴⁷ This multiplicity of meaning is augmented by the audience’s knowledge of other ritual immersions practiced, not primarily for the forgiveness of sin, but for purification from ritual uncleanness occasioned in the contacts of daily living. Such play in the meaning and use of the baptism symbol extends throughout Luke-Acts, beginning with John’s promise of a baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16; cf. Acts 11:15–16); recurring in Jesus’ statement that, “I have a baptism to undergo” (Luke 12:50); and continuing in the distinctive baptism proclaimed by Peter (Acts 2:38) and

⁷⁴⁵ R. F. Collins, “Luke 3:21–22,” 823; Robert C. Tannehill, “The Mission of Jesus According to Luke iv 16–30,” in *Jesus in Nazareth* (BZNW 40; ed. Walther Eltester; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), 69 no.53.

⁷⁴⁶ R. F. Collins, “Luke 3:21–22,” 823.

⁷⁴⁷ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 136; cf. Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 27–34, 245.

elaborated on in the rest of Acts. Luke, by moving the two interlocked baptisms somewhat apart from John's preaching, creates space for the consideration of such differing symbolic implications of the two baptisms.

As the introductory movement in Jesus' own rite of passage, his baptism, like that of the people, carries qualities of separation. He is now parting forever from his former life in the role of an obedient son living obscurely in a quiet Galilean village (cf. Luke 4:16–30). Indeed, while the people's baptism was the dominant symbol of their ritual representing their internal change of heart and mind, Jesus' baptism, beyond its connection with the baptism with the people, stands rather as an act of separation removing him from association with home and from every external earthly influence into sacred time, in order to experience the more central divine initiation which he alone is about to receive. In this it is closer to the ritual purification of Lucius as he prepares for his central initiation experience.

As has been demonstrated in chapter 4, Luke introduces each new and momentous stage in Jesus' life with specific ritual associations coupled with a connection to God through prayer.⁷⁴⁸ This begins immediately in the account of his birth which opens with the people at prayer (1:10; cf. 2:37) and is celebrated by the rites of circumcision and naming and presentation to the Lord (2:21–24) and extends to his suffering, death, and exaltation which opens with prayer on the Mount of Olives (22:39–44) and which he refers to as a distressing “baptism” he must undergo (12:50). Likewise, the events at his baptism are opened with prayer, and are even a part of his prayer

⁷⁴⁸ Luke's emphasis on Jesus' prayer in the context of transitions in his life has been accepted widely from Hans Conzelmann to the present (Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* [trans. Geoffrey Buswell; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982], 180; see also, e.g., Bovon, *Luke 1*, 208).

experience for the text says they occurred “while he was praying” (προσευχομένου 3:21). For as is the norm in Luke-Acts, heaven actively responds to the individual at prayer.⁷⁴⁹

Jesus’ prayer thus becomes the entrance point leading into the direct involvement of the divine in the singular process which opens with Jesus’ baptism. No longer will God’s action in this paired ritual account be represented through the words of an intermediary but now instead through an impressive display of supernatural action. In contrast Paul is recorded as praying only following the confrontation by the heavenly voice (9:11), and even Lucius’ response from Isis is focused on her generous mercy than to the strong commendation Jesus is about to receive from God (Apuleius, *Met.* 11.5–6).

6.2.2 Movement 1: Jesus is Anointed (3:21b–22)

[‘Εγένετο] . . . ἀνεωχθῆναι τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ καταβῆναι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον σωματικῶς εἶδει ὡς περιστερὰν ἐπ’ αὐτόν, καὶ φωνὴν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ γενέσθαι· σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.

In the first movement three sacra are delineated by means of three complementary infinitives: heaven opened (ἀνεωχθῆναι), the spirit descended (καταβῆναι), and a voice came (γενέσθαι).

“*Heaven Opened*” (*ἀνεωχθῆναι*)

With the prayer of Jesus the scene of interest shifts from earth to heaven. For in that very moment, while Jesus is yet praying, the heavens open.⁷⁵⁰ This dramatic occurrence is the first in the series of the three main events—the opening of the heavens, the descent of the Spirit, and the voice from heaven—which make up the primary liminal phase of Jesus’ ritual. These supernatural events are connected and emphasized by their

⁷⁴⁹ Luke 1:10–11; 2:37–38; Acts 1:14–2:4; 4:23–31; 9:10–19 (esp. 11–12); 10:1–4, 9–11; 13:1–3; 22:17–21. In contrast Saul’s prayer is not recorded until after his encounter with a heavenly voice, yet it too results in a heavenly response when the Lord appears to him in vision with the promise that he would regain his sight and also to Ananias sending him to lay his hands on Saul.

⁷⁵⁰ “For Luke the Spirit is given in response to prayer, and neither in nor through baptism” (Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 33–35).

placement in three parallel infinitival clauses which are the true subject of ἐγένετο, the main verb of this complex sentence of Luke 3:21–22.⁷⁵¹ In contrast to Mark’s εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, Luke (with Matthew) portrays the opening of heaven as an objective event (Ἐγένετο . . . ἀνεωχθῆναι τὸν οὐρανὸν), a concrete ritual action in the world, rather than a subjective personal experience perceived by one alone.⁷⁵²

This opening of heaven, so often a prelude to an action or communication by God, marks the change both in ritual leadership and in ritual intensity and signification, dissolving the barriers that normally stand between the earthly and heavenly realms.⁷⁵³ No more momentous backdrop for a ritual could have been chosen. It is as if heaven, having started this ritual through the ῥῆμα θεοῦ, has been waiting for this moment to make it complete. Now it is heaven which acts. Jesus himself stands engrossed in prayer, in the role of passive recipient-observer resting as clay in the hands of the divine ritual elder.⁷⁵⁴

“The Holy Spirit Descended” (Καταβῆναι)

Moving deeper into the liminal phase of ritual, a divine apparition now appears, descending upon Jesus as he prays (προσευχομένου . . . καταβῆναι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον).⁷⁵⁵ As with the opening of heaven, Luke presents the Spirit’s descent as an actual

⁷⁵¹ “The effect is to lay stress on the supernatural phenomena and to play down the importance of the attendant earthly circumstances” (Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 152; cf. Green, *The Gospel*, 185; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* [Nashville: Broadman, 1934], 1389).

⁷⁵² Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 148.

⁷⁵³ Such an opening of heaven often initiates a divine visitation in the form of judgment/deliverance (Isa 64:1–2; Rev 19:11), of blessing (Deut 28:12), or of revelation (Acts 7:55–56; 10:11; Ezek 1:1; John 1:51).

⁷⁵⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 103.

⁷⁵⁵ Victor W. Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas, Parts I & II,” *Worship* 46 (1972): 399.

ritual event, rather than as a vision experienced subjectively by one alone.⁷⁵⁶ Such visitations by supernatural powers, whether in grotesque or beautiful form, are characteristic of the liminal phase of a rite of passage in which ritual participants meet experiences divergent from all of the culture's normal categories of living. Here candidates are prepared to enter the new stage or role that is ahead of them, with supernatural appearances being one of the possible aspects of that transformation, recalling to them the building blocks from which their hitherto taken-for-granted world has been constructed."⁷⁵⁷ In this ritual setting the presence of the Spirit, already the effective agent in Jesus' conception (1:35), comes upon Jesus at a whole new level.

However conditioned the audience might be by the foregoing narrative and by cultural experiences to accept the reality of divine participation in human events, the appearance of the supernatural is always a marvel. And a visual manifestation of the Holy Spirit is particularly out-of-the-ordinary—even in the annals of Scripture. Here the creaturely form given to the Spirit, along with the complex symbolism bound up in Luke's account of its descent, posed (and still poses) an ambiguous and evocative riddle which, when embedded in the liminal phase of ritual, elicits a questioning and reordering of formerly assumed cultural "ideas, sentiments, and facts."⁷⁵⁸

Although the actor is directly identified as the Holy Spirit, the appearance and action of the Spirit described here are rich in symbolism which can profitably be explored by means of Victor Turner's processual symbolic analysis, paying particular attention to

⁷⁵⁶ Luke 3:22 καὶ καταβῆναι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (cf. Mark 1:10; Matt 3:16). Luke must seek more than portraying, "the reality of the presence of the Spirit to Jesus," as Fitzmyer suggests, for Mark's "he saw" would convey this idea more than adequately (Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 484.); cf. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 128; Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium, Erster Teil. Kommentar zu Kap. 1, 1–9, 50* (HTKNT 3,1; Freiburg: Herder, 1969), 190.

⁷⁵⁷ Victor W. Turner, "Process, System, and Symbol: A New Anthropological Synthesis," *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 69.

⁷⁵⁸ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 105; idem, "Metaphors of Anti-Structure in Religious Culture," in *Changing Perspective in the Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), 78; idem, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* (The Anthropology of Form and Meaning; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 49–50.

the narrator's own *exegesis* of a symbol, along with careful consideration of its *operations* in the course of the ritual event and its *positioning* in relation to other symbols in space and time.

Narratively, Luke gives primacy to the action, or *operation*, of the Spirit's descent (καταβῆναι), opening this clause like the previous one, with the aorist infinitive verb. This second clause, which is longer and more complex than the first, ends, as well, with an adverbial phrase identifying the destination of the action as being "ἐπ' αὐτόν." The action of descending sets up a *positional relationship* between the newly-opened heaven *above* and Jesus *below* in a bridging of the opposition between earth and heaven accomplished by the descent of the Spirit.⁷⁵⁹ In its position in the narrative, the placement of this connection through the Spirit recalls and surpasses the earlier visitations of the Spirit (1:15, 17, 35, 41, 67, 80; 2:25–27). It also evokes John's recent prophecy that the coming one—already identified for Luke's audience with Jesus (1:31–33, 43–45; 2:11, 26–32)—would in the future *baptize* with this Spirit he was now receiving (3:16). It also looks forward to the presence of the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus (e.g., 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21) and would later be poured out upon his followers (e.g., Luke 11:13; 12:12; 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:2–4, 17–18, 33, 38).⁷⁶⁰

The ongoing importance of this heavenly connection through the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts underlines the central significance of the Spirit's descent within the cluster of ritual *sacra* represented in Luke 3:21–22.⁷⁶¹ The opening of the heaven is the prelude to the spirit's descent; the heavenly voice may be seen as commentary upon it. Both the

⁷⁵⁹ Cf. Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Acts* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 187–88.

⁷⁶⁰ Tannehill, "The Mission of Jesus," 68–69.

⁷⁶¹ Ritual *sacra* are the symbolic objects, actions, and instructions held sacred within the bounds of a particular ritual (Victor W. Turner, "Passages, Margins and Poverty," 399; idem, *Forest of Symbols*, 102–09; idem, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," in *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach* (ed. William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt; New York: Harper & Row, [1979], 239).

meaning of the spirit's descent and its central importance in the rite are borne out in Luke's later exegesis of the scene in the three passages, unique to Luke-Acts, which refer back to these events. These passages, Luke 4:18, Acts 4:27, and 10:38, speak not of the act of baptism, nor of the happenings in the heavens, but *only* of the descent of the Spirit. In a ritual sense they demonstrate that, as is often observed in rites of passage, the central sacrum of the Spirit's descent affects the very nature of the initiand, preparing him "to cope with [his] new responsibilities" and even "restrain[ing him] in advance from abusing [his] new privileges."⁷⁶²

The Spirit's Descent in Luke 4:18–19

Luke 4:18, the first passage to interpret the descent of the Spirit, is placed at the opening of the first scene after the completion of Jesus' ritual experience. At the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus introduces and grounds his own ministry using the words of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me (ἐπ' ἐμὲ), because he has anointed (ἔχρισέν) me to bring good news to the poor . . ." (Luke 4:18; quoting Isa 61:1–2; cf. 58:6). Here the Spirit's descent of Luke 3:22 is interpreted in terms of a ritual anointing for ministry. The change from Mark's εἰς αὐτόν (1:10) to ἐπ' αὐτόν further underlines the link between Luke 3:22 and 4:18 and also enhances the parallel, mentioned earlier, with the ῥῆμα θεοῦ which came ἐπὶ Ἰωάννην in 3:2.⁷⁶³ The purpose of this ritual action is specifically identified: Jesus is anointed in order "to bring good news (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) to the poor," and not to announce only, but to "proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to send away (ἀποστεῖλαι) the downtrodden in release."

⁷⁶² Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 103; cf. idem, "Passages, Margins and Poverty," 399; idem, *Forest of Symbols*, 102–09; idem, "Betwixt and Between," 239. The communication of the sacra is also said to show initiands that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is being impressed upon them by society—or in Jesus' case—by divine power. This could be seen in the Lukan narrative in that Jesus' powers are, from the beginning, not his own but dependent on the Spirit's presence.

⁷⁶³ R. F. Collins notes this link between Luke 4:18 and 3:22 ("Luke 3:21–22," 824).

For Luke's audience, especially in the context of the people's wondering about ὁ χριστός in 3:15, Jesus' claim in 4:18 to have been anointed (ἔχρισέν με), would have immediately recalled the title Χριστός (*anointed one*) commonly given to him in the early Christian church and already divinely attributed to him twice in the opening chapters (2:11, 69). This title was central to several varieties of contemporary eschatological hopes, particularly the hope for a kingly Davidic messiah but also for a messiah identified as a priest, a prophet, or a pre-existent heavenly figure like the son of man in Dan 7.⁷⁶⁴ Though the use of the title Χριστός for Jesus is pervasive in the NT, it is Luke alone, among the Gospels, who uses the verb (χρίω) or speaks of Jesus actually *being anointed* by the Spirit.

The identification of this scene as an *act* of anointing deepens the ritual significance of these events and evidences the particular attention to ritual in this account of Jesus' story.⁷⁶⁵ For, although Jesus' ritual experience is sponsored neither by the central structures of society nor by any identifiable subgroup (as in John's baptism), the symbolic action of anointing implicitly places it in company with the rich tradition of symbolic ritual anointings (משח/χρίω) recorded in the LXX and in other Jewish literature (as discussed in section 4.1.2 above).⁷⁶⁶ By interpreting the ritual events following Jesus'

⁷⁶⁴ John J. Collins describes these hopes in detail in *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

⁷⁶⁵ Hebrews 1:9 applies Ps 45:7 including the words, "your God has anointed (χρίω) you" to Jesus. Elsewhere both 2 Corinthians (1:21) and 1 John (2:20, 27) speak of believers as receiving an anointing. These, and the related word (Χριστιανός) in Acts (11; 26; 26:28) and 1 Peter (4:16) are the only other uses of this word family in the NT. (Neither is the cognate verb ἀλείφω used in this sense of Jesus, but only of the woman's anointing of his feet [Luke 7:38, 46; John 11:2; 12:3] and of the spices to anoint his body after death [Mark 16:1].)

⁷⁶⁶ In the Greco-Roman world, χρίω is generally used literally to mean "to rub" or "touch on the surface." Only rarely is it used ritually ("χρίω," LSJ 2007; "χρίω," BADG 1091).

baptism in terms of ancient rituals of anointing, Luke-Acts thus draws the audience to interpret Jesus' ritual in the light of this larger subsystem of Jewish ritual.⁷⁶⁷

By far the most common references to anointings in the LXX involve initiations of Israel's kings and priests, which are introduced as the means by which God designated the one chosen for the role and by which he was formally and ritually backed up with all the power and authority of God, and also of the people (see chapter 4 of this dissertation). It has long been argued, however, that Luke 4:16–30 interprets Jesus' role more in terms of a prophetic mission, for the Isaiah passage read by Jesus (Isa 61:1–2; 58:6) is taken from the mouth of a prophet and emphasizes the task of proclamation.⁷⁶⁸ Jesus predicts that he will have the same kind of welcome in Nazareth as that of any prophet in his hometown (Luke 4:24), and to compare his future path with that of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Later in the Gospel, Luke continues to point toward Jesus' prophetic role both in the repeated declarations of the people (Luke 7:16, 39; 9:8, 19; 22:64; 24:19) and, more importantly, in Jesus' own statement that he must press forward “for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem” (Luke 13:33). In the sermons of Peter

⁷⁶⁷ A means of interpretation recognized by Victor Turner in the final step of his *processual symbolic analysis* (*The Forest of Symbols*, 46; idem, *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1968], 2).

⁷⁶⁸ Fritzeo Lentzen-Deis, *Die Taufe Jesu nach den Synoptikern: Literarkritische und gattungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Frankfurter Theologische Studien; Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1970), 285; John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 118, 132 n. 84, 205, 213 n. 61–62; Fitzmyer, *Luke I, 1–9*, 529–32; I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian & Theologian* (3d ed.; New Testament Profiles; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 118–28. Anointing of Priests: Exod 28–30; Lev 6–8; of later priests, Lev 16:32; 21:10; cf. Judg 17:5, 12. However the positional attributes of this symbol in Luke 3:21 have no relationship to the essential tabernacle/temple location of a priestly anointing. Anointing of Kings: *Saul*, 1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 11:15; 15:17; *David*, 16:3, 12–13; 2 Sam 2:4; 5:3; 1 Chr 11:3; and *Others*, continuing through at least Jehoahaz the son of Josiah in 2 Kgs 23:30. The ongoing interest in both these rites are witnessed to in the 2nd century B.C.E. document, Ben Sirach, which commemorate both Samuel and Elijah as anointing kings (46:13; 48:8); and where Moses anointing Aaron is also recalled (45:15). For more detail on anointing in Jewish tradition, see section 3.1 above. David L. Tiede understands Jesus' anointing as an anointing to kingship (*Luke* [ACNT; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988], 95).

and Stephen in Acts. Further, in Acts Jesus is forthrightly declared to have been the end-time “prophet like Moses” (Acts 3:22–23; cf. 7:37).⁷⁶⁹

Strangely, however, prophetic anointings are almost never spoken of in the LXX. The only clear case is that of Elisha, of whom Jesus speaks in this opening discourse. Though not directly declared in 1 Kings, ben Sirach, closer to Luke’s day, remembers Elisha as having been anointed from Elijah (Sir 48:8; 1 Kgs 19:16) and he is also said to have received a double portion of Elijah’s spirit when his master went up in the whirlwind (2 Kgs 2:9, 15).⁷⁷⁰ Prophets are spoken of as anointed in the sectarian literature of Qumran in CD 2.12–13; 5.21–6.1 and 1QM 11.6–8, which, if John Collins is correct, may even make reference to an eschatological prophet-messiah.⁷⁷¹ It is uncertain how far spread such a memory of prophetic anointing may have been, but it is certainly possible that Luke’s audience may have been aware of similar traditions.

Yet it has also been noted that the description of Isa 61:1–2 goes beyond the prophetic task of proclamation to the act of liberation more normally associated with a

⁷⁶⁹ Paul S. Minear, *To Heal and to Reveal: The Prophetic Vocation According to Luke* (New York: Seabury, 1976); P. F. Feiler, “Jesus the Prophet: The Lucan Portrayal of Jesus as the Prophet like Moses” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton, 1986).

⁷⁷⁰ Prophets are possibly also spoken of as anointed in Ps 105:15; 1 Chr 16:22. See Fitzmyer, *Luke I, 1–9*, 529, 532; John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 118, 32 n. 84. Where the initiation of a prophet’s ministry is discussed in the LXX, it more often involves a direct call and commission from God than a symbolic and societally-enacted ritual. Jesus’ ritual does not strictly follow the prophetic call pattern (Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 247–48; B. J. Hubbard, “Commissioning Stories in Luke-Acts: A Study of Their Antecedents, Form and Content,” *Semeia* 8 [1977]: 103–26). For it lacks a specific call and also the traditional objection to the call, although it does bear similarities to the calls of certain prophets, particularly to the call of Isaiah with its supernatural figures (Isa 6:2), symbols of separation/purification (6:5–6), and assurance of acceptance (6:7). Luke, unlike Mark and Matthew does, however, interpret the coming of the Spirit as a call when, in 4:18–19, Jesus speaks of his anointing in terms of a sending (πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμὲ οὐ εἶνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς, ἀπέσταλκέν με, κηρύξαι . . .).

⁷⁷¹ John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 118; cf. Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 9; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 228.

kingly role.⁷⁷² And this more-than-prophetic task is in the very clause apparently inserted in Isa 61:1–2 (from Isa 58:6). Although the kingly associations here in Luke 4:18–19 here are muted there is the implication of one acting in a saving role generally associated with a military and/or political leader such as a king. The liberation aspects of the passage may be also associated with the hopes of a new exodus often alluded to in Isaiah 61 and surrounding chapters (Isa 40:1–6; 43:19–20; 48:20–21 (LXX); 55:11–13).⁷⁷³ Such a connection would tie in well with Luke’s later identification of Jesus as the prophet like Moses.

The Spirit’s Descent in Acts 10:37–38

The second, and even more explicit, identification of the Spirit’s descent as an anointing occurs after Jesus’ death, in Acts 10:37–38, as Peter looks back with Cornelius on Jesus’ ministry, which he summarizes as “preaching peace” while at the same declaring him “Lord of all things.” Peter’s succinct account of Jesus’ life opens “after the baptism which John proclaimed” and tells how “God anointed (ἐχρίσεν) him with the Holy Spirit and with power (δυνάμει), and how he went about doing good and healing those being oppressed by the devil because God was with him.”⁷⁷⁴ Here the initiation of Jesus’ ministry is recast for this god-fearing Roman military man in terms of a ritual event, centered upon the descent of the Spirit. This descent is interpreted as a conferral of power, thereby revealing to him (and reminding others in the Lukan audience of) Jesus’ resulting divine authority to act in the role (or for a military man, the rank) of χριστός/anointed one. This power and authority is said to be used for doing good and

⁷⁷² Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* [JSNTSup 110; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 230–33; Max Turner, *Power from on High*, 240–41. Fitzmyer, however, does not find this here (*Luke 1, 1–9*, 529).

⁷⁷³ On the kingly aspects of the 4:16–30 passage see Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium, Erster Teil*, 229. Mark Strauss also notes the major proponents of each of the varying views (*The Davidic Messiah*, 226, 230–33); Max Turner, *Power from on High*, 214, 240–44.

⁷⁷⁴ Max Turner argues that Acts 10:35–38 may be modeled on Luke 4:16–30 and may further interpret it (*Power from on High*, 262).

healing, with the specific declaration that Jesus healed “those being oppressed (καταδυναστευομένους) by the devil,” possibly suggesting the fulfillment of the declaration in Luke 4:18 that Jesus was sent “to set free those who are oppressed (τεθραυσμένους).”

In this passage, the descent of the Spirit is not only confirmed as the landmark event in Jesus’ experience at the Jordan, but is also presented as of the most fundamental importance to his whole ministry. For by this anointing Jesus is said to receive both the guiding Spirit of God and the supernatural power which, it is implied, stemmed from that Spirit.⁷⁷⁵ Interestingly, as he concludes this account Peter speaks of him as “the one who has been appointed (ὠρισμένος) by God as judge of the living and the dead,” insisting that “through his name everyone who believes in him receives ἄφεσιν of sins” (Acts 10:42–43). The mention of God’s appointing in the context of the ἄφεσιν proclaimed in Luke 4:18, suggests the possibility that this is a further interpretation of Jesus’ role for which he was anointed at the time of his baptism.

The Spirit’s Descent in Acts 4:26–27

Luke makes reference to the anointing-descent of the Spirit one more time, in Acts 4:26–27 soon after Jesus’ ascension, in a context which further expands on the complexity of the role to which Jesus was anointed. Here, with Jesus understood to be now exalted to God’s right hand (Acts 2:33), the believers quote Ps 2:2 in prayer as they seek boldness and the manifestations of God’s power in Jesus’ name. In their prayer they declare their assurance that what “the Holy Spirit . . . said” in Ps 2:2—that “The kings of the earth took their stand, . . . against the Lord and against his anointed (τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ)” —has now been fulfilled in the events of recent days when “Herod and Pontius Pilate, . . . were gathered together against Your holy servant (τὸν ἅγιον παῖδά σου) Jesus,

⁷⁷⁵ Max Turner, *Power from on High*, 263; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 465. Fitzmyer, however, inaccurately states that Luke here “speaks of the *baptism* of Jesus by John as an ‘anointing.’”

whom *You anointed* (ὃν ἔχρισας).” As in the anointing of Jesus in the previous passages so, following the prayer, the believers too are now “filled with the Holy Spirit” and go on to testify “with great power (δυνάμει μεγάλη Acts 4:31, 33).”

In the context of Luke 4:18 and Acts 10:37–38 it is clear that the anointing in 4:29 is none other than the Spirit’s descent following Jesus’ baptism, thus directly connecting the title Χριστός with Jesus’ baptism-anointing. Here Jesus’ anointing is interpreted in terms of a kingly rather than a prophetic role, for it is spoken of by direct reference to the words of David (4:25) and to a royal installation Psalm (ch. 2).⁷⁷⁶ As Bultmann argues, it would be misreading the evidence to argue that the events at the Jordan were an actual royal *enthronement* for Jesus, for it is not presented as a public event and Luke –Acts sees this occurring later, following Jesus resurrection and ascension.⁷⁷⁷ Still, Acts 4:26–27 suggests that the church after Jesus’ ascension came to understand the descent of the Spirit in relationship not only to a prophetic, but also to a kingly messianic role.⁷⁷⁸

Luke’s portrayals of Jesus’ anointing, in fact, bear several interesting likenesses to the royal anointing of David (1 Sam 16:13). Samuel “anointed (ἔχρισεν) him in the midst of his brethren” and that “the Spirit of the Lord (πνεῦμα κυρίου) came upon David (ἐπὶ Δαυίδ) from that day forward.”⁷⁷⁹ David is commissioned as king long before his actual enthronement (1 Sam 16:13; 2 Sam 2:1). Thus it may not be out of line to consider the

⁷⁷⁶ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Continental Commentary* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 125–26. C. F. Evans states “In A. 4:26–27 ‘whom you anointed’ expresses through the verb what is implied by the adjectival noun ‘his anointed’, i.e. his anointing by God is Jesus’ appointment, not as effective prophet, but as God’s messiah or anointed one” (*Saint Luke*, 269).

⁷⁷⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition: Ergänzungsheft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 88; cf. Max Turner, *Power from on High*, 200; contra Petr. Pokorny, “The Temptation Stories and Their Intention,” *NTS* 20 (1973-74): 118.

⁷⁷⁸ John Collins states that Ps 2 was the basis of developing Messianic hopes for an ideal Davidic king (*The Scepter and the Star*, 11, 23; cf. J. J. M. Roberts, “The Old Testament’s Contribution to Messianic Expectations,” in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* [ed. James H. Charlesworth; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 42–43. Fitzmyer believes the opposite stating, “there is little evidence that it was ever understood as a messianic psalm . . . in pre-Christian Judaism” (*Luke I, 1-9*, 309).

⁷⁷⁹ 1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 11:15; 15:1, 17; 2 Sam 19:10; 1 Kgs 1:34–45; 1 Chr 29:22; 2 Kgs 11:12 || 2 Chr 23:11; 2 Kgs 23:30 || 2 Chr 36:1(LXX); cf. Sir 46:13; Max Turner, *Power from on High*, 197.

ritual event, not as a royal installation, but instead in terms of a royal *commissioning*. These references to anointing also recall the messianic prophecy regarding an eschatological Davidic king in Isa 11:1–2: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a blossom shall come up from *his* root: and the Spirit of God (πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ) shall rest upon him (ἐπ’ αὐτὸν) . . .”⁷⁸⁰

The reference to Jesus as God’s παῖς, or servant, in Acts 4:27 suggests another link between Jesus and David for, as Donald Juel notes, David is also there spoken of as God’s παῖς, through whom the Holy Spirit has spoken (4:25).⁷⁸¹ The use of the term, παῖς, which is also used of Jesus in Acts 3:13, 26 and 4:30, bears allusion as well to the παῖς who is the subject of Isaiah’s Servant Songs where the figures are basically prophetic.⁷⁸² Unlike βασιλεύς or προφήτης, the παῖς is not a formal title or role one might be anointed for in the LXX tradition, but rather a more general descriptor of one’s relationship with God.⁷⁸³ Although Juel has demonstrated that early Judaism often read these Servant Songs and other portions of Isaiah atomistically, Strauss points out that Luke-Acts makes repeated use of echoes from all corners of Isaiah to describe the person and mission of Jesus.⁷⁸⁴ In the portrayal of Jesus’ anointing in Luke-Acts, the narrator demonstrates that he was very comfortable drawing together various messianic themes

⁷⁸⁰ *En.* 62:2; 49:3; *Pss. Sol.* 17:42, 18:6–8. M. B. Crook suggests that Isa 11:1–9 may originally have been a coronation liturgy for a king (Jehoash), while 9:2–7 was a liturgy of enthronement (“A Suggested Occasion for Isaiah 9,2–7 and 11,1–9,” *JBL* 68 [1949]: 213–24).

⁷⁸¹ Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 131.

⁷⁸² Fitzmyer, *Gospel According to Luke*, 284–85.

⁷⁸³ Other righteous ones in Israel’s past were called God’s servants, always with a qualifying construct such as servant of God or my servant (e.g., *Abraham*: Gen 18:17 [LXX]; *Moses*: Josh 1:7, 13; 11:12; Dan 9:11; 1 Chr 6:49; 2 Chr 24:9; *David*: Isa 37:35).

⁷⁸⁴ E.g., Isa 40:3–5 in Luke 3:4–6, Isa 61:1–2 in Luke 4:18–19; Isa 6:9 LXX in Luke 8:10; Isa 56:7; Luke 19:46; ; Isa 53:12 in Luke 22:37; Juel, *Messianic Exegesis*, 121–27; Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah*.

such as servant, Davidic king, and Mosaic prophet-leader from Isaiah and elsewhere in LXX tradition.⁷⁸⁵

The Spirit's Descent in Light of Acts 7

There is one other passage in Acts which, though the terms *χρίω* is not used, carries correspondences both with Luke 3:22 and with the anointing passages. In Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin, interpreting the mission and fate of Jesus in light of the experience of Israel's great leaders of old, Moses' prophetic call is summarized in terms of a rite of passage bearing similarities to Jesus' own experience (Acts 7:30–34; cf. Exod 3:1–10). Here Moses encounters a supernatural being (*ἄγγελος*) in the wilderness (*τῆ ἐρήμῳ* Acts 7:30; cf. Luke 3:2, 22) and hears God's voice (*ἐγένετο φωνὴ κυρίου* Acts 7:31; cf. Luke 3:22) telling him that he himself has come down (*κατέβην* Acts 7:34; cf. Luke 3:22) to rescue his people from their oppression (*κάκωσιν* Acts 7:34; cf. Luke 4:18), and commissioning Moses for his role (*ἀποστείλω σε* Acts 7:34; cf. 7:35; Luke 4:18). This role Stephen immediately clarifies as that of ruler and deliver (*ἄρχοντα καὶ λυτρωτὴν* Acts 7:35), but also as prophet (Acts 7:37; cf. 3:20–22) who does “wonders and signs” (Acts 7:37). He further links Moses to Jesus by citing the famous prophecy of Deut 18:15, “God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.”⁷⁸⁶

Thus Acts 7:30–37 both echoes 3:20–22 and 4:18 verbally, and draws together the same range of roles as those claimed for Jesus at his anointing: prophet, deliverer, king. As Max Turner has argued, these roles, and the persons of Moses and Jesus who are said to hold them, are brought together in Luke-Acts by a larger *new exodus* theme which has

⁷⁸⁵ Fitzmyer notes however that “the idea of prophets as anointed servants of Yahweh does emerge in later pre-Christian Palestinian Judaism, e.g., in Qumran literature (see CD 2:12; 6:1; 6QD 3:4)” (*Luke 1, 1–9*).

⁷⁸⁶ Cf. William S Kurz, “Luke 3:23–38 Biblical and Greco Roman Genealogies,” in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the SBL Seminar Papers* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 174–75. Philo, too, saw Moses as Prophet, Priest, and King, while Josephus assigned this combination of roles to John Hyrcanus (Philo, *Mos.* 2.2; Josephus, *J.W.* 1.68). Other Lukan allusions to Moses may be found in the talk of Jesus' exodus in 9:31; the selection of the seventy (Luke 10:1; Num 11:16, 24) and the Passover motif in 22:15–16. See J Mánek, “The New Exodus in the Books of Luke,” *NovT* 2 (1957): 8–23.

already been noted in the description of John preparing a way in the wilderness (Luke 3:2–6) and in the liberation aspects of Jesus’ introductory sermon (4:18–19).⁷⁸⁷ Mark Strauss further suggests that Luke’s christological reading of the book of Isaiah brings together the roles of David and Moses in the person of the Isaianic servant of Yahweh so that “the eschatological deliverer may be viewed as [a] Davidic king who (like Moses) leads an eschatological new exodus of God’s people.”⁷⁸⁸

The Descent of the Spirit in Luke-Acts

In summary, it is clear that Luke-Acts presents the descent of the Spirit in Luke 3:21–22, as a ritual anointing, but an enigmatic one upon which is loaded at the same time the multiple images of prophet, servant, and king. The audience has already been prepared for these images by means of the heavenly beings and inspired messages of chapters 1 and 2 which have emphasized that he would be an eternal king of David’s line (1:32–33, 69) and a Savior-Redeemer (1:68, 71; 2:11, 38), but also suggest that he would guide the people in the way of peace (1:69; cf. 2:34). These aspects are brought together into one role in the imagery of an anointing which makes Jesus an *anointed one* or Christ, the role predicted of him in Luke 2:11, 29 and specifically attributed to him in Acts 4:27, and the one sought by the people who participated in John’s baptism, the ritual of the many (Luke 3:15). Here in Luke-Acts’ own exegesis of the event, it is presented largely in terms of servant and prophet when the focus is on his immediate task, and more in terms of its kingly aspects when the view is of his heavenly exaltation.

In Luke-Acts this event was not just a supernatural omen given in connection with the *ritual of the many*, in the manner of Suetonius’ *Galba*, who was visited by Fortune at the time he assumed the gown of manhood.⁷⁸⁹ For Luke (alone) has identified this as an

⁷⁸⁷ Max Turner, *Power from on High*, 204–08, 244–50.

⁷⁸⁸ Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah*, 304.

⁷⁸⁹ Suetonius, *Galb.* 3.

anointing—a qualitatively different type of ritual occasion. Neither, in Luke, was this event simply “the official beginning of the ministry” shaped “like the anointing of a king” as Plummer suggests, this ritual action is portrayed as potent in shaping Jesus for his new role, for in the process he receives power and commission for his future ministry (Acts 10:38; Luke 4:18).⁷⁹⁰ Though in Acts the believers will also receive the Holy Spirit and engage in the ministry of preaching and teaching, it is only Jesus who is ever said to be *anointed*.

While the foregoing paragraphs have considered primarily what Jesus was anointed *to* through this descent of the Spirit, another question that might be asked is, “What did a ritual of anointing *mean*?” In the LXX, anointing was a ritual of divine designation and endowment.⁷⁹¹ It might be understood as similar to what we speak of in English as a “commissioning” by which is conveyed the power and the authorization to carry out a prescribed role or set of duties, often to act for, or on behalf of another. When such a ritual was directed by God in the LXX, it indicated officially God’s choosing of an individual for a particular role and was the occasion of the conferral of God’s blessing involving the authority and power necessary for the task (1 Sam 10:1; 16:13). In general, the communication of the details of the role are not a part of the LXX anointing ritual.

In the account of Jesus’ anointing ritual beginning in Luke 3:21, what has been observed thus far is the descent of the Spirit which both designated him as the anointed one, and is seen as conferring upon him the power to accomplish his role. In its central position in the account and its place as the focal point of later reference to the event, the Spirit’s descent, rather than baptism, stands as the dominant symbol in Luke-Acts’ ritual of the mightier one. As will be explored below, this symbolic event thus organizes, in its presentation and later interpretation in Luke, the ancillary symbols such as the dove and

⁷⁹⁰ Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (1922), 99.

⁷⁹¹ James Luther May, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 47.

voice, shedding light on their place in the ritual and contributing to their further exegesis.⁷⁹² It also represents the central sacrum bringing about the fulfillment of the goals of the ritual as the Spirit remains with Jesus, filling, leading, and empowering him (cf. Luke 4:1, 14; Acts 10:38).⁷⁹³

The Symbol of the Dove

In contrast to the dominant action of the Spirit's descent, Luke provides no exegesis of the puzzling symbol of the dove beyond the comment that the Spirit's descent was like a dove "in bodily form." It has been argued that Luke here pictures the *action* of descent as being dove-like.⁷⁹⁴ However unlike Mark and Matthew who state ambiguously that he saw the Spirit "descending like a dove," Luke adds the additional clause which clearly specifies the bodily nature (σωματικῶ ἐΐδει) of this dove-symbol.⁷⁹⁵ Luke also thereby removes the descent of the dove from the uncertain realm of appearances underlining once again, as with the opening of the heavens, the real and observable nature of this ritual event.

It has already been noted that in its position and movement the dove symbol acts in Luke 3:21–22 to connect earth to heaven. Yet its association with a dove suggests additional symbolic meanings. In a ritual interpretation of this symbol, the interest falls on the meanings and evocations available to the Lukan audience rather than on the historical sources of this symbol. As a ritual symbol the dove does not simply signify a clearly boundable known idea but has rich and multivocal meaning created by both

⁷⁹² Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 20–22, 31–32, 45.

⁷⁹³ Victor W. Turner, "Passages, Margins and Poverty," 399; idem, *Forest of Symbols*, 102–09, 239; idem, *The Ritual Process*, 103.

⁷⁹⁴ Liander E. Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," *NTS* 17 (1970–71): 63; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (vol. 1; 2 vols.; Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; ed. Moisés Silva; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 339.

⁷⁹⁵ H. Greeven, "περιστερά" *TDNT* 6:67–69, esp. n.59; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 152; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 104–05.

logical and nonverbalizable associations standing in tension.⁷⁹⁶ From the audience's experience of the περιστερά, the dove is a consort of deities and a poor-man's sacrifice, a wise messenger of hope and salvation and a representation of gentleness and innocence, a symbol of purity and chastity and an evocation of love and desire. (See appendix for a fuller discussion.) Such tensions of thought and affect would be both challenging and discomfiting for the Lukan audience, in such close association with the Holy Spirit which Luke depicts as coming from heaven with power to anoint this prophesied one and as remaining with him throughout his ministry.

“A Voice Came” (Γενέσθαι)

Into the silence following the opening of the heavens and the descent of the dove fall the words from heaven, “You are my beloved son. I have taken delight in you.” It is natural for verbally-oriented students of the text to construct their interpretation of the entire ritual of Jesus at the Jordan largely upon these logically reduceable words from heaven.⁷⁹⁷ And these words do provide important clues to the interpretation of the ritual, such as the suggested designation *son of God*, which will be repeated later in the ritual. Within ritual however, the evocative power of movement, pattern, and sensory experience, though impossible to analyze fully, cause nonverbal factors to also play an important role in communicating the meaning and accomplishing the purpose of the ritual event. In Luke-Acts' rendering, as evidenced in Luke 4:18, Acts 4:26–27 and Acts 10:38, it is the description of the physical action of the Spirit's descent, rendered into words and

⁷⁹⁶ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 26–27; idem, *Drums of Affliction*, 21.

⁷⁹⁷ See, for example, Gerhard Voss, *Die Christologie der lukanischen Schriften in Grundzügen* (StudNeot 2; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 83–99; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 481; Donald Juel, *Luke-Acts: The Promise of History* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), 26.

carefully exegeted in terms of an anointing, that is to be considered the dominant and organizing action of the ritual of the one.⁷⁹⁸

The words from heaven which follow this anointing at the center of Jesus' inauguration,, must be understood in their place as one more aspect of the ritual itself, not as a separable exegesis of the ritual. As the last of three central parallel clauses within the single sentence of 3:21–22, the heavenly voice can be seen to be closely connected to the preceding two ritual events, temporally in the absence of time suggested between the events thus recorded, and spatially in the focus on heaven with no mention of the earthly location or characters. Yet this third clause is also somewhat separated as, to the dramatic verbs used to open the first two clauses, is added the simpler phrase, “a voice from heaven came.”

It is here at last—in these liminal moments of awe and submissiveness, power and puzzle—that the true ritual elder speaks. From the message of the voice, and its heavenly origin, Luke's audience would immediately have recognized its source to be God himself, the same God who initiated, with the $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, this pair of entwined rituals, and who has directed them silently up to this point.⁷⁹⁹ Both Moses and David speak of this same voice, in Moses' case as instructing the Israelites ($\acute{\epsilon}\kappa$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ $\omicron\upsilon\tilde{\rho}\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon$ $\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta$ $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$ η $\phi\omega\nu\eta$ Deut 4:36) from the midst of the great fire, and in David's as poetically thundering from heaven ($\acute{\epsilon}\xi$ $\omicron\upsilon\tilde{\rho}\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon$. . . $\phi\omega\nu\eta\nu$) in the act of saving David from his enemies (2 Sam 22:14; cf. Ps 17:14 LXX).

As is the case in John's baptism, it is normal during rites of passage, from mystery initiations to Jewish rites of purification after birth, for the authority of the ritual instructor to hold sway, enforcing taboos and guarding against the dangers of negativity

⁷⁹⁸ Victor W. Turner, “African Ritual and Western Literature: Is a Comparative Symbology Possible,” in *The Literature of Fact: Selected Papers from the English Institute* (ed. A. Fletcher; New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 80–81.

⁷⁹⁹ Cf. Dan 4:31 LXX, where a voice came out of heaven uttering judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar ($\phi\omega\nu\eta\nu$ $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ $\omicron\upsilon\tilde{\rho}\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon$ η $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\epsilon$; or in the TH version $\acute{\alpha}\pi'$ $\omicron\upsilon\tilde{\rho}\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon$ $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$).

and of chaos that accompany and particularly threaten during a liminal state.⁸⁰⁰ In contrast with these “lesser” rites, the authority of this voice from heaven is of the highest order, its spatial and hierarchical position allowing for no doubt regarding the reliability of the message communicated and trumping the objections of any other possible authority, rendering its pronouncement unassailable.⁸⁰¹

Jesus, the ritual participant, having separated from home and routine in his baptism at the Jordan and been singled out by the Spirit from the followers of John, remains in a deconstructed liminal place between the station and duties of his Nazareth life and those of the new role for which he has been anointed. With the opening of the heavens and the descent of the Spirit he stands likewise in an undefined marginal space between earth and heaven. Though he is at the center of attention in relation to the voice, just as in both of the previous actions, Jesus, as a proper ritual candidate, is passive, as he has been ever since his arrival (with the single notable exception of his prayer). It might be said, in the metaphor of Turner, that he is portrayed as being, in a sense, inscribed upon like clay, though not in this case by the wishes of society or human ritual elder but rather by the God and Father of earth and heaven.⁸⁰²

For the most part, Luke appears to have been content to pass on the tradition of the voice just as he found it, diverging from Mark only in adjusting the form to his own three-clause structure, and in the use of the singular of οὐρανός. Significantly, like Mark, the address is reported in the 2nd person (σὺ, . . . σοι), suggesting that it is not directed toward any other ears but those of Jesus alone. Scholars have often seen this transition from the third person objective account of events to a voice speaking to Jesus alone as

⁸⁰⁰ Victor W. Turner, “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media,” *Religion* 15 (1985): 210–11.

⁸⁰¹ The preeminent position of the speaker, speaking directly to Jesus in this scene, rules out the shaky argument that the dove together with the voice suggest the *bat kol* of later rabbinic literature. Luke Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 69; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 154.

⁸⁰² Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 103.

incoherent, but from a ritual perspective the shift makes perfect sense.⁸⁰³ For just as the dramatic events of this stage of the ritual, while objectively presented, are focused on the ritual candidate alone, so the words of the voice are addressed to him alone. Thus, within the narrative, the message is not primarily a public announcement of status but an actual ritual interaction solely between heaven and Jesus, for the achievement of God's own purpose.⁸⁰⁴ At the same time, Luke indirectly takes advantage of these words to corroborate for his audience Gabriel's promise of Jesus' special sonship (1:32–33) announcing that Jesus is now ready to act in this role.

On the surface, the heavenly message is a rather straightforward pronouncement of Jesus' status before God as beloved and pleasing son. For unlike the other ritual recipients of heavenly messages, Jesus' message in contrast to that of Saul and Lucius, is solely commendation. There is little that is completely new here for the audience of Luke.⁸⁰⁵ They have already been cued to recognize the unique nature of Jesus' sonship through Gabriel's declaration in 1:32, 35 that he would be conceived by the agency of no man but rather through the Holy Spirit. In this context, the understanding of sonship conveyed here goes beyond the designation 'son of God' used in the LXX and early Judaism of righteous ones, particularly Davidic kings, angelic beings, and even Israel itself (in a collective sense).⁸⁰⁶ Yet it also incorporates the cultural expectation of the day, pointed out by Rohrbaugh and Green, that a beloved and pleasing son was one who naturally exhibited the qualities of his father, and who, as son, was scrupulously obedient

⁸⁰³ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 481.

⁸⁰⁴ Brawley, *Centering on God*, 420.

⁸⁰⁵ Boyon states, "Everything that Luke has so far written about Jesus serves to prove that he is God's Son. . . . What is new is only that Jesus is here now, receives the Spirit, and hears the voice himself" (*Luke 1*, 129).

⁸⁰⁶ *Of angels*, see Job 1:6, *of the nation*, Exod 4:22–23; *of the king*, 2 Sam 7:14; *of the Messiah*, 4 Ezra 7:28. It appears that Jesus also recognized, to some degree, the uniqueness of this relationship, in his reference to his father when his parents scolded him for remaining behind in the temple (Luke 2:49).

to his father and therefore had the right, as well as the ability and full support, to act as a worthy representative on his father's behalf."⁸⁰⁷ The statement ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα, evidences the father's special regard for him but also may carry the element of choice, as evidenced in Luke 12:32, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your father has chosen (εὐδόκησεν) to give you the kingdom" (cf. Rom 15:26–27; 1 Cor 1:21; Gal 1:15).

Scriptural Echoes in the Words of the Heavenly Voice

The heavenly voice also resounds with other, scriptural, echoes, echoes that help to locate the place of this ritual instruction within Jesus' own rite of passage. The two allusions most easily recognizable are: (1) Ps 2:7, in which the Lord declares to David "You are my son" (υἱός μου εἶ συ); and (2) Isa 42:1, which in the LXX assures Israel that it is a servant chosen and accepted by God and upon whom he has placed his Spirit.⁸⁰⁸ For the Lukan audience, these allusions contribute to the understanding of this brief pronouncement, both through their context in the LXX and through Luke-Acts use of them elsewhere. They also further the apparent solemnity and authenticity of the ritual through its connection with ancient and revered tradition.

Psalms 2:7 with its declaration, υἱός μου εἶ σύ, is thought to be part of a royal psalm of installation and to look back, from the center of the ritual, to a moment when the

⁸⁰⁷ Sir 4.1–10, Ps Sol 17.28–30 and Philo, in *Spec.* 1.318, speak of sons of God in terms of obedience. On the closeness of the relationship see Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 485–86; and Richard L Rohrbach, "Legitimizing Sonship—A Test of Honour: A Social-Scientific Study of Luke 4:1–30," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (ed. Philip F Esler; London: Routledge, 1995). See Green on cultural expectations of sons (*The Gospel*, 184). C. H. Turner has demonstrated the possibility (not proof) that this should be read "only" son, but Luke has chosen to leave the more open word ἀγαπητός (possibly in allusion to Abraham's relation with Isaac in Gen 22:2) rather than changing it to the more specific term and narrowing the meaning to a single specific possibility ("O YIOS MOY O AGAPHTOS," *JTS* 27 [1926]: 113–29).

⁸⁰⁸ Cullman and Jeremias argued for the likelihood of Isa 42:1 as the source, while Vigne supports Ps 2:7. Most scholars seem to be comfortable with a combination of sources (Oscar Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament* [trans. J. K. S. Reid; SBT; Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1950], 16–19; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (vol. 1; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 53–55); Daniel Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain: Le Baptême de Jésus dans la tradition judéo-chrétienne* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1992), 107–32.

Lord commissioned the unknown Davidic *king-candidate*, giving him the title *son*.⁸⁰⁹ Luke-Acts cites other aspects of this installation Psalm at least twice. As already discussed above, Acts 4:25–26, applies the kingly title, *the Lord’s anointed one*, in Ps 2:2 to Jesus himself. Later, Paul in Acts 13:33 cites further Ps 2:7 itself, υἱός μου εἶ σύ, σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε apparently to refer to the raising up of Jesus from the dead (Acts 13:34), likely suggesting his elevation all the way up to God’s right hand.⁸¹⁰ This metaphor of a symbolic re-birthing is a common liminal symbol in rites of passage such as the commissioning of a king alluded to here. Indeed, it may be that this association was already made by the audience at the time of the baptism, particularly if the textual variant which places σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε as the second half of the heavenly declaration in Luke 3:22 is correct, as Vigne has argued.⁸¹¹ In its linking of the ritual at Jesus’ baptism to the initiation of a king, the allusion to Ps 2 in the words of the heavenly voice furthers the kingly implications already noted in Acts 4:26–27. Significantly, however, Luke-Acts nowhere speaks of Jesus in the words of Ps 2:6 (LXX) “I *have been* established as king by him on Zion his holy mountain,” leaving the full establishment as this king who rules with a rod of iron (2:9), to an indeterminate future time.

In the extant versions of the LXX, Isa 42:1 introduces God’s servant (designated here as Israel) as “my servant (ὁ παῖς μου)” and “my chosen one (ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου)” of whom God says “my soul has accepted him (προσεδέξατο αὐτόν).” This acceptance, or

⁸⁰⁹ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 129.

⁸¹⁰ Cf. Acts 2:24–25, 32–33 Fitzmyer, *Luke 1*, 1-9, 508, 516.

⁸¹¹ Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain*, 107–32. Although some (e.g., E. Klostermann and M. Rese) support the variant reading σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε which finds this phrase in 3:22b as well, it is found in only one errant Greek manuscript and has no firm basis for support (Klostermann, *Das Lukasevangelium* [3d. ed.; HNT 5; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1975], 55; Rese, *Alttestamentliche Motive in der Christologie des Lukas* [SNT 1; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1969], 193–95). The divine begetting of Jesus is already noted in Luke 1:35 and Luke may save this statement for application to Jesus’ resurrection in Acts 13:33. See Darrell L. Bock for a review of the discussion of this variant (*Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology* [ed. David Hill; JSNTSup 12; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987], 100–01). Vigne believes the 3:22 variant (begotten you) is original, speaking of the baptism as an actual birth, but that the Ebionites interpreted it too flatly as his only birth (not recognizing the Son/birth language also at the transfiguration and resurrection) and thus the early church fathers had to condemn it.

welcome, becomes even more pronounced in the MT's הִתְצַדֵּק (pleased with, delighted), a reading Luke or his source may also have known in some form.⁸¹² The links between this passage and Luke 3:22 are not as obvious as in Ps 2:7, but the ideas of being chosen and accepted correspond in meaning with the $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\acute{o}\kappa\eta\sigma\alpha$ of 3:22. The connection is strengthened by the wording of a second heavenly message ($\phi\omega\nu\eta\ \acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \nu\epsilon\phi\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\eta\varsigma$), in Luke 9:35, which echo 3:22 for the benefit of his closest followers. Here, following Jesus' prayer, he and his followers pass through a similar event marked by miraculous appearances and a heavenly voice, preparing them for the final phase of Jesus' ministry. Though Mark and Matthew here repeat the words at the Jordan almost verbatim, in Luke the voice declares, $\omicron\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\nu\ \acute{\omicron}\ \nu\iota\acute{o}\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\upsilon\ \acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\lambda\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\gamma\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$, by substituting the term $\acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\lambda\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\gamma\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ for $\acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ underlining this link between Jesus and the chosen servant of the servant songs.⁸¹³ The concluding words of 9:35, $\acute{\alpha}\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\acute{\epsilon}\tau\epsilon$ —in conjunction with the visit of Moses and Elijah and their talk of the $\xi\acute{\xi}\omicron\delta\omicron\varsigma$ Jesus was about to fulfill in Jerusalem—also recall Moses' declaration in Deut 18:15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me . . . , $\acute{\alpha}\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$ ” thereby bringing out the prophetic aspect of this servant whose task was connected with the Isaianic new exodus for Israel.⁸¹⁴

⁸¹² Fitzmyer, *Luke I, 1-9*, 486; Bock, *Proclamation*, 314 n.42.

⁸¹³ Although Luke only quotes directly a portion of Isa 42:1, the servant described in this passage also was, like Jesus, accepted favorably by God ($\pi\rho\omicron\sigma\epsilon\delta\acute{\epsilon}\xi\alpha\tau\omicron\ \acute{\alpha}\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\ \eta\ \psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}\ \mu\omicron\upsilon$), the recipient of his spirit ($\acute{\epsilon}\delta\omega\kappa\alpha\ \tau\omicron\ \pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\acute{\alpha}\ \mu\omicron\upsilon\ \acute{\epsilon}\pi\prime\ \acute{\alpha}\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu$), and expected to bring judgment, liberty, sight to the blind, and light to the Gentiles (Isa 42:1, 6–7; cf. Luke 4:18–30).

⁸¹⁴ Mánek, “New Exodus”; Craig A. Evans, “Luke’s Use of the Elijah/Elisha Narratives and the Ethic of Election,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 82. Other passages such as Isa 41:8 (Bock), Gen 22:2 (Marshall), and Exod 4:22–23 (P. G. Bretscher) have also been suggested as sources, and are possibly in Luke’s mind (Bock, *Proclamation*, 103–04; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 155; Bretscher, “Exodus 4:22–23 and the Voice from Heaven,” *JBL* 87 [1968]: 301–11). However, there are fewer indications in the rest of the text of Luke-Acts to support such connections (see Fitzmyer, *Luke I, 1-9*, 486; Bovon, *Luke I*, 130).

The Scriptural allusions in these words of the divine ritual instructor reinforce the symbolic meaning in the descent of the Spirit. These allusions become explicit in Luke's exegesis of the event in 4:18–30. They intimate that Jesus' future is bound up in still-enigmatic messianic images of servant/prophet-hood and delivering ruler announced in Luke 1 and 2. In addition, the assurance is given that the special sonship already announced at his conception is recognized by God to be an ongoing relationship that is real and pleasing to him. For Luke's Greco-Roman audience the ritual declaration of his sonship was in keeping with the reported origins of itinerant practitioners of the mysteries who, like Jesus, were without institutional backing. According to Walter Burkert, the work of these individuals was normally based in "an invoking of tradition, of a craft handed down by a master, of a real or spiritual 'father'" and that the focal "transmission takes the form of *telete*," or initiation.⁸¹⁵ More generally in the cultural understanding of the day, Jesus—here declared to be a beloved and obedient son—is confirmed to well represent the character of his father in his actions and is thus qualified to act with his full authority in that society.⁸¹⁶ With this honor declaration coming from the highest possible source, Jesus receives full legitimation for the role he is now taking on.⁸¹⁷ As Max Weber (with some overstatement) has pointed out of Jesus as charismatic prophet, "It was doubtless this consciousness of power, more than anything else, that enabled him traverse the road of the prophets."⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁵ Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 31. Burkert gives as support, Hippocrates *Morb. sacr.* 1.6.360; cf. the later "Aglaophamos" text in Iamblichus *Vit. Pyth.* 146; the Hippocratic *Nomos* 4.642.

⁸¹⁶ John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 112–13. Could it also suggest that a repentance baptism was unnecessary for Jesus, or be part of directing his baptism toward a different sort of rite of passage?

⁸¹⁷ Rohrbaugh, "Legitimizing Sonship"; cf. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), 304.

⁸¹⁸ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (trans. Ephraim Fischhoff; Boston: Beacon, 1963), 47.

Jesus has already received an anointing ushering him into his role as Christ/anointed one, a role carrying rich implications provided both in scriptural associations and in the direct declarations of chapters 1 and 2. In this descent of the Spirit he also receives the leading (4:1) and power (Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38) for his role, arriving in a dove-like form with symbolic evocations of divine redemption and sacrifice, wisdom and lowliness. Now the heavenly voice has come, but not primarily to declare Jesus' anointing as son, for his sonship is already established and nowhere in Luke-Acts is anointing spoken of as initiating sonship. Nor is it a typical prophetic call, for there is no designation of a mission and a much-broader destiny has been proclaimed for him since his birth. And neither is it the declaration of an official installation into kingship, for Luke presents this as taking place at the ascension or the Parousia. Instead, as Jesus enters public life, the heavenly voice completes his commissioning, placing upon him the full divine authority necessary for the complex messianic role for which he has been designated and empowered by his anointing, and which must begin, as he declares in 4:16–30 with a ministry as God's servant and prophet.⁸¹⁹

6.2.3 Narrator's Aside: Jesus' Age and Genealogy (3:23–38)

Καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν Ἰησοῦς ἀρχόμενος ὡσεὶ ἐτῶν τριάκοντα, ὧν υἱός, ὡς ἐνομίζετο, Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἡλὶ ²⁴ τοῦ Μαθθᾶτ τοῦ Λευὶ τοῦ Μελχὶ τοῦ Ἰανναὶ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ ²⁵ τοῦ Ματταθίου τοῦ Ἀμῶς τοῦ Ναοὺμ τοῦ Ἐσλὶ τοῦ Ναγγαὶ ²⁶ τοῦ Μάαθ τοῦ Ματταθίου τοῦ Σεμεῖν τοῦ Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἰωδᾶ ²⁷ τοῦ Ἰωανᾶν τοῦ Ῥησᾶ τοῦ Ζοροβαβέλ τοῦ Σαλαθιήλ τοῦ Νηρι ²⁸ τοῦ Μελχὶ τοῦ Ἀδδὶ τοῦ Κωσᾶμ τοῦ Ἐλμαδάμ τοῦ Ἡρ ²⁹ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ἐλιέζερ τοῦ Ἰωρίμ τοῦ Μαθθᾶτ τοῦ Λευὶ ³⁰ τοῦ Συμεὼν τοῦ Ἰούδα τοῦ Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἰωνάμ τοῦ Ἐλιακίμ ³¹ τοῦ Μελεὰ τοῦ Μεννὰ τοῦ Ματταθᾶ τοῦ Ναθάμ τοῦ Δαυὶδ ³² τοῦ Ἰεσσαὶ τοῦ Ἰωβήδ τοῦ Βόος τοῦ Σαλὰ τοῦ Ναασσῶν ³³ τοῦ Ἀμιναδάβ τοῦ Ἀδμὶν τοῦ Ἀρινὶ τοῦ Ἐσρώμ τοῦ Φάρες τοῦ Ἰούδα ³⁴ τοῦ Ἰακώβ τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ τοῦ Θάρα τοῦ Ναχώρ ³⁵ τοῦ Σεροῦχ τοῦ Ῥαγαὺ τοῦ Φάλεκ τοῦ Ἐβερ τοῦ Σαλὰ ³⁶ τοῦ Καϊνὰμ τοῦ Ἀρφαξᾶδ τοῦ Σήμ τοῦ Νῶε τοῦ Λάμεχ ³⁷ τοῦ Μαθουσαλὰ τοῦ Ἐνώχ τοῦ Ἰάρετ τοῦ Μαλελεήλ τοῦ Καϊνὰμ in ³⁸ τοῦ Ἐνώς τοῦ Σήθ τοῦ Ἀδάμ τοῦ θεοῦ.

⁸¹⁹ Cf. Green, *The Gospel*, 187.

As the liminal phase of a rite of passage is so often marked by metaphors of birth or rebirth, so Jesus' rite of passage is now set in the context of his birth through both divine and human lineage. Just as the narrator earlier paused before the final act of the ritual of the many in order to glance forward and complete the cycle of John's ministry, so now before the completion of the ritual of the mightier one the narrator again pauses, this time to glance backward and place events in the context of Jesus' ancestral past. This insertion breaks from the narrative of the foregoing events of 3:21–22 with the words, "And when he, Jesus, was beginning" (Καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν Ἰησοῦς ἀρχόμενος), reinforcing and building on the beginnings signaled in Jesus' baptism and in his anointing to the new role for which he was born.⁸²⁰ And while the account of the heavenly ritual in 3:22 portrays Jesus as the primary recipient of the ritual action, the aside of 3:23–38 addresses the audience directly, giving evidence of his fitness in two further areas key to the cultures of the day: maturity and family background.

The inclusion of Luke's first assertion, that Jesus was "about thirty" at the time "he began," probably presents an approximate, rather than an exact age and suggests that the symbolic importance of this age designation. Indeed, in the Roman world of Luke's day, thirty was still considered the ideal age to assume a leadership role in public affairs such as a local magistracy or quaestorship in the Senate.⁸²¹ The ongoing importance of the age of thirty as the time when priests and Levites were to begin their service in the

⁸²⁰ As Charles H. Talbert notes, "By the phrase 'when he began his ministry' in 3:23, Luke has referred us to the narrative in which Jesus says that he has been anointed by the Spirit. This is Luke's way of telling the reader what the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism means. It is his *anointing* for the servant's role and work" (*Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts* [SBLMS 20; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974], 117).

⁸²¹ Some adjustments were made by Augustus, but Roman traditions are witnessed by Cicero *Agr.* 2.3–4; idem, *Off.* 2.59, *Brut.* 323; Dio Cassius (52.20, Maecenas speech to Augustus); Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 4.6.2–3; and the *Tabula Heraclenensis* 89–97. The prominence of the age of thirty is also witnessed by Seneca the Elder, who posits it as the age when a son must receive his inheritance in one of his fictional cases (*Contr.* 3.3). A rare Greek reference is in Plato, *Resp.* 5.460e. Harlow and Laurence argue that thirty remained the standard age for quaestorship (first main office) well past the era of the Republic (Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome: A Life Course Approach* (London: Routledge, [2002], 114–16).

tent of meeting (Num 4; 1 Chr 23:3; 2 Chr 31:15) in Jewish tradition is evidenced at Qumran (1QSa 1.12–14; CD 14.4–9; 1QM 6.12–13).⁸²² In addition, David’s crowning as king is reported to have taken place at thirty (2 Sam 5:3–4). Thus Luke-Acts was able to present the age of thirty as a culturally ideal age for Jesus to begin his public life and work, just as the rite of passage was the ideal means by which to prepare for it. Such an approximation in age or developmental requirements for a given ritual has been observed to be a not uncommon practice among ritual candidates.⁸²³

To the impressive list of inherited and developmental qualifications already compiled for Jesus’ anointing to his messianic role is now added one more: a genealogy tracing of Jesus’ legal lineage. Like the wording of the anointing narrative itself, the genealogy places the account of Jesus into a deliberate historical context.⁸²⁴ In common with the functions of other ancient biblical and extra-biblical genealogies which M. D. Johnson and R. R. Wilson have demonstrated, Luke 3:23–38 firmly connects Jesus to the heritage of his people and demonstrates the continuity of his new role with the whole of God’s work of salvation in history.⁸²⁵ It also reiterates his illustrious descent from David.⁸²⁶ That the genealogy goes back to Adam has been considered significant by a

⁸²² For other examples of the age of thirty in Jewish tradition see Gen 41:42–46; *m. Avot* 5:21.

⁸²³ Henry J. Cadbury, “Some Lukan Expressions of Time,” *JBL* 82 (1963): 275–76. See for example, Vincent Crapanzano’s demonstration of the widely varying ages even of boys undergoing the “puberty” ritual in twentieth-century Moroccan villages (“Rite of Return: Circumcision in Morocco,” in *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society* 9 [ed. Werner Muensterberger and L. Bryce Boyer; New York: Psychohistory Press, 1981]) and the varying ages at which ancient Romans actually ascended the *cursus honorum* (Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, 104–16).

⁸²⁴ M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies: With Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 255.

⁸²⁵ M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, 85–138; Fitzmyer, *Luke* 1, 1–9, 489–90; Kurz, “Luke 3:23–38,” 176–77, 182. These, and other functions of genealogies less central to Luke, have been analyzed in their biblical context by M. D. Johnson and R. R. Wilson (Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*; Wilson, “Genealogy and History in the Old Testament” [Ph.D. diss., Yale, 1972]).

⁸²⁶ (Cf. 1:27, 32–33, 69, 2:4, 11, 26). M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, 85–138; Luke Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 69, 72; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 76–77. M. D. Johnson’s argument that Luke sought to demonstrate Jesus’ prophetic lineage by tracing it through a Nathan who was

number of commentators, particularly in the context of Jesus' temptations, although it is to the ultimate connection with God not with Adam that Luke's genealogy is pointing.⁸²⁷ This tracing of the genealogy back to God is not new to Luke but follows a form used elsewhere in Greco-Roman literature to establish the inherent right to eminence.⁸²⁸ In keeping with the portrayal of God as initiating the sequence of interlocked rituals through the ῥῆμα θεοῦ and taking charge of each step of Jesus' anointing, Luke's genealogical connection of Jesus with God has been seen to further reinforce Jesus' legitimacy for his new office.⁸²⁹

Ironically however, it also demonstrates the availability of this same connection, through Adam, to every member of the human race. This connection, with its extensive detailing of Jesus' sonship through a human family, thereby echoes and further draws the Lukan audience into the *communitas* urged by John and participated in by Jesus through his baptism along with the people. In considering this paradox of his divine and human origins, the Lukan audience is also challenged with the continuing liminality of the account. By broadening Jesus' family to include the whole human race, the genealogy functions to further separate him, in the minds of the audience, from his local Galilean roots as he makes the transition to his new public role. In this context of the anointing ritual, the demonstration of Jesus' descent from God also may be seen to act as a sort of

both son of David and also prophet is possible but not verifiable (*The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, 240–52; cf. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 161).

⁸²⁷ This connection with Adam is argued by Joachim Jeremias, "Adam," *TDNT* 1:141–43; Kurz, "Luke 3:23–38"; A. Feuillet, "Le récit Lucanien de la Tentation (Lc. 4:1–13)," *Bib* 40 (1959): 613–31; Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Absence of Jesus' Emotions—the Lucan Redaction of Lk 22,39–46," *Bib* 61 (1980): 163–65; and idem, *The Passion According to Luke: A Redaction Study of Luke's Soteriology* (Theological Inquiries; New York: Paulist Press, (1985), 166–77.

⁸²⁸ M. D. Johnson notes that genealogies in Hellenistic biographies and histories tracing back to a divine parent are found, for example, in Suetonius, *Jul.* 6.1; *Galb.* 2; cf. also Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Plato* 3:1–2 and Plutarch, *Alex.* 2:1 (Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, 114).

⁸²⁹ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 157. This genealogy is couched primarily in a Hellenistic form with its ascending order of the names, while its length and non-Grecized names carry a Septuagintal flavor also in keeping with the overall Lukan style.

ritual instruction for the Lukan audience revealing one aspect of the meaning of the divine heavenly oracle by relating Jesus' sonship to his physical human ancestry.

Although the placement of Jesus' genealogy here has raised questions as to whether Jesus' baptism and temptation should indeed be seen as a unity, there are reasons beyond the stylistic ones listed above to explain it. Exodus offers a precedent: the genealogy of Moses and Aaron is provided not in the birth narrative, but in Exodus 6 following Moses' experience at the burning bush and his first public appearance.⁸³⁰ Exodus 6:2–7:7 presents a version of Moses' call which can be viewed as a rite of passage in his life. Moses hears the voice of God in a supernatural event, as Jesus has just heard the voice of God in a supernatural event. (6:2–5), and has received a divine commission (6:6–13). The genealogy interrupts the visionary dialogue (14–27) which resumes to include the mission of Aaron (6:26–7:6) and Moses' age is noted at the conclusion (7:7). All of this is a prelude to an extended wilderness ordeal.⁸³¹ Similarly Jesus, who has already received the anointing and assurance of God, is shown in the literary signal, “when he began (ἀρχόμενος),” to be moving forward toward his reincorporation, a pathway that, like Moses, involved confrontation with a deadly foe. Although Moses is not named in the genealogy, the structure of the narrative thus tightens Jesus' connection with Moses, the pattern of his prophecy.

Finally, the genealogy concludes with Jesus' derivation from God, forming a bridge from the proclamation of the heavenly voice (“you are my son”) to the interrogation of the devil (“If you are God's son”). At the same time, because it provides

⁸³⁰ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 102; cf. Kurz, “Luke 3:23–38,” 172–75.

⁸³¹ Kurz, “Luke 3:23–38,” 172–75. It is possible that a prophetic call formula was unnecessary as Jesus' role has been made clear from the beginning at his birth.

Jesus' human descent, the ritual ordeal he is about to undergo at the hands of the devil takes on an especially threatening cast.⁸³²

6.2.4 Movement 2: Jesus is Led by the Spirit in the Desert (4:1–13)

Ἰησοῦς δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου ὑπέστρεψεν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰορδάνου καὶ ἦγετο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ² ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου. Καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲν ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις καὶ συντελεσθεισῶν αὐτῶν ἐπέινασεν. ³ εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ διάβολος· εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰπέ τῷ λίθῳ τούτῳ ἵνα γένηται ἄρτος. ⁴ καὶ ἀπεκρίθη πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς· γέγραπται ὅτι οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος. ⁵ Καὶ ἀναγαγὼν αὐτὸν ἔδειξεν αὐτῷ πάσας τὰς βασιλείας τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐν στιγμῇ χρόνου ⁶ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ διάβολος· σοὶ δώσω τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην ἅπασαν καὶ τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν, ὅτι ἐμοὶ παραδέδοται καὶ ὧ ἂν θέλω δίδωμι αὐτήν. ⁷ σὺ οὖν ἐὰν προσκυνήσῃς ἐνώπιον ἐμοῦ, ἔσται σοῦ πᾶσα. ⁸ καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· γέγραπται· κύριον τὸν θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις. ⁹ Ἦγαγεν δὲ αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ ἔστησεν ἐπὶ τὸ πτερύγιον τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, βάλε σεαυτὸν ἐντεῦθεν κάτω. ¹⁰ γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ ἐντελεῖται περὶ σοῦ τοῦ διαφυλάξαι σε ¹¹ ἢ καὶ ὅτι ἐπὶ χειρῶν ἀροῦσίν σε, μήποτε προσκόψῃς πρὸς λίθον τὸν πόδα σου. ¹² καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι εἴρηται· οὐκ ἐκπειράσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου. ¹³ Καὶ συντελέσας πάντα πειρασμὸν ὁ διάβολος ἀπέστη ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἄχρι καιροῦ.

Having undergone the liminal experience of baptism in *communitas* with ‘the people,’ followed by his own deeper transformation under the direction of a divine ritual director, Jesus is next portrayed as beginning his return (ὑποστρέφω Luke 4:1) from the desolate Jordan region. In this second major movement in the ritual of the mightier one, Luke presents Jesus’ wilderness ordeal. The narrative is structured in three parts: (1) Jesus is led by the spirit in the wilderness (4:1–2); (2) the devil/adversary interrogates Jesus (4:2c–12); and (3) the end of the trial (Luke 4:13).

First then, Luke announces that Jesus, filled with the holy spirit turned back (ὑπέστρεψεν) from the Jordan.⁸³³ This description calls back into mind the liminal events

⁸³² François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-Five Years of Research (1950–2005)* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006), 137.

⁸³³ Fitzmyer here translates the phrase as “Jesus withdrew” (*Luke I, 1–9*, 513); cf. Marshall who suggests the term “departed” (*The Gospel of Luke*, 169). Yet the idea of return lingers, *perfectly expressing* Jesus’ movement away from the marginal space of the Jordan and, ultimately, toward the social space where people live and work.

at the heart of the ritual at the Jordan (3:3, 21–22) which were separated off by the insertion of the genealogy. At the same time these opening words work together with the genealogy to close off the previous section of ritual, for this word ὑποστρέφω is frequently used by Luke to mark the close of a narrative, most notably of the resurrection visions (Luke 24:9, 33, 52, Acts 1:12).⁸³⁴ This suggests the beginnings of Jesus’ reincorporation in his new role as *anointed one* and the beginnings of his ministry, a beginning already announced with words “when he began” (ἀρχόμενος) in 3:23. These beginnings are evidenced in the defeat of the devil in the course of this ordeal, a task Acts 10:38 identifies as an important result of his anointing. Jesus’ reincorporation can also be seen in his gradual movement away from a completely passive role at the heart of the rite, toward an increasingly active role as he acts in response to the leading of the Spirit and the testing of the διάβολος.⁸³⁵

An Ordeal in the Desert

But before Jesus moves fully into his reincorporation upon his return to Galilee, as signified by a second use of ὑπέστρεψεν (Luke 4:14), Luke depicts Jesus as being led (ἄγω, imperfect tense) in the ἔρημος by the Holy Spirit he had just received, and undergoing a forty day period of ordeal and testing. The importance of such a period of trial in rite of passage accounts of the time is evidenced in Josephus’ reported devotion to Bannus in the same wilderness (ἐρημία) region just decades later, and also possibly in Lucius’ challenging experiences at the “boundary of death” on “the threshold of Proserpina,” in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*.⁸³⁶ Indeed Plutarch, in encouraging his young audience to listen submissively to reproof, compares the experience with the “solemn rite

⁸³⁴ Deborah Prince, “Vision of the Risen Jesus: The Rhetoric of Certainty in Luke 24 and Acts 1” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2005), 194, n. 23–24.

⁸³⁵ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 139.

⁸³⁶ Josephus, *Vita* 1.11; Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.23; cf. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 89–92.

of a novitiate,” in which he must “submit to the initial purifications and commotions, in the expectation that something delectable and splendid will follow upon his present distress and perturbation” (*Rect. rat. aud.* 47a [Babbitt, LCL]).⁸³⁷

In fact, in Jesus’ movement from Jordan to ἔρημος, he can be seen to enter a space even further outside society’s normal day-to-day boundaries of space and human activity than was the Jordan region.⁸³⁸ The spatial and temporal references in Luke 4:1–2 (wilderness and forty days) are shared with Matthew, but take on special significance in the larger context of Luke-Acts. The symbolic functions of the wilderness discussed above (5.1.1) are operative here. The biblical wilderness is a betwixt and between place, a sort of threshold between the social-political space of this world and the realm of transcendent space where the natural and supernatural are thought to meet.⁸³⁹ Even when the ritual has ended, an early Lukan summary in 5:15–16 suggests that, as often happens with ritual, Jesus repeatedly returns to pray in wilderness locations reminiscent of this liminal preparation and passage (αὐτὸς δὲ ἦν ὑποχωρῶν ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις καὶ προσευχόμενος, cf. 4:42; 9:12, 18). This experience under the leading of the Spirit in the wilderness generates a new practice which will structure and shape Jesus’ mission in Luke.⁸⁴⁰

Amid the liminal symbols of wilderness, nature, and journeying, the wilderness account is tied closely to the scene of the anointing by the continuing dominance of the

⁸³⁷ Cf. *Fac.* 943c; Petr Pokorný, “The Temptation Stories,” 115–27.

⁸³⁸ K. C. Hanson, “Transformed on the Mountain: Ritual Analysis and the Gospel of Matthew,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 157–60; Philip Esler, “Mountaineering in Matthew: A Response to K. C. Hanson,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 172.

⁸³⁹ Susan Ackerman, “Why is Miriam also among the Prophets? (And is Zipporah among the Priests?),” *JBL* 12 (2002): 70; Ackerman cites Edmund Leach, “Anthropological Approaches to the Study of the Bible during the Twentieth Century,” in Edmund Leach and D. Alan Aycok, *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland), 16.

⁸⁴⁰ As the book of Acts and the account of the church opens, they too, following Jesus’ instruction, collectively practice a period of separation and prayer, and receive a miraculous bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

divine ritual director, now acting through the Holy Spirit who leads Jesus in the wilderness. Here, as McVann notes, Jesus is exposed to one of the “grotesque monsters” of Turnerian liminal theory which challenges him to reexamine the factors of his culture.⁸⁴¹ The devil’s goading repetition (4:3, 9) of the designation *son of God*, further connects the scene with the liminal core of the ritual and to the intervening genealogy (3:22, 38).⁸⁴² And like each of the other narrative accounts of ritual examined in detail in chapter 4, the experience of this time is shaped by the deprivation of the natural human need for food.⁸⁴³

As John’s βάπτισμα ritual was rooted in the ancient promise of a voice in the wilderness (Isa 40:3; Luke 1:80; 3:2), Luke grounds Jesus’ own rite of passage in the central tradition of Israel’s collective “rite of passage” from slavery to freedom, echoed in Isaiah’s promises of a way through through the wilderness.⁸⁴⁴ This account appears to draw on the exodus summary in Deut 8:2–5. In Luke 4:1–2 Jesus, like Israel, is said to be led (ἄγω Luke 4:1; Deut 8:2) by God in the wilderness (ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ Luke 4:1; Deut 8:2) where, as God’s son (υἱὸς Luke 4:3, 9; Deut 8:5; cf. Luke 3:22; Matt 3:17; 4:3, 6), he is tested (πειράζω Luke 4:2; Matt 4:1; Mark 1:13; ἐκπειράζω Deut 8:2), for a forty day

⁸⁴¹ Mark McVann, “The Making of Jesus the Prophet: Matthew 3:13–4:25,” *Listening* 24 (1989): 270.

⁸⁴² E. E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (2d ed.; London: Oliphants, 1974), 94; Fitzmyer, *Luke I, 1–9*, 506. Ἰορδάνης (4:1) is also repeated, but indicates only that the wilderness scene follows immediately upon those of the Jordan region (3:2) (Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95).

⁸⁴³ Lucius avoided all animal food and wine during the ten-day period until his ritual was complete (*Met.* 11.23), Josephus apparently joined Bannus in his limitation to foods that grew wild (*Vit.* 11), and Saul neither ate nor drank for the three days before Ananias came to him (Acts 9:9).

⁸⁴⁴ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 169. This is again *contra* Mauser’s claim that Luke has no interest in the wilderness as symbol. In fact, Luke repeatedly recalls Israel’s passage experience in the wilderness (Luke 4:1; 9:30–31; Acts 7:30–44; 13:18; 21:38). François Bovon notes further that Jesus travels John’s path in reverse, from Jordan to wilderness, but that, while both met liminal supernatural beings there (in accordance with ritual expectation), John was introduced to God’s voice while Jesus encountered and bested the devil (*Luke I*, 140).

period symbolically patterned after the forty years (ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα Luke 4:2; τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη Deut 8:4) of Israel's testing.⁸⁴⁵

Deuteronomy 8 interprets Israel's liminal experience in the wilderness as a discipline (or training, παιδεύω) imposed in order that "the things in their heart might be discerned" (8:2).⁸⁴⁶ Jesus who, like Israel, experiences hunger in the wilderness (Luke 4:2; Deut 8:3), passes successfully through this period of discipline and testing, proving himself, in contrast to Israel, an ideal ritual candidate in his submissive obedience to his father, the ultimate ritual director.⁸⁴⁷ For Jesus responds righteously to the devil's three final challenges, rejecting the first, despite his acute hunger, with the very words of Deut 8:3, οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτω μόνω ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος (Luke 4:4), and going on to reject the others with the nearby words of Deut 6:13, 16. A further reference to Jesus' overcoming the original temptation of Adam is also likely, especially in the temptation to eat (Gen 3:1–5), though Luke does not develop this further here.⁸⁴⁸

⁸⁴⁵ G. H. P. Thompson, "Called–Proved–Obedient: A Study in the Baptism and Temptation Narratives of Matthew and Luke," *JTS* 11 (1960): 2; Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah*, 216; cf. Hanson, "Transformed on the Mountain," 158. The use of ἄγω with ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, and the briefer designation ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα, are found in no other (canonical?) gospel.

⁸⁴⁶ "And you are to remember all the way which *the Lord your God led you in the wilderness* (ἠγαγέν σε . . . ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ), so that he might afflict you and *test* (ἐκπειράσῃ) you and that the things in your heart might be discerned—whether you will keep his commandments or not. He afflicted you and let you be *hungry*, and hand-fed you with manna which your fathers did not know, in order that he might make known to you that *a human being is not to live upon bread alone*. Rather a human being is to live by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Your clothing did not wear out, your feet did not become calloused, indeed for *forty* years (τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη). And so you are to know in your heart that just as any man might discipline his son (τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ), so the Lord your God will discipline you." Deut 8:2–5, emphasis added.

⁸⁴⁷ J. A. T. Robinson, "The Temptations," *Theology* 50 (1947): 43–48; Thompson, "Called–Proved–Obedient"; B. Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son (Matt 4:1–11 & Par.): An Analysis of an Early Christian Midrash* (ConBNT 2/1; Lund: Gleerup, 1966); Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 510; C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, 255–56; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 76; Green, *The Gospel*, 193; Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

⁸⁴⁸ A correspondence can also be seen between Jesus' second temptation and the serpent's claim to Eve that she would be like God (Gen 3:5); and also between Jesus' third temptation and the claim that she would not really die (Gen 3:4). Neyrey has demonstrated correspondences also between these temptations and Jesus later ἀγωνία/πειρασμός at Gethsemane ("The Absence of Jesus' Emotions—the Lucan Redaction of Lk 22,39–46," 163–65). A number of commentators deny that Luke intended to focus on a connection

In typical rite of passage fashion, then, Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, with its replaying of Israel's forty-year wilderness testing, stands in Luke-Acts symbolically within a long-standing tradition of sacred time set apart.⁸⁴⁹ In the LXX tradition the number forty repeatedly carries symbolic resonances of liminal moments and passages across thresholds.⁸⁵⁰ Some such sense of rebirth or remaking can be seen in the re-beginning of the world after the 40 days of destructive deluge (marked by the descent of a dove, Gen 7:17; 8:11), in Moses' 40-day visits to the mountain to receive the Law (Exod 24:18; 34:28; Deut 9:9–11; 10:10) and his 40-day periods of prayer for Israel's forgiveness (Deut 9:18, 25), and in Elijah's 40-day flight to the mountain of God in the wilderness (1Kgs 19:8).⁸⁵¹

Luke-Acts gives particular emphasis to the connection between the forty days of Jesus and the forty years of Israel in Stephen's speech in Acts. This speech, which directly quotes Moses' prophecy that God would "raise up for you a prophet like me" (Acts 7:38; cf. Deut 8:15), uses the phrase "forty years in the wilderness" (Acts 7:36, 42) not once, but twice, in its description of this liminal time of "signs and wonders" performed by Moses (7:37). The liminal signification of the number forty is even further amplified in the declaration that Moses was around *forty* when he was forced to become an exile far from home and family after striking down the Egyptian (7:23), and that he spent *forty* years in this liminal exile before God called him in the wilderness of Sinai to return to Egypt as ruler and deliverer of his people (7:30–35).

with Adam and certainly not to the level of the Pauline first Adam-second Adam theology (e.g., Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 161; Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, 234–52.)

⁸⁴⁹ Edmund R. Leach, "Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time," in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* (Series B; vol. 251; no. 772; 1966).

⁸⁵⁰ Luke 4:2; Acts 1:3; 4:22; 7:23, 30, 36, 42; 13:18, 21; 23:13, 21.

⁸⁵¹ Consider also the forty year rests of the land in Judges (3:11; 5:31; 8:28) and Ezekiel (29:11) and the transitional place and marginal position of the twelve spies (Num 13:25) outside of their own people in danger in a land that was not yet theirs. Forty also represented a time of discipline or punishment elsewhere than in the story of Israel (Deut 8), as in the symbolic time in which Ezekiel bore the sins of Judah (Ezek 4:6) or God's giving of Israel into the hands of the Philistines (Judg 13:1).

In Luke-Acts itself, the time of Jesus' meeting with his disciples before his ascension (Acts 1:3) is also a forty day period outside the normal flow of time. Later in Acts, Paul too speaks of God's toleration of Israel for forty years in the wilderness (13:18). This speech goes on to tell of Saul's reign of forty years before God "raised up (ἤγειρεν) David" (13:22), making the declaration similar to that of the heavenly voice in Luke 3:22, "I have found David . . . a man according to my heart who will do all my will" (Acts 13:22). This quote is taken partially from Ps 88:21 (LXX) which states, "I have found David my servant, I have anointed (ἐχρίσα) him" and also from 1Sam 13:14 (LXX) where Samuel tells Saul, "The Lord will seek for himself a man after his own heart and the Lord will commission (ἐντελεῖται) him as ruler over his people."

Early in the twentieth century, Alfred Loisy interpreted Jesus' sojourn in the desert as "*the messianic probationary period, included in a preliminary or immediate initiation to the ministry of salvation*" and which would be followed by the probationary period of his death in the scene at Gethsemane.⁸⁵² Such periods are a common aspect of rites of passage during which, in Turner's words, "participants may also be, in a sense, ground down in the liminal experience through ordeal, circumcision, hazing, endurance of heat and cold, and impossible physical tests"⁸⁵³ and may be "given riddles to solve . . . that call on their ingenuity and elicit their talents."⁸⁵⁴ Yet of all the narrative ritual accounts examined in this study, the ordeal Jesus faced is the most intense of all in several ways. Jesus' long solitude and the hunger he faces during his wilderness existence fit in this category, but more important are the actions of the supernatural characters, the Holy Spirit and the Devil, who here cross paths and also cross purposes. The devil takes

⁸⁵² Alfred Loisy, *L'Évangile Selon Luc* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1924), 152.

⁸⁵³ Victor W. Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 49–50.

⁸⁵⁴ Victor W. Turner, "Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media," 210–11. David too spent an extended time in the wilderness between his anointing and his coronation and enthronement (e.g., 1 Sam 23:14; 25:4; 26:2).

the primary role of tester, attributed in Deut 8:2–5 to God himself but here apparently facilitated by the Holy Spirit whom Jesus follows faithfully throughout.⁸⁵⁵ In the continuous leading of the Spirit, this probationary period can be seen not only as an ordeal of testing, but as part of the reconstruction process preparing the Son through discipline for successful incorporation into public life in his new role.⁸⁵⁶

Thus as Jesus turns from the heaven-centered experience of anointing and affirmation toward reincorporation into the day-to-day world a new expression of fundamental dichotomy becomes evident, contrasting the Father’s model for sonship with the devil’s proposed model. This opposition, of course, is not directly articulated by the devil, who seeks to cloak his suggestions in terms of apparent harmony with the will of the Father. Nor was it evident in Jesus’ baptism, or in the opening heaven, the descending dove, or the fatherly voice. Yet it is through the enactment of ritual actions such as those which Jesus had just experienced that, as Catherine Bell has observed, instinctive schemes for perception and evaluation of an underlying dichotomy are inscribed upon the ritual body.⁸⁵⁷

Luke closes the period with an expression that announces its completion in ritual terms: “when they were completed” (συντελεσθεισῶν αὐτῶν) appears to be Luke’s addition, and belongs to the vocabulary of ritual built around the root τελ.⁸⁵⁸ Jesus has been shown to link himself with the people in baptism at the same time he has seen the heaven open and experienced his anointing with power and authority for his mission. Having earlier undergone the preparation of a “ritualized body” he is now even more

⁸⁵⁵ ἠγγετο is in the imperfect tense signifying Jesus’ ongoing following which, Kittel suggests, includes the idea of ongoing communion through fasting and prayer (G. Kittel, “ἠγγετο,” *TDNT* 2:658). Nevertheless Luke’s emphasis here is upon staying true in the face of ritual testing no longer on receiving ritual instruction.

⁸⁵⁶ Deut 8:5; Victor W. Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 49–50.

⁸⁵⁷ Catherine Bell, “The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power,” *JRitSt* 4, no. 2 (1990): 310.

⁸⁵⁸ See chapter 4.1 above.

ready to choose the difficult way of the Father in the inevitable coming conflict as this whole-body preparation now etched deeper and even more indelibly through Jesus' forty long days of following the Spirit in wilderness deprivation and testing .

The Three Ultimate Temptations

On the completion of the forty-day fast, the ordeal culminates in a final confrontation (Luke 4:3–12). The structure of this second part of the wilderness narrative is inherited from Sayings Source. It consists of three demands made by the adversary/ *διάβολος*, each countered by Jesus with a response drawn from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13, 16). The scene again involves liminal paradoxical and wondrous occurrences, for although they seem never to leave the wilderness, the devil takes Jesus up so as to display all the kingdoms of the world at once (Luke 4:5) and finally to Jerusalem (v. 9). The order of the temptations was probably chosen by Luke to reflect the ultimate goal and completion of Jesus' prophetic mission.

As Jesus now faces the devil's three ultimate temptations in this cosmic struggle between these two conflicting models, he has been ritually prepared to face down and set aside personal and cultural values and expectations in the final confrontation that will complete the deconstruction and rebuilding of the ritual participant in preparation for his new role.⁸⁵⁹ Yet even at this point Jesus does not act on his own internal guidance alone but, in each case, consults the traditionally hallowed authority in the Scriptural record of his Father's will.

As Robert Brawley has noted, these temptations present a series of more specific oppositions which, from the apparent entering opposition, *hungry/full*, is carried forward by the transcendent antithesis, *devil/Holy Spirit*, demonstrating that he is assuredly "led by the Spirit rather than by the devil."⁸⁶⁰ This binary opposition of devil/spirit which is

⁸⁵⁹ Victor W. Turner, "Process, System, and Symbol," 68.

⁸⁶⁰ Brawley, *Centering on God*, 188.

evident in Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience, connects also into the schema underlying John's speech (discussed above) built around the fundamental opposition of the salvation of God/the coming wrath.

First, in the face of the intense natural desire of hunger, and the option to make use of his spiritual power to assuage it, Jesus chooses to wait obediently upon his father's leading and timing through the Spirit, living by the values of *communitas* in setting aside advantages of sonship his fellow initiands in baptism could not have. Second, offered the opportunity, through a simple act of obeisance indicating his submission to the devil's leadership, to painlessly gain full authority over the kingdoms of the world, he refuses to acknowledge any authority outside of his father God.⁸⁶¹ Though kingdom authority and honor are completely in keeping with the purpose of an anointing ritual as well as with cultural expectations of an anointed one-Christ, Jesus rejects what Luke intimates is the means used by earthly kingdoms who are portrayed here as all under the devil's control. Finally, perceiving the devil's misuse of God's act of anointing and assurance of sonship, he steps aside from the cultural expectations for messianic miracles and possibly his own need for certainty, and chooses, as must all those with whom he shares *communitas*, to wait on God's leading instead of pushing for answers according to his own will and timing.

As a completion of the complex ritual of the anointing, the wilderness testing thus should be seen as preparatory more than it is exemplary, disciplining and testing Jesus for his new role through bodily practice as well as through verbal exchange. Esler notes similarly, "there are difficulties in regarding the narrative as a pattern of discipleship. The issues raised relate to the messianic status of Jesus, which was not shared by his followers. The passage describes the successful testing and preparation of the hero, not

⁸⁶¹ "Προσκυνέω," LSJ 1518; "προσκυνέω," BDAG 882–83.

the realities of discipleship.”⁸⁶² Unlike Israel or Adam before him, Jesus prevails, successfully passing through the testing that has stood between God’s people and the reception of his promises.⁸⁶³

The third and final part of the narrative adds two specifically Lukan notes (4:13). The first is the observation that the devil had “completely performed” all testing (συντελέσας πάντα πειρασμὸν); again, Luke invokes ritual language to describe the event. At last the devil, recognizing his defeat, leaves him “for a time.” Even if this departure is less momentous to the narrative than was suggested by Conzelman, its significance in the ritual context is manifest.

6.2.5 Movement 3: Jesus Returns to Galilee (4:14–15)

¹⁴Καὶ ὑπέστρεψεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν. καὶ φήμη ἐξῆλθεν καθ’ ὅλης τῆς περιχώρου περὶ αὐτοῦ. ¹⁵καὶ αὐτὸς ἐδίδασκεν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν δοξαζόμενος ὑπὸ πάντων.

In 4:14–15, Luke provides a summary of the first part of Jesus’ ministry which forms the third movement of the ritual.⁸⁶⁴ Upon the devil’s departure, Jesus leaves behind the desolate regions of the two interlocked rituals and returns to the social landscape of everyday life, attending the synagogues and involving himself in human interaction. According to Luke, Jesus is said not simply to *come* into Galilee but to *return* (ὑπέστρεψεν 4:14), as Josephus also speaks of returning (ὑπέστρεφον) to Jerusalem from his time in the wilderness with Bannus at the conclusion of his ritualized transition to adulthood (*Vit.* 12). This second repetition of the word in Luke thus signals the completion of the return begun when Jesus left the Jordan (ὑπέστρεψεν Luke 4:1; cf. Mark 1:14).

⁸⁶² Esler, “Mountaineering in Matthew,” 172.

⁸⁶³ Robert L. Brawley, “Canon and Community: Intertextuality, Canon, Interpretation, Christology, Theology, and Persuasive Rhetoric in Luke 4:1–13,” in *SBLSP 1992* (ed. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1992), 420.

⁸⁶⁴ It has been seen this way at least since Conzelmann, (*The Theology of St. Luke*, 29–31).

Jesus' *reincorporation* is also signaled by his movement from the passive role, which he played in the heart of the ritual, to main initiator of the action, a situation that will continue until the days of his passion in Luke 23 and 24. He does not act on his own initiative alone, however, for he arrives "*in the power of the Spirit*" who descended upon him at the Jordan, and whose continuing presence thereafter is attested in 4:1, 18. In this relationship Jesus is said to act within, or by (ἐν), the Spirit's power (4:13), rather than to hold, wield, or control it.

Jesus' return is not to the role of obedient son in Nazareth that he left to come to the Jordan, as Luke makes quite evident in the depiction of his fellow townspeople driving him out of their πόλις in 4:28–29. The centrality that teaching and preaching was to have in his work as a whole is announced in the Lukan summary (4:15) where the ongoing nature of this activity is signaled by the use of the imperfect tense (ἐδίδασκεν). This is reinforced in his opening claim in 4:18 that he has been anointed "to preach good news." It is confirmed as a priority later in the same chapter when he states, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose" (4:43). Later, teaching was Jesus' first action in Capernaum (Luke 4:31; cf. Acts 1:1) and continued to be a primary descriptor of his actions, especially on the journey to Jerusalem (Luke 13:22) and during the subsequent days in the Jerusalem temple (19:47; 21:37).

At the same time, although Luke does not directly state that Jesus did miracles immediately upon his return, such deeds do seem to be hinted at in the use of the term δύναμις and in the quick spread of his fame (4:14). This suggestion is supported by the statement in Nazareth in 4:23, "Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well."⁸⁶⁵ The miracles of course, did come, as alluded to in the Nazareth speech (4:18, 25–27) and were carried out in subsequent days in Capernaum and elsewhere, though not in Nazareth itself.

⁸⁶⁵ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 176; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 521–24, 526.

Both teaching and miracles are consonant with the role of prophet emphasized in Jesus' inaugural speech in Nazareth (4:16–30), as discussed earlier in 6.2.2. In this discourse, Jesus defies not only cultural expectations for a man of his time and station but, more problematically, also the cultural expectations for the fulfillment of the role of anointed one which he suggests for himself in 4:18. For at the same time the connection between the descent of the dove and the earlier promises of an anointed one is brought into clearer focus for the Lukan audience, the kingly aspects of these earlier promises that might be expected to be fulfilled in an anointing ritual are played down as they will be for some chapters to come.⁸⁶⁶ There are only hints present of a liberator-savior: in the line “to send forth the oppressed in freedom” brought over from Isa 58:6, and in the jubilee flavor of the passage with its good news for the poor and promise of release/ἄφεσις raising hopes for the great end-time jubilee on behalf of Israel (Lev 25:10; cf. Isa 49:5–10).

The success of the ritual in preparing Jesus for his new public role is made evident immediately upon his return from the wilderness, not only in the power of the Spirit in which he now walked, but in his immediate engagement in the act of teaching with most excellent results. As with Saul in Acts 9, it seems that everyone is talking about him, and his teaching in the synagogues provokes widespread praise (Luke 4:14–15; cf. Acts 9:20–21). Yet, also like Saul, Luke immediately makes clear that in this very success Jesus encounters resistance to the way in which he envisions enacting his role. After at first seeming positive toward his identification with the role of prophet-savior proclaimed Luke 4:18–19, the people of Nazareth respond with rage when he attempts to reshape their expectations as to what this role involved (Luke 4:24, 28–30; cf. Acts 9:22–23). For, in contrast to the (normal) cultural expectation that his new powers should be dedicated above all to the benefit of his own kin-group and neighbors, he informs them

⁸⁶⁶ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 529, 532; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 81; cf. John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 118, 132 n. 84.

baldly that his mission was aimed beyond them not only to the people of Capernaum but far beyond to the people of the Gentiles (Luke 4:24–27).

Thus, although Jesus has now fully returned to social life, it would not be accurate to say that he has been fully reincorporated into society in his new role. His rejection in Nazareth not only foreshadows his ultimate rejection in Jerusalem but suggests that, despite the early applause, he will remain outside the mainstream of his society, in a liminal position with regard to the values and expectations of his society concerning how he should enact the complex role he had just claimed for himself. Indeed, since his return from the wilderness, instead of returning to settle into a normal life, he has been portrayed as moving from synagogue to synagogue, only pausing at home in Nazareth to teach in their synagogue before moving on. Further, all this is said to be done in the ongoing presence of a supernatural being, the Holy Spirit.

As was suggested to those congregated in the Nazareth synagogue, and will be repeatedly pointed out again later in Luke (6:23; 11:47–50; 13:33–34), such a position, under the influence of the Spirit is not unusual for a prophet but is the norm, and is a position that his liminal experience of ritual anointing (by the Spirit), confirmation, and testing has prepared him for. The continuing *communitas* evidenced in his concern for the poor and oppressed is consonant with this ongoing liminality, as is the extension of this liminal *communitas* even to the Gentiles, which was a much broader degree than anyone in his village seemed willing to grant.⁸⁶⁷

6.2.6 Jesus' Baptism and Anointing as a Rite of Passage

In contrast to the *ritual of the many* in Luke 3:1–18 with its emphasis on separation and repentance, in Luke's portrayal of this *rite of the mightier one* in 3:21–4:15 Jesus' initial *separation* from home and normal life is not even noted in this

⁸⁶⁷ Liander E. Keck, "Jesus' Entrance upon His Mission: Luke 3:1–4:30," *RevExp* 64 (1967): 479; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 177–78; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 529; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 81.

pericope. Rather his entrance is made known only with the announcement of his baptism. There is no continuation of the emphasis on active repentance associated with John's baptism (e.g., 3:3, 8), nor any foreshadowing of the importance of such repentance in the baptism of believers in Acts (2:38, 9:1–5, 20; 22:16) although there is a shared readiness to do God's will. Instead for Jesus the baptism, which takes place at the beginning of his rite like the ritual washing of Lucius (Apuleius, *Met.* 11.23), may as for Lucius denote a symbolic separation from past associations in preparation for the deeply liminal heaven-based events which immediately follow. The singularity of the events that accompany his baptism then further separate him both from the people who were baptized with him and from all other baptism accounts mentioned.

Paradoxically his baptism, unlike the other ritual accounts studied, is pictured at the same time as a ritual action received in *communitas* with "all the people," apparently foreshadowing his transition to a public role even before the focus of the rite shifts to his own singular liminal experience. Every public figure must make the transition from private life representing only his own and family interests to public life representing and guarding the interests of his whole constituency. Jesus' baptism can be seen to enact this movement in a symbolic way, separating him from the private life of his youth toward a fuller identification with his people.

It is the *liminal phase* following the baptism that receives the primary stress in this ritual narrative, stretching from Jesus' prayer in Luke 3:21 to his return from the wilderness in 4:14. As the later interpretation of the event in Luke-Acts makes clear (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:26–27; 10:37–38), the rite of anointing is the dominant symbol of the ritual and its central liminal event. In it Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and is designated, in the presentation of Luke-Acts, as the anointed one-Christ (Acts 4:26–27). This role Luke-Acts interprets by reference to the ritual anointing of kings (e.g., 1 Sam 16:13; Ps 2:2, 7; Luke 3:22; Acts 4:26–27), but also to the predicted activities of a servant-prophet

like that of Isa 61:1–2 (Luke 4:18–19), like Elijah and Elisha (4:20–30), and like Moses, whom God sent as prophet, as well as ruler and deliverer (Acts 7:35, 37).

The rest of the ancillary symbols of the rite are also organized around the dominant symbol of the Spirit's descent. For the audience, the genealogy furthers this identification with Moses and David, as well as with his Father and paradoxically with all of humankind. And, still in a liminal betwixt-and-between position in the wilderness Jesus, led by this Spirit, overcomes the ordeal of the devil's testing, demonstrating his readiness to act with complete submission to his Father in the role for which the Father commissioned him. In this he is placed in binary opposition to rebellious Israel in their wilderness sojourn (Deut 8:1–5) as the devil performs the function of binary opposition to the Spirit. Here his *communitas* with the people continues to run as an undercurrent, as he refuses to act in ways unavailable to them just as Luke earlier declares him to have been baptized with all the people, and to descend from God through a completely human genealogy.

In the *reincorporation*, normally expected to follow the liminality of a rite of passage, Jesus returns to society and his home region of Galilee but not to his role as submissive son of human parents in Nazareth. Neither does his liminality entirely cease, for instead he is shown by Luke to immediately begin traveling from synagogue to synagogue still led by the liminal manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and his results swing from praise to vilification. The primary focus on the prophetic aspect of his mission is demonstrated in his discourse at Nazareth, as is the outsider nature of his message which is full of promise for the poor, oppressed, and blind of all the earth, and which the hearers ultimately reject.

Though Jesus has moved on, then, from the time and place of his anointing ritual, he continues to live in the reversal and *communitas* of liminality Turner considered common with such persons as prophets and artists. These, he says, “tend to be liminal and marginal people, . . . who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the

cliches associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination.”⁸⁶⁸ For such *sacred outsiders*, “what is essentially a liminal or extra-structural phase” is, according to Turner, transformed into a permanent condition, in which the individual assumes “a statusless status, external to the secular social structure, which gives him the right to criticize all structure-bound personae in terms of a moral order binding on all, and also to mediate between all segments or components of the structured system.”⁸⁶⁹

6.3 The Significance of Jesus’ Baptism and Anointing in Luke-Acts

Luke’s portrayal of Jesus’ baptism and anointing contributes to a number of purposes regularly attributed to the work as a whole. In a general sense the account functions, like Josephus’ ritualized account of his passage to adulthood, as a logical narrative bridge between Jesus’ private life and public ministry, assuring the audience that this transition has been accomplished, as expected of such transitions in the Greco-Roman culture, with a level of omen and ritual appropriate to the claims made for him both in the instruction the audience had previously received and in the first two chapters of Luke. The audience is thus assured that they can count on him to carry out the complex role proclaimed for him in chapters 1 and 2 and in the pregnant allusions of the ritual itself, although how this will all come together is only gradually brought to light as the narrative unfolds.⁸⁷⁰

⁸⁶⁸ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 128.

⁸⁶⁹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 116–17.

⁸⁷⁰ As with the main account of Paul’s rite of passage in Acts 9, no specifics are said to be given to Jesus regarding the role he is being commissioned for.

Jesus' baptism and anointing also evidence, in a number of ways, Luke's purpose of demonstrating the ongoing fulfillment of God's plan and promises to Israel.⁸⁷¹ It opens the final stage of the parallelism of John and Jesus, initiating Jesus' ministry just as the coming of the $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in his $\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\iota\lambda\iota\varsigma$ had initiated the ministry of John. And, whatever truth is in Conzelmann's argument about Luke-Acts' distinct separation between John representing the period of Israel and Jesus as the center of history, the baptism certainly also stands as a connecting point stretching from John to Jesus and on into the experience of the Lukan audience, which Conzelmann labeled the period of the church.⁸⁷² For John, who preaches this baptism of water as the centerpiece of his message, looks forward to a time when the mightier one would give a spirit-and-fire baptism (Luke 3:3, 16). Jesus, who joins in this water baptism along with the people, at the same time receives this promised spirit (3:21–22). And Jesus' followers, who continue to practice the water baptism preached by Luke, now receive the outpouring of the Spirit in fire (Acts 1:5, 2:17, 33).

Luke-Acts' purpose to demonstrate the grounding of current Christian practice in the practice of Jesus is evident not only in the act of baptism itself but in some of the practices surrounding it.⁸⁷³ Like Jesus' wilderness experience, the three most extensive baptism accounts in Luke-Acts also involve a liminal period of preparation either before or after the baptism, often centering on the spoken word. Before the opening Spirit-baptism at Pentecost, the apostles are said to undergo forty days of instruction from one who had just risen from the dead, had observed his miraculous heavenly ascension and had spent days apart with other believers in prayer during which time they were called

⁸⁷¹ Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1961), 303–04; Fitzmyer, *Luke 1,1–9*, 9; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 10; Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic Historiography* (NovTSup 64; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 380–381; Bovon, *Luke 1*, 6, 10.

⁸⁷² Cf. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 22–27.

⁸⁷³ Such a general purpose is suggested, for example, by Loisy, *L'Evangile Selon Luc* 142; Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, 386; Bovon, *Luke the Theologian*, 459–60.

into recollection of their own experience at John's water baptism (Acts 1:3, 21–22; 2:4). And Paul's liminal encounter with the heavenly voice and his three days of fasting bears a particular likeness to Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience, though Paul's experience is much shorter and lacks the magnitude of supernatural participation. Even the baptism of believers in Acts 2 is preceded by a supernatural manifestation and an accompanying speech by an apostle, a pattern apparently paradigmatic of many of the briefer notations of baptisms in Acts. The Lukan audience, whether they had yet experienced baptism themselves, are drawn into the liminal experience as they grapple with the supernatural events at Jesus' baptism, the paradox of a genealogy evidencing Jesus' special connection to his Father through the bloodlines of the whole human race, and the challenges thrown at him by the devil.

With the sudden appearance of Jesus in the Lukan account just as the people are being baptized, leaving no account of his physical separation or participation in the preaching of John (who spoke of him as coming rather than present), emphasis is placed upon the liminal aspects of his rite. He is removed thus from the implications of what has gone before, leaving the baptism of John and his preaching to represent the grounding of Christian practice with respect to separation and repentance. On the other hand, Jesus' reincorporation following his rite of passage, unlike the open-ended ritual of the people in Luke 3:1–21a, shows a great deal of congruence with Christian practice as portrayed in Acts. For after his baptism, Jesus is said to immediately return to society and begin teaching, as does Peter following his Spirit-baptism and Paul following his baptismal rite of passage (Acts 9:20). Although other newly-baptized believers in Acts tend, somewhat like the people in Luke 3, to disappear from the story not long after their baptism, they are often spoken of as "praising God" (2:47) or "rejoicing (8:38–39; 16:33–34), and are several times reported as later speaking the word (8:4; 11:19). Two further aspects of reincorporation in Christian baptism are based not so much on Jesus' baptism itself but on his life in its larger context: their frequently declared baptism "into the name of Jesus"

(ἐν 10:45; εἰς 8:16; 19:5; ἐπι 2:38); and their reincorporation into the community of believers (e.g., 2:41–42) which Jesus had been developing since not long after his own baptism (Luke 5:10–11; 27–28).

Yet at the same time Luke shows Jesus and also the newly-baptized Christian believers continuing to remain in a liminal, or set-apart, position with regard to society as “sacred outsiders.” For Jesus’ wandering lifestyle suggested in Luke 4:14–15 continues throughout the gospel, and is underlined in his statement to a would-be disciple, “The foxes have dens and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man does not have anywhere to lay his head” (9:48). As time goes by his lack of fit with societal values and expectations evidenced in Nazareth (4:16–30) is shown only to deepen in the sharp conflicts such as those regarding fasting (5:33), Sabbath-keeping (6:1–5) and hand-washing (11:37) in which the structural leaders of his society increasingly took offense at his position. In addition Jesus’ ongoing *communitas*, irrespective of rank or position, is evidenced in his insistence that even the pious and societally ordained interpreters of the law are deeply in need of repentance (10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 18:10–14), that the greater must act as servants (22:25–27), and that those with wealth should sell it and give to the poor (12:33; 14:33; 18:22). Instead of associating himself with those who might be considered his peers, Jesus is portrayed as spending time with tax collectors and sinners (5:27–30; 7:34; 15:1; 19:2–5; cf. 18:10–13), giving special attention to children (9:47–48; 18:16–17) and traveling with unaccompanied women (8:1–3; 23:49, 55). Luke evidences this liminal, betwixt-and-between position, in which Jesus continued to live, in a very different way in the allusion to Israel’s liminal passage from Egypt to Canaan in his mountaintop discussion with Moses about the “ἔξοδον which he was about to complete (or fulfill, πληροῦν) in Jerusalem” (9:30–31) and also in Jesus’ statement that he was still

awaiting a further baptism which must be ritually completed (τελέω) before he could “cast fire upon the earth” (12:50).⁸⁷⁴

The experience of the early Christian believers in Acts following their baptism echoes in varying degrees this ongoing liminal experience, and is connected to that of Jesus both by example and by Jesus’ own instruction.⁸⁷⁵ For many believers suffered in the position of outsiders rejected and persecuted by their own society (Luke 12:51; Acts 4:1–3; 8:1; 9:16), a position made particularly evident in the portrayal of Paul (e.g., Acts 9:16; 14:19–20; 21–28). They also acted in the role of itinerant missionaries (1:8; 8:26–40; 15:36–41), either purposefully as with Paul (9:15–16; 13:2–4) or as a result of the scattering following a persecution (8:4; 11:19). And, like Jesus, supernatural manifestations accompanied them (Luke 9:1–2; Acts 2:43; 8:13; 19:11). The *communitas* of the first believers in accordance with Jesus’ teaching is emphasized in both Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–37 where they were all together in one accord and shared their possessions as any had need, and is also evident in the immediate caring and generosity of Lydia (16:15) and of the newly baptized jailer (16:33–34), and in the universal nature of Paul’s message and concern (9:15; 22:21; 26:16–18).⁸⁷⁶

As the Lukan audience looked back on the baptisms of John and of Jesus, it was apparent that the Christian baptism they knew and found explicated in the book of Acts, grew out of the baptism described as ritualized by John at the instigation of the ῥῆμα θεοῦ

⁸⁷⁴ “Τελέω,” LSJ 1771–72.

⁸⁷⁵ Cf. Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 153–57; Warren Carter, “The Earliest Christian Movement: Sectarian, Itinerant, or Liminal Existence?” *Koinonia* 1, no. Fall (1989): 91–109; Brigid Curtin Frein, “The Literary Significance of the Jesus-as-Prophet Motif in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles” (PhD diss. Saint Louis University, 1989), 309; Christian Strecker, *Die liminale Theologie des Paulus: Zugänge zur paulinischen Theologie aus kulturanthropologischer Perspektive* (vol. 185 of FRLANT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

⁸⁷⁶ This universality has been pointed forward to in association with baptism ever since the accounts of the baptisms of John (Luke 3:6); of Jesus (3:23–38); and of Peter (Acts 2:39). In contrast to the ongoing liminality of Jesus and the Christian believers, the one characteristic of ongoing liminality following Lucius’ rite of passage is his separation to the service of Isis, while for Josephus there is no ongoing liminality suggested.

from the building blocks of earlier tradition, but also out of Jesus' baptism experience ritualized directly by heaven itself. Of these two baptisms with their condensed and divergent symbolizations, Christian baptism gathers from John's baptizing particularly the basic form of water baptism and the emphasis on the separation of active repentance, and from Jesus' baptism the additional promised outpouring of the Spirit and the transformation into an ongoing *communitas* and liminality.

Finally, the baptism accounts contribute to Luke's concern for certainty (*ἀσφάλεια* Luke 1:4) about who this Jesus was and would be. For Jesus' rite of passage at his baptism goes far beyond that of any Christian believer in Acts, and is focused instead upon the descent of the Spirit.⁸⁷⁷ Beginning immediately after Jesus' return from the wilderness in Luke 4:18–19 this descent is interpreted as an anointing, connecting it with the already-voiced promise that he would be the long hoped-for Christ/anointed one (2:11, 26, and 3:15). Although Jesus does, as John promised, pour out a baptism of the Spirit upon believers in Acts (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 2:33), it is only Jesus who is ever spoken of as being *anointed* by the Spirit.

One expectation that such an anointing reinforces is the declaration of chapters 1 and 2 that he would sit upon the throne of David (Luke 1:32–33, 69; 2:4, 11), for anointing was used, above all, to commission Israel's kings. In David's case, this commissioning also involved the coming of the Spirit which remained upon him from that day forward (1 Sam 16:13). This kingly implication is strengthened by allusion to the royal installation song of Ps 2 by the heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:22; cf. Ps

⁸⁷⁷ Fitzmyer, *Luke 1, 1–9*, 192. With regard to one other commonly recognized role of Luke (e.g., Cadbury, *The Making*, 308–11; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 8.), the desire to present Jesus and Christianity as innocent and politically unthreatening, the baptism accounts are on the surface unthreatening, being focused on religious ritual and rejecting in the wilderness temptations power over the kingdoms of earth and crowd-rousing display. Yet also present is criticism by the prophet John of Herod, as well as a number of kingly allusions. Only the rest of Luke will demonstrate the political innocence of Jesus and his followers despite the threatening predictions and illusions. Neither did the baptism contribute to an apology for Rome, due to Herod's unflatteringly portrayed behavior.

2:7) and by the direct quote of Ps 2:2 in Acts 4:26–27 which identifies Jesus as the one whom God anointed in this Psalm. And it is never completely lost in the Gospel of Luke as Strauss has demonstrated (e.g., 19:38; 23:3, 38).⁸⁷⁸

Yet what Luke-Acts actually emphasizes immediately in Jesus' opening sermon in Luke 4:18–19, and in Peter's speech in Acts 10:38, is the prophetic aspect of his role as Christ/anointed one. Though it was rare, prophets too were at times spoken of as anointed, and the interpretation provided in Luke 4:16–30 emphasizes this prophetic aspect. It is also evident in his actions during his ministry as can be seen by the commonly voiced conclusion that Jesus was a prophet (7:16, 39; 9:8, 19; 20:6; 24:19), a label he also occasionally applied to himself (4:24; 13:33). Such an interpretation is made explicit in Acts 3:22–24 where he is spoken of directly as the promised prophet like Moses, a linking that is strongly reinforced in Acts 7:21–44. Luke-Acts' portrayal of Jesus' continuing liminality as an outsider-critic of his society, and his *communitas* with the downtrodden, is completely consonant with, and contributive to, his role as prophet. Ultimately his enactment of this largely prophetic role resulted, not in his incorporation into society in that role, but in being rejected and murdered by the structures he critiqued. In Luke's view, this is precisely the role of prophets, and is laid down in the Scriptures (Luke 13:33; Acts 7:35–37).

While it has to one degree or another been accepted that the role suggested of Jesus at his baptism apparently involves both prophet and king, there has been little agreement and much discussion about how or whether two such strangely divergent roles could at the same time be intended by Luke.⁸⁷⁹ In fact, Luke-Acts highlights this tension between prophet and king in the portrayal of John's fate in Luke 3:19–20, and in the

⁸⁷⁸ Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah*.

⁸⁷⁹ Dahl and Tiede are two who directly claim both the role of prophet and of king as part of the role Luke-Acts portrays for him Niels Alstrup Dahl, "The Purpose of Luke-Acts," in *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church: Essays* (ed. Niels Alstrup Dahl; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 90–91; David L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 55.

comparison between Herod in king's clothing and the prophet John in the wilderness in 7:24–26.

Victor Turner's description of prophets as liminal people who have not completely reincorporated into society suggests a way of making sense of this tension. For the Luke-Acts portrays Jesus as in just such a marginal betwixt-and-between position during the time of his ministry, the time during which he is repeatedly identified as a prophet. This prophetic aspect of his messianic role, acting as a spokesperson for God, ends at his resurrection, or possibly his ascension. Thereafter, though Luke generally avoids the politically dangerous terminology of king in Acts, he is portrayed as having "been exalted to the right hand of God" to await his full accession to rulership (2:33–35; cf. 10:42; 13:32–35; 17:7), thereby completing his full reincorporation.

Luke-Acts of course, never mentions or conceives of the term *liminal*, but does depict Jesus as an outsider figure in tension with the structures of society. This liminality is in keeping with the avoidance by the Lukan Jesus of directly using the term *king*, or even *Messiah*, of himself at any time during his ministry, for this would have misrepresented his current role and cut short its accomplishment.⁸⁸⁰ Rather, like Moses, Jesus is portrayed by Luke as remaining in a liminal position of passage throughout his exodus until its ritual completion in Jerusalem (9:30–31) when he is able to deliver for his people the promises God had made of him.⁸⁸¹

Such a liminal/outsider position between private life and kingship is not unheard of in Greco-Roman narrative, for the myth of Theseus depicted in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* portrays the hero Theseus as journeying through the wilderness and across the sea and destroying the enemies of his people before arriving to assume the throne in Athens

⁸⁸⁰ The terms do however show up in Luke in the mouths of demons (4:41), disciples (9:20), blind beggars (18:38), and excited crowds (19:38).

⁸⁸¹ As this completion is apparently also alluded to in Jesus' statement about the fearful baptism he had yet to undergo [12:50], one is tempted to think of these two baptisms in terms of the water crossings at the beginning and end of Israel's exodus, the second of which Moses himself was unable to join.

(*Thees.* 5–23). A tension, or disjuncture, in this understanding should be recognized, however, in the depiction in Acts 2:33–35, for example, of Jesus as still liminal following his exhaltation, remaining at the right hand of the throne of God until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet.

In summary, Luke-Acts portrays Jesus' baptism above all as a ritual of anointing, designating the official beginning of his role as the looked-for Christ/anointed one, a role which is shown to be played out primarily under the rubric of outsider-prophet before his later reincorporation at his ascension when he takes his place at the right hand of God as a prelude to his full kingship. This anointing ritual provides Jesus with the formal commission that pronounces his messianic role and also bestows the power and authority necessary to carry it out. As a change in roles this is in contrast to the baptism of John which called a whole society to a change of state focusing on a separation from sins to a life of active repentance, and to Christian baptism with its similar focus on a change in state but which instead emphasizes reincorporation into Jesus and the community of believers. For both of these rites of passage, with their emphasis on a change of state, the baptism is at the liminal center of the ritual embodying the change in status. By contrast, in Jesus' rite the baptism is depicted as only the opening movement in a momentous change in role centered around his anointing.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been the aim of this dissertation to explore ways in which rite of passage theory might be useful for understanding the portrayal of Jesus' baptism and wilderness experience in the larger context of Luke 3:1–4:15 and for considering its place in the narrative of Luke-Acts. Over the course of the study several conclusions have taken shape.

First, the dissertation has shown a number of useful aspects of rite of passage theory for the analysis of ancient Christian literature, and has further explored the methodology by which this theory can be applied to ancient texts. Rite of passage theory, which grows out of the work of Victor Turner and is further developed by more recent theorists, seeks to describe and understand the processes by which people, both ancient and modern, mark the passage of individuals or groups from one state or position in life to another. Such processes may be more or less ritualized, and may be presented in texts as deliberately planned formal events or may be used metaphorically to represent less formal and often more abstract transitions or the phenomena that accompany them.

In either case, the study of a textual reference to rite of passage should include an analysis of its particular context, which Turner called the ritual field, on the level of both the narrative world and of the literary structure of the text. The analysis of the ritual itself (Turner's operations field), follows the movements and relations depicted in the process of the rite itself. In this step it is helpful to recognize separation, liminality, and reincorporation as three interwoven phases which are often not limitable to three distinctly separable stages in lockstep order, but which are useful for exploring the dynamics within, and resulting from the rite. The liminal betwixt-and-between phase is of

particular significance, where participants are set apart from the regular designations of social status and position and the normal expectations of life are often turned upside down. Essential to rite of passage analysis is also a consideration of the symbols, both physical and verbal, which make up the rite. Finally the place of the rite in both the larger ritual system of the narrative world and in the structure of the text itself should be considered. This involves a consideration of the way in which the ritual is shown to interact with the structures of the society in which it is depicted, as well as with the implicit intentions of the author of the text.

The observations of ritual theory with regard to these various aspects have proved useful for the new questions and connections it identifies, and for its potential to highlight and interpret the relations among ritual, individual, and society. It is important to recognize that rite of passage theory makes a significant contribution to literary and historical interpretation only insofar as it is recognized as a conceptual construct used to describe, not to govern, the phenomena being observed. But given these caveats, the approach can be fruitful not only for the Luke-Acts and ancient Christian texts, but also for texts from other ancient contexts, like Josephus' *Vita* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.

Second, the study has shown that Luke-Acts in particular has literary and theological investments in ritual action, especially in those spoken of here as rites of passage. Such rituals mark transitions and new beginnings not only in the career of Jesus in Luke, but also in that of the Christian church in Acts. The Gospel of Luke shows a particular interest in rites of passage, recounting a number of rites that are found only here. They almost invariably are the occasion for a divine manifestation and are particularly clustered around beginnings, starting with the first narrative of the Gospel which opens in the midst of a ritual enactment of incense-burning, and marking the births of John and Jesus with rituals of naming and circumcision and with Jesus' presentation in the temple. Jesus' movement out of naïve boyhood is signaled at his celebration of the

ritual of the Passover (again at the temple), and the formal beginnings of the church are celebrated in the ritual commissioning of the twelve apostles. Even the transitions between the main stages of Jesus' ministry are marked by metaphorical allusions to rites of passage, each adding to the impression that God was in charge of each new beginning and that everything was ritually prepared for each new stage.

While other rites of passage in Acts continue to mark beginnings, baptism, with its association with numerous rituals of cleansing, is by far the most important. The Christian baptism depicted in Acts, which most of Luke's audience already knew and had experienced, is represented as a completion of John's baptism, carrying on the idea of repentance (in contrast to the ritual washings of Lucius and Josephus; Acts 2:38; 22:16) but also embodying the joining of believers to the Jesus John had told them to believe in (Acts 19:1–6), and accompanying the further baptism of the Spirit he had promised (Acts 2:38; Acts 10:47). In Acts baptism represents primarily a change in state—the physical enactment of a boundary resulting in incorporation into the whole community of believers gathered in Jesus' name, a community which remains partially liminal in the sharing of *communitas* (2:42–47; 4:32–37) and in their frequent alienation from mainstream society (8:1–4; 11:19).

The call of Paul/Saul in Acts 9:1–30 is the most fully ritualized depiction of such a transition. As the first of three accounts of this important turning point in the book of Acts, this rendition of Saul's transformation particularly functions to detail Saul's ritual experience, here emphasizing Saul's change of state from persecutor to witness under the direct guidance of the now exalted Lord Jesus. This transition immediately sets him on the way, the liminal mission of constant journeying, driven both by the divine direction of the mission and the hostility it arouses.

Third, Luke 3:1–4:15 marks the most important of these ritually-marked transitions in Luke-Acts. Luke's treatment of these events constructs from his sources

two interlocking rituals, each in three movements: the ritual of the many conducted by the ritual elder/prophet John, and the ritual of the stronger one conducted from heaven itself, and communicated through the visual symbol of the dove descending and the heavenly voice. The actual baptisms of the people and of Jesus link them in *communitas*, but are minimized and subordinated in Luke's narrative, perhaps in order to cast the details of the baptismal ritual in the mode of the *sacra* of a mystery cult. The author can thus evoke the experience of *communitas* in the memory of the baptized among Luke's audience.

The ritual of the many is the center of John's proclamation, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This baptism account, which is recalled repeatedly in Acts as a time of beginnings, is focused on separation, not only in the physical movement to the marginal edges of Jordan and wilderness but in the rough nature of the language and metaphors. These all focus on the need for a repentance living to avoid the wrath to come and to experience his greater baptism in the Spirit and fire and the gathering of salvation brought by the mightier coming one. Unlike the other rites of passage studied, its manifestation is primarily verbal, allowing an extended exegesis of the meaning of the rite and leaving the details of the enactment with the appearance of mystery, though known by the many initiated among the Lukan audience. In the narrative world, John's baptism represents a change in state offered to a whole society in preparation for the coming of the mightier one. Like many of the other rites of passage in Luke-Acts, John's baptism marks a beginning, in this case the beginning of the constitution of a people prepared for the Lord. As a beginning it is left open toward future events, for the statement of the people's baptism is the last event recorded in the ritual of the many, with no mention made of reincorporation.

In contrast to the ritual of the many, Jesus' baptism, the ritual of the mightier one, is the opening event of Jesus' baptism suggesting its role in this ritual as a separator from his previous life. Luke-Acts places it in a subordinate clause alongside the baptism of the

people and Jesus' prayer to God, thereby indicating a certain shared solidarity or *communitas* even before the main events of this rite of the mightier one begins. Of the three liminal events which immediately befall him, the descent of the Spirit stands as the center and focal point. This is made evident in the portrayal of the Spirit's subsequent leading in the wilderness and into his ministry in Luke 4, and in the rest of Luke-Acts which looks back on Jesus' rite always in terms of the bestowal of the Spirit. This bestowal is explained in Acts 10:38 as bringing to Jesus the power of God for his ministry, and in Acts 2:33 the exalted Jesus is said to have on that day poured out this same Spirit upon his people in fulfillment of John's prophecy. The descent of the Spirit is interpreted in Luke-Acts as an anointing, identifying him in the context of Luke 2:11 and 3:16 as the hoped for anointed one. This hope for an anointed one is connected in the LXX and Jewish literature with the use of anointing as a ritual event in the LXX for the commissioning of kings, priests and very occasionally prophets.

Fourth, the reincorporation of Jesus in 4:14–15 is at best partial—or rather the new state in which he returns to Galilee includes an element of permanent liminality, resolved only when he takes his position on God's right hand. There are repeated allusions to a kingly role in Luke 1–4 beginning with Gabriel's direct pronouncement to Mary and continuing through the devil's temptations in which Jesus is tested in his faithfulness as son to the Father and in his ability and willingness to stand in solidarity with all the people. Yet following the temptations Jesus' role is both portrayed and described more in terms of a prophet (Luke 4:18–30; 13:33; Acts 3:23; 7:21–44). Also following the temptations Jesus' reincorporation is shown to be only partially complete for although he rejoins society in a new public role he remains a homeless wanderer, the center of controversy, and in an unusual level of *communitas* with the lowest and most marginal of society. This ongoing liminality coincides with, and helps to clarify, the understanding of Jesus as prophet for, as Victor Turner notes, prophets tend to be

edgemen or sacred outsiders who never fully reincorporate into their society leaving them in a position outside the structure and thus able to critique and to enter into undifferentiated relationships with all levels of society. Thus Jesus' role change in this ritual initiates the beginning of his ministry (3:23) and might be identified as a divinely directed commissioning designating him formally and providing the power and guidance to begin upon the complex role of anointed one in which for a time he remains in a liminal position outside the expectations and structures assigned by society until it is time to fulfill his kingly role. A ritual studies perspective thus suggests another way to understand some of the complexities of Lukan Christology by: recognizing 1) the ongoing liminal nature of Jesus' life as strongly influenced by the events of the anointing ritual; and 2) that the time Luke describes between his anointing as Christ and his future promised crowning as king is a betwixt-and-between time that naturally lends itself to the liminal qualities of a prophet.

Further study is needed on the effects of these and other biblical rites of passage upon the literary audiences both intended and modern. More nuanced approaches need to be developed for moving between the levels of text, narrative world, and audience. More attention also needs to be given to recognizing and understanding dissonance, tensions, and oppositions within and between these ritual accounts and how they contribute to and also deconstruct the intentions of author and reader. Most importantly the dissertation suggests that the use of rite of passage theory can provide a particularly fruitful approach to the narratives of the Gospels and the origins of Christianity.

APPENDIX A:
THE SYMBOL OF THE DOVE AND THE LUKAN AUDIENCE

In approaching the much-debated question of the meaning of the dove symbol, a ritual approach may be of particular help not because it can demonstrate a new interpretation or prove an old one but because it frames the question in different terms. For ritual theory recognizes the multivocal nature of symbols, recognizing that a single symbol may evoke a wide array of emotions, impulses, and thoughts in a particular ritual audience. In addition, ritual theory shifts attention from the historical origin of a particular symbol toward its later exegesis by participants or observers.

Although it is impossible to discover the whole breadth of meaning the dove-symbol might carry, either for the Luke's ancient audience as a whole or for its individual members, a number of likely concepts and associations are suggested in the extant literature. These possibilities will here be considered briefly, not with the assumption of finding *the answer* to the symbol's origin, or even to its certain meaning for all of Luke's audience, but as participation in the realm of serious play Turner recognized as elicited by such liminal riddles and marvels, as participants improvise and innovate the various symbolic elements in the negotiation of meaning.⁸⁸² As Turner insisted, this play is bounded, but certainly not smoothed or constricted, by the details specifically included or

⁸⁸² Victor W. Turner, "Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media," *Religion* 15 (1985): 210–11; idem, "Process, System, and Symbol: A New Anthropological Synthesis," *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 68; Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 14; cf. Victor W. Turner, "Comments and Conclusions," in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (ed. B. Babcock; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 282.

omitted by the narrative. In Luke-Acts the dove (περιστερά) is presented: as descending with no other recorded sound or action; as the visual representation of the anointing of the Spirit; and as coming from the open heaven upon Jesus by no apparent human initiative or control.

The experience of Luke's ritual audience with the περιστερά, or house-pigeon, may be considered in three main categories: (1) doves featured in Scriptural narrative; (2) contemporary uses of dove in sacrifice or symbol; and (3) relations to doves in daily life.⁸⁸³ Out of these experiences with the dove and others of its category will arise those cognitive interpretations which can be described in words and analyzed logically, as well as emotive responses connected through the senses to basic desires which may not even rise to conscious awareness and which may stand in tension with the cognitive understandings.⁸⁸⁴

Noah's dove (περιστερά) of Gen 8:8–12 is the one dove prominent in LXX narrative and also referred to frequently in Jewish and Christian literature from around Luke's time.⁸⁸⁵ For Luke and his audience, well-tuned to LXX allusions, associations between the dove-story of Luke 3:1–4:15 and aspects of the dove-story of Gen 6–8 which were given particular attention at that time can be seen: in the preaching of righteousness which was believed to precede both events (Luke 3:3–18); in the elements of a passing through water and of divine intervention (Luke 3:3–6, 7–9, 16–17; Gen 6:12–8:6), and in

⁸⁸³ Where distinguished from other dove-type birds, περιστερά generally referred to the common house-pigeon. Philo speaks of three dove-type birds: “doves (φαττας), pigeons (περιστερα) and turtledoves (τρυγων)” (*Spec.* 4.117). B. Lorentz lists a number of others (*Die Taube im Altertume* [1886], 3–11).

⁸⁸⁴ R. L. Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing: Ritual in Fictive, Liturgical, and Public Places* (Washington, D. C.: Pastoral Press, 1993), 19–22; Sperber, Dan. *On Anthropological Knowledge*. Translated by Alice L. Morton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

⁸⁸⁵ I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 153; C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (ed. Howard Clark Kee and Dennis Nineham; London: SCM Press, 1990), 248. Noah's dove is mentioned by Josephus in *Ant.* 1.72–104, Philo in *QG* 2.38–9, and 4 *Bar.* 7:10, and in a number of other passages listed below.

the subsequent verbal assurance directly from God (Luke 3:22; Gen 9:10).⁸⁸⁶ The story of Noah, in fact, is early associated directly with baptism in Christian thought, as is evidenced in 1 Pet 3:20–21 where the ark, which brought eight persons safely through the water, is compared with Christian baptism.⁸⁸⁷ This recollection of salvation from a watery judgment, in which the dove played a role, was part of the available cognitive and ideological framework by which they understood the dove of Luke 3:22, and brought along with it the emotive aspect of hope springing up in tension with the fear of judgment and wrath.⁸⁸⁸

Luke and his audience also knew of and possibly interacted with doves in contemporary religious experience and symbolism. In Luke-Acts' only use of περιστερὰ outside of Luke 3:22, Luke (alone) specifically describes the dove in a previous ritual of which Jesus was a part (2:24). There the περιστερὰ is named as an acceptable sacrifice which could be brought by the poor for the ritual of purification after birth according to the Mosaic covenant (Luke 2:24; Lev 12:8), a sacrifice which Jesus' parents scrupulously carried out. The ritual sacrifice of doves as burnt offerings and sin offerings in rituals of

⁸⁸⁶ As Evans has noted, Noah's preaching of righteousness is discussed in *Jub.* 7:20ff, Josephus, *Ant.* 1.74, 2 Pet 2:5, cf. Heb 11:7; while a comparison with salvation in the face of a future judgment of fire can be seen in 1 *En.* 10:1ff., and 2 Pet 3:4–12. The divine intervention is emphasized by Josephus, *Ant.* 3.87 and 2 *Ezra* 3:11. Philo, *QG* 1.56, *Sir* 44:17–18 and 2 *En.* 35:1 are particularly concerned with the promise, or covenant, which followed (Evans, *Saint Luke*, 248). For the arguments for Noah's dove as the *origin* of the dove-symbol in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism see Charles G. Dennison, "How is Jesus the Son of God: Luke's Baptism Narrative and Christology," *CTJ* 17 (1982): 19; cf. G. W. L. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (London, 1951), 36; J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 27 n. 13.

⁸⁸⁷ By the time of Tertullian at the end of the 2nd century, the connection between Noah's dove and the dove of Jesus' baptism is made explicit, with the dove at the baptism said to have brought news of "the assuagement of celestial wrath" and, with the olive branch, a foretoking of the peace of God (Tertullian, *Bapt.* 8).

⁸⁸⁸ The hovering (נִרְדָּף) of the Spirit over the waters of Gen 1:2, which also betokens the gift of life, is a possible allusion in for a Semitic speaker (I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels, first series* [Cambridge: University Press, 1917], 49–50), but is not carried forward in the Greek verb (ἐπεφέρετο) used in the LXX (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* [SP 5; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991], 69). Neither is it likely that the Hellenistic audience would have picked up on the meaning of the name of the prophet Jonah (יֹנָתַן: dove) who brought the message of judgment and offer of life through repentance to Nineveh.

atonement and cleansing were a commonplace in the Scriptures of Luke's audience, directly observable by any who visited the temple in Jerusalem, and represented, in most simple terms, a death in exchange for life (Lev 18:5; 25:18).⁸⁸⁹ Luke's unique reference to the dove in 2:24 would thus have drawn nearer to the surface thoughts and emotions regarding the lowliness of the family it represented and the sadness and ugliness of its death, contrasting with the hope and assurance of atonement with their God. This association of the dove with the Mosaic covenant, recalls not only the connections with the Noahic covenant noted above, but also the account of Abraham who walked between a halved dove (περιστερά) and other animals in the sealing of his covenant with Yahweh (Gen 15:9), making the dove a part of each major covenant between God and his people in the LXX.⁸⁹⁰

The dove was also associated, through representation and/or legend, with numerous Greco-Roman gods of whom Luke and his audience were likely aware including Zeus, Dionysus, and Aphrodite.⁸⁹¹ They may possibly have also observed or participated in sacrifices of doves.⁸⁹² These associations may have influenced Ps 84:3 (LXX), where a dove replaces the MT's swallow (Ps 83:4), building her nest at the altar of the Lord of Hosts. Further, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, Abraham is depicted riding

⁸⁸⁹ On doves used for burnt offerings, see: Lev 1:14; sin offerings Lev 5:7, 11; atonement in cleansing offerings Lev 12:6–8, 14:22, 30; 15:14, 29.

⁸⁹⁰ G. W. H. Lampe, "The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Luke," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (ed. D. E. Nineham; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 36; L E Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," *NTS* 17 (1970–71): 48.

⁸⁹¹ For example, Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 71 states "The Greeks are correct in saying that the dove is sacred to Aphrodite." Cf. Lorentz, *Die Taube im Altertume*; E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (vol. 8; New York: Pantheon, 1953), 27–33; Greeven, "περιστερά," *TDNT* 6:63–6. Simply as a bird, the dove also suggested to Romans a positive omen from the gods as witnessed, for example, in Plutarch's story of Numa, whose accession to the throne received divine ratification by the flight of birds (*Num.*, 7.3–8.3).

⁸⁹² Apuleius, *Met.* 6.6; cf. Claudian, *Epithalamium Palladis et Celerinae* 104.

on the wing of a pigeon-type dove into the heavens.⁸⁹³ For Luke’s audience, then, a dove descending from heaven would not have been a surprise, however it would have stood in tension, to some degree, with the LXX context of lowliness and sacrifice.

Luke and his audience would also, and possibly most commonly, have come into contact with doves in their own ordinary day-to-day lives, whether observing them in their natural state, or in homes or larger columbariums where they were kept for sacrifice or (Mosaically clean) food, for message-carrying or simply pleasure.⁸⁹⁴ Beyond the obvious symbol of the freedom of flight, familiarity with doves led the ancients to use them to represent virtues such as tameness, gentleness, innocence, and even wisdom.⁸⁹⁵ Doves were also associated with more negatively viewed traits such as lowliness, foolishness, and mourning.⁸⁹⁶ As exemplified in the Song of Solomon where the lover addresses his female companion as “my dove,” the dove is also associated with the powerful emotions of love and desire, extending paradoxically from representations of purity and chastity, through mother-love to include associations with *eros* and fertility.⁸⁹⁷ Such underlying associations, though not likely applied consciously to the dove symbol

⁸⁹³ *Apoc. Ab.* 12, 15 (1st to 2nd century C.E.). Prior to this, “the thought of the dove as a divine bird was alien to the OT world” (Greeven, “περιστερά,” *TDNT* 6:66).

⁸⁹⁴ Homing pigeons are known in Greece as early as 444 B.C.E. Greeven states that Pherecrates 33, a fifth-century *comicus*, speaks of a “περιστερος” as a carrier-pigeon (“περιστερά,” *TDNT* 6:64). It is possible that such a function is behind Noah’s use of the dove in Gen 8.

⁸⁹⁵ Flight: Ps 55:6; Hos 11:11. Tameness and gentleness: *Let. Aris.* 145:4; Philo saw these qualities as making them particularly appropriate for food and sacrifice (*Spec.* 1.162; 4.117); and for use as Noah’s scout (*QG* 2.38–39). Innocence: proverb repeated in Matt 10:16; Origen commenting on the baptism (*Hom. Luc.* 27.5). Wisdom: primarily human (vs. divine) wisdom Philo, *Her.* 126–127, 230–236; *QG* 3.3–6; cf. the gnostic *Acts of Thomas* (200–250 C.E.).

⁸⁹⁶ Lorentz, *Die Taube im Altertume*, 43. Lowliness: Philo, *Mut.* 233–235. Foolishness: Hos 7:11. Mourning: Isa 38:14; Nah 2:7.

⁸⁹⁷ E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*. (13 vols; New York: Pantheon, 1953) 6:33, 44; Lorentz, *Die Taube im Altertume*, 15; cf. Philo, *Spec.* 4.117. *Mother-love*: depicted on Attic tombs being given to child by mother, (Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 8:34). *Eros*: Songs 1:10, 15; 2:10, 13–14; 4:1; 5:2; 6:9; Pompeiian amulets depicting doves with phallic body, cupid’s dove’s wings; use of temple prostitutes in Corinth and elsewhere as ‘doves’ to connect with divine (Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 8:27, 31, 41). *Fertility*: idem, *Jewish Symbols*, 8: 28–29.

of Luke 3:22, nevertheless surround the more cognitive understandings of the dove with the currents of desire and restraint hidden beneath the calmer surface of the dove's gentle lowliness and innocence. Thus representing the Holy Spirit here is no kingly eagle ferociously sating its appetites, but in true liminal culture-upsetting fashion, the submissive foolishness of the gentle dove.

Within the context of ritual, such a diverse interweaving of sometimes-conflicting cognitive and emotive responses as that stimulated by this central symbol of the dove/Holy Spirit has been observed to arouse many opposing forces within ritual participants, transferring meaning and arousing often unconscious feelings and desires. Operating at many different psychological levels simultaneously, such a symbol might be thought of as drawing the audience of Luke beyond passive "observation" and mental play to an increased emotive interaction with the ritual's meaning and outcome.⁸⁹⁸ Cognitive thoughts connecting doves with deities, with covenant and salvation from death and judgment, intermingle with those of familiarity and of lowliness and innocence, and are under laid with intermeshed emotions of hope and desire and sadness connected with the deepest of un verbalized human emotions. Its action of descending from heaven upon one who has been, and will be, identified as the son of God (Luke 1:35; 3:22; 22:70; Acts 9:20), brings into association, for the observer both in the narrative world and in Luke's audience, ideas and emotions which have only just begun to be laid out in the text of Luke. Thus, though it is just one part of the ritual of the many, the dove symbol is worthy of further exploration, not as to its origins, but as to its ritual effects on the Lukan audience, for it visually represents the dominant symbol of the ritual.

⁸⁹⁸ Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 27–29, 44; idem, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (ed. Victor Turner; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), 25.

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