

It Happened One Saturday Night

Ritual and Conversion in Augustine's North Africa

Thomas M. Finn

THAT PEOPLE EXPRESS in ritual what moves them most is an anthropological axiom (Wilson 1954:230). The importance of the axiom for the historian of religion is that rituals disclose what most moves a people and, in the process, open up a broad new avenue into their inner history.¹

Consider the study of early Christianity, bound as it has been largely by the scriptures (canonical and non-canonical) on the one hand and the writings of the church fathers on the other.² With ritual as a way of seeing what was there once, early Christian liturgy becomes an invaluable source for the study of early Christianity: one is enabled to see and feel things as they saw and felt them. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ritual process that made Christians of Jews and others. Known as the "catechumenate" (De Puniet 1910; Dujarier 1979), the process began with formally registered interest, ended with baptism, and could take from several years to a lifetime. Elsewhere I have explored the importance of the catechumenate for the survival and spread of early Christianity (Finn 1989). Here I explore pivotal rites in the North Afri-

Thomas M. Finn is Professor of Religion at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA 23185. This study was made possible by a summer grant from the College of William and Mary and the excellence of the staff and collections of the Woodstock Theological Center Library at Georgetown University.

¹For an account of the rise and thrust of symbolic anthropology and ritual studies, see Douglas 1970, 1984, Turner 1969, and Grimes 1985. Particularly helpful in situating the work of Turner and Douglas in relation to liturgical studies is Farwell 1976.

²Archaeological studies, of course, have long been important, producing the monumental *DAEL*; more recently, the social sciences have been harnessed to the study of early Christianity; for an up-to-date account see Osiek 1989.

can catechumenate to determine what moved the early Christians most about conversion.

The rites in question consisted of a solemn exorcism, its *dénouement*, the renunciation of Satan, and its concomitant, the recitation of the creed. Together they formed the pivot around which the ritual process of conversion turned, at least in the western empire. Already deeply planted in second-century soil (Finn 1989), these rites achieved their most distinctive development by the end of the fourth century in North Africa. To understand what they disclose about the early Christian and conversion, however, an overview of the whole ritual process of conversion in North Africa is in order. With the catechumenate as context, we can then consider the pivotal rites in detail, and, finally, attempt to understand their function and what they disclose.

THE NORTH AFRICAN CATECHUMENATE³

When North Africans became seriously interested in the church, they sought preliminary instruction given either in private or in small groups.⁴ If interest quickened, the next step was entry into the catechumenate, signaled by inscription. The rite consisted of a formal interrogation about the state of the inquirer's belief and commitment, tracing the sign of the cross on the forehead (consignation), exorcism, the imposition of hands, and the ingestion of salt (Aug. *De cat. rud.* 26:50). From that point on the candidate was a *catechumenos* or *auditor*, traditional terms for those who, though not yet Christians, could, nonetheless, "hear" the scriptural readings and the interpretive homilies at the eucharist. Dismissed at the end of the homily, the catechumens were thereby excluded from the eucharist proper. But since they bore the mark of Christ's ownership (the sign of the cross imprinted at inscription), they were counted as his and were gradually initiated into the community, normally over a two-year period.⁵

Although their role was largely learning by listening, what they learned was intended to shape both mind and heart. Indeed, the test of

³The key studies are Busch 1938, and Poque 1966 13-115. But see also Weller 1959. The primary sources are principally Augustine's Lenten and Easter homilies (PL 38) and the three homilies *De symbolo* of Quodvultdeus (CCL 60 305-378). I am unaware of any studies of the North African catechumenate beyond Tertullian (Evans 1964).

⁴Augustine's *De catechuzanis rudibus* was composed for just such preliminary instruction and contains two model instructions (chs 16-25, 26 51-57) and the rite of inscription (26 50).

⁵The period could vary from a few weeks, as in the case of Manus Victorinus (for whom see below, p 00), to years, as in the case of Augustine.

whether conversion was taking hold lay in demonstrated reform of conduct (Burghardt 1964). However slowly, one's values and conduct had to change. Thus the connotation of the Greek-based term "catechumen," the root of which was *echo*: the catechumens were to "echo" in their conduct what they heard in church (Finn 1967:60). Augustine, for instance, expresses horror at the prospect of a catechumen of unbridled sexuality entering the baptismal font (*De adult. coniug.* 2:16), and his younger Carthaginian contemporary, Quodvultdeus,⁶ chides both catechumen and Christian who want to embrace both the saving scriptural "spectacles" of mystery and miracle and the withering far-from-scriptural spectacles of theatre, racetrack, and the fights (S I 2:1-17). In an earthy play on a passage about Elijah (1 Kgs.18:21), he describes them as people who limp about as if "with two swollen testicles" (S III 1:14).

Those catechumens who clearly did not "limp" and appeared ready for baptism were encouraged to hand in their names at the start of Lent, as Augustine himself did at Milan in 387 (*Conf.* IX, 6:14). The rite (appropriately called *nomen dare*) included a homily and the chanting of Ps. 41 (42): "As the hart longs for flowing streams. . ."⁷ At that point the catechumens became *competentes*, because, as Augustine puts it (S 216:1), they seek baptism at the same time (*petentes simul*). From then on their daily fare was the instructional part of the eucharist (*missa catechumenorum*, S 49:8) and the strict observance of Lent: no wine, no meat, nor baths, no public entertainment, and no use of marriage.⁸ Although intended for faithful, competents, and catechumens alike, the homilies often featured the competents prominently, intent especially on their final prebaptismal moral formation.

"Competency" was especially a time for probing and testing. As a result, exorcism was a frequent part of the competents' experience. As Augustine puts it, the purpose was to grind the competents as grain into flour for the bread that he calls *corpus mysticum Christi* and thinks of as both the church and the eucharist (S 229). In the rite⁹ the ministers

⁶For Quodvultdeus see the entry in DS 15:282-290 by René Braun, who has done the critical edition of Quodvultdeus's work (=Quod., CCL 60). He holds that the three homilies *De symbolo*, originally attributed to Augustine, are Quodvultdeus's. The homilies are abbreviated in this article as follows: S I, S II, S III. Quodvultdeus was the last pre-Vandal Catholic bishop of Carthage.

⁷Muldowney has collected and translated five of Augustine's *nomen dare* homilies (1959:83-115); see also Aug., *En. in ps.* 41:1. His enumeration is that of the Vulgate, which is the first number given in this study; the RSV number is added in parentheses.

⁸See Aug. *De fid. et op.* 6:8; Poque discusses Lent (23-25) and the appropriate liturgical psalms (31-33).

⁹See Poque (24-29). Although she gives these details in connection with the scrutiny, they were the normal part of Lenten exorcism. See also Leclercq 1922.

imposed their hands on the competents, invoked the power of Christ and the Trinity, and voiced angry biblical rebukes of the devil, peremptorily commanding his instant expulsion. The striking finale was "exsufflation": grasping the competents, the exorcist hissed in their faces. Were exsufflation done to a statue of the emperor, according to Augustine, the offence would have been the capital crime of denigrating majesty (*Sec. Jul. resp.* 3:199).¹⁰ As for the competents themselves, they may have been dressed in coarse leather outer garments (*tunicae pelliciae*) and stood barefoot, with necks bent (Busch 1938:439-440). Although we will return to the subject shortly, one can sense that exorcism could be a terrifying experience. *Caveat competens!*

Prayer, exorcism, catechetical homily, and strict Lenten observance, then, were the regular diet of the competents. As baptism approached, the preparations intensified. On Saturday, fifteen days before Easter, the bishop confided the baptismal creed to them (Poque 1966:27, n.2) in a rite (*traditio symboli*) which required him to present the creed orally article by article in the course of a homily.¹¹ The competents were asked to repeat it several times during the homily, thus initiating the work of memorizing the creed. During the week following, their sponsors took charge of recitation practice (Aug., S 214, and S 1 Guelf. 1:11).¹²

Next came what I consider the pivotal rites in the process of conversion. Since their reconstruction is the subject of the next section, here I indicate only setting and sequence. On Saturday, eight days after the *traditio*, when the rite of lamplighting (*lucernarium*) signaled the arrival of evening, competents and community gathered in a solemn vigil comprised of prayers, psalmody, and homiletic instruction. Well after darkness set in, two of three related rites were celebrated: the scrutiny and the renunciation of Satan, followed on Sunday morning by the recitation of the creed.¹³ They were accompanied by homilies which first dwelt on the challenge of conversion built into the rites and then explored the articles of the creed.

Later in the day, the competents returned for another *traditio*, this time the confiding of the Lord's Prayer (*traditio orationis dominicae*), which the competents, having learned it by heart, would recite on Easter

¹⁰Augustine notes that exsufflation was performed also on infants, showing that even they, who are not capable of personal sin, are under the devil's sway.

¹¹See below, p.00, for the Hippo baptismal creed. For examples of homilies see Ss 212-214.

¹²Guelf. abbreviates Codex Guelferbytanus. The texts for homilies thus abbreviated can be found in the entry under Augustine *Sermo Guelferbytanus*.

¹³Poque 1966: 26-27 thinks of them as successive, but the homilies of Quodvultdeus assign the scrutiny and renunciation to the vigil and the recitation to the morning of Palm Sunday.

either as they emerged from the baptismal font or at their first eucharist or both: as new-born members of the family of God they could rightly pray "Our Father."¹⁴ Prominent in the rite was a homily on the prayer organized petition by petition (Aug. Ss 56-59).

On Wednesday of "Great" Week,¹⁵ the Lenten liturgy turned toward the passion of Christ, with the lessons at the eucharist devoted to the Lamentations of Jeremiah (Jer. 9) and to Matthew's account of the unknown woman who anointed Jesus for his burial (Mt. 26:1-13). The psalm of the day was Ps. 21 (22): "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me. . . ."

On Thursday, bathing was permitted and the fast relaxed for a special evening meal and the eucharist, both in commemoration of the Last Supper (Aug. *Ep. ad Jan.* 54:4-5). The foot-washing recounted in the gospels (Jn. 13:1-11; cf. Lk. 22:24-27) appears to have been part of the rite.¹⁶

Friday initiated what Augustine calls "the most holy triduum of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection" (*Ep. ad Jan.* [55] 14). The day was devoted to the remembrance of Christ's crucifixion, with rites that included the reading of the passion according to Matthew and a homily on the passion. The order of the day also called for fasting in solidarity with the competents as they approached the end of their long and exacting journey (Aug. S 210:1).

And so the stage was set for Saturday and the "sublime nightwatch" (Aug. S Guelf. 5). Devoted to biblical lessons, responsive prayers (largely psalms), meditation, and biblical homilies, the vigil lasted from sunset, when the paschal candle was lit,¹⁷ to cockcrow Easter morning,

¹⁴There is some dispute about just when the prayer was first recited; for discussion see Poque 1966:65-69. Tertullian is the first to write a commentary on the Lord's Prayer, followed by Cyprian and Origen. At some point between Tertullian (ca. 200) and the Jerusalem liturgy as Cyril comments on it (ca. 350) the custom entered the baptismal liturgy. In my opinion it has already done so in Tertullian's Carthage, since the Lord's Prayer was the preparatory prayer Christians said before receiving the eucharistic bread they had brought home and kept in what they called *arca* for daily communion.

¹⁵The term is in Egeria's diary, where *major* and *paschale septimana* are used (*Itin. Aeth.* 30). See Poque 1966: 69-77, and Busch 1932:446-449, for discussion of the Holy Week liturgy.

¹⁶Poque thinks it was a postbaptismal rite as at Milan (1966:37-38), while Busch thinks it was Holy Thursday (1938:447). But see Aug., *Ep. ad Jan.* [55] 35. Given the commemorative thrust of the day, Thursday seems best. Ambrose considered the evangelical rite as the institution of baptism.

¹⁷For the psalms and Augustine's surviving 15 vigil homilies see Poque 1966: 31-33, 73-78. For the Paschal candle and the *Praeconium paschale* see Weller 1959: 34-38, and Leclercq 1938. Although Augustine composed a metrical eulogy on the candle (see *De civ. dei* XV: 22) as a result of which some have thought him author of the celebrated *Exultet* hymn, it first appears in the *Gregorian Sacramentary* (ca. 800 C.E.). Ambrose is thought by some to be the author, and Jerome by

when baptism was celebrated. A central event of vigil was the second recitation of the creed—as in the earlier vigil, an extremely solemn public moment.¹⁸

At cockcrow the process of conversion reached its climax in the rites of baptism proper: 1) baptismal water was consecrated; 2) the competents processed to the font while chanting the now familiar Ps. 41 (42), 3) they removed their garments (the coarse leather penitential tunic); 4) they responded to a final inquiry into their faith and firm will as they stood waist-deep in the font, and 5) they were immersed three times in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. When they emerged the bishop imposed his hand on them, anointed their heads with chrism, and traced the sign of the cross on their foreheads, probably also with chrism. The newly-baptized then dressed in white, including a linen head cover. They then received a baptismal candle and the embrace of the congregation. Finally, they celebrated their first eucharist, which included a cup of mixed milk and honey and a homily on the resurrection. As newly-baptized, they would return later Easter morning for a second eucharist (and perhaps in the afternoon for a third), hearing a homily devoted to the meaning of the eucharist.¹⁹

White-robed, they returned each day for the rest of the week to celebrate the eucharist and hear homilies on the resurrection accounts in the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.²⁰ They sat prominently in the chancel of the city's basilica, resplendent in their "garments of resurrection"; the only thing to cloud their horizons, as Augustine saw it, was how to keep unstained the inner renovation symbolized by their garb, which they would wear for the last time on the octave day of their baptism: would they also put away what had been accomplished in baptism (Ss 259,260)?

THE PIVOTAL RITES²¹

Holy Week and Easter Week were official holidays (*dies feriati*), dur-

others. Whoever authored the hymn, the blessing of the paschal candle was rite which had already taken hold in the west by Augustine's time.

¹⁸Busch thinks it may have come at the beginning (1938:449).

¹⁹Muldowney 1959 and Weller 1959 have both collected and translated into English Augustine's Easter homilies; about Weller, however, see Poque 1966:10-11, n.3.

²⁰Muldowney and Weller have also collected and translated Augustine's Easter Week homilies.

²¹For discussion see Busch 1938:434-440, 449-453, and Poque 1966:26-33. Busch separates scrutiny and renunciation, which he places just before baptism, whereas Poque (correctly, I think)

ing which the newly-baptized (*infantes*, Aug. S 228) occupied center-stage. They had come from every station of life: rich, poor, masters, and slaves. And they had come from the surrounding villages and towns as well as from the episcopal city.²² Their diversity added to the drama, as did the fact that the non-resident competents were accustomed to take up residence in the city for the whole of Lent and Easter Week; their families, encouraged by the holidays, would swell the congregation for the climactic rites. Indeed, an important function of the Easter holidays was to focus public attention on those new-born, who, in their long and taxing journey, had moved from unbeliever to catechumen to competent to newly-baptized and, finally, to faithful, when, as Augustine notes, they shed their prominence, mingled with the rest of the congregation, and wore their white no longer (S 260).

When infant baptism came to be the norm towards the end of the fifth century (Whitaker 1981:38-39), the charged ambience would change. But here in Roman Africa at the end of the fourth century and in the early fifth the ritual drama of baptism and its Lenten preparations were the *spectacula christiana*—the new theatre, the new racetrack, and the new boxing ring.²³ It is difficult to overestimate the impact of this long-extended ritual drama on convert and community alike. But one need not simply imagine. In the celebrated diary of her pilgrimage, the fourth-century Spanish nun and contemporary of Augustine, Egeria, speaks of Jerusalem's churches and streets, which, she says, mourned with weeping and rang with applause (*Itin. Aeth.*: 37, 47).

Clearly the events of Holy Week and Easter Week marked the ritual climax of conversion. But the pivotal rites, hardly less intense, are our direct concern, and they anticipated Easter by a week. As we have already seen, the rites were scrutiny (*scrutatio, examen*), the renunciation of the devil (*renunciatio*), and the recitation of the creed (*redditio symboli*). However striking Augustine's personal drama of conversion in the garden at Cassiciacum, the even more striking ritual drama, which he calls the "stages of curative treatment" (*ordo curationis*), began in earnest on Saturday evening before what would come to be called Palm Sunday.²⁴

With the rite of lamp-lighting (*lucernarium*; Weller 1959:36-38) the

joins them. Unfortunately, she links them chronologically with the recitation of the creed during the vigil, which disregards the evidence of Quodvultdeus, who places recitation on Sunday morning.

²²See Aug. *De cur. pro mort. ger.* 15; S 259:4; Quod., S 1:1, 1:8.

²³See Quod., S 1:1-28 for the origin of the notion of the "new spectacles."

²⁴See *De fid. et op.* 36, and Poque 1966:36. Technically, they began at inscription. For the "cura-

ritual moment of conversion was at hand. Competents and community gathered in vigil for a night devoted to prayer, psalms, biblical readings, and instruction. In the dead of night the competents—naked, heads bowed, and barefoot—were led out before the assembled community, there to stand on coarse animal hides (goat skin, *cilicium*).²⁵

Such was the setting for the first rite, a solemn exorcism, or as Augustine puts it, *sacramentum exorcismi* (S 227). As in their Lenten exorcisms, the competents heard the invocations of Christ and the Trinity and the biblical condemnations of the devil and his legions, and they felt the rough hands and hot breath of the exorcist. But this exorcism was not like the others. Called “scrutiny,” it involved a physical exam to determine whether any competent had a disease that would disqualify from baptism.²⁶ While the exam was conducted, the congregation chanted an interpretive psalm.²⁷ Quodvultdeus has provided the only firsthand account of the rite. In a homily the following morning he asks:

Beloved, what is it that was celebrated among you? What is it that was done this past night that we have not done on previous nights? From a secret place you were each presented before the entire church, and then with your head bowed, which was proudly upright before, and standing barefoot on goat skin, the scrutiny was performed on you, and while the humble and most noble Christ was invoked, the proud devil was rooted out of you. All of you were humble of demeanor and humbly you pleaded by praying, chanting, and saying: “Probe me, Lord, and know my heart” (Ps. 138:3). He has probed, he has weighed, he has touched the hearts of his servants with his fear; by his power he has caused the devil to flee, and he has freed his household from the devil’s way. (S I: 1, 4-7)

The scrutiny culminated in the rite of the renunciation of the devil, long a critical rite in baptismal preparation.²⁸ Still naked and barefoot on goat skin but standing upright, the competent professed for all to

tive cult” in an anthropological perspective, see Turner 1969:13-15. “Palm” Sunday seems to have originated in the Frankish kingdom with the rite of blessing the palms.

²⁵For discussion, see Quasten 1942. See also Quod., S I:1, 4-7; Aug., S 216:11.

²⁶Ambrose is the first to name the rite and give its function: *Expl. symb.* 1:1. Augustine uses the term sparingly (S 216: 6,10). Quodvultdeus uses the term *examen* (SI:1,5). For the origin and development of the rite see Leclercq 1950, and Dondeyne 1932, and for Augustine and North Africa, Busch 1938:434-440, and Poque 1966:26-33.

²⁷In Hippo, Ps. 33 (34): “. . . let the afflicted hear and be glad . . .”; and 138 (139) in Carthage: “Probe me Lord and know my heart.” See Aug., S 116, Quod., S I:1, 6-7, and Poque 1966:32-33.

²⁸See Rahner 1931, Boismard 1964, and Finn 1967:86-118. Hints of the rite are present in the early second century, rooted in the exodus typology: Satan is Pharaoh, his service is Egyptian slavery, and the work or burden imposed is pagan cult. The term *pompa diaboli* is first used by Tertullian.

hear: "I renounce the devil, his pomps, and his angels" (Aug. S 215:1; Quod. S I:1,11). Before Constantine, the monster which loomed behind the ancient words was a hostile Roman state (Finn 1989); after Constantine, it was the omnipresent culture of the Greco-Roman "world" (*saeculum, mundum*).²⁹ For Augustine the world was inward, made up of desire gone awry (S 116:2); for Quodvultdeus it was the outer, cultural world of the racetrack, the theatre, and the arena (S I, 2:1-28; S III, 1:15-21).³⁰ But both agreed that fear and desire unleashed by the "world," be it inner or outer, were the weapons the devil used with cunning to capture and break the spectators.

Scrutiny and renunciation were parts of a whole: scrutiny had made renunciation possible, and renunciation had given scrutiny meaning. Augustine called the two rites *aversio*; the competents had "turned away" from the devil and his world, declaring before the packed assembly "a glorious strife" against them (S 216:6). Quodvultdeus saw the rites as a public profession, the words of which were recorded by God and his angels (S III: 1, 10-12). For both, however, the critical result was that the competents, in Augustine's words, were "free from their former master (*immunis*) and healthy (*sanitas*) in body and heart" (S 216:11). Suzanne Poque highlights the impact of the two rites: "Naked, overcome with lack of sleep, stomachs empty, unwashed, barefoot, head bowed, the candidate for baptism felt the insulting breath of the exorcist, heard the curses hurled at the mysterious occupant of his being, and professed to renounce the baggage of the world: his pride was put to the test and 'the old man' began to die in him" (1966:27).

The final rite of the three awaited the arrival of morning and the (Palm) Sunday eucharist (Aug. S. 215:1; Quod. S I: 1, 1-4). The heart of it was the recitation of the creed, for which, as we have seen, the competents had been preparing all week, followed by a homily based on its articles (Aug. S 215; Quod. S I, S II, S III). At Hippo the chant on the occasion was Ps. 26 (27): "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear . . .?" (Poque 1966:31). Individually the competents came forward, now not to renounce the devil but to profess their faith, which Augustine implies was a cry of the heart (S 216:5). The awe of the occasion and the strain of the previous night's ordeal, however, apparently caused many a heart to clutch with fear and many a memory to go blank. But all was not lost, for one had a second chance

²⁹ Augustine uses the terms interchangeably; Quodvultdeus uses *mundum* exclusively in his three homilies.

³⁰For similar attitudes in the east see Finn 1967:99-102.

to make a creedal recitation at the Easter Vigil (Aug. S 58:1). Augustine has preserved something of the drama of the rite in his account of the conversion of the celebrated Neoplatonic philosopher, Marius Victorinus, at Rome about 360:

Finally, when the hour arrived for him to make a public profession of his faith—which at Rome those who are about to enter into thy grace make from a platform in the full sight of the faithful people, in a set form of words learned by heart—the presbyters offered Victorinus the chance to make his profession more privately, for this was the custom for some who were likely to be afraid through bashfulness. But Victorinus chose rather to profess his salvation in the presence of the holy congregation. . . . So, then, when he ascended the platform to make his profession, everyone, as they recognized him, whispered his name one to the other, in tones of jubilation. Who was there among them that did not know him? And a low murmur ran through the mouths of all the rejoicing multitude: “Victorinus! Victorinus!” There was a sudden burst of exaltation at the sight of him. He pronounced the true faith with an excellent boldness, and all desired to take him to their very heart—indeed, by their love and joy they did take him to their heart. And they received him with loving and joyful hands. (*Conf.* VIII: 2:5)³¹

What had started the night before with *aversio* now reached that moment which Augustine calls *conversio* and identifies as this public profession of faith (*redditio symboli*). In the stages of “curative treatment” recitation was the counterpart of renunciation, which in turn was the counterpart of scrutiny.³²

The cure had begun to take, and conversion was in evidence. The competents, upright and on their own, had turned from the devil to Christ and made with him a “pact” (*pactum*), the terms of which were spelled out in the creed (Aug. S 216:2). But conversion was as yet embryonic. *Quodvultdeus* regards the newly-professed as in the womb of “holy mother church” who carries them joyfully to the day of rebirth and on the way feeds them with the rites, especially scrutiny, renunciation, and recitation (S III: 1, 1-4). Rebirth awaited the “rite of the font

³¹His profession seems to have been made just before baptism, perhaps during the Easter Vigil. The event antedated Augustine by some 30 years. The translation is Outler 1955:161.

³²For discussion, see Poque 1966:29-30. She comments that the term in Augustine appears so frequently and is so often associated with *credere* that it must be a liturgical formula. She regards the renunciation-conversion as a single rite with two moments. One should note, however, that both temporally and logically renunciation belongs to the scrutiny. In my view, scrutiny, renunciation, and conversion are a single complex rite with three moments.

and of baptism" (Aug. S 228:3)—which is another story, beyond the scope of this study.

FUNCTION AND MEANING

I take the axiom that people express in ritual what moves the most to be a fair formulation of the ancient liturgical principle, *lex orandi, lex credendi*: rituals do indeed reveal the deep convictions and experiences of a community. From start to finish the rituals of the catechumenate had deeply etched in them what most moved early Christians about conversion. This is especially the case with the pivotal rites just reconstructed. They at once expressed and shaped the North African Christian experience of self, other, community, the world at hand, and the world beyond.

At the outset, however, one is faced with a difficult problem. The rites speak in the many voices of poetry and drama.³³ Like biblical texts, they require exegesis, with this difference, that the method of the ancients was *mystagogy* (Finn 1967:59-73), controlled on the one hand by a common tradition and on the other by typology and allegory—an exacting enterprise for even the giants among the ancient *mystagogues* like Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Ephrem Syrus, and Augustine. For the modern interpreter, who sits astride the shoulders of the ancients, the enterprise must include liturgical and social history as well. In short, an even more exacting task, which prompts me to confine my attention in this section largely to the *competents* and my observations to four themes: 1) a threshold people, 2) ritual combat, 3) culture and the convert, and 4) and the power of ritual.

1. A Threshold People

The most obvious thing about the *competents* is their anonymity: they were faceless, naked, head bowed, barefoot, wholly passive, and without identity, personality, or sexuality. Not even "nobodies," they were just bodies. Indeed, they were not even the exorcists' primary object: the devil who inhabited them was. Except as *competentes*—those about to be baptized—they had no status. Whether rich or poor, master or slave, they were treated the same (Quod., S I, 1:7). As they

³³For discussion of the multivocality or "polysemy" of symbols in early Christianity see Daniélou 1956 and 1960; for an anthropological approach see Turner 1969: 1-93, espec. 14-15, 37-43.

stood abjectly before the congregation they evoked the familiar image of the slave auction (Aug., S 116:3), and Augustine and Quodvultdeus repeatedly depict them as enslaved captives.

How had they come to their present plight? Quodvultdeus answers that their "ancient and begrimed enemy," the devil, captured them in the mad fury of the racetrack or through the lewd desires unleashed in the theatre or by the savagery of the arena (S I, 2:1-10). Augustine offered his competents a less colorful reason: in as much as they have sinned they languish under the deadly, everlasting, and accursed fault destined for punishment (S 215:5). Although Quodvultdeus explained that already in Adam they had been ensnared by the devil (S II, 10:2), and Augustine also intimated that descent from Adam was the cause of their condition (S 228:1; 233:3; 246:5), neither homilist has much to say to the competents about Adam and the Fall. Rather they reflect the traditional understanding built into the rites and first made explicit by Origen: sin is a contract with the devil, to whom the sinner sells her- or himself, becoming his debtor and slave in the bargain (Lukken 1973:185-187).

Nonetheless, in spite of their condition, the competents were neither hopeless aliens nor outcasts. From the moment of inscription they were of the church. As such they attended the *missa catechumenorum*, heard the scriptures read and explained, and, from the beginning of Lent on, were very much a presence in the congregation. Recall that for Quodvultdeus they were in the womb of holy mother church (S III, 1:3); according to Augustine, they were in the throes of birth to the faith (S 216:7). Yet the competents were not insiders either: they stood in the dark on the edges of the congregation, on the boundaries of the church as slaves, and were treated as enemy territory, if not the enemy himself.

Anonymity involved ambiguity: they were neither insiders nor outsiders but people in between. In transition, they stood on the no-man's land between the world which they sought to leave and the church which they sought to enter. Of both but in neither, they were in a state which anthropologists call "liminal," that is, they were a "threshold people" who elude the positions assigned by law, custom, convention, and even ceremonial (Turner 1969:95). Characteristic of "liminars," whether modern or ancient, is the fact that two worlds meet in them, the world from which they are being separated and the world into which they are being initiated. What intrigues me about the liminars of Augustine's North Africa is a fact not often enough acknowledged: one hundred years or more after Theodosius proclaimed orthodox Christianity (392) the religion of the empire, the imperial world and the ecclesial

world still stood poles apart.³⁴ In the values proclaimed by the rites of scrutiny and renunciation and in the mystagogy of Augustine and Quodvultdeus (and countless others homilists; Finn 1967:99-103) there was no union of church and state, no “establishment” of Christianity. As will be clear shortly, they were two mutually opposed worlds—the *ecclesia* and the *saeculum*—embodied in the competents, who were liminal in both worlds, and their liminality dramatically reminded the church of its own stance on the threshold positioned between the here and now and the hereafter. Granted that Ambrose and Augustine could invoke the martial power of the Roman world, the rites on which they commented continued to despise that world.

2. Ritual Combat

Indeed, the controlling metaphor in the rites is struggle (*agonista, certamen*) between church and world. Recall for a moment the physical circumstances of the scrutiny: the dead of night, the procession of the naked candidates and their arraignment before the community, the goat skin, their empty, sleepless, grimy bodies, imposition of the exorcist’s hands and his insulting breath, the imprecations, the physical inspection. Surveying the scene which had just been enacted, Augustine cried out: “Behold where the stadium is; behold where the wrestling grounds are; behold where the racetrack is; behold where the boxing ring is!” (S 216:6).

A contest of Olympic proportions was at hand: a cosmic struggle between the world embodied in the competents and the world embodied in the exorcist. About the competents’ world, as we have seen, it was devil’s. The conviction behind this *exorcismus sollemnis* was that the devil inhabited the competents. The dead of night, for instance, prompted Augustine to alert his competents: “For you are still in darkness and darkness is in you. . . . Now at last be weary of the Babylonian Captivity! Behold Jerusalem. . . .” (S 216:4). Long before Augustine, doubtless from the time that the exorcismal aspects of baptism came to be enacted in separate rites, liturgical tradition rested on two coordinate convictions: just as the Holy Spirit dwelled in the baptized, so the evil spirit dwelled in the unbaptized.³⁵

About the exorcist’s world, which Augustine calls the “full assembly

³⁴But see MacMullen 1984:74-85, and Wilken 1983:29-33. Orthodox here means that of the Nicaea and Constantinople councils.

³⁵See Lukken 1973:185-187, 228-229, and n.272.

of a new people" (Aug., S 216:7), the exorcist spoke and acted on behalf of the church for the "Savior" and the "mighty Trinity."³⁶ What unfolded was a ritual combat. The place of combat, the arena, was at once the church as building³⁷ (doubtless in the *consignatorium* attached to the city's basilica; Marrou 1938:115,148-149), and the church as community, signified by the encircling congregation (Quod. S 1:1, 4). The subject of the drama was the competent, with the exorcist in the leading role. The stage directions and script were the rites of the scrutiny. Very likely, however, competent and exorcist stood face to face, more accurately, bowed head to face. The hands of the exorcist were imposed, perhaps roughly, on the competent's shoulders, and the congregation as chorus chanted an interpretive psalm.³⁸ In a stentorian voice and biblical language the exorcist assaulted the devil in the competent and sought to drive him out in the name of Christ, the Redeemer, and of the Trinity.³⁹ The contemptuous hissing of exsufflation brought the assault to a climax.

The physical exam, however, which gave this solemn exorcism the name "scrutiny," brought the assault (one may be permitted to think of it as the drama's first act) to a close. Augustine says about the rite that whatever the devil has wrought in the competents by dangerous entrapments and seductive solicitations "will now be publicly revealed and done away with" (S 216:7); he concludes his comments about scrutiny by assuring the competents that they are now free from evil spirits and "healthy in their bodies" (S 216:11). And we know from Ambrose that a physical exam (*inquisitum*) was made to determine whether any uncleanness "might still cling to the body" of any competent (*Eplan. symb.* 1:1). It seems certain that scrutiny was designed to uncover contagious diseases like leprosy and venereal disease, which, as the symptoms of sinfulness, disclosed the continuing presence of the devil, rendering the competent unfit for baptism (Busch 1939:71). In the process, the rite put to the test their psychological mettle for evidence of diabolic

³⁶This is the tenor of Aug. S 216 6, 7, 10. For the role of the "adept" in curative cults, see Turner 1969 20-38.

³⁷For discussion of the building history of Hippo's basilica of the "Three Naves," see Marrou 1960 115-117, 123-133, 143-154. He concludes that the basilica of the second stage was built by the Catholics between 347-361, but he reviews the counter-evidence that it was the Donatist basilica and agrees that a cloud of doubt hangs over the whole question (148-150). For a review of recent archaeological work on baptisteries in Carthage, see Duval 1988.

³⁸As noted above p 00 and n 27 in Hippo, Ps 33 (34), in Carthage, Ps 138 (139).

³⁹For discussion of baptismal exorcism in the fourth century, see Finn 1967 73-81, compare Aug. S 216 6,10.

possession.⁴⁰

By design, then, scrutiny was an ordeal at once physical and psychological. Quodvultdeus actually calls it “the trembling (*pavor*) endured for the gift of full peace of mind” (S III:1:3), and Augustine implies as much. Did any competents fall in combat? Neither homilist provides an answer. But the antecedent probability is that some, at least, did not pass scrutiny and were set aside. In addition, the document which must be regarded as the seed bed from which these pivotal rites sprang, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, makes the probability more than antecedent. Close to baptism the competents (called the “elect” in the AT) underwent a final searching exorcism to determine whether they were “pure”—very likely a physical exam to determine ritual purity. Those found to be “impure” were rejected: they had not “heard the instructions with faith,” and the “alien” continued to cling to them (AT 20). Compiled as a jural document to record existing practice, the *Apostolic Tradition* concerns itself with the actual rather than the hypothetical and points to the fact that some competents did not pass scrutiny (Finn 1989:69-70). For them the struggle was over, at least for that year, perhaps forever.

3. Culture and the Convert

Granted the ritual combat in scrutiny, who exactly were the combatants? The underlying principle in ritual is that two worlds intersect, the visible world of every day and the world of perception, conviction, and values that lies beyond the visible yet shapes and is shaped by it (Turner 1969:25). As a result, what is made perceptible to the participant (and observer) through symbolic enactment is made accessible to the action of the community. We have considered the visible world of the pivotal rites in detail, and to some extent, the invisible world disclosed by them. As we have just seen, for instance, the two worlds which intersected in the scrutiny were the visible showdown between competent and exorcist on the one hand and the invisible showdown between the divine and diabolic on the other. Clearly revealed is the radical opposition between the two.

Scrutiny, thus, reveals the nature of the struggle. The second and third rites—renunciation and recitation—reveal the underlying identity

⁴⁰John Chrysostom tells his competents that possession, like drunkenness, is often accompanied by foaming at the mouth, passing out, rolling of the eyes, and vomiting: *Ad il. cat. alt.* See also Poque 1966:32, including notes.

of the contestants. First, the investing evil one. Recall the formula of renunciation: "I renounce the devil, his pomps, and his angels" (Aug., S 215:1; Quod., S I:1, 11).⁴¹ The devil, his pomps, and his angels may have been invisible, but they were far from abstractions in early Christianity. For the pre-Constantinian Christians of Rome, for instance, the object of renunciation was the devil and his agents embodied in the social and legal system of a hostile Roman state and society (Finn 1989:70-72). Among their contemporary North African brethren the object was the devil and his agents resident in the heart of Greco-Roman religion and strikingly epitomized in the processions that took place at the amphitheater and racetrack, where the gods were carried about, and with the cultic activities associated with them (Kelly 1985:96-98).

For Augustine, as we have seen, the object renounced was the "armed enemy" who ruled the inner world (*saeculum, mundum*) of desire gone awry in the hearts of both the competents and humankind. From one perspective he saw it as the world they had created by a life "lived for so many evil years in sins" (S 216:4); from another, as the world of the "old man" (216:2); from still another, as the "land of the dying" (216:5); from still another, as a life of "eternal punishment because of longstanding guilt" (216:8); and from still another, as a world made dangerous "from the sins of others" (216:10). In summary, however, Augustine insisted that his competents renounce their former life lived in the fallen world of North Africa's largely urban culture.⁴²

Quodvultdeus, however, stood more directly in the tradition of his African predecessors. He trained his competents to see that the "ancient and begrimed enemy" was embodied in their cultural institutions, especially in the centers of entertainment that exerted such fascination in Greco-Roman urban life: the racetrack with its savage competition and ferocious crowds; the theatre, with its lewd trivializing of the divine and human; and the amphitheater, with its inhuman contests and spilt blood (S I, 2:2-28). He regards them as the "devil's dens" and intimates that they provide the opium of the people: "There," he says, "smoke is breathed in, so that a person, under the influence of some strong power, when he thinks about what it means to be a man, does not realize that he is one him self" (S II,1:5).

⁴¹For a recent historical survey, see Kelly 1985:94-105; for the fourth century east, see Finn 1967:86-117.

⁴²See S 215:1, a homily he delivered at the *redditi symboli*. Augustine equates the devil, his pomps, and his angels with the past and their former life and insists, doubtless tutored by his own experience, that they withdraw their mind and soul from that former world.

To this heavily-snared world the homilist opposes what he calls the "wholesome and worthy spectacles" designed to attract, delight, and to preserve rather than to destroy them (S I, 1:2-28): there in the Christian arena is the greatest of all charioteers, Elijah (2 Kgs. 2:9-12), who drove with such speed and skill that he reached the very boundaries of heaven; there on the Christian stage is the biblical drama which presents Mary, at once virgin and mother, chaste Joseph (Gen. 39:7, 20), Peter walking on water (Mk. 14:29), virtuous Susannah (Dan. 13:8, 45), and holy hymns and canticles; there in the church's amphitheater are featured Daniel and the lions, a battle fought without steel or killing (Dan. 14:3-42).

How extensive was the rejection of the competents' cultural world to be? Clearly, it embraced those traditional bastions of the entertainment industry: the racetrack, the theatre, and the amphitheater. Even shorn of their Greco-Roman religious heritage they inculcated values and cultivated habits and actions wholly unacceptable to the church; Quodvultdeus is eloquent on the subject.⁴³ Unfortunately, the homilists do not divulge what other institutions of culture, popular or otherwise, proved to be battlegrounds between the ecclesiastical and secular worlds. The focus was on the forums of leisure, because, above all others, they attracted the allegiance of the city's people—that, at least, is the message between the lines of every post-Constantinian mystagogical homily of the fourth and fifth centuries delivered on renunciation within the boundaries of the empire. Whether it be racetrack, theatre, or amphitheater, such was the arena where God and devil fought for the soul of competent and faithful alike.⁴⁴ To be sure, with drama, conviction, and feeling the competents renounced the devil, his pomps, and his angels, but their victory was fragile. If the repeated denunciations of these "dens of the devil" are any index, the instances of recidivism were high (Finn 1967:99-104). All of which brings me to what the pivotal rites accomplished and how they worked.

4. The Power of Ritual

Later ages speak of function or of cause and effect. The rites, how-

⁴³The attitude was widespread see Finn 1967:99-102. The idolatrous aspect, so prominent in Tertullian, receded by the fourth century.

⁴⁴See Wilken 1983. "The full impact of paganism, however, can be seen not in popular amusements or pagan holidays, its most significant impact was on the upper classes, on the way they educated their children, in the web of traditional values and behavior. Paganism and Christianity were not on equal footing in Antioch. Hellenism set the tone, undergirded the institutions, inspired the art and literature" (30).

ever, speak of symbolic action. When competents passed scrutiny, the rite considered them freed from diabolic possession in all its manifestations: such was the message whether in Ambrose's Milan, Hippolytus' Rome, Augustine's Hippo, or Quodvultdeus's Carthage. No longer with head bowed but standing upright before the entire congregation, each competent proclaimed the words of renunciation, the intent of which was to break the devil's hold. The rite testified to the renunciants' new-found freedom to break and cast off the shackles of captivity. They could turn away from the devil, however powerful the pomps and angels. And, as the searching light of morning revealed, the renunciants could go on to proclaim allegiance to Christ before the assembled congregation (as Marius Victorinus once did):

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of the universes, king of the worlds, immortal and invisible. I believe in his son Jesus Christ our Lord, born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried. On the third day he rose from the dead, ascended to the heavens, sits at the right hand of the Father, from which he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, in the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, and life eternal in the holy church (Aug., S 215:passim).⁴⁵

In two words—both Augustine's as we have seen—the rites accomplished *aversio* and *conversio*.⁴⁶ The process of conversion was complete; the competents were now ready for baptism. But did the rites bring about the conversion they signified? The North African Christianity we have explored insists on an affirmative answer, the rites themselves demand it, and Augustine and Quodvultdeus affirm it. To be sure, conversion was the result of long and exacting collaborative effort that involved the congregation, the competents, the ministerial church, and the unseen world of the Redeemer and the Trinity (Aug., S 216:5-6,11). But the nexus was the rites; there is where the action was. So convinced was Augustine that he required even of infants that they be subject to scrutiny and participate in renunciation and recitation through their sponsors.⁴⁷ Nor was the requirement a formality, for in a letter to an

⁴⁵In S 214, composed towards the end of his career, Augustine records a creed text closer to the Nicene creed. It is thought that he did so to propose a model for priests at the start of their ministry. The text in S 215 is that of the church at Hippo and, doubtless, the rest of Roman North Africa. See Poque 1966:61-64. The formula in Antioch paralleled the renunciation (called *apotaxis*, "breaking ranks"), "And I enter into your service, O Christ" (the rite was called *syntaxis*, "entering the ranks"), for which see Finn 1967:105-110. The recitation may have followed immediately.

⁴⁶See above p.00, and n.32.

⁴⁷Aug. *Sec. Jul. resp. imp. op.* IV:7 (PL 45:1343).

episcopal colleague, Augustine insists that, although infants do not have the voluntary faith of the adult believer, the rite of recitation confers on them "fidelity" (*fidelem*); indeed, he even calls the rite *sacramentum fidei* (*Ep. ad Bon.*[98]:9).⁴⁸

Conditioned, then, by what the rites proclaimed of themselves, and following in the footsteps of their older North African contemporary, Optatus of Milevis, Augustine and Quodvultdeus seem quite convinced that the rites effect what they signify (Finn 1990:813).⁴⁹ But how did the rites do so? Augustine's answer to his competents' unspoken question is theological: "Run to [Christ] and be converted, for it is he who brings back those who have turned away; who searches after the fugitives; who finds those who have been lost; who humbles the proud; who feeds the hungry; who releases those who are in chains; who gives light to the blind; who cleanses the unclean; who refreshes the weary; who raises the dead; and who rescues those who are possessed and held by the spirits of iniquity (S 116:11). For all three, it is Christ who acts in the rites and nothing, in their view, can brook his action.

From the physical and psychological standpoint, the state of the competents, Suzanne Poque concluded that the "old man" had truly begun to die.⁵⁰ From the perspective of ritual's dynamics, it is clear to anthropologists that symbolic action evokes powers inherent in both community and subjects, especially in curative rites like scrutiny, renunciation, and recitation.⁵¹ After all, what is made perceptible to the

⁴⁸In the same letter, he calls the rite of renunciation *sacramentum conversionis*. Augustine appears to use the term *sacramentum* as the rough equivalent of *mysterium*; I think it best translated "rite," when he deals with the rites which compose the baptismal liturgy, as here. The term first appears in Tertullian, who may well have gotten it from Old Latin Version of the scriptures. See Finn 1990: 811-815.

⁴⁹In *Against Parmenian the Donatist* V:4, Optatus isolates three "elements" which make up the body of the sacrament: the action of the Trinity, the faith of the recipient, and the action of the minister. He regards only the first two as indispensable; the third, the minister, is only instrumentally necessary, and his moral condition, of no effect. Augustine, in his similarly anti-Donatist work, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists*, turns his attention from the "unholy" minister to the "deceitful" candidate for baptism, and argues that, irrespective of his unworthiness, the sacrament gives him the seal or character of Christ in virtue of which the "benefit" of the sacrament revives when he is contrite and reconciled (I.7:10-13; PL 43:115-122). It is very likely that his teaching about the seal or character was derived from the postbaptismal rite of chrismation in Hippo and elsewhere. In any case, it proved to be the foundation of the medieval teaching that the sacraments effect what they signify *ex opere operato*.

⁵⁰See above p.00, and for full discussion her 1966:26-33.

⁵¹See Douglas 1970 and 1984, who tends to see rituals as a response (not always beneficent) to social determinants, especially social structure. Turner explores in detail the curative function of rites (1969:18-43). In the rites he studies they are effective for the restoration of the right relation between matrilineity and marriage, the reconstruction of the conjugal relations between wife and husband, and making the woman, and hence the marriage and lineage, fruitful (18). See also

senses in the form of symbolic action is by that fact made accessible to the purposive action of the community (Turner 1969:25).⁵²

A temptation that sorely tries the student of ritual is reductionism, whether one reduces the effect of ritual to grounds theological, medicinal, psychological, social, or economic. Augustine, for instance, without further consideration, ascribes the liberation of his competents to the grace-giving Redeemer "who rescues those who are possessed and held by the spirits of iniquity" (S 216:11). Someone else, untutored by Augustine's insistence that unless "you believe you will not understand" (S 212), may well see the effect of the rite in a physically induced psychological therapy. Still another may conclude that wholeness lies in the capacity of ritual to elicit the restorative powers inherent in the community. However, what the rites of scrutiny, renunciation, and recitation themselves insist is that the invisible world of perceptions, convictions, and values intersects with the visible world of words, gestures, things of nature, and enactment to restore *sanitas* and to bring about *conversio*. To put asunder the two worlds, whether among the modern pre-industrial tribes of Sub-Saharan Africa or among the Christians of ancient Roman Africa, is to shut oneself off from a vital human reality. In short, they "worked," and in the process revealed the underlying world of ancient North African Christianity.

CONCLUSION

Between 300 and 400 C.E., the Christian population of the empire increased from five to thirty million. How were so many won over? It hardly needs to be said that what made the difference was Constantine and the preferred status for Christianity that came in his train. Before Constantine the church kept pretty much to itself, drawing fairly sharp boundaries, largely in reaction to hostility from its Greco-Roman world. The people who crossed those boundaries were initially led by the desire for blessings, the fear of physical pain, and credence in miracles (in that ascending order); with the arrival of Constantine, the added inducements which made the difference were the desire for a blend of social

Douglas 1984 7-28, 58-72 She argues that Frazier, whose influence she sees as baneful as it is widespread, did not understand symbolic action

⁵²See above, p 00 On the subject of magic, Douglas has an extensive and valuable discussion of its rise and inadequacy as a tool of analysis (1966 7-28, 58-72) She traces its prominence back to Frazier

and material rewards that Christian status could bring, coupled with actual and potential coercion (MacMullen 1984:102-119).

The catechetical homilies of the fourth and fifth centuries lend a good deal of credence to this profile, not because they yield the same picture, but because their pervasive insistence on reformation of character and life gives every evidence that conversion, which the homilists see as the coming to birth of *homo novus*, was an arduous task for all concerned. In fact, it was arduous beyond words, as the drama of the North African catechumenate and its pivotal rituals underscore.

The low estate of the motives which brought the inquirers to basic instruction as beginners (*rudes*) was not particularly relevant, for the first thing the rites disclose is that task of conversion was to reshape an entire way of living and system of values. To be sure, conversion was a personal process; from what we have seen in Augustine's North Africa, however, at bottom conversion was a ritual process. The garden at Cassiciacum inevitably led Augustine himself to the baptismal font. In a striking confirmation of this ritual fact, the Second Council of Orange (529 C.E.) responded to the aftermath of the Augustine-Pelagius controversy by re-orienting the entire discussion about the first stirrings of conversion (*initium fidei*) by shifting the focus from the interplay between God and the individual soul to the interaction between God, the community, and the baptismal candidates (Mansi 8:718).

The process (even in the infant, Augustine's case) truly began with inscription, which normally took place at the end of initial instruction. What the catechumenate reveals, however, is that the process was ever so gradual, a slow weaning through extensive exposure to homiletic instruction, to the community, and to ritual. The early stages with their accompanying rites are stamped with the conviction that conversion was a long process requiring extensive socialization, normally for several years, but often, as in the case of Augustine and most of the leading post-Constantinian churchmen, for half a lifetime.

Pace and intensity accelerated dramatically when a catechumen determined to seek baptism and entered the group of competents through the rite of inscription at the beginning of Lent. The critical period of conversion had arrived. And the rites confirm what Augustine and Quodvultdeus make abundantly clear in their Lenten homilies, namely, that the conversion of competents and community alike was the issue. Indeed, each of the rites which characterized the Lenten catechumenate makes the point in its own distinctive voice that conversion was a communal enterprise designed to change both catechumen and community. Thus, the community, as we have also seen, was an encir-

cling presence in all the rites, and dramatically so in the pivotal rites: if the competents were to be reborn by the rites, then the community was to be renewed in the rites. The holidays which marked the Easter season celebrated *both* rebirth *and* renewal. The fact is that rites of initiation can and do “through brief revelation ‘burn out’ or ‘wash away’—whatever metaphor of purification is used—the sins and Sunderings of the community” (Turner 1969:185). But granted that conversion of competent and community alike is the object, what do the pivotal rites say about conversion?

The stentorian voice of the scrutiny called attention to the central theme of the rites: conversion was a matter of mortal combat with a range of unseen forces. The divine and the diabolic were locked in combat within and over the competents. Either they would die to the “old man” and live to the “new” or be listed as casualties, even though they were not the principal combatants. Enslaved to the culture and values of the world—the *pompa diaboli* (Rahner 1931)—from which they were coming, the competents alone and unaided had no inherent capacity to fight, much less to break away. Others with commanding authority had to fight for them, specifically, Christ and the Trinity embodied in the church and acting through its ministers, especially, the instructor and the exorcist. The competents’ contribution was passive obedience and the strict adherence to Lenten asceticism (not exactly a small matter!).

A very different voice, the still voice of fear, was there for the hearing also, lurking largely in the setting: the darkness, the undress and demeanor of the competents, the impact of the exorcist, the physical exam and its outcome. All these pointed to the liminality of the competents, who stood anonymous on the boundaries of the congregation, betwixt and between. And their liminality generated fear: the world from which the competents sought to flee had penetrated through them to the very hearth of the church. Nor was the successful outcome of the ensuing combat a given: there would be casualties. In addition, the congregation had compelling reason to be afraid, for the world they had renounced, if we can believe Augustine and his colleagues, was too much with them.⁵³ In the liminality of the competents they encountered their own continuing liminality, for as members of the church they nonetheless stood on the boundaries of the world subject to its enchantments, or, in Quodvultdeus’s image, its opium. Competent and Chris-

⁵³See especially Augustine’s postbaptismal Easter season homilies (Ss 229-260).

tian alike had learned from basic instruction that there was no conversion through hope, only through fear.⁵⁴

Still another voice, in fact, many different voices, disclosed that, however enslaved to and by their past the competents might be, the possibility of making a break and new start was within reach. Stripped of everything but the grime, hunger, and exhaustion of the struggle, yet standing upright, they stepped forward into the half light of dawn, each in her or his own voice, publicly to renounce the devil, his pomps, and his angels. If modern weddings are any index, the sound of one's own voice doubtless made some renunciants tremulous, but each formally announced the break, which, according to Quodvultdeus, a scribe recorded in the hidden world of the Carthaginian Christian archives. In the morning those same voices, perhaps fortified by some sleep (but not much) and with the *sanitas* restored the night before, affirmed a new allegiance by professing the North African baptismal creed—also a daunting experience for some. Nonetheless, nourished by the rites, as Quodvultdeus put it, they could and did embrace publicly their own conversion.

Were it possible to draw a profile of the newly-professed as they left the basilica of Hippo or Carthage on Palm Sunday would it be markedly different from the profile they bore to their initial instruction? A final voice spoke of accomplishment. The rites we have explored and Augustine and Quodvultdeus, to whom we have listened, answered a ringing yes. But the rites spoke performative not prophetic language; they declared the present but did not address the future. Would these new converts stay converted? They themselves went away to their homes at the end of Easter Week with the answer, for in an Easter Wednesday homily Augustine exclaimed: "There are penitents here in great numbers. When the blessing is given, the line is very long, indeed. . . . I examine penitents and find them living badly. If they are repentant, let them not commit these sins; if sins continue to be committed, their name is a mistake; their guilt remains. . . . Change yourselves, change yourselves. The end of life is uncertain" (S 232:7-8).

The newly-professed might soon join the long line of penitents, indeed, might fall away altogether. Although effective, this rich, complex, and "trembling" ritual process of conversion was neither infallible nor invincible.

⁵⁴Aug. *De cat. rud.* 5:9; see MacMullen 1984:64-65.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AA American Anthropologist
- CCL Corpus Christianorum, series Latina
- CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
- DACL Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie
- DS Dictionnaire de spiritualité
- EEC Encyclopedia of Early Christianity
- ELA Ephemerides Liturgicae Analecta
- FC Fathers of the Church
- Guel Sermo Guelferbytanus (see Augustine)
- HTR Harvard Theological Review
- LQF Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen
- Mansi Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio
- PL Patrologia Latina
- PG Patrologia Graeca
- REA Revue des études Augustiniennes
- RHE Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique
- SC Sources chrétiennes
- SCA Studies in Christian Antiquity
- TS Theological Studies
- ZKT Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie

SOURCE REFERENCES

Ambrose

Expl. symb. *Explanatio symboli*. SC 25bis. 1961.

Augustine

De adult. coniug. *De adulterinis coniugiis*. CSEL 41:347-410

De cat. rud. *De catechizandis rudibus*. CCL 41:121-178

Conf. *Confessiones libri XIII*. CCL 27:1-273.

De civ. dei *De civitate dei*. CCL 48:452-497

De cur. pro mort. ger. *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*. PL 40:591-610

Enn. in pss. *Ennarationes in psalmos XLI*. CCL 38:459-474

Ep. ad Bon. [98] *Epistularum XCVIII*. CSEL 34:520-533.

Ep. ad Jan. *Epistola ad inquisitiones Januarii [54-55]*. CSEL 34:158-213.

De fid. oper. *De fide et operibus*. CSEL 41:37-97

S. Guelf. *Sermo Guelferbytanus*, G. Morin, ed. 1930 *Sancti Augustini sermones post Maurinos reperti*, in *Miscellanea Agostiniana* I. Rome: Vatican (SeT)

S *Sermones* 1-340. PL 38 23-1484

Sec. Jul. resp. imp. op. *Secundam Juliani responsionem imperfectum opus*. PL 45:1049-1608.

Chrysostom

Ad il. cat. I, II *Ad illuminandos catechesis prima et altera*. PG 49:221-240.

Egeria

Iten. Aeth. *Itinerarium Aetherae*. SC 21, 1948.

Quodvultdeus

SI, SII, SIII *Sermones de symbolo* CCL 60:305-378.

Tertullilan

De bapt. *De baptismo*. Evans 1964.

Traditio apostolica. Münster: LQF 39, 1963.

TA

REFERENCES

- Boismard, M.E. 1964 "‘I Renounce Satan, his Poms, and his Works’." In *Baptism in the New Testament: A Symposium*, 107-112. Ed. by A. George, et al. Baltimore: Helicon.
- Busch, Benedictus 1938 "De initiatione christiana secundum sanctum Augustinum," *ELA* 52, 159-167 (pre-Aug. N. Africa), 385-483 (Aug. N. Africa).
- Burghardt, Walter J. 1964 "Catechetics in the Early Church," *The Living Light* 1, 100-118.
- Daniélou, Jean 1956 *The Bible and the Liturgy*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
1960 *From Shadows to Reality*. London: Burns and Oates.
- De Puniet, P. 1925 "Catéchuménat," *DACL* 2,2: 2579-2621.
- Dondeyne, A. 1932 "La discipline des scrutins dans l'église latine avant Charlemagne," *RHE* 28: 5-33, 751-787.
- Douglas, Mary 1970 *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. New York: Pantheon Books.
1984 *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (Ark edition).
- Duval, Noel 1988 "Un nouveau baptistère de Carthage," *REA* 34: 86-92.

- Dujarier, Michel
1979 *A history of the Catechumenate: The First Six Hundred Years*. New York: Sadlier.
- Evans, Ernest, ed.
1964 *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*. London: SPCK.
- Farwell, Lyndon I.
1976 *Betwixt and Between: The Anthropological Contributions of Mary Douglas and Victor Turner Toward a Renewal of Roman Catholic Ritual*. Claremont, Ca. Dissert.
- Finn, Thomas M.
1967 *The Liturgy of Baptism in the Baptismal Instructions of St. John Chrysostom*. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press. SCA 15.
1989 "Ritual Process and the Survival of Early Christianity: A Study of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus," *Ritual Studies* 3,1:69-89.
1990 "Sacraments," EEC 811-815.
- Grimes, Ronald L.
1985 *Research in Ritual Studies: A Programmatic's Essay and Bibliography*. Metuchen: American Theological Library and Scarecrow Press.
- Kelly, Henry Ansgar
1985 *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama*. Ithaca: Cornell.
- Leclercq, Henri
1922 "Exorcisme, Exorciste," DACL 5/1:964-978.
1938 "Pâques," DACL 13/2: 1559-1571.
1950 "Scrutin," DACL 15/1:1038-1052.
- Lukken, G.M.
1973 *Original Sin in the Roman Liturgy*. Leiden: Brill.
- MacMullen,
Ramsay.
1984 *Christianizing the Roman Empire, A.D. 100-400*. New Haven: Yale.
- Mansi See Abbreviations.
- Marrou, Henri, I.
1960 "La basilique chrétienne d'Hippone d'après le résultat des dernières fouilles," REA 6 109-154.
- Muldowney, Sarah,
tr.
1959 *Saint Augustine: Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. New York: FC 38.

- Osiek, Carolyn
1989 "The New Handmaid: The Bible and the Social Sciences," TS 50:260-278.
- Outler, Albert, tr.
1955 *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Poque, Suzanne, ed.
1966 *Augustin d'Hippone: Sermons pour la Pâque*. Paris. SC 116.
- Quasten, Johannes.
1942 "Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Exorcism of the Cilicium," HTR 35:209-219.
- Rahner, Hugo.
1931 "Pompa Diaboli," ZKT: 239-273.
- Russell, Jeffrey
Burton.
1981 *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*. Ithaca: Cornell.
- Turner, Victor.
1969 *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Weller, Philip T.
1959 *Selected Easter Sermons of Saint Augustine*. St. Louis: B. Herder.
- Whitaker, E.C.
1981 *The Baptismal Liturgy*. London: SPCK, 2nd ed.
- Wilken, Robert L.
1983 *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Fourth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wilson, Monica
1954 "Nyakyusa Ritual and Symbolism," AA 56:228-241.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.