Liturgical Theology after Schmemann

An Orthodox Reading of Paul Ricoeur

Brian A. Butcher
Foreword by Andrew Louth, FBA

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CHAPTER

8

Manifestation and Proclamation

Overview

In this chapter we will finally endeavor to apply the insights acquired from our reading of Ricoeur to the interpretation of a particular liturgical rite—namely, the Byzantine tradition's "Great Blessing of Water" (*GBW*) to which we have hitherto referred only obliquely. Following a brief description of the service, I provide a historical overview of its development. Then I offer an analysis according to the threefold schema proposed in Parts II and III above, treating in turn the rite's metaphors and symbols, its models of subjectivity and, finally, its dynamics of mnemonic transformation.

Before proceeding any further, it will be worthwhile to outline the shape of the service as reflected in the *textus receptus*.[1] The rite begins in the church, at the end of Vespers on the eve of the feast of Theophany, or of Matins (or Divine Liturgy) on the day, with the clergy and servers processing out from the altar (with cross, bells, incense, and torches) into the nave itself (when the blessing is celebrated indoors). Alternatively, exiting the church proper, and followed by the congregation, they continue on to a nearby body of water, to the singing of the opening hymns.[2] When the blessing is celebrated in the church, the community gathers rather around the font or vessel containing the water to be blessed.[3] After the font and church (or open body of water), and the people have been censed, the readings begin. There are three from Isaiah (35:1–10; 53:1–13; 12:3–6), followed by a brief Psalm response (26:1 [LXX]) and an Epistle (1 Cor. 10:1–4). Next the Alleluia is sung (intercalated with Ps. 28:3 [LXX]) and the Markan baptismal Gospel

(1:9–11) is proclaimed with the usual solemnity. Thereafter come the general intercessions segueing into the great prayers over the water. These concluded, the theme songs of the feast are sung while a cross is immersed three times into the water. Finally, the people are sprinkled with the holy water and approach to partake of it, also taking some into their own containers for domestic use throughout the rest of the year.[4] Such use includes consumption and the blessing of family members, in keeping with the identity of the Christian home as a "domestic church." This identity is reinforced when, in the weeks following Theophany, the priest of the parish conducts a visitation of all his parishioners, at which time he solemnly blesses their homes with Theophany water. As mentioned above, "Theophany water" is conserved in the precincts of the church as well, for use in the manifold blessings of persons, objects, and places.

Historical Evolution of the "Great Blessing of Water"

Having spoken at length in the last chapter concerning the importance of the dialectic between the critical history of an event and its interpretation, it behooves me to refer to Nicholas Denysenko's definitive historical-critical study of the *GBW*.[5] What follows here is a resumé of the salient findings of his research. Since the oldest extant Byzantine liturgical manuscript, Codex Barberini 336 (reflecting the cathedral usage of Constantinople),[6] dates only from the second half of the eighth century, Denysenko concedes the prehistory of the rite to be obscure. To mitigate the lack of explicit liturgical evidence, however, he adduces the witness of several church fathers and of select saints' vitae, among other discrete sources. The import of these texts is that from at least the fourth century, if not earlier, Christians commemorated the Baptism of Christ by blessing water and reserving it for domestic consumption and sprinkling. A key witness in this respect is St. John Chrysostom (c. 349–407) whose "Homily on the Baptism of Christ" testifies to the practice: Water was kept for the remainder of the year or longer, even up to three years, during which period it allegedly retained its purity and freshness. Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310/320–403) corroborates the account of Chrysostom. The sources clearly exhibit a faith in the miraculous and beneficent properties of such water, accruing from the liturgically mediated sanctification of the Jordan by Christ.

The history of the actual *GBW* rite proper is arranged into three stages through recourse to more than two dozen euchologies (sacramentaries) and

typika (customaries) representing the breadth of the relevant Eastern (Byzantine, West Syrian, Armenian, Coptic) liturgical traditions. In Stage One (eighth to tenth centuries), the majority of the ritual components are variable across the sources, with only the four principal, presidential prayers achieving stability in all.[7] Readings, for example, vary in number, content, and position in the rite, as do hymnography and gesture. Important to our reflections below is the fact that the early texts show the rite to have been celebrated at a courtyard fountain or other contained water source, whereas its prehistory favors live water—a dialectic that will abide in the rite down to the present day.

Stage Two (eleventh to thirteenth centuries) is marked by the influence of the Constantinopolitan Studite and Palestinian Sabaitic monastic traditions, displayed in the proliferation of hymnography at the opening of the service, for instance, and a tendency toward detailed rubrical specifications. For their part, the readings remain in a state of flux with respect to number and content, but are now consistently found near the beginning of the service (rather than at the end, as in the first stage). Since it does not appear in the monastic typika that dominate this stage, the received prologue to the "Great Are You" prayer is posited to be of cathedral provenance. Finally, a salient gesture, rare in the sources of Stage One, comes now to be widespread: the plunging of the Cross into the blessed waters to the singing of a festal hymn.

In Stage Three (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries), several additions and enrichments obtain, including the reappearance of elements from the first stage absent in the second—illustrative in Denysenko's view of Taft's "law of the paradox of the periphery." According to this "law," churches on the margins of a given territory—in the Byzantine Rite, *Magna Graecia* would be exemplary—retain older usages despite their respective liturgical center undergoing development.[8] From the perspective of this stage, Denysenko can affirm the office to be "most likely a collection of materials created by anonymous authors and collated into a cohesive whole," despite the occasional attribution of certain elements to prominent churchmen, notably St. Basil (329/330–79) and St. Germanus of Constantinople (634–733/740).[9] He concludes:

> Collectively, the three stages constitute a snapshot into the life of a liturgical rite that continues to develop. The Byzantine blessing of waters has multiple variants particular to local communities in Stage

> One, and even though certain elements become prevalent in most Euchologia by Stage Two, the ritual is not settled by Stage Three, but appears to represent a continued attempt to sort out the order for the celebration. The only certain conclusion is that the core prayers of the rite are stable, while accompanying components like hymnody, gestures and their accompanying texts, and secondary prayers tend to vary from one source to the next.[10]

Among the three prayers that remain stable throughout the entire history of the *GBW*, as charted by Denysenko ("Lord Jesus Christ," "Great Are You," and "Incline Your Ear"), he identifies the second as the longest and most important, consequently singling it out for an in-depth analysis. Deriving from a prayer presumably originating in the rite of Baptism, with which it overlaps to a large degree, "Great Are You" can be seen (following the pioneering work of Miguel Arranz) to exhibit the classic, tripartite structure of anaphoras (eucharistic prayers) deriving from the Antiochene tradition. Although the customary initial dialogue (i.e., the *Sursum Corda*) of such is completely missing, and the *Sanctus* ostensibly so, there is nonetheless a clear movement from doxology to anamnesis to epiclesis; moreover, the angelic worship to which the eucharistic *Sanctus* bears explicit witness is invoked obliquely in the "Great Are You" prayer, which also employs apophatic terminology—another integral feature of the Antiochene liturgical idiom. In Denysenko's estimation, the prayer thematically encapsulates the significance of the rite as a whole:

> Five themes from the "Great are You" prayer set the stage for greater elaboration of the theology of the blessing of waters on Epiphany. First, the prayer is highly Christological, as it addresses Christ and employs language that draws upon the anamnesis of the Epiphany feast as its main source. Second, the image of angelic worship is evoked to emphasize worship of Christ, who is the initiator of divine activity in the liturgical assembly, and the assembly joins the angels in glorifying him. Third, the prayer also has a Trinitarian motif, referring to divine work as an act of the Holy Trinity, with each person of the Trinity acting in a particular way revealed by the story of the feast. Fourth, creation is also a prominent theme . . . as creation participates in the divine activity, and is also illuminated. Fifth, the prayer refers to the Baptism of Christians, as it frequently interprets the gifts granted to the participants through baptismal motifs.[11]

The coherence implied in this thematic synthesis discloses Denysenko's conviction that there is a consistent theology in the *GBW*, notwithstanding a certain plurivocity deriving from its composite authorship. Incidentally, I would suggest here that Ricoeur's dialectic between selfhood as *idem* and as *ipse* (elaborated in our discussion of *OAA* in Chapter 5) may also be helpful in understanding the "identity" of a liturgical office such as the *GBW*. For, despite claiming a thematic coherence for the rite, Denysenko acknowledges that its *formal* unity derives rather from editors compiling and rearranging elements to suit the practical exigencies of actual celebration. Is not the service's identity then to be found in its potentiality for action/passion? The *GBW*'s history, that is, witnesses a diversity of recensions and, hence, exhibits only a modicum of *idem* identity; nevertheless, there is *ipse* identity in the potentiality/actuality of communities blessing water—and being blessed by it.

We will have occasion to return to Denysenko's work in the course of our discussion below. The present resumé may be drawn to a close by rehearsing the theological claim advanced by the author for the importance of the rite. It is said to be an effective recapitulation of Baptism, a reminder and renewal for its participants of a sacramental event they may have forgotten, and whose commission they may have neglected. He muses that virtually the same graces may be sought of both Baptism and the *GBW*, an affirmation of the erstwhile practice of administering Baptism during the celebration of Theophany.[12] In this vein, he also proposes that a sharp differentiation between sacraments and sacramentals, characteristic of Western (and scholastically influenced Orthodox) systematic theology, is both artificial and counterproductive: "My analysis of the blessing of waters on Epiphany suggests that an encounter with God and the reception of sanctification are not limited to a prescribed number of sacraments, but can occur in a variety of liturgical celebrations. This warrants a spirit of openness in defining sacramentality and suggests the importance of recovering a patristic understanding of what constitutes a sacramental event."[13] Of course, there are many contemporary (Western) theologians who would wholeheartedly agree.[14]

"We Do Not Conceal Your Benevolence": Naming God in the *GBW*

With Denysenko as a dialogue partner, we can proceed in our hermeneutical analysis of the *GBW*. Recall that in Chapter 3 we explored Ricoeur's

approach to the naming of God in Scripture and its corollary use of metaphor, teasing out its general implications for liturgical theology. Let us now attend to the specificity of the world opened up by the *GBW*, treating, in turn, its Christological orientation; the spectrum of "namings" displayed in the rite's various genres; and the implicit theodicy expressed by its construal of evil.

"You Are Our God"

The most conspicuous feature of the naming of God in the *GBW* is its preponderantly Christological orientation—comparatively rare in the Byzantine liturgical corpus, as Denysenko rightly observes.[15] He speculates that such an orientation actually serves to challenge the normative (Chalcedonian) conception of liturgical prayer as properly addressed to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.[16] Particularly unusual is the form of epiclesis by which *Christ*—rather than the Father—is supplicated to send the Spirit: "For the Byzantine tradition, the possibility that an entire liturgical rite addresses prayer to Christ, and invokes Christ to send the Holy Spirit, suggests a liturgical theology that challenges this monarchical priority of Trinitarian theology."[17] Denysenko later acknowledges there to be ambiguity in regard to the addressee of the rite's core prayer ("Great Are You"), which has alternatively been taken to invoke the Father—the result, in his estimation, of a collusion between the composite authorship of the rite and said "monarchical priority."

Here Ricoeur's understanding of polyphony would seem apropos. For if on the one hand the *GBW*'s diverse contents indicate it to have been a living euchological text, with several authors contributing to its final contents, this diversity has nevertheless been susceptible to homogenization, given the strictures of Orthodox trinitarian and sacramental theology. For his part, Denysenko counsels a renewed appreciation for the peculiar Christological orientation of the rite, judging that it issues a constructive challenge to the received understanding; in place of an a priori, univocal description of the operations of liturgical prayer, therefore, he advocates the value of the alternative framework permitted by the text's equivocity. We shall explore this framework further below, when discussing the modes of subjectivity licensed by the *GBW*. Here it suffices to submit that such equivocity serves to exemplify Ricoeur's "surplus of meaning." That is, where historical-critical inquiry rightly endeavors to reconstruct the origi-

nal form(s) of the rite, a hermeneutical consideration duly listens for the polyphony voiced in the received text, thereby vindicating its potential enrichment of the communication in question.

This polyphony is in fact more momentous than it might at first appear, for the Christological interpretation entails a metaphorical "seeing as" by which the divine initiative acclaimed in the rite's Old Testament allusions is assimilated to Christ, that is, by which the "God" referent becomes predicable of Jesus, in precisely the fashion that Ricoeur ironically disavows: "I will not hesitate to say that I resist with all my strength the displacement of the accent from God to Jesus Christ, which would be the equivalent of substituting one naming for another."[18] Denysenko explains that such allusions, which he terms "anamnetic doxologies," do not mention the Father and are thus indeterminate, being ascribable to the agency of either the Father or the Son. On the Christological reading, favored by the position of the doxologies in the *GBW*, the Son may be efficaciously supplicated to sanctify the water because he is taken to be the self-same God "who in the days of Noë drowned sin through the water of the flood. . . . [W]ho through Moses freed the Hebrew race from the slavery of Pharaoh through the sea. . . . [W]ho split open the rock in the desert, and waters rushed out and torrents flooded down, and [who] satisfied your thirsty people. . . . [W]ho through Elias turned Israel from the error of Baal." These doxologies thus serve to allow Christ to be credited with the typological water-related miracles of the Old Testament.

Now such a discrepancy may be accepted by granting the intimate association of the person of Christ with that of the Father, such that the agency of the latter may be seen as predicable in some sense of the former; this is indeed how Denysenko concludes the matter:

> The blessing of waters offers a paradigm of divine activity performed by the entire Holy Trinity, with Christ as the initiator and author whose presence blesses the waters by the descent of the Holy Spirit. This paradigm modifies the notion common to East and West that all liturgical prayer addresses the Father, as the prayer of this celebration consistently addresses Christ. This does not entail the absence of the Father from the Trinitarian economy operating in the blessing of the waters. The Trinitarian model based on the monarchy of the Father is not overturned by the implications of this liturgy, as the Father's role as the source of being is not compromised.[19]

Thus the admittedly unusual Christological focus of the *GBW* is for Denysenko not ultimately out of step with the classical trinitarian teaching of the Eastern Church, in which the three persons of the Trinity are said to have a common will and a common energy or power of operation. And yet, Byzantine Christology has been accused of being crypto-Monophysite, with its promotion of the deity of Christ unwittingly obscuring the full stature of his humanity.[20] It seems to me that this tendency naturally invites also a blurring of the distinction between his person and that of the Father. Regarding such an interpretative trajectory, Jaroslav Pelikan observes (citing Tertullian) that already by the turn of the third century the Christian faithful would resist overdistinction in the nature of God and his acts toward the world, preferring to err on the side of glorifying Christ in excess—to "clai[m] the titles 'God' and 'Lord' for Christ without qualification"—rather than risk denying him rightful glory, or worse, jeopardizing his divinity.[21]

In this respect, the extant *GBW* serendipitously exploits the continuity between the Old and New Testaments established by the tandem use of the term "Lord" (*kyrios*) in the Septuagint's reference to Yahweh, and the New Testament's designation of Christ. By calling Christ "kyrios," that is, all the divine attributes and actions associated with that title in the Old Testament accrue to him; not only is he seen to be one with the God of Israel, but the God of Israel is now seen to be one with him—indeed, in a preincarnate form, to *be* him. The language of Scripture would thus seem to have conspired with the determinations of dogmatic theology, as expressed in the decrees of the early ecumenical councils, to "Christify" the Old Testament, providing approbation for ambiguity of the kind Denysenko discerns in the received version of the "Great Are You" prayer—although, as mentioned above, he considers this ambiguity to actually result from a situation of multiple authorship. Of course, it is debatable whether or not one is dealing here with a hermeneutical *felix culpa*.

"Sing to the Name of the Lord"

Set within this broader dialectic between (in Ricoeur's terms) the "poem of God" and the "poem of Christ," how do the respective genres of the *GBW* cause the naming of God to "migrate"? The processional hymn of the *GBW* melds a phrase from Psalm 28:3 (LXX) with a gloss on Isaiah 11:2, immediately establishing a narrative setting: "The voice of the Lord

upon the waters cries out, saying, 'Come all of you, receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the fear of God, of Christ who has appeared.'" This opening text offers an interesting variation upon the primacy Ricoeur accords to narrative as indicative of "God's imprint [being] in history before being in speech. Speech comes second inasmuch as it confesses the trace of God in the event."[22] For, whereas biblical narrative recounts the operations of divine agency in the past, the hymn in question acclaims it as occurring in the present: The voice of the Lord *is* calling out.

Ricoeur does acknowledge this phenomenon to an extent, in his consideration of the "time" of the hymn—which, given his biblical frame of reference, he terms the "time of the psalms"—as that which envelops all other modes of temporality: "This time is that of today and everyday. . . . It is the privilege of worship to reactualize salvation, to reiterate the creation, to remember the exodus and the entry into the promised land, to renew the proclamation of the law, and to repeat the promises."[23] Note, however, that he regards the psalms as celebrating, by means of the vivid present tense, past events; the past is called to mind via the use of the present.

In our liturgical hymn, by contrast, what is described does not correspond to a particular biblical event; there is no instance in Scripture of God calling out over the waters, "Come all of you." Instead, one is faced with the prospect of either a gnomic affirmation—namely, that water categorically carries the resonance of the divine voice—or more plausibly, the claim that in the moment of the liturgy the specific waters before which the congregation is gathered themselves bear witness to said exhortation on God's part. In the latter case, a metaphorical injunction is once again imposed: The worshippers are beckoned to a "seeing-as," or better, a "hearing-as," in which the sound of water is taken to convey the words actually uttered by the cantors, if not indeed by the worshippers themselves. Implicitly commended here, in my opinion, is what we have called "truth as manifestation." If one does take the statement as constative (i.e., *not* as one whose illocutionary force is to constitute the very thing articulated, which would be tantamount to considering the voice of God to speak merely in *our own* performing of the liturgical text "over" the respective font or body of water), then the worshippers are invited to verily encounter the "waters" as disclosing a word that, paradoxically, cannot be articulated save by the ancillary work of language.

Ricoeur captures this concept deftly:

> A symbolism is operative only if its structure is interpreted. . . . And in this sense, any functioning of a symbolism requires a minimal hermeneutics. Yet this linguistic articulation does not suppress but rather presupposes what I have called the adherence of the symbolism that seems to me to characterize the sacred universe. . . . The sacredness of nature shows itself in symbolically saying itself. And the showing founds the saying, not vice versa. Its sacrality is immediate or it does not exist.[24]

We shall return to this below, in considering the "bound" symbolism of water. We shall also remand until later a discussion of the second and third stichera sung at the beginning of the rite. In the present connection, I wish simply to evince how the service starts by adverting to truth as manifestation, to a "showing" that founds a corollary "saying."

After the opening hymns come three readings from Isaiah. The liturgical setting of these readings conditions the import of their naming of God, since the eschatological "world in front of the text" would appear to be realized in an immediate, albeit partial way, by the rite itself. When the text declares, for example, that "[God] himself will come down and save us . . . there will be a spring of water for the thirsty land," the respective divine condescension might be readily equated to the grand narrative of the Incarnation whose protagonist, in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, identified himself as the source of the living water that would forever quench thirst (John 4:14). And yet this is still to circle within what Ricoeur calls the centripetal movement of the biblical text; aside from the fruitful intertextuality reaped by such a messianic interpretation of the Isaian prophecy, the more obvious and fecund reference is to the tangible water about to be blessed. The Great Litany will evoke a synthesis, indeed, of these two approaches, by its own allusion to, and sacramental extension of, the Gospel pericope just mentioned: "For this water to become water springing up to eternal life, let us pray to the Lord."

Strikingly absent from all three readings from Isaiah is any hint of the threat that Ricoeur often associates with the prophetic genre. Recall that in the penultimate Gifford Lecture, he presented prophecy as occasioning a "fragmented identity."[25] Nevertheless, Ricoeur is also well aware of the transition within the genre from, we may say, critique to conviction: Passing through the denunciations of an Amos, Scripture inexorably courses

toward the consolations of an Isaiah, credited by Ricoeur for his "eschatology [which] liberates a potential of hope, beyond the closure of the established [i.e., narrative] tradition."[26] Now if we follow the Ricoeurian account of the influence exercised upon this tradition by prophecy, i.e., that its temporal dialectic casts the founding narrative as incomplete—"the promise contained in the tradition itself now appears as not saturated by prior accomplishments"—we gain a new perspective on the baptismal narrative already announced in the opening hymns of the *GBW*. Inasmuch as one may designate this narrative as the liturgical analogue of the Torah to which Ricoeur's discussion of biblical time refers, its orbit within the "gravitational space" of the succeeding prophecies of Isaiah causes it to similarly acquire a new temporal meaning: That is, whereas the narrative presents the Baptism of Christ as a *completed* action, the prophetic readings float the possibility that it is in some sense unfinished, yet to be fulfilled in a future event inaugurated truly, if not definitively, by the rite to unfold. Ricoeur asserts that "the past"—in this instance, the singular event of Christ's Baptism—"is not simply exhausted . . . rather, it leaves behind a storehouse of inexhaustible potentialities. But it requires prophecy and its eschatology to open this initial surplus of meaning that, so to speak, lies dreaming in the traditional narrative."[27] One may perhaps draw a connection here to Schmemann's own *liturgical* eschatology, which Frøyshov characterizes thus: "For Schmemann, the Kingdom is inaugurated and yet to come, though it is clear that this is the same reality which manifests itself at each instant. Instead of the 'already *but not* yet' [of conventional eschatology], Schmemann seems to say 'already *and* now *and* yet.'"[28]

For it is surely apparent that the surplus of meaning borne by the baptismal narrative requires for its harvest an extraordinary interpretative labor; after all, no dominical injunction, like those to baptize or celebrate the Eucharist, sanctions the *GBW*, nor does any other New Testament text even countenance such a rite. One may, therefore, be forgiven for presuming Christ's Baptism to have reached fulfillment in his Passion and, by extension, the sacrament of Baptism by which humanity is made to share therein. Only in the light of the prophetic text interpreted synchronically in the context of the liturgy does one glimpse the ritual world *in front of* the Gospel text, even as it is given to the rite's opening hymn to deploy the virtuality of the cosmic symbolism conveyed by the creature of water. Not only are the prophecies harbingers, moreover, of the narrative's potential, but they function to ground the scaffolding of action undergirding a liturgical

hermeneutic. For does not the entire rite ostensibly qualify as a perlocutionary effect of the third reading?

> Thus says the Lord: Draw out water with gladness from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day, Sing to the Lord and cry out his name. Proclaim among the Nations his glorious deeds, remind them that his name has been exalted. Sing to the name of the Lord, for he has done great things. Proclaim these in all the earth. Exult and be glad, you that dwell in Sion, because the Holy One of Israel has been exalted in the midst of her? (Isaiah 12:3–6)

Is it not here in the *GBW* itself that the Lord is vividly hailed in song; that he is offered praise and thanksgiving for his great deeds; that the Holy One is experienced in the midst of the faithful who will "draw out water with gladness," as the litany prescribes, "for every suitable purpose"? Interestingly, this third reading from Isaiah is the first to receive any historical documentation, as far as the *GBW* is concerned, in the compilation of fifth- through eighth-century Jerusalemite liturgical material known as the Georgian lectionary.[29]

Moving on, we observe that the Epistle serves willingly to enshrine the typological method, as if to literally defend the liceity of applying the preceding lections to the actions soon to follow. Fortuitously, Ricoeur actually happens to argue that the kind of "creative repetition" dominating restorationist prophecies like Isaiah presages the use of typology exemplified in this text: "The early church will turn this procedure [i.e., 'creative repetition'] into a hermeneutic and find in it the basic structures of its typological reading of the Old Testament. This development authorizes us to speak . . . of an interpretation of the New in terms of the Old already at work in the Old Testament."[30] Our text sees St. Paul describing the Children of Israel as "baptized" into Moses, as having imbibed "the same spiritual drink" as the Corinthians themselves: "For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them. Now the rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). The person of Christ is thus projected back upon the sacred history of the Hebrews, such that they are portrayed as having sojourned with the trinitarian God without having known him as such. Not only does this text, therefore, endorse a typological correspondence between the thirst-quenching of old and that with which the rite will conclude, but it anticipates the ascription to Christ of other Old Testament water-related miracles that the "Great Are You" prayer will condone, as related above.

At this juncture it is also important to draw attention to the brief psalm response (*prokeimenon*) preceding the Epistle. Identical to that sung in the baptismal liturgy, a sacrament known from ancient times as "enlightenment" (*photismos*), its appropriateness follows from the Septuagint version of the text: "The Lord is my enlightenment and my Saviour. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 26:1 [LXX]). Notice here that in addition to rendering "enlightenment" for the Hebrew "light," the Septuagint also differs in its choice of "saviour" over "salvation," and "defender" over "stronghold," illustrating an observable tendency in the Septuagint Psalter toward personal rather than impersonal appellations for God—despite its otherwise rigorously literal translation style.[31] We recall that for Ricoeur, a Psalm text like this is a capital instance of the kerygmatic language of the Bible, appreciable in its recourse to metaphor only by comparison to the poetic language to which it is akin.[32] And yet, one wonders whether this tendency betrays a certain discomfort with metaphor, the insertion perhaps of "another Logos" (the philosophical scruples of a nascent ontotheology?) into the "seeing as" produced by the sacred word.[33]

Such a dialectic in the naming of God would actually seem to obtain throughout the *GBW* in the space between its respective treatment of light and of water: In Denysenko's assessment of the rite's historical variants, light (as mentioned above) was counted a theme as persistent as water. In the Great Litany, for example, amid a series of petitions for exceptional graces to be bestowed on, in, and through the water to be blessed, stands out a request for the "enlightenment of knowledge and true religion through the visitation of the Holy Spirit"—the naming of God being thereby projected onto spheres as ethereal as epistemology and ethics, and as tactile as the ritual consumption, indeed, "communion" of water.[34] This symbolic contrast between the immateriality of light and the materiality of water will recur elsewhere in the service, notably in the festal kontakion and the concluding idiomelon.[35] It shall also prove significant in our evaluation of the soteriology of the *GBW* below.

The Psalm verses sung at the Alleluia following the Epistle likewise invite a metaphorical "seeing-as," the first ("The voice of the Lord is upon the waters") repeating the reference of the rite's opening hymn to its aquatic setting; the second ("The God of glory thundered upon the waters"), functioning by dint of its past tense as a narrative preface to the baptismal account about to be proclaimed. The sway in the biblical text's tenses reiterates

the temporal oscillation already introduced at the beginning of the service in the third of the opening hymns: "As a man, Christ King, you came to the river, and in your goodness you hasten to accept the baptism of a servant at the hands of the Forerunner." Next we have the Gospel, the laconic, Markan account of Christ's Baptism.[36] Perhaps the most salient aspect of the text is its obvious brevity, particularly arresting given the amplitude of the gloss inscribed upon it by the liturgy. We will attend to its interpretation momentarily, in our discussion below of the soteriology embraced by the *GBW*, and return to it again in our historiographical determinations near the end of the chapter.

We must finally recover, in this present analysis of the naming of God by the rite, the potent dialectic of apophasis and kataphasis treated at length in Chapter 4. The epic prologue to the central prayer of the *GBW*, "Great Are You," commences with an address to the "Trinity beyond all being, beyond all goodness, beyond all godhead, all-powerful, all-vigilant, invisible, incomprehensible; Creator of the spiritual beings and rational natures, innate goodness, unapproachable Light that enlightens everyone coming into the world." The first three phrases, taken verbatim from the opening lines of *The Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius[37]—a treatise consecrated to a kind of theological "work of the negative"—intone a note of *docta ignorantia* that reverberates like an ostinato under the ensuing paean to the acts wrought by God in history. That is to say, with the rite already having spoken in rhapsodic terms (through the preceding hymns, readings, and prayers) of God as *revealed*, the prologue contrastingly disclaims any pretension to a mastery of meaning. Again, if the multiple namings in the preceding genres already caused a certain "migration" of God's name, in their rapid juxtaposition of multiple figures, the present prayer explicitly thematizes the unknowability of God, speculatively qualifying such figures as metaphorical.

And yet the metaphors are not, to use C. S. Lewis's terms, "magistral," but rather "pupillary"; the insertion of apophatic terminology does not reduce that of the kataphatic, but makes it mean more, serving as a qualifier that pushes us not outside of metaphorical speech but deeper into it. For as Gorazd Kocijančič neatly puts it:

> The main philosophical characteristic of ecclesiastical apophaticism is the knowledge that the real apophasis (i.e., the real negation of our words and thoughts because of the otherness of the Other, the real

> openness for the mystery) is only that one which does not prescribe [what] should "be" and what "not." . . . [The] apophaticism of the Church, contrary to the (post)atheistic thematisation of mystery, thus demands in the name of philosophical reasoning not only apophasis, the negation of everything which could be said and thought about Mystery, but also the negation of negation . . . i.e., the possibility of cataphasis as the free self-communication of Mystery.[38]

This recalls Ricoeur's insistence that the labor of language, its struggling through metaphor toward silence, is a duty that must not be abdicated by a preemptive mystical retreat.

In this sense, the audacity of the prayer, first asseverating the divine transcendence, and immediately thereafter bubbling forth in acclamations to God's immanence in Christ, exhibits how the prolixity of the kataphatic is not the contrary of the terseness of the apophatic, but its necessary consequence and complement. Admitting that "no word is adequate to sing the praise of [God's] wonders," we must nevertheless defy limitations in stammering forth, lest these wonders not be known at all. The paradox is particularly acute given the fact that the apophatic terminology is employed not only in the first lines of the prologue, addressed to the Trinity as a singular, ineffable entity, but also in the subsequent naming of Christ as him who "being God uncircumscribed, without beginning and inexpressible, came upon earth, taking the form of a servant." As with the assimilation of the naming of Christ to the naming of God in the Old Testament, discussed above, there is here an extravagance of ascription—a Ricoeurian "reorientation by disorientation," to which we will return below.

"Crushing the Heads of the Dragons on the Waters"

We turn now to the central prayer of the *GBW*, "Great Are You." This text confesses Christ to be the agent of creation, the artisan of the cosmos, to whom it—along with the spiritual powers of heaven—ought to render obeisance. Having descended to earth in the "compassion of [his] mercy," he "sanctified the streams of Jordan by sending down from heaven [his] All-Holy Spirit and [he] smashed the heads of the dragons that lurked there."[39] In this line of the prayer, we encounter a surprising, seemingly incoherent and misplaced allusion to Psalm 73:12–15 (LXX) wherein God is depicted—in imagery borrowed from Near Eastern mythology—as having

established the world by vanquishing a preternatural sea-monster. I would propose, however, that this allusion is actually the unexpected *key* to the soteriology of the rite. Why? Consider that the *GBW,* prima facie, lacks any reference to the Paschal Mystery; conspicuous by its *absence* is any indication of the Passion or the Resurrection. Only the gesture of plunging the Cross into the waters at the conclusion of the service is connotative in this respect.[40] Does the *GBW* promote what Kevin Vanhoozer calls a "pristine soteriological model," before which the "myth of penal substitution" ought to recede?[41]

The matter is profoundly dialectical, inviting an application of Ricoeur's determinations concerning the naming of evil, which according to van den Hengel serves as one of the "twin goads" to his lifework—alongside the naming of God.[42] Now Ricoeur argues that evil, if approached speculatively, leads to an aporia: It cannot be thought in rational terms *adequate* to our experience. Indeed, it is an enigma that calls into question reason's very requirement of logical coherence—i.e., that propositions be submitted to the rules of noncontradiction and systematic totalization.[43] Part of the challenge is that we seem unable to avoid placing phenomena as heterogeneous as sin, suffering, and death within the common category of evil.[44] The genre of theodicy aspires to just such a comprehensive taxonomy and has historically had a prolific career: There is no dearth of speculative discourse on evil.[45] Nevertheless, Ricoeur regards its successes as pyrrhic; genuine gain is afforded rather by those less ambitious genres preceding theodicy—in particular, myth (which narrates evil, typically in terms of a given cosmology); wisdom (which reflects on how and why evil affects me personally); and gnosis (which dualistically posits its necessity—thereby appreciating the sheer magnitude of evil—if also renouncing upon its contestation).

Such genres compel us to think more, by thinking *differently*. Ricoeur singles out wisdom as being particularly productive in this regard—"one of the possible paths by which thought, action, and feeling may venture forth together"[46]—but we meet another, I think, in the myth of evil sustained by the liturgy. For although the doctrine of God proffered by the *GBW* is perforated by speculative thought (as displayed by the rite's apophatic un/naming of him), the rite's treatment of evil does appear to abide on the purely mythical level. True, something of an exception may obtain in the priest's apology, embedded within the prologue to "Great Are You." Recognizing his sinfulness, he makes the following request: "May my sup-

plication for the people here present be acceptable, so that my offenses may not prevent the Holy Spirit from being present here; but permit me now without condemnation to cry out to you." For the most part, however, evil is located in the extrinsic power of dragons: a cosmic, rather than moral, etiology.[47]

But how does myth actually amplify thought? Ricoeur explains: "The realm of myth . . . is a vast field of experimentation, or even of playing with hypotheses in the most varied and the most fantastic forms. . . . The counterpart of this tremendous contribution of mythical thought to speculation on evil is that one is ceaselessly brought back to the question of origin: From whence comes evil?"[48] By its narrative of Christ conquering the dragons, accordingly, the liturgy can be seen to prevent us in our thinking about evil, and this in both senses of the word: It "goes before" us, expressing our sense of evil being somehow, mysteriously, always and already there; but it also "obstructs" our attempts at discursive circumscription.[49] But is this not rather to reduce the scope for thinking through evil, than broaden it? To justify our contention, we must integrate Ricoeur's pertinent exegetical inquiry on the first chapter of Genesis.[50]

By way of introduction, however, let us recall that for Orthodox theology, as represented by Schmemann, the blessing of the waters constitutes a type of spiritual cosmogony:

> The waters of creation, darkened and polluted by the fall, which had become the very symbol of death and demonic oppression, now revealed as the waters of Jordan, as the beginning of recreation and salvation. The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, who 'moved on the face of the waters' in the beginning, descends again on them; and they—and through them the world—are revealed to be that which they were meant and created to be: the life of man as communion with God. The time of salvation begins again.[51]

Schmemann's lyricism belies a dichotomy exposed by Ricoeur's text: the commingling in the Old Testament of two contrary models of creation. The earlier model, adopted from Near Eastern mythology and cited in Psalm 73:13–14 (LXX), consists in the divine conquest over the dragon (Leviathan, Rahab).[52] The later, distinctively Hebraic model, is that of a divine wind hovering over the waters with an ensuing *"Fiat lux!"* In short, there is scriptural warrant for seeing creation as preeminently the result of *deeds*, but also for favoring the role of *words*—with this latter process

incorporating, without effacing, the former: "Genesis 1 is continuous with Psalms 89 and 74. And so understood, the thought process at work in such a creation narrative consists in linking the archaic form of the myth, foreign to the faith of Israel, to the history of salvation specific to the Hebraic theological world."[53]

Noteworthy here is the fact that the pagan model involves not only action, but conflict, while the Hebraic seems to infer a *gratuitousness* in creation. I would like to propose that the *GBW* preserves this tension in a dialectic between the symbolism of water and that of light, introduced above. Water and light, respectively, can be taken as representing the two creations by deed (act proper) and word (speech-act). How so? On the one hand, the rite emphasizes Christ's victory over the dragons at the consummation of his Baptism, the event whose salvific repercussions are felt in the sanctification of the waters transmitted to participants in and by the *GBW*. On the other hand, there is a definite soteriological theme of light and the disclosure of a concomitant knowledge, proclaimed, inter alia, in the kontakion: "Today you have appeared to the inhabited world; and your light, O Lord, has been marked upon us; who with knowledge sing your praise. You have come, you have appeared, the unapproachable Light."[54]

The rite thus exhibits its salvation/creation drama as a rehearsal of Genesis, but one that distends the *action* element in the biblical text; where Scripture combines a hovering over the abyss with a speaking into the void, the *GBW* revivifies (and co-opts) the ancient motif of God engaging as a warrior in the battle against primordial, preternatural foes.[55] The sequence of the narrative flows from the Spirit descending upon the Son (reflected, respectively, in the Gospel itself and the litany's petition, "For us to be enlightened with the enlightenment of knowledge and true religion through the visitation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord"); through the epiclesis of the Spirit upon the water; to the reenactment of Christ's marine combat in the plunging of the Cross. Similarly, the "Lord Jesus Christ" prayer passes effortlessly from rational illumination to sacramental sprinkling,[56] a movement anticipated also in the very identification of Baptism as enlightenment, to which the prokeimenon alludes.[57]

Arguably, the soteriology of the rite *does* therefore herald the Paschal Mystery, but in a mythical idiom resistant to conversion into some other. The Jordan River, in virtue of its putative lurking leviathans, serves unto a "seeing-as" of the ultimately unrepresentable mystery of evil; the *GBW* shows the waters of death, the monster of sin, and the chaos of the Fall—

all to recede before the ineffable "being-as" engendered by Christ on the Cross. As Pope Benedict XVI suggests, the Baptism of Christ is rightly to be grasped as an anticipation of the Passion and his reemergence, of the Resurrection; his Baptism is the interpretative key to his death and vice-versa:[58]

> The Eastern Church has further developed and deepened this understanding of Jesus' Baptism in her liturgy and in her theology of icons. She sees a deep connection between the content of the feast of Epiphany . . . and Easter. She sees Jesus' remark to John that "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Mk. 3:15) as the anticipation of his prayer to the Father in Gethsemane: "My Father . . . not as I will, as thou wilt" (Mt. 26:39).[59]

The icon of Theophany, he explains, further illustrates the connection to Pascha inasmuch as the baptismal pool is customarily made to resemble a watery cave, corresponding in the iconographical canon to Hades.[60]

In sum, the liturgy demonstrably promotes the kind of "broken dialectic" commended by Ricoeur; evil is annihilated by Christ, if still found to be resurgent in us—as the celebrant's prayer of apology in the *GBW* suggestively admits—insinuating itself into our own intentions and actions. Evil, in the *GBW*, is not simply the *privatio boni* of St. Augustine but an *active* principle, set in confrontation with the figure of Christ. And as Ricoeur asserts: "This 'christological turn' given to the problem of evil is one of the paradigmatic ways of thinking more about evil by thinking differently."[61] Moreover, such "thinking more" is not, as we shall see further below, a mere matter of cogitation. Van den Hengel, for instance, argues as follows:

> The "issue" of the myths is to be found in the promise of an ending to the "reign" of evil. Hence, the good is pronounced, proclaimed, as more originary than evil. . . . In other words, fault or evil is paradoxically at the same time a crucial experience of the sacred. Evil is experienced as a threat to the bond with the sacred. The myths of evil do not reveal the heart of darkness except through an even stronger hope of an end to evil and suffering.[62]

In this vein, I would contend that the *GBW* entails at least in principle a program of *acting* against the evil whose inexorable defeat has been liturgically vouchsafed.

"The Nature of Waters Is Made Holy"

We have indicated that Ricoeur distinguishes symbols based on their capacity to be "bound" to an array of meanings primordially disclosed upon the cosmos itself, if nonetheless rendered articulate by language. That is to say, he understands symbolic operation to yield a meaning congruent with a definite *quid* inherent in the symbol, inchoate though such may be. According to Ricoeur, therefore, things do not mean whatever we wish them to—although they submit to our wishes, as it were, to the extent they are able. He situates this dialectic between the poles of "manifestation" and "proclamation": The former term denotes the Eliadean assertion of nature's essentially hierophanic character; the latter, the complementary movement of linguistic interpretation that reflects upon natural hierophany and subjects it to symbolism proper—that is, of being "thrown together" with significations of one sort or another. Thus, "Symbols come to language only to the extent that the elements of the world themselves become transparent, that is, when they allow the transcendent to appear through them. This 'bound' character of symbolism—its adherence—makes all the difference between a symbol and a metaphor. A metaphor is a free invention of discourse, whereas a symbol is bound to the configurations of the cosmos."[63]

Convenient for our present inquiry is Ricoeur's concentration upon the symbolism of water. Water is seen to exemplify the drama of the cosmos, its "principal function [being] to evoke the universal source of potentialities from wherein existence emerges as both real and experienced. Through this power of water . . . nature speaks of the depth from which its order has emerged and toward which chaos it may always regress."[64] Now this "power of water" is not simply a function of its awesome ubiquity in nature, of what we might call the "far side" of its linguistic symbolization; rather, the persona water acquires in our narratives gains gravitas from the actual use of water in manageable forms in religious ritual. On the "near side" of the symbol there is thus a renewed contact, albeit structured and controlled, with that which originally gave rise to the symbol. Ricoeur observes that "the element becomes once again immediately meaningful" through "rituals of immersion, emersion, ablution, libation, baptism, and so on."[65] Manifestation is thus combined with proclamation: "Water symbolizes something virtual or potential, but we are the ones who speak of virtuality and potentiality, yet it is the epiphanies of water itself that 'bind' this discourse about virtuality, potentiality, the unformed, chaos."[66] In fact,

not only does water inspire a flood of particular symbols, mediated by narratives and rites, but the sum of its symbolic "life" is greater than the parts, such that the water-ness invites a hermeneutical response: "We may also say that the innumerable particular revelations related to water form a system capable of integrating them and that this structuring and totalizing character, which the word 'symbolism' itself suggests, brings into play a labor of language."[67]

Now this hypothesis is well substantiated by the Byzantine liturgical tradition, in which the blessing of water serves as the necessary condition of most other blessings.[68] Holy water is the medium whereby persons and objects are blessed, such that the attendant rites find their *fons et origo*, literally, in the "system" condensed within the *GBW*.[69] Water readily lends itself to establishing a "system," as we can see in the network of blessings promised by this service. And as Ricoeur observes, if "any functioning of a symbolism requires a minimal hermeneutics,"[70] it is also the case that once interpreted, a symbolism such as that of water seems capable of effectively functioning on its own: The various blessings in which holy water is used, for instance, do not themselves rehearse the symbolism of the latter but simply assume and invoke it. Explication is given in the blessing of water itself and elsewhere only *indirectly* secured.

We can recall in this connection the conclusion of Chapter 4, in which we discussed Mark Searle's notion of liturgy as metaphor. Searle argued that liturgical metaphors become dead when the metaphorical tension between the "is" and "is not" is effaced either by an insufficient or an excessive stylization of the symbol in question. The metaphoricity of bread as the body of Christ, for example, requires both that the eucharistic bread be *real* bread, but also that it be handled and spoken of in such a way as to disclose its liturgical status as other than (or more than) "normal" food. Liturgy must strike a balance, that is, between grounding its symbols in common human experience and effectively deploying them as vehicles of that which *transcends* such experience.[71] Lamenting the historical eclipse of axial liturgical symbols, Searle muses: "Paradoxically, the very reverence which their disclosure-potential inspired has resulted in the collapsing of the tension upon which their communicative effectiveness depended. . . . Only when there is enough water to allow baptism to recover its original contact with drowning and death will its claim to be the sacrament of life grip us as something more than a tired cliché."[72] Searle's insights challenge the facility with which we might accept Ricoeur's consideration of the

operation of a symbolism such as that of water. Indeed, I think *GBW* dramatically illustrates the difficulty of preserving an equilibrium between the worldly and the otherworldly—between the "boundedness" of a symbol and its thematization for and by us.

Consider on the one hand how Searle's "attenuation of sacramental signs" (by which they "lose their metaphorical potential to point beyond themselves"[73]) would appear to be occasioned by the prescription that on the eve of Theophany the entire *GBW* be conducted around an ordinary, manipulable container of water, *inside* the church building. Thus domesticated, this water is nevertheless made to bear the full weight of cosmic imagery unfurled by the ritual script, readily appreciable in an uncircumscribed outdoor setting where the sun, moon, trees *et alia* are visible, and the vastness of nature can impress itself unfettered. Since the water to be blessed is to be taken as the Jordan River, does an indoor celebration perhaps mute the symbolism of water—drowning and death, for Searle, potentiality and chaos, for Ricoeur—and with it, the raft of metaphors with which it is laden? Certainly, in such a context, jumping or diving into the blessed water—a cherished custom in many places—is impossible.

On the other hand, if such an indoor celebration appears resistant to Ricoeur's account of the prefiguration of the symbolism of water—and in turn to this symbolism's configuration in the *GBW* by means of a panoply of paradisal prophecies and numinous invocations—it is yet perfectly suited to the refiguration countenanced by the rite: that the blessed water will serve for a "cleansing of souls and bodies for all those who draw from it with faith and who partake of it." Why? People naturally do not drink salt water, and yet it is customary in many locales to celebrate the *GBW* ocean-side. Similarly, even where fresh water is concerned, it is frequently not potable—and the ephemerality of river water, for instance, begs the very question of distinguishing the blessed water as such. In fact, outdoor celebrations of the *GBW* not infrequently *also* involve a simultaneous blessing of a portable container of water, erected adjacent to the natural body of water where the service takes place.

I think we can regard this discrepancy as indicative of the aporia between the moments of Ricoeur's narrative arc. If he is correct with respect to his estimation of the natural symbolism of water, that it is already "bound" to an array of significations in virtue of its properties and role within the cosmos, one wonders to what extent this primordial symbolism is susceptible of metaphorical mutation. I would even venture to sug-

gest that the blessing of water is analogous to the (ontotheological) giving/withdrawing of the Name in that topos of Ricoeurian exegesis, Exodus 3:14; for at one level the holy water is given, mastered by its very circumscription in the font: The blessing is *here*, as opposed to *there*. At another level, as the blessing of an outdoor body of water makes evident, the same blessing can be viewed as incorrigibly elusive. Where, after all, is the blessed water of a river that has been blessed? It is gone—but with the blessing or without? Does one return to a blessed place upon leaving and returning to such a river, or does the blessing depart with me, inasmuch as it is ordered to my own outlook, my "representation" (to use the language of Owen Barfield mentioned above)?

"Let Us Therefore Draw Water with Gladness"

The foregoing consideration encapsulates what I would call the liturgical dialectic of the cosmic and the domestic. Just as God himself, according to Ricoeur, recedes behind the plethora of figures by which he is depicted in Scripture, compelling an implicit movement toward the threshold of unknowability—which the apophaticism of speculative discourse will render explicit—so the sacramental "metaphor" of holy water "names" the divine presence in a polyphonic manner such that it is both *localized* and *diffuse*. The self-same blessing, given subsequently or simultaneously to both a reified quantity and an undefinable mass of water, appears to challenge the very intelligibility of sacramental presence. If the blessing is *here*, how can it be *there*? If *everywhere*, how is it not then in a sense *nowhere*, or at least superfluous? If the purport of blessing is said rather to consist in a species of Bultmannian existential decision, rather than in an objective transformation of the world, one faces the same critique Ricoeur addresses to those who would, in that vein, demythologize the Scriptures. To accept the facticity of the Incarnation and balk at sacramental realism is surely to swallow the proverbial camel while straining at the gnat.

But here we must also be mindful of David Power's argument that the sacramental imagination of Christianity originally distinguished itself, vis-à-vis its pagan counterparts, by an unexpected restraint. Power claims that what is original in Christianity is the surprising transition from the cosmic to the domestic. In the faith of those following in the footsteps of the humble, kenotic Christ, Power finds justification for an instinctive aversion to grandiose, cosmogonic rites:

> There is a ritual distinctiveness in Christian sacrament that puts the focus on domestic rites, not on festive or cosmic ones, however much these are appropriated or respected. It is this which gives the particular sense of being in time that is proper to the memorial of Christ. There is ritual transfer from sacrifice, rites of passage, cosmic rites, indeed from the whole language of cosmic identity, to the loaf and the cup, to the tub of water, to the jar of oil, shared in daily living.[74]

Is a service such as the *GBW* then to be viewed as a metastasis from the healthy quotidianness of Christian practice? In its naturalistic orientation, its "mythical projection, offering the vision of a well ordered universe where all falls under divine providence and plan,"[75] does it not displace the *petit récit* of the Gospel in favor of another grand narrative? One may respond that a dialectical sacramentology may need to allow for the cosmic alongside the domestic, respecting thereby the divinity of Christ as well as his humanity, his twofold identity as Pantocrator and Suffering Servant. Only thus would it correspond to the veritable challenge of a genuine Christology—in Ricoeur's estimation, one that duly adheres to the imperative to link the naming of God in the Old Testament to the proclamation of Christ in the New.

"Your Light, O Lord, Has Been Marked Upon Us": Personal Identity in the *GBW*

We argued in Chapter 3 that despite a common criticism of hermeneutics—namely, that it does not do justice to the performative dimension brought into relief by ritual studies—Ricoeur's later thought makes ample room for both narrative and ritual, and indeed, for interweaving them. Ronald Grimes was cited as an exemplar of the ritual studies school, which generally takes exception to a text-based approach to phenomena.[76] As we discovered in Chapter 5, however, Ricoeur's *OAA* evades this species of criticism by construing the primary object of hermeneutics as the human person—i.e., the self whose interpretation requires a detour through pragmatics as well as semantics. This route arrives at the development of practices that in turn serve as targets for our aiming at a "good life." If Ricoeur does not here elaborate the role of ritual per se, his focus on the role of action both in the prefiguring of narrative (for example, his discussion of the "constitutive rules" by which practices are recognized) and in its refiguring, or ethical appropriation, encourages a narrative-ritual integration.

A liturgical approach to the question of selfhood highlights the complementarity between story and service: The narrative configured in the *GBW* finds its ritual fulfillment in the practices of the domestic context, as the Great Litany anticipates: "For this water to become a gift of sanctification, a deliverance from sins, for healing of soul and body and for every suitable purpose, let us pray to the Lord. For those who draw from it and take from it for the sanctification of their homes, let us pray to the Lord." The contradistinction between narrative and ritual posited by Grimes only obtains if one maintains an a priori separation between the two, a separation that, if not untenable, is certainly unnecessary. The *GBW* presents rather their interdependence, not least because the form and content of the rite are to a great extent common to the rite of Baptism, which refers simultaneously to both a singular sacramental act and (by force of metonymy) to the totality of Christian faith taken as a baptismal vocation.

One relives, or better, recapitulates his or her Baptism in the course of the *GBW*: by first hearing the prophetic narrative in which the self is encountered as a "summoned self"; by assisting in the configuration of the hoped-for Theophany through the exercise of the productive imagination in tandem with one's corporeal participation in the rite; by performing a response to this call in ritually consuming the blessed water; and finally, by transforming one's daily existence through a continuous appropriation of the wager concluded in the rite—namely, that in seeking God's blessing in the sacramental mode in which it has been vouchsafed, one will continue to receive its refigurative power.

The Summoned Subject of the GBW: Psalmist or Thaumaturge?

Now in Chapter 5 we only explored the general features of a liturgical analogue to Ricoeur's notion of the "summoned subject," a figure he elaborated through recourse to biblical and hagiographical figures. We found there that the liturgy presented the self as *capax Dei*, able to recognize itself as susceptible to a doxological vocation to bless God. How then does this obtain in the *GBW*? The rite issues a particular kind of summons, inviting the congregants to process outside to a natural body of water before which they are to remember Christ's baptism (and all the great works of God that, according to the *GBW*, are fulfilled by that event) and bind themselves to the diffusion, through the medium of the blessed water, of the meaning communicated in the Theophany feast.

The liturgical idiom revels in exploiting for this purpose what Ricoeur calls "the support and renewing power of the sacred cosmos"; it is in being placed before the grandeur of the natural world that the panegyric enjoined by the following prayer speaks, as Ricoeur writes, "not only to our understanding and will but also to our imagination and our heart; in short, to the whole human being."[77] Consider the following excerpt from the *GBW*:

> All the spiritual Powers tremble before you. The sun sings your praise, the moon glorifies you, the stars entreat you, the light obeys you, the deeps tremble before you, the springs are your servants. You stretched out the heavens on the waters; you walled in the sea with sand; you poured out the air for breathing. Angelic Powers minister to you. The choirs of the Archangels worship you. The many-eyed Cherubim and the six-winged Seraphim as they stand and fly around you hide their faces in fear of your unapproachable glory.

The doxological summons issued here corresponds best, I think, to the biblical figure who witnesses an *epiphany*. While an epiphany is frequently unanticipated by the party concerned, occurring as an unpredicted "I-Thou" encounter (e.g., Moses's experience at the Burning Bush), there are also instances of another sort. In Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18), for instance, the protagonist ritualizes in anticipation of an epiphany, calling the people to sacrifice in order that God may be made known. Indeed, the "anamnetic doxologies" following the "Great Are You" prayer put forward this very incident as a prototype of what is transpiring in the rite at hand ("And give to [this water] the grace of redemption . . . [For] You are our God, who through Elias turned Israel from the error of Baal").

In like manner, there emerges in the fourth of the opening hymns a New Testament analogue to the summoned self represented in the figure of Elijah: "At the voice of the one crying in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord', you came, Lord, having taken the form of a servant, asking for Baptism, though you did not know sin. . . . The Forerunner trembled and cried out, saying, 'How will the lamp enlighten the Light? The servant place his hand on the Master? Saviour, who take away the sin of the world, make me and the waters holy.'" The Forerunner is here enjoined by Christ to allow the epiphany that the liturgical action will in fact disclose at his hands to take place—personal unworthiness and lack of comprehension notwithstanding. Participants in the *GBW* appear in turn to reiterate this sum-

mons by inviting Christ to be baptized anew, as it were, in the waters before which they are gathered. The subject modeled on St. John the Baptist—according to Christ, the Elijah who was to come (Matt. 11:14)—is one who evangelizes by exhorting all to draw near and behold the mystery, but one who also addresses the divine persons—the actual agents of the manifestation to be wrought in the rite.[78]

The summoned self of the *GBW* is thus caught up in the Ricoeurian dialectic between proclamation and manifestation described above, and that we explored earlier in the chapter under the soteriological signs of word and deed, light and water. For the anamnesis of Christ's Baptism is expressed both in a doxological summons to proclaim the narrative as well as a kind of sacramental throwing down of the gauntlet: a charge to manifest the narrative in practices that, in van den Hengel's words, "reorient human action in response to the excess, disproportion or extravagance of the Naming of God."[79] If the memory is textual—i.e., enshrined in the account of the Baptism given in the Gospel and recited in the course of the Great Blessing—the *remembering* is ritual, both in terms of the aural/oral character of the encounter with the textually inscribed memory, as well as in repercussions of the rite beyond the moment of its transpiring.

Ricoeur argues, with respect to the figure of the inner teacher elaborated by Augustine, that it is grafted onto what philosophy has recognized as the natural faculty of the human person: "Through the conscience, the self bears witness to its ownmost power of being before measuring and in order to measure the inadequation of its action to its most profound being. In this sense, we can note the neutral character of the phenomenon of conscience as regards its religious interpretation."[80] Conscience is already serviceable in its own right, that is, but fortified by the scriptural figures welded onto it. Similarly, might we propose that conscience also bears witness to an inchoate aptitude for gratitude? That it constitutes a stem, so to speak, which liturgy supports like a trellis? That the religious response budding forth in Ricoeur's obedient "I hear" ("where the superiority of the call—by which we mean its position as Most High—is recognized, avowed, confessed") is thus strengthened to respond to a doxological calling and to develop a sacramental capability?[81]

The Self as Another

Denysenko proposes that the *GBW* underwrites an alternative view of the trinitarian economy, one that takes the body's dialogue with Christ as head

as the point of departure. Christ as mediator implies two dialogues, he explains, following Boris Bobrinskoy: one with the Father, and another with the Church; the Church, on this view, ought to enjoy "the freedom . . . to ask Christ to initiate divine activity."[82] We can develop the implications of this claim further by asking if Christ's identity is not thereby seen to be constituted by a kind of Ricoeurian solicitude for the other. For it is in the naming of him by the Father, and the showing effected by the descent of the Spirit, that he is *recognized* as Christ. As Denysenko observes: "The Father bears witness to the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ and Son through his baptism in the Jordan, while the Holy Spirit confirms the authenticity of the revelation by revealing Jesus' true identity."[83] Analogously, in the intracorporeal dialogue of Christ and the Church, is there not a sense in which we too are only recognized, revealed in our true identity, in virtue of our being named and shown by the liturgy to be *in* Christ? Dare we go so far as to suggest that Christ also fully knows *himself*, in virtue of our solicitude?

Hence Denysenko's assessment of the unique Christological orientation of the *GBW*—he is "the author, initiator and chief celebrant of the liturgical event"—appears to dovetail with Ricoeur's determinations concerning selfhood, for we recall from Chapter 5 that the self knows alterity both in its experience of others and that of its own body, as well as in its interior colloquy with conscience. The liturgical subject then, adapting Zimmerman's account of its dual predication, can be regarded as experiencing in the *GBW* the opportunity to encounter God both as *self* and as *another*: In the measure that the assembly speaks to *God* in Christ, it speaks to one who can never be but altogether Other; in the measure that it speaks to God in *Christ*, however, it speaks to one connatural with itself—a dialogue (as Denysenko has it) of the body with the head.[84] And yet even in this dialogue there is the aporia of alterity, since the body suffers under the threat of a distension, so to speak, from its head; the priest must pray—with no assurance being given either way—for his sins to not impede the coming of the Holy Spirit: namely, the power of life sustaining the body and head as one organism.[85]

This threat also parallels the moment of Ricoeur's "fragmented identity" to the extent that it affects the union of the assembly with Christ and its corollary capacity for addressing God. What the baptismal narrative secures, in its account of the victory of Christ over the evil represented by the dragons in the water, suffers a definite—if subtle—rebuke in the admission of interior forces that cannot be so readily or permanently van-

quished. *Passivity* accompanies the very recognition by the liturgical subject of its power, in Christ, over extrinsic evil, betraying the subject's concomitant vulnerability to an intrinsic evil that may divide it even from itself, splitting head from body. In turn, the identity that passes through the waters is universalized to the extent that the fullness of blessings is made available to it, albeit in hope; and yet it is simultaneously singularized by the arduous task of realizing the potential of said blessings. Like the blessed water itself, the ontology of the liturgical subject of the *GBW* obtains not in the *state* of being blessed, but rather in a continual *dynamic* of blessing corresponding to Ricoeur's *ipse* identity. This identity is constituted by a faithful keeping of the ritual word, an on-going refiguration of the world by using the blessed water "for cleansing of souls and bodies, for healing of passions, for sanctification of homes, for every suitable purpose."

"Today Things on High Keep Festival with Those Below": Remembrance of Time and Place in the *GBW*

In the last part of this chapter we will examine the process of mnemonic transformation triggered by the *GBW*. But by way of background, it may be helpful to first set forth in brief a general theory of how blessings "work"—informed, of course, by the thought of Ricoeur as developed hitherto—and thereafter to zone in on the specific operations evident in our service.

"Speaking Well" and/or "Sanctifying"?

As was suggested in Chapter 1, blessings can be seen as demonstrating our essentially liturgical vocation, succinctly expressed in Schmemann's classic definition of the human person as *homo adorans*:

> But the unique position of man in the universe that he alone is to *bless* God for the food and the life he receives from Him. He alone is to respond to God's blessing with his blessing. The significant fact about the life in the Garden is that man is to *name* things. . . . To name a thing is to manifest the meaning and value God gave it, to know it as coming from God and to know its place and function within the cosmos created by God.[86]

Our priestly capacity for "stand[ing] in the center of the world and unif[ying] it in [the] act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from

God and offering it to God"[87] was impaired by the Fall but restored through the Incarnation. Humanity's privileges and prerogatives have in consequence been reclaimed, legitimating in turn the commerce of blessings transacted in the sacramental economy. But in what exactly does "blessing" consist?

Orthodox liturgist Elena Velkovska contends that the eucharistic blessing, the anaphora, "is the paradigm and model of every blessing."[88] This assertion is confirmed, as we saw above, by Denysenko's historical analysis of the *GBW*, arguably the most significant of Byzantine blessings and the most integrated into the Church Year; it is also structured like an anaphora, with an epiclesis employing language akin to that found in the eucharistic epiclesis.[89] Alongside the use of the Greek term *eulogein* to denote blessing, Velkovska notes the frequency of the term *hagiazein* (to sanctify). These are to a great degree interchangeable, as Denysenko again concurs, although according to Velkovska the former term is preponderant in the blessing of persons. She concludes that in contemporary Eastern Christianity, as a result of the frequent use of unintelligible sacral idioms combined with an inordinate emphasis on sacerdotal mediation, "the meaning of the blessing is in fact twisted into a kind of magico-ritual consecration."[90] This observation seems particularly ironic given that one of the short, alternate prayers in common use (for blessing water outside of the *GBW*) petitions that through the blessed water the faithful will obtain "freedom from superstition"![91]

There is something of a dialectic at work in this ambivalence, I would venture, corresponding to Ricoeur's "manifestation" and "proclamation." For on the one hand, to bless (*eulogein*) is literally to proclaim, to "speak well" of something/someone: a hermeneutical act, as Schmemann indicates in his association of blessing with *naming*. On the other hand, to sanctify (*hagiazein*) is more than verbal, implying a ritual transformation or at least a consecration or setting apart. Now while *eulogein* has a primarily oral connotation, the standard equivalent in English (to bless) appears conversely to connote *action*. For the Anglo-Saxon root of the English is *bledsian* (or *bloedsian*), that is, "to redden with blood."[92] If we allow etymology to serve for "thinking more"—as Ricoeur is wont to do—then we find ourselves brought back to the treatment of evil above, specifically, the role of conflict in Christ's own sanctification of the waters. The battle with the dragons rehearsed there is only intelligible (as Pope Benedict XVI proposed) in terms of the Passion in which Christ will have his *own* blood shed—

rather than that of his aquatic foes. The English term "blessing," then, felicitously connotes the role of sacrifice portended in the *GBW*: It is only by the Cross reddened with blood, we may say, that the waters and we ourselves can be either "spoken well of" or "made holy."[93] Indeed, should we further indulge in word-play, and place the root of "to bless" in conjunction with that positive state of mind and body denoted by blood-redness in the word *sanguine* (cheerfully confident; optimistic), we find confirmed that integral consequence of blessing as envisaged by the *GBW*: *health* of body and soul.

Toward a "Narrative Unity of Life"

Let us see whether Ricoeur's treatment of narrative identity can help us more fully relate the dual roles of speaking and acting connoted by blessing. Now Reiner Kaczynski observes that "through the sanctifying action of blessings, material things, both those that are natural and those that are the product of human work, are interpreted for human beings in their connection with the saving event of creation and redemption."[94] This interpretation, however, is yet a process mediated by a *text*. Hence Ricoeur's "narrative arc" commends itself: For its part, a *prefiguration* of blessing appears to obtain in the natural appreciation of material things that prompts their original presentation for blessing. We only bless that which is *already*, in some sense, spoken of as good. Cultures the world over, after all, express gratitude for the yield of the earth and its skillful transformation through human ingenuity—a gratitude displayed preeminently in the rich traditions of hospitality expressed in what Margaret Visser calls the "rituals of dinner."[95]

The liturgy in turn invites a *configuration* of this quasi-sacramental behavior: The *mythos* of a blessing subsumes the activity associated with the object, event, or person at hand into a theological plot. The imaginative variation upon life conjured by the rite's metaphorical "seeing-as" discloses a new way of being-in-the-world, those participating being challenged to see said object, event, or person as if it were now—in consequence of the blessing—*changed* in some respect. The "ontological vehemence" of this process arises inasmuch as the challenge is issued not simply to the imagination but to the senses and to the will; one is charged to *act* in accordance with the "seeing-as." The quality of the consequent response constitutes, in turn, the moment of *refiguration*. In sum, one cannot have access to the

blessing otherwise than in and through the blessing itself. It retains an irreducibility, a hermeneutic uniqueness proper to the existential implication of each participant in it. Blessings do not differ in this respect from the general gamut of events that may be highly significant in the life of a given person, being similar in their operation to other customs or ceremonies or, for instance, participation in artistic performances or athletic pursuits of whatever kind.

What may be distinctive, however, is the manner in which blessings contribute profoundly to what Ricoeur, following Alisdair MacIntyre, calls the "narrative unity of a life." If it is true, as Ricoeur claims, that life is in fact narrated and only thus lived, then blessings may be seen to provide a privileged moment of narrative mediation wherein the life of Christ with its "soteriological vehemence," so to speak, is retold in our own "acting and doing"—wherein our own life is rendered poetic, a human mimesis of the divine praxis.[96] In the evocative tag of Pope St. Leo the Great, "What Christ did visibly during his earthly ministry has now passed over into sacrament,"[97] we find a basis for considering blessings, inasmuch as they approximate the sacraments, a form of sacramental narrative. Writ large, the narrative so reprised includes the doings of the pre-Incarnate Logos in the Old Testament, duly celebrated in the *GBW*.

If "our Redeemer's visible presence" is taken to comprise his self-implication in the ordinary affairs of those whom he encountered, it becomes understandable that the liturgical tradition should provide blessings for all manner of daily needs. Christ's blessing of particular events, objects, or persons, is less significant than the fact that he lived an incarnate *life*. Moreover, if "what has not been assumed, has not been redeemed,"[98] as St. Gregory of Nazianzus writes (summarizing a common patristic notion), then the Church's manifold blessings actually testify to a belief that in Christ, God has redeemed the full ambit of human "being-in-the-world." The Church honors this conviction by endeavoring to bless all that is possibly "blessable," an enterprise that remains ongoing and open-ended—as the blessings for modern objects like cars and airplanes makes clear. Hence Anscar Chupungo can state: "There is hardly any proper use of material things that cannot be directed toward sanctification and the praise of God."[99]

But such is the narrative shape of experience that our "proper use of material things" seems to require an emplotted reference, a paradigmatic episode in accordance with which our present scenario can be configured. If

the Incarnation, taken as a metanarrative, can be seen as the necessary and sufficient dogmatic cause for blessings, the liturgy still tends to refract it through the kind of *petits récits* discussed by Power, specific episodes in the life of Christ deemed to presage whatever blessing is to be conducted. In their absence, the liturgy mines the Old Testament and even apocryphal literature for suitable precedents, its claim to a divine disclosure here and now being legitimated by a sort of narrative casuistry.[100]

As we saw in Chapter 7, however, this is potentially problematic to the extent that the narrative referent of a given rite may be historically dubious. Inasmuch as Christianity is ostensibly obligated to take historicity seriously—in the spirit of the Pauline admonition, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17)—the following question arises: In what regard ought one to hold narratives (such as those drawn from apocryphal sources) whose historicity does not seem to be worth the wager of the Resurrection itself? Do they occasion a second naïveté, the imperative to recover meaning merely from the text/rite, rather than from the event at stake? Ought their narrative reference to be omitted as a possible "abuse" of memory and only the doxological component retained? After all, the tradition knows prayers that exhibit only a modicum of narrative concern, privileging the world "in front of" the text rather than that which lies behind it.[101] If so, do we rightly subject such prayers to contemporary historiographical consensus, or do we rather defer to the Yerushalmi-esque "living memory" of generations of worshippers whose history can only be known from within?

For, on the one hand, it is possible that to treat as veracious, events that one actually only regards as parables at best, subtly undermines the necessary—if somewhat fluid—distinction between fiction (representing what Ricoeur terms "the conditions of possibility") and history ("the conditions of actuality"). Indeed, a blatant indifference to this distinction would perhaps constitute grounds for deeming a given blessing aberrant. Such a blessing would arguably be one that compromised the Christian story at large by promoting episodes or ideas not in keeping with the drift of the plot, as it were: one that thwarted the fundamental configuration of this plot, threatening the reference points necessary for its own narrative coherence as also for the "narrative unity" of a Christian life responsive to it. On the other hand, Ricoeur has enabled us to see, in light of his understanding of metaphor (and its role in narrative), that there is *never* an unmediated access to the events of the past, and that in certain instances

the very incredulity that might naturally arise in response to a singularity of a given event almost *requires* a flouting of historiographical modesty.

The "Poetics of Love"

Where, then, does the narrative configuration of the *GBW* stand in this respect? For there is in fact an extravagance in its emplotment, bearing an affinity with Christ's parables, as understood by Ricoeur. Hyperbolic language is employed not only with respect to the water being blessed, but also in regard to the meaning of the episode upon which the ritual action is based, effecting a Ricoeurian "reorientation by disorientation." Both the celebration of the service and its perpetuation in the subsequent use of the blessed water are made to bear an almost insupportable weight of eschatological scandal. The limits of sight are transgressed by the boldness of faith in its expectation of a divine munificence—a superabundance in keeping with the "economy of the gift." For such a common part of nature is here made to convey the significance of an utterly singular event, known not externally through the "history-like" record of the Gospels, so much as through the schematization of memory effected by (participation in) the rite.

The *GBW* requests, for instance, that God "give to [this water] the grace of redemption and the blessing of Jordan [and] make it a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a deliverance from sins, an averting of diseases, unapproachable by hostile powers, filled with angelic strength." Hearing these petitions one might well wonder why water so blessed is not even more assiduously employed by the faithful than it already is; why indeed, after some sixteen centuries of celebration, the inordinate benefits of assisting at this rite have not proven themselves to all and sundry. In other words, one might well be forgiven for requesting some *evidence* for the singular qualities attributed to the blessed water.

I would contend that the answer to this question—or rather, the response to this suspicion—is to recognize the mystery represented by the *GBW* as intelligible only in terms of what Ricoeur calls the "poetics of love." As he explains: "The discourse of love is initially a discourse of praise, where in praising, one rejoices over the view of one object set above all the other objects of one's concern." In this discourse "key words undergo amplifications of meaning, unexpected assimilations, hitherto unseen interconnections, which cannot be reduced to a single meaning."[102] Thus, the act of blessing, taken as an act of love, an incarnate discourse by the Word who

became flesh, ought by rights to be irreducible to empirical proofs, or to the evacuation of meaning contained in a univocal explanation of its import. In a similar vein, let us submit the following: We cannot *understand* the rite in the literal sense of "standing under" it, analyzing it from a remove; we can nevertheless *comprehend* it—i.e., "take [it] with" ourselves, carrying it forward into our lives.

To be sure, the rite itself does advance a kind of narrative "proof": a rehearsal of the historic *magnalia Dei* that allegedly justify the present liturgical action. But these divine deeds remain subject to the criterion of attestation by which, as we heard Jean Ladrière explain in Chapter 6, the one receiving the testimony to them becomes himself implicated therein. In this sense, the Baptism of Christ does not abide on a plane distinct from the multitude of other events said to occur in the "today" of Byzantine-Rite celebrations. Having already occurred, such events do not recede into the horizon but follow rather the inverse perspective associated with iconography: They move toward us, confuting the normativity of our conventional distinction between then and now, there and here. Hence the *GBW*'s uninterrupted account of the creation of the world and of the theophanies of the Old Testament alongside Christ's kenotic *exitus* from the Father forth into the world: There is no background, as it were, but only a foreground.

And yet it is still the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan that towers high in salvific significance:

> The Jordan turned back . . . seeing him drowning the death from disobedience, the goad of error and the bond of Hell in Jordan and granting the Baptism of salvation to the world. . . . For you could not bear, Master, in the compassion of your mercy to watch the human race being tyrannised by the devil, but you came and saved us. You sanctified the streams of Jordan by sending down from heaven your All-holy Spirit and you smashed the heads of the dragons that lurked there.

The rhetoric exhibited here surely illustrates that property of love that according to Ricoeur tends to extol one thing over all others: The Baptism of Christ becomes in the *GBW* the divine chef d'oeuvre, serving as a metonym for the Paschal Mystery—and all that *it* means. And yet, as the saying goes, "love is blind": The myopia besetting the soteriological vision of the rite makes it dependent on the guidance of another narrative that cannot itself be circumscribed within the celebration, any more than its

protagonist can be kept within the bounds of description. Paradoxically, it is as if the *GBW* points to its own contingency in the very attempt to attach all possible meanings to itself.

But is the liturgical labor therefore in vain? Of course not, since it is altogether too easy to fail in transmitting to future generations the "unbelievable" truth of the past—in this instance, the genuine import of Christ's Baptism. Ironically then, as suggested above, literary transgression of the historical genre through fictive devices may actually be necessary here (as elsewhere) in order to render due justice to the history in question, that is, "to realize our debt to the past." As Richard Kearney comments, in regard to Ricoeur's reflections on the matter: "[Narrative has] the responsibility to refigure certain events of deep ethical intensity that conventional historiography might be tempted to overlook in favour of a so-called objective explanation of things. . . . The refigurative act of standing for the past provides us with a 'figure' to experience and think about, to both feel and reflect upon."[103]

If we compare the brevity of the Markan account of the Baptism of the Lord, taken here as the equivalent of the "objective explanation of things," with the rhetoric of the *GBW*, we find the liturgy attempting to fulfill a debt, striving to communicate to all generations the depths of the mystery—hidden beneath the waters, as it were—of an event that the Gospel treats in a rather straightforward way. Thus the *GBW* can aspire, on the one hand, to be equal to the event it treats: "We acknowledge your grace, we proclaim your mercy, we do not conceal your benevolence"; and yet, on the other hand, the rite admits its utter failure to do so: "No tongue is adequate to sing the praises of your wonders." This paradoxical confession flows from a sense of the event as a limit-experience. Ricoeur's approach to the Holocaust appears applicable also, mutatis mutandis, to our concern here. As van den Hengel summarizes:

> Limit-events and limit-experiences force us toward the outer edges of, or even beyond, language. It is no wonder, therefore, that, as a limit-event, the Shoah [viz. the baptism of Christ] tests the capacity of representation. What the figurative forms must achieve is what representation cannot achieve: to make a singular claim of truth. No realist novel, no naturalist history is up to it. It requires the idea of the exemplarity of the singular. . . . What is at work here, according to Ricoeur, is a moral singularity of an absolutely incomparable event.[104]

When van den Hengel speaks of us being forced beyond language, one thinks of the way in which the *GBW* by its very nature directs the participants forward, by its exhortation to refigure their lives through the manifold use of the blessed water; the only way to honor the past is by the effort to put one's testimony into practice.

Yet one may ask: Is the simulacrum enthroned by such representation not a kind of usurper? After all, we must remember Kearney's caveat: "The deployment of novelistic techniques by historians to place some past event or personage vividly before the reader's mind . . . [serves as] a way of making things visible as if they were present. The danger is, of course, that the figural 'as if' might collapse into a literal belief, so that we would no longer merely 'see as' but make the mistake of believing we are actually seeing."[105] Indeed, this is the crux of the matter. For it must be admitted that liturgy in this respect increases the transgression. The "hallucination of presence" is the very spell the rite endeavors to cast.[106] By its pneumatic invocations (e.g., "Therefore, O King, lover of mankind, be present now too through the visitation of your Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water"), it seeks to push the imagination to its limit—over the cliff, we might say. Whereas Kearney posits narrative's "double responsibility: to the past as *present*, and to the past as *past*,"[107] the realized eschatology of the liturgy begs the question of whether this is the proverbial "distinction without a difference."

The Transfiguration of Time and Space

Consider in this connection the effacement of temporal distance perpetuated by the use of "today," ubiquitous in Byzantine liturgical texts and recurring no less than twenty-two times in the received form of the *GBW*. By this adverb an event of the past is announced as present to the assembly in and through its own celebration. The Baptism of Christ—an episode in the personal history of one transcending the limits of time and space—is selected for anamnesis; in and through the ritual calling to mind, the worshippers are (through the efficacy of the Holy Spirit) purportedly made contemporaries of that which they "remember." This mnemonic operation, epitomized in the diaconal address commencing the Byzantine Eucharist (referred to above: "It is time for the Lord to act"), implies the possibility of an authentic encounter in the present with those things historically accomplished by Christ.[108] Hence Taft contends, "Liturgical feasts,

therefore, have the same purpose as the Gospel: to present this new reality [i.e., the life in Christ] in '*anamnesis*,' memorial, as a continual sign to us not of a past history, but of the present reality of our lives in him. As St. Paul says in 2 Cor 6:2: 'Behold *now* is the acceptable time; behold *now is* the day of salvation.'"[109]

We can elucidate Taft's contention by noting how liturgical feasts revolve around a certain inversion of both the idiom of testimony and the operations by which it is schematized (as discussed in Chapter 7). For the testimony given in such celebrations, exemplified in their festal hymnography, exhibits peculiar deictics: the use of the first-person plural (together with the present tense of the verb) and an emphasis on "here" versus "there"—or rather, a rhetorical assimilation of "there" to "here" (and "then" to "now"). Thus the following can be sung: "In the preceding feast we saw Thee as a child, while in the present we behold Thee full-grown. . . . For today the time of the feast is at hand for us: the choir of saints assembles with us and angels join with men in keeping festival. . . . Today the waters of the Jordan are transformed into healing by the coming of the Lord."[110] Actually, as observed above in our treatment of the *GBW*'s naming of God, the verb tenses of Byzantine hymnography typically oscillate between past and present, promoting a contraction of the temporal distance between the liturgical "testimony" and the referent it indicates.

The schematization of place also plays a critical role in the revivification of an "I was there." We can chart in the *GBW* a centrifugal dynamic by which "geometrical space" becomes "lived" by being ritually inhabited. The procession from the church to a given body of water spatializes the festal narrative of Christ going forth to Baptism; the blessing of the water renders it a physical metaphor for the Jordan River, whose currents proceed to "flow" into the homes of the faithful. By being employed for blessing in the domestic milieu, the Theophany water functions both to further integrate lived space into the sacral topography, spreading outward from the body of water blessed, and to incorporate lived time into the narrative of salvation. Finally, the place where the rite occurs, converted through the blessing into an object (namely, "holy water") acquires ontological "density" to the extent that this object is sprinkled or drunk as sacramental, experienced as mediating prayer for the welfare of oneself and others.

One sees in the dynamics of the *GBW*, therefore, an utter reversal of Ricoeur's "transition from living memory to the 'extrinsic' positing of historical knowledge," as it ordinarily obtains in the historiographical move-

ment from testimony to document.[111] The liturgy is ordered rather to what we might call (to coin a neologism) an "abscription"—a movement *away* from writing—of the witness conserved in the liturgical archives. What is remarkable, though perhaps no more so than other instances in Christian heortology, is the way in which such a rich and complex web of liturgical practice and religious devotion can hang upon such a thin Scriptural thread—namely, the laconic account of the Baptism of the Lord in the Gospels. Or to change the metaphor: The *GBW* rests not on terra firma, but floats upon a trust in the veracity of the evangelists' testimony. To paraphrase 1 Cor. 15:17: "And if Christ has not been baptized, your faith is futile."