

# **Baptism, Eucharist, and the earliest Jesus-groups – from the perspective of alternate states of consciousness**

**A dissertation by  
Jonanda Groenewald**

# **Baptism, Eucharist, and the earliest Jesus-groups – from the perspective of alternate states of consciousness**

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**Jonanda Groenewald**

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**Supervisor: Prof Dr A G van Aarde**

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**(17 August 1948 – 19 October 2005),**

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The earliest evidence<sup>1</sup> that we possess indicates that from the very beginning baptism and the Eucharist played an important role in the lives of the first followers of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> In one way or another, many Christians in an Eurocentric world today still participate in these rites, but it is a moot point whether Westerners religiously experience these two sacraments of the contemporary institutionalized church in a similarly meaningful way as two thousand years ago.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the earliest followers of Jesus experienced baptism and the Eucharist. What was their reason for participating in these rites? What kind of value did these rites add to their lives? What was the meaning attached to them? In the end this approach might assist us to gain a deeper understanding of these two “early Christian” rites, which in turn could help us to comprehend what kind of value baptism and the Eucharist could add to our lives today. I am of the opinion that this investigation could be especially fruitful, because institutionalized churches today are entering a phase of deinstitutionalization,<sup>3</sup> and these rites came into being before formative Christianity became an institution. Where some postmodern believers might want to disperse of everything that reminds them of the *institutionalized* church (cf Schutte 2004), this study could assist them to realize once again what the value of baptism and the Eucharist could be, without the tag of “formalism” being attached to these rites.

In the first-century Mediterranean world religion did not function as an isolated phenomenon in culture. The social world and the symbolic universe as a “sacred canopy” mutually influenced each other (see Berger 1967:3-51). In this holistic symbolic and social world baptism and the Eucharist were symbolic events which gave meaning to people. Baptism and the Eucharist can be described as rites.

Rites consist of rituals and ceremonies. The earliest followers of Jesus separated themselves from their “parent body”, the House of Israel, to find their own identity (see Collins 1989:38-39). To symbolize their entrance into their new group, a legitimate crossing of a boundary, baptism served as the ritual of initiation and transformation of status in the context of the earliest Jesus-groups (cf Turner 1987:380-383, 386). Members of this “new” community practiced a new lifestyle. This was symbolized by their participation in the Eucharist, which can be termed an all-inclusive ceremony of integration (Theißen 1999:121). These two rites represented a value system which has its historical foundation in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus crossed taboo boundaries and advocated open meals (Crossan 1998:444; Theißen 1999:132-138).

We also know that the earliest followers of Jesus were part of a cultural world that was characterized by two major institutions, namely the Roman Empire and the House of Israel (cf e.g., Sanders 1980; Sanders, Baumgarten & Mendelson 1981; Meyer & Sanders 1982; Elliott 1995:81, 84; Meier 1997:253; Smith 2003:8). Baptism and the Eucharist were syncretistic rites, because among the followers of Jesus they were influenced by elements of the Greco-Roman mystery religions (cf e.g., Reitzenstein 1978; Meyer 1987) as well as embedded in the context of the Israelite temple tradition (cf e.g., Elliott 1995; Theißen 1999). The mystery religions entailed ritual participation in deity and had two characteristics, initiation and participation, that are clearly reflected in the earliest Jesus-followers’ experiences of baptism and the Eucharist. In the context of the Israelite tradition, baptism among Jesus-groups was influenced by “proselyte baptism”, which implied a crossing over from one terrain to another. The Eucharist, on the other hand, was influenced by the Passover, a meal that celebrated redemption from foreign bondage.

Extensive research has already been carried out on the origins of baptism and the Eucharist. However, it has not indicated whether this ritual of initiation and ceremony of participation could be newly explained if one takes the

contemporary knowledge of alternate states of consciousness<sup>4</sup> into consideration. Alternate states of consciousness can be described as qualitative and quantitative alterations in the overall pattern of mental functioning relative to some state of consciousness chosen as a baseline, in order that a person will experience his or her consciousness as different (often radically so) from the way it functions in the baseline state (Erickson & Rossi 1981:242, 248; Tart 2000:257; Pilch 2004:2). Erika Bourguignon (1979:236) defines alternate states of consciousness as “conditions in which sensations, perceptions, cognition and emotions are altered. They are characterized by changes in sensing, perceiving, thinking and feeling. They modify the relation of the individual to self, body, sense of identity, and the environment of time, space or other people” (cf Ludwig 1966:225; 1972:11; Krippner 1972:1).

Another important factor that one should keep in mind is that whatever is experienced as the baseline state of consciousness in any given cultural setting is a construct and not a given – in other words, it is the product of a variety of factors. Our levels of consciousness change constantly throughout the day. Cultural forces select and prescribe from the broad spectrum of human potentialities those elements which are to be described as “normal/ordinary” (Craffert 2002:66; Tart [1980] 1982:245). Craffert (2002:67) explains: “Depending on which states of consciousness are taken as baseline, all other states will turn out to be alternative. Thus, what is *altered* from one point of view (cultural system) is *ordinary* from another.” Culture also provides the content of experiences of consciousness, because they are grounded in a cultural environment (Craffert 2002:67; see Lewis 1989:5).

This anthropological phenomenon termed alternate states of consciousness has recently been applied to biblical studies, pioneered<sup>5</sup> by John J Pilch (1981-2004). However, research into alternate states of consciousness creates a theoretical problem because, even though these states can be experienced simultaneously by more than one person in a group, experiences of alternate states of

consciousness represent individual, mental, psychological states (cf Richeport 1984). Each experience is unique and in the first instance a personal experience (Lewis 1989:5). In other words, without empirical evidence of what an individual has really experienced during an alternate state of consciousness, research is jeopardized, because of the impossibility of ascertaining the religious meaning and value attributed to a specific alternate state of consciousness experience. Yet, we do have texts as well as archeological and paleontological findings which show that there is a correlation between alternate states of consciousness and a participation in the “dying and rising” of deities, symbolized by “blood” ceremonies such as enactments of sacrificial atonement.

In the light of social-scientifically oriented studies, we know on account of cross-cultural anthropological investigations that only ten percent of people all over the world today do not experience common alternate states of consciousness, while the rest of humanity do (Bourguignon 1974:229-232). Pilch (2002c:33-34) puts this as follows:

Das kulturell plausible Szenario der mediterranen Welt zum Verständnis der Visionen in den synoptischen Evangelien und an anderen Stellen der Bibel ist eine panhumane Erfahrung, die als veränderter Bewusstseinszustand (*altered state of consciousness*, abgekürzt: ASC) bekannt ist. Neunzig Prozent der heutigen Bevölkerung auf diesem Planeten haben normalerweise und natürlicherweise solche Erfahrungen. Auf der Basis von ethnographischen Belegen...schätzen Sozialwissenschaftler, dass 80% der Menschen in den mediterranen Gesellschaften schon solche Erfahrungen hatten....Sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen erhärten die Universalität des veränderten Bewusstseinszustandes als Ursprung für religiöse Erfahrung und als Grundlage für die Manifestation manchen religiösen Verhaltens....

Research, therefore, demonstrates that the premodern mythical world of the biblical period stands in continuity with this finding – people who lived in the first-century Mediterranean world experienced alternate states of consciousness as

an ordinary part of life (see Bourguignon 1974:232; Bourguignon 1979:236; Pilch 1996a:133). Only in the Eurocentric world have we – the ten percent exception to the rule – started to interpret baptism and the Eucharist as cognitive dogmatic constructs (cf Kleinman 1988:50-51). We have, thus, lost sight of the syncretistic nature exhibited by the earliest baptism and Eucharist.

In our contemporary context we can perform empirical research into the experience of individuals. But it is not possible to determine what individuals experienced two thousand years ago when the earliest followers of Jesus developed their baptismal and Eucharistic rites. We also do not possess empirical evidence indicating whether they even understood their initiation and participation in a group as expressions of alternate states of consciousness.

My hypothesis<sup>6</sup> is that the initiation and participation, ritually expressed by the two “sacraments”, can be “better” explained<sup>7</sup> against the background of alternate states of consciousness. However, a model is necessary to verify or falsify the legitimacy of this hypothesis (see Van Staden 1991:152-183). The model I wish to employ is that of “anti-language”, the language that is used by an anti-society, which in turn can be described as a conscious alternative to another society (Halliday 1976:570-584; [1978] 1986:164-182). The earliest Jesus-followers formed an anti-society, into which they were initiated by means of baptism and in which they participated by means of the Eucharist.

The method I shall follow is firstly to offer a comprehensive analysis and provide an explanation of the phenomenon of alternate states of consciousness. Then I shall enquire whether alternate states of consciousness are expressed by means of language patterns that are characteristic of rituals and ceremonies when they are collectively experienced by individuals in a group.

In using baptism and the Eucharist as case studies, my point of entry is that of current research that indicates that baptism and the Eucharist can be seen as

symbolic rites. As with other symbols, the earliest<sup>8</sup> baptism and Eucharist carried *meaning* because they were performed for a *reason* and they added *value* to people's lives (cf Beattie [1964] 1968:69-70).

Subsequently, my purpose is to indicate that the earliest baptism and Eucharist as a ritual initiation and ceremonial participation – seen from a sociological perspective as expressions of the religious experience of an individual in a collective group – legitimized the crossing of boundaries in a symbolic manner. This process led to a new identity with new rights and responsibilities (cf Van Staden 1991:194-195). Especially “new” for followers of Jesus within this new value system were the crossing of taboo boundaries and the transformation of existing insider-outsider relationships (cf Esler 2003:26; see Theißen 1999:63-64, 287; Malina 2002:609). In other words, this ritual crossing of social boundaries is, sociologically viewed, a phenomenon that leads to an anti-society. This was the case because of the experience of alternate states of consciousness. An individual's experience of an alternate state of consciousness is a momentous event, but perceived collectively, was verbalized in anti-language by the earliest Jesus-followers – an experience that was repeated ceremoniously. The Eucharist as the institutionalizing of a ceremony of open table fellowship symbolized an alternative lifestyle within “baseline consciousness”. It bore meaning for one's social life in the here and now experiences of the earliest Jesus-groups.

I intend to argue that the ritual initiation and ceremonial participation of the earliest Jesus-followers were the result of alternate states of consciousness as expressed in anti-language. I aim at redirecting extant research concerning the origins of the “Christian” baptism and the Eucharist by means of a multidisciplinary methodological approach. The importance and relevance of this research are found in the enhancement of social inclusivity as an ideal in the present day.



## 1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study encompass:

- indicating what anti-language is;
- explaining what alternate states of consciousness are;
- approaching religion as a cultural symbol system;
- arguing from a cultural anthropological methodological perspective that the earliest baptism should be seen as a cultural ritual symbol and the earliest Eucharist as a cultural ceremonial symbol;
- establishing the historical foundation, the value system and existential meaning (see Beattie 1968:69-70) of baptism and the Eucharist in the earliest post-Easter Jesus-groups;
- showing that alternate states of consciousness were verbalized in anti-language and re-enacted in the rites of the earliest Jesus-followers;
- enhancing social inclusivity as an ecclesiastical ideal (Van Aarde 2004b:716, 723; Hancock 2005:265-275);
- redirecting extant research concerning the origins of the “Christian” baptism and the Eucharist from dogmatism to ethnography by means of a multidisciplinary methodological approach.

## 1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the last twenty years a wide variety of new and interdisciplinary research methods have been introduced in biblical studies (Horrell 1999b:3). Craffert (2002:53) indicates the importance of interdisciplinary study in pointing out that “different perspectives not only enrich each other, but often challenge conclusions reached in any individual field of research.” The social sciences in particular are useful for interpreting the New Testament. The intention of social-scientific interpretation, together with the use of cross-cultural models, is to enable a “fuller” and “better” appreciation of biblical texts and communities within their historical, social, and cultural settings. This method of research complements the conventional exegetical operations such as text criticism, literary criticism, historical criticism, source criticism, form criticism, tradition

criticism, and redaction criticism, and is not an alternative to them (cf Elliott [1993] 1999:341). Elliott (1999:340) defines contemporary social-scientific criticism of the Bible as a specific phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the cultural and social dimensions of a text by making use of the social sciences. He remarks that as a component of the historical-critical method of exegesis, social-scientific criticism investigates biblical texts as meaningful configurations of language displaying the intention to communicate (cf Pilch 1995c:63; Horrell 1999b:3-4).<sup>9</sup>

The nature of the present study requires interdisciplinary research. Biblical studies, social sciences, historical studies, anthropology, psychology and neurology are some of the disciplines that could help to illuminate the issues to be addressed<sup>10</sup> (cf Davies 1995:204; Pilch 1995c:50; Rollins 1999:v-vi; Winkelmann 2000:1; Craffert 2002:53-54; Pilch 2002a:104-105; Pilch 2002d:690-692). One important factor in this regard is that one should remember that some of these disciplines are embedded in Western culture and cannot be applied directly to the situation of the first-century Mediterranean world<sup>11</sup> (Pilch 1997b:112; 2002a:104-105; Berger 2003:1).

An example of a cross-disciplinary method for studying the Bible and its world is the use of social-scientific models. Elliott (1986:5-6) observes:

In the social sciences models are used to analyze and interpret the properties of social behavior, social structures and social processes. From observation and then generalization about the regularities perceived in human behavior, concepts and theories are formed to account for such regularities and patterns of interrelated properties. All human beings, on the basis of their personal experience and diverse sources of knowledge, have certain perceptions of, and general theories concerning, the nature, structure and meaning of social reality. The purpose of models in the social sciences is to explicitly express these theories and test their validity.

Elliott (1986:6; see Horrell 1999b:7) indicates that although this procedure may be commonplace in other sciences, for a long time theology and exegesis have often failed to follow suit.

Although there are many different definitions of what a “model” is, Elliott (1986:3-9) states that models can be described as “cognitive maps”, employed consciously or unconsciously to categorize, compare, generalize and synthesize the amount of data we have selectively admitted through our cognitive filter. He adds that models are the media by which we establish the meaning of what we allow ourselves to see. According to Esler (1994:12-13), one of the benefits of using models is that they bring the interpreter’s values and perspectives out in the open. He also comments that this allows the interpreter to judge whether such values and perspectives are appropriate to the data. He describes a model as a heuristic tool, allowing comparisons to be made with the texts for the purpose of posing new questions to them – the text, not the model, supplies the answers. Therefore, he contends, it is inappropriate to debate whether a model is true or false, valid or invalid – the only thing that matters is whether the model is useful.

The implication of using a social-scientific model is that the present study is not deductive in nature, since employing a model implies an inductive method of research. However, there is the possibility that an inductive study could be positivistic in nature (see Van der Merwe 1996:278-282; Kritzinger 2001:15-316). If it should turn out to be positivistic, my model will determine my investigation. Instead, I should like to describe my method of research as abductive. This means that I shall remain open to the possibility that my hypothesis could be falsified<sup>12</sup> (cf McGrath 2001:231-237). The nineteenth century scholar, Charles S Peirce (1932:53-54), discovered a way to avoid the empirical one-sidedness of both the deductive and inductive approaches in positivistic epistemology. His non-positivistic approach is known as abduction (cf Fann 1970:5-10; Reilly

1970:30-38; Ochs 1998:114-115; Brawley 2003:605-608). Brawley (2003:608) describes abduction as follows:

Challenging constructs of reality through the imaginative association elements heretofore unrelated is tropological. Abduction functions like a fresh metaphor, which also associates something novel with something conventional in order to transform conventional perspectives. Thus, abductive argument begins with shock, a challenge, disorientation. The shock breaks the frames of conventional thinking and confronts readers with a new way to construe reality.

For constructing typical situations from the past, Van Aarde (2001a:29-30) recommends the “historiographical” theory of the German sociologist Max Weber. In this manner a researcher can avoid being too positivistic about the possibility of “naïve-realistically” (see Van Huyssteen 1987:20) reconstructing the past. Hengel (1991:34) rightly avers that historical reality is always more complex than that which meets our eyes. I shall thus use a model in the sense that Weber (1949:90) describes the use of an “ideal-type”. This means that I am not attempting to devise a record of concrete historical situations based on empirical data. According to Weber (1949:89-112), an “ideal-type” (in this case “model”) is a theoretical construct into which possible occurrences are brought into a meaningful relationship with one another, so that a coherent image may be formed by using data from the past. In other words, as a theoretical construct, a model is a conceptualization that will not necessarily correspond with empirical data. As a construct displaying a coherent image, the model does not influence the conditions of investigations into what could have happened historically, in that the purpose of establishing such a model is to account for the interrelationships between discrete historical events in an intelligible manner. Such a coherent construct is not formed by or based upon a selection from what is regarded as universally valid – in other words, that which is common to all relevant cases of similar concrete situations of what could in reality have happened (cf Van Aarde 2001a:46). It is therefore not a logical-positivistic choice based on either inductive

or deductive reasoning. Weber (1949:92; emphasis by Weber) explains this point as follows:

The construction of ideal-types recommends itself not as an end but as a *means*. Every conscientious examination of the conceptual elements of historical exposition shows however that the historian as soon as he attempts to go beyond the bare establishment of concrete relationships and to determine the *cultural* significance of even the simplest individual event in order to “characterize” it, *must* use concepts which are precisely and unambiguously definable only in the form of ideal types.

## 1.4 FRAME OF REFERENCE

### 1.4.1 Introduction

A certain amount of background information is important to support the reader’s comprehension of the hypothesis discussed in this study. The intention is not to provide a comprehensive description of each of the following themes, but only to highlight some factors of the frame of reference in this study.

### 1.4.2 Our world

I regard myself as a postmodern person who lives in an Eurocentric world, although on African soil. I consider that it is important to mention this, because the time frame in which a person lives influences everything that one does, thinks and says (cf. [Du Toit 2000:13-14](#)). Scholars generally divide the history of humankind into three periods, namely the premodern, modern, and postmodern paradigms<sup>13</sup> (cf. [Kuhn \[1962\] 1966](#); [Küng 1988](#); Van Aarde 1995a:20-24; [Du Toit 2000:13-61](#)).

The premodern paradigm can also be termed the pre-scientific era. During this period people evinced a pre-scientific mythical understanding of the world. The modern – or scientific – era started in [1514](#) with Copernicus’ discovery that the sun and not the earth constituted the centre of the planetary orbits (Allen

1985:158-162; cf Van Aarde 1990:295; Malina 1995b:3). After two world wars, the previous optimism regarding humankind as well as technological progress began to decline. This gave rise to the postmodern paradigm in which we find ourselves today.<sup>14</sup> The postmodern paradigm represents a period during which some people argue that there is no such thing as pure, objective knowledge (cf Burridge & Gould 2004:199).<sup>15</sup>

A postmodern frame of reference is important for the research I plan to do in this study. Where only “instrumental rationality” was regarded as important in modern times in the Western world, every aspect of humanity, including the spiritual and aesthetic, has once again become relevant today ([Du Toit 2000:56](#); see [Küng 1988](#):197-200; [Van Aarde 1990:297-301](#)). It is exactly this spiritual dimension of humanity that is important for this study, since it played a major role in the way people understood themselves in the first-century Mediterranean world. Without giving attention to the spiritual dimension as such, we shall not be able to understand the behavior of people who lived in biblical times, and in the end this can also limit our perception of ourselves as Christians today.

#### **1.4.3 The first-century Mediterranean world**

When we as Westerners read the Bible today, we encounter quite a few descriptions of events that do not constitute a taken-for-granted part of our lives. One example is the seemingly easy way in which first-century Mediterranean people experienced contact with the spirit world. In general, Westerners regard reports like these as unscientific and uncritical (cf Borg [1987] 1993:26-34). Crossan (2003:30-31) rightly asks:

How do we get post-Enlightenment ears and eyes, hearts, minds and imaginations back into a pre-Enlightenment time and place? How do we return to a world where, since the miraculous was culturally a permanent possibility, its assertion needed not just evidence but, more importantly, relevance?

In a pre-Enlightenment world it was generally accepted that “events” such as virginal conceptions, divine births, miraculous powers, resurrections and ascensions could and did happen. These were neither unique, nor impossible. While the question today is whether it is really possible that situations like these could occur, in antiquity the debate would have been whether such things had happened to this or that individual. In contrast to today, the non-believer would not raise the impossibility option; neither would the believer raise the uniqueness option (Crossan 2003:31).

Since Westerners today practice a totally different worldview, speak different languages and have different cultures than the people who lived in the first-century Mediterranean world, it is necessary to understand the worldview of such people before we shall be able to understand anything regarding their way of life (see Malina 1986:1-12; Pilch 1995c:49, 58; 2000c:3-12; 2002a:103-104).<sup>16</sup> Other cultures or times cannot be fully comprehended from the perspective of one's own world. This will lead to ethnocentrism and anachronism<sup>17</sup> (see Malina 1991:3-8; 1993a:9-11; Pilch 1995c:50; 2000c:3-12).

Beattie (1968:14-15) assents that a proper way in which we can understand people of other cultures, is to understand them within the context of their own cultures. He remarks that we do injustice to the subtle, allusive and evocative power of language if we require all meaningful verbal expression to conform to the rules of syllogism and inductive inference. He argues that “[c]oherent thinking can be symbolic as well as scientific, and if we are sensible we do not subject the language of poetry to the same kind of examination that we apply to a scientific hypothesis” (Beattie 1968:69). Because of this, Beattie (1968:69) regards the work of social anthropologists as important. When they study other cultures they are interested in symbols and symbolic thinking. In this regard, Beattie (1968:69) points out: “The study of these is difficult, partly because in Western culture very much less importance is attached to this kind of thinking than to logical,

‘scientific’ thought.” Although we do not always realize it, even the thinking of “enlightened” Westerners is filled with symbolism, often implicit and unanalyzed.

Esler (1994:2-5) concurs, considering that the New Testament writings manifest a complex interpretation of society and gospel, of context and *kerygma*, and that we cannot hope to understand either without an appropriate methodology for dealing with the social aspect. As indicated earlier, in addition to the literary and historical techniques which have long been employed by New Testament critics, it is thus necessary to make use of the social sciences, for example sociology, anthropology and social psychology, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content of the New Testament. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:2; emphasis by Malina & Rohrbaugh) also comment on this point:

We must...recognize, as indeed recent social-scientific studies of the New Testament have begun to do, that the distance between ourselves and the Bible is as much *social* as it is temporal and conceptual. Such social distance includes radical differences in social structures, social roles, values, and general cultural features. It involves being socialized into a different understanding of the self, of others, of nature and time and space, and perhaps even of God. In fact, it may be that such social distance is the most fundamental distance of all.

Berger (1967) developed a model to explain how phenomena in the empirical social world are impacted on by a “sacred canopy” that constitutes the “symbolical world” (Van Aarde 2005b:683-708). The importance of Berger’s model is that it demonstrates that New Testament documents were written for particular early Jesus-groups who lived in communities with specific social worlds (see Segal 1989:123-125; Esler 1994:6). The various theologies presented in these social worlds can be interpreted as the “symbolic provinces of meaning” that were attributed to them by the authors of the various texts, or by transmitters of the traditions before them. They have meaning because they legitimize the early gatherings of “Christians” (not even bearing that name yet). This is a



process that pertains to socialization, legitimization and normalization. Seen from this perspective, “socialization” within the context of a religious community such as an early Jesus-group comes down to “theologization”. New Testament theologies became sacred canopies for the social worlds of Jesus-followers who tried to discover a place and identity while they experienced opposition from outsiders and dissension from insiders (Esler 1994:7-12). At the social level, the texts of the New Testament may be interpreted as vehicles for the construction of institutional and symbolic worlds within which the communities for which they were written found meaning in a hostile world. Everything the earliest Jesus-followers experienced occurred within communities, where there were strong links between social reality and theological affirmation (Esler 1994:18).

Craffert (1999a:12) comments that worldviews are cultural matrixes which provide an understanding of what is real, possible, plausible and desirable in a specific setting. He points out that worldviews provide the mental maps by means of which people experience reality and live their lives. The worldview of the people who lived in the first-century Mediterranean world can be characterized as follows (Craffert 1999a:12-14):

- *A first-century view of the universe:* Most people in the first-century world believed in a three-storied universe in which a flat earth is vaulted by a dome (heaven) where the sun, moon, stars and gods can be found. Underneath the earth was an area called the underworld<sup>18</sup> (cf Malina 1995b:3). They believed that heaven could be reached by climbing a high mountain or tower. Sky and land constituted a single environmental unit. The inhabitants of the sky influenced what happened on land.
- *The inhabitants of the first-century universe:* The whole universe was populated by gods, demons, spirits of the dead and angels. Most of these agents could influence human affairs in some way (cf Malina et al 1996:14). They were responsible for the well-being and misfortune of

human beings. Sickness and negative weather patterns were caused by them. Most of these beings could be manipulated, bribed, persuaded or controlled; and people who could intervene and/or mediate were in great demand (cf Berger 2003:27-28). Access to stronger and more effective power was what was needed in this regard.

- *The dynamics of a first-century worldview:* The most important principle operative in the first-century world can be described as the “great chain of being”. Everything was linked to everything else, both above and below. Nothing happened by chance – it happened because some power was involved or responsible.<sup>19</sup> Not only the extraterrestrial beings (divine agents) but most substances (such as minerals) could influence the elements or agents higher in the chain. The essential element was access to power which could control this chain. Power was an important feature of this world: without a proper balance of power, the universe would lose its distinctive character; and without access to power or proper protection against malignant forces, a person was vulnerable. People with power were thus in great demand. Not only human beings but also agents (gods, demons and angels) and “natural” elements (such as crops and the weather) could be affected. In the chain of demand a variety of things played an important role, namely words, natural elements (lead, copper, wood), substances (spittle, goat milk, blood), actions (rituals), and agents (magicians or holy people).

Life made heavy demands on human beings in the first-century world. It was only the strong and fortunate who survived and lived a long and rewarding life. This makes it understandable that people who could intervene in the chain of events were in demand (Craffert 1999a:14). In contrast to this, people who are socialized in the modern world possess the unconscious worldview that reality is constituted by matter and energy interacting to form the visible world, which is regarded as the only world (Borg 1993:27, 32-33). Within the modern framework,

experiences of another reality mark a person as clinically psychotic. But the reality of the other world deserves to be taken seriously. The primary intellectual objection to it flows from a rigid application of the modern worldview's definition of reality. Borg (1993:34) observes:

Yet the modern view is but one of a large number of humanly constructed maps of reality. It is historically the most recent and impressive because of the degree of control it has given us; but it is no more an absolute map of reality than any of the previous maps. All are relative, products of particular histories and cultures; and the modern one, like its predecessors, will be superceded.

It is not only their worldview, but also the way in which the first-century Mediterranean people lived their daily lives, that differs considerably from those of the Western world today. In the remainder of this section, I shall offer a short description of some aspects which constituted first-century Mediterranean day to day living, in order to indicate why we do not always readily understand what they said, did and experienced. If this background information is taken into account, one may understand why they, in contrast to us, experienced alternate states of consciousness as a common phenomenon.

The culture of first-century Mediterranean people could be described as "high-context". They produced sketchy and impressionistic texts and left much to the reader's or hearer's imagination, which means that in their literature far more was left unsaid than in a contemporary Eurocentric context. In contrast to this, Western society is "low context". Low-context societies produce detailed texts, spell out as much as possible and leave little to the imagination (Malina 1991:19-20; cf Kehoe 2000:78, 92; see Pilch 1995c:50).

Another difference between people who live in an Eurocentric world today and those in the first-century Mediterranean world, is that the societies of the New Testament period consisted of only two clearly differentiated social institutions,

namely politics and kinship (see Malina 1986:139-140). All other aspects of life, including religion, were imbedded within these two institutions, whereas in contemporary Western society all the different aspects of life are neatly categorized and treated separately.

First-century Mediterranean people, like Middle Easterners today,<sup>20</sup> also exhibit collectivistic (group-centered, socio-centric, or dyadic) personalities.

Contemporary Western society on the other hand regards individualism as being of great importance (cf Malina, Joubert & Van der Watt 1996:12; Berger 2003:28-29). Individualism in general describes the preference for individual autonomy; it, therefore, creates a very loosely knit social network. In contrast, collectivism denotes a preference for embeddedness in a tightly knit social network.

Collectivistic individuals are socialized to be deeply, emotionally integrated into groups, like the extended family, clan, or in-group, which will protect them and care for them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (see Malina 1994:109-113).

Malina (1993b:172) states that groups are marked off from each other by imaginary lines, so to speak. The people within the lines form the in-group.

People in an in-group were required to support the other members of their group at all times, even at their own expense, while they had to treat out-group members with indifference<sup>21</sup> (cf Saldarini 1991:45-46; see Sumner 1959:12-13).

Describing social groups, Mary Douglas ([1973] 1996:54-68) distinguishes between the concepts of the group and the grid. She describes the “group” as the experience of a bounded social unit, and the “grid” as comprising rules that relate one person to others on an ego-centered basis. On account of this distinction, Malina (1986:38) terms the first-century Mediterranean world a strong group/low grid society. He remarks that in societies of this kind, initiation rituals which introduce people into the group are of major interest and concern (e.g., circumcision for Israelites, baptism for Christians, initiation procedures at Qumran, etc). There is a steadfast concern to ferret out persons who do not belong within the boundaries (cf Weber 1968:58), with rituals for expelling them

beyond group lines (e.g., expulsion, shunning, excommunication, etc) (Malina 1986:38; cf Pilch 1981:108-109; Douglas 1996:8, 13). In a strong group/low grid society, the kin group (family) plays an important role. People who belonged to groups such as the earliest Jesus-movement were like “brothers” and “sisters”, with God as Father, forming fictive kinship groups (cf Malina 1986:39, 159; Elliott 1991:390; Theißen & Merz 1996:206; Esler 2003:20-26; see Malina 1993b:47-101; Malina et al 1996:12-57).

Key values in the first century Mediterranean world were honor and shame. Malina (1993b:171) describes these as follows: “Honor refers to an individual or collective claim to worth along with the social acknowledgement of that worth. To have shame is to be concerned about one’s honor; to be shamed is to lose honor” (see Malina et al 1996:8-9). In the Eurocentric world of today materialism fulfills these roles.

The socio-economic aspect of the first-century Mediterranean world can be perceived as an example of what anthropologists call a classic peasant society, since it was composed predominantly of agricultural or fishing villages, socially tied to preindustrial cities. There were only two social classes, the workers and the elite, whose relationship was that of patron-client. The elite comprised only a very small group, while the “clients” viewed their existence as determined and limited, by the natural as well as the social resources available to them. This led to the perception that all the goods available to a person were limited. One’s social position could thus only be improved at the expense of others (Malina 1993a:90-96; see Van Aarde 1994b:96-99). Less than ten percent of the population could read and write, and wealth was restricted to a small group of elite in the cities. Poor hygienic conditions, inadequate medical services, and excessive crime rates led to a high death rate.

People in the first-century Mediterranean world understood time in a different manner from the way in which we do today. It is anachronistic and ethnocentric

to interpret the concept of time that people used in a pre-industrial, advanced agrarian Mediterranean society from a contemporary Eurocentric perspective. We could term our Western concept of time “clock time”. It is linear and divisible, consisting of past, present and future, where one thing is done at a time and progression can occur (Hall 1976:14-18; see Sheehan 1986:66). In contrast with this, Mediterranean people exhibited a concept of “social time”. Lauer (1981:21) explains this term as follows: “...by social time, I refer to the patterns and orientations that relate to social processes and to the conceptualization of the ordering of social life.” Social time was grounded in social relations and was influenced by history, feelings, beliefs and values, that is by issues that were more important to first-century people than scheduled time (see [Hall 1976:14](#); Lauer 1981:21-46; [Malina 1996:197-198](#)).

Social time comprised two dimensions, namely “cyclical time” and “procedure time”. Cyclical time denotes human behavior that repeatedly takes place in the same manner, like the planting and gathering of a harvest. Procedure time is rooted in the processes of biological organisms. According to this concept time is not understood as a cycle but as a process. The procedure is important, not the time taken to complete it. Therefore, all the time that it took to finalize the procedure was perceived as the “present” (Malina 1996:199-202).

Procedure time can be further categorized as “experienced time” and “imagined time”. For us, the future holds a possible resolution for events that take place in the present, while the reality of first-century Mediterranean people only consisted of experienced time in the experienced world (Malina 1996:188). Malina (1996:188) points out: “Experienced time is the perception of duration solely within the perceived horizon of the world of actual experience.” This “present” includes the horizon of the past and the future, which means that the present can sometimes cover a very long period, depending on the process that is taking place at the moment. Imaginary time existed outside of experienced time and imaginary time included everything that did not exist in the present – it was

understood as the domain of God, in which anything was possible (Malina 1996:192).

A comprehension of the way in which first-century Mediterranean people understood time is necessary in order to understand the apocalyptic frame of mind which constituted their worldview (see Käsemann 1969:92, 102, 107). Apocalypticism is a complex phenomenon. It can be described as a kind of eschatology<sup>22</sup> (see [Crossan 1998:258](#); [Van Aarde 2000:7-8](#)). The word eschatology stems from the Greek word *eschaton*, which denotes “end”. Miller (2001:5) points out that in a general sense eschatology comprises a set of beliefs about the end of the world. In biblical studies it refers to a way of thinking that is centered on the end of “heaven” and “earth” as the creation of God. It has to do with the belief that the immanent is going to be replaced by the transcendent world of God. In a certain sense the world of God comprises a “perfect world” which is in contrast to the corrupt human world (see [Van Aarde 2000:9](#)). Miller (2001:5) elaborates:

For Jews and Christians this end is understood to be a culmination, not a cessation: the end of history is the fulfillment of God’s plan for humanity. Both Judaism and Christianity exhibit a variety of eschatologies....[but] all biblical eschatologies are united by the fundamental conviction that God will prevail in the end.

The term “apocalyptic” derives from the Greek word *apokaluyiv*, which means “revelation”. This term was deduced from the first word of the last book in the New Testament, namely the *Revelation of John* (see [Murphy 1994:147](#); [Van Aarde 1994b:79](#); [Sim 1996:23](#); [Van Henten & Mellink 1998:12-13](#)). It is difficult to define “apocalyptic”. Sim (1996:23, 26) expresses the opinion that we face a terminological problem in this regard, since this one word is used to express two different ideas. On the one hand it refers to a specific genre of Israelite and “Christian” texts which focuses on the revelation of heavenly secrets. On the other hand it describes a specific eschatological worldview. There is not

necessarily any relation between the genre “apocalyptic” and the religious perspective “apocalyptic eschatology” (cf Barr 1998:154-159; [Van Aarde 2000:6](#)).

The [Apocalypse Group of the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project](#) proposed the following definition for “apocalypse” ([Collins 1979:9](#)):

“Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.

Later this Group added the following definition of the function of apocalyse ([Collins 1986:7](#)): “...intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority” (cf Van Henten & Mellink 1998:12-12, 30; Burridge & Gould 2004:15).

With Miller (2001:6), I understand apocalypticism as “a kind of eschatology that envisions the end of history coming soon and brought about by an overpowering divine intervention. This occurrence will be evident to all people and will be preceded by cataclysmic events.”

From the period when one major world power after another reigned over Israel, the latter wondered when God would fulfill his promises of grace and prosperity. Apocalypticism gave answers to the “why?” and “where to?” questions (Van Aarde 1994b:79-80; Schwarz 2000:323). The Israelites believed that on the “day of judgment”, all their circumstances would change; that all the righteous Israelites would reign, together with Yahweh, from the new Jerusalem. This would be a righteous world, lacking hardships (Cohn 1957:1-6).



The earliest Jesus-followers made use of these ideas that had been developed by the Israelites (see Van Aarde 1994b:83-85). By about 70 CE, the Jesus-followers were becoming more and more isolated in their surroundings. On the one hand their relations with the house of Israel, symbolized by the Synagogue, had worsened (see Katz 1984:43-76), while on the other hand their relationship with the Roman Empire had also weakened, because they did not wish to participate in the Greco-Roman cultic activities (see Koester 1992:3-15; Van Aarde 2000:10). They experienced themselves as marginalized, which led to their adopting apocalyptic thinking (see Cohn 1957:7; Rist 1989:381).

Van Aarde (1998:18; cf Hanson 1979:11-12; Saldarini 1991:44-48) ascribes apocalyptic eschatology to a “sectarian mentality”, like that of the group of early Jesus-followers (see chapter 3). He shows that in a crisis, a minority group becomes marginalized, and consequently its members tend to display a dualistic orientation – they are only aware of two sides of a matter, the right and the wrong, the divine and the satanic, a world “here and now” and a world “beyond”. Their world is marked by pessimism and determinism on the one hand, and by hope on the other hand, because they regard the present dispensation as miserable and the transcendent dispensation as joyful. Their pessimism and determinism can be relativized by the conviction that the course of history can be changed by means of the prayers and martyrdom of the “righteous” (see Malina 1996:192-193). In this vein, Van Aarde (1998:18) writes:

The crisis in the cultural world of Israel and the church, which gives rise to this, revolves around the pressure that heathen powers placed on the cult and the being of the church. The crisis is magnified because the presumed relation between deed and retribution is not realized. The godless are not punished, and the righteous are not visibly the victors.

*Experienced time*, as a result of this despair and embarrassment, was projected into an *imaginary time* in which God exercises control. To Van Aarde (1998:19) “[w]hat is ‘imagined’ is expressed in symbolic language. ‘Imaginary time’ is, by

analogy with experience, expressed in ‘procedure time,’ for example in dry and rainy seasons.” An apocalyptic worldview, therefore, creates a new and meaningful symbolic universe (Sim 1996:54, 69; Van Aarde 2000:8). “Apocalyptic imagery” thus expresses these experiences of “imaginary time”, which are in turn related to “alternate states of consciousness” (Van Aarde 1998:18). Hence, a comprehension of this concept is necessary for the present study.

If one keeps the worldview of the first-century Mediterranean people in mind, it will thus be much easier to comprehend:

- why they formed a distinctive group;
- how a person could become a member of this group;
- what responsibilities members of the group had to fulfill;
- and what kind of value and meaning was added to their lives by participation in this group (cf Esler 2003:197-221).

## **1.5 IDENTIFYING A RESEARCH GAP**

### **1.5.1 Easter**

In New Testament times people placed more emphasis on the spiritual dimension of humans than Westerners usually do today (see Borg 1993:25; Davies 1995:20; Pilch 2002a:108-109; Dreyer 2004:938). Historically speaking, we can refer to Jesus as a Spirit-filled person in the charismatic stream of formative Judaism (cf Weber 1968:60; Theißen & Merz 1996:178-182, 217; Den Heyer 1997:84-88; see Holmberg 1978:136-150). Everything that Jesus taught and did ensued from his own intimate experience of the “world of Spirit” (Borg 1993:25, 42-51; cf Meier 1997:265). This can be seen in the words with which, according to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus began his public ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovering of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk 4:18-21, quoting Is 61:1-2).<sup>23</sup> The notion of “another world”, a “world

of Spirit”, understood as *actual* even though nonmaterial, is alien to our contemporary way of thinking.

As I mentioned earlier, since the beginning of the modern period, Westerners have tended to see reality as possessing only one dimension, the visible and material realm. The “world of Spirit” is not part of our taken-for-granted understanding of reality: for the most part we even feel skeptical about it. In contrast to this the notion of another reality was (and still is) the common property of many other cultures. The cultural tradition in which Jesus lived, for example, took this primordial tradition for granted. Its members believed that there are at least two worlds, and that the “other world” can be known (see Borg 1993:26-27). The world of Spirit and the world of ordinary experience are not perceived as completely separate, but as intersecting at a number of points.

This experience of God as present in his life (cf Malina 2001:136), afforded Jesus an alternative outlook on the world, which can be summarized as follows:<sup>24</sup>

- Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God<sup>25</sup> was *different* from the present age (cf Sanders 1985:123-158, Crossan [1991] 1992:227-353; Blackburn 1994:385).
- This kingdom was already *present*<sup>26</sup> (cf Den Heyer 1997:155-158; Crossan 2003:50; contra Sanders 1985:152-156).
- People could *share* in this kingdom, which was made possible through Jesus’ healings and exorcisms (Crossan 1992:xii; 332; cf Blackburn 1994:386-392; cf Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:531-532; Burridge & Gould 2004: 42; contra Sanders 1985:133-140, 148-157, 340).
- Jesus lived and promoted an *inclusive* lifestyle<sup>27</sup> (Elliott 2002:75-91; 2003:173-210; cf Crossan 1992:xii, 261-264, 361; 1994:71-74; Blackburn 1994:389-390).

Jesus’ alternative lifestyle led the earliest Jesus-followers to form an alternative society after Easter – they did not live in the same way which they had been

used to. However, Jesus did not leave behind any writings of his own. Everything that we know about Jesus is known from the way in which he was proclaimed (see Den Heyer 1997:22-23). We can distinguish between the proclaiming Jesus (the pre-Easter Jesus), the proclaimed Jesus (the post-Easter Jesus) and the proclaiming “church”<sup>28</sup> (see Den Heyer 1997:70-72). In referring to Jesus, *proclaiming* refers to Jesus himself acting and speaking, while *proclaimed* refers to the interpreted Jesus whose words and deeds are retold by others<sup>29</sup> (see Van Aarde 2001a:8-9). Van Aarde (2001a:9) queries why scholars draw this distinction between the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Jesus. According to him, the answer lies in the fact that historical-critical exegesis of the New Testament brought forth the insight that Jesus did not regard himself as the Christ. Nor was he recognized as the Christ by the people around him. But the New Testament,<sup>30</sup> the church fathers, and the drafters of the fourth-century creeds proclaimed and confessed him in these terms (cf West 2001:50, 53).

Easter, thus, played the major role in leading the followers of Jesus to understand what his mission was and to describe him in the most glorious terms known in his culture (see Den Heyer 1997:5-6). But the “seeds of the church’s proclamation lie in the experience of the historical Jesus, even if the full-grown plant needed the experience of Easter to allow it to burst forth” (Borg 1993:50; cf Davies 1995:21; Den Heyer 1997:57, 65-66, 68-69; Meier 1997:265).

To live immediately in the presence of God, as Jesus did, was something that the earliest Jesus-followers proclaimed. For them it was important to realize that the temple and sacrifices were not necessary (cf Malina 1986:39; Crossan 1992:324; Theißen 1999:139-142). They lived by grace alone. BurrIDGE and Gould (2004:107) express this in the following way: “In accepting the poor, the weak, the women, Gentiles, lepers and other people considered unimportant by the religious authorities, Jesus was accepting people back into the culture of the people of God without requiring them to go to the temple and make sacrifices.”

It is especially in the experience of individuals that the “other world” is known (Borg 1993:26-27). Borg (1993:27) explains this as follows:

In every culture known to us, there are men and women who experience union or communion with the world of Spirit, either “entering” it or experiencing it coming upon them. Those who experience it frequently and vividly often become mediators between the two worlds in a variety of cultural forms: as healers, prophets, law-givers, shamans, mystics. Such men and women are charismatics in the proper sense of the word: people who know the world of Spirit firsthand.

Jesus fits this description very well. The Israelite tradition, from which Jesus comes, allows for God’s direct communication to persons – the prophets (West 2001:58-59, 65; cf Horsley 1985, 1986). From the perspective of sociology, Weber ([1963] 1964:46) describes a prophet as an “individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.” A prophet is someone who received a personal revelation and possesses charisma (cf Malina 2001:130-131). Weber (1964:47) adds that prophets very often practiced divination as well as healing and counseling. Jesus can thus be understood as one of many prophets who felt themselves addressed by God, not only indirectly through the community and its traditions, but directly (cf Sanders 1985:237-240; Theißen & Merz 1996:141-142; BurrIDGE & Gould 2004:38, 41). By means of the picture that the gospel writers paint about Jesus, we can clearly see that his contemporaries understood his life in this manner – especially after Easter. They tell stories about Jesus, using imagery rich with associations in that time, which affirm that the living Christ of the early church’s experience was (and for Christians, still is) one who, sharing in the power of God, “delivered them from peril and evil, nourished them in the wilderness, and brought life out of death” (Borg 1993:70).

The first followers of Jesus interpreted the meaning of what he said and did from a spiritual perspective. This spiritual dimension became important on account of

the resurrection experiences of the disciples. Davies (1995:182-185) points out that the reports by some of Jesus' followers that they had seen him after his death took on great significance in the formative "Christian" movement. This is the case because the *importance* of Jesus' death and subsequent appearances derived from the *experience* of later "Christians" that they too had died and subsequently arisen to new lives as persons possessed by the Spirit of God.

The experience of spirit-possession is thus cognate with an experience of death and resurrection. According to Pilch (1998a:57; 2002a:112), these "resurrection experiences" of the disciples were alternate state of consciousness experiences and are therefore not just a literary or redactional form, but real. The disciples saw Jesus in alternate reality. The interpretation that they gave to these experiences was that God had raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>31</sup>

As a Spirit-filled person, the historical Jesus exhibited the characteristics of a healer (Funk & the Jesus Seminar 1998:527, 531). As mentioned earlier, one of the methods by which he healed people was by means of exorcism (see Brown 1984:4-5; Blackburn 1994:354-361; Davies 1995:44; Craffert 1999a:88-92; Funk & the Jesus Seminar 1998:530-531). To understand this, we must once again keep the worldview of Jesus and his contemporaries in mind. Jesus' exorcisms took place in a culture that maintained a strong dichotomous picture of the spiritual world: evil spirits or demons were in constant battle with the power of God. The world of human beings was invaded by forces that were responsible for various misfortunes, including illnesses. In this battlefield between humans and demons, Jesus acted as a healer to alleviate the illnesses of many (Craffert 1999a:108; see Saler 1977:38-51; Davies 1995:113; Malina & Pilch 2000:5; Pilch 2002a:108-109).

These features in the Jesus tradition point towards a possible fit between Jesus as an historical figure and the role that the shaman plays as a "religious specialist" in many cultures (see Craffert 1999b:329-340). A shaman is someone

who interacts with the spirit world on behalf of the community, mainly by making use of alternate states of consciousness<sup>32</sup> (cf Balzer 2003:310; MacLellan, 2003:366).

If we understand Jesus as a shaman-like figure, it is much easier to comprehend how he, as a Spirit-filled person, experienced the presence of God directly in his life<sup>33</sup> (see Den Heyer 1997:29). Alternate states of consciousness can help us to understand the phenomenon that a person can experience the presence of God in such a manner. Jesus did not use a specific rite that was part of his healing processes, as shamans usually do (see Choi 2003:170-171), but the earliest Jesus-groups created rites grounded on what Jesus did, as in his baptism and open meals. During Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist he experienced an alternate state of consciousness (DeMaris 2002:137-138; Pilch 2002a:108), and this baptism was transformed into a ritual by the early Jesus-groups. Jesus' meals with others and his last meal with his disciples were meals without preconditions, which were transformed into a ceremony by the early Jesus-groups (Smith 2003:221-223). Why did they do this? Most probably to keep on experiencing the presence of God directly in their lives; and an easy way in which this could be achieved, was by means of employing alternate states of consciousness. Although an alternate state of consciousness is a personal affair, it can be institutionalized (see Bourguignon 1979:239; Pilch 1993:237), and this is what I suggest occurred in the earliest baptism and Eucharist.

The baptism and Eucharist of the earliest Jesus-followers can thus be understood as rites that re-enacted alternate states of consciousness. Although an alternate state of consciousness is an individual psychological affair, it can be transformed into words by understanding it as a symbol. In other words, that which was witnessed to by the earliest followers of Jesus, the *kerygma*, was cast into words. A psychological state was transformed into a real state. It became a symbol in words.

The distinction between enactment and recounting can be termed “showing” and “telling” (Funk & the Jesus Seminar 1998:27-28). The story of Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1:9-11 illustrates the difference:

<sup>9</sup>During that same period Jesus came from Nazareth, Galilee, and was baptized in the Jordan by John. <sup>10</sup>And just as he got up out of the water, he saw the skies torn open and the spirit coming down toward him like a dove. <sup>11</sup>There was also a voice from the skies: “You are my favored son – I fully approve of you.”<sup>34</sup>

Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998:28) aver that in verse 9 the baptism of Jesus is reported or recounted. The storyteller does not depict the actual baptism. In verse 10 the story alters from reporting to showing. We learn that Jesus was in the water and that as he came out of it, he saw the skies split open and the spirit descended toward him or into him “like a dove”. This sentence transports the reader or listener to the scene at the Jordan and allows him or her to witness what happened, namely that Jesus “sees” the spirit descending. The showing technique continues in verse 11. In addition to something seen, there is also something heard – a voice from the skies which announces: “This is my son. I fully approve of him.” The hearing is not limited to Jesus; everyone who witnessed Jesus’ baptism could hear the voice. The voice is reproduced: the readers get to hear the actual words. According to the Jesus Seminar, verse 9 is “historical”, since Jesus’ baptism by John was retold in more than one independent form in the gospels. Because of this multiple independent attestation Jesus’ baptism was probably based on historical reminiscence. Verses 10-11 are, however, probably not historical. In these verses we see how the storyteller “imagined” what happened at the baptism of Jesus. The storyteller could not have known what Jesus saw, and the witnesses could not have heard exactly those Greek words, since they spoke Aramaic. We also need to keep in mind that this story was written down many years after the event.



The implication is that the historical Jesus “showed” and the first gospel writers “told”. “Show” and “tell” constitute the dialectics between Jesus and the gospel writers. Afterwards the early Jesus-groups “re-enacted” the telling. A ritual is a symbolical re-enactment of something which was “showed” dynamically. This process started at Easter – Jesus died, but after Easter he lived again. Easter brought the change. Jesus’ death and resurrection made that people started “telling” (see West 2001:66).

We know that Jesus experienced the presence of God directly in his life. This happened in alternate states of consciousness. An experience in an alternate state of consciousness is not the same as an experience in the real world. It represents an interruption in reality, a momentary alternative to the ordinary. How is it then possible to repeat this spirit-filledness in real life?<sup>35</sup> One may do so by making use of symbols (see Cassirer 1944:31-32; Turner 1967:19; Douglas 1996:37). Thus, in order to retell and experience that which Jesus “showed”, the authors of the gospels wrote it down in symbolic form. The “telling” of the “showing” of an alternate state of consciousness thus required symbolic language. And when this symbolic language is “re-enacted”, it becomes a rite.

However, ordinary language is not adequate to express an alternate state of consciousness. To speak about this we need another kind of language – anti-language. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:1-16) developed a social scientific model regarding anti-language. By applying this model to “telling” as anti-language, we might be able to gain insight in the early Jesus-movement’s formation of rites from alternate states of consciousness.

### **1.5.2 The model: Anti-language**

According to sociolinguists, language is the way in which people interact (Halliday 1986:10). Therefore, we cannot study language without taking its social context into consideration. Something else that needs to be taken into account is the complementary and inseparable standpoints of the inter-organism as well as

the intra-organism. The concept of the “inter-organism” can be described as “language as behavior”, and has to do with the fact that humans can speak and understand language because there are other people around. There can be no language without society, and no society without language. The concept of the “intra-organism” can be described as “language as knowledge”, because it has to do with the internal make-up of the organism – the brain structure, and the cerebral processes involved in speaking and understanding, as well as in learning to speak and understand. One important factor about speaking and understanding language is that it always takes place in a context (Halliday 1986:10-13). Halliday (1986:14) remarks that when we take a look at the human being as a biological specimen, we shall observe that like the individual in many other species, an individual is destined to become part of a group. But unlike other species, humans achieve this mainly by means of language. By this means the “human being” thus becomes part of a group of “people”. But “people”, in turn, consist of “persons”, which means that by virtue of participating in a group, an individual is no longer simply a biological specimen of humanity – he or she is a person. Halliday (1986:14-15) then takes this dialectic one step further: The individual as a “person” is a potential “member” – he or she possesses the capacity to function within society, and once more it is through language that this status is achieved. Being a member of society means occupying a social role, and yet again it is by means of language that a “person” becomes the potential occupant of a social role or roles. Halliday (1986:19) argues that “[l]anguage is what it is because of what it has to do.”

The relation of language to the social system is not simply one of expression, but one of a more complex natural dialectic in which language actively symbolizes this system – language creates the social system, while at the same time language is created by the same system. Because of this, Halliday (1986:183) describes language as being a “social semiotic”. He adds that the meanings that construct the social system are exchanged through a variety of modes or channels, of which language is one, but not the only one<sup>36</sup> (Halliday 1986:189).

We can say that wording is the linguistic way in which humans express meaning (Halliday 1986:21). But the meaning that languages express is not on the wording level: it derives from a social system (Halliday 1986:23-31; see Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:3). Languages entail three linguistic modes of meaning: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual. The ideational refers to what is being said or described; the interpersonal looks to the personal qualities of the communicating partners; and the textual pertains to the abilities of language to form units of meaning at a level higher than the sentence, for example, by means of cohesion of paragraphs into some whole. Thus, *what* one says is ideational, *with whom* one speaks is interpersonal, and *how* one speaks is textual (Halliday 1986:69, 123, 125-126, 142-145).

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:7) demonstrate that if we study the language of the earliest Jesus-groups, we shall perceive similarities with what Halliday (1976:570-584; 1986:164-182) has labeled “anti-language”. “Anti-language” is the language of an “anti-society”. Halliday (1986:164) describes an anti-society as “a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it. It is a mode of resistance, resistance which may take the form either of passive symbiosis or of active hostility and even destruction.”

Halliday (1986:164-182) studied different situations in which he detected anti-language, including the language of individuals put into prison or reform school in Poland, of members of the underworld in India, and of vagabonds in Elizabethan England. All these individuals formed groups that were in fact anti-societies set up within a larger, broader society, and in this setting their language came to express their social experience. This point brings Giblett (1991:1) to the following conclusion: “Antilanguage and antisociety go together; one is not possible without the other. There can be no society without language and no antisociety without antilanguage.”

Halliday (1986:165) indicates that the simplest form taken by an anti-language is that of substituting new words for old – in other words, it is a language relexicalized. This relexicalization is partial, not all words in the language possess equivalents in the anti-language. Usually a different vocabulary is central to the activities of the subculture, which distinguishes it sharply from the established society. Elizabethan vagabonds, for example, called a horse thief a “prigger of prancers” and they referred to stealing packages as “lifting law”. But anti-language is not merely relexicalized, it is also overlexicalized. In the Calcutta underworld language, there is not just one word for “bomb”, but twenty-one, as well as forty-one words for “police”.<sup>37</sup>

If we examine the language of the earliest Jesus-followers, Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:4-5) indicate that these two linguistic phenomena, namely relexicalization and overlexicalization, can be easily recognized. If we keep the theme of this study in mind, an example of relexicalization can for example be seen in the terminology associated with the Eucharist. To call bread “the body of Christ” or wine the “blood of Christ” is to employ instances of relexicalization. Relexicalization usually points to items and objects affecting areas of central concern to the group. Overlexicalization can for instance be seen in the “I am...” statements of Jesus, for example “bread” (Jn 6:35) and “door” (Jn 10:9). These words have the same denotation in the context in which they are employed; they refer to real objects. However, when identified with Jesus in an “I am...” proposition, each takes on an interpersonal dimension. Jesus is not bread, but he is like bread for those who stay attached to him; he is not a door, but he is like a door to God for those who believe in him (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:5-6).

Berger and Luckmann ([1966] 1976:172-173) argue that the most important vehicle for reality-maintenance is conversation. An individual’s subjective reality is created and maintained through interaction with others, and this interaction is largely verbal. If anti-language is considered in this regard, we have to keep in mind that subjective reality can be transformed (Halliday 1986:169-170; cf Berger

& Luckmann 1976:176). Berger and Luckmann (1976:176) comment that for an individual to *be* in society already entails an ongoing process of modification of subjective reality. Transformation involves different degrees of modification. Since subjective reality is never totally socialized, it cannot be totally transformed by social processes. These authors remark that “[a]t the very least the transformed individual will have the same body and live in the same physical universe” (Berger & Luckmann 1976:176). Nevertheless, there are instances of transformation that appear to be total when compared to lesser modifications, and these transformations can be termed alterations. Alteration requires processes of *resocialization* (Berger & Luckmann 1976:176). Halliday (1986:170) asserts that anti-language is the vehicle for such resocialization: “It creates an alternative reality: the process is one not of construction but of reconstruction.”

If we apply this concept to the earliest Jesus-followers, it means that through baptism, they became “new people”, although in actual fact they still looked the same as before and lived in the same world as before. They did not become angels, for instance; they stayed human. But they possessed new rights and responsibilities and a totally new frame of reference. In contrast to the world around them, in their alternative community, life made sense.

This process of resocialization makes special demands on language, because it must enable the individual to establish affective identification with others. Halliday (1986:170-171) points out that:

Conversation in this context is likely to rely heavily on the foregrounding of interpersonal meanings, especially where...the cornerstone of the new reality is a new social structure – although, by the same token, the interpersonal elements in the exchange of meanings are likely to be fairly highly ritualized.

The anti-language arises when the alternative reality is a *counter*-reality, set up in opposition to an established norm. It is, thus, not the *distance* between the two realities that are significant, but the *tension* between them.

Halliday (1986:171-172) adds that there is continuity between language and anti-language, just as there is continuity between society and anti-society. But he also remarks that there is tension between them, reflecting the fact that they are variants of the same underlying semiotic. So although they express different social structures, they are “part and parcel of the same social system.” In this regard, Halliday (1986:172) writes:

An antilanguage is a means of realization of a subjective reality: not merely expressing it, but actively creating and maintaining it. In this respect, it is just another language. But the reality is a counter-reality, and this has certain special implications. It implies the foregrounding of the social structure and social hierarchy. It implies a preoccupation with the definition and defense of identity through the ritual functioning of the social hierarchy. It implies a special conception of information and of knowledge.

Weber (1968:xliv-xlv) concurs in commenting that as a rule anti-societies bear a negative relation to the traditional conventions of society. They are not outside society, but in opposition to the established norms within society (cf Giblett 1991:2-3).

There are many different reasons why people adopt a conscious alternative to the society in which they are embedded. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:9) mention prison inmates, members of street gangs, the drug culture, new religious cults, and underground political groups. They write that some of these people might have been treated with hostility by members of the larger society, or they might have been labeled deviant, or they could have experienced a total lack of social concern, “resulting in their living in the greater society in a state of passive

social symbiosis” (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:9). As deviants, people like these often undergo public disconfirmation of their ability to act as adult persons. Their choices and movements are restricted, and they are denied the status of significant human actions. Since what they say and do is defined as mere behavior, as going through meaningless motions, they presumably are without capacities to act in human fashion (Harris 1989:606).

Anti-language and the alternate society which generates it derive from individuals who have experienced such “socially sanctioned depersonalization” (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:10). In other words, an anti-language is a language deriving from and generated by an anti-societal group. And an anti-societal group is a social collectivity that is set up within a larger society as a conscious alternative to it (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:9-11). Anti-language exists exclusively in a social context of resocialization. Like any other language, it is a means of realizing meanings stemming from the social system of the specific society. It is a means of expressing perceptions of reality as interpreted by persons socialized in that social system. Socially, the use of language actively creates and maintains the existing interpretations of reality. But unlike ordinary language, anti-language creates and expresses an interpretation of reality that is inherently an alternative reality, a reality that emerges in order to function as an alternative to society at large. To be able to understand an anti-society, it is thus important to also understand the larger society to which it is opposed. Anti-society makes no sense without the society over against which it stands. Like language itself, anti-language is the bearer of social reality, but of an alternative social reality that runs counter to the social reality of society at large. Thus, anti-language serves to maintain inner solidarity in the face of pressure from the wider society (from which group members stem, and in which they are to a large extent still embedded). Furthermore, for individuals to maintain solidarity with their fellow anti-societal members and not fall back into the margins of the groups they left or from which they were ejected, an alternative ideology and emotional anchorage in the new collectivity is necessary. This necessity is best served by

demonstrations of mutual care and concern on the part of those in the anti-societal group.

As I remarked at the beginning of this chapter, the larger society in which the earliest Jesus followers were embedded, comprised the Roman Empire, where the Greco-Roman mystery religions played an important role, as well as the House of Israel, with its hierarchical temple structure.

If we keep in mind that metaphorical modes of expression are the norm in an anti-language (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:13-14; Halliday 1986:175-177), it will be possible to relocate alternate states of consciousness in texts regarding baptism and the Eucharist, because something totally different from what is said is enacted. In the ritual of baptism a person is baptized with water, by which that person indicated that he or she died and rose with Christ and is thus initiated into a new community (see Theißen 1999:122-136). In the ceremony of the Eucharist, which is called a meal, a person eats bread and drinks wine and in so doing maintains that he or she has a part in the death and resurrection of Jesus (see Theißen 1999:126-138). Baptismal and Eucharistic “language” is an example of anti-language.

The above information suggests that the early Jesus-movement can be explained as an anti-society, with anti-language as its mode of expression. The earliest followers of Jesus wished to say something about Jesus’ alternative lifestyle, which they re-enacted. The lifestyle he advocated differed in many ways from the norms and the customs of the day. Jesus proclaimed that to be a part of the kingdom of God was the opposite of being a part of the kingdom of Caesar (see Van Aarde 2000:10; cf Koester 1992:10-13; Malina 2001:1; Elliott 2002:86). Because the earliest Jesus-followers were marginalized by the Israelite parent body (with its hierarchical temple structure and sacrifice tradition), as well as by the Roman Empire (where recognition was to be given to Caesar, who was perceived as a deity, in every activity, and where refusal was interpreted as



treason) (see Barr 1998:127, 164-179), they formed an alternative community with an apocalyptic worldview.<sup>38</sup> Since apocalypticism has to do with the revelation of God's alternative world in the real world, it can be seen as an alternate state of consciousness phenomenon. The earliest followers of Jesus projected a better future promised by God – a promise that functioned in their present circumstances as a kind of coping mechanism.

Because of the "institutionalization" of the alternate states of consciousness of the earliest Jesus-followers, an alternative community was formed. Although it is difficult to study *alternate* states of consciousness because of their psychological individuality, the result of experiencing them – the formation of an *alternative* community – can be studied much more easily because of its empirical appearance and externally witnessed evidence.

## **1.6 RELEVANCE AND METHODOLOGY**

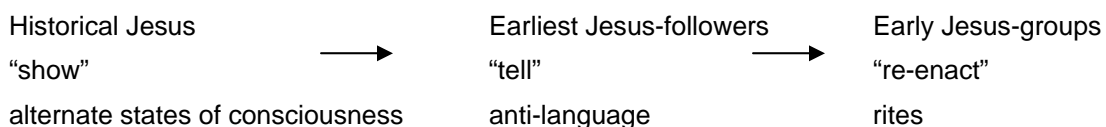
Extensive research has already been performed on the origin of the earliest baptism and Eucharist. My contribution will be to link this existing research with a study of alternate states of consciousness. In this way, I believe that not only will we, as Westernized people who live in the twenty-first century, understand the baptism and Eucharist of the earliest Jesus-followers more fully, but that this study will also enrich the meaning of experiencing the Christian baptism and Eucharist today. Because of the influence of the modern paradigm, we have to a great extent lost the spiritual dimension that played such an important role in the earliest baptism and Eucharist. By means of this study, I hope to aid Westerners to discover this spiritual dimension once again.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to investigate the possibility that alternate states of consciousness exhibit a tendency to become institutionalized in rites. We know that an alternate state of consciousness is not a cognitive affair; it is "irrational" and mentally experienced by an individual (see Davies 1995:136;

Lewis 1989:5; Malina & Pilch 2000:5). But group dynamics accord certain characteristics to the experience of persons (see Davies 1995:170-171; Winkelmann 2000:97). Group experience makes it possible for a researcher to look back and see how a non-rational experience in a group became institutionalized in a rite and how people reflected on it in a rational way. We can discover more about group experiences like these by means of text study, archeology, and paleontology. We do not possess any evidence of exactly how and why baptism and the Eucharist as rites originated. If we know so little about the first phases of the earliest baptism and Eucharist, how will we be able to draw a line connecting a psychological state (an alternate state of consciousness) to concretized rites? In other words, how will it be possible to indicate that the texts that we do have regarding baptism and the Eucharist can show that these rites were the concretizing of alternate states of consciousness, since we do not possess sufficient information regarding the earliest forms of “Christianity”? The method I wish to apply is to show that by means of anti-language, an alternate state of consciousness was verbalized and afterwards re-enacted in the symbolic rites of baptism and the Eucharist.

Baptism and the Eucharist are the symbolic “re-enactment” of that which Jesus “showed”. Each is the re-experiencing of an alternative state. By participating in baptism and the Eucharist, the “ordinary” world is interrupted by something non-ordinary. That which Jesus experienced in his alternate state of consciousness, can also be experienced in these rites, namely that the kingdom of God is immanent, that it differs from the ordinary world, and that people can share in it in an inclusive way. This was the case in Jesus’ time, and it can still be the case today, if we once again attach a similar meaning to baptism and the Eucharist as the earliest Jesus-followers did.

#### Summary:



## **1.7 RESEARCH PLAN**

Since I have described my theory, model and method in chapter 1, the remainder of this study will consist of explaining and illustrating this in detail.

In chapter 2, I shall describe the phenomenon of alternate states of consciousness, as well as related themes such as myth and shamanism.

Chapter 3 will be devoted to explaining group formation, institutionalization, symbols and rites. In chapter 4, I shall discuss baptism as the initiation ritual of the early Jesus-movement and in chapter 5, I shall consider the Eucharist as the early Jesus-movement's ceremony of integration. In chapter 6, I shall link all these concepts and show that baptism and the Eucharist can still possess value and meaning for Christians today, especially because institutionalized churches are entering a phase of deinstitutionalization at present.

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## ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 1

<sup>1</sup> Here I refer to the documents included in the New Testament and other early apocryphal documents that are related to this theme, as well as the writings of the church fathers. Specific references to these works will be made throughout the study.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to the way in which I describe the people we read about in the Bible, the reader should note the following: Throughout this study I use the terms “Israelites” or “Israelite”, instead of “Jews” or “Jewish”, because the latter is an anachronism. The term “Judean” (not “Jew”), a translation of *Ἰουδαῖος*, is a regional designation for an inhabitant of Judea (*Ἰουδαία*), in distinction from, for example, an inhabitant of Galilee (*Γαλιλαῖος*) (see Pilch 1997a:119-125). I refer to the temple-centered religion of both Judeans and Galileans as the religion of post-exilic “Israelites”. “Insiders”, who supported the ideology of the Second Temple, referred to themselves as the “people of God” or the “house of Israel” (e.g., Mt 10:6) (see Elliott 1995:76). Geographically perceived, Galilee and Idumea, which were situated concentrically around Judea, were regarded as regions with a lesser claim to purity than Judea. There were two reasons for this: they were further away from Jerusalem and the temple, and they were populated by people from “mixed” marriages (marriages between Israelites and non-Israelites), who were regarded as “outsiders”. But Idumea and Galilee were still part of the “house of Israel”. From the perspective of Israel, outsiders were often stereotyped as “non-Israel”. They were referred to as *ἐθνοὶ*, which is usually translated as “Gentiles”. The term *χριστιανοί* (“Christians”) is a similar example of stereotyping used by Judeans and Romans to refer to Jesus-followers in, for example, Syria (see Ac 11:26). Therefore, from an “in-group” perspective, the term “Christians” is not a suitable description for the very first followers of Jesus. (Therefore, I employ inverted commas if I do need to use these terms in this study.)

<sup>3</sup> See Yolanda Dreyer’s (2004:920, 929-932) analysis of the deinstitutionalization theory of the sociologist Max Weber and her analysis of the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu.

<sup>4</sup> I choose to use the term “alternate” states of consciousness, because, as Zinberg (1977:1 note 1) comments, it is a “plural, all-inclusive term” (see chapter 2).

<sup>5</sup> Stevan L Davies (1995) was probably the first scholar to apply alternate states of consciousness to biblical studies, but he does not apply it in the same general manner as Pilch does. His focus is more on spirit-possession (one specific manifestation of alternate states of consciousness) and his main aim is to describe the historical Jesus as spirit-possessed healer.

<sup>6</sup> A hypothesis is a suggested solution to a problem (see Van der Merwe 1996:289-290).

<sup>7</sup> Van Huyssteen (1988:88) remarks that explanatory progress in theology points to an increase in intelligibility. This is the reason why, epistemologically, I explain “progress” in science in terms of the words “explanation” and “better”. Van Huyssteen (1988:88) says: “Explanatory progress, as a form of inference from the best available explanation in terms of either hermeneutical, theological or philosophical criteria, can therefore indeed be established retrospectively by indicating how a later interpretation improves on its predecessors – and because of the reality depiction of theological statements this need not be an instrumentalist or pragmatist notion of progress.”

<sup>8</sup> Whenever I employ the terms “earliest” baptism or “earliest” Eucharist throughout this study, I refer to the baptism and Eucharist of the earliest followers of Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> For a concise overview of the scholarly development of social-scientific criticism, as well as a commentary on and critique of the different methods (especially model-based methods), see Horrell (1999b:4-27).

<sup>10</sup> Here I give a short description of all these disciplines, to make it clear why so many different fields need to be taken into consideration for this study:

- biblical studies: the study of the content of the Bible (in its original languages);
- social sciences: the study of persons in society (Harris 1989:599);
- historical studies: the study of the history of a group or public institution (*Collins Essential English Dictionary* 2003:357);
- anthropology: the science most appropriate for comparing societies and cultures (Harris 1989:599; Pilch 1995b:23);
- psychology: the study of individuals' inner selves (cf Harris 1989:599);
- neurology: the scientific study of the nervous system (*Collins Essential English Dictionary* 2003:513; cf Bulkeley 2003:123).

<sup>11</sup> Theißen (1987:269) argues that the results of modern social-scientific research cannot provide support for historical theses, but says that these findings can serve as a heuristic starting point and as an illustration. He adds that hypotheses can be constructed by observing contemporary phenomena, but then they must be verified exclusively on the basis of the historical sources. Esler (1994:44) states that we should be open to the prospect that we may be able to conclude as a matter of probability (and historical research is always a matter of probabilities) that certain phenomena sociologists describe (e.g., specific kinds of alternate states of consciousness) could have occurred in the first-century Mediterranean world.

Pilch (1997b:112), therefore, argues that when using psychological and psychoanalytical approaches to interpret early texts such as the Bible, we should be critical and should recognize the diversity of perspectives available in each discipline. He states this because modern Eurocentric psychology and psychoanalysis are distinctly monocultural disciplines. While most of the major contemporary psychological concepts arose in Europe and North America in the time between Charles Darwin and World War II, they have been extensively developed in the United States. According to Pilch, many Eurocentric trained psychologists analyze and judge non-Eurocentric populations by models and insights developed among a small and non-representative, elite segment of Eurocentric populations. Psychology and psychiatry focus on individuals in industrial urban societies. Since these disciplines developed in such a context, they will remain Eurocentric, ethnocentric, and "incomplete" sciences with regard to an analysis of the first-century Mediterranean world.

<sup>12</sup> To make sure that I do not use my model in a positivistic manner, I shall ask myself the following questions in a self-critical manner throughout my investigation:

- Is this an appropriate model to approach the question at stake? (Because it is possible that the data that I find could show that the model is not appropriate.)
- Can the objection of John J Pilch (personal interviews: Georgetown University, Washington DC, Fall 2003; Christian University of St Petersburg, July 2005) that my investigation lacks legitimacy because there is too little empirical evidence (regarding the way in which the earliest Jesus-groups experienced baptism and Eucharist), be adequately addressed by my applied model?

<sup>13</sup> There is a difference between the concepts "postmodern/postmodernity" and "postmodernism". I use the term "postmodern", because, in contrast to any word that ends in "-ism", it contains positive and useful values (cf Van Aarde 1990:294, 300-301).

<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that every single person today thinks in a postmodern way. There are still people who find themselves in the modern paradigm, while there are also people in Africa, Asia, the Far East and South America who still live according to a premodern worldview today (see [Du Toit 2000:41-42](#)).

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<sup>15</sup> This cursory explanation only serves as a background to the phenomenon that people understand themselves and the world they live in according to a certain worldview. For a detailed discussion of the complicated process of developing and shifting paradigms, see Kuhn (1966) and Küng (1988).

<sup>16</sup> For a better understanding of this phenomenon, see Douglas (1996:54-68). She developed a comprehensive model for comparative, cross-cultural understanding and interpretation, a useful tool in the process of trying to understand foreigners and interpret the meanings shared by alien groups (cf Malina 1986:12).

<sup>17</sup> William Graham Sumner ([1906] 1959:13) coined the word “ethnocentrism” as “the technical name for this view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (cf Van Eck 1995:9; Pilch 1997b:115). In the same vein, Malina (1993a:9-11) defines ethnocentric anachronism as imposing the cultural artifacts, meanings, and behavior of your own period on people of the past (see Pilch 2000c:3-12).

<sup>18</sup> Malina (1995b:3-10) considers that this perception of the world (e.g., as described in Genesis), started to change in the Hellenistic period (c 333 BCE). Scott (1991:55) indicates that during this time, in the philosophical schoolrooms, the consensus on the nature of the cosmos was that the earth is a sphere, remaining motionless at the centre of the universe, and that all the other heavenly bodies were also spheres. Seven planets, including the sun and moon, surrounded the earth, each moving in its own sphere, and all of these were enclosed by an eighth sphere containing the fixed stars. He says that this general picture of the cosmos was very common. Different ethnic groups who lived in the Hellenistic age “read” the sky to gain information from the stars, each in terms of their traditional ethnic story.

<sup>19</sup> First-century Mediterranean people, thus, exhibited the tendency to see the world in terms of a dualism, in the sense that there are warring forces of good and evil, with the evil outside and penetrating the good inside. The terminology “this world” served as an antithesis to some other world. “This world” of hostile groups and conspiracies that ruin good human intentions had to be evil; those in “our group” were good, no longer part of “this world”. This explains why the Roman occupying forces in Palestine were regarded as unjust (Malina 1986:40).

<sup>20</sup> According to Hofstede (1991:17) approximately eighty percent of the contemporary world population is collectivistic in nature.

<sup>21</sup> Pilch (1997b:113-114) illustrates the difference between individualistic and group-centered societies by saying that in a Eurocentric context, the answer to a question like: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”, would be: “Maybe yes, maybe no...”, while in a Middle Eastern context the answer would be: “Absolutely! And the keeper of everybody else in this network!”.

<sup>22</sup> We need to keep in mind that the term “eschatology” only originated in the nineteenth century, and can, therefore, too easily be used anachronistically when referring to first-century Mediterranean people (Malina 1996:210-211; [Van Aarde 2000:7-8](#)).

<sup>23</sup> Scripture quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

<sup>24</sup> Scholars who study the historical Jesus disagree on various factors regarding his life (see e.g., Miller 2001). It is not my intention to participate in the debate about *who* the historical Jesus was. These four characteristics of the historical Jesus as I understand him are relevant for my study. However, my theory does not stand or fall by these four characteristics of the historical Jesus. If research should indicate that the historical Jesus could be better understood in a different manner, my arguments regarding the baptism and Eucharist of the earliest Jesus-followers could still be valuable.

<sup>25</sup> Davies (1995:112-117) has an interesting way of explaining the “kingdom of God”. He says that if Jesus believed himself to be able to free people from demonic rule (by means of exorcism), it would follow that he sought to enable people to experience divine rule. Thus, the kingdom of God is a mode of being alternative to the rule of Satan. Davies sees the kingdom of God as a form of experience – an alternate state of consciousness directly related to Jesus’ career as healer. It is not a social condition or way of life. This alternate state of consciousness was induced by Jesus’ parables and other elements of his recorded discourse. Davies calls this kind of alternate state of consciousness religious trance, which he defines as an alteration in perception. In the case of Jesus and his followers, it can be understood to be a radically revised mode of perception of this world.

<sup>26</sup> Scholars remain sharply divided on the question of the nature of Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God. Meier (1997:258) asks: “Did Jesus proclaim that the kingdom was already present in his ministry, or did he see it as a reality soon to come – or both?” Sanders (1985:140) contends that “[i]t is possible – no more – that Jesus saw the kingdom as ‘breaking in’ with his own words and deeds.” On the other hand Crossan (1992:422; 2003:50) remarks that Jesus spoke of a kingdom that was present in his ministry and not of a kingdom still to come on some final day of Israel’s history. Meier (1997:258), and Theißen and Merz (1996:250), find themselves caught between the two positions. Meier (1997:258) writes that on the one hand there is too much authentic material in various streams of Gospel tradition to deny that Jesus spoke of “...some future coming of God in his kingly rule” (e.g., Mt 6:10; Mk 14:25; Mt 8:11-12; Mt 5:3-12). But on the other hand, “...certain authentic sayings of Jesus suggest that he saw his ministry of teaching and healing as somehow mediating and actualizing God’s kingdom in the present moment” (e.g., Jesus’ exorcisms – Lk 11:20; Mk 3:27; Lk 17:21; Lk 10:23-24; Mk 2:18-20) (Meier 1997:258-259). Meier (1997:267-268) presents the following sketch of the historical Jesus: “Baptized by John the Baptist around the year 28 C.E., Jesus of Nazareth soon set out his own ministry to Israel. He presented himself to his people as an eschatological prophet proclaiming the imminent coming of God’s definitive rule over Israel, a rule that Jesus had already made palpably present by performing startling deeds of healing reminiscent of the miracles performed by Elijah the prophet. Perhaps equally startling to stringently observant Jews was Jesus’ outreach to the religiously and socially marginalized, even to the point of eating with them as a sign that they, too, would be included in the final banquet in the kingdom. Jesus the prophet proclaimed and actualized the kingdom’s coming in word as well as deed, most notably in his enigmatic parables, which often challenged the presumed orderly religious world of his hearers and thus opened them to the new world he was heralding....[S]ome of his followers began to identify him with the hoped-for Davidic Messiah. The kingdom of God was to have a visible king. Jesus brought such hopes to a high point on his last visit to Jerusalem with his two symbolic prophetic actions, namely, the triumphant entry and the ‘cleansing’ of the temple. Sensing that his clashes with the Jerusalem authorities were reaching a deadly climax and that he might suffer the martyrdom attributed in Jewish thought to a number of the Old Testament prophets, he arranged a final solemn meal with his disciples...probably in the year 30 C.E. During this last supper – indeed, the last in a whole series of suppers symbolizing the coming salvation of the kingdom – he used bread and wine as prophetic symbols of his imminent death, a death he accepted as part of God’s inscrutable plan to establish his kingdom, a kingdom Jesus still hoped to share....[Jesus was] crucified on Friday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. He died before sundown....”

<sup>27</sup> The term Crossan (1992:xii, 261-264, 361; 1994:71-74) uses to describe Jesus’ lifestyle is “egalitarian”, but Elliott (2002:75-91; 2003:173-210) illustrates that egalitarianism is an anachronistic term. Jesus did not promote an egalitarian lifestyle, but an inclusive one, a life in which everybody was welcome, although they still occupied different social roles, economic statuses, etc (see chapter 4). Elliott (2003:183) argues that the words “equal” and “égalité” only began to resound in eighteenth century Philadelphia and Paris.

<sup>28</sup> The rise of historical-critical exegesis and its effect on the Christian faith is well summarized by Theißen and Merz (1996:21-33). One of the first scholars who made a long lasting contribution in



this regard, was Albert Schweitzer ([1906] 1966). To create a theological reconstruction of the identity of Jesus, he believes that we must go beyond historical reason while staying consistent with it.

<sup>29</sup> The concepts *historic-kerygmatic* and *proclaimer-proclaimed* first appeared in the title of a book by Martin Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* ([1896] 1956; see Van Aarde 2001a:9). According to him the Christian faith could not be dependent on historical investigation. The Gospels could not serve as the basis for a reliable, scientific biography of Jesus, since the authors of the Gospels did not write historical documents – the purpose of the Gospels was to bring people to faith or to strengthen people's faith in Jesus Christ (see Den Heyer 1997:50-51).

<sup>30</sup> Gerhardsson (2001:26) contends that in the four Gospels we see how the evangelists and their sources look back to an era which lies in the past and is separated from the present not only chronologically, but also spatially and factually: "It is admittedly true that this perspective has been broken through and toned down in various places – the splendor of the resurrection has colored the traditions...." But still the intent of the evangelists was to describe the ministry of Jesus in Israel. Burridge (1998:124) concurs: "The Gospels are neither a clear glass window onto the historical Jesus or the early communities, nor a polished mirror in whose reflection we can see anything we happen to place before them. They are more like a piece of stained glass *through which* we can catch the occasional glimpse of what is behind them and *in which* we sometimes mistake our own reflection from in front of them, but *upon which* the main picture has been assembled using all the different colors of literary skill – and it is the portrait of a person. The historical, literary, and biographical methods combine to show us that the Gospels are nothing less than Christology in narrative form, the story of Jesus."

<sup>31</sup> Pilch (2003b:257-258) describes the overall significance of the resurrection experiences as follows: In his lifetime, Jesus was commended by God with the mighty deeds, wonders, and signs that God worked through him. Some accepted Jesus, others rejected him. But Jesus' shameful death on the cross, a punishment reserved for criminals, caused his followers to wonder whether they had been deceived. If God was truly with Jesus, how could God allow this to happen? But shortly after Jesus' death, Jesus' friends began to experience him transformed and alive in alternate states of consciousness. Since only God can raise a person from the dead, this had to mean that God was pleased with Jesus. God rewarded Jesus with resurrection – which in the Israelite tradition was recognized as the reward for the righteous. To experience Jesus in an alternate state of consciousness after his death was not surprising, but reassuring. It helped his contemporaries to better understand his life and teaching, his present location in God's ordered creation, and it also lessened their grief and disappointment (Pilch 1998a:59; 2002a:113). Davies (1995:184) understands it in the following manner: "The profound importance for the Christian movement of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ arose from the retrojection of the psychologically understandable death/resurrection experience of formative Christians. Those who had 'died and risen' conceived themselves to have died and risen with Christ, the mythic paradigm of the spirit by whom they were newly possessed. The significance of Christians' experience of death/resurrection was retrojected biographically back to the mythic occasion of Jesus' death/resurrection giving personal and mythic significance to reports that some of Jesus' followers had seen him after he died."

<sup>32</sup> Shamanism will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.

<sup>33</sup> According to Crossan (1992:422), Jesus not only experienced the presence of God directly in his life, he also proclaimed a "brokerless" kingdom of God: "Miracle and parable, healing and eating were calculated to force individuals into unmediated physical and spiritual contact with God and unmediated physical and spiritual contact with one another."

<sup>34</sup> This quotation is from Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998:27).



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<sup>35</sup> Elliott (1995:83, 88) argues that the first Jesus-followers understood themselves as illuminated and endowed with the Spirit (they had a personal experience of the Spirit) and that they participated in the death and resurrection of the Lord (there are numerous texts in this regard in the New Testament, see e.g., Luke-Acts, where a community led and infused by the Spirit is described; Gl 5:25).

<sup>36</sup> In chapter 3, I shall discuss other channels through which meanings are constructed, namely, symbols and rites.

<sup>37</sup> We also encounter relexicalization and overlexicalization in contemporary drug cultures, prison populations (e.g., where “7-up” means that a correctional officer is approaching), the underworld, and street gangs (e.g., where “blotters” means “dealers”), etc. For more examples, see e.g., *Dictionary of slang* [s a]:[www.kindafunkyradio.com/extras/dictionary.htm](http://www.kindafunkyradio.com/extras/dictionary.htm); *A prisoner’s dictionary* 1995-2003:[www.prisonwall.org/words.htm](http://www.prisonwall.org/words.htm).

<sup>38</sup> As described earlier in this chapter, apocalyptic thinking comes to the fore when religious people feel that they cannot alter their unbearable circumstances by themselves. Then they reach out to God for help. They believe that God will soon bring an end to this wicked world and call a righteous world into existence (cf Rist 1989:157; Van Aarde 1994b:79-80).

## CHAPTER 2

### ALTERNATE STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 1, I indicated that by means of employing an alternate state of consciousness, Jesus “showed”; by means of anti-language the earliest Jesus-followers “told”; and by means of the rites of baptism and the Eucharist Jesus-groups “re-enacted” this “telling” of the “showing” of an alternate state of consciousness. In this chapter, I intend to discuss the nature of alternate states of consciousness. I consider that such states of consciousness played a fundamental role in the lives of the people who lived in the first-century Mediterranean world.<sup>1</sup> Insight into this matter could shed light on many of the unfamiliar events we read about in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

I shall examine the following themes in this chapter: Consciousness (since our understanding of alternate states of *consciousness* will depend on our understanding of consciousness), the many facets of alternate states of consciousness, alternate states of consciousness and myth, the context of alternate states of consciousness, shamanism, and the function of alternate states of consciousness. At the end of the chapter, I shall offer some concluding remarks.

A short note on terminology: there is no consensus among scholars regarding the appropriate terminology for describing the phenomenon at stake. The traditional phrase “altered states of consciousness” raises quite a few problems. I concur with Zinberg (1977:1 note 1), Austin (1998:306), and Craffert (2002:65) that the term “alternate states of consciousness” describes this phenomenon adequately.<sup>3</sup> Craffert (2002:65) indicates that on a homoversal<sup>4</sup> level, a distinction can be made between ordinary and extraordinary states of consciousness. What is “ordinary” is not homoversal – in other words, it is not the same for all human beings. On a cultural level, a distinction can be made

between *baseline* (or normal) and *alternate states of consciousness*, which differ from culture to culture. Craffert (2002:65; emphasis by Craffert) writes that it should be realized “that these distinctions are analytically necessary in order to avoid the single distinction between *consciousness* and *altered states of consciousness* (with the implication that a fixed set of altered states exists for all human beings).” Regarding the history of the term “altered”, Austin (1998:306-310) shows that it was first used in the context of describing the state brought about by psychedelic drugs, which could easily *alter* a person’s consciousness. Zinberg (1977:1 note 1) further exposes the term’s implicit pejorative and ethnocentric<sup>5</sup> connotation, since these states are commonly perceived to represent a deviation from the way consciousness “should” be. Owing to these reasons, I prefer not to use the term “altered states of consciousness”. On the other hand, the term “alternate” makes it clear that “different states of consciousness prevail at different times for different reasons and that no one state is considered standard” (Craffert 2002:65). Or as Austin (1998:306) comments: “As a term, *alternate* carries no pejorative connotations. It states the obvious: many optional states occur. And they differ substantially.”

Another important issue addressed by Craffert (2002:53-54) is the perspective from which alternate states of consciousness can be described. He chooses a “biopsychosocial” perspective, which he describes as follows:

On the one hand, it is grounded in neurobiology and neurosciences and maintains that the nervous system constructs the world of everyday experience. The underlying truth of this viewpoint is that consciousness and conscious experiences are largely the constructs of the human nervous system. On the other hand, it accepts the insights of transpersonal anthropology which indicate that similar transpersonal experiences are to be found among people from all cultures of the world. Taken together, these fields of research open fascinating avenues not only for looking at religious experiences but also for understanding human beings as unitary beings.

As I have already indicated in chapter 1, I concur with Craffert that a multidisciplinary methodology serves the study of alternate states of consciousness well. To start at the beginning, I shall now investigate the phenomenon of “consciousness”.

## **2.2 CONSCIOUSNESS**

A certain comprehension of the term “consciousness” is essential for an adequate appreciation of the concept “*alternate* states of consciousness”.<sup>6</sup> But it is not an easy task to describe “consciousness”.<sup>7</sup> There are even scholars who regard consciousness as indefinable.<sup>8</sup> The reason for this, according to Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili ([1990] 1992:72, 77), is that despite the fact that all kinds of divisions or sections of the brain and nervous system can be identified, the nervous system does not neatly divide into parts like a Lego toy. Each moment of consciousness is mediated by a field of neural connections that involve millions of neural cells and their support structures. The conscious organism is a certain “way of being” which represents a specific ontological level or reality. The above authors indicate that consciousness defies easy definition, because it is “a functional complex” and not an object or “thing” (cf Craffert 2002:62-63).

Intrinsically, consciousness refers to a continuum in which we are able to feel, think, and perceive (Wright 1996:128).<sup>9</sup> This means that what a human being experiences in waking awareness is termed ordinary or normal consciousness.<sup>10</sup> But because of the negative connotations<sup>11</sup> some people may associate with the words “ordinary” and “normal”, I shall throughout refer to this state as “baseline consciousness”. According to Krippner (1972:5), this baseline state of consciousness is characterized by logic, rationality, cause-and-effect thinking, goal directedness, and the feeling that one is in control of one’s mental activity. In Eurocentric terminology, a conscious person is someone who engages in reflective thinking; in other words, an individual who is aware of himself or herself as an experiencing unit. Pease (1993:14) agrees, defining consciousness as: “...the totality...of sensations, perceptions, ideas, attitudes, and feelings of which

an individual or a group is aware at any given time span.” Kriel (2000:113) contributes to this discussion by adding that consciousness is neither a property of the mind nor a phenomenon that exists separately from a person, but a manner of existence (of the person as a total system) in the world. It is a process (or a relation) rather than an entity, and this process is culturally constructed and determined (see Price-Williams 1975:88, 90; Pilch 1993:234; Ellis 1995:2). Winkelman (2000:10-11) writes that the term “consciousness” is fundamentally concerned with an informational relationship between an organism and its environment, the process and properties of “knowing” systems. Consciousness functions to couple the individual organism, its social group and the environment. The central nervous system integrates all the activities of the individual (cf Popper & Eccles 1977:127-129). Thus, consciousness refers to the ongoing stream of experience that is mediated by a functional neural complex, and this complex models the world (Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili 1992:90). We must keep in mind that the properties of consciousness are not only the properties created by brain structures; they are also derived from the interrelations of systemic properties of the brain with the symbolic information and meanings provided by learning and culture (Winkelman 2000:24). Culture, language and education play an important role in the development of human consciousness, since they are the most extensive context in which meaning is constructed (cf Scheff 1993:188-194). As Winkelman (2000:15) observes: “Consciousness is produced by the structures that mediate interaction between knower and known.” Consciousness thus implies awareness and socially shared knowledge (cf Ellis 1995:28-29, 138; see Pilch 2002d:692).

Something else that we have to keep in mind is that consciousness is not a natural “given”, but a rather arbitrary “construction”. The basic components of consciousness are attention or awareness energy and structures, and these components form a system. Such a system is dynamic, since the function of consciousness is to cope successfully with the external environment, which means that parts of the former are changing all the time, while maintaining the

overall patterns that comprise its nature (see Tart 1977:160-169, 180-181). Because we are born as human beings, creatures with a certain kind of body and nervous system living on the same planet, a very large number of human potentialities are in principle available to us. But we are born into a particular culture that selects and develops a small number of these potentialities, actively rejects others, and is ignorant of many of these potentialities as well. The small number of experiential potentialities selected by our culture, plus some random factors, constitute the elements from which our baseline state of consciousness is constructed. But there is a possibility of developing latent potentials outside the cultural norm, by temporarily restructuring our consciousness – and this can be done by entering an alternate state of consciousness (see Tart 1977:215; 1982: 245-248).

Craffert (2002:65-69) indicates that a distinction can be made between cultures which favor different patterns or views of consciousness. In Western cultures people with monophasic consciousness give dominance to ego-consciousness. For them the only “real world” is the world experienced during the baseline phase. But the majority of people on the planet experience polyphasic consciousness, in which many more states of consciousness (such as dreams or visions) are taken as real and are often experienced. Such cultures also provide the rituals and prescriptions for the how, when and where of these experiences. Baseline states of consciousness as well as alternate states of consciousness in a specific setting are thus not stereotyped reactions to specific stimuli or neurological conditions, but dynamic, goal-oriented processes which the individual has learned from his or her culture (see Lewis 1989:5).

In conclusion, Craffert (2002:65-69) considers that consciousness is not only a biological or neurological feature of human nature, but that it is also embedded in psychosocial parameters which co-determine it. He adds that since consciousness is a systems and functional entity, neither states of consciousness nor consciousness as such are fixed. For example, the

consciousness of a child is not the same as that of an adult. States of consciousness are unique and personal experiences.

With this basic understanding of consciousness in mind, we can now turn to the concept *alternate states* of consciousness.

## **2.3 ALTERNATE STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

At the beginning of the previous century, James ([1902] 1985:388) had already realized the importance of alternate states of consciousness. He writes:

...our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question, – for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality.

Rowan (2001:215) similarly comments that there are multiple levels of human consciousness, and argues that if “we are genuinely trying to explain human behavior, or understand human actions, or interpret human conduct, it must be absurd to ignore these different conditions” (cf Rollins 1999). Even though scholars realize the importance of alternate states of consciousness, they struggle to define this concept. Craffert (2002:72) observes that if we take the large number of components of consciousness into account, as well as the many

induction techniques and the variety of cultural settings within which they operate, “it is almost inevitable that no single map or universal cartography of states of consciousness exists, that no unified definition of any individual aspect or of the overall group of phenomena can be given.”

As I remarked earlier, a distinction can be made between *baseline* and *alternate states of consciousness*, which differ from culture to culture (Craffert 2002:65; see Tart 1972:1-2). An alternate state of consciousness is a shift in a person’s level of awareness (Erickson & Rossi 1981:242, 248).

In chapter 1, I referred to a definition of alternate<sup>12</sup> states of consciousness given by Bourguignon<sup>13</sup> (1979:236). In addition to her description, I consider that Ludwig’s (1966:225; 1972:11) definition of alternate states of consciousness also describes this phenomenon adequately:

...any mental state(s), induced by various physiological, psychological, or pharmacological manoeuvres or agents, which can be recognised subjectively by the individual himself (or by an objective observer of the individual) as representing a sufficient deviation in subjective experience or psychological functioning from certain general norms for that individual during alert, waking consciousness. This sufficient deviation may be represented by a greater preoccupation than usual with internal sensations or mental processes, changes in the formal characteristics of thought, and impairment of reality testing to various degrees.

In an alternate state of consciousness a person, thus, enters another level of reality than the one he or she usually experiences. In this reality, interaction with unseen personages, celestial and terrestrial, can take place (see Malina and Pilch 2000:4-8; Winkelman 2000:147; Pilch 2002d:692). To describe these events as contacts with the “transcendent” or the “supernatural” would be ethnocentric. For people who lived in the first century, the realms of God and God’s angels, of stars and planets, of spirits, demons, and genies, were all part



of the total environment in which humans lived (cf Saler 1977:42-44). The distinction between “natural” and “supernatural”<sup>14</sup> is a concept deriving from Western culture and is of no help in understanding first-century Mediterranean concepts<sup>15</sup> (Saler 1977:43-44, 46, 51; cf Rogerson 1976:5; Pilch 1996a:134-135; Van Aarde 2001b:1165).

Alternate states of consciousness are something common to humanity. States like these have been recognized as common possibilities from the early first century until today (Crossan 2003:47; see Winkelman 2000:116). Crossan (2003:47) remarks: “How you explain them and whether you judge them objective, subjective, or interactive, is quite another question.”

Alternate-states-of-consciousness research thus examines and compares ecstatic, trance, mystical, transcendental, or visionary experiences that pervade human cultures around the world. The wide range<sup>16</sup> of states of consciousness that researchers consider under the rubric of alternate states of consciousness makes it difficult to define the phenomenon with precision (DeMaris 2002:145-146).

### **2.3.2 Misperceptions regarding alternate states of consciousness**

In contemporary Western culture, alternate states of consciousness are generally thought of as irrational<sup>17</sup> (cf Bourguignon 1973:3; Goodman 1988a:3, 36; Goodman 1990:11; Pilch 1993; Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998:14; Winkelman 2000:116; Turner 2003:145-151). For this reason, a large percentage of Westernized people offer strong cultural resistance to alternate state of consciousness experiences. These people tend to consider alternate states of consciousness as pathological and infantile, while considering their own mode of consciousness as “normal” and “ordinary”. But as a number of cross-cultural social psychologists insist, the Western baseline state of consciousness is a socially learned and selectively patterned state of consciousness that in many ways is arbitrary (see e.g., Tart 1982:244-245). Consequently, many of the

values associated with it are quite arbitrary and specific to Eurocentric culture alone (Malina & Pilch 2000:5; see Pilch 2002a:105; Craffert 2002:84).

However, Bourguignon (1974:229-232) shows that alternate states of consciousness are widespread human phenomena, experienced in a variety of forms by almost all human beings. It seems as if it is mostly people who are part of contemporary Western culture who choose not to employ alternate states of consciousness. She compiled a sample of 488 societies in all parts of the world, at various levels of technological complexity, and found that approximately 90% of these societies evidence institutionalized forms of alternate states of consciousness.<sup>18</sup> Her conclusion is that societies which do not utilize these states are historical exceptions which need to be explained, rather than the vast majority of societies that do use these states<sup>19</sup> (see Bourguignon 1973:9-10; Bourguignon 1976:49-51; Goodman 1988a:36; Goodman 2001:6-7). Thus, it would be anachronistic and ethnocentric to take our post-Enlightenment, technologically orientated society as normative for judging anyone other than ourselves. For most of the world, even today, a report of alternate states of consciousness would be considered quite “normal”<sup>20</sup> (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:282-285; cf Kleinman 1988:123; see Pilch 1995c:49-50, 56-57).

Clottes and Lewis-Williams (1998:12, 81) concur: they state that in all places and at all times people have entered into alternate states of consciousness.<sup>21</sup> As a matter of fact, they carried out research which shows that it is likely that 1.4 million years ago people had already experienced alternate states of consciousness<sup>22</sup> (cf Henderson [1964] 1988:151). The potential to shift, voluntarily or involuntarily, between different states of consciousness is a function of the universal human nervous system (cf Joseph 2001:105-106; see Pilch 2002e:717-718). This makes sense if we keep in mind that, according to Malina (1993a:8), all humans are entirely the same (100%; according to nature), entirely different (100%; according to person), and somewhat the same and somewhat different (50%/50%; according to culture) at the same time. Our common biology,

thus, explains why alternate states of consciousness are a pan-human phenomenon for those people who do not block such states (see Pilch 2002d:704).

But why do some societies, especially in the contemporary West, lack alternate state of consciousness experiences? Kleinman (1988:50) explains that the advent of modern science in about the seventeenth century disrupted the bio-psycho-spiritual unity of the human consciousness, as well as the unity of the human consciousness and cosmos, that had existed until then (see Price-Williams 1975:87-88). According to Kleinman (1988:50-51) we have developed an “acquired consciousness”, whereby we dissociate the self and look at the self “objectively”. Western culture socializes individuals to develop a meta-self, a critical observer who monitors and comments on experience. The meta-self does not allow the total absorption in lived experience which is the very essence of highly focused alternate states of consciousness. By internalizing a critical observing mentality, the self is rendered inaccessible to possession by gods or ghosts; it cannot faint from fright or become paralyzed by humiliation; it loses the literalness of bodily metaphors of the most intimate personal distress, accepting in their place a psychological meta-language that has the appearance of immediacy but in fact distances felt experience; and the self becomes vulnerable to forms of pathology (like borderline and egotistic personality disorders) that appear to be culture bound to the West (cf Jung [1964] 1988:45; Goodman 2001:7). This also explains why primarily, in the West, the idea of ecstatic religious practices (related to alternate states of consciousness) is associated with a lack of respectability. Bourguignon (1973:342-349) points out that within the norm of proper Eurocentric behavior, such abandonment of self-control is easily regarded as indecent. Capitalism, science, and technology are linked to rationality, and as such to a suspicion of mysticism and otherworldliness (Bourguignon 1974:234-235). According to Price-Williams (1975:81-87), Westerners experience alternate states of consciousness as “primitive” or part of “primitive cultures”,<sup>23</sup> merely because they have not socialized or cultured these

studies. “Primitives” are just as logical and coherent in their own world as the so-called “civilized people” in theirs<sup>24</sup> (cf Bourguignon 1974:234).

### **2.3.3 Characteristics of alternate states of consciousness**

Bourguignon (1973:6) writes that alternate states of consciousness are characterized by a deviation in the quantity of central nervous system arousal from a baseline state. General characteristics of alternate states of consciousness are: alterations in thinking, disturbed time sense, loss of control, change in emotional expression, change in body image, perceptual distortions, change in meaning or significance, sense of the ineffable, feelings of rejuvenation and hypersuggestibility (Ludwig 1966:227-230; 1972:12-15; cf Korn 2002:41).

In line with the above mentioned features, Goodman (1988a:37; see Goodman 2001:9) describes the characteristics of *religious* alternate states of consciousness as follows:

The religious altered state of consciousness...causes a number of changes in the body. Some are readily observable. The individuals involved may start breathing more deeply. Some perspire profusely, they may blush, tremble, or twitch. Occasionally muscles tense, especially around the neck. Were a person to speak in this state, there would be a switch to a beautifully rhythmic vocalization, pulsing like poetry, and rising in intonation until the end of the first third of the utterance unit, then steadily dropping toward the end. A careful observation of subjects experiencing a religious trance indicates that a single occurrence, an episode, has a clearly discernible start, a certain duration, and an end or dissolution.

She portrays the process of experiencing a religious alternate state of consciousness thus:

- *The start:* Religious communities where alternate states of consciousness are institutionalized use rituals to induce them, and the people who participate in the experience learn to react to these rituals<sup>25</sup> (cf Davies<sup>26</sup> 1995:30). There is almost no limit to the types of stimuli that are suitable for induction, for example: the singing of a certain hymn or chant, clapping, dancing, drumming, shaking a rattle, turning around one's own axis, reciting a certain formula or prayer, glancing at a flickering candle or moving water, or smelling a certain fragrance. The reason for this great variety lies in part in the fact that it is not so much the stimulus in and of itself that produces the switch from one state of consciousness to another, but rather the expectation that this shift is going to take place. This, together with the associated ritual situation, produces an intense concentration, which is aided by the stimulus. Concentration is an introductory strategy (cf d'Aquili & Newberg 1999:100-102).
- *Sojourn:* During this phase, the body works hard, exhibiting the features described above. Here differences occur in the ecstatic experiences of different people, because although humans are similar as far as physical manifestations are concerned and all human beings share the same nervous system, we are very diverse culturally. The physiological changes of religious alternate states of consciousness are our common gateway, but they admit us to our own, distinctive alternate reality.
- *Dissolution:* Eventually, the people who experienced the alternate state of consciousness "awaken". This happens as a response to a signal in the ritual, for example the ceasing of the drumming or the sound of a sharp bell.

- *After-effects*: After the conclusion of the alternate state of consciousness, the people who participated in the experience are rewarded with a feeling of intense euphoria (Goodman 1988a:37-38).

If we take into consideration the descriptions we possess about the way in which the earliest baptism and Eucharist were conducted (see chapters 4 and 5), we shall recognize that there are certain similarities between the rites of baptism and the Eucharist and the process of experiencing alternate states of consciousness described above.

#### **2.3.4 Types of alternate states of consciousness**

Because of the complexity of the phenomenon, we can distinguish between different types of alternate states of consciousness. Winkelman (2000:124, 187) distinguishes between modes and states of consciousness. He argues that *modes* of consciousness are biologically based, and that their functions are related to organismic needs and homeostatic balance. *States* of consciousness reflect sociological learning and psychosocial needs. States operate within modes, and the functions of states are determined by social, cultural, and psychological functions rather than by strictly biological needs.

Examples of *modes* of consciousness are waking consciousness, deep sleep, REM (rapid eye movement), sleep (dreaming), and transpersonal, mystical, or transcendental consciousness (integrative consciousness) (Winkelman 2000:118-119, 122). Examples of *states* of consciousness include nocturnal dreaming, alcohol intoxication, drug-induced states (e.g., by marijuana), strong emotional states (e.g., rage, depression, ecstasy), hypnosis, meditation-induced states,<sup>27</sup> sensory-isolation induced states, mediumistic and possession trance, reverie, shamanic states, guided visualization states, and channeling states (Tart 2000:258; see Winkelman 2000:125-126).

Although Krippner (1972:1-5) does not make a distinction between modes and states of consciousness, he largely agrees with Winkelman by identifying twenty states of consciousness: the dreaming state, the sleeping state, the hypnagogic state (drowsiness before sleep), the hypnopompic state (semi-consciousness preceding waking), the hyperalert state, the lethargic state, states of rapture, states of hysteria, states of fragmentation, regressive states, meditative states, trance states, reverie, the daydreaming state, internal scanning, stupor, coma, stored memory, “expanded” consciousness states, and the baseline state.

These states of consciousness shade one into the other, along a continuum, with *alert consciousness* (the condition in which people are fully aware of their surroundings and are able to react rationally to these surroundings) at one end and *deep states* (trance) at the other. Thus, alert consciousness sometimes gives way to daydreaming in which one is less alert. Next there is dreaming and lucid dreaming, a state between waking and sleeping in which people can control or learn to control the imagery in their dreams. In deep states of trance, all the senses are involved: people see, hear, smell, feel, and taste things. They experience a variety of sensations in their bodies (cf Turner [1982] 1992:81; see Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998:13-14; Pilch 2002d:694-697). Because these states flow one into the other, and are thus not fixed categories, we need to keep in mind that even in the case of a single individual, such states are not exactly the same from one occurrence to the next (Craffert 2002:72).

Therefore, Craffert (2002:72-75) proposes that instead of suggesting that all these phenomena can be covered by the same descriptive map, it will be more appropriate to employ different maps which each highlight specific features of alternate states of consciousness, and consequently engage in a constant process of translation between them.

He gives the following examples of such maps (Craffert 2002:72-75):

- *Map 1:* This map distinguishes between *ordinary* and *extraordinary* states of consciousness. It has already been pointed out that baseline consciousness is not fixed or standardized. Craffert (2002:73) continues:

What is added here is that some states are ordinary in the sense that people experience them every day. Among the ordinary states are waking, sleeping, and dreaming, with transition periods in between. Thus, all people ordinarily experience a baseline consciousness which contains certain different states. In addition, there is a great variety of potential states which are extraordinary, some of which are experienced by many people at some time during their lifetime (e g when ill with high fever or intoxicated or due to certain activities), and others which some people experience more often due to their cultural settings. These states can be normal or ordinary for people living in a polyphasic culture but are definitely extraordinary for those living in a monophasic culture.

The value of this map is that it portrays that which the neurosciences also confirm, namely that the human and bodily potential of experiencing a great variety of states of consciousness is totally “normal”.

- *Map 2:* This map provides a view of the spectrum of ritually induced states of consciousness. It has already been indicated that in a great majority of human societies there are ritually induced forms of alternate states of consciousness. In this regard Bourguignon (1972:417-418; 1973:12-17; 1974:229-240; [1976] 1991:7-10) distinguishes between alternate states of consciousness interpreted as possession and those given some other explanation.<sup>28</sup> She uses the term “trance” to refer to an alternate state of consciousness in which contact with self and others is modified in some particular way, ranging from total unconsciousness to a very shallow modification. Among these states, two are found very frequently: The



concept of a temporary absence of the soul, which leaves the body and goes on a trip or is abducted; or the notion that the body is taken over by one or more possessing spirits for the duration of the trance. She refers to the first kind as *trance* and to the second as *possession trance*.<sup>29</sup> She also mentions a concept of possession that is not applied exclusively to alternate states of consciousness, and this she refers to as *possession*<sup>30</sup> (cf Jung 1988:32-38; Lewis 1986:82; Davies 1995:23-26, 117; DeMaris 2002:146-151).

- *Map 3*: This map distinguishes between ecstatic and meditative states in religious settings. "These can be placed on a single circular continuum which represents two alternate ways of attaining the Self" (Craffert 2002:74). D'Aquili and Newburg (1993:5-6) observe that neurologically speaking, these experiences can be driven from the "bottom-up" (by means of the physical behaviors of ritual), or from the "top-down" (triggered by the mind). Although the two ends of the continuum represent different physiological processes, they bring about much the same result – an experience of oneness with the universe.

Craffert (2002:75) concludes from these maps that not all alternate states of consciousness are religiously experienced, that not all religiously experienced states are similar, and that the borders between them are flimsy.

### 2.3.5 Induction techniques

The possibility of experiencing alternate states of consciousness occurs in the interaction of the biological and symbolic systems. Winkelman (2000:24) explains this as follows:

A range of biological manipulations of the body, including drugs,<sup>31</sup> sensory stimulation and deprivation, and physical activities, can dramatically alter consciousness and the individual's experience of self

and world. Conversely, voluntary control of mental process and attention to symbols can yoke experience and body physiology, forcing dramatic alterations in consciousness and organic responses.

According to Price-Williams (1975:88-89), alternate states of consciousness do not come ready-made without discipline, training, and initiation. Goodman (1990:180-181) lists the following conditions that must be met before a person can experience an alternate state of consciousness:

- Such a person needs to know how to find the crack between the ordinary reality and the alternate reality.
- Since the human body is an intruder in the alternate reality, some bodily preparation is necessary for the person to tune the physical self to the alternate reality. Only in this way can he or she properly perceive it.
- The person who wants to experience the alternate state of consciousness needs to know the proper angle of vision.
- The event perceived in the experience of the alternate reality is sketched out very hazily and can only be understood by means of cultural expectations.

In addition to this, certain neurological procedures also need to take place in order to induce an alternate state of consciousness:

- The baseline state of consciousness must first be disrupted. This can be carried out by psychological, physiological or drug actions that disrupt the stabilization process either by interfering with this process or by withdrawing attention or awareness energy from it.
- Secondly, patterning forces must be applied. These are stimuli that push disrupted psychological functioning toward the new pattern of the desired alternate state of consciousness.
- Thirdly, the patterning stimuli must push the isolated psychological structures into a new construction – resulting in an alternate state of

consciousness (see Tart 1977:192-197; Tart 1982:262-266; Tart 2000:257).

This can be achieved, according to Ludwig (1966:225; 1972:12), in any setting, by a wide variety of agents or maneuvers which interfere with the normal inflow of sensory or proprioceptive stimuli, the normal outflow of motor impulses, the normal emotional tone, or the normal flow and organization of cognitive processes. It seems that an optimal range of exteroceptive stimulation is necessary for the maintenance of baseline consciousness, and levels of stimulation either above or below this range appear to contribute to the production of alternate states of consciousness. Thus, alternate states of consciousness can be induced by modifying sensory input, either directly or indirectly (Bourguignon 1979:236; cf Pilch 1996a:133).

This argument makes it clear that there is a close connection between religious experiences and the human body.<sup>32</sup> Goodman (2001:7) points out that the most popular technique to induce alternate states of consciousness in a religious ritual involves rhythmic stimulation. This causes the following changes in a person:

The rate of the heartbeat increases; the blood pressure drops; in the blood serum, adrenaline, noradrenalin, and cortisol diminish; and the brain begins to release a peptide, the beta endorphin. This compound is the body's own opiate and is what produces the infinite joy associated with ecstasy. The electric activity of the brain also changes; high-amplitude and low-frequency theta waves appear in EEGs produced by altering current, while at the same time the brain begins to act like a battery and produces an enormous increase in its negative potential, as seen in direct-current EEGs. All of these changes are instituted on cue; that is, when the rhythmic activity – the drumming, clapping, singing, and so forth – starts, and the systems of the body involved in the trance return to previous conditions when the stimulation stops.

But rhythmic stimulation is not the only way in which alternate states of consciousness can be brought about. Craffert (2002:59) perceives the two main ways by means of which these states can be induced as:

- Physiological deprivation: fasting, sleep deprivation, restricted sensory stimulation and breath control. In most religious traditions these are all institutionalized and are performed in culturally prescribed ways.
- Physiological overstimulation: can be induced by ritual practices like drumming, chanting, singing and dancing.

Craffert (2002:69-70) also lists a number of different ways in which alternate states of consciousness can be brought about.<sup>33</sup> These can follow from certain bodily conditions or experiences (e.g., highway hypnosis) or be caused by certain illnesses (e.g., fever), be the result of recreational activities (e.g., mood-altering drugs or long distance running) or the result of religious practices (e.g., rituals). Induction can thus be deliberate (e.g., meditation) or accidental (e.g., highway trance), it can be produced by artificial means (e.g., drugs) or within a natural setting (e.g., dancing or drumming), it can be individual and spontaneous (e.g., during solitude or prayer) or while participating in a group activity (e.g., ritual dancing or chanting) (cf Bourguignon 1976:47, 53; Richeport 1984; Lewis 1989:34; Pilch 1995c:53-54; Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998:14; Korn 2002:41; Harvey 2003:27-56).

Like most skills, the induction process can be learned so well that transition to an alternate state of consciousness can be almost automatic and instantaneous. Such fast transitions and habitual familiarity can mean that a person may not consciously recognize that he or she is in an alternate state of consciousness (see Tart 2000:257-258). On the other hand, since consciousness is a very complex system, with multiple stabilization processes operating simultaneously in the human brain, induction may not always work. Additionally, people's personalities as well as their contexts also play a role in their openness towards alternate states

of consciousness (cf Shapiro 1977:148; Glicksohn 2001:347; see Tart 1977:192-197; Tart 1982:262-266; Tart 2000:257).

When the process of preparation for the earliest baptism (as we find it described in some of the early texts) is discussed in chapter 4, the similarities with these induction techniques will become apparent, which will show that the baptism of Jesus' earliest followers was probably alternate states of consciousness experiences. The similarities with the earliest Eucharist, which will be discussed in chapter 5, are not as obvious as is the case with baptism, but it is still possible to draw a line between preparation for the earliest Eucharist and induction techniques that result in alternate states of consciousness – especially regarding the first time Jesus-followers participated in the Eucharist, since this event took place immediately after baptism.

### **2.3.6 The neurology of alternate states of consciousness**

Research into the human brain and nervous system may explain why and how alternate states of consciousness occur and can help us to interpret these experiences (Pilch 2002d:697). Neuroscience demonstrates that the brain mediates thought, image, feeling, and action<sup>34</sup> (Laughlin 1997:472). The structures mediating consciousness are, therefore, also located in the brain and produced by the nervous system, with or without stimulation by events occurring in the external world (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:43; cf Siegel 1977:139-140). This explains why both a flash of light and gentle pressure on the eyeballs will result in the experience of light in the visual receptors (see Siegel 1977:134; Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:109-110). When one is in an alternate state of consciousness, the images experienced in the sensorium are, therefore, just as "real" as those experienced when one is in a baseline state of consciousness (see Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:273). Consequently, a neurophenomenological framework linking biology and experience needs to be taken into consideration in order to understand alternate states of consciousness (see Winkelman 2000:1).

The desire to alter consciousness is an innate, human, biologically based drive with adaptive significance. Alternate states of consciousness are a manifestation of a fundamental homeostatic dynamic of the nervous system. These manifestations of consciousness involve a biologically based integrative mode of consciousness, replacing baseline conditions with a parasympathetic dominant state characterized by high-voltage, slow-wave electroencephalogram (EEG) activity originating in the circuits linking the brain stem and the hippocampal-septal area of the limbic system with the frontal cortex. Winkelman (2000:7-8) explains this as follows:

This integrative mode of consciousness is a condition of homeostatic balance, a physiologically based mode of organismic functioning and integration. These conditions of systematic brain-mind<sup>35</sup> integration provide different types of information processing than that associated with waking consciousness....Induction of integrative brain processing is achieved through rituals that manipulate biological functions through both physical activities and cognitive-emotional associations to produce transformations of consciousness, linking the individual with supraindividual and intrapersonal frames of reference.

The most basic part of the nervous system is the autonomic nervous system. The latter system is responsible for maintaining “baseline” bodily function, which happens with input from the rest of the brain and central nervous system. It also allows the body to respond to external stimuli and it helps in generating fundamental emotions such as joy, fear and shame. The autonomic nervous system is thus the part of the brain that plays an important role in inducing alternate states of consciousness.

The autonomic nervous system is composed of two subsystems, namely the sympathetic system and the parasympathetic system. The sympathetic system subserves to the fight-or-flight response and comprises the physiological base of our adaptive strategies. It is in control of short-range adaptation to events in the

environment. The sympathetic system forms part of the arousal system, which is responsible for the functioning of vital resources, like stopping digestion, opening the airways in the lungs, increasing heart rate and blood pressure, increasing muscle efficiency, the dilation of the pupils, erection of body hair, and increasing the rate of respiration. The function of the parasympathetic system is directly opposite to that of the sympathetic system. This system is responsible for maintaining homeostasis and conserving the body's resources and energy. It regulates physiological maintenance activities and vegetative functions such as the growth of cells, digestion, relaxation, and sleep. It forms part of the quiescent system. The functions of the quiescent system include storage of vital resources, digestion and distribution of nutrients, constriction of bronchi, decreasing heart rate and blood pressure, collection of waste products, and slowing of respiration. Increase of activity in one of these two systems normally leads to decrease of activity in the other. But the specific balance between these two systems under particular environmental circumstances is open to conditioning. Ritual or meditation can generate alternate states of consciousness by activating the arousal and the quiescent systems (d'Aquili & Newberg 1999:23-27; cf Sargant 1961:52-57, 89-90).

This implies that alternate states of consciousness can be induced in the autonomic nervous system from the "bottom up" (via ceremonial ritual) or from the "top down" (via meditation), as I mentioned earlier. These terms refer to whether the initiating events in generating such experiences occur first in the autonomic nervous system (bottom up) or in the cerebral cortex (top down)<sup>36</sup> (d'Aquili & Newberg 1999:99-104).

An alternate state of consciousness can be described as a state in which wholeness of perception is to one degree or another greater than the sense of the discreteness of its component parts. d'Aquili and Newberg (1993:10) state that there is substantial evidence indicating that the posterior-superior parietal lobe of the brain is responsible for the imposition of wholeness on perceived or

imagined reality. This area is responsible for orienting self and objects in three-dimensional space, and even the sense of space itself arises from the functioning of this area. It is their hypothesis that the degree of unity perceived in organizing sensory input is directly proportional to the amount of information input cut off from the posterior-superior parietal lobe. This process of progressive “deafferentation” from information input results in an accumulating holistic perception of reality, until total deafferentation from information input results in a sense of contentless absolute unity.

Another factor to take into consideration is that cognized and labeled categories of experience (like “awake”, “dreaming”, “playing”), and their mediating neurocognitive entrainments, are called *phases* of consciousness. The points of experiential and neurophysiological transformation between phases are called *warps* of consciousness. When a society wishes to exercise control over the recurrence and quality of a phase of consciousness, it will tend to ritualize<sup>37</sup> the individual’s activity during the warp preceding the phase. Warps are durations of neural transformation that are usually both short and efficacious. They also tend to occur unconsciously (Laughlin 1997:478). In any society a finite set of possible phases of consciousness is declared normal. Members of that society are socialized to recognize the appropriate attributes of these phases and to consider them significant for their own and other’s mindstates (Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili 1992:142). Thus, a warp is a liminal event – an event that stands between two cognized strips of experience (two phases), much as a doorway stands between two rooms (Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili 1992:142). In order for individuals or groups to control phases of consciousness, control must be exercised over the factors inducing warps. In other words, control must be exercised over the structural aspects of experience about which the experiencer is normally least aware. The simplest and most direct means of controlling a phase of consciousness is by directing the attention of the experiencer to the warp preceding it. For example: The warp between the waking phase and the dream phase of consciousness has been termed “hypnagogic” and the warp



between the dream phase and the waking phase “hypnopompic”. There is evidence that mediation of these warps is carried out by neural systems over a wide expanse of the nervous system. These warps are extremely brief and few people in the Western culture are aware of them, but learning to control them can lead to the recalling of dreams (Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili 1992:141-144; cf Winkelman 2000:123-124).

When entering an alternate state of consciousness, there are different stages through which a person goes (not every person necessarily passes through all the stages):

- In the *first stage*, people see geometric forms, such as dots, zigzags, grids, sets of parallel lines, nested curves, and meandering lines. The forms are brightly colored and flicker, pulsate, enlarge, contract, and blend with one another. Some societies give meanings to these forms and colors,<sup>38</sup> others do not.
- In the *second stage*, persons try to make better sense of the geometric forms by illusioning them into objects of religious or emotional significance. The objects often depend on the emotional state of the person. For instance, if the person is thirsty, a round luminous form may be seen as a cup.
- The *third stage* is reached through something like a tunnel. People feel themselves drawn into the tunnel, at the end of which is a bright light. On the sides of the tunnel is a lattice derived from the geometric imagery of stage one. In the compartment of this lattice the person can now start to see people, animals, and so forth. When people emerge from the far end of the tunnel, they find themselves in the world of trance. The things that they see are intensely real. People can fly and change into birds or animals (Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998:14-19; cf Siegel 1977:132-139).

Although we now know that the above mentioned stages are wired into the universal human nervous system, this does not mean that every person who experiences an alternate state of consciousness interprets it in the same way. The meanings given to the items people see and experience in alternate states of consciousness are culture-specific. At least in some measure, people experience what they expect to experience (Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998:14-19; see Pilch 1998a:56).

This concludes my discussion on the nature of alternate states of consciousness. In chapter 1, I said that Jesus “showed” by means of alternate states of consciousness and that Jesus-groups later “re-enacted” this by means of the rites of baptism and the Eucharist. Now that we know some theories of how alternate states of consciousness function, this hypothesis should make sense. In the following section, I intend to describe the relation between alternate states of consciousness and myth. By means of anti-language, the earliest Jesus-followers “told” about his alternate states of consciousness and the way in which these states affected his life. Myths are closely related to anti-language. In a sense, myths can be described as the “objectifying” of alternate states of consciousness, as verbalized in anti-language.

## **2.4 ALTERNATE STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND MYTH**

### **2.4.1 What is myth?**

Before we investigate the role which alternate states of consciousness play in culture, it is important to understand what myth is, since in a sense alternate states of consciousness and myth construct the bridge to alternate states of consciousness and culture.

Van Aarde (2001a:49; cf Barthes 1957:142-143) describes the relation between alternate states of consciousness and myth as follows:

In a mythological context, everyday experiences are projected into an imaginary world; in other words, reality is emptied. The imaginary world consists of imageries analogous to everyday experiences; the “emptied history” is filled with “nature.” Crises in life are often made bearable by living in such an altered state of consciousness.

Another reason why an understanding of myth is important for this study is that myth forms an integral part of religion<sup>39</sup> and plays an important role in biblical interpretation (see Walsh 2001:1-12). Theories of myth differ. Segal (1998:3; 1999:67) notes that at least three major questions can be asked of myth, namely: what is its subject matter, what is its origin, and what is its function?<sup>40</sup> The subject matter can include anything, either something literal (gods and goddesses) or something symbolic (divinities as symbols of human traits). According to most theories, myths originate and function to satisfy a need (for anything – e.g., rain, information, or the meaning of life). Eliade<sup>41</sup> ([1963] 1975:5-6) avers that myth is an extremely complex cultural reality, which can be approached and interpreted from various and complementary viewpoints. Although myth is not easily definable, Segal (1986:5-6) shows that theorists largely agree on the following matters:

- That in the *first place* myth is a story. As a story, myth is more than an argument of proof. Not logic, but imagination, drives the plot. In myth, anything can happen.
- *Secondly*, myth considers the causes of events in terms of personalities. Events happen not because of the mechanical operation of impersonal forces but owing to the decisions of willful agents. Some think of these personalities as gods; for others they are legendary humans or animals; while still others interpret these personalities symbolically – gods as

symbols of humans or as symbols of the forces of nature – as long as the literal causes of events are personalities of some kind.

- In the *third place*, the prime kind of myth, for most scholars, is a creation story – a story of the creation of the world itself or of individual phenomena within it<sup>42</sup> (cf Van der Leeuw 1964:413-417; Eliot 1976:59).

According to Van Aarde (2003:245-245; 2005a:469; cf Sumner 1959:31-32; Honko 1984:49), some people may be under the impression that “myth” refers to a primitive, unsophisticated story – an untrue fable<sup>43</sup> which originated in oral culture and was handed down by unknown narrators<sup>44</sup> (cf Rogerson 1976:9). In contrast to this, he sees myth as folklorist “art” (cf Rogerson 1978:66-85), which is “true history” because it is “sacred history”<sup>45</sup> (cf Eliade 1975:1; Eliade, in Eliot 1976:13-14). Myth cannot be judged in the same way as “literature”, since its “truth” has no origin in logic and it is not historical. Dibelius (1971:1-2) classifies the literary products of individual writers as *großen Literatur*. In contrast to this, myths can be classified as *Kleinliteratur*, possessing collective origins. Kundera's ([1982] 1983:122) description of “folk song” explains this argument. He comments that songs “came about much like stalactites, developing new motifs and new variations drop by drop. They were passed down from generation to generation, and each singer added something to them. Every song had many creators, and all of them modestly disappeared behind their creation” (cf Rogerson 1976:8; see Van Aarde 2005a:469).

In the same vein, Jung (1988:79) remarks that it is sometimes assumed that at a given occasion in prehistoric times, the basic mythological ideas were “invented” by a clever old prophet or philosopher, and then were “believed” by uncritical people for ever thereafter. But, according to him, the word “invent” is derived from the Latin *invenire*, which means “to find” something by “seeking” it. The word itself then hints at some foreknowledge of what was going to be found. Jung (1988:89-90) indicates that myths consist of symbols that have not been

invented consciously. They have happened. He considers that myths go back to the primitive storytellers and their dreams, to people moved by the stirring of their fantasies. They did not concern themselves with the origin of their fantasies: it was only much later that people started to wonder where the stories had originated.

But what is the origin of myths? According to Jung (1988:79), myths are created by archetypes.<sup>46</sup> He believes that myths of a religious nature can be interpreted as a sort of mental therapy for the anxieties and sufferings of humankind in general, namely hunger, old age, disease, death, and war:

The universal hero myth, for example, always refers to a powerful man or god-man who vanquishes evil in the form of dragons, serpents, monsters, demons, and so on, and who liberates his people from destruction and death. The narration or ritual repetition of sacred texts and ceremonies, and the worship of such a figure with dances, music, hymns, prayers, and sacrifices, grip the audience with numinous emotions (as if with magic spells) and exalt the individual to an identification with the hero.

Walsh (2001:1-12; 55) describes myth as a sacred story,<sup>47</sup> which, according to him, includes texts, film, other media, and traditional oral tales. To him myth can constitute a vehicle for interpretation, a hermeneutical perspective, or a world view<sup>48</sup> (cf Segal 1986:97-100; Donald 1991:267-268; Arden 1998:44-45). To say myth is sacred story is to imply that it is both powerful story and structuring device. It uses the sacred (some mysterious, powerful “other”) to empower and to structure the natural and social maps in and by which human beings live. He adds that humans must “myth” to live, and while they do this they draw boundaries to include and exclude, they “achieve perspectives” to interpret otherwise meaningless data, they recognize and deal with tensions in a metaphysical, epistemological and ethical way, and they desire the “other”. In contrast to this myths can also oppress, dominate and deceive. Therefore, human beings also sometimes need liberation from myths.

Honko (1984:49-51; see Van Aarde 2003:250-252; 2005a:473-474) defines myth in terms of four criteria, namely form, content, function, and context:<sup>49</sup>

- The *form* of myth is a narrative, a verbal report of what is known about the origins of that which is sacred. Myth can be expressed in one of two forms – either as *enacted myth* or as *narrated myth*. Enacted myth can be described as a “ritual drama”, such as holy meals or initiation rites. Narrated myth comprises a “liturgical performance” where verbal and non-verbal forms, like hymns, sermons, prayers and dances, play a role (cf Walsh 2001:56).
- Regarding *content*, cosmogony plays an important role in most myths. Cosmogony has to do with reports on the creation of the world, the origin of the cosmos and the subjugation of chaos.<sup>50</sup>
- The *function* of myth in general is to serve as a model for behavior (cf Segal 1998:21; Walsh 2001:83).
- The *context* of myth is normally the rite, where the secular presence is filled by the sacred past. What was once possible in primordial times again becomes possible in the present and can once again exercise influence (see Walsh 2001:66).

If we take these four criteria into account, the importance of myth for this study becomes apparent:

- *Form*: I detect anti-language in the narrative reports of the earliest baptism and Eucharist, which in turn were enacted in these rites by the earliest Jesus-followers.

- *Content:* The content of these myths is the origin of the apocalyptic “new world” in Jesus, in contrast to the persecution the earliest Jesus-followers experienced.
- *Function:* Jesus’ “showing” as well as the earliest Jesus-followers’ “telling” served as a model for behavior. Each time this model was “re-enacted” it had the function of reminding the participants what their behavior needed to be.
- *Context:* This myth was re-enacted in the rites of baptism and the Eucharist. By means of baptism someone became part of a new group of people (initiation), and then by means of participation in the Eucharist, the meaning of Jesus’ death became present again.

These responses were only possible because of the first Jesus-followers’ apocalyptic worldview and their experience of alternate states of consciousness.

#### 2.4.2 Time in myth

Myths can either be explanatory or aetiological, which makes it important to reflect on the relationship between myth and history,<sup>51</sup> which in turn draws one’s attention to the role *time* plays in the interpretation of myth (Van Aarde 2003:247). Van der Leeuw (1964:384-385) points out that in the Western world we read time from the clock, but this is not the only way in which time can be understood. In mythical consciousness, for example, time can “stand still”; even though in actual fact the clock never stops ticking. He terms this “sacred time” (cf chapter 1). According to Otzen ([1972] 1973:14-18), scientists of religion and biblical scientists usually distinguish between “mythical time” and “historical time”, but they do not agree on the difference between these two types of time. Van Aarde (2003:247; 2005a:471-473; cf Sløk 1960:1263-1268; Van der Leeuw 1964:414) shows that the dimensions of “time” deals with the *Urzeit*

(narration about creation and paradise, thus *before*) or *Eindzeit* (narrations about the new heaven and earth; re-creation, thus *after*). Other scholars, like Bultmann ([1958] 1964:17, 21-36), perceived “mythical time” as time which transcends “historical time” (as the actual time in which historical events take place and which as such can be the object of historical criticism). “In other words, although articulated in an objectified form, ‘mythical time’ is not the subject of historical critical investigation, but is existentially capable of interpretation as *explanatory* or *aetiological* mythical sayings which should be demythologized in a hermeneutical way” (Van Aarde 2003:247, emphasis by Van Aarde). Eliade (1975:168-169; cf Allen 2002) views mythical time and historical time as overlapping in a synthetic manner. Van Aarde (2003:248) describes this as follows:

People live in “profane time” (which can be depicted linearly because it encompasses time from birth to death – i.e. normal, “historical” time). At the same time people also live in “sacral time” which manifests itself during religious happenings in their lives. “Sacral time” is cyclical insofar as it is recurring and traverses “profane time”. Its point of departure is always in “primeval time” (*Urzeit*). It then traverses someone’s life cycle many times and because of his or her desire to become “contemporary with the gods” (cf Eliade 1975:[169]), such “eschatological” desire (*Endzeit*) to return to a “primordial situation” where the gods and mythical ancestors are present, manifests itself at times. Thus myths about creation and paradise are often repeated in myths about a new heaven and earth....

Since “historical time” becomes arbitrary in alternate states of consciousness as well, the relation between alternate states of consciousness and myth can be seen in the above description of the perception of time in myth.

### 2.4.3 Myth and rites

Since this study concerns the rites of the earliest Jesus-followers, and myth and rites are interconnected with each other, a discussion of the relation between



myth and rites should illuminate the issues at stake. According to Segal (1999:37-41), a certain theory of myth and ritual claims that myth and ritual cannot exist without one another. He shows that Smith (1889) pioneered the myth-ritualist theory. Smith (1889:17-18) warns against the anachronistic habit of looking at religion from the side of belief rather than of practice. He argues that instead of first looking for the creed so that it can provide the key to ritual and practice, the reverse needs to be done. First find the ritual; then you will be able to unlock the creed. He cautions against even expecting to find a creed, for early religions did not necessarily possess a creed. He also asserts that the explanations given for a ritual were not very important and could even differ from time to time. These explanations were not formal declarations of belief (or creeds): they were stories, or myths, which simply described “the circumstances under which the rite first came to be established, by the command or by the direct example of the god” (Smith 1889:18). The rite was thus connected with a myth, and not with dogma. He even contends that in early religions mythology takes the place of dogma. But ritual was more important than myth (Smith 1889:19). According to Smith (1889:19), myth was derived from ritual, and not the other way around. To him, myth only arose once the reason for the ritual had somehow been forgotten.

Frazer ([1922] 1943:608-609) does not agree. In his myth-ritualist scenario, myth arises prior to ritual. A myth is applied to a ritual in which it is enacted. He considers that myth gives ritual its meaning. Frazer (1943:608-609), as well as others, argues that modern science replaced not only myth-ritualism, but myth and ritual per se (see Segal 1999:41-42).

On the other hand, Harrison ([1912] 1962:328) and Hooke (1933:3) assert that myth and ritual arise simultaneously. To Hooke, the spoken part of a ritual consists of a description of what is being done – thus myth. For Harrison, the primary meaning of myth is the spoken correlative of the acted rite (cf Van der Leeuw 1964:413-415; Segal 1999:42-43).

Later Malinowski ([1926] 1971:13-15, 18-19) and Eliade (1975:19) added that myth sanctions phenomena of all kind, not merely rituals (see Segal 1999:44). But Eliade stresses the importance of the ritualistic enactment of myth in the fulfillment of the ultimate function of myth: namely, that when myth is enacted, it serves as a time machine, carrying one back to the time of the myth and thereby bringing one closer to the divine.

Segal (1999:46) concludes by acknowledging that as influential as the myth-ritualist theory has been, there are theorists of myth and theorists of ritual who maintain that myths and rituals exist largely independently of one another (see Segal 1999:159-160). Although there is uncertainty about these matters, I argue that there is a probable relation between myth and ritual, and that this relation can be seen in the earliest baptism and Eucharist. Eliade's (1975:19) point, that in one way or another people "live" the myth, strengthens my case. To him, this happens in the sense that one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted. He writes that "living" a myth implies a genuinely "religious" (in my terminology – an "alternate state of consciousness") experience, since it differs from the ordinary experience of everyday life. Eliade (1975:19, emphasis by Eliade) explains:

The "religiousness" of this experience is due to the fact that one re-enacts fabulous, exalting, significant events, one again witnesses the creative deeds of the Supernaturals; one ceases to exist in the everyday world and enters a transfigured, auroral world impregnated with the Supernaturals' presence. What is involved is not a commemoration of mythical events but a reiteration of them. The protagonists of the myth are made present, one becomes their contemporary. This also implies that one is no longer living in chronological time, but in the primordial Time, the Time when the event *first took place*. This is why we can use the term the "strong time" of myth; it is the prodigious, "sacred" time when something *new, strong, and significant* was manifested. To re-experience that time, to re-enact it as often as possible, to witness again the spectacle of the divine works, to meet with the Supernaturals and relearn

their creative lesson is the desire that runs like a pattern through all the ritual reiterations of myths.

In other words, the rite is the context of the myth (Honko 1984:49-51). Myth gives content to a rite and repeats the sacred origin of the myth in the present. A myth, thus, expresses and confirms a society's religious values and norms; it provides patterns of behavior to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends and establishes the sanctity of the cult.

#### **2.4.4 The function of myth**

Many different theories exist according to which the function of myth is interpreted. Honko (1984:46-48) lists twelve:

- myth as source of cognitive categories;
- myth as form of symbolic expression;
- myth as projection of the subconscious;
- myth as an integrating factor in people's adaptation to life: myth as worldview;
- myth as charter of behavior;
- myth as legitimation of social institutions;
- myth as marker of social relevance;
- myth as mirror of culture and social structure;
- myth as result of a historical situation;
- myth as religious communication;
- myth as religious genre;
- and myth as medium for structure.

For the purpose of this study, I wish to emphasize two of these theories, in which myth is interpreted existentially:

- According to the Jungian school, myth is a *projection of the unconscious* (see Jung [1949]1984:248; Segal 1998:3-6, 17-19). For Jung himself this

happens by means of independent invention as hereditary, while neo-Jungians understand this as happening via independent invention through experience (see Segal 1998:13-17). From the shared substratum of humanness comes a condensed message which in actuality is a projection of the unconscious, which is controlled partly by tradition and partly by the elementary facts of life (see Van Aarde 2005a:475).

- Myth can also be perceived as a *worldview*, which can be described as a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense of the word (cf Kuhn 1966:43-51; see Küng 1988:172). In this sense myths offer an explanation for a specific individual paradigm, which at the same time possesses collective and traditional characteristics. People who are confronted with fundamental problems in connection with society, culture, and nature, in times of crises are given the opportunity to select those elements from their mythical heritage and paradigm that will satisfy other individuals and the society. Myths legitimize social institutions, since myths, with their ritual and ceremonial substructure, express the religious values by which social institutions are maintained (Van Aarde 2005a:475).

These theories all boil down to the notion that myth serves as a model for human action, since a mythical worldview does not presuppose change or development and is experienced as static. An almost uniform explanation of the world, which is based on the creative and formative actions of the gods, can be derived from myths. The religious personality shares in these deeds in so far as they are established as models in thoughts and are imitated and followed in action (Van Aarde 2005a:474). This process can once again be perceived clearly in the earliest Jesus-followers' participation in baptism and the Eucharist.

According to Van Aarde (2003:257-258), in studies of myth, "myth as worldview" and "myth as narrative" are sometimes regarded as mutually exclusive epistemological perspectives. But Bultmann's (1964:14-16) dialectical distinction

between mythology (worldview) and myth (an objectifying speech act as expression of such a world view) avoids this. Van Aarde (2003:259) comes to the conclusion that scholars must be careful not to interpret myth as non-mythical. He posits that “to approach myth from a post-modern perspective in the same way in which non-positivistic hermeneutics interprets metaphors in these days, opens a door for innovative theorizing about myth. Such an approach is a beginning of an exciting time for reopening a new stage in the interpretation of mythical elements in early Christian writings.”

Van Aarde’s (2005a:478-479) answer to the dilemma of misinterpreting myths lies in a tautegorical interpretation (as opposed to allegorical interpretation). An allegorical interpretation of myth approaches the mythical text from the angle of what could be “true” or “meaningful” for the interpreter. These assumptions stem from the worldview of the interpreter and not from the myth itself. On the other hand, a tautegorical interpretation views meaning and judges the truth of the myth by means of criteria which perceive the worldview of the myth as “other”, but do not understand the meaning of the myth as so “strange” that it has to be altered by way of allegory. This interpretation does not mean that the myth needs to be communicated “literally” as it is, but that the “same” message is communicated.<sup>52</sup>

The meaning of myths needs to be examined in connection with the specific time and society from which they originate, since meaning is relative (Van Aarde 2005a:475-476). Segal (1998:11, emphasis by Segal) observes:

To reach their intended audience, myths must be translated into a language the audience knows. Just as archetypes must be translated, however insufficiently, into myths, so myths must be translated, however insufficiently, into the language of those whose myths they are. Just as archetypes are dependent on myths to convey their meaning, so myths are dependent on interpretations to convey *their* meaning.

One should keep in mind that there is a difference between premodern and modern spiritualities. Premodern people exhibited a way of thinking that can be described as spontaneous and fantasy-like (*mythos*), while the modern mode of thought can be described as rationalistic and logical (*logos*) (Segal 1999:81-84). The “mythological” worldview underwent change in modern times and was replaced with a dualistic worldview. In this dualistic, scientific worldview, *mythos* (the “supernatural”) and *logos* (the “natural”) were increasingly seen as separate entities, which led to a type of historical consciousness according to which God’s “supernatural” work in history can only be understood when seen as part of natural processes<sup>53</sup> (Van Aarde 2005a:477; cf Rogerson 1976:1-9).

People construct myths to explain their world. d’Aquili and Newberg (1999:86-91) point out that as long as there are unanswerable questions in the universe, the cognitive operators will try to find temporary solutions – in the form of myth. But why is it important to take note of myth for the purpose of this study? In my opinion Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili (1992:276-281) answer this question adequately. They argue that symbols provide an ideographic mode of access (portals from which a person can enter an alternate state of consciousness), as well as giving form to the experiences encountered in this state. Rites constitute the driving force behind the alternate state of consciousness, and are characterized by patterned, repetitive, and structured behavior, which produces generally inter-organismic or intra-organismic coordination. Supported by the driving techniques encountered in rites, intense concentration upon a particular symbol can place the mind into a visual pattern in a hyperintentional way that eventually fills the whole of consciousness. The mode of conceptual integration employed by a person entering an alternate state of consciousness is myth. Myth forms the bridge between the iconic and the verbal (rational) and includes elements of both. Within the mythic world, imagery and feeling are cast into a narrative. For the purpose of my investigation, this narrative is told by way of anti-language. Story line and causality become more linear and thus more satisfying to the analytic mind. Myth mediates between the transpersonal and the personal,

between the “sacred” and the “profane”. Although myth explains and applies to the realm of the practical, it stems from the realm of the sacred. Existing in manifest form within the world of the “real,” myth acts as the container for, and integration of, the land of the “unreal” (cf Bourguignon 1972:427; Laughlin 1997:480-481).

It can thus be posited that myth exhibits two functions. In the first place, it presents a problem of ultimate concern to a society, which is normally offered in the form of opposites, such as life-death, heaven-hell, or good-evil. Secondly, once the existential problem is presented in myth, it is solved by some resolution or unification of the seemingly irreconcilable opposites that constitute the problem. This resolution usually occurs when the myth is enacted in a rite, because properly performed rites can produce powerful alternate states of consciousness. When the myth is incarnated by the rite, this sense of union or oneness is applied by the mind to the major antinomies of the myth. When this enactment is successful, the sense of a resolution of the problem is vividly experienced by the participants in the rite, and the resolution of otherwise irreconcilable opposites becomes a fact which is experienced (d'Aquili & Newberg 1999:85-86).

In conclusion it can be reaffirmed that myths were one of the ways in which alternate states of consciousness could be verbalized. These myths were told in anti-language, because the content of these myths was related to alternate states of consciousness – which cannot be adequately expressed in “ordinary” language, since the last-mentioned is in opposition to such states. Jesus’ baptism and all-inclusive meals became a myth for the newly established groups of Jesus-followers, the anti-society “family of God”. They re-enacted this myth in order to accord meaning to their lives.

## **2.5 THE CONTEXT OF ALTERNATE STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

As I explained earlier, alternate states of consciousness function within a specific cultural setting. Without taking the context of alternate states of consciousness into consideration, the meaning these states could have may be jeopardized. Although I remarked in chapter 1 that first-century Mediterranean people did not understand religion as a separate category in their lives, in the study of alternate states of consciousness religion does play a role. Therefore, I intend to investigate the cultural as well as religious context of alternate states of consciousness in this section.

### **2.5.2 Alternate states of consciousness and culture**

Every culture possesses a consensus reality. Cultural selectivity and plausibility structures shape the wide range of human potentials into a fixed and stable state of baseline consciousness. This is a characteristic of mental functioning that adapts people more or less successfully to survive in their culture's consensus reality. Our baseline state of consciousness constitutes a tool for coping with the environment, the consensus reality we live in<sup>54</sup> (Tart 1982:260-261). If we desire to understand the appearance and effect of alternate states of consciousness in the first-century Mediterranean world, for example, I argue that we must pay attention to the Mediterranean culture's consensus reality<sup>55</sup> (see chapter 1; Malina & Pilch 2000:5; Pilch 2002a:105).

If we keep in mind that almost every aspect of life is culturally conditioned, it is only natural to conclude that alternate states of consciousness are also culturally formed and influenced by learning, cultural patterning, social practice, tradition and community opinion<sup>56</sup> (Bourguignon 1979:239; cf Tart 1977:211-212). Thus, alternate states of consciousness are open to different cultural controls and to various cultural interpretations (cf Lewis 1989:39; Goodman 2001:7-8). The content of alternate states of consciousness is usually determined by a local



cultural pattern, which determines how the person who experienced the alternate state of consciousness will identify what he or she had “seen” in the alternate state (see Pilch 1995c:55). New members of any society are socialized into its culture and they develop particular personalities that include particular beliefs. Thus, the behavior manifested in a given alternate state of consciousness may reflect a certain personality, or that person’s values and beliefs, stresses, and needs, or reflect the same about the culture of which the person is a member (Pilch 1993:237).

This suggests that people who were initiated into early Jesus-groups by means of baptism, and were later integrated into the community by means of repetitive participation in the Eucharist, would all understand the alternate states experienced during these rites in the same manner. The Eucharist was a celebration of Jesus’ redemptive death and a reminder that his followers needed to arrange their lives according to the example Jesus had given them.

Although alternate states of consciousness are widespread psychobiological phenomena experienced in at least one form by almost all human beings, some of these states are more generally and extensively culturally patterned than others (Bourguignon 1974:234-235). Since people have to cope with these different states of consciousness in one way or another, culture offers a way of doing so by prescribing the appropriate behavior (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998:12; Pilch 2002d:701). This leads to the institutionalizing of some alternate states of consciousness (Pilch 1993:236-237) – as in the earliest baptism and Eucharist. Thus, alternate states of consciousness are best understood in terms of a specific culture’s expectations<sup>57</sup> (cf d’Aquili & Newberg 1999:158; see Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:282-285). In fact, alternate states of consciousness play an important role in culture. The institution of alternate states of consciousness can mean something for the participating individual on the one hand and fulfill a function for the society on the other (Bourguignon 1976:51; cf Tart 1972:3). Expectations with respect to alternate states of consciousness and experiences

during these states contribute to the construction of a cultural universe or behavioral environment and provide channels for the verification of beliefs<sup>58</sup> (Bourguignon 1972:429). Therefore, it is important to examine the role religion plays in alternate states of consciousness as well.

### **2.5.3 Alternate states of consciousness and religion**

For the purpose of the following discussion, we must keep in mind that religion is also embedded in culture. According to Goodman (1988a:6-7), some of the universal traits of religion are: ritual; alternate states of consciousness; an alternate reality; good fortune, misfortune, and the rituals of divination; ethics; and the semantics of the term “religion”. Regarding alternate states of consciousness, she writes that a religion as such can be described using ordinary language, but religious experience can take place only if there are radical changes in the way the body functions, initiating an alteration in consciousness. She describes the alternate reality as constituting another dimension of reality as a whole. Entrance into the alternate reality is gained through an alternate state of consciousness and this reality is patterned by the specific culture to which the religious practitioner belongs.

Bourguignon (1973:3; see Bourguignon 1976:48) asserts that often alternate states of consciousness are

...institutionalized and culturally patterned and utilized in specific ways....The cultural meaning supplied for these states and the institutional framework within which they operate vary from society to society, and thus the specific functions they fulfill vary also. Yet, there are some common trends. In traditional societies – and to a considerable extent in modern societies as well – the context in which such patterned states are viewed most often by people is one that we may broadly call “religious”.

One of the major functions of religion is to deal with the areas of life that are beyond the empirical skills of a society's specialists, things that they cannot control, like illness, weather conditions, the fertility or availability of game, social conflicts, the mysterious and unanswerable questions about the universe and the beings and forces in it (Bourguignon 1973:4):

Among such problems beyond the control of individuals are the frequently cataclysmic consequences of change – social, cultural, economic, and political. And when we consider the relationship of religion to change, its double role as a bulwark against change on the one hand and as a mediator or even initiator of change on the other, we often find that key individuals in this process experience altered states of consciousness. It is on this point of juncture – between religious institutions (beliefs, practices, and personnel) and the process of sociocultural change, where altered states of consciousness may play a critical role.

Concerning social change, Bourguignon (1973:29-33) distinguishes between “microchange” and “macrochange”. Microchange<sup>59</sup> refers to modifications in the social situation of an individual without implying a modification in the social structure, whereas macrochange<sup>60</sup> refers to modifications in the social structure. To the extent that alternate states of consciousness offer opportunities for a larger number of personal options to the individual within the existing social framework, these states help to maintain that framework and thus act as a conservative force. On the other hand, by providing a sanctioned and prestigious form of decision-making, these states may, in situations of social crisis, provide a way for the expression of dissatisfaction with existing patterns and for the introduction of innovations. This is in my view what took place during the lives of Jesus and his earliest followers.

Berger (1967:41-43) points out that religion serves to maintain the reality of the socially constructed world within which people exist, since religion is rooted in the practical concerns of everyday life. But the legitimating power of religion has

another important dimension – the integration into a comprehensive understanding of the marginal situations in which the reality of everyday life is put in question. Situations like these occur frequently, since all individuals pass through such a situation approximately every twenty hours, in the experience of sleep and in the transition stages between being asleep and being awake. In the world of dreams the reality of everyday life is left behind (cf Jung 1988:45, 95). In the transition stages of falling asleep and waking up again the contours of everyday reality are less firm than in the state of fully awake consciousness. The reality of everyday life, therefore, is continuously surrounded by a collection of different realities. Where these other realities (experienced in alternate states of consciousness) are taken seriously as realities, to be precise as realities of a different kind,<sup>61</sup> religion serves to integrate these realities into the reality of everyday life. But within a modern or scientific frame of reference religion is less capable of performing this integration, since these realities are, most of the time, not taken seriously as realities in the Western world. All the same, where religion continues to be meaningful as an interpretation of existence, its definitions of reality must somehow be able to account for the fact that there are different spheres of reality.

One may ask what Berger (1967:43-45) means by “marginal” situations. He describes such situations<sup>62</sup> as characterized by the experience of ecstasy – in the literal sense of “*ek-stasis*” (standing, or stepping *outside* reality as commonly defined). The world of dreams is ecstatic regarding everyday life, and the latter can only retain its primary status in consciousness if some way is found to legitimate these ecstasies within a frame of reference that includes both reality spheres. Other bodily states also produce ecstasies of a similar kind, particularly those arising from disease and acute emotional disturbance. The confrontation with death (whether through actually witnessing the death of others or anticipating one’s own death in the imagination) constitutes what is probably the most important marginal situation. When someone has to do with death, everything in the daytime world of one’s existence in society is threatened with

irreality. This could lead us to conclude that Jesus as well as his earliest followers (after his death) were placed in marginal situations. Berger (1967:43-44; emphasis by Berger) writes that insofar as “the knowledge of death cannot be avoided in any society, legitimations of the reality of the social world *in the face of death* are decisive requirements in any society. The importance of religion in such legitimations is obvious”. Religion maintains the socially defined reality by legitimating marginal situations in terms of an all-encompassing sacred reality. This permits the individual or group who experiences these situations to continue to exist in the world of their society – not “as if nothing had happened,” which is psychologically difficult in the more extreme marginal situations, but in the “knowledge” that even these events or experiences have a place within a universe that makes sense (Berger 1967:44). Thus, “[t]he key to a stable religion and a stable situation is the ability to utilize altered states under controlled, ritualized conditions....[A]ltered states increase suggestibility, they heighten the common faith of those who experience them jointly” (Bourguignon 1973:338).

d'Aquili & Newberg (1999:159-161) also consider that one of the functions of religion is an attempt to control the external environment. They add another function, namely, that religion leads to self-transcendence. An alternate state of consciousness has to do with this second function. It involves self-transcendence and increases a person's sense of unity with some higher order of reality. Why would a person want to experience self-transcendence? To gain a sense of insight into the world of the mysterious, union with God (or the Absolute), a sense of bliss or tranquility and a lack of fear regarding death. And this reinforces the first function of religion, because it verifies the existence of the power sources that are believed to be able to change the environment.

Examining what happens neurologically during religious behavior, d'Aquili and Newberg (1999:149) explain that religious behavior arises from the operation and interrelationship of two distinct neuroanatomical and neurophysiological mechanisms in the brain. The first comprises the perception of causal sequences

in the organization of reality, which results in an attempt to impose control over the world through the manipulation of causal constructs such as gods, demons and spirits. The second results from neurophysiological evolution, culminating in the potential to develop alternate states of consciousness. Experiences like these are often interpreted as glimpses into the world of the “supernatural” and tend to confirm the existence of the personalized power forces generated by the first mechanism. Such experiences can facilitate a reorganization of the personality structure and a realignment of the person toward the cosmos.<sup>63</sup> The amygdala, hippocampus and inferior (right) temporal lobe of the brain appear to provide the foundations for mystical, spiritual, and religious experience, the perception of ghosts, spirits and demons, and belief in demonic and angelic possession (Joseph 2001:106, 129; see d’Aquili & Newberg 1993:2-34).

In the religious life of a community, the classic mediator of alternate states of consciousness is the shaman. Shamans experience alternate states of consciousness, because they feel themselves endowed with powers to see and hear events in a realm not perceptible by all humans, and they usually do this for the benefit of others (see Winkelman 2000:116). In chapter 1, I indicated that Jesus can also be viewed as a shaman-like figure. Furthermore, studies regarding alternate states of consciousness were traditionally associated with the shaman (Pilch 2002a:104, 108), and therefore I shall provide a cursory overview of the phenomenon *shamanism* in the next section.

## **2.6 SHAMANISM**

### **2.6.1 Introduction**

A discussion of alternate states of consciousness without any reference to shamanism would be incomplete. The reason for this is that certain people who experience alternate states of consciousness take on special statuses and ritualize these experiences so as to help make better sense of their way of life.

Anthropologists call these ritual specialists shamans (see Lenski, Lenski & Nolan 1991:110-112).

Although the term “shaman” can be translated “the ecstatic one”,<sup>64</sup> according to Stutley (2003:3), it is difficult to develop a workable definition of “shaman”<sup>65</sup> (see Lewis 1986:88; Kehoe 2000:8, 57; Winkelman 2000:6-7, 58; Price 2001:5; Grim 2003:92; Hamayon 2003:63-64; Harvey 2003:1). Furthermore, not only the meaning, but also the origin, of the word “shamanism” is a point of dispute between scholars<sup>66</sup> (see Stutley 2003:3). There are scholars who trace the word “shaman” back to the Tungus language of Central Siberia, and consequently state that it can only be used to refer to Siberian shamans, since there are vital differences between other ritualists and Siberian shamans (see Kehoe 2000:8, 65; cf Eliade [1964] 1989:3-5). Other scholars argue that since the methods by which shamans are chosen and trained and the ways in which they fulfill their roles are of considerable interest to academics in many disciplines, and because they attract popular interest too, the word shaman has become part of languages outside Siberia (see Lewis-Williams 2001:21; Harvey 2003:1-2, 5-6; MacLellan 2003:366). In this regard, Lewis (1986:78) asserts that the “term *shaman* belongs to that special category of ethnographically specific concepts used cross-culturally outside their own native contexts.” Price (2001:6) does not concur with historians of religion who resist using the term “shamanism” beyond certain regions of central Siberia, since, according to him, the concept of *shamanism* has always been an externally imposed construction, and does not exist anywhere at all other than in the minds of scholars investigating this phenomenon. Craffert (1999b:324) indicates that even the origin of the term *šaman* in the Tungus language, which is spoken by about 6% of the inhabitants of Siberia, is uncertain. It is also not certain whether the modern word *shaman* is derived from the Tungus world at all. But whatever the origin of the term, it has been widely adopted by anthropologists and scholars of comparative religion to refer to specific groups of religious practitioners in diverse cultures, including medicine men, witchdoctors, sorcerers, magicians, healers and seers. The word “shaman”

has thus become part of a new vocabulary where it carries additional associations and implications<sup>67</sup> (Harvey 2003:2).

Despite the variety of definitions regarding shamanism, Craffert (1999b:324-325) indicates that some commonalities do occur.<sup>68</sup> He describes the shamanic complex as a family of traditions which regularly occurs in many cultural systems,<sup>69</sup> and consists of a configuration of certain *features* (controlled alternate states of consciousness on behalf of the community) and certain *social functions* (such as healing, mediating, prophecy, exorcism and spirit possession), which flow from these experiences. He points out that it is not so much the individual elements but the combination of a number of aspects which constitutes the shamanic complex as an identifiable phenomenon in many cultural settings (cf Pilch 2002a:106). Shamanism is thus constituted by a combination of elements which exist independently elsewhere but are integrated into this complex with a particular worldview and which validate specific techniques.<sup>70</sup> Craffert (1999b:325) comments the following:

From this point of view a shaman is a person within a particular cultural system who successfully operates within the parameters of the shamanic complex; someone who combines controlled altered states of consciousness or non-ordinary psychic states with a variety of social functions on behalf of the group or community.<sup>71</sup>

Price (2001:6) concurs: "As both a term and a notion, shamanism is entirely an academic creation, and as such it is certainly a useful tool serving to describe a pattern of ritual behavior and belief found in strikingly similar form across much of the arctic and sub-arctic regions of the world."



Craffert (1999b:326; cf Eliade 1989:3-5) has compiled the following list of features and functions of shamanism:

- Features include *experiences*, like journeys, visions, possession, mediumistic and transformation experiences; as well as *techniques*, like ecstasy, drama, dreams and meditation.
- The functions ascribed to the shaman are those of healer, mediator, diviner, interpreter of dreams, sacrificer, protector from spirits, psychopomps, retriever of souls and exorcist.

Without suggesting that all elements of each category appear in every instance of shamanism, it seems clear that the combination of features and functions within recognizable world-views constitutes the shamanic complex (see Malina & Pilch 2000c:6-7; Pilch 2002a:106). Consequently, Harvey (2003:6) warns that it is difficult to achieve an appropriate balance between lumping all indigenous peoples together as if they were essentially the same and atomizing them into entirely dissimilar “tribal” groups. Thus, it might be that the concept of the “shaman” usefully points to widespread communalities among indigenous peoples, but that we need to speak about particular shamans (e.g., those who are Tungus) rather than implying that all shamans are alike.

The essence of shamanism, thus, is generally considered to be a healing ritual, practiced by a communal leader chosen and trained to work for the community; incorporating observable drumming, dancing, and chanting; climaxing in the adept falling down in a trance; plus the stated belief that the shaman’s soul leaves the body to travel in company with spirits during the trance<sup>72</sup> (Kehoe 2000:57; Harvey 2003:1; cf Henderson 1988:151; Lewis 1986:88). The shaman is the bridge between the spiritual and physical world (MacLellan, 2003:366). The way in which a shaman accomplishes acting as this bridge is to make use of alternate states of consciousness<sup>73</sup> (see Balzer 2003:310). According to

Winkelman (2000:7-8), shamans represent the first people who learned to operate within and to utilize alternate states of consciousness, providing psychodynamic integration and transformation. He argues that symbols, ritual, and myth, such as those referred to in the descent and ascent found in shamanic flight, represent these developmental transformations. These are exemplified in the death and rebirth experiences that represent the termination of one ego or identity and the birth of a new identity and sense of self.

### **2.6.2 Holy men or women**

In the biblical context, people who displayed the same characteristics and performed the same duty as shamans are known as “holy men” or “holy women” (*Hasid*) (Myburgh 1995:139; Pilch 1998a:53; Pilch 2002a:104; cf Brown 1971:89-92, 96). The term “Hasid” (חסיד) can be translated literally as “he who practices ‘hesed’ (חסד)”; “the loyal, the pious one” (Koehler & Baumgartner 1985:319). Myburgh (1995:138) understands this term as referring to someone who experiences an exceptional relationship with God. A holy person was a living model worthy to be imitated (Pilch 1998a:54). We learn from rabbinic literature (see Pilch 1998a:54) that a holy person was considered as Torah incarnated – everything such a person did was a living example of the Torah’s content and form.

If we take a look at the way Jesus of Nazareth is described in the Gospels, we see that this description fits him well (cf Van den Heever 1993:433-434). Jesus was authentically Jewish – and therefore he must be understood within his contemporary Judaism<sup>74</sup> (see Sanders 1985; Crossan 1992:417; Theißen & Merz 1996:143; Den Heyer 1997:73-74, 80-82). Vermes (1993:206-207) describes Jesus as “[a] powerful healer of the physically and mentally sick, a friend of sinners, he was a magnetic preacher of what lies at the heart of the law, unconditionally given over to rescue, not of communities, but of persons in need.” By means of his way of life, Jesus “showed” his contemporaries what it meant to be part of the kingdom of God. He did this in such a manner that his followers felt

inclined to “tell” other people about this and to live like Jesus themselves, by “re-enacting” Jesus’ “showing” in the rites of baptism and Eucharist.

Although there are no known instances available in the literature where Jesus is called a *Hasid* (Myburg 1995:149-150), Vermes (1983:83, 209) argues that the picture the Gospel writers paint of Jesus corresponds to that of a miracle-working *Hasid*. Another feature that suggests a connection between Jesus and a “holy man”<sup>75</sup> is the way in which he called God his father (e.g., Mk 14:36). The *Hasidim* displayed the same intimacy with God (see Pope 1989:528-529).

As with shamans, holy people were believed to have ready access to the deity and alternate reality. This access takes place in alternate states of consciousness, during which the holy person can discover solutions to problems, find new direction in life, heal the sick, change the weather, foretell the future, control the movement of animals, and converse with spirits<sup>76</sup> (Pilch 2001:242-243).

Thus, in social-scientific terms, it can be said that the Gospels portray Jesus as a holy man (see Mk 10:17; Lk 20:21; Craffert 1999b:329-340), who was gifted with alternate state of consciousness experiences, with the power to heal, and with power over spirits (see chapter 1). Furthermore, this meant that his reward (of continued life in alternate reality) was not completely unexpected, since holy people were believed to keep on living in alternate reality after they died<sup>77</sup> (Pilch 1998a:53; 2003b:257). This brings Pilch (2002a:104) to the following conclusion: “By reflecting on the social-scientific understanding of shamans and ASCs [alternate states of consciousness], the interpreter of the Gospels will be able to make fresh, culturally plausible interpretations of the events such as the visions reported about Jesus and his disciples”.

If we consider the process by which a person becomes a shaman, we shall observe striking similarities with the way in which Jesus started his public

ministry. Townsend (1997:444) comments that an individual cannot decide that he or she wants to become a shaman: this is the prerogative of the spirits (cf Eliade 1989:13; Dowson 1992:15). The usual sequence of events in the process of becoming a shaman is as follows (Pilch 2002a:106-107; adapted from Townsend 1997:445; cf Eliade [1958] 1965:87-89; Hitchcock 1976:169; Malina & Pilch 2000:6-7):

- contact with the spirit (by possession or adoption);
- identification of the possessing or adopting spirit;
- acquisition of necessary ritual skills;
- tutelage by both a spirit and a real-life teacher;
- growing familiarity with the possessing or adopting spirit;
- and ongoing alternate state of consciousness experiences.

It is also possible that a death-rebirth or major-change symbolism transfers the novice from his or her old status to a liminal transitional position and finally to rebirth as a changed being (Townsend 1997:446; Pilch 2002a:108; see chapter 3).

Pilch (2002a:108) interprets Jesus' baptism (Mk 1:9-11//Mt 3:13-17//Lk 3:21-22) as his call to become a holy man. Pilch explains this event as follows: Jesus meets John the Baptist, his teacher and guide, and becomes his apprentice. In an alternate state of consciousness Jesus sees the Holy Spirit descending upon him, which means that he was contacted by the spirit world. He then hears a voice from heaven whereby the spirit revealed his identity and announced a new identity for Jesus – a beloved son who pleases the Father. Thus, Jesus is called to become a holy man, a broker on behalf of the patron (God)<sup>78</sup> (cf Van den Heever 1993:426). Davies (1995:52-54) points out that in accord with Mediterranean cultural values, the honors attributed to Jesus at his baptism needed to be tested. Jesus had to prove that he really was a faithful, adopted son of God. This he did in an alternate state of consciousness. He engaged in a challenge-riposte contest with the tester, and he won. The devil tested Jesus'

spiritual strength, loyalty and obedience (Mk 1:12-13//Mt 4:1-11//Lk 4:1-13). The experience and successful passing of the test also constitutes one of the steps toward becoming a shaman: Jesus demonstrated that he had acquired the necessary skills to deal with and control the spirit world (Pilch 2002a:108-109; cf Pilch 1999c:80). All of this can be summarized as “Jesus showing”, which in turn leads to “telling” and “re-enacting”, as argued earlier.

Now that we know that it was expected of Jesus, as a holy man, to experience alternate states of consciousness in the first-century Mediterranean world, it is necessary to investigate the function of these states.

## **2.7 THE FUNCTION OF ALTERNATE STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

According to Ludwig (1966:230-233; 1972:20) the very presence of alternate states of consciousness in people attests to their importance in everyday functioning. As a matter of fact, alternate states of consciousness exhibit functions on more than one level. He lists adaptive as well as maladaptive expressions of alternate states of consciousness. The adaptive expressions can for example be used in healing (e.g., by shamans or pharmacologically), in avenues of new knowledge and experience (e.g., creative insights and problem solving) and in social function (e.g., possession by a deity [or the Holy Spirit] allows an individual to fulfill his or her cult role; from society's standpoint the needs of the group are met through its identification with the entranced person who acts out ritualized group conflicts and aspirations, such as the themes of death and resurrection and cultural taboos) (cf Neufeld 2005:7). The description of Jesus in the Gospels indicates that he utilized his ability to deploy alternate states of consciousness for all of these “adaptive” expressions. Maladaptive expressions comprise the following: attempts at resolution of emotional conflict (e.g., amnesias), defensive functions in certain threatening situations conducive to the normal arousal of anxiety (e.g., lapsing into hypnoidal states during psychotherapy), a breakthrough of forbidden impulses (e.g., panic reactions), escape from responsibilities and inner tensions (e.g., alcohol), the symbolic

acting out of unconscious conflicts (e.g., demoniacal possession), the manifestation of organic lesions of neurophysiological disturbances (e.g., toxic conditions) and an inadvertent and potentially dangerous response to certain stimuli (e.g., highway hypnosis).

For the purpose of this study, an important function can be observed in the alternate state of consciousness which Bourguignon (1973:31-33) termed possession trance. In her view, possession trance is often a search for compensation and self respect among people who are humiliated in their daily lives. The kind of society most prone to give rise to the practice of possession trance is sedentary and dependent on agriculture and/or animal husbandry (cf Lewis 1986:84). This leads her to conclude that those people who suffer the greatest inability to modify their own lives in a given society under existing circumstances will be most likely to make use of alternate states of consciousness<sup>79</sup> (Bourguignon 1973:350; cf Lewis 1986:82-83). Davies (1995:40) concurs. According to him, societies where alternate states of consciousness occur frequently contain local groups larger than 1 000 and have an overall population greater than 100 000, exhibiting a jurisdictional hierarchy extending beyond the local level, and a rigid hierarchical system often including a form of slavery. Alternate states of consciousness often represent the way in which certain individuals circumvent restrictions imposed by their economic, sexual, or social status, and so will most often be found in societies where these restrictions are rather clearly defined. The society of first-century Palestine (the world of Jesus and his followers) meets these criteria (Davies 1995:40; see Malina 1993a, 1993b).

Lewis (1989:27-29, 119, 157-158) further distinguishes between “peripheral possession” and “central possession”. Neufeld (2005:7-9) describes this issue as follows: Peripheral possession refers to what happens on the margins of a community, where the weak and powerless are found. On the other hand, central possession can be found in the center of a community, where powerful people

compete for authority. The function of peripheral possession is employed by the marginalized to protest their position and situation in society, while central possession is utilized by the powerful to protect a social and religious morality under attack. With reference to the present study, because of their marginalization, the Jesus followers formed an anti-society in opposition to the established society where the powerful resided. Alternate states of consciousness played an important part in this process.

Davies (1995:39-40) agrees with Lewis, but he places more emphasis on “peripheral possession”. He shows that because people who experience possession trance enjoy an upward alteration in social status during the period when they are possessed, more often people of relatively low social statuses, marginal people, or people in a condition of social oppression, choose to join groups where alternate states of consciousness occur regularly. People whose opinions are normally received with respect, and whose resentments can normally be expressed effectively, will be less likely to experience possession trance.<sup>80</sup> Once again the situation of Jesus and his contemporaries, as well as the situation of Jesus’ earliest followers after his death, fit this description. As I described in chapter 1, they lived in a situation where they were marginalized by the Roman Empire as well as by the hierarchical Israelite temple tradition. This makes it easier to understand why Jesus experienced alternate states of consciousness (“showing”), and why his followers started “telling” and “re-enacting” these states.

How does this process work in practice? As discussed earlier, structures of consciousness can be transformed by rites, since rites connect previously developed (socialized) intentionalities by means of symbols, eliciting conditioned responses (that can change the structures of consciousness). States of consciousness that are induced through the performance of rites, contrast with normally static and stable social life by providing a period of fluidity for the purpose of transformation of social status and the transformation of self-

experience through liminal or transitional stages. The rite then resolves ambiguity of status by marking the social transition and by producing feelings of unity or community with the social group (Winkelman 2000:97). If we apply this process to the situation of Jesus' earliest followers, we can perceive that they were initiated into a new group by means of the ritual of baptism. During this ritual they experienced alternate states of consciousness. Their status was transformed, since in their "new community" they possessed new rights and responsibilities. By means of participating in the ceremony of integration (the Eucharist), community and social bonding with the rest of the group was established. During this ceremony they also experienced alternate states of consciousness, because they experienced the presence of the exalted Christ in their midst, which reminded them that they were required to live according to a new ethic. This entire process will be described in the following chapter.

I conclude this section with the words of Pilch (1995c:64): "For people who have no control over their lives and who believe that God alone is in charge of life, ASCs [alternate states of consciousness]...are as essential to well being as aspirin...are to modern Westerners."

## **2.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this chapter, I have indicated the nature of alternate states of consciousness. I have also suggested that, like all first-century Mediterranean people, Jesus as well as his followers experienced alternate states of consciousness on a regular basis. If we keep the relation between the historical Jesus and the *kerugmatic* Christ in mind, we shall remember (as indicated in chapter 1), that the historical Jesus could be described as a healer. Because of the influence he exerted on the lives of the people surrounding him, we can describe Jesus' earliest followers as "healed healers". Jesus changed their lives, and they set out to change the lives of others. This they also did by means of bringing about alternate states of consciousness. Once again this indicates the relation between Jesus' "showing", his earliest followers' "telling" and the "re-enactment" of this by early Jesus-



groups. The healed healers verbalized Jesus' alternate states of consciousness experiences in anti-language and then ritually re-enacted them by means of the earliest baptism and Eucharist.

Throughout this chapter, I have emphasized the important role that alternate states of consciousness play in rites. In the next chapter I shall describe the nature of rites, placing a specific focus on the rites of the earliest Jesus-followers – baptism and the Eucharist. I am also going to indicate the relatedness between rites and the formation of new groups, since the rites of Jesus' followers played an important part in the formation of their anti-society – the “family of God”.

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## ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup> Since this study has to do with the people the Bible was written about, I would like to point out that in the Bible there are numerous examples of alternate state of consciousness experiences. Pilch (1998c:121-122; 2002d:691) indicates that we already encounter this phenomenon in Genesis when God puts Adam into a deep sleep to create Eve (Gn 2:21) and we still read about it in Revelation, where John declares that what he reports is the result of experiences in trance (Rv 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).

<sup>2</sup> John Allegro (1970) describes Christianity as a secret Near Eastern fertility drug cult, which used the “sacred mushroom” (known today as the *Amanita muscaria*) for its hallucinatory powers. He indicated the importance of alternate states of consciousness for the understanding of the earliest Jesus-followers and showed that “early Christianity” was influenced as much by the Israelite tradition as by the Greco-Roman mystery religions, but other than that I do not agree with his findings.

<sup>3</sup> Because of this, in some of the publications I refer to, other terminology is used instead of or next to the term “alternate state of consciousness”, for example “altered state of consciousness”, “distinct states of consciousness”, “trance”, “spirit possession”, “hallucinations”, “visions”, “ecstasy”, etc., but to a large extent the authors mean the same thing (see, e.g., Price-Williams 1975:84; Tart 1977:173-174; 1982:255-256; Rossi 1986:111; Lewis 1989:38-39; Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998:14-19; Craffert 2002:72, 77; Pilch 2002d:691-692).

<sup>4</sup> The term “homoversal” was coined by Henry Rosemont (jr) (1988:52), to signify “for all human beings, physiologically and mentally constituted as they are”.

<sup>5</sup> In this regard Craffert (2002:77, emphasis by Craffert) remarks: “It is much less ethnocentric to think...in terms of states of consciousness which can be grouped together in multiple ways (alternate), than to operate with altered (as opposed to *normal*) consciousness....Mystics, shamans and the like do not visit alternate reality – they visit reality as seen within their cultural system or cycle of meaning.”

<sup>6</sup> Bosman (2003:177-190) points out that in the time before Philo, reflection on psychological processes is virtually absent. It was only in Hellenistic times that the composition and workings of the soul became important. This was due to sociopolitical changes – the decline of the classic cities and the new world of Hellenistic kingdoms. During this time the requirements for honor had changed. The ambitious had to be actively involved in the political activities of the state and were obliged to contribute to its welfare, either by means of personal wealth or by influencing state affairs or policy. This was very difficult. But the philosophies of the time offered possibilities of regaining sense in life, by focusing on the “phenomena of consciousness”. Little else remained but to withdraw into the self and to make happiness dependent on the state of the soul alone. Another explanation for this occurrence is seen as a continuity between classical and Hellenistic philosophy and is ascribed to Socrates and his example of “self-mastery”. The ideal human being was seen as someone who proclaims complete authority over himself or herself. Analyzing the mechanics of the soul became a sophisticated enterprise in the philosophical schools of that time, labeling the “components of the soul” in traditional Greek fashion by means of abstract concepts. See Bosman (2003) on the meaning and use of the *su&noida* (“conscious”) word group in Philo and Paul.

<sup>7</sup> I do not intend to provide an extensive description of the concept “consciousness”. This section only serves as a background to the understanding of the phenomenon “alternate states of consciousness”.

<sup>8</sup> One such scholar is Newton (2001:47-51), who perceives consciousness as *sui generis*, which means that nothing else is like consciousness *in any way at all*. Although Newton (2001:47-51)

sees consciousness, like many emerging properties, as arising from the forced blending of intrinsically incompatible components into a unified framework, she also describes consciousness as a unique type of emergent property that is analytically and comparatively indefinable. This means that even though consciousness is unique as a psychological state, its uniqueness is comprehensible in terms of a more general kind of emergence. Consciousness essentially involves synchronous activations of representations, with distinct temporal tags, of more or less “identical” intentional content. She explains this as follows: “The greater the identity, or matching of expectations with actuality, the less the surprise or confusion. Understanding this brain process allows the prediction of certain experiential properties of phenomenal consciousness that identify it as a case of the emergence of novelty from incompatibility....[I]t follows from the general nature of such emergence that the properties of consciousness would be indefinable and hence seem mysterious, and even incoherent, which in fact they are” (Newton 2001:51). Wright (1996:128) agrees by saying that consciousness “is paradoxical because we have direct and immediate personal knowledge of it, but, at the same time, it seems to evade the explanatory frameworks of the social and natural sciences.”

<sup>9</sup> The Latin word *conscious* consists of *com-*, meaning “together” and *scire*, meaning “to know”; thus, “knowing with others” (*American Heritage Dictionary* 1985). The definition of “consciousness” in the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1985) is: “the state or condition of being conscious”. The definition of “conscious” reads: “having an awareness of one’s own existence, sensations, and thoughts and of one’s environment; capable of thought, will, or perception; subjectively known or felt; intentionally conceived or done; deliberate; having or showing self-consciousness; aware; the component of waking awareness perceptible by an individual at any given instant....”

<sup>10</sup> We cannot apply the term “ordinary/normal consciousness” homogeneously to all people. A giant leap for a person in one kind of society or time may resemble only a minimal increment for a person from another society or time (cf Price-Williams 1975:91). Normal or ordinary consciousness has adaptive value for a human being within a particular culture and environment.

<sup>11</sup> In the sense that these words can apply to an attitude of superiority, where the opposite of these words is seen as extraordinary and abnormal. This is not the meaning of baseline consciousness.

<sup>12</sup> In regard to the term “*alternate*” states of consciousness, one needs to remember that the word “alter” is a Latin word that can only be fully comprehended in conjunction with the word “ego”. According to the *Collins Latin Dictionary plus grammar* (1997:12, 74), the Latin adjective “alter” means “the one, the other (*of two*)”; “alter ego” means “a second self”; and the pronoun “ego” can be translated “I”. Furthermore, the term “state” is used to describe temporal clusterings of the content and organization of consciousness (Tart 1982: 251).

<sup>13</sup> She explains alternate states of consciousness as “conditions in which sensations, perceptions, cognition and emotions are altered. They are characterized by changes in sensing, perceiving, thinking and feeling. They modify the relation of the individual to self, body, sense of identity, and the environment of time, space or other people” (Bourguignon 1979:236; cf Krippner 1972:1; Erickson & Rossi 1981:242, 248).

<sup>14</sup> Foucault’s explanation of “reason” and “unreason” can help to illustrate this point. He has shown that without a concept of reason there could be no concept of “unreason” (Strathern 2000:20). Foucault ([1965] 1967:30-220) pointed out that in the classical age (Age of Reason; 1650-1800) madness became separated from reason and the concept of “unreason” was born. It was then that madness was confined to the asylum (cf Strathern 2000:43; Horrocks & Jevtic [1997] 2001:39-46).

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<sup>15</sup> It was the translation of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius into Latin in the ninth century that introduced the word “supernatural” into the theology of the Western Christendom (Saler 1977:38, 46; see Pilch 1996a:134).

<sup>16</sup> DeMaris (2002:145-146) avers that the “rise of drug use and the introduction of meditative techniques from South to East Asia in the 1960<sup>s</sup> and ‘70<sup>s</sup> fostered an interest in such inquiry at the popular level in Europe and North America. More important, however, was the impetus from anthropologists and other scholars who sought to counteract dismissive assessments of departures from an alert waking state as aberrant, pathological, or dysfunctional.”

<sup>17</sup> Jung (1988:45) makes some interesting remarks in this regard. He writes: “I have more than once been consulted by well-educated and intelligent people who have had peculiar dreams, fantasies, or even visions, which have shocked them deeply. They have assumed that no one who is in a sound state of mind could suffer from such things, and that anyone who actually sees a vision must be pathologically disturbed. A theologian once told me that Ezekiel’s visions were nothing more than morbid symptoms, and that, when Moses and other prophets heard ‘voices’ speaking to them, they were suffering from hallucinations. You can imagine the panic he felt when something of this kind ‘spontaneously’ happened to him. We are so accustomed to the apparently rational nature of our world that we can scarcely imagine anything happening that cannot be explained by common sense. The primitive man confronted by a shock of this kind would not doubt his sanity; he would think of fetishes, spirits, or gods.” Jung (1988:82) comments that Western people today are blind to the fact that, with all their rationality and efficiency, they are possessed by “powers” that are beyond their control. Their gods and demons have not disappeared at all: they have only received new names. They keep people “on the run with restlessness, vague apprehensions, psychological complications, an insatiable need for pills, alcohol, tobacco, food – and, above all, a large array of neuroses.” He further says that what we call civilized consciousness has steadily separated itself from our basic instincts. But the instincts did not disappear. They have only lost their contact with our consciousness and are, thus, forced to assert themselves in an indirect fashion (Jung 1988:83).

<sup>18</sup> Since the first-century Mediterranean world is of particular importance for this study, I have singled it out from the rest of the cultures Bourguignon studied. According to her findings, alternate states of consciousness were most probably experienced by about 80 percent of the cultures in the first century Mediterranean world, which is still by far the majority of people (see Bourguignon 1974:232; Bourguignon 1979:236; Pilch 1995c:50; Pilch 1996a:133; Pilch 1998c:121; Pilch 2002d:693).

<sup>19</sup> For clarity, Felicitas D Goodman (1988a:36) adds that *institutionalized* religious alternate states of consciousness are “normal”. That is, when and if the altered state of consciousness represents controlled behavior, when it is a ritualized action, capable of being called forth and terminated on a given signal, then it is a perfectly “ordinary” phenomenon. She says that some brain diseases or biomedical disturbances of the body occasionally manifest themselves in a loss or change of consciousness, hallucinations, convulsions, and the like. An alteration in consciousness of this kind is an illness, but religious alternate states of consciousness are not (see Goodman 2001:7).

<sup>20</sup> Crossan (1998:xviii) explains this as follows: “Trance and ecstasy, vision and apparition are perfectly normal and natural phenomena. Altered states of consciousness, such as dreams and visions, are something common to our humanity, something hard-wired into our brains, something as normal as language itself. They are recognized as common possibilities in the early first century, and they are still recognized as such in the late twentieth century. And only when their human normalcy is accepted can a proper response be offered. That response should not be, We deny the *fact* of your vision. It should be, Tell us the *content* of your vision. And then we will have to judge, not whether you had it or not, but whether we should follow it or not.”

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<sup>21</sup> E.g.: Interactions with the risen Jesus described in various early Jesus-groups can best be explained in terms of alternate states of consciousness experiences. But since experiences like these are generally unavailable to human perception in the Western culture, Westerners usually do not realize this (see Goodman 1988a:3, 36; Goodman 1990:11; Pilch 1998a:59).

<sup>22</sup> Examples of this can be seen in rock engravings and cave paintings (see Dowson 1992; Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998).

<sup>23</sup> I consider that one of the advantages of the postmodern paradigm is that Western people are becoming more open-minded and accommodating towards people with different worldviews.

<sup>24</sup> In this regard, see the “labyrinth complex”. Henderson (1988:125) explains this heritage from Greek mythology as follows: In all cultures, the labyrinth has the meaning of an entangling and confusing representation of the world of matriarchal consciousness; it can be traversed only by those who are ready for a special initiation into the mysterious world of the collective unconscious. See also Jung’s (1971:193-194) views on mythical and profane thinking (cf Tylor 1924:273-315; Frazer 1943:319, 392; Segal 1998:3-6).

<sup>25</sup> In a documentary film, Richeport (1984) records footage of alternate states of consciousness as experienced by diverse groups of a specific society – from the privileged rich to the illiterate poor. In this film it is evident that a whole congregation can experience alternate states of consciousness at the same time.

<sup>26</sup> DeMaris (2002:145) praises Davies for using the cross-cultural phenomenon of spirit possession in the analysis of the historical Jesus. But according to him, Davies makes a mistake by introducing psychological analysis to account for Jesus’ possession as response to John the Baptist. The psychoanalytical claims he make are anachronistic vis-à-vis first-century Mediterranean personalities, and they cannot be verified from the information the Gospels provide. He refers in particular to pages 56, 58 and 118 of Davies’ book (see also Pilch 1997b:112-114). In the same vein, Pilch (1996b:182) criticizes Davies by noting that he uses cross-cultural anthropology to validate analogies and similarities between contemporary and ancient cultures, while by definition it focuses on differences between cultures. Davies employs modern psychology (e.g., Erickson 1980) to interpret happenings in the time of Jesus, but this is a Western science and useless for interpreting other cultures. Pilch asserts that Davies seems unaware of Mediterranean anthropology – a discipline that helps prevent ethnocentric misinterpretations of New Testament evidence, yet provides a basis for creating and testing culturally plausible reading scenarios for biblical texts.

<sup>27</sup> Highly practiced psychological practices (like meditation) can shape conscious experience in the same way that drugs do (Shapiro 1977:148).

<sup>28</sup> Craffert (2002:73-64) comments that although there are shortcomings in this map of Bourguignon (e.g., by suggesting that these categories correlate with specific cultures or societies; see Lewis 1986:82-85), it is useful in bringing to the surface some of the distinctions which are used in such cultures.

<sup>29</sup> There is a connection between trance and simpler societies and possession trance and more complex ones. Trance, which often involves hallucinations (or visions, in a sacred context) is an intrapersonal event. It is a private experience of the individual that others can know about only from the individual’s report, as he or she remembers the experience. It is prominent in middle and eastern Asia and in the native cultures of the Americas. Possession trance involves the impersonation of another being on an occasion when there are witnesses. As such it is an interpersonal event, for the audience has a crucial role to play in the event. It appears frequently in sub-Saharan African, Latin-American, Afro-American, and Mediterranean cultures (DeMaris 2002:147). Possession trance is often conceived of as pathological, especially in Western

society. Unless the person who experienced the trance can convince others that he or she has indeed had a supernatural experience, such a person will be regarded as deviant and even considered to be dangerous (Bourguignon 1972:428).

<sup>30</sup> Most commonly, possession belief is used to account for diseases (see Davies 1995:39-40). The film, *The Exorcist* (Friedkin [1973] 1998), provides a good illustration of possession (see Goodman 1981, 1988b:xv).

<sup>31</sup> Investigators into the drugs used for inducing alternate states of consciousness cannot agree on a generic name for these substances. In contrast to terms like “hallucinogens”, “psychotomimetic” and “psychoactive”, the term “psychedelic” (coined by Humphrey Osmond) seems to be the most neutral. It literally means “mind-manifesting”. These drugs occur naturally in plants or can be synthesized in laboratories (Tart 1972:327; Wulff 1997:89-95; cf Siegel 1977:132).

<sup>32</sup> Wulff (1997:49, 70-89) indicates that certain religious practices often include exercises that are directly related to the body. This includes psychological or other modes of deprivation, like assuming certain postures, depriving oneself of food or sleep, submitting the body to certain discomforts (like stimulus deprivation during solitude) or controlling the rate of breathing. It also includes overstimulation, like ecstatic dance and other forms of excessive sensory stimulation or profound emotional arousal (like brandishing weapons, handling or walking on fire, flagellating oneself or others, sacrificing animals, religious revival, handling of snakes, and glossolalia). All of these techniques can contribute to changes in the central nervous system that facilitate the induction of alternate states of consciousness (cf Craffert 2002:59). This will happen especially when some of these exercises are combined, since this will lead to the production of endorphins (a mechanism that dramatically reduces maladaptive pain or fear, which can be described as natural opiates in the human brain) by the brain and, thus, to alternate states of consciousness (Wulff 1997:85-89; cf Lewis 1989:34).

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Ludwig (1966:226-227; 1972:12-15). He provides a long list of methods for the induction of alternate states of consciousness:

- Reduction of exteroceptive stimulation and/or motor activity:  
E.g.: Solitary confinement; prolonged social and stimulus deprivation while at sea, in the Arctic or the desert; highway hypnosis; extreme boredom; sleep; dreaming.
- Increase of exteroceptive stimulation and/or motor activity and/or emotion:  
E.g.: Brainwashing; religious conversion; healing trance experiences during revivalist meetings; mental aberrations associated with certain *rites de passage*; spirit possession states; shamanistic and prophetic trance states during tribal ceremonies.
- Increased alertness or mental involvement:  
E.g.: Prolonged observation of a radar screen; fervent praying; intense mental absorption in a task, such as reading, writing, or problem solving; total mental involvement in listening to a charismatic speaker.
- Decreased alertness or relaxation of critical faculties:  
E.g.: Mystical, transcendental, or revelatory states attained through passive meditation or occurring spontaneously during the relaxation of one's critical faculties; daydreaming; drowsiness; nostalgia; music-trance resulting from absorption in soothing lullabies.
- Presence of somatopsychological factors:  
E.g.: Fasting; dehydration; sleep deprivation; hyperventilation.

<sup>34</sup> This supports Craffert's (2002:79) statement: that everything that is meaningful to religious experiences happens in the mind. He argues that we trust our perceptions of the physical world, which are also only flashes inside our skulls, so there is no rational reason to declare that religious experiences are fiction or only in our minds.



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<sup>35</sup> What is the difference between “mind” and “brain”? According to d’Aquili and Newberg (1999:75) it is essentially two different ways of looking at the same thing – the brain represents the structural aspects of the mind, and the mind represents the functional aspects of the brain. Feinberg (2001:143) comments that by its very nature, the brain functions in a way that produces irreducibly mental states (mind). See Feinberg (2001:123-145) for a further discussion of this issue.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed description of the functioning of the neurological system during alternate state of consciousness experiences, see Goodman (1988a:39) and d’Aquili & Newberg (1993:5-28; 1999:99-104).

<sup>37</sup> Rituals are symbolically rich events. Rituals incorporate a variety of drivers that may account in some measure for the ritual’s efficacy. Drivers are ritual elements that evoke specific neurophysiological effects. These ritual elements can be striking in form, such as drumming, dancing, ingestion of psychotropic drugs, sweat baths, ordeals, flickering lights, chanting, fasting, and special diets; or they can be relatively subtle in form, such as extraordinary concentration on breathing, on eidetic imagery, or on a question (Laughlin 1997:478-479).

<sup>38</sup> I consider that alternate states of consciousness are closely linked to an apocalyptic frame of reference (as indicated in chapter 1). Therefore, it might be possible that there is a relation between the symbolic meanings of color in apocalyptic literature and the first stage of entering an alternate state of consciousness (cf Pilch 2003b:256).

<sup>39</sup> For Jung, myth and religion have traditionally worked in tandem. Religion has preserved myth, and myth has sustained religion. Segal (1998:35) writes: “The heart of religion for Jung is neither belief nor practice but experience, and myth provides the best entrée to the experience of God, which means to the unconscious. Jung thus praises early Christianity for adopting and adapting various pre-Christian myths”. Jung argues that the “spiritual vitality” of a religion depends on the continuity of myth, and this can be preserved only if every era translates the myth into its own language and makes it an important part of its worldview. In contrast to “early Christianity”, according to Jung, modern Christianity has failed to update its myths.

<sup>40</sup> According to Segal (1998:3), Jung (1984:248) is one of the few scholars who has developed a theory that answers all three questions. Jung says that myths are “original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of physical processes”. He, thus, considers that the subject matter of myth is not literal but symbolic – not the external world but the human mind. Myth originates and functions to satisfy the psychological need for contact with the unconscious.

<sup>41</sup> See Allen (2002) for a comprehensive critical discussion of the place of myth in Eliade’s broader theory of religion.

<sup>42</sup> Here is Eliade’s (1975:5-6) definition of myth as an example: “Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the ‘beginnings.’ In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality – an island, a species or plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a ‘creation’; it relates how something was produced, began to *be*. Myth tells only of that which *really* happened, which manifested itself completely. The actors in myth are Supernatural Beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent times of the ‘beginnings.’ Hence myths disclose their creative activity and reveal the sacredness...of their works. In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred...into the World.”

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., the lexicographical contributions in the *Collins Essential English Dictionary* (2003:506).

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<sup>44</sup> Van Aarde (2003:246-247) points out that Strauss' ([1836] 1984:273) over-emphasis on myth, "to the extent of the entire New Testament being regarded as mythological, resulted in exegetes and theologians becoming increasingly uncomfortable with and even rejecting the notion." On the other hand, Bultmann's (1964:14-16) dialectical distinction between the concepts "mythology" (referring to the pre-modern thought structure) and "myth" (referring to the objectified textual evidence of an encounter of humans with external divine or demonic powers) appealed to the exponents of the hermeneutical approach. According to this approach, in order to be relevant, myth requires interpretation.

<sup>45</sup> Eliade (1975:1-2) shows that from the time of Xenophanes (c 565-470 BCE) – who was the first to criticize and reject the "mythological" expressions of the divinity employed by Homer and Hesiod – the Greeks steadily continued to empty *mythos* of all religious and metaphysical value. Contrasted both with *logos* and later with *historia*, *mythos* came in the end to denote "what cannot really exist." But there were, and still are, societies in which myth is "living", in the sense that it supplies models for human behavior and, by that very fact, gives meaning and value to life.

<sup>46</sup> Jung (1988:69) defines archetypes as follows: "What we properly call instincts are physiological urges, and are perceived by the senses. But at the same time, they also manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images. These manifestations are what I call the archetypes" (see Segal 1998:39-40). Myths are more than archetypes – they are stories that, read symbolically, contain archetypes. Archetypes are mythological components which can be called "motifs", "primordial images" or "types". But an archetype is not only a motif within a myth; it is a motif within many myths. A motif found in only one myth would not be an archetype. Segal (1998:43) explains this as follows: "Any myth ordinarily contains multiple archetypes, though one archetype is often dominant. The plot of myth is not only the manifestation of one or more archetypes but also the development of them and their interaction." Archetypes are not mere names or philosophical concepts; they are pieces of life itself – images that are integrally connected to a person by the bridge of the emotions. Because of this, Jung (1988:96) considers that it is impossible to give an arbitrary (or universal) interpretation of any archetype. It must be explained in the manner indicated by the whole life-situation of the particular individual to whom it relates. For example, in the case of a devout Christian, the symbol of the cross can be interpreted only in its Christian context. But this does not mean that in all circumstances the symbol of the cross has the same meaning. If that were so, it would be stripped of its numinosity, lose its vitality, and become a mere word. Archetypes come to life only when one patiently tries to discover why and in what fashion they are meaningful to an individual.

<sup>47</sup> Another perspective is that of Goodman (1990:17). She describes myth as "traditional story", a report about events that took place in the other reality and that involved people or beings who straddled the two dimensions. She takes Joan of Arc as an example. Joan of Arc was not guided by a military command but by spirits. She disguised these spirits as saints when she came into conflict with the Inquisition (see Pilch 1993:239-240).

<sup>48</sup> Walsh (2001:30) indicates that there are three basic understandings of myth, namely:

- The *popular* understanding of myth: this is the most common understanding and usage of myth in the West. Here myth is seen as a powerful ordering device, materially and ideologically.
- The *romantic* understanding of myth: this understanding deliberately rejects the popular understanding of myth. The Romantic motif suggests that myth is playful and creative.
- The *sociological* understanding of myth: this understanding underlines the pluralistic notion of myth in the ambiguous world that we live in today. The sociological definition of myth indicates orders that are manifold and diverse.



<sup>49</sup> In the same vein Theißen (1999:325) distinguishes three dimensions in myth, namely, that myth is a text, a power that shapes life and a thought-structure:

- *Myth as text*: Myth is a narrative according to which numinous subjects, like gods, demons, and angels, can transform a weak state of reality into a stable state.
- *The function of myth*: The mythical narrative can serve as the basis for a form of social life (or it can put such a form in question), since it has legitimizing power.
- *Myth as mentality or thought structure*: Myths are narratives based on another way of ordering the world in forms of perception and interpreting it in categories.

<sup>50</sup> Since *rites de passage* serve as markers of identity, giving people a place in a specific cultural grouping, rites like these play an important role in cosmogonic myths (cf McVann 1991b:333).

<sup>51</sup> For Theißen (1999:23-26) myths are narratives from a time which was significant for the world, with supernatural agents who can turn an unstable state into a stable state. Myths act in their own kind of world with thought-structures that differ from those in the everyday world. For example, in myth, two things or persons which are different in people's perception, can be identical at a deep level – for instance, a dead person can return in a new form; a rite can make something else really present. If myth is understood in this manner, the preaching of Jesus also contains a myth – a myth of the end time as a time which is decisive for the world, in which God will establish himself against the supernatural powers (Satan and his demons) to change the present unstable state of disaster into a state of salvation. This mythical future is present in the activity of Jesus through the overcoming of evil. Jesus interprets his exorcisms as the establishment of the rule of God over Satan and his powers (Mt 12:28), in fact, Satan has already been cast down from heaven (Lk 10:18). Although these are mythical statements, they are associated with concrete historical experiences – the exorcisms. This mythical future is present as a hidden nucleus in the present (Lk 17-20-21). While this statement appears to be a contradiction in everyday language, there is nothing strange about the future being present *in* the present in a mythical framework of thought. Jesus' action in the present can be identical to the future rule of God at a deep level, although in actuality it is clearly different. We see the same thing in aesthetic experience, namely, that something can be present that is really absent. The work of art makes it appear, even if it is only a "foretaste" of the beautiful. It is, thus, not by chance that Jesus used aesthetic forms, like parables (short fictional stories of great poetical quality), to communicate his message. Traditionally the apocalyptic expectation of the rule of God is always bound up with a victory over the Gentiles, but for Jesus the rule of God is already present in hidden form without the Gentiles being conquered. The rule of God and Roman rule can co-exist for a time in the present. The revolution which begins with the kingly rule of God is a revolution at a metaphysical level, an end to demonic rule, a revolution within the people: the kingdom of God belongs to the poor (Mt 5:3) and the children (Mk 10:14); the toll collectors and sinners will enter it before the pious (Mt 21:32). A change in the expectation of the kingdom of God should, thus, be called a "demilitarizing", because it is detached from the great military victory over the peoples.

<sup>52</sup> The term "tautegory" is deduced from the Greek words *to \_ tau) to&* ("the same") and *a0gopeu/w* ("to speak/proclaim"), while "allegory" is deduced from *al1loj* ("different") and *a) goreu&w* ("to speak/proclaim") (see Liddel & Scott 1961; Van Aarde 2005a:478-479).

<sup>53</sup> The words "natural" and "supernatural" are used here in terms of a modern Western perspective, since, as I indicated earlier, first-century Mediterranean people as well as other premodern cultures did not employ these notions in such a manner.

<sup>54</sup> For example, in Mediterranean cultures of the first century, belief in spirit entities and their relations to human beings was part of baseline consciousness. For such cultures, alternate states of consciousness fell into readily recognizable patterns. On the other hand, from a rational, modernistic perspective, alternate states of consciousness are frequently regarded as "supernatural" (Pilch 1993:234-237; see Saler 1977:31-38).

<sup>55</sup> The phenomenon that different societies exhibit different consensus realities can be demonstrated as follows: Any state of consciousness a culture can construct will be effective in insuring biological survival, if it, for example, prevents its members from walking off cliffs. Tart (1977:213) explains: "We could construct a rationale based on a potent and invisible force called 'gravity', which will throw one to the bottom of the cliff, causing physical pain. Or we could construct a rationale based on the idea that demons lurk at the bottom of every cliff and smash up people who fall over the edge. Or we could form a rationale around the belief that the rapid acceleration in falling makes the soul leave the body, thereby rendering the body vulnerable to physical hurt....The sheer size and complexity of the world allows us to conceptualize it in a vast variety of ways; thus the diversity of cultures".

<sup>56</sup> In the context of the New Testament it is easy to recognize the cultural patterning of alternate states of consciousness, because these states are usually described by the following elements that frequently occur together:

- those experiencing the vision are initially frightened;
- they do not recognize the figure;
- the figure offers calming assurance;
- the figure identifies himself or herself;
- then the figure offers the desired information: the clarification of identity or the granting of a favor.

The purpose of the experience is to illuminate a puzzle in life (by answering a question like: "Who is this person?") or to suggest or approve a line of conduct (with an answer like: "My beloved son, listen to him") (see Pilch 1998a:57-58; Pilch 1998c:121).

<sup>57</sup> For example, Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:282-285) note that appearances of the risen Jesus were widely known in ancient Mediterranean culture (e.g., Jn 20:1-29; Mk 9:2-8; Mt 17:1-8; Lk 9:28-36; Gl 1:12; 2 Cor 12:2-4). What this means is that if the disciples witnessed to having repeatedly experienced the risen Jesus, this is undoubtedly because they were culturally prepared to have such experiences.

<sup>58</sup> The idea of alternate states of consciousness as "channels for the verification of beliefs" legitimates Theißen's (1999:121-122) theories of the meaning and ethics of sacramental rites. Theißen (1999:122) describes these rites as depicting the basic rules of social life which are unconditionally binding on all and make the co-ordination of action, feeling, and thought possible. He also understands rites to ward off chaos. Rites "serve to ward off anxiety that hurls people into social chaos. However, this warding off of chaos or of the dissolution of the existing order does not take place by suppressing chaos but by admitting it in ritualized form" (Theißen 1999:122).

<sup>59</sup> Microchange can be seen in the way "charismatic" churches deal with two major problems: illness, by offering faith healing; and self-respect, by offering salvation. This helps society to keep on functioning as always without major changes (Bourguignon 1973:350).

<sup>60</sup> Macrochange concerns innovators who aim towards the restructuring of the entire society (cf Giddens [1984] 1993), at developing alternate ways of living and of experiencing life. They begin this process while experiencing a personal crisis. This results in a restructuring of their world and their functioning within it. Then they gain followers. When they develop the movement toward the reorganization of society, they have, in part, already removed themselves from that society and have created a small new society for themselves (cf Weber 1968:252-267). Thus, change is brought about and legitimized by supernatural sanction (usually gained in possession trance). In addition to the benefits that alternate states of consciousness bestow on members of such a group, membership itself is a transforming experience (on the level of personal behavior and experience as well as on the level of social action) (Bourguignon 1973:32-33). In Yucatán Maya (Mexico), for example, individuals experienced "baptism in the Holy Spirit" (which comprised glossolalia) and felt themselves to be saved. They also altered their style of life by giving up the

“things of the world”, and they developed new ties to the quasi family represented by the congregation. Life in such a congregation is meaningful, even if the larger society is not changed (Goodman 1973:178-218; see Goodman 2001).

<sup>61</sup> These “realities of a different kind” can be compared with what a person experiences during sacramental rites. Theißen (1999:121-122) describes sacramental rites as independent of space and time, which causes the person who participates in these rites to be able to “drop out” of the flow of transitoriness, and experience them as an incursion of the “eternal” into time. Theißen (1999:121-122) also describes rites as free from everyday purposiveness: “An action which is an end in itself can become the symbolic depiction of the ultimate reality which in itself is purpose, meaning and value – and on which everything that has meaning and value depends. What is intrinsically regular is hallowed in the rite.”

<sup>62</sup> While the ecstasy of marginal situations is a phenomenon of individual experience, entire societies or social groups may, in times of crises, undergo such a situation collectively. Thus, there are events that affect entire societies or social groups which provide massive threats to the reality previously taken for granted. At such times religious legitimations almost invariably come to the front. Killing under the auspices of the legitimate authorities has from ancient times to today been accompanied by religious paraphernalia and ritualism. People are put to death amid prayers, blessings and incantations. The ecstasies of fear and violence are, by these means, kept within the bounds of “sanity”, of the reality of the social world (Berger 1967:44-45).

<sup>63</sup> This is most probably what happened to the first Jesus-followers after they were baptized and became part of a new family who regularly participated in the Eucharist. According to Matthew, Jesus-followers (i.e. disciples) formed a “fictive family” and this happened because they were baptized into such a new situation (see Mt 28:16-20).

<sup>64</sup> Kehoe (2000:8) understands the meaning of the word “shaman” a little differently. She writes that: “*Saman* in Tungus incorporates the word *sa*, “to know”, hence an especially knowledgeable person.”

<sup>65</sup> When reflecting on a phenomenon like shamanism, Kehoe (2000:78) warns Westerners against labeling small non-Western societies as “primitives” or “preliterate” (cf Price-Williams 1975:81-82). She says: “From the perspective of genuine, distinctively human empowerment, the term ‘primitive’ cannot, in any sense, be applied to...small indigenous nations....Their technology is not ‘low’, but constructed from renewable raw materials. This perspective applies to medical (‘healing’) practices, which generally demand prayer and invocation but incorporate plants and techniques with very demonstrable physical qualities useful for treating illnesses” (Kehoe 2000:92).

<sup>66</sup> Regarding the dispute about the origin of the term “shaman”, Stutley (2003:3) indicates that some scholars content that it is derived from the Tungus word *šaman*, while others believe that it is derived either from the Pali term *samaṇa*, the Chinese term *sha-men* or the Vedic term *śram*. She concludes by pointing out that it needs to be kept in mind that different tribes also have different terms for “shaman”, and Harvey (2003:2) adds that speakers of some languages previously lacked a term like “shaman” – either because they had never encountered people who acted in these ways or because they had not noticed such people. Since shamanism was first recorded by Europeans among the Tungus, this is most probably the reason why their term is used.

<sup>67</sup> Indigeneity became a key element of academic definitions of shamanism. Harvey (2003:5) mentions that recently the label “neo-shamanism” has been used to describe those who claim to be shamans, without being indigenous. He says: “Of course, this misses the point that Western and academic rather than indigenous people invented shamanism – albeit from indigenous resources” (cf Price 2001:6-10). Regarding this topic, Vitebsky (2003:276-277) remarks that in the

jungles and the tundra shamanism is dying. An intensely local kind of knowledge is being abandoned in favor of various kinds of knowledge which are cosmopolitan and distant-led. Meanwhile, something called shamanism thrives in Eurocentric magazines, sweat lodges and weekend workshops. The New Age movement, which includes this strand of neo-shamanism, is in part a rebellion against the principle of distant-led knowledge. In the wild, shamanism is dying because local people are becoming more global in orientation, while in the West it is flourishing – apparently for the same sort of reason. Regarding neo-shamanism, Johnson (2003:334-335) claims that a ritual that changes faces is not the same ritual at all. He says that the practice of neo-shamanism is, contrary to its claims, deeply imbedded in its *own* cultural matrix (what he calls “radical modernity”).

<sup>68</sup> Stutley (2003:2) agrees that shamanism should not be thought of as a single centrally organized religion, as there are many variations. Despite these cultural differences, three features are shared by all forms of shamanism:

- Belief in the existence of a world of spirits, mostly in animal form, that are capable of acting on human beings. The shaman is required to control or cooperate with these good and bad spirits for the benefit of his or her community.
- The inducing of trance by ecstatic singing, dancing and drumming, when the shaman's spirit leaves his or her body and enters the supernatural world.
- The shaman treats some diseases, usually those of a psychosomatic nature, as well as helping the clan members to overcome their various difficulties and problems.

Eliade (1989:3-8) avers that it is necessary to distinguish between shamans, magicians, healers, and the like. Although shamans also perform miracles and heal people, not all healers and magicians are shamans. The shaman is the great master of ecstasy. Shamans stand out in society, because of the intensity of their own religious experience.

<sup>69</sup> Winkelman (2000:58) concurs that shamanism is a worldwide phenomenon, but points out that it is encountered mainly in nomadic hunting-gathering societies. In societies like these the shaman is the principal political and religious functionary, the leader of hunting and group movement, and the bearer of cultural mythology (Winkelman 2000:6-7).

<sup>70</sup> As a general model Craffert's description of shamanism contains fewer specifics of particular cases but has the advantage of covering more cases which belong to the same pattern.

<sup>71</sup> Pilch (2002a:106-107) also considers that the purpose of a shaman is to interact with the spirit world for the benefit of those in the material world. He explains this ideology by emphasizing that ordinarily in a worldview where shamans operate, spirits are considered to cause problems in the world of human beings that can be corrected by other spirits, with the shaman acting as intermediary.

<sup>72</sup> According to Lewis-Williams (2001:22-23), San rock art represents one of the places where evidence exists regarding the rituals and experiences of shamans (cf Dowson 1992:15-21; 67-75). Some of these paintings picture shamanistic visions. San shamanism was not an optional extra for a few people: it was (and still is) the very framework of San thought and society. The pervasive and persuasive power of San shamanism is founded largely in alternate states of consciousness (that everyone has the potential to access, even if only in dreams) (Lewis-Williams 2001:26). Bourguignon (1974:234) points out that visions acquired in alternate states of consciousness are “raw materials for potential cultural utilization”.

<sup>73</sup> Like any other form of alternate state of consciousness, shamanistic soul journeys appear after people fasted, were tired, took some kind of drugs, or were exposed to pounding drums, dancing and singing (see Harvey 2003:27-56). Harvey writes that “shamans and their communities perform religion when they attempt to meet needs for health, food, security and knowledge. Their

understandings of the world are expressed in particular actions, at which point it is the expertise of shamans that makes them recognisable as shamans.”

<sup>74</sup> Vermes (1993:184) shows that Jesus’ own kind of Judaism displayed specific features partly attributable to the eschatological-apocalyptic spirit which permeated the age in which he lived, and partly, on the subjective level, to his own turn of mind (see Vermes 1993:184-207). The observance of God’s law and the pious practices based on the law comprised the most important action a pious Jew could do (Jos, *Ap* i. 60; Philo, *LegGaj* xxxi. 210) (Vermes 1993:186; cf Sim 1998:13). Jesus made no attempt to restrict, or interfere with, the Torah, but interpreted the law in a specific, eschatological way (Vermes 1993:188-196; cf Sanders 1985:336). Unlike a religious vision which takes the future for granted and envisages life in a solidly established group context (like that of Second Temple Judaism), an eschatological vision (like that of Jesus), demands a complete break with the past, exclusively concentrates on the present moment, and does this from a personal perspective. Vermes (1993:191-194) remarks that eschatological religion has the following characteristics:

- It starts with an individual act: repentance, which implied a complete turning away from sin and a conversion to the “kingdom of heaven”. This can be seen in Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan.
- Time becomes focused on the present.
- It is absolutely single-minded, giving and decisive. There is no place for self-interest, generosity is important and believers must be ready to lose their lives in order to reach their ultimate goal.

<sup>75</sup> But this does not mean that Jesus did not also exhibit characteristics associated with apocalyptic prophets (cf Horsley 1985:461-463; 1986:20-24; Myburgh 1995:150; see chapter 1).

<sup>76</sup> In many cultures this person acquires an animal-guide which reveals its wisdom and bestows its distinctive power on the visionary (Pilch 2001:242-243).

<sup>77</sup> Pilch (1998a:56) points out that alternate state of consciousness experiences have been documented for the Circum-Mediterranean world at least since the fifth century BCE. We perceive examples of indirect as well as direct encounters with holy persons. We also read about these in the Gospels with regard to the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. When Jesus himself does not appear, other spokespersons appear from the realm in which Jesus now lives (that of alternate reality). We see this indirect encounter with the risen Jesus in Ac 9:17 and 22:12-14 where Ananias reminds Paul of the pertinent data from the culturally accepted lexicon. In direct encounters with the holy person in alternate reality, the subject often did not know who was being encountered. Sometimes a short dialogue took place in which the holy person revealed his or her identity. The same is true of the resurrection appearances of Jesus. The risen Jesus was thought to be a gardener (Jn 20:15), a stranger on the beach (Jn 21:4), a stranger who became a traveling companion (Lk 24:15-16), or a ghost (Lk 24:37). The authentic identity of the holy person cannot be doubted since the holy person makes the identification and not the person experiencing the alternate state of consciousness. The entire experience is culturally defined and the culture contains a latent discourse which is available to everyone in the culture as a guide for interpreting the content of the alternate state of consciousness (Pilch 1998a:56). Since a person’s culture accords content to his or her alternate state of consciousness experience, we can understand why the people who believed in Jesus experienced him in this way after his death, because we read about similar situations in the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Sm 28). The angelic figures which people sometimes see before they encounter the risen Jesus possess a function apart from any alleged “eschatological” significance – they help people to interpret these experiences, because the meanings are not necessarily immediately self-evident (Pilch 1998a:58).

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<sup>78</sup> Although Jesus' baptism and everything that is associated with it may at first not make sense to a Westerner, in the light of our discussion on alternate states of consciousness we now know that this event did not surprise or shock Jesus or the first readers of the Gospels, since spirit activity was an essential part of their belief system. A holy man must be able to "see" spirits and other things in alternate reality to be able to deal with such reality, and the cultural world of Jesus was permeated by spirits who regularly intervened in ordinary human life.

<sup>79</sup> The place of possession trance as coping mechanism in apocalypticism can be seen in the same light (cf [Bourguignon 1973:29-33](#); see [Pilch 1993:236-237](#)). [Pilch \(1993:231-232\)](#), for example, describes the visions in Revelation as the result of alternate states of consciousness.

<sup>80</sup> But this does not mean that they cannot experience alternate states of consciousness, since no one enjoys as high a status as a god and the experience of alternate states of consciousness is not purely social in nature: it also offers inherent euphoric rewards and may even be considered as conveying soteriological benefits (Davies 1995:39-40).



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SYMBOLS, RITES AND GROUP FORMATION**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter 1 it was argued that ordinary language was not sufficient to express Jesus' experience of the direct influence that the Spirit of God exerted in his life, because this Spirit-filledness was experienced during alternate states of consciousness. Alternate states of consciousness, in turn, are not ordinary events. This I described in chapter 2. But why was it important to verbalize these experiences of Jesus? Jesus' alternate states of consciousness had a lasting effect on his life; they caused him to experience the world in a totally different manner from his contemporaries (see Davies 1995:44-65; Pilch 1998a:53-57; 2002a:106-110). Scholars (e.g., Davies 1995:171) argue that accordingly Jesus' followers participated in this Spirit-filledness after his death, and in this way formed a new movement, consisting of different groups. An individual, momentary happening, like an alternate state of consciousness, can be expressed by means of symbolic anti-language. Once this is done, it can be re-enacted by means of a rite. The earliest Jesus-followers did so by means of the rites of baptism and the Eucharist.

In the light of this, it is necessary to understand the nature of symbols and rites. After a few preliminary remarks, the first part of the discussion in this chapter will concern symbols, while the second part will explain rites. Special attention will be given to the distinction between rituals and ceremonies as the two different manifestations of rites, because the earliest baptism can be described as a ritual and the earliest Eucharist as a ceremony. In the last section of this chapter, I shall spend some time explaining certain aspects of social identity theory and institutionalization, because the rites of baptism and the Eucharist played an important part in the process of group formation among the earliest Jesus-followers. In subsequent chapters this theoretical information will be applied to the symbolic rites of baptism and the Eucharist.

## **3.2 SYMBOLS**

### **3.2.1 What is a symbol?**

According to Peters (1992:33) symbols function somewhat like a prism:

...a prism has an unusual revelatory quality. If you pick it up, focus your eyes on it, and turn it carefully until you find just the right position, then suddenly a whole rainbow of color breaks out. The prism does not create the color, of course. The colors were there all the time. It may seem under ordinary conditions that the room is bathed in white, colorless light, but the prism reveals that the whole spectrum of color is co-present. The key to knowing this is looking through the prism to see the otherwise invisible truth.

When we look through a prism, we see truths that we would otherwise miss. Peters (1992:34) adds that a symbol “is what it is, but at the same time it points beyond itself to a greater reality. In fact, this greater reality is somehow present to the symbol and efficacious through it. Symbols live because they bear us gently from this world to the next without ever leaving this world behind.”

Peters’ definition explains that by means of symbols it is possible to access information that would otherwise be lost – for the purpose of this study the alternate states of consciousness that Jesus experienced while he was on earth.

White (1954:252) considers that the symbol is the basic unit of all human behavior and civilization, while Jung (1988:20) explains that humans use the spoken or written word to express the meaning of what they want to convey. But language is full of symbols and signs. Examples of signs are abbreviations (such as UN). Although abbreviations are meaningless in themselves, they have acquired a recognizable meaning through common usage or deliberate intent. Signs do no more than denote the objects to which they are attached (cf Brown 1984:19). On the other hand, a symbol can be described as “...a term, a name, or



even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us" (Jung 1988:20). Hence, a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning.<sup>1</sup> Since symbolic ideas cannot be formulated in a way that satisfies intellect and logic, according to Jung (1988:91), they create problems for the scientific mind.

Pilch and Malina (1993:xvi-xvii) note that an object endowed with meaning and feeling is often called a "symbol". Thus, a person, thing, or event filled with socially appreciable value bears the meaningfulness characteristic of a symbol. For example, a country's flag is basically a colored cloth. When this cloth is called a flag and accepted as a symbol, it stimulates meaning and feeling that the cloth alone does not (cf Pelser 1981:268). The perception of symbols in general, as well as the interpretation of these symbols, is socially determined (see Douglas 1996:9). Pilch and Malina (1993:xvii) observe that:

The way in which values are affixed to value objects is the process of "symbolizing," or having some person, thing, or event serve as a symbol. Symbolizing takes place by means of drawing lines over, under, around, through, into and out of persons (self, others), nature (the non-human), time, space, superhumanness (transcendence), the All, and then investing the lines thus drawn with feeling, and finally perceiving meaning in the emerging configuration.

Jung (1988:93) distinguishes between "natural" and "cultural" symbols. He describes natural symbols as deriving from the unconscious contents of the psyche, which represent an enormous number of variations on the essential archetypal images. In many cases they can be traced back to their archaic roots (to the ideas and images we find in the most ancient records and in primitive societies). Cultural symbols express "eternal truths", and are used in many religions. These symbols are transformed and developed to become the

collective images accepted by civilized societies. But they nevertheless retain much of their original numinosity or “spell”.<sup>2</sup> These symbols cannot be ignored, even if they may seem irrelevant to some people, because they are an important part of our mental make-up and play a role in the construction of human society (Jung 1988:93; see Henderson 1988:106-107).<sup>3</sup>

As I mentioned in chapter 1, the social anthropologist, John Beattie (1968:69-71; cf White 1954:254-255), describes symbols in the following manner:

- Usually there is a *reason* why a particular symbol is appropriate in a specific case; there is an underlying rationale which is at least ideally discoverable, even though it may be by no means obvious, and may even be unknown to the persons who use the symbol. Sometimes the rationale is obvious, like whiteness as a symbol of purity or a serpent biting its tail as a symbol of eternity. At other times the rationale is less evident, as in the case of a flag of a particular color and design symbolizing a nation, or a totemic animal of a particular species symbolizing a clan (cf Weber 1964:39-40; Winkelman 2000:52). Different grounds exist on which a symbol's appropriateness to what is symbolized is based. There may be a real or fancied resemblance between the symbol and what is symbolized, or a historical conjunction in the individual's or the culture's past could comprise the motivation for using the specific symbol.
- Symbols commonly stand for or *imply some abstract notion*; they do not simply refer to a concrete entity or a specific event. Abstract notions – like group solidarity or power – are symbolized. Sociologically, this is the most important aspect of symbols, namely that they provide people with a means of representing abstract ideas, often ideas of great practical *importance* to themselves indirectly, ideas which it would be difficult or even impossible for them to represent to themselves directly. This statement makes it clear why the earliest baptism and Eucharist, with their

associated alternate states of consciousness, can be described as symbols. Here it must be kept in mind that the capacity for systematic analytic thinking about concepts is a product of several millennia of education and conscious philosophizing. It is a luxury unavailable in cultures whose members must devote most of their time and energy to producing the minimum necessities of daily life.

- Consequently symbols are essentially expressive; a symbol is a way of saying something important, something which is impossible or impracticable to say directly. What is expressed symbolically must be thought to be worth expressing. What is symbolized is always an object of *value*. People's attitudes to their symbols are thus rarely neutral.

This brings Beattie (1968:71) to the conclusion that symbolism is a kind of language and that it is appropriate to ask of any symbol what it means. This is precisely the aim of the present study. Anti-language is the "kind of language" that is investigated in this regard.

Symbols express values. Symbols do not only possess meanings, they also lead to social consequences (Beattie 1968:72). People who carry out institutionalized symbolic procedures or rites usually believe that by doing so they are either producing some desired state of affairs or preventing an undesired situation (Beattie 1968:202). Symbolism is the major operator in rites. All rites are organized around a core symbol or set of symbols that imparts coherence and forms its most expansive intentionality in a culture's cosmology (see Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:213-214).

From a neuropsychological perspective, Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili (1992:163) describe the symbolic process as follows:

The symbolic process is that part of the nervous system by which the neural network mediating the whole is entrained by and to the network mediating the part; that is, the mechanism by which the neurocognitive model(s) of a noumenon is evoked by partial sensory information stimulated by the noumenon. A model may be evoked by a stimulus originating either in the outer operational environment, which excites sensory receptors at the periphery of the nervous system, or in another model within the organism's cognized environment. It is customary to call the stimulus a *symbol* ("signifier", "vehicle") and the model or models evoked by that symbol its *meaning* ("signified", "designatum"). The relationship between symbol and meaning is one of part to whole.

Perception, symbols and consciousness are closely related (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:159-237; see Winkelman 2000:38). The symbolic process operates in cognition largely at an unconscious level. But many symbols can exist that are consciously cognized to one degree or another (by an individual or a group) as symbolic, or are internalized in ritually delineated bundles (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:172).

According to Glicksohn (2001:354), the hypothesis relating metaphoric thinking to consciousness claims that metaphors, symbols, analogies and images are used in an attempt to depict the alternate state of consciousness experience, which is not easily translatable into words. Some makeshift mode of communication is therefore used to express the inexpressible. My hypothesis regarding the earliest baptism and Eucharist can be viewed in this light. I consider that these two symbolic rites were expressions of alternate states of consciousness, which were verbalized in anti-language. Glicksohn (2001:354) further argues that metaphoric thinking is one of the hallmarks of the experience, and is used both in an attempt to depict the experience, but more importantly to convey to the reader (or

listener), and possibly to induce in the reader, some of the qualities of that experience. This is not a makeshift mode of communication; rather, the use of metaphoric-symbolic language reflects underlying metaphoric-symbolic cognition. The alternate state of consciousness itself is experienced and described in terms of culture-specific metaphors.

By way of summary it can be remarked that a symbol conveys meaning in that a signifier points to the signified (see Cassirer 1944:31-32; Turner 1967:19; Douglas 1996:37). Theoretically argued, there is a historical *reason* why a specific symbol fits the social context. An idea which communicates *values* and provides *meaning* lies behind a contextualized rite. In chapters 4 and 5, I shall investigate the reason, value and meaning that the earliest baptism and the Eucharist possessed for the persons who participated in these symbolical rites. For some people the values which give meaning to life can be found in religion, which is embedded in a cultural system. This system is dialectically influenced by a symbolic universe, which functions as a kind of “sacred canopy” (see Berger 1967:3-51; Esler 1994:13-17).

### **3.2.2 Religion as a cultural sign system**

#### **3.2.2.1 Introduction**

Four levels can be discerned in the evolutionary development of the symbolic process, namely primordial symbols (the simple recognition of an object); cognized symbols (metaphors, cosmograms, rites); sign systems (natural language utterances); and formal sign systems (symbolic logic, set theory) (Laughlin 1997:475; see Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:172-187; Arden 1998:44; Korn 2002:41).

In referring to religion<sup>4</sup> as a cultural *sign system*, one indicates that the symbolic system of religion provides a “frame” for transmitting the information. Since the most important form of sign systems comprises spoken and written language

(see Laughlin 1997:475), the model of anti-language will provide to be helpful in understanding the *cognized symbols* (rites) of the earliest Jesus-followers.

Terming religion a *cultural* sign system constitutes a reminder that all humans are embedded within a cultural setting (see Arden 1998:44-45). Every culture colors the way its members perceive and interpret reality. Therefore, although reality is always the same, cultural interpretations of it differ (see Pilch 1988:13-14; Pilch & Malina 1993:xiii; Pilch 2000c:27; Winkelman 2000:48). Halliday (1986:203) expresses this in the following manner: "Our experience of reality is never neutral. Observing means interpreting; experience is interpreted through the patterns of knowledge and the value systems that are embodied in cultures and languages." According to Berger (1967:3), every human society is an enterprise of world-building, and religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise. He avers that society is a product of people, while people are also products of society; thus society exhibits a dialectical character. In the process of world-building, a person provides stability for himself or herself, in the form of culture. Culture must be produced and reproduced, and consists of the totality of people's products. Berger (1967:6) explains this as follows: "Man produces tools of every conceivable kind, by means of which he modifies his physical environment and bends nature to his will. Man also produces language and, on its foundation and by means of it, a towering edifice of symbols that permeate every aspect of his life." For Berger (1967:25), religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. By sacred is meant a quality of mysterious power, something that is not human, although it is related to humans, something which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience. The cosmos posited by religion thus both transcends and includes humans. This sacred cosmos is confronted by humans as an immensely powerful reality other than themselves. Yet this reality addresses itself to humans and locates their lives in an ultimately meaningful order (Berger 1967:25-26; see Esler 1994:13-17). In Berger's (1967:28) words, religion "implies that human order is projected into the totality of

being. Put differently, religion is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant”.<sup>5</sup>

Religion, embedded in culture, can thus be described as a system of symbols. Systems of symbols generally establish powerful and enduring feelings and motivations in people by formulating conceptions of value objects and endowing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the feelings and motivations which the symbols generate are perceived to be reality (Geertz 1966:4). The system of symbols thus becomes a system of meaning and feeling, a system of socially shared meaningfulness. A cultural group comprises a group of people who share such a set of meanings and generally feel strongly about the meanings shared within that group. Symbolizing concerns constructing, maintaining, and living out such systems of meaningfulness. It is another way of describing both the social line-drawing that allows a place for everyone and everything and also the emotional and social pressure to keep them in their place. Symbolizing deals with effectively sharing, dividing, altering, and circulating the symbols that make up a group's world of meaningfulness, the symbols that enable human beings to adapt to an environment in some purposeful, meaningful and social way. Tampering with the lines that define and delimit leads to confusion and ultimately to meaninglessness (Malina 1986:1-12, 74-75; Malina 1993a:9; cf Turner [1969] 1977:94-130; Geertz 1973:3-30; Goodman 1988a:5; McVann 1988:97; 1991b:334; Pilch & Malina 1993:xvi-xvii; Douglas 1996:11; Van Staden 2001:583-584).

In the words of Theißen<sup>6</sup> (1999:2), religion can thus be called “...a cultural sign language which promises a gain in life by corresponding to an ultimate reality” (cf Geertz 1973:90). According to Theißen (1999:2), this cultural sign language possess a semiotic, systematic and cultural character (cf Goodman 1988a:6-7). I shall offer a short description of each of these characteristics in turn.

### 3.2.2.2 The semiotic character of religion

People do not merely exist in their environment; they make it habitable by fulfilling social roles, using technology and interpreting their interaction with people and objects. This interpretation pertains to the activities of science, art and religion. The transformation of the world through interpretation is a symbolic action. It is an interaction that consists of a referential relationship between a *signifier* and the *signified*. Life demonstrates a semiotic character. Signs and sign systems do not alter the signified reality, but rather people's cognitive, emotional and pragmatic relationship to signs and sign systems. The semiotic nature of life determines consciousness and transforms perceptions into patterns.

Consciousness and perceptions therefore influence actions (cf Cassirer 1944:25-26; Theißen 1999:2). Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili (1992:174) term the dialogue between a symbol-model and the world (which establishes one's response to the world) "semiosis". Thus, semiosis is the process by which a symbol develops its intentionality.

The distinctive feature of a religious sign system is the combination of myths, rites and ethics (Theißen 1999:2; cf Stolz 1988b:79-147). *Myths* function on an unconscious level and manifest themselves in narrative form. Social behavior and interaction can be explained by identifying their mythical roots (cf Cassirer 1955; Malinowski 1971:11-35; Bolle 1987:261; Stolz 1988a:81-106; Theißen 1999:3, 325). A *rite* constitutes a cultural form of this social activity. Rites are recurrent patterns of behavior which interrupt everyday life. In this way the sacred becomes present in the mundane. This sacral reality represents "another reality", the mythical narrative of someone's life. Rites consist of ritual formulae (which interpret the mythical narrative) (cf Lang 1998:442; Theißen 1999:3). All forms of religious sign language, for example rites, represent a specific *ethical* consciousness (cf Theißen 1999:4). If we keep the schema of the present study in mind, we can say that the mythical narrative of Jesus' life were re-enacted by his followers, with specific ethical consequences.



### 3.2.2.3 The systematic character of religion

“Signs” function in relation and opposition to other signs so as to form a “system”. These signs and forms of a religion constitute its “language”, which is guided by rules, just as a language is governed by grammar and vocabulary (Theißen 1999:4; cf Lindbeck 1984: 33, 81, 95-96; Ritschl 1986: 147-166).

### 3.2.2.4 The cultural character of religion

The word “cultural” indicates that religious sign language is produced by human beings, irrespective of the dimension of religion. To confer meaning on “material elements” (such as water, bread and wine) and to organize these meanings into a system of rites (such as baptism and the Eucharist) is a social action. Such a sign system becomes effective by means of the participation of individuals in a group. Religion as a social cultural sign system is embedded in a historical context. Religions originate, disappear and mix because of the ways in which groups engage in history (cf Theißen 1999:6-7).

The religion of the early followers of Jesus as a sign system thus consisted of three elements: a *narrative* sign language which indicated how myth functioned in social life, a *prescriptive* sign language communicating values (meaning which was found by means of participation in rituals and ceremonies) and a *ritual* sign language in the form of baptism and the Eucharist.

## 3.3 RITES

### 3.3.1 What is a rite?

Berger (1967:40-41) answers this question by saying that people forget, and that they must therefore be reminded over and over again. One of the oldest and most important prerequisites for the establishment of culture is the institution of such “reminders”. Religious rites have comprised a crucial instrument in this process of “reminding” (cf West 2001:126-127). Again and again a rite “makes present” to those who participate in it the fundamental definitions of reality and

their appropriate legitimations. The “action” of a rite consists of two parts – the things that have to be said and the activities that have to be done (cf Burridge & Gould 2004:134). The performance of the rite is closely linked to the reiteration of the sacred formulas that “make present” once more the names and deeds of the gods. Religious acts as well as religious legitimations (ritual and mythology) together serve to “recall” the traditional meanings embodied in the culture and its major institutions. In this manner the continuity between the present moment and the social tradition is restored, placing the experiences of the individual and the various groups of the society in the context of a history (which can be fictitious or not) that transcends them all. In its essence society can be described as a memory (which has been a religious one through most of human history) (cf Sumner 1959:60-62).

The term “rites” can be understood as a general concept that covers both *rituals* and *ceremonies* (Neyrey 1990:76). Rites are closely connected to purity. In the words of Malina (1986:21), purity concerns the socially contrived lines through time and space that human groups maintain in order to create and discover meaning (see Segal 1989:142). Once a group develops a set of lines, there are all sorts of reasons and occasions for focusing on the lines, either to cross them or to maintain and strengthen them. Social behaviors concerned with crossing lines constitute rituals, while those concerned with maintaining or strengthening purity lines comprise ceremonies. Crossing the lines between being unmarried and being married or being ill and being well, are examples of rituals – events that place their focus on the transition to a new, socially recognized state with a resulting change in role or status for the individual concerned. Examples of ceremonies include Sunday worship and Christmas – events that focus on those within a group and reinforce the lines that distinguish the members from those of other groups (Malina 1986:21-22; see Esler 2003:210-211). For the purpose of this study, baptism can consequently be termed a ritual and the Eucharist a ceremony.

To explain rituals and ceremonies, Malina (1986:139-140) uses a comparison that functions effectively. He compares social interaction to a field game, in which this interaction takes place on a field marked off by the various features of the cultural script. On the marked-off field a number of games take place simultaneously, and these games are regulated by the respective symbolic media of social interaction – power games and commitment games, inducement games and games of influence. During the course of any game there are various opportunities for a “time-out”. In all instances of time-outs, whether irregular (such as for injuries or for substitutions) or regular (such as quarter and halftime breaks), certain persons are present whose role it is to call the time-out and to direct activity during such sessions. In the normal flow of social interaction, time-outs comprise periods when rites take place (cf Pilch 2004:170-171). Malina (1986:139-140; emphasis by Malina) describes this concept as follows:

There are two general types of such time-outs. The first is the irregular break in action, called *ritual*; the second is the regular break in action, called *ceremony*. The persons who determine, call for and then preside over irregular breaks in the action are *professionals* who direct rituals, for example, physicians, dentists, or clergy. The persons who call for and preside over regular breaks in the action are *officials* who direct ceremonies, for example a father/mother presiding over a family meal, a clergyperson presiding over weekly church service, or a politician presiding over a national holiday gathering.

Malina (1986:140-142; cf Pilch 2004:171) writes that *rituals* are irregular time-outs. Just as irregular time-outs in a game are determined by situations or conditions that affect individual players or groups of players and cannot be predicted ahead of time (except perhaps statistically), so too rituals occur when situations or conditions that affect individuals or groups arise which call for a standstill in the action. The purpose of such time-outs is either to help a sidelined player to return to the action or to allow for substitution in which a player or group of players can take on a new role in the game.

Rituals that fulfil the first type of purpose (to help a sidelined player back into the action again) are called rituals of status reversal. Examples of such rituals are for a person to be declared well by a physician and discharged from a hospital or to be declared innocent by a judge and free to go home. Rituals that fulfil the second type of purpose, allowing players to take on new roles, are termed rituals of status transformation. Examples of these rituals include graduation, marriage, or ordination. In other words, rituals are interactions that express an individual or group transition into or out of the flow of social interaction in terms of the same or new social roles. Rituals of the status reversal type, such as healing interactions focused on the transition from a sick state to a healthy state, comprise rituals with the aim of reversing the present situation. Such status reversal rituals are cyclical, because they can recur – a healed person can become ill again. Rituals of the status transformation type mark a transition in an irreversible way, usually following the biologically rooted and culturally noted stages of human personal and social development, for example birth rituals or the assimilating of new members into a group. In other words, the earliest baptism can be described as a status transformation ritual.

On the other hand, *ceremonies* are regular time-outs, called for by the very quality of the social structure – irrespective of the condition of the players. Ceremonies can be predicted, because they are set by the norms of society and indicated on a calendar, in order to designate regular intervals in the life of the social group. Ceremonies do not depend upon the conditions that might befall individuals or groups in the game; they occur as predetermined by the social structure which sets the rules of the game. In other words, ceremonies confirm the social institutions that structure the dimensions of communal living, in order to strengthen the respective statuses of persons in those institutions, and thereby demonstrate their solidarity among all the persons who together realize and give concrete shape to the institution. Ceremonies always take place on a regular predefined date, like the celebration of a birthday. Rooted in some historical situation, ceremonies look to the present time of celebration and mark the current

solidarity in the group concretizing the institution. Ceremonies, thus, celebrate belonging and mark a time-out in order to enable persons to evaluate their place in the world (Malina 1986:140-142; cf Pilch 2004:172). Hence, the earliest Eucharist can be described as a ceremony.

In terms of spatial images, Malina (1986:142) indicates that ritual focuses on the beyond – on transcendence and transformation – or it focuses on transition to something else beyond the normal human limits, whether vertical, horizontal, depth, or mass, and hence beyond the individual and social body. Conversely, ceremonies focus on the inside – on immanence, inwardness, or the internal dimensions of a social and individual body.

The persons whose task it is to see people through various ritual processes, can be called limit-breaking agents, since they can assist people to transcend the limitations and boundaries that trap them, in a socially accepted and satisfying way (Malina 1986:145-146; cf Neyrey 1990:76-77). Strong group/low grid limit-breaking agents derive their influence from occupying customary limit-breaking roles which are rooted in law. Since purity lines are porous, along with legal competence there exists an extremely large proportion of illegal competence that is difficult to control. Given the porous purity boundaries, intruding illegal competence is frequently recognized as legitimate by persons exercising influence, who at times form groups around persons with legitimate (and illegal) competence (cf Holmberg 1978:128).<sup>7</sup> These network groups count for more than some hierarchically shaped, integrated society. Incompetence is rated in terms of legitimacy and custom, not legality and law, and the incompetent are regarded as the illegitimate, those with no sanctioning higher order norms to back their behavior. Such incompetents are normally simply ejected from the group. As a result, there were two sets of limit-breaking agents in the first-century Mediterranean world, often in conflict with each other: “One set is endowed with legal competence based on the inflated power and commitment of the political institution, while the other set wields legitimate competence based on the equally

inflated influence and inducement of the various non-political institutions of the society” (Malina 1986:146). Arguments and competition between representatives of the two sets focus on the legitimacy of each; those with legal competence point to the illegality of their challengers, while those with legitimate competence admit the legality of their components and yet question the latter’s legitimacy in terms of higher order norms (Malina 1986:146; cf Lewis 1989:27-29, 157-158).

By way of summary, Neyrey (1990:76; see McVann 1991b:335; Neyrey 1991:362) lists the following distinguishing characteristics of rituals and ceremonies:

|                   | <b>Ritual</b>                          | <b>Ceremony</b>                                    |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Frequency:        | Irregular pauses                       | Regular pauses                                     |
| Calendar:         | Unpredictable, when needed             | Predictable, planned                               |
| Time focus:       | Present-to-future                      | Past-to-present                                    |
| Presided over by: | Professionals                          | Officials  |
| Purpose:          | Status reversal; status transformation | Confirmation of roles and statuses in institutions |

### 3.3.2 The function of rites

Beattie (1968:203-205; see Winkelman 2000:232; Choi 2003:170-171) explains that rites<sup>8</sup> regularly enact the state of affairs which it is hoped will be brought about. A rite is a communicative occasion – in every rite something is said as well as done (as mentioned earlier). The use of mimetic objects or situations is an appropriate way of expressing what has to be said: it is not simply that a causal connection is believed to exist between things which resemble one another and are used in a rite. For instance, a rain-making ritual often involves the simulation of rain or clouds – by pouring water or burning green herbs to make heavy smoke. The central significance of a rite is expressive, it is an end in itself; it is therefore considered worthwhile participating in, whether it is effective or not. Art functions similarly. It is a way of saying something. Its worth lies in the effectiveness with which it communicates, rather than in any result which may be

sought. This can be clearly perceived in the early baptism, where the sins of believers are washed away (see chapter 4), and especially in the Eucharist, where an all-inclusive lifestyle is acted out around the table (see chapter 5).

Beattie (1968:205-209) further explains that on the cognitive level, rites almost always embody beliefs, and these beliefs may provide acceptable explanations for events which would otherwise be incomprehensible (cf Segal 1989:137-138). But a rite is not only a way of thinking about things, it is also a way of doing things – it provides a way of coping with situations of misfortune or danger where no other means of doing so are available. On the functionalist level, rites have implications not only for their performers' state of mind, but also for other social institutions in the same society. Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili (1992:145-146) concur. For them, rites are markers and mediators of social and psychological change. Rites direct the attention of participants to objects and events of cultural significance. This direction amounts to social manipulation of intentionality. People who participate in rites commonly come to view aspects of their society, cosmology, environment, situation, and even themselves, in a new light.

Smith and Taussig (1990:97) warn that interpreters must be careful not to accord exactly the same meaning to rites throughout the world and in history. In this regard, Turner (1975:15-33) points out that in rites there exist patterns of particular social meaning for specific groups of people.<sup>9</sup> To him, rites reveal a basic communal structure and support the social units of the people who participate in the rite. He also places emphasis on the multidimensionality of the gestures and symbols used in rites. Particular symbols and actions in rites can mean different things, depending on their context and sequence. Smith (in Smith & Taussig 1990:97-103) agrees by saying that rites consist of elements that are "empty" of general meaning and capable of particular signals, depending on the context and character of the situation.

Smith (in Smith & Taussig 1990:100-102) has characterized rites in general<sup>10</sup> as exhibiting the following overlapping effects on the people involved:

- *A detection of a pattern, occurrence, or dynamic within a situation:* Rites in general are performed to call attention to something that has happened or is happening in the environment of the participants, usually something that is problematic. The rite does not solve the problem, but results in deeper thought. "It is a testing of the adequacy and applicability of traditional patterns and categories to new situations and data in the hopes of achieving rectification" (Smith 1982:100-101).
- *A perfecting of rationalizing about such observed phenomena:* Rites observe events that have become problems for people, and then explain them away or cause them to look better in a constructed setting. Rites provide "the means for demonstrating that we know what ought to have been done, what ought to have taken place. But, by the fact that it is ritual action rather than everyday action, it demonstrates that we know 'what is the case'" (Smith 1982:63; cf Segal 1989:140-141).
- *An assertion of difference within the social body:* Just as rites perceive the events that are problematic and irreconcilable for a particular group, they also mark the differences between people within a particular social formation. Rites assert these differences in order for a social body to be able to work with them, rather than to overcome them. Living with difference is a skill that a social body needs to develop because of the inevitability of variations. The observation of difference can also lead to demarcation of those inside and those outside (see Douglas 1966:4).

d'Aquili and Newberg (1993:28; 1999:89, 99) enumerate the following characteristics of a rite:

- it is a sequence of behavior which is structured or patterned;



- it is rhythmic and repetitive (to some degree) – it tends to recur in the same or nearly the same form with some regularity;
- it acts to synchronize affective, perceptual-cognitive, and motor processes within the central nervous system of individual participants, thereby generating an alternate state of consciousness within the individual;
- and it synchronizes these processes among the various individual participants, thereby creating a strong sense of group unity.

Anthropological analyses of rites have emphasized the distinction between manifest and latent functions, of the expressed intents versus the unintended, unarticulated or unrecognized collateral effects. Because rites generally assert means-ends relations not considered functionally possible, explanations have emphasized their latent effects on psychodynamics or social behavior. But even this perspective cannot fully appreciate the technical aspects of the psychodrama of a social rite in which important personal and social therapeutic effects are achieved as intended by the rite (Winkelman 2000:233).<sup>11</sup>

d'Aquili and Newberg (1993:29, 99; 1999:91-93) describe the neurological functioning of rites as creating slow external rhythms that manifest a quiescent dominance, while the imposition of a rapid external rhythm represents a dominance of the arousal system. Rapid external rhythmic drivers would eventually lead to a release of hippocampal inhibition on arousal centers in the brain. This would result in an increased arousal drive via the amygdale to the cortex. This process continues until maximal arousal occurs, which leads to spillover and quiescent breakthrough. The initial quiescent breakthrough would result in a change in the activation of the hippocampus, which is strongly correlated with trance or dreamlike states. In these states there is a profound sense of internal harmony and union between external ritual participants. These states of quiescent breakthrough allow the hippocampus and the orientation association area to generate a powerful alternate state of consciousness experience. Slow rites can achieve the same effect simply and directly by

activating the quiescent drive without first going through the intense “flow” experience of the hyperarousal drive and the subsequent quiescent spillover. In both cases, however, brief alternate states of consciousness result (d’Aquili & Newberg 1999:99-100).<sup>12</sup> d’Aquili and Newberg (1999:100) explain this phenomenon as follows:

However brief they may be, if these states are experienced as being profound, there obtains not only a sense of union of the...participants but also a sense of the union of opposites presented in the myth that the ritual [or ceremony] incarnates. Problems of life and death, good and evil, quest and attainment, God and human being, that are presented in mythic form, can be perceived to be resolved in the powerful unitary experience of a hyperarousal state with quiescent breakthrough or in a hyper-quiescent state directly.

Because rites are practiced in a group, they usually bring the members of that group into a sense of corporate unity. This of course was one of the main functions of the earliest baptism and especially of the Eucharist. Rites may state obligatory conditions of social life and communicate this message to participants, binding them together in a group that feels a sense of commonality. Rites also express the structure of society and the culturally ascribed meanings of the moral and natural order, providing an interpretative system that humans use to order experience and behavior (d’Aquili & Newberg 1999:95; cf Choi 2003:170-171). It is important to understand that rites involve both internal communication within the organism and external communication between the organism and its world. Thus, rites simultaneously constitute external interactions among group members or between the individual and his or her world (including the self) and internal relations among structures, all the way up and down the functional hierarchy of the individual nervous system (see Laughlin 1997:475).

One of the basic functions of rites is to transcend the immediate personal situation and to appreciate the theological macro-system perspective (Arden

1998:93). But rites also have important social consequences (see Beattie 1968:210) – they may provide a means of ordering and coordinating everyday practical activities. People tend to attach a special kind of potency to symbols and the procedures that take place during rites. These symbols are fundamentally expressive, but because of this they are often taken to be instrumentally effective as well.<sup>13</sup> Theißen (1999:122-123) similarly considers that rites manifest two essential functions: to structure time and to co-ordinate people. The structuring of time can clearly be seen in early Christian baptism as an initiation and status transformation rite. The co-ordination of life in communities took place mainly through sacrifices, especially where these were connected with shared meals. The earliest Eucharist is a rite of integration, which is constantly repeated and renews the cohesion of the community. Rites thus describe the place of human beings in the world<sup>14</sup> (see Segal 1989:138).

Having outlined the theory regarding rites (as ritual and ceremony), I shall now look in detail at ritual and ceremony as such.

### **3.4 RITUAL**

#### **3.4.1 Description of “ritual”**

In the course of the history of humankind, a number of different adaptations to the habit have manifested themselves. Although the border between them is fluid, anthropologists have been able to recognize the following principal adaptations: hunting and gathering societies, simple horticultural societies, advanced horticultural societies, simple agrarian societies, advanced agrarian societies, and industrial societies. Each of these adaptations correlates with a different religious behavior (Goodman 1988a:17; see Goodman 1988b:25-27; Lenski et al 1991:71). The people of the first-century Mediterranean world lived in an advanced agrarian society (cf Lenski et al 1991:169-201; Malina 1993a:90-94; Van Aarde 1994b:96-99). They believed that major changes in people's lives took place by means of rituals.

Goodman (1988a:20) explains:

Seeds, after all, become plants, only to yield seeds once more. The plant is merely another aspect of the seed. For the seeds to reveal their alternate aspect, they need to undergo the ritual of being planted in the ground. All other objects of ordinary reality have alternate aspects also, insects, stones, mountains, the wind, the heavenly bodies, and of course also humans, and in the ritual of metamorphosis, alternate between these aspects.

Rituals accompany people throughout their lives. They mark situations of crisis, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death, with proper solemnity, functioning to facilitate the passage from one social condition to the next (Goodman 1988a:31; see Förster 2003:704-709). Turner (1973:1100) defines ritual as “a stereotyped sequence of activities, involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interests” (cf Turner 1967:19; see Förster 2003:711). Accordingly, Goodman (1988a:31) remarks: “A ritual is a social encounter in which each participant has a well-rehearsed role to act out. It takes place within a set time span and in a limited space, and involves a predetermined set of events. Once initiated, it has to run its course to completion” (see Zuesse 1987:405; Meeks 1993:92-93; Collins 1996:218).

Arnold van Gennep ([1909] 1960) coined the term *rites de passage*.<sup>15</sup> According to him it describes two types of rituals: rituals that accompany the passage of a person from one social status to another in the course of life, like birth and marriage; and rituals that mark recognized points in the passage of time, like the new year and the new moon (Turner 1987:386; cf Girard 1972:425; see Myerhoff, Camino & Turner 1987:380-383; McVann 1991b:335-336; Gehlen 1998:58-63).

Baptism is likewise an initiation rite<sup>16</sup> or *rite de passage*. Since baptism is the ritual that will receive special attention in this study, the remainder of this section will focus on *rites de passage*. In a symbolic fashion rituals like these represent the legitimate crossing of a boundary, which brings along a new identity with new rights and responsibilities. Boundaries can be understood as fences around what is holy, protecting and guarding what is enclosed. But with all boundaries, there must be gates to permit legitimate entrance – so there are rituals that carefully define the process of who may enter and who may legitimately cross the boundaries (Neyrey 1990:87). These rituals assign people a location in cultural space and accord them a status that the other members of society recognize as proper<sup>17</sup> (Van Staden 2001:583; cf Eliade 1965:ix-x; McVann 1991b:333). Baptism can be seen as such an entrance ritual, whereby outsiders legitimately enter the realm of God.<sup>18</sup>

Certain elements allow this transition to a new status to take place effectively, namely the *initiands*, who undergo the change of role or status; the *ritual elders*, who preside over the ritual; and the *symbols* of the new world, which the initiands learn during the ritual (Van Gennep 1960:21, 65-115; McVann 1988:97; 1991a:152-153; 1991b:336; cf Winkelmann 2000:234-235; see Turner 1967:94-108, 235-236).

### **3.4.2 Phases in status transformation rituals**

#### **3.4.2.1 Introduction**

The ritual process of status transformation takes place in three phases, namely *separation* from society, *demarcation* against society and *reintegration* into society (McVann 1991b:338; cf Beattie 1968:211; Wedderburn 1987:363; see Van Staden 2001:585; Esler 2003:211). Each of these will now be described in turn.

### 3.4.2.2 Separation

People undergoing status transformation rituals experience separation in three ways: separation from people, place and time. Participants are separated from the ordinary rhythm of the *group*. At the point of ritual separation, the initiands and the place of initiation become “off limits” to everyone who does not have a role to play there. It is important to remove the initiands to a *place* separated from the locus of ordinary life because the experience into which they will enter is “out of the ordinary”. The participants in a ritual are removed from the normal flow of *time*. They leave “secular” time and enter into a sacred “timelessness”. The usual times for eating, sleeping, working, and learning are altered (McVann 1991b:338-339; cf Turner 1967:97, 223-226).

### 3.4.2.3 Liminality-*Communitas*

Turner (1967:99-102) describes the process of demarcation against the society as liminality-*communitas*.<sup>19</sup> *Liminality*,<sup>20</sup> the negative side of the ritual process, describes the state into which the initiands are brought by virtue of their separation from their everyday, familiar world. During this period initiands become disoriented, having been cut off from the persons, points of reference and activities which shaped their previous way of living. In a sense they “disappear” from view, or “die”. They are required to abandon their previous habits, ideas and understandings of their personal identity, as well as their social relations. Their previous identities are no longer operative, but they have not yet acquired new roles and statuses. Therefore, they are “in between” and perceived to be dangerous (McVann 1991b:339; cf d’Aquili and Newberg 1993:3; see Turner 1977:95; Wedderburn 1987:367-368). The liminal stage is the heart of the process, the time of transformation, when the initiands shed an old identity and gain a new one (see Esler 2003:211). *Communitas*,<sup>21</sup> the positive side of the ritual process, refers to the initiands’ recognition of their fundamental relation to the institution into which they are being initiated. All the distinctions between the initiands disappear and equality and unity are emphasized (McVann 1991a:153; 1991b:340; cf Winkelman 2000: 265; see Turner 1967:99-101; 1974:46).

d'Aquili and Newberg (1993:3) state that it is especially during the liminality-*communitas* phase that alternate states of consciousness are experienced. In fact, according to them, the states that can be produced during rituals (as well as ceremonies) seem to overlap with some of the alternate states of consciousness generated by various meditative practices. In their opinion it is "probably not too strong a statement to make that human ceremonial ritual provides the ordinary person access to mystical experience" (d'Aquili & Newberg 1993:4; see Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:142). In other words, the liminality-*communitas* component of ritual can be described as a portal between the sacred and the profane (see Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:213-214). In the words of Winkelman (2000:97):

Rituals connect previously developed (socialized) intentionalities with symbols, eliciting conditioned responses that can transform structures of consciousness. Ritually induced states of consciousness contrast with the normally static and stable social life by providing a period of fluidity for transformation of social status and self-experience through liminal or transitional stages. The ritual then resolves status ambiguity by marking the social transition and by producing feelings of unity or community with the social group.

#### **3.4.2.4 Aggregation**

With the ritual process completed,<sup>22</sup> the initiands return to society with new roles and statuses as well as with new rights and obligations. The society acknowledges that the initiands now possess the capabilities required for their new roles. Their status in the community has been redefined (McVann 1991a:153; 1991b:340; cf Turner 1967:251-260).

#### **3.4.3 Concluding remarks**

Turner (1967:19-47) regards experience as a very important part of the ritual process (see Förster 2003:712). He proposes that the elements of ritual are clustered around two poles: the pole of moral and social order, and the sensory

pole. According to him, people engaged in a ritual are using elements of the sensory pole in order to express something located at the pole of the moral and social order (see Goodman 1988a:32).<sup>23</sup>

If we keep in mind that according to the model applied in this study, rituals (and ceremonies) are the symbolic re-enactment of something that is said in anti-language, it makes sense when Winkelman (2000:234) explains ritual in the following way:

Ritual symbols are “multivocal”, embedded in a system of meanings in which they have multiple referents. These multivocal symbols express and evoke a multiplicity of meanings, from general values to norms, roles, relationships, and beliefs. Ritual activities communicate important meanings to participants, including rules for social behavior. Didactic effects are found in rituals and associated activities, expressing traditional cultural knowledge and guidelines for social behavior.

Goodman (1988a:33) concurs that religious ritual is the most exalted form of human communication. In her view, what humans compose in their rituals is something like a huge canvas representing what makes them human. At the onset of the ritual, people are transported into another plane of reality. It is an orderly world, like the ordinary one, but its rules are different, and the modes of ordinary reality do not apply.<sup>24</sup> This was a way in which the early Jesus-groups could experience the presence of the Spirit of God in their lives as Jesus did, namely by means of alternate states of consciousness. Goodman (1988a:34-35) explains that as a dependent variable, rituals change when humans modify their interaction with the habitat. But without exception, all rituals contain a signal to indicate to the participants at which point they should make the switch to the alternate mode of perception.<sup>25</sup>

In chapter 4 it will be shown that the earliest baptism can be described as an initiation and status transformation ritual, since all the different stages of these



kinds of rituals can be recognized in the way early Jesus-followers allowed themselves to be baptized in order to become members of a new community.

### 3.5 CEREMONY

#### 3.5.1 Description of “ceremony”

A ceremony can be defined as a highly formalized practice prescribed by custom and undertaken by a group of people (Alexander 1987:179; cf Grimes 1993:187). In conventional usage the term “ceremony” is arbitrarily interchanged with “ritual”, but in current theoretical discussion the terms are increasingly distinguished.<sup>26</sup> In this regard, Alexander (1987:179) writes that ceremony is identified as a *type* or *mode* of ritual behavior. By “ritual behavior” he means what is understood by “rite” in this study. Thus, once again, to avoid confusion, references to “ceremony” and “ritual” in this study will throughout refer to two distinct forms of rites (as described earlier in this chapter).

Like all symbolic behavior, ceremony points to a larger framework of action. Through dramatization and other representational means, ceremony presents the values and ideologies that constitute social and cultural life. For Alexander (1987:179), “[t]he underlying motivation in the ceremonial representation of the various social and cultural constructs is the confirmation and reinforcement of those organizing frameworks that order socio-cultural life in a normative way.” Turner (1992:80-84) similarly comments that where it is the function of ritual to *transform* social structure, ceremony “*indicates*” – it is expressive of social structure. This confirmatory function of ceremony accords it a conservative character. Because the intent of ceremony is to conserve the social structural state of affairs, spontaneity and disorder have no place during the course of a ceremony. Moore and Myerhoff (1977:8, 16-17) explain that as formalized behavior, ceremony is an attempt to emphasize order. They remark that through order, formality, and repetition ceremony intends to state that the social world (or a particular part thereof) is orderly, explicable, and for the moment fixed. It is

formality that allows ceremony to authenticate its message and confers permanence and legitimacy on something which is actually a social construct. Ceremony's medium is thus part of its message. But ceremony not only symbolizes or communicates that which is socially and culturally normative, it also puts into action what it symbolizes (see Alexander 1987:179-180). Grimes (1982:224) argues that linked to ceremony's corroborative and legitimating functions are the affirmation and securing of power for those who have an interest (recognized or not) in a specific ideology or social structure. He further states that because ceremony implies a distinction between the group that is symbolically asserting its power and the "other side", it can be competitive and even conflict-laden (see Alexander 1987:180).

While baptism can thus be described as a status transformation and initiation rite (a ritual), the Eucharist can be called a rite of integration (a ceremony) (see Theißen 1999:121). In fact, scholars identify not only the Eucharist, but many kinds of meals in antiquity as ceremonies rather than rituals (see e.g., Neyrey 1991:362). The reason for this is that a ritual (like baptism) effects a change in status, but a ceremony (like the Eucharist) is a "regular and predictable occurrence which confirms and legitimates people's roles and status in a community" (Pilch 1996c:95).

When we regard meals as ceremonies, Neyrey (1991:363) suggests that the following questions can be asked in order to understand what a particular ceremony means:

- when was the meal eaten;
- by whom and in whose company;
- who presided over it;
- and in which social institution did it take place?

Neyrey (1991:363) provides the following examples:

[I]n the context of first-century social roles, a daily meal confirms the basic family unit and bolsters the respective roles of father as provider and mother as nourisher. A Passover meal confirms membership in the covenant people of Israel, even as it bolsters the role of the head of the clan who presides at the meal (Exod 12:3-4, 26-27). A Pharisee haburah meal confirms membership in the brotherhood of those who share Pharisaic ideology. Because of their important position in Israelite society, scribes expect to be seated “in the places of honor at feasts” (Luke 20:46) thus confirming their role.

### **3.5.2 Concluding remarks**

Whereas rituals focus on crossing lines, ceremonies leave the lines of the maps of society in place, because the latter function to confirm the structures and values of society, to affirm the purity code of society, and to celebrate the orderly classification of persons, places, and things in the cosmos: “Birthdays, anniversaries, festivals, and the like, confirm the roles and statuses of individuals in the group as well as the group’s collective sense of holy space and the holy time that pertains to them” (Neyrey 1990:77). Ceremonies replicate the group’s basic social system, “its values, lines, classifications, and its symbolic world” (Neyrey 1991:363).

In chapter 5, it will be indicated that the earliest Eucharist can be described as a ceremony, since all the different characteristics of ceremonies can be recognized in the way Jesus’ followers participated in the Eucharist as an all-inclusive meal.

## **3.6 THE FORMATION OF A NEW GROUP**

### **3.6.1 Introduction**

In chapter 1, I explained that the early Jesus-followers formed a new group, a fictive kinship, an anti-society, where they could live according to the ethic which

Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, rites play a fundamental role in group formation and stabilization. By means of the earliest baptism a person could become a member of this group (cf Brown 2000:24-34), while the earliest Eucharist served as the ceremony of integration for the members of the group (cf Mack 1988:80; Brown 2000:44-63). The concept of anti-society is linked to social identity, which in turn is related to the formation of factions and sects, as well as with institutionalization. In this section, I shall offer a cursory description of these concepts. The purpose of this discussion is not to provide a detailed explanation of group formation. I am merely going to describe the basic facets that could aid us to gain insight into the earliest Jesus-groups' formation of rites, associated with alternate states of consciousness.

### **3.6.2 Social identity theory**

The distinction between insiders and outsiders constitutes a fundamental first-century Mediterranean perspective, which is shared by all New Testament authors (Malina 2002:610). Esler (2003) has set out a theory of identity that is embedded in the process of inter-group differentiation and hostility as we find it in the early days of the dispersion of the gospel around the Mediterranean. New Testament research employing notions of identity drawn from the social sciences (especially the sociology of knowledge) has highlighted that the foundational concept in any research of identity is that of *difference* as constituting identity: "...something only *is* to the extent that it is distinguished from something else" (Esler 2003:19). Esler (2003) employs social identity theory, a theoretical perspective stemming from the area of social psychology, to describe inter-group differentiation in the first-century Mediterranean world. This theory was developed by Henry Tajfel to distinguish between inter-group and interpersonal relations and also to lay the foundation for a social psychology of inter-group relations and group processes that was non-reductionist, in the sense that these phenomena were seen as possessing psychological properties distinct from those of a collectivity of individuals merely acting together (see Tajfel 1978:61-76; Brown 2000:311-315). Underlying this theory was the fundamental discovery

that merely categorizing people into groups resulted in behavior in which members of one group favored each other over members of other groups (Esler 2003:19-20).

Tajfel (1978:63, emphasis by Tajfel) defines “social identity” as “that *part* of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.” The theory is especially concerned with the ways in which the members of one group seek to differentiate it from other groups so as to achieve a positive social identity (see Tajfel 1978:64-67). To Esler (2003:20), connecting this form of social identity with the “Christ-movement” in Rome, for example, means investigating the unique kind of identity which Paul proposed its individual members gained, simply by belonging to it, regardless of their ethnicity. Esler (2003:20) argues that social identity is “genuinely socio-psychological, since it covers the group experience but also interests itself in how this affects the hearts and minds of individual Christ-followers in the cognitive, emotional, and evaluative dimensions of group belonging.”

According to social identity theory, a group instills its distinctive identity into individual members by way of “norms”, the values that define acceptable and unacceptable attitudes in and behaviors by members of the group. Norms thus maintain and enhance group identity (Esler 2003:20-21; cf Brown 2000:56-63). Esler (2003:26) found that where people define themselves in terms of a shared category of membership, they tend to stereotype themselves in terms of this membership, and in this way enhance the sense of identity shared by in-group members, while simultaneously heightening the sense of contrast between themselves and members of the out-group.<sup>27</sup> When in a foreign location, people from the same village will regard each other as part of their in-group, although they might be part of the out-group to each other at home. Everybody falling outside the in-group boundaries is out-group. Dealings with out-group persons might even be hostile (cf Malina 1992:72; 2002:609-610; see chapter 1). Malina

(2002:611) describes this process as follows: “This insider/outsider division is a form of boundary drawing that constitutes a fundamental dimension of a group’s purity system, enabling a place for everyone and everything, thus creating order. To say the least, such categorization lends itself to radical ethnocentrism” (see Neyrey 1990:22-24).

If we keep social identity theory in mind, it should be easier to comprehend how and why the early Jesus-followers formed distinct groups. They distinguished themselves from the broader society to form an anti-society. This anti-society became their new in-group.

### **3.6.3 From faction to sect**

Elliott (1995:76) refers to the groups of early Jesus-followers as a “Jewish” sect. According to him, in Jesus’ lifetime, the Jesus-movement operated as a “Jewish” faction still embedded in the structures and norms of its corporate body, the House of Israel. After the death of Jesus and under changing social conditions, the faction gradually adopted the features of a “Jewish” sect<sup>28</sup> (cf Wilson 1970:7; Scroggs 1975:72-91; Esler [1987] 1996:65-70; Theißen & Merz 1996:143-144; Sim 1998:110, 141). Boissevain (1974:192) describes a faction as:

...a coalition of persons (followers) recruited personally according to structurally diverse principles by or on behalf of a person in conflict with another person or persons, with whom they were formally united, over honour and/or control over resources. The central focus of the faction is the person who has recruited it, who may also be described as the leader.

The earliest Jesus-movement can thus be described as a *faction*, embedded within the social, economic and political institutions and culture of the House of Israel, with Jesus as its leader. Only after the death of Jesus can this movement be described as a *sect*, because during this time the faction became dissociated from the parent body, socially and ideologically (Elliott 1995:78-80; cf Theißen 1999:286-292).

The study of the sociological concept of “the sect” was pioneered by Ernst Troeltsch<sup>29</sup> (see especially [1931] 1950:331-343), while Robin Scroggs (1975:71-91) was the first scholar to apply this model in detail to the emergence of “Christianity”. Although there is no general agreement on the range of meaning of the term “sect”, for Wallis (1975:9) “a certain minimal consensus exists that the concept has to do with groups, organized around a common ideology, which in a variety of ways cut themselves off from, or erect barriers between themselves and the rest of society” (see Wilson 1961:354; 1967:14-18; 1970:7). Troeltsch (1950:333; cf Wilson 1970:7) contends that originally the word “sect” was used in a polemical and apologetic sense, since it was used to describe groups which separated themselves from the official Church and represented “inferior side-issues, one-sided phenomena, exaggerations or abbreviations of ecclesiastical Christianity.” He would rather regard a sect as an “independent sociological type of Christian thought” (Troeltsch 1950:338). Although Wilson (1973:12) observes that “the sect” can no longer be understood by direct contrast with “the church”, in the way that Troeltsch perceived the former, some of the characteristics that Troeltsch ascribes to sects are applicable to the early Jesus-movement, such as all-inclusiveness, the importance of the shared experience of the inner community, the fellowship of love, and the tension with regard to the outside world (cf Scroggs 1975:72-88). Wilson (1970:26-27, emphasis by Wilson) characterizes sects as follows (and he intentionally does not contrast them with the church):

Sects are voluntary bodies. Individuals have some choice, theoretically complete choice, in subscribing to sect tenets. The very concept of sect implies at least division, and usually diversity, of religious belief within a given society. The votary must choose the sect, but choice is mutual – the sect receives or rejects the man. Membership is by some test of merit: the individual must be worthy of membership. The sect then has a strong sense of self-identity: who is admitted becomes “one of us”. And this “us” is set over against all others, the more compellingly so because sects lay claim to special and usually exclusive access to supernatural truths. The

sect is a body which claims complete and conscious allegiance of its members, that should transcend where it does not eclipse all other allegiances, whether to state, tribe, class or kin-group.

Wilson (1970:26-27) further asserts that because a sect understands itself as the sole possessor of true doctrine, its members see themselves as a people set apart. They also develop procedures for the expulsion of the wayward; therefore the individual members are expected to live the life of a good sectarian. Although the sect possesses an alternative set of teachings and practices from the orthodox tradition, this alternative is never a complete rejection of all elements in orthodox tradition. It is essentially a set of teachings with a different emphasis. Wilson (1970:28-35) acknowledges that this formulation is general and “ideal-typical”. In actual sects we must expect that each of their specific attributes will show some variation from the formulation.<sup>30</sup>

In applying the above information regarding sects to the early Jesus-movement, the model of sectarianism that Esler (1994:13-14) developed (based on the work of Berger and Luckmann [1976]), may be helpful. His model shows that the development of a sect in the first-century Mediterranean world is closely related to the formation of an anti-society. According to Esler it is very common for the members of one religious movement to become dissatisfied with it and to forge a distinctive outlook which is seen as deficient in the larger institution. This process will often originate under the leadership of a particular individual regarded as invested with special insights and powers, who is able to articulate the dissatisfaction felt by the members of the group with the existing order of things and to propose an alternative path. In pre-industrial societies this often involved the reassertion of traditional values and institutions. As long as the new movement remains within the larger body it can be described as a reform movement. Over a period of time relations between the two may sour and pressure may build up, which may result in the expulsion of the new group. If such a split takes place in a religious context the group that has departed is



called a sect. At times the parent religion will be able to enlist the support of political authorities in suppressing the sect, since it is in the interests of both the dominant church and the state to maintain the status quo. The members of the sect – especially in the period directly following the separation – will be in a difficult position. Many of them may feel residual loyalty to the church or religion they have left and they may even experience pressure from their former co-religionists to return. Because of this it is essential that their leaders legitimize the new movement. They need to put in place a symbolic universe within which the new institutional order will possess identity and meaning. Esler (1994:14) explains this situation as follows:

In a situation where there is a great degree of animosity between the old and new groups, such legitimation may involve denunciation of the mother religion and its leadership. But the denunciation is for the benefit of the members of the new group; it is not intended to be directed at the old. The precise nature of the legitimation will often depend on the traditions which were originally shared by the two and the precise circumstances of the split.

Most probably the first Jesus-movement was a reform movement of this type (Scroggs 1975:88-91). Although we do not know the precise nature of this movement, we can state that its members were distinctive, because of “a belief in the resurrection of Jesus and surely at a very early stage the experience of charismatic phenomena such as glossolalia, visions and miraculous cures, which they attributed to the presence of the Spirit among them” (Esler 1994:15). At some stage a breaking point was reached between the mother church and the new group. This action was perhaps precipitated by a very high “Christology”, given the Israelite hostility to anything which diminished the oneness of God. Esler (1994:16) points out: “In social terms however, a likely contender is the practice of table-fellowship between Jews and Gentiles in the community, the eucharistic sharing of the one loaf and the one cup, which threatened the maintenance of Jewish ethnic identity.”

Concurring with this statement, I have already indicated that “sectarian groups often have their own rituals or activities which bind together the community while simultaneously marking them as something distinct from outsider groups” (Sim 1998:141). Elliott (1995:79, 82-83, 85) argues that when the early Jesus-followers formed their own group, there was a shift in the rituals of incorporation (baptism instead of circumcision) and solidarity (Eucharist instead of temple worship). Admission to the messianic sect, in contrast to the Israelite parent body, was open to all classes, genders and strata, including the marginalized and gentiles (e.g., Ac 10-11, 15; Rm 10:12; Gl 3:28; Col 3:11; etc.) (Elliott 1995:82, 94). In accordance with what I remarked earlier, Elliott (1995:82, 87) also indicates that the sect promoted all-inclusiveness – claiming indiscriminate access to God and equal reception of the divine Spirit (see e.g., Mt 23:8-12; Lk-Ac; Rm 12:3-8; Gl 3:28; Eph 2:11-22; Col 3:11). Elliott (1995:84) adds that the Christian sect “attempted to insulate (but not isolate) itself from the pressures of the larger society by employing a concept of fictive kinship and brotherhood along with a modification of traditional codes of purity and pollution to establish a distinctive group identity, internal cohesion and clear lines of social and moral boundaries” (see Elliott 1995:84).

The early Jesus-followers thus began to refer to themselves as a new movement, the “family of God” (Mk 3:31-35//Mt 12:46-50//Lk 8:19-21) (see chapter 1; Elliott 2002:76). Since the family played a very important role in the first-century Mediterranean world, Jesus also exhibited a positive attitude towards the family, to such a degree that he thought it an appropriate institution for defining life under the reign of God. Jesus *redefined* the identity of the family and the basis of one’s membership of the family – not on blood or marriage, but on obedience to the will of God: “In Jesus’ collectivist society this new surrogate family makes available to those who have renounced their natural families a form of community essential to their personal and social existence” (Elliott 2002:82; see Malina 1994:111-113).

Elliott (2002:87) describes this situation as follows:

This new family of God was one in which all humans trusted in and relied upon God as their Father and benefactor. It was a family constituted not by ties of blood or marriage but by obedience of the heavenly Father's will. It was a family in which all who trusted in God, as did Jesus, were established and united as brothers and sisters who maintained familial solidarity by a respect for familiar order, loyalty, compassion, emotional commitment (love), truthfulness, integrity of word and deed, generosity, hospitality, and mutual aid and support – all qualities typical of the honorable family and kin group.

The Jesus-movement did not stay a sect forever. In the process of group formation, institutionalization is unavoidable.

#### **3.6.4 Institutionalization**

At a certain stage in the history of the “early church”, the anti-societal characteristics of the Jesus-movement became normative for the broader society. It was not *opposed* to the broader society anymore; because of institutionalization, it *became* the “broader society”.<sup>31</sup> This led to further consequences, because on the grounds of the post-Easter experiences of the early Jesus-followers, we are an institutionalized church today. In this section I intend to discuss the process that takes place from forming a new group<sup>32</sup> to institutionalization.

Jesus-groups were formed because of Jesus' charismatic authority.<sup>33</sup> For Holmberg (1978:139) such authority is “extra-ordinary” to an extreme degree and is opposed to traditional and rational authority, which can be termed “everyday” forms of authority (see chapter 1; Neufeld 2005:2-5). Holmberg (1978:139) describes charismatic authority as “specifically foreign to everyday routine structures, it is anti-economic, anti-organizational and highly personal. And that is why charisma in its pure form is an unstable, short-lived type of authority which

very soon becomes either traditionalized or rationalized or both.” According to Holmberg (1978:179), institutionalization is a gradual process that can be traced back to the leader. Initially authority and control reside with the leader. This remains the case as long as he lives. After a short period of time a charismatic group usually develops into an institutionalized organization (cf Weber 1968:54-55; see Holmberg 1978:162-195). Weber (1968:xxi, 54-55) explains this process by pointing out that people have the desire that the charismatic blessing should be available on a permanent basis in everyday life. The death of the leader often provides the impetus for this process to begin, since decisions consequently need to be made regarding the future of the group. The leader's interest in creating a lasting community and social forces such as the “traditionalization and rationalization of the community's doctrine, cult, ethical behavior, and order of common life” (Holmberg 1978:165) also constitute factors that can trigger the institutionalization process. During the process of the institutionalization of charismatic authority the charisma loses its direct force. It can now only be accessed indirectly, by means of representatives, offices, traditions and *rituals* (Holmberg 1978:179-180; cf Horrell [1997] 1999a:331-334). The charismatic group that consisted of Jesus and his followers also underwent institutionalization (cf Davies 1995:170; Horrell 1999a:310, 313). They institutionalized their own initiation rite, baptism, and their own ceremonial communal meal, the Eucharist (Dreyer 2000:216; Van Aarde 2001a:184). In this regard the experiences of the disciples regarding Jesus' resurrection played a decisive role. Officials were now needed to preside over the ritual of baptism and the ceremony of the Eucharist. People who could claim that they had received a commission from the *resurrected Jesus* fulfilled these roles (Dreyer 2000:233, 241; see Bultmann [1921] 1995:260-316).

Weber (1968:60) avers that for charisma to be transformed into a permanent routine structure (see Horrell 1999a:312-315), its anti-economic structure must be altered. It must be adapted to a form of fiscal organization in order to provide for the needs of the group and the economic conditions necessary for raising

taxes and contributions. During the process of routinization the charismatic group “tends to develop into one of the form of every-day authority....” (Weber 1968:60; cf Holmberg 1978:162-164, 175-178).

The reason why an institutionalization process occurs is that human beings are creatures of habit – their behavior follows certain repetitive patterns. An institution exercises social control. The effect of this social control on the one hand limits the individual's freedom, but on the other hand creates a structured world for individuals (see Berger & Luckmann 1976:70-85). After the process has started, legitimation follows, when the fundamental value-systems and belief-systems that function within the institutionalized world are used to validate and explain the system (cf Weber 1968:61). The new generation receives these explanations and in the process its members are socialized into the system. Society and religion are maintained by legitimation. This is especially important in any social order where the existing arrangements are under threat either from within or from without, which may be capable of causing members to weaken in their commitment (e.g., in the “early Christian” communities). As I mentioned in chapter 1, Berger (1967:3-51; Berger & Luckmann 1976:113-118) uses the phrase “symbolic universe” to refer to the integrated totality of the various bodies of meaning and symbolism used to legitimate a social world. Where one group has recently separated from another (e.g., by becoming sectarian in relation to a mother church), the necessity for its leadership to provide legitimation to its members, to structure a symbolic universe within which their experience will have order and meaning, may become apparent. He refers to a symbolic universe in such a context as a “sacred canopy”. Because this is a dialectical process, it must be kept in mind that although religious legitimations arise from human activity, once these legitimations are crystallized into complexes of meaning that become part of a religious tradition, they can attain a measure of autonomy over against this activity. They may act back upon actions in everyday life, transforming the latter, sometimes radically (see Esler 1994:13-17).

The social function of religion is thus to provide legitimation, which is instilled by rites<sup>34</sup> (Berger 1967:40-41; see Segal 1989:125). After initial institutionalization, cumulative institutionalization needs to follow in order that the new institution can survive, a process which Holmberg (1978:173) calls the “institutionalization of the institutionalization process”. The first part of the process can be seen in institutionalized interpretations, offices and official procedures, while the second part is invisible and takes place in the processes of forming public opinion and socialization. The latter part of the process legitimates the former part. While the first level of institutionalization constitutes the natural result of interaction among people, this is not the case when it comes to higher levels of institutionalization. New institutional structures must be created, and this is usually done by the charismatic leaders and their followers, who fulfill the role of an entrepreneurial élite. Even if their intentions had only been to create a new way of living, an institutionalized structure would still be the outcome (Holmberg 1978:175; cf Berger & Luckmann 1976:145-146). It was thus unavoidable that the groups of early Jesus-followers eventually formed the institution called a “church”.

### **3.6.5 The formation of the Jesus-community and the Christian movement**

I shall conclude this section with the application of the above information to the formation of the Jesus-community and the “Christian” movement. For this purpose, I am going to offer a summary of a model developed by Malina (1995a, 2001). To understand the formation of early Jesus-movement groups, Malina (1995a:96-97; 2001:141-159) begins with three generalizations (cf Brown 2000:24-63):

- Small groups emerge because some person becomes aware of a need for change and shares this vision with others.
- Small groups develop through five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Only in the first three stages are all the members of the group in the same phase of group socialization.
- Small groups form to support intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup or extragroup change.

Applying these points to the situation of Jesus, Malina (2001:142-143) argues:

Since Jesus did indeed proclaim a kingdom and looked upon God as Father, proclaiming a political, political religious, and political economical theocracy to Israel, he was aware of a solution to Israel's political problems and was in the process of sharing this solution with others. Those who heard him would compare his solution with other available solutions and, if they found it feasible, would adopt it and tell others about it. It is at this point that people would be amenable to forming a small group around Jesus. If people rejected the solution, then Jesus' proclamation would be without effect.

Small group formation can thus be summarized in four words: aware, share, compare, declare. Malina (1995a:98) writes that the New Testament gives evidence of two general types of groups: Jesus-movement groups and "Christian" groups: "The fact that it is these latter that are our main evidence for Jesus movement groups would lead one to expect traces of Christian group concerns in descriptions of Jesus movement groups as well" (Malina 1995a:98). The Gospel story of the early Jesus-movement groups reflects a period before the foundation of "early Christian" groups, but that story was written down in different forms after the foundation of those "Christian" groups. Today this causes distortion in our understanding of these groups (Malina 1995a:98).

The existence of the Jesus-movement indicates that Jesus believed that a specific situation should be changed and that one person acting alone could not bring about that change. "Israel" had to "get their lives in order" ("repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"), an awareness shared with John the Baptist. Individuals joined the core group of the Jesus-movement by invitation. The need for the rise of "Christian" groups, on the other hand, can be traced back to the "experience of the risen Lord" (see Matthew's edict in 28:18-20; Luke's final vision of Jesus in Acts 1:6-11; Paul's personal insistence on having seen the risen Lord in Gl 1:16; 1 Cor 15:8; and Paul's knowledge of five hundred-plus



group members who had seen the risen Lord, recorded in 1 Cor 15:3-6) in alternate states of consciousness, which led them to believe that some specific situation should be changed. The situation here dealt with “salvation”, a cosmic rescue. And the guarantee for one’s salvation was accepting the group rooted in Jesus the Messiah (Malina 1995a:99-103). Thus, the Jesus-movement was a type of political action group, looking to societal change by God’s intervention. It thus exhibited an extra-group focus. On the other hand, the “Christian” movement comprised a type of fictive kin group, shaped by the norms of the prevailing kinship institution. The organization of the social movement set up by Jesus was based upon solidarity and loyalty towards Jesus himself and his cause, not among the recruits. But an elective association like the “Christian” movement functioned in a different way. People joined under pressure, in search of benefits for their primary kin groups (not in search of benefits for themselves alone). People joined associations like these because the larger society did not allow their kin group a space or a voice. Once persons “voluntarily” joined a group, interpersonal ties with central personages and the prestige this gave their kin group, made it morally impossible to leave without dishonor (Malina 1995a:108-109). Malina (1995a:109) describes this situation as follows:

Christian associations formed expressive groups. They existed primarily to serve the needs of members: social, informational, support. As expressive groups they were not concerned with issues of the larger society and its societal political problems. They were not concerned at all to reform society, because they awaited the coming of Jesus with power. As expressive groups with intragroup focus, they were apolitical, choosing to foster any of various methods of evading group stigma. Thus they would eject deviants, help the individual to correct his or her faults or defects, adopt socially acceptable life-styles and the like.

For a small group to emerge the following circumstances are necessary (Malina 1995a:100-103):

- conditions favorable for change;



- accompanied by a vision for a new situation;
- coupled with a hope related to implementing that situation successfully;
- and all these factors combined in a social system that contains problem-solving groups.

Malina (1995a:100-103) concludes that in both the Jesus-community and with the “Christian” movement, all four of these dimensions must have been present; otherwise groups would not have been formed. He describes this environment as follows:

| Criteria                          | Jesus-movement   | “Christian” movement   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Presence of conditions for change | A political program premised on the need for Israelites to put their lives in order, for God's imminent takeover of the country. | Not a political strategy, but of a kinship sort, “naturing through recruitment and nurturing through group attachment and support” (Malina 1995a:100).   |
| Vision of new situation           | We see Jesus' plan in his own chosen task of proclaiming and healing.  | Because of the resurrection of Jesus, matters could be improved. They developed a new vision while recruiting members as fictive kin, prior to formulating a creed.  |
| Hope of success                   | Jesus successfully persuaded his core group to proclaim and heal with him.   | Paul's “Christian” groups witnessed a range of alternate states of consciousness, enforcing confidence in the achievement of the group's purposes. They developed confidence in their unit by active participation and realizing their objectives. |
| Cultural context                  | Groups were common and valued in Galilee and Judea, e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, etc.   | Philosophical schools and clubs were common in the Hellenistic world.  |

Malina (1995a:102-103) adds:

For the Jesus faction, the purpose was to have Israelites get their lives in order as preparation for God's forthcoming takeover of the country. The goal was political. For Pauline groups, the prevailing purpose was salvation, cosmic rescue from the present situation. Pauline organizations were formed to attain God's rescue by enduring, persevering and waiting "in Christ". Paul's problem, given this purpose, was to inform people how to get "in Christ", and how to remain "in Christ". This goal is characteristic of fictive kin groups.

Malina (1995a:103-106, my emphasis) employs a model developed by Tuckman (1965:386-387, 396) for describing group-therapy, which was further corroborated by Moreland and Levine (1988:151-175), to indicate that over a period small groups develop through the following stages:

| Stage   | Jesus-movement   | "Christian" movement  |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Forming:</i> When the group is put together. (Members uncertain about belonging to group, commitment to group is low.)   | Task-oriented: Had a mission to proclaim God's imminent taking over of the country, to require Israel to put its affairs in order, and to heal those in need of healing. | Not task-oriented: Social activity groups. Individuals are invited to join group, others seek affiliation. Group dependence develops. |
| <i>Storming:</i> Group joiners jockey for position and ease into interpersonal stances. (Members assertive, desire to satisfy personal needs. Commitment to the group is higher.) | Members resist working closely with one another. Conflict emerges.   | Conflict breaks out, group members argue and criticize leader.  |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Norming</i> : Marked by interpersonal conflict resolution in favor of mutually agreed upon patterns of behavior. (Attempt to resolve conflict by negotiating clear guidelines for group behavior.) | Exchange phase: Everyone shares ideas to improve group's level of performance.  | Cohesion phase: Members feel more positive about their membership.                                    |
| <i>Performing</i> : Participants carry out the program for which the group was assembled. (Members work together to achieve mutual goals.)  | Problem-solving stage: Members work together productively.  | Role-taking: Members take social roles so as to make group more rewarding to all. They work together. |
| <i>Adjourning</i> : Group members gradually disengage from task activities and social activities, in a way that reflects their efforts to cope with the approaching end of the group.                 | The adjournment of the Jesus-group signaled by the crucifixion of Jesus loops back to renewed norming and performing for former Jesus-faction members, around whom "Christian" fictive kin groups emerge. The trigger of this loopback comprised the experience of meeting Jesus after his death. <i>The ritual of baptism commanded in Matthew and described in Acts points to such a fictive kinship focus. The quality of these groups as fictive kin groups is further indicated by the main group ceremony, the common meal.</i> |   |

Malina (1995a:105) argues that from the evidence provided in the New Testament documents, the Jesus-faction moved into the *performing* stage: "The sending of the seventy (-two; Luke 10:1-20) points to enlarged activity. This implies further recruitment or forming, with subsequent storming and norming to lead to greater performing" (Malina 1995a:105). But there is little evidence of the performing stage to be found in the Pauline "Christian" groups. The problems addressed in the Pauline corpus have to do with *storming* and *norming*.

By way of summary it can therefore be asserted that the early cultic community of Jesus-followers separated themselves from the ideology of the temple cult. They formed an anti-society on the following grounds, as described by Dreyer (2000:241; emphasis by Dreyer):

Jesus' vision of an *alternate* kingdom (as expressed in aphoristic symbols and healing activities) provided the setting for understanding God's reign and sovereignty. In this cult the values of inclusiveness and egalitarianism make it possible for the destitute and slaves to participate in the dying and rising of the cultic hero on an equal level with those of noble birth. This resulted in conflict with the customs of the emperor cult and a tense relationship with the temple and synagogical authorities.

As time went by, this anti-society became institutionalized. Rites played an important part in the institutionalization process, since it was by means of the ritual of baptism that a person could become part of this "institution" and by means of the Eucharist that group cohesion took hold.

### **3.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this chapter I have suggested that the "telling" of the "showing" of alternate states of consciousness required symbolic language. When this symbolic language is "re-enacted", it becomes a rite. By using anti-language, alternate states of consciousness were verbalized and then "re-enacted" in the symbolic rites of the early Jesus-groups. Like all rites, these rites of the early followers of Jesus can be divided into rituals and ceremonies. Baptism was a ritual, because it was only administered to a person once and then it caused a change in the status of that person, effective for the rest of his or her life. It was also the means by which a person was initiated into a new group – the "family of God". The Eucharist was a ceremony, because baptized persons participated in the Eucharist on a regular basis to confirm their status in the group. A person who wanted to become a member of the newly founded Jesus-movement in the first century, crossed a boundary by being baptized and maintained this boundary by

regularly participating in the Eucharist. All these factors gave meaning to such a person's life, especially by means of the alternate states of consciousness that were experienced in both rites, as well as by the lasting effects these states had on their lives (see chapter 2).

In the next two chapters the ritual of baptism and the Eucharistic ceremony will be discussed in more detail.

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## ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 3

<sup>1</sup> Jung (1988:20-21) believes that a symbol has a wider “unconscious” aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained. He adds that because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot fully comprehend or define. This is one of the reasons why religions employ symbolic language or images. A sign is always less than the concept it represents, while a symbol stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. Symbols are natural and spontaneous products. In this regard, Jung (1988:55) writes: “No genius has ever sat down with a pen or brush in his hand and said: ‘Now I am going to invent a symbol.’ No one can take a more or less rational thought, reached as a logical conclusion or by deliberate intent, and then give it ‘symbolic’ form.”

<sup>2</sup> According to Jung (1988:93), these symbols can evoke a deep emotional response in people, and this psychic change makes them function in much the same way as prejudices.

<sup>3</sup> “Where they [cultural symbols] are repressed or neglected, their specific energy disappears into the unconscious with unaccountable consequences. The psychic energy that appears to have been lost in this way in fact serves to revive and intensify whatever is uppermost in the unconscious – tendencies, perhaps, that have hitherto had no chance to express themselves or at least have not been allowed an uninhibited existence in our consciousness” (Jung 1988:93). To Jung (1988:93), such tendencies form an ever-present and potentially destructive “shadow” to our conscious mind: “Modern man does not understand how much his ‘rationalism’ (which has destroyed his capacity to respond to numinous symbols and ideas) has put him at the mercy of the psychic ‘underworld’”. He has freed himself from ‘superstition’ (or so he believes), but in the process he has lost his spiritual values to a positively dangerous degree. His moral and spiritual tradition has disintegrated, and he is now paying the price for this break-up in world-wide disorientation and dissociation” (Jung 1988:94). Jung (1988:95) then adds that this enormous loss is compensated for by the symbols of our dreams. According to him dreams convey our original nature, but, unfortunately, they express their contents in the language of nature, which is strange and incomprehensible to us. This gives us the task of translating it into the rational words and concepts of contemporary speech, which has liberated itself from its primitive burdens, from its mystical participation with the things it describes. Today the surface of our world seems to be cleansed of all superstitious and irrational elements. But the real inner human world is not really freed from primitivity. This we can see, for example, in the number 13, that is still taboo for many people today (Jung 1988:95-96).

<sup>4</sup> Segal (1989:137) states that among contemporary anthropologists, few have devoted themselves more passionately to religion than Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, and Mary Douglas. They contend that religion functions above all to express beliefs about the place of humans in the world. For them, not only religion, but all of culture serves to express those beliefs. They regard rites as very important, because, as mental activities, rites are expressions of belief.

<sup>5</sup> According to Esler (1994:7-17), Berger’s model exhibits one negative feature: that it is reductionist and allows no other religious phenomena, in particular, those of a transcendental nature. He says that the same human activity that produces society also produces religion, with the relation between the two products always being a dialectical one. However, I do not agree with Esler, since Berger does give attention to “other religious phenomena” in his works: *A rumor of angels: Modern society and the rediscovery of the supernatural* ([1969] 1970, especially 94-97) and *Questions of faith: A skeptical affirmation of Christianity* (2004, especially 14-30).

<sup>6</sup> See Lüdemann (2003:163-177) for a critical discussion of Theißen’s (1999) book, *A theory of Christian religion*.

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<sup>7</sup> As an example of this, note the groups of people wielding influence who clustered around Jesus – who himself possessed legitimate but illegal authority.

<sup>8</sup> I have explained that I understand rites as consisting of rituals and ceremonies. What I describe as “rites”, are termed “rituals” by some scholars, and what I describe as “ceremonies”, are sometimes also termed “ritual” by different scholars. To avoid confusion, I shall use the terminology “rites”, “rituals” and “ceremonies” as I have explained it throughout, even though the authority I am referring to may use another term for the same concept. Lang (1998:444), for example, understands “rites” as the smallest elements in sacred actions, while he sees “ritual” as the overall event that is built up of rites.

<sup>9</sup> Segal (1989:143) criticizes Turner, arguing that Turner confuses the reality of a *need* for a meaningful world with the *reality* of a meaningful world (see e.g., Turner 1975:31).

<sup>10</sup> These theoretical developments regarding rites provide a helpful frame for understanding first-century baptism and meals. These rites do not need to be unified under one universal meaning or message, but can be perceived as consistent with both current ritual theory and first-century precedent in their ability to nourish specific and individual realities (Smith & Taussig 1990:103-106).

<sup>11</sup> Winkelman (2000:233) shows that rites have traditionally been conceived of as repetitive behavior for which no evidence exists to substantiate the technical or physical effects believed in by the participants. Because of this he often regards “rites” as an outsider’s term, “imputing faulty causal reasoning to the participants by the analyst who dismisses the effects participants presume their rituals attain.” This happens when rites are understood as acting at symbolic levels rather than at strictly technical or physical levels. A distinction needs to be made between the practical (technical) and expressive or symbolic aspects of rites. These two levels are not always separate. Symbols and rites are found even in activities that are considered to be technical: “Symbolic acts elicit associations and beliefs that transform experience, as well as physiological responses, and enhance positive expectations and commitment. Ritual techniques for altering consciousness exemplify their physiological consequences and, hence, technical effects” (Winkelman 2000:233).

<sup>12</sup> d’Aquili and Newberg (1993:29, 99; 1999:107) regard Christian liturgy as exemplifying slow rhythmic rites and Sufi dancing or the Umbanda of Brazil as examples of rapid rites. Activation of the arousal system by means of music and words, will engender in the participants a sense of awe. d’Aquili and Newberg say that by directing the excitation of the arousal system toward God, a sense of awe in the presence of God can be created. A rite that directs the quiescent system toward God will result in a feeling of the immense love that God has for people and of God’s infinite goodness. If someone wants to establish a sense of unity with God or the universe, a liturgy that incorporates both arousal and quiescent components needs to be constructed.

<sup>13</sup> The bread and wine in the Eucharist can probably be seen as an example of this. In the Roman Catholic Church (contemporary as well as in the past) not only the body and blood of Christ are seen as holy, but also the bread and wine that become the body and blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Segal (1989:138) indicates that in contrast to other scholars, Turner, Geertz, and Douglas regard rites not only as primitive phenomena. They can be contemporary as well, because as a part of religion, rites do not rival science and, therefore, are not superseded by science. Rather than explaining or controlling the world, rites describe the place of human beings in the world. By “world” they refer to the cosmos as well as society.

<sup>15</sup> Wedderburn (1987:363) comments that by this phrase Van Gennep denoted the special acts by which individuals progress from one stage of life to another, from one occupation to another, or from one group to another: “These special acts or rites can be subdivided into three sets of rites,



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those of separation (pre-liminal), transition (liminal – Turner uses here the word 'margin'), and incorporation (post-liminal – here Turner's word is '(re)aggregation')."

<sup>16</sup> Another kind of initiation rite occurs where young men and women are weaned away from their parents and made members of their clan or tribe. Henderson (1988:129) describes this as follows: "...in making this break with the childhood world, the original parent archetype will be injured, and the damage must be made good by a healing process of assimilation into the life of the group....Thus the group fulfills the claims of the injured archetype and becomes a kind of second parent to which the young are first symbolically sacrificed, only to re-emerge into a new life". The initiation rite solves the problem of the power of the original archetype that can never be permanently overcome. The ritual takes the novice back to the deepest level of original mother-child identity "or ego-Self identity", thus, forcing the child to experience a symbolic death. Then the child is ceremonially rescued from this state by the rite of the new birth. Henderson (1988:130) describes this as "the first act of true consolidation of the ego with the larger group, expressed as totem, clan, or tribe, or all three combined". Whether this ritual is found in tribal groups or in more complex societies, it insists upon this rite of death and rebirth, which provides the novice with a "rite of passage" from one stage of life to the next. Henderson (1988:157) adds that there is a conflict in our lives between adventure and discipline, evil and virtue, freedom and security. But these are only phrases we use to describe an ambivalence that troubles us, and to which we never seem to be able to find an answer. But he believes that there is an answer, that there is a meeting point between containment and liberation, and that we can find it in rites of initiation. These rites can make it possible for individuals, or for groups of people, to unite the opposing forces within themselves and to achieve equilibrium in their lives. But the rites do not offer this opportunity automatically. They relate to particular phases in the life of an individual (or group), and unless they are properly understood and translated into a new way of life, the moment can pass. In Henderson's (1988:157) words: "Initiation is, essentially, a process that begins with a rite of submission, followed by a period of containment, and then by a further rite of liberation. In this way every individual can reconcile the conflicting elements of his personality: He can strike a balance that makes him truly human, and truly the master of himself."

<sup>17</sup> Beattie (1968:211) calls rituals like these transition rituals, which expresses the great social importance which a society attaches to changes of status among its members – the smooth working of any social system depends on everyone knowing and accepting their proper role in it.

<sup>18</sup> This is described in John 3:5: "...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."

<sup>19</sup> There are scholars who criticize Turner regarding his description of liminality-*communitas*. Förster (2003:714-715), for instance, thinks that Turner regards the symbols as more important than the people, since the initiands do not really experience freedom in the liminal phase as described by Turner, because in reality they are dependent on the grace of the ritual elders. d'Aquili and Newberg (1993:3-4) also differ from Turner: "It is easy to see why, when Turner hit upon these very real social and psychological states as explanatory concepts, he tended to emphasize their anti-structural function in human societies. While it is very true that the generation of liminality and *communitas* may blur social and individual boundaries, and thus minimize the structural aspects of a society, it is nevertheless also true that ritual may generate these states within component social entities of a single society, thereby creating an increased sense of the cohesion within various sub-groups of a society. Therefore, this process may serve to further define the boundaries between these subgroups, thereby increasing the structural aspects of the society as a whole....Thus, Victor Turner may have been a bit too quick to emphasize the anti-structural aspects of ceremonial ritual behavior." d'Aquili and Newberg point out that human ceremonial ritual is in itself a morally neutral technology, which, depending on the myth in which it is embedded and which it expresses, can either promote or minimize the structural aspects of a society and promote or minimize overall aggressive behavior (d'Aquili & Newberg 1993:4).



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<sup>20</sup> According to d'Aquili and Newberg (1993:3) liminality can be described as a transitional or threshold state between social individuals and social roles and between various levels of social hierarchy. Liminality can be described as an event that stands between two cognized strips of experience, much as a doorway stands between two rooms (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:142; see chapter 2). For Malina (1986:56) "[l]iminality is an emotional high, the feeling one gets when one is free from social constraints or when one is between or above the lines comprising stable society."

<sup>21</sup> Turner (1977:96) comments that he prefers the Latin term *communitas* to "community", to be able to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an "area of common living".

<sup>22</sup> Before aggregation can take place, certain status transformation rites require a form of *ritual confrontation* which needs to end successfully in order for the initiands to gain public recognition. They are tested to see whether they have acquired the skills necessary for the new roles they are going to fulfill and to apprise whether they are committed to the charge laid upon them (McVann 1991b:350; cf Turner 1977:100-102; Girard 1972:147-149, 179-180, 409-462).

<sup>23</sup> If we apply this analysis to the ritual of baptism, it suggests that the water would belong to the sensory pole, and washing away sins would be its counterpart at the pole of moral and social order (Goodman 1988a:32).

<sup>24</sup> Goodman (1988a:33-34) adds that we can see a contemporary example of this in the story of the Last Supper and the salvation myth which are compressed into the brief span of a mass, and the sumptuous meal into a thin wafer and a sip of wine (cf Crossan 1998:444).

<sup>25</sup> Once again Goodman (1988a:35) explains this by means of a contemporary example. She notes that in the Catholic Churches before the Second Ecumenical Council, there was an abundance of such signals: the semidarkness of the older buildings, the flickering candlelight, the fragrance of incense, the hymns, the repetitious prayers, and the kneeling. Even the telltale break was there, preceding the "transformation" of the bread and the wine into the true body and blood of Christ, a step into the alternate reality that should by rights be experienced in trance. But this experience is no longer expected. The trend in the majority of Christian denominations today is toward *thinking about* religion instead.

<sup>26</sup> Certain scholars refer to ceremony as relating to secular affairs, as opposed to ritual which has to do with religious or sacred situations. But in theoretical studies regarding ceremony and ritual this distinction is not carried through consistently (see Alexander 1987:179, 181-183). On the contrary, Theißen (1999:121) considers that although religious myth is enacted in rites, rites do not need a religious character. The profane, everyday life is also full of rites. But then again even secularized ceremonies often possess a religious aura. A strict distinction between secular and religious activity is problematic in any case, since historical phenomena do not exhibit the same exact boundaries found in theoretical categories (Alexander 1987:181-182).

<sup>27</sup> According to Esler (2003:195), in Romans 5-8 we have a very clear example of the origins and nature of the new in-group identity in Christ (within the framework of social identity).

<sup>28</sup> See Elliott (1995:75-95) for a detailed discussion of the shift from faction to sect in the early Jesus-movement, as well as definitions of specific terminology, critique and other studies done on the subject.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson (1970:22; 1973:11) points out that Troeltsch took, as his basic data, information about sects from medieval and modern Christendom. He understood sects as being in contrast with the church. Although this scheme has been criticized, especially for its limited conception of sects, its restricted view of the church, and also for the implication that sects as such depend on the church

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towards which they are antithetical, it is, according to Wilson, still useful (cf Woodhead & Heelas 2000:40).

<sup>30</sup> In this regard, Wilson (1970:35) writes: "The danger of sociology is that its constructs may easily be mistaken for summary statements of reality, for formulae in terms of which the world is to be grasped." By emphasizing that the empirical data is richer than the categories, he points out that we need to remind ourselves that the categories are merely convenient ways of handling large amounts of data that fit approximately. The specific cultural and historical circumstances can render our typifications false in detail (cf Wilson 1967:1-4).

<sup>31</sup> It is interesting that Wilson (1970:17) notes that although religions usually begin as sects, once they are established they are intolerant of new sects (cf Neufeld 2005:15).

<sup>32</sup> According to Malina (1995a:96) a group can be defined as any number of persons who come together for some purpose, while a gathering of unrelated people can be termed a collectivity. Halliday (1986:14), on the other hand, views a group as a simple structure, a set of participants among whom there are no special relations, while he perceives a society as not consisting of participants, but of relations, and these relations define social roles (cf Brown 2000:2-4).

<sup>33</sup> Weber (1968:48) applies the word "charisma" to an individual who is set apart from ordinary persons and is treated as endowed with "superhuman" or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These powers are not accessible to the ordinary person, since they are regarded as of divine origin, and on the basis of such powers the individual is considered as a leader. "This means that the 'natural' leaders – in times of psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, political distress – have been neither officeholders nor incumbents of an 'occupation' in the present sense of the word..." (Weber 1968:18). One example Weber (1968:19, 49) cites, is the shaman (we can also include Jesus in this classification) (see chapter 2). Weber (1968:50) further explains that the group that is subject to charismatic authority is based on an emotional form of communal relationship: "The administrative staff of a charismatic leader does not consist of 'officials'; at least its members are not technically trained. It is not chosen on the basis of social privilege nor from the point of view of domestic or personal dependency. It is rather chosen in terms of the charismatic quality of its members. The prophet has his disciples; the warlord his selected henchmen; the leader, generally, his followers" (Weber 1968:50). There is no "appointment" or "dismissal", no career, promotion, hierarchy, salary; only a call (Weber 1968:50-51). The genuine prophet or true leader preaches, creates, or demands new obligations. Like Jesus who spoke in opposition to the Scribes and Pharisees: "It is written..., but I say unto you...." Weber (1968:51-52) says that in the pure type of charisma, these new obligations are imposed on the authority of revelation by oracles, or of the leader's own will, and are recognized by the followers of the charismatic person, because they come from such a source. Charismatic authority is a revolutionary force which repudiates the past. In contrast to traditional authority it is irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules.

<sup>34</sup> Holmberg (1978:171) refers to this process as the fourth level of legitimation. Berger and Luckmann (1976:112-118) also point out that legitimation occurs on different levels. The first level of legitimation is part of the vocabulary, the second level consists of simple wisdom, the third level displays theories that validate the institution and the fourth level consists of symbolic universes, which Berger and Luckmann (1976:112-118) describe as "...bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality", while Holmberg (1978:171) adds that a symbolic universe is "an all-embracing frame of reference".

## CHAPTER 4

### BAPTISM

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The earliest baptism is a symbolic ritual. As with all symbolic rites, it carries *meaning*, because it is performed for a *reason* and adds *value* to people's lives (chapter 1; cf Beattie 1968:69-70). The aim<sup>1</sup> of this chapter is thus to investigate the *reason* why the first followers of Jesus underwent baptism, what it could have *meant* for them and what kind of *value* it could have added to their lives. I shall also discuss the origin of the earliest baptism, since this might illuminate the role alternate states of consciousness (as discussed in chapter 2) played in this ritual. At the end of chapter 1, I summarized the argument as follows: By means of the rites of baptism and the Eucharist, early Jesus-groups "re-enacted" alternate states of consciousness that Jesus "showed" dynamically during his lifetime, and which they were "told" about by the earliest Jesus-followers, who employed anti-language.

In this chapter, I shall suggest that by means of the ritual of baptism, Jesus-followers were initiated into a new movement, the "family of God". This implied a status transformation, which in turn resulted in new roles and responsibilities for the baptized (cf Turner 1987:380-383, 386). It seems that as if by means of the ritual of baptism, the early Jesus-followers believed that in a symbolic fashion they were buried and resurrected with Christ, and thus participated in the salvation that Christ wrought. During baptism they also experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, as Jesus probably did when he lived on earth (see Stevenson 1989:66), by means of alternate states of consciousness. They expressed this experience by way of anti-language, since ordinary language could not express this "extra-ordinary" status transformation, the acquiring of a new social identity. In the following chapter, I shall discuss the Eucharist, the ceremony of integration. By means of participation in the Eucharist these new roles and responsibilities were confirmed.

This chapter is structured as follows: Firstly, I shall give attention to the *reason* why the earliest Jesus-followers participated in a baptismal practice, which will entail an examination of the foundation of the earliest baptism. Subsequently, I shall discuss the *value* that baptism added to the lives of these followers, which will entail an examination of baptismal formulae for traces of anti-language. Lastly, I shall explore the *meaning* baptism could have had for the earliest Jesus-followers, which will entail a discussion of baptism as a cultural ritual of initiation and symbol of status transformation.

## **4.2 REASON: THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARLIEST BAPTISM**

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

In this section, I shall briefly discuss the possible foundation and origins of the earliest baptism. This topic has been of great scholarly interest in the past and even today it continues to stimulate debate (see e.g., Cullmann [1950] 1969; Pelser 1981; Collins 1989; Stevenson 1989; Bradshaw 2002). It is not my intention to offer a complete survey of all the issues at stake. I shall merely refer to certain aspects that I regard as valuable for the topic discussed in this chapter.

In the following section, I shall investigate the importance of the question of origins, as well as the possible foundation and origins of the earliest baptism. Subsequently, I shall spend some time on the baptismal practice of John the Baptist, which most probably played an important role in the foundation of the early Jesus-followers' baptism. After this, I shall outline the similarities between baptism and circumcision, which probably constitute an important reason why *baptism* became the initiation rite of the early Jesus-followers. Jesus' own baptism is also of some importance in this regard and will therefore also be discussed. Lastly, I shall suggest some preliminary findings.

## 4.2.2 Origins of the earliest baptism

### 4.2.2.1 Introduction

When one is carrying out research regarding the origin of baptism (or the Eucharist), a frequently asked question is: “Why bother to try to find how early Christians worshiped?” Stevenson (1989:9-12) states that although many people object to looking for the origins of a rite like the earliest baptism, especially regarding accessibility, relevance, and whether it is normative for today, he is convinced that some information in this regard *is* accessible. Although times and ways of worship change, he holds the opinion that we cannot regard the way in which the earliest Jesus-followers worshipped as irrelevant. As a matter of fact, according to him, to study the era of origins could provide us with basic norms that may challenge the way in which we worship today. In this regard, Stevenson (1989:12; emphasis by Stevenson) comments:

This is not to suggest...that all liturgies have to be ideologically sound and that we can only worship authentically if we are doing it in continuity with generations long since passed on. But it is to affirm that mere knowledge of how, for example, early Christians valued baptism ought to awaken sleepy Christians born again not of water and the Spirit but of secular consumerism to look once more at how Christian initiation is practiced in their locality. Of course, how the early Christians thought cannot, in some ways, be how we think. Everybody knows that the earth is not flat. But not everybody knows what riches are to be found in, for example, some early Eucharistic prayers, which sometimes use the sort of simple, symbolic language that bypasses many of the doctrinal problems that festered through the Middle Ages and came to a head at the Reformation. We don't have to *imitate* the early centuries – but there can be little doubt that they propose to us certain significant norms that ought to challenge our own discipleship and the quality and depth of our worship.

For Stevenson (1989:12-13) the issue goes even deeper. To say that the worship of antiquity is accessible, relevant, and in some sense, normative is to take several steps along the road of our own self-understanding. We are creatures of change, because our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us alter with the passage of time. To maintain that “early Christian” worship is important, is to express crucial things about ourselves and our own needs. “As Christians we are people with a story, and part of our own progress through history is to hold a continuing conversation with our roots” (Stevenson 1989:12).

On the other hand, Bradshaw (2002:x) remarks that we know much less of the liturgical practices of the first three centuries than we once thought we did, adding that what we do know about patterns of worship in that period points towards considerable variety. The “classical shape of Christian liturgy” is to a large degree the result of an assimilation of different traditions to one another in the fourth century, rather than the survival of one pattern of “Christian” worship from the earliest apostolic times or even from Jesus himself. That which emerges in this post-Nicene era is frequently a liturgical compromise, rather than the triumph of one way of doing over all others. Bradshaw (2002:x) explains this statement as follows:

This means that what then becomes the mainstream liturgical tradition of the church in East and West is often quite unlike what any single Christian group was doing prior to the fourth century. A real mutation had taken place at that time, and many primitive customs had either disappeared or had been greatly altered from their former appearance.

Over the years have emerged numerous different methods for interpreting liturgical practices among the earliest Jesus-followers, for example the philological method, the structural approach, the organic approach, the comparative method, and the hermeneutics of suspicion.<sup>2</sup> Since none of these methods is perfect, one may feel that to reconstruct patterns of “early Christian” worship is doomed to failure, because “it is not simply a matter of joining up the

dots on a sheet of otherwise plain paper, but rather of finding the dots in the first place, buried as they are among countless others of different shades and hues, and of doing so with a blindfold over one's eyes" (Bradshaw 2002:20). But although the task is not easy, and we shall most probably never be able to learn everything we would like to know about the church's early worship, it is not impossible to say, even if only in a provisional way, that a certain amount of information about how "early Christian" worship began and developed in the first few centuries, is accessible. Bradshaw (2002:20) considers that "[w]hen the dots are carefully joined, a faint picture can indeed emerge."

Although this is no easy task, I shall investigate the possible origins of the baptism of the earliest Jesus-followers in the remainder of this section. If we understand where this practice stemmed from, it may be easier to determine the *reason* why they participated in baptism. Traditionally, the view was held that the practice of baptism in the "early church" resulted from the command of the risen Lord in Matthew 28:16-20 (see Collins 1989:37). But since this passage is most probably not authentic<sup>3</sup> (see Beasley-Murray 1962:77-92; Barth 1981: 13-17; Pelser 1987:559-560; Bradshaw 2002:60), the answer must lie somewhere else.

The first uncertainty that needs to be clarified is whether the earliest baptism originated with Jesus himself or only among his followers after his resurrection. "Christians" appear to have known and practiced baptism from the earliest times. Mitchell (1995:243-246) maintains that Paul, for example, underwent a baptism that seems not to have been that of John, perhaps fifty years after Jesus' death. In like vein, Stevenson (1989:34) comments that Paul's description of baptism as dying and rising with Christ (Rm 6:3-11), suggests that the reason for being baptized is that Jesus rose from the dead. This might be why the earliest followers of Jesus chose baptism as their initiation ritual. Although this implies that the rite of baptism did not begin with Jesus' own baptism, his baptism most probably played a role in its coming into being.



Where did the baptism practiced by the earliest Jesus-followers' originate? Baptism and other types of ritual baths were rather common in antiquity, in the Israelite tradition (the "parent religion" of "Christianity"), as well as in the Greco-Roman mystery religions, which makes it difficult to determine the answer. The origins of "Christian" baptism have been sought in the mystery religions, in the Old Testament regulations concerning ceremonial cleansing, in proselyte baptism and in the baptism practices of sects such as Qumran (see Barth 1981:37-43). A brief consideration of all these possibilities follows.

#### **4.2.2.2 Greco-Roman mystery religions**

There are indeed similarities between the initiation rites of the mystery religions and the earliest baptism. But the differences are greater. One similarity comprises the idea of dying and rising in, for example, the Taurobolium initiation rite (see Meyer 1987:8, 12). Some mystery cults required a ceremonial washing or baptismal ritual before participation in religious practices was allowed: for example the cults of Isis, Mithras, and Eleusis (see Pelsner 1981:247; Meyer 1987:155-221; Pilch 1996c:8). Regarding the evaluation of Paul's use of traditions in Romans 6, Wedderburn (1983:349-350) argues that the link between dying and rising with Christ on the one hand and the rite of baptism on the other may be a secondary one. The former may encompass a theological idea (it need not be Paul's own for this argument to make sense) which he uses to interpret baptism – to show his readers its consequences and implications for ethics. Wedderburn (1983:350) adds:

If that is so then it would be less plausible to regard baptism as the indispensable and original context for this theological idea; yet that is what it must be if the Christian rite of initiation is the entry-point for such an idea to come over into early Christianity from the initiatory rites of the Hellenistic mysteries, as many assert.



Pelser (1981:248; cf Thom 2001:401-402) also doubts whether the mystery religions exerted a direct influence on the early Christian baptism, since most of the mysteries reached their zenith in post-New Testament times.

#### **4.2.2.3 Ceremonial cleansing in the Old Testament**

In the Old Testament, Naaman was cleansed of his skin problem by bathing in the Jordan (2 Ki 5:14). The high priest was also required to perform different kinds of purification rites (Lv 15:5-13; 16:4, 24). Prophetic symbolism speaks of God's people being cleansed with pure water in preparation for the advent of the messianic age (Ezk 36:25-28) (see Pelser 1981:247; Stevenson 1989:34; Pilch 1996c:8; Bradshaw 2002:59-60). The tradition and practice of Levitical ablutions is closely related to John's baptismal ritual, which apparently also involved total immersion in water. The prophetic-apocalyptic tradition also exhibited an aspect that was important for John's baptism – the expectation of a future, definitive intervention of God. The ethical use of ablution imagery is also significant (e.g., Is 1:16-17; Ezk 36:25-28). God's transformation of people in eschatological restoration was to encompass a new spirit and a new heart. This new creation would begin with a divine sprinkling of clean water upon the people to cleanse them from their sins and acts of idolatry (Collins 1989:32-36).

#### **4.2.2.4 Proselyte baptism**

Proselyte baptism has been considered as a possible influence on the baptism of the early Jesus-followers (Jeremias 1958:34-44), but the earliest indisputable evidence for a proselyte water rite is dated as late as the end of the first century,<sup>4</sup> when the baptism of the early Jesus-followers was already well established (Pelser 1981:247-250; Koester 1982:72; cf Mitchell 1995:246; Bradshaw 2002:59-60). Proselyte baptism was a kind of transition rite which was performed only once in a person's life. In this respect it was more similar to the earliest baptism than to the purification baths which were prescribed in the Old Testament. Further, proselyte baptism is observed by witnesses, and could be called a purification rite, which is also true of the early Jesus-followers' baptism.

But proselyte baptism was not associated with forgiveness of sins, nor was it connected with conversion and repentance in a critical, eschatological perspective. It was also performed by the proselyte himself or herself, whereas in the baptism of the early Jesus-followers the one baptized was passively baptized by another person (Collins 1989:32-36; Hartman 1992:34).

#### **4.2.2.5 The Qumran community**

We do not possess enough information concerning initiation rites in Israelite sects to compare them with the baptism of the early Jesus-followers, except for that regarding the Qumran community. Although similarities exist between the rites of these two communities, the rites at Qumran were repeated washings related to the need for ritual purity and do not seem to have included an initiatory baptism (Pelser 1981:250-251; Mitchell 1995:246; Pilch 1996c:8; Bradshaw 2002:59-60). The baptism of John did exhibit similarities with the ritual washings at Qumran: both involved withdrawal to the desert to await the Lord; both were linked to an ascetic lifestyle; both included total immersion in water; and both had an eschatological context. But these features were not unique to John and the community at Qumran. Many differences occur too: a priestly, exclusive community versus the activity of a prophetic, charismatic leader in a public situation; a ritual practiced at least once daily versus an apparently once-and-for-all ritual; and a self-enacted ritual versus a ritual administered by John (Collins 1989:32-36; Webb 1994:184).

#### **4.2.2.6 Provisional findings**

Although one can detect similarities between the baptism of the early Jesus-followers and the above-mentioned practices, none of these practices satisfactorily answer the question concerning the origins of the baptism of the earliest Jesus-followers (cf Jeremias 1958:23-50; Oepke 1968:532-536; Meyer 1987:17-30, 155-196; Pearson 1999:42-62; see Pelsers 1981:247-251). On the other hand, many scholars suggest that “early Christian” baptism originated in the baptismal practice of John<sup>5</sup> (Oepke 1968:536-538; Reicke 1987:219; Collins

1989:28; 1996:218; Theißen & Merz 1996:193-194; Bradshaw 2002:59-60; Esler 2003:204).

#### **4.2.3 The “foundation” of the earliest baptism in the activity of John the Baptist**

The question I intend to consider here is whether there is continuity between the baptism of John, the ministry of Jesus and the (diverse) baptismal practices of first-century believers. Collins (1989:28) points out that since the late nineteenth century, New Testament scholars have recognized that the history of “early Christianity” in a sense began with John the Baptist. Jesus differed from John in lifestyle and teaching (see Theißen & Merz 1996:194-196). In Luke 7:31-35 (Mt 11:16-19) John is described as someone who does not eat bread or drink wine, while in contrast Jesus is portrayed as a “glutton and drunkard”. Furthermore, John proclaimed that people needed to repent, because the kingdom of God was at hand, while Jesus proclaimed that one could already experience the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, Jesus was baptized by John, which suggests that the Jesus-movement had its roots in the activity of John, leading Collins (1989:28) to the conclusion that most probably the baptism of the early Jesus-followers also originated in the baptism of John<sup>6</sup>(cf Meier 1997:266).

The relationship between the activity of John and that of Jesus is portrayed differently in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Gospel of John. According to the Synoptics Jesus’ activity of teaching and healing began only after John was arrested (Mk 1:14; Mt 4:12-17; implicitly Lk 3:18-23), and there is no indication whether Jesus or his disciples baptized during the life of the historical Jesus. The Gospel of John on the other hand describes Jesus’ public activity as overlapping with John’s and it states that Jesus did baptize people (Jn 3:22-30), although these statements are corrected in John 4:1-3, where it is reported that it was not actually Jesus who baptized people, but his disciples (see Collins 1989:36). Whether the Synoptics or John portray what really happened has been much disputed. Collins’ (1989:36-38; 1996:230-232) opinion is that the Gospel of John

is more accurate at this point, because there is no plausible theological reason why the tradition that Jesus and his disciples baptized people would be invented.

Furthermore, the report of Jesus' baptizing creates a difficulty for the evangelist. This issue can be explained as follows: In John 1:33 Jesus was presented as the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, but the description in John 3-4 does not imply that Jesus' baptism was any different from John's. According to John 7:30 the Spirit is only given to Jesus after his "exaltation". Collins (1989:37) argues:

If Jesus administered baptism of a kind similar to John's, one would expect continuity between the baptism of John and early Christian baptism. The discontinuity is as great as the continuity in the cases of the gospel of Matthew and the letters of Paul, but there is striking continuity between John's baptism and the baptism to which Peter invited the Jews assembled in Jerusalem on Pentecost according to the second chapter of Acts.

Webb (1994:219-223) also considers that Jesus did baptize for a period. He contends that Jesus began his public ministry as a baptizer associated with John's movement. But Jesus moved beyond that initial ministry so that his later ministry revealed significant points of discontinuity with John, while at other points Jesus remained in continuity with John (cf Mitchell 1995:243-246). In important ways John provided a foundation upon which Jesus was able to build. In the opinion of Webb (1994:229), from a historical perspective John's ministry thus did in some way function to "prepare the way" for Jesus: "We may conclude at the historical level what the early Christians concluded at a theological level: John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus." However, most scholars (e.g., Pelsner 1981:251-252; Jeremias 1973:50-55; Boers 1989:39-40; Funk & the Jesus Seminar 1998:529; Theißen 1999:126-127) regard John's preaching and baptism *only* as preparation for Jesus' ministry and in general do not believe that Jesus baptized others himself. Nonetheless, most scholars agree that it is likely that the early Jesus-followers inherited their baptismal practice from John the

Baptist, who baptized numerous people in the Jordan, including Jesus, whose baptism was most certainly historical – given the embarrassment it caused – and not an etiological legend to explain the origin of the ritual (Esler 2003:204).

Esler (2003:204; see Schweizer 1970:177) maintains that John's baptism was related to the remission of sins in view of an imminent and radical transformation of the world. Furthermore, John's baptism entailed dipping the person seeking baptism under the water. The similarities between the Jesus-movement's baptism and John's, in each of these respects, suggest the former's adaptation of this practice. Hartman (1992:33-38; 1993:195-197; see Barth 1981:23-43) concurs, but he adds that the enumeration of a series of similarities does not answer the question of why the early Jesus-followers began to baptize with the Johannine baptism. Presumably, it was of some importance that Jesus had undergone John's baptism. This will point be discussed in the following section.

Before this is done, I should like to investigate the nature of the baptism performed by John (see Boers 1989:31; Webb 1994:189-197; Theißen & Merz 1996:184-193). John's baptism was most probably influenced by the Levitical washings, which entailed a full immersion in water,<sup>7</sup> and the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition, according to which a definite intervention of God was expected in the future (see Collins 1989:36; 1996:218-229; Theißen & Merz 1996:187-194). John created a new rite by altering the ritual washings of the Second Temple period to a single baptism functioning as an initiation into God's "eschatological" kingdom. By performing this rite (baptism for the forgiveness of sins) only a few miles from the Jerusalem temple, John challenged the traditional rites of atonement. John's baptism proclaimed a new life for those who repented and were willing to live according to a radically new ethic (Theißen 1999:126-128). The significance of John's baptism is best understood in terms of a prophetic reinterpretation of the purity ideology: obedience to the new ethic safeguards one against apocalyptic judgment (cf Pelser 1981:252-253; Webb 1994:182-185; Collins 1996:229; Hooker 1997:9-13; see Koester 1982:71;

Crossan 1996:46-49; Theißen 1999:126, 287). BurrIDGE and Gould (2004:39) elaborate as follows:

If a non-Jewish man wanted to become a convert to Judaism, then he could be circumcised. A far more popular method – and open to women as well – was to become what was known as a God-fearer, a pious fellow-traveller, and the way to do this was to be baptized, as a way of washing away your impurity. What was different about John was that he was suggesting that even the people of God needed to be baptized.

According to Collins (1989:38) the assumption of unbroken continuity between the baptism of John and that of Jesus' disciples offers advantages<sup>8</sup> (cf Barth 1981:17-35). It explains why the crowd of persons referred to in Acts 1:15 are not said to have undergone any particularly "Christian" baptismal ritual, and it explains why the basic function of baptism as reflected in Peter's Pentecost sermon is similar to the baptism of John. But two new elements have been added: In the first place, we read in Acts 2:38 that baptism occurs "in the name of Jesus Christ". This implied that the reception of baptism had become an outward sign of faith in God through Jesus (cf Hartman 1992:33-38; 1993:195-197).

Collins (1989:38-39) writes that when John baptized, reception of his baptism implied acceptance of his message, namely that the end was at hand, as well as repentance. It further implied recognition by the baptismal candidate that the will of God was manifest in the preaching of John. When Jesus' disciples baptized people, their baptism similarly implied that the candidate accepted the teachings of Jesus. Subsequently, a shift took place, because after the crucifixion and the appearances of the risen Lord, the followers of Jesus did not possess the same direct authority that John and Jesus had. Reception of baptism at the hands of the disciples implied acceptance that there was a need for repentance in preparation for the full manifestation of the kingdom of God. It also implied the recognition that the will of God was manifest in the death of Jesus, as well as that God had raised Jesus from the dead. Because of this connection between

baptism and acceptance of what God had done in Jesus, the early Jesus-followers' baptismal ritual became an initiation rite into a community (cf Schnackenburg [1974] 1981:45-46). In this regard Collins (1989:39) avers that although the picture of the "Christian" community in Jerusalem which is painted in Acts is an idealized one, there is no reason to doubt that a new group identity formed early (see chapter 3).

The other new element comprises the association of baptism with the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:38). In his sermon Peter provides a *peshet-like* interpretation of Joel 2:28-32. In the Biblical tradition the Spirit of God rested only on certain individuals, such as kings, prophets, and judges. The Joel prophecy looked forward to the day when the gift of the Spirit would be democratized. The "early Christians" claimed that this day had arrived (1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; Gl 3:27-29) (Collins 1989:39-40). Cullmann's (1969:9-11; see Pelser 1987:559-560) interpretation of the Holy Spirit's association with the baptism of the early Jesus-followers is as follows: Jesus did not baptize, but after his death, his followers again baptized. Jesus is therefore not the founder of baptism, but to what extent is it traceable to him? The first question that needs to be asked in this regard is: why does the transmission of the Holy Spirit within the "church" take the form of baptism? It is understandable that proselyte baptism and Johannine baptism should be represented as an act of washing, because their effect was that of the forgiveness of sins. Just as ordinary water takes away the uncleanness of the body, so the water of baptism will take away sins. Cullmann (1969:11-14) explains that although immersion in water does not have anything to do with the gift of the Holy Spirit, "Christians" still need forgiveness of sins. This is why the "Christian sacrament" of the Holy Spirit remained a baptism. But it is no longer the washing away that purifies, but rather the immersion in the water, because the person being baptized is "buried with Christ" (Rm 6:4).<sup>9</sup> This signifies forgiveness of sins, and the emergence from this burial with him means "walking in newness of life" (Rm 6:4), in other words, "walking in the Spirit" (Gl 5:16) (cf Schnackenburg 1981:45-46).



The anchorage of baptism in the life of Jesus of Nazareth therefore entailed three consequences: the forgiveness of sins is now based on the redemptive death of Jesus; forgiveness of sins and transmission of the Holy Spirit come to share in a close theological connection; and both are set in a significant relation to one and the same external baptismal act, so that both the immersion and the emergence become significant (Cullmann 1969:14-15). Since Jesus also received the Holy Spirit at his own baptism, it is easy to understand why the gift of the Spirit was associated with baptism after Jesus' death (see Cullmann 1969:21).

By way of summary it can be argued that Jesus, after his baptism, returned to Galilee where he lived according to the ethic intended by John's baptism (Van Aarde 2001a:55-57). Although John expected an imminent end and Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God as a present fulfilled reality (Jeremias 1973:50-56; cf Koester 1982:73; 1992:14-15), they agreed on the fundamental distinction between God's kingdom and the kingdoms of the world (Van Aarde 2001a:72). The continuity of the understanding that John, Jesus, and the early Jesus-followers evinced regarding the reason for baptism can be deduced (cf Bultmann 1972:253; Pelser 1981:252-252). The early followers of Jesus reinterpreted the baptism with water as a spiritual baptism, which represents "another reality". In the past scholars referred to this as an "eschatological" event.<sup>10</sup> However, early Jesus-followers understood baptism with water spiritually (representing a "mythical" experience of an alternate state of consciousness in "historical time" – cf Eliade 1955:68-70, 104-105; see Otzen 1973:15), that is as a symbolic reference to their participation in the death of Jesus (a baptism into the death of Jesus – see Paul in Rm 6:4) (cf Theißen 1999:125-126). A transformation of "iconic relationships" took place. The symbolic action of baptism with water was reinterpreted as a symbolic baptism into the death of Jesus. The symbol of water<sup>11</sup> refers to purity and reminds participants of the traditional purity ideology which was challenged by John. The symbol of death indicates impurity and reminds participants of how Jesus had brought an end to the previous ideology by means of his death. This is "a dissolution of the iconic relationships" (Theißen



1999:128). The previous ritual taboo (contact with the dead) has been terminated. This radical change requires an adaptation of ritual practice and it implies a radically new ethic.

#### 4.2.4 Baptism and circumcision

The *reason* for baptism as a symbol for overcoming a social taboo is rooted in history. The “cult” of the early Jesus-followers consisted of a symbol structured on the basis of the cult of the Second Temple period (cf Theißen 1999:286). In order to become part of Israel an individual was obliged to undergo an initiation rite – circumcision.<sup>12</sup> By this means a male baby was made part of the covenant between God and Abraham (Gn 17:7-14). This rite took place on the eighth day after birth. For Israel it physically signified becoming part of the people of God (see Knobel 1987:392-393; Hyatt 1989:629-631; Sim 1998:15-18).

The religion of the earliest Jesus-followers soon became an autonomous symbolic system, which originated with Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom of God after his baptism by John (cf Theißen 1999:286-292). Circumcision was exclusively for men, whereas Jesus’ message contained *new values*. For instance, no distinction was made between men and women. Jesus understood God’s presence differently. This meant that a new initiation rite had to be developed. Baptism as the initiation rite made it possible for *all* people to become part of the kingdom of God<sup>13</sup> (cf Cullmann 1969:56-57).

Circumcision initiates people into Israel in a physical manner. In the Gospels the kingdom of God stands in relation to the redefined Israel who live in the presence of God. Paul views this “Israel of God” (Gl 6:16) as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). In the Gospels and in Paul’s letters the expression “kingdom” carries a political connotation (cf Elliot 2000:25). The kingdom of God is an alternative to the kingdom of Caesar in Rome (see Crossan 1998:413). A life in the presence of God means that one should simply enter it as a child (Mk 10:14-15). In order for an adult to live as a child, an alternative state of being is required. A rite could

bring about this cultural-psychological alternate state of consciousness. Through baptism people who became part of the kingdom of God underwent a symbolic status transformation from the biological-physical world to the world of God.

#### **4.2.5 The baptism of Jesus**

One of the events where we can easily observe the experience of an alternate state of consciousness is the baptism of Jesus (see chapter 1). As I remarked earlier in this chapter, Jesus most probably did not baptize people, but was himself baptized by John. Shortly after Jesus' death the earliest Jesus-groups institutionalized baptism as a means of entry into their newly-found community. Because Jesus' baptism must have been important for them in this regard, it is necessary to devote some time to a consideration of Jesus' own baptism.

Jesus' baptism is recorded in Mark 1:9-11, Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22 and John 1:29-34. In this regard, Davies (1995:52) writes:

One day in or about the year 28 CE Jesus of Nazareth came to the Jordan River along with scores of other people. There, having repented of his sins, he was baptized by John, son of Zechariah. He saw the heavens torn open and the spirit descended upon him like a dove and he heard a voice from heaven say, "You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased." Then the spirit drove him out into the desert where he was tempted by the devil.

Scholars debate the authenticity of Jesus' baptism. Did it occur historically or was it a fiction invented to serve the needs of the Jesus-movement? As I mentioned earlier, most scholars in fact argue that Jesus' baptism was a historical event (see e.g., Davies 1995:52). Meier (1991:168-184) describes the primary criteria<sup>14</sup> by which the historicity of sayings or events in the Gospels may be evaluated, and names Jesus' baptism as an event that can be regarded as historical (see Webb 1994:214-218). Collins (1989:36; cf Crossan 1994:44-45; Funk & the Jesus Seminar 1998:528-529; Burridge & Gould 2004:39) concurs that one of the

few strong points of consensus regarding the historical Jesus is that he was baptized by John. In contrast, there are scholars who regard the story of Jesus' baptism as having been told to serve mythic purposes (e.g., Mack 1988:54).

Numerous explanations also exist for the reason why Jesus was baptized.<sup>15</sup> Pilch (1996c:19-21) explains that Jesus presumably leaves his family and village to visit John in order to be baptized. This was a highly symbolic move, since in the first-century Mediterranean world the family comprised one of the central social institutions. Individuals possessed no identity or meaningful existence apart from their family. A person not embedded in a family was as good as dead. Jesus has taken what seems to be a very shameful step away from his family. But the answer to this predicament lies in his baptism. A voice from the torn-open heavens declares Jesus to be Son of God, beloved of the Father (Mk 1:9-11). The limited understanding of reproduction in the ancient world made it almost impossible to prove who the actual father of a child was. For this reason, only when a father acknowledged a baby as his own did a child become his son or daughter. In the first-century Mediterranean world Jesus' true identity was a critically important matter. A son of an artisan from an unimportant village possessed no legitimacy as a public figure. But the legitimacy of the son of God as a public figure is incontestable. The baptism of Jesus was therefore different from the other baptisms by John, because it accorded Jesus a new identity (Stevenson 1989:34). This influenced the baptism of the early Jesus-followers, since every individual who was baptized became part of a new family and received a new identity – such a person occupied a new role in society, accompanied by new rights and responsibilities (cf Van Staden 1991:194-195). Pilch (2002a:108) goes further in writing that Jesus' baptism can be interpreted as the call of Jesus to become a holy man ("shaman") (see chapter 2). At their baptism early Jesus-followers most probably also experienced alternate states of consciousness (as Jesus did), during which they received the Holy Spirit (cf Barth 1981:60-72).

DeMaris (2002:152; cf Craffert & Botha 2005:5-32) concurs and remarks that it would not be possible to reach these conclusions without the help of the social sciences. As I mentioned in chapter 1, social sciences can advance the work of historical study:

If a social-scientific approach cannot always contribute to determining the historicity of an account's specific features, it is essential for identifying events and their sequence that would have been plausible in the culture of first-century Judea. Making such a determination is useful because historical reconstruction of the ancient world relies heavily on plausibility and probability to do its work and to make its case.

DeMaris (2002:130-144) concludes therefore that the alternate state of consciousness which Jesus experienced during his baptism<sup>16</sup> might even be historically more plausible than the baptism itself. I argue that both Jesus' baptism and the alternate state of consciousness which he experienced at his baptism can be described as "historical", since alternate states of consciousness were common in the lives of the people who inhabited the first-century Mediterranean world.

DeMaris (2002:137-138) maintains that although communities and individuals usually depend on rituals to induce alternate states of consciousness, spontaneous entry into such states also occurs. One aspect which a social-scientific approach cannot determine with much certainty is the specific ritual that induced the occurrences reported in Mark 1:10-11. In this regard, DeMaris (2002:138) contends:

The account has an affinity to an established pattern of anointing and spirit possession or bestowal of God's Spirit in ancient Israelite society, and it also resembles the later experience of many entering the Jesus movement, namely, baptism's imparting of the Holy Spirit. If a ritual other than baptism triggered Jesus' altered state of consciousness, it is easy to

account for displacement of that ritual by baptism in the account as it now stands.

Since it is possible to enter an alternate state of consciousness without any ritual prompting, DeMaris (2002:138) considers that this could have been the case at Jesus' baptism:

The followers of Jesus may have introduced the baptismal rite into the story of his possession because of the stigma attached to spontaneous possession. Cultures like that of ancient Judea typically recognize both positive and negative possession and associate the former with ritual activity. Joining a baptismal report to Jesus' entry into an altered state would have identified what happened to him as positive rather than negative, that is, as possession by the Holy Spirit and not by a demon.

In the view of Neufeld (2005:1-2) people in the Israelite tradition possessed a highly articulated sense of the place of alternate states of consciousness, of who could claim them, of how to recognize the legitimacy of these states, and of what functions they served, if any. He shows that not all alternate states of consciousness were recognized as legitimate, especially during times of intense competition for authority in the society. In particular during the introduction of religious innovations not acceptable to the elite, alternate states of consciousness became a means of legitimating such claims. In my opinion Jesus' baptism served this function – namely to legitimize his authority in contrast to that of the temple tradition.

Van Aarde (2001a:47) understands Jesus' baptism as a ritual event through which "sinful sickness" (e.g., the stigma of being a fatherless son) was addressed and healed. He argues that Jesus desired to be baptized because of his unfortunate relationship with his family and his critique of the patriarchal family as such. In Van Aarde's (2001a:47) words, Jesus "started a ministry of

healing/forgiving ‘sinners’ with the help of disciples who were also called upon to act as healed healers.”

#### **4.2.6 Preliminary findings**

At this stage, it can therefore be posited that the foundation of the baptism of the earliest Jesus-followers can, at least in part, be traced back to the baptism of John. It could also have been influenced to a certain degree by the other ritual washings known from the Israelite tradition and Greco-Roman mystery religions. But we shall probably never be able to know for certain what motivated the early followers of Jesus to initiate new members into their community by means of baptism. Yet it is possible to conclude that this baptism added *value* to their lives.

Having discussed Jesus’ “showing” in this section, in the following section, I shall examine different baptismal formulae. In these formulae one can observe a definite usage of anti-language, which denotes the earliest Jesus-followers’ “telling” of what Jesus “showed”. Since anti-language not only comprised of the characteristics of an anti-society (see chapter 1), like that formed by the earliest Jesus-followers, but also constituted a way by means of which alternate states of consciousness could be expressed, this concept might aid us to understand more fully the *value* that baptism added to the lives of the earliest Jesus-followers.

### **4.3 VALUE: BAPTISMAL FORMULAE AS ANTI-LANGUAGE**

#### **4.3.1 Introduction**

We can be sure that the earliest Jesus-followers participated in baptism in order to become members of the Jesus-movement, because this purpose is recorded in the New Testament and in other early sources. But since the earliest texts available to us date from about 50 CE (the letters of Paul) (see Pelser [s a]d:14-15; Kümmel [1975] 1978:256; Duling & Perrin 1994:222), we cannot be certain exactly when, how and why the baptismal practice began. The only references

regarding the baptism of the earliest Jesus-followers are found in certain texts, which clearly indicate that anti-language was probably the way in which the alternate states of consciousness experienced during baptism could be verbalized. By means of these texts the early Jesus-followers “told” others why baptism added *value* to their lives.

In this section, I shall firstly examine baptismal formulae in the New Testament and other “early Christian” literature. Secondly, I shall undertake a cursory examination of the similarities between the earliest baptism and the Greco-Roman mystery religions, since this could help to illuminate the role which alternate states of consciousness, as expressed in anti-language, played in the earliest baptism.

Before we examine these texts, a few preliminary remarks are appropriate. If we take note of the dominant tendency in scholarly research regarding the origin and early history of “Christian” baptism, we observe a trend towards a single harmonized picture.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis falls on the similarity of the various traditions to one another rather than on their diversity, which leads to the impression that the earliest Jesus-movement initiated new converts everywhere in basically the same manner, with only minor observable differences<sup>18</sup> (see Bradshaw 2002:144-145). But Bradshaw (2002:146) holds the opinion that the traditional claim that the early initiation practice was fundamentally identical in every place cannot be sustained:

The major centers of early Christianity were not nearly so uniform in the elements of their baptismal practice as many others have tended to conclude, and a very different picture emerges if we observe not what appears to have been common but what was distinctive or unique about the baptismal process in each place.<sup>19</sup>

Even in the New Testament one reads not a unique testimony regarding baptism, but varying testimonies stemming from different circles in the earliest Jesus-

movement. It seems as if the earliest Jesus-groups flexibly altered practices to fit their situation (see Pelser 1981:265; Mitchell 1995:242).

Bradshaw (2002:60-61) considers that whatever the origins of the baptism of the earliest Jesus-followers, it appears that from early times it became the usual – though perhaps not yet universal – custom to initiate new converts into the early Jesus-movement. Baptism was performed in a river, a pool, or a domestic bath-house. What else besides the immersion might have been involved is not made explicit in the New Testament. There may possibly have been a preliminary period of instruction, especially when converts came from a Gentile background, and this ritual most probably included a confession of faith in Jesus, in one form or another. One point that is clear from the New Testament is that the process of becoming a Jesus-follower was interpreted and expressed in a variety of different ways. For example, in some traditions the emphasis was placed on the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:38); in others the metaphor of birth into new life was used (Jn 3:5-6; Tt 3:5-7); in still others baptism was understood as enlightenment (Heb 6:4; 10:32; 1 Pt 2:9); and in Paul's theology the primary image was that of union with Christ through participation in his death and resurrection (Rm 6:2-11). This variation in baptismal theology suggests that the baptismal ritual itself may have varied from place to place. Bradshaw (2002:169-170) concludes therefore:

What can be said to have emerged as common to rites by the time that the third century is reached, out of the apparent diversity of practice of earlier times, are certain fundamental ritual elements – preparatory instruction, renunciation and act of faith, anointing, immersion, and perhaps also imposition of hands – but each of these still tends to take a different form and, at least to some extent, a different meaning in the various local or regional traditions, and they have been combined with one another in differing sequences, with the result that there are just too many variations in structure and theology to allow us to construct a single picture in anything but the very broadest terms. To emphasize what is



common and to ignore what is distinctive of individual churches – or worse still, to force the evidence to fit some preconceived notion of a normative pattern – is seriously to distort our understanding of the variety of primitive Christian practice, and to lay a false foundation for the modern revision of initiation rites.

The evidence for baptismal formulae found in the New Testament will now be evaluated.

#### **4.3.2 Baptismal formulae in the New Testament**

Many references to baptism occur in the New Testament, but I do not intend to offer a complete survey of all the available baptismal texts in this section. The texts I shall refer to will merely serve as illustrations. According to Hartman (1992:8), Galatians 3:26-29 is one of the oldest texts in the New Testament that addresses this subject (cf Pelser [s a]d:11-13). 1 Corinthians (6:9-11; 1:14-17) and 2 Corinthians are probably of the same date – about 55 CE (cf Du Toit 1984:64, 92-93, 105-106). In these texts it is evident that Paul takes the baptismal rite for granted (cf Pelser [s a]d:11-13). There are good reasons to believe that from the beginning entrance into the Jesus-movement normally meant that the neophyte was baptized. This is self-evident to the author of Acts (Ac 2:38-41; 8:36-38; 10:44-48; 16:15, 33) as well as to the authors of other independent traditions, like the Johannine tradition (Jn 3:5), the Matthean tradition (Mt 28:19),<sup>20</sup> and, prior these, to Paul and those Jesus-followers before him and contemporary with him, of whom he bears indirect witness in his letters (e.g., Rm 6:3). Since Paul takes it as a matter of course that he himself was baptized (1 Cor 12:13), this implies that about five years after the death of Jesus (approximately the time of Paul's conversion) there were already Jesus-followers to whom it was natural that newly converted persons should be baptized<sup>21</sup> (Hartman 1992:32).

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, from the beginning baptism seems to have been performed “into the name of Jesus the Lord” or “into the name of Jesus the

Messiah” (Hartman 1993:192). According to Hartman (1993:192), these formulae indicate features of early “christological” thinking. He believes that the formula “(baptize) into the name of the Lord Jesus” represents the oldest layer of baptismal traditions and that it derives from Hebrew and Aramaic rites: “The ‘name’ ‘into’ which the rite was performed indicated a fundamental reference of the rite; thus it also, indirectly, separated the rite from other similar rites which were performed ‘into’ other ‘names’” (Hartman 1993:192-193). Hartman (1993:193) suggests that when the phrase “into the name...” was used in connection with the baptism of the earliest Jesus-followers, it was the result of a literal translation of a Semitic phrase employed in the Aramaic-speaking early church and indicated the fundamental reference of the rite concerned. The Aramaic origin of the formula points to its early date (Hartman 1993:195).

The basic meaning of the ritual of baptism as a washing, a cleansing from sin, which probably originated with John the Baptist (see the previous section) was expressed in “early Christian” writings until the second century (Ac 2; 22:16; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 15:29; Eph 5:25-27; 2Mac 12:39-45; Herm, *Man* 4.3.1) (cf Schnackenburg 1981:47). According to Stevenson (1989:35), one of the first accounts of baptism is to be found in the Acts of the Apostles (Ac 8:26-40). He argues that in this story we find the seeds of what became the standard procedure in the liturgies that developed all over the “Christian” world in the early centuries. Stevenson (1989:35) elaborates as follows:

The convert first of all expresses interest – and has the Scriptures explained to him which might last some time. That becomes the profession of faith, backed up by a series of instructions beforehand. Then both minister and convert go back into the water and the baptism takes place, probably using water quite lavishly. The minister...identifies himself with what is going on by being there in the water.

The early centuries added many features to this bare procedure, which were expressed mainly by means of anti-language. Symbolism played a very important

role in this regard. We notice this if we for instance consider *water*, which connoted washing, for the forgiveness of sins. It meant the pouring out of the Spirit, like the water being poured over the head of a baptized person. It meant taking part in Jesus' death and burial in a symbolic way (cf Wedderburn 1987:368).

Other interpretations of baptism thus arose and developed alongside the original one, such as the notion of baptism as God's seal placed on "Christians", authorizing them and guaranteeing their protection, in Paul's letters (2 Cor 1:21-22; cf Rm 4:11), in the deutero-Pauline letters (Eph 1:13-14; 4:30), and in the Shepherd of Hermas (Herm, *Sim* 9.16.1-4). Suggestions that baptism was viewed as an initiation ritual can be found in Acts 2:38, 41-42; Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:26-29; and Colossians 2:11 (Collins 1989:40-41). Two sayings attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic tradition seem to use the word baptism metaphorically to connote death, especially the death of Jesus (Mk 10:38-39; Lk 12:50). Here the operative symbol has shifted from cleansing, that leads to a pure and holy life, to death that leads to new life. These sayings are similar to Paul's interpretation of baptism in Romans 6.<sup>22</sup> For Collins (1989:42) in "Romans 6:1-14 the ritual of baptism is explicitly interpreted as a reenactment of the death and resurrection of Jesus in which the baptized person appropriates the significance of that death for him- or herself. In this understanding of the ritual, the experience of the Christian is firmly and vividly grounded in the story of the death and resurrection of Christ."<sup>23</sup>

Here one may observe a tension between the outward performance and the religious significance of the earliest baptism. Owing to its reference to the death of Jesus, the new rite of baptism lost its visible or "iconic" character. Where a cleansing with water can easily be understood as an image of inner cleansing, this ritual now possessed an aniconic character. Baptism is not an image of the death of Jesus – there is no visible relationship between baptism and death/burial (Theißen 1999:132; see Pelser 1981:254-255). The *ethical value*

which early Jesus-followers attached to baptism was not illustrated by an iconic association between the ritual event of baptism and its religious *meaning*. A narrative now communicated this *value* and *meaning*, thereby conveying the *reason* why the early followers of Jesus performed the ritual of baptism.

Strictly speaking, Paul does not identify baptism with death, but with being buried<sup>24</sup> (Rm 6:4) (see Wedderburn 1987:368-371). Just as burial is a confirmation that death has taken place, so baptism as being buried with Christ is the external confirmation of one's spiritual dying with Christ (Theißen 1999:134). The metaphor of grave and burial enters the realm of taboos<sup>25</sup> (cf Sumner 1959:30; Weber 1964:32-45). For Israelites graves were unclean. In the early interpretation of baptism it is perceived as the grave where the old person is left behind in order that the person may attain new life and salvation. People who were baptized died symbolically and attained salvation (Theißen 1999:134; see Mc Fague 1983:15; Soskice 1985:15). Being baptized expresses symbolically the overcoming of anxieties related to social contact. In Galatians 3:28 Paul hands down a baptismal tradition according to which those who were baptized "clothed" themselves with Christ: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". If one envisages how many taboos must have been imposed to maintain the social differences mentioned here, one can judge the magnitude of the step taken by the baptized towards overcoming such social taboos (Theißen 1999:134).

The reference to baptism as dying and rising with Christ indicates that the first Jesus-followers saw baptism as a symbol – to be precise a symbol expressed in anti-language. To be dipped underneath the water has literally nothing to do with Jesus' dying and rising from death, but by means of baptism the earliest Jesus-followers thought themselves to be participating in Jesus' death and resurrection. And the concept made sense to them, since they experienced this "event" during alternate states of consciousness. Afterwards they understood themselves to be new people.

According to Cullmann (1969:71) one of the oldest baptismal rituals appears in Acts 8:36-37. He argues this on the basis of the short confession in verse 37: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God".<sup>26</sup> Cullmann (1969:71) is of the opinion that this confession dates from the earliest period. On the occasion of baptism the confession was developed further and broadened to a "three-membered formula", since the Holy Spirit had to be mentioned as a baptismal gift. Cullmann motivates his conclusion by indicating the liturgical answer, *elcestin* ("it is lawful") in verse 37, that is given to the liturgical question in verse 36, and employs Acts 10:47, 11:17, Matthew 3:13-14 and the Gospel of the Ebionites (Epiphanius 10:13) to demonstrate that this liturgical question was customarily placed at the beginning of the baptismal ceremony (even in the first century). In all of these examples the verb *xwlu/ein* ("prevent") appears when baptism is referred to. Since the question whether there was any reason hindering the baptism of a candidate could have been asked from time to time in the first century before the completion of baptism, it might have become a ritual question. For Cullmann (1969:71-76) this would explain why the eunuch in Acts 8:36 surprisingly asked what *prevents* him from being baptized, and not something like "Can I be baptized?"

Cullmann (1969:76-78) perceives another baptismal formula in Mark 10:13-14. Although baptism is not mentioned here, he regards this passage as such a formula because these verses exhibit the same structure as the examples mentioned above. The situation here is identical to that in the baptismal stories. All the same elements are present: those who are to be blessed; those who make request for their blessing; those who may wish to reject the request; the person who performs the blessing and accepts the request; and the formula *mh\ xwlu/ete au0ta/* ("forbid them not"). Cullmann is of the opinion that the people who wished to transmit this story of the blessing of children, desired a solution to the question of infant baptism. Jeremias (1958:51-68) concurs but Aland (1963:12) does not. Schweizer (1970:177) agrees with Cullmann, pointing out that in Mark 10:15 Jesus promises entry into the kingdom of God to whoever

receives it like a child.<sup>27</sup> The phrase “do not hinder them” in verse 14, also appears in early Christian baptismal liturgies from Acts 8:36 onwards (see Cullmann 1969:524-525). Schweizer (1970:177) continues that John 3:5 (“...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit”) evinces a tradition that understood this saying in the light of baptism. The formulation “to enter into the kingdom of God” is foreign to John, because he never speaks of the kingdom of God. This demonstrates that he quotes a traditional phrase, which is identical with the phrase used in Mark 10:15. According to Schweizer this indicates that the child-like receiving of the kingdom in the subordinate clause of Mark 10:15 has been interpreted by the “early church” in the light of its understanding of baptism as “being born from water and Spirit”. By taking the arguments of the above mentioned scholars, as well as others, into account, Van Aarde (2004a:132-136, 140) contends that Mark 10:13-16 does not refer to baptism; it rather indicates Jesus’ reversal of the hierarchical assumptions of his day, by making the child, and not the father, the model for entry into the reign of God.

Another clear example of anti-language is observable in Colossians 2:11, where baptism is called circumcision, but it is immediately qualified as a circumcision that is not done by hands (cf Dunn 1996:154-158). In this case, Lohse (1971:102; cf Pelser [s a]d:133) argues, circumcision was not understood as a sign of the covenant which required obedience to the Old Testament law and effected entrance into fellowship with Israel’s patriarchs, though it was understood like this in the communities in Galatia. It can rather be viewed as a sacramental rite by which a person entered the community and gained access to salvation. Lohse (1971:102) explains this point as follows:

The reference to the phrase “putting off the body of flesh”...suggests the practices of mystery cults. In the initiation rites the devotee had to lay aside what previously had served him as clothing so that he could be filled with divine power. Jewish terminology, in this case, would clearly function as a means of giving greater authority and appeal to the

sacramental rite of initiation. The phrase “body of flesh”...characterizes the human body in its earthly frailty wherein it is subject to suffering, death, and dissolution....It must be stripped off if the devotee wants to experience the divinizing vision and be filled with divine power. Before the initiation rites the initiate must remove his clothes and take a purificatory bath. After fasting during the period of preparation before the deity's feast, he is clothed with sacred garments....In this act his soul experiences rebirth, i.e. transformation by divine power.

Lohse (1971:102) concludes therefore that when “circumcision” was understood as “putting off the body of flesh” it had nothing to do with the Israelite interpretation of circumcision, but that this cultic act had assumed a meaning that corresponded with the Gnostic way of viewing the world, because this is what Gnosticism taught – to flee the world and open up one's way to the heavenly homeland. Lohse (1971:102-103) considers that against this background the baptism of the earliest Jesus-followers gains new meaning, especially since the circumcision is not “done by hands”. In the Old Testament this phrase refers to the graven images the pagans created for themselves, and thus implies negative connotations. On the other hand, something not made by hand must be created by God himself. The author of Colossians thus points to baptism as the work of God. God himself accomplished the change from the old to the new life. In verse 12 the author of Colossians says that this circumcision of Christ which every member of the community has experienced is nothing other than being baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ (cf Uitman 1955:60-61).

In the opinion of Lohse (1971:103-104) the same kind of expression also underlies Romans 6:4-5. The early Jesus-followers believed that Christ died for their sins, that he was buried and that God raised him from the dead (1 Cor 15:3-5). They believed themselves to be linked to this event by an indissoluble bond, because they had died with him in baptism and have been laid in the grave, so that their old lives have been put aside. In Rom 6 Paul's concern is to demonstrate that it is therefore impossible to still live under the dominion of “sin”,

since the “old” person had been crucified with Christ (Rm 6:6). Paul adds that in baptism believers have been linked to the resurrection of Christ. All these factors imply a new existence for the baptized.

Lohse (1971:104) elaborates that in Colossians, as in Romans 6, we read that in baptism we have died with Christ. But in contrast to Romans 6 the emphasis falls on the fact that the baptized have already been raised with Christ in baptism. What is still to take place in the future is not the resurrection of the dead, but the revelation of that life which was received in baptism and is now still hidden “with Christ in God” (Col 2:12). Lohse (1971:105) understands the saying “to be raised with Christ” as denoting nothing else than to receive forgiveness of sins (Col 2:13); this is not the same fanatical enthusiasm that we read about in 2 Timothy 2:18, according to which “the resurrection has already taken place”. Lohse (1971:106) therefore arrives at the conclusion that these verses signify that where there is openness towards the power of God, which is operative in the Gospel, there this receptivity creates new life. And Colossians describes this new life as being raised with Christ, summoning its readers to put aside the old person and to put on the new person who lives according to the will of his or her creator. In Colossians 2:13 the point is once again stressed – death has been vanquished and life attained, but only where fellowship with Christ exists. In Galatians 3:27, Colossians 3:9 and in Ephesians 4:24 the reader once again encounters anti-language that is related to baptism, namely in the phrases “put off” and “put on”. Berger (2003:41) observes that the socio-psychological function of clothes in antiquity was to indicate one’s social role. Through the close bond with Jesus Christ that baptism establishes, each baptized individual is outfitted with some quality of Jesus that transforms all relationships – all the baptized become joint members of one new society. Berger (2003:41) points out that the effect of this “putting on Christ” is the disappearance of all distinctions between human beings, distinctions that have previously been expressed by means of differences in clothing: “Thus their ‘old clothes’ had served as insignia of their respective social roles.” For the people in the New Testament, there was



a much closer relation between clothing and the self than there is among us today. In those days a person's relationships were symbolized by the clothing he or she wore, which in turn meant that clothing shaped the quality of one's life. Berger (2003:42) writes: "Thus, when it is said that someone 'puts on Christ,' what is meant is that a new role is accorded to that person, a role in which he or she is then expected to grow."

Lohse (1971:141) concurs that the image of taking off and putting on a garment was widespread in antiquity and was employed in the mystery religions in order to interpret the action of initiation. As an example he refers to the account of Isis' rites that Apuleius gives in the *Metamorphoses*, where he describes how the initiate was clothed in twelve robes during the initiation ceremony and received a garment adorned with images of animals. The putting on of the garment consecrated the initiate – such a person was filled with the powers of the cosmos, experienced a transformation within himself or herself and received a share of the divine power of life. Lohse explains that Gnostic texts understand the image of putting on or receiving the garment as expressing that the redemption had truly occurred, a redemption which is accomplished when the person is taken up into the divine world and suffused with its light and power. Regarding Paul, Lohse (1971:141-142) observes:

When Paul employs the image of putting off and putting on, he describes neither an ontological transformation of man nor the release of a divine kernel so as to allow it to develop fully and to let man possess salvation. Rather, the image illustrates the change of rule that has taken place in baptism. The baptized have been transferred into the domain of Christ's rule and are called to conduct their lives in obedience.

Paul continues that the old person needs to be put aside and the new person needs to be donned (Col 3:10). In Colossians 3:11 we read that what separates people from one another in the world has been abolished in the community of Jesus Christ. There is "no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised,

barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” This unity in Christ is grounded in baptism. The author of Colossians speaks about people stemming from completely diverse origins, who have been gathered together in unity in Christ through allegiance to one Lord. Although they continue to occupy the roles that the world assigns to them as Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, where the “body of Christ” exists there the differences which separate people from one another are abolished (Lohse 1971:142-144). This expression can also be viewed as an instance of anti-language, because although Paul proclaims that there is neither male nor female, for example, people did not literally lose their gender. Men stayed men and women stayed women, but in contrast to the way in which their society functioned, both men and women were welcome in the community of Christ (cf Elliott 2002:84-85).

Using the above mentioned texts as examples, Bradshaw (2002:56) warns against the danger of reading later practices back into New Testament times. He points out that in Galatians 3:27 we read that the baptized “put on” Christ, and that Colossians 3:9-10 and Ephesians 4:22-24 speak of putting off the old nature and putting on the new. This leads to the question of whether these images were occasioned by an already existing baptismal custom of stripping off one’s clothing before being immersed and of being clothed with a white garment after emerging from the water, as one notices in fourth-century evidence. Or are these only metaphors, which – much later – encouraged or gave rise to the liturgical usage? It is possible that the development could have been from metaphor to later literal fulfillment, but it could also have taken place from early practice to literary image (Bradshaw 2002:57; cf Stevenson 1989:34).

In 1 Peter 3:19-22 one comes across a reference to baptism that must be understood analogically. The author compares the time of the flood and the period in which the text was written. The purpose of 1 Peter 3:8-4:6 is to encourage the recipients to verbalize their faith in spite of the risk. They are assured that God hears their appeals; that Jesus has authority over all powers

and that God is waiting to vindicate them at the final judgment (see Westfall 1999:134). The use of anti-language can be observed, in the comparison of the water that saved the eight people in the ark with the redemptive qualities of the water in baptism.

Analyzing the Gospel of John, Schweizer (1970:177) considers that in the interpretation of the pre-Johannine church, baptism (understood as a rebirth by water and Spirit) guaranteed entry into the coming kingdom of God. John uses the same phrase in a different way. He no longer expects a coming kingdom: for him it is primarily a present reality that the believer is already able to experience. He accepts baptism as an ecclesiastical rite, but does not evidence much interest in it. His own formulation can be found in John 3:3: "...no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again". To be born again was connected with the rite of baptism, which was understood to bring about the kingdom of God: "In it, what the apocalypticists expected from a future parousia, already happens" (Schweizer 1970:177). Schweizer (1970:178-179) shows that John was not the first person to display such an understanding. In the time of Paul, the Corinthians also thought that they were living in a new aeon (1 Cor 4:8; 12:2; 13:1-2; 14:27, 32; 15:12) (see Schweizer 1970:178). In Colossians 1:13 the term "kingdom", which is rare in the Pauline letters, occurs again. The context of this verse is that of conversion, and the terminology reminds us of the baptism of Jesus (Mk 1:11). The assertion here is that the baptized are saved from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of God. This kingdom is no longer a future reality to be hoped for: it is present and the believers are now living in it. Thus, baptism represents the anticipation of the change in the aeons – by it the believer is transported into the coming kingdom, and the only way in which this was possible, was by means of experiencing alternate states of consciousness. In Titus 3:5 baptism, according to Schweizer (1970:178-179; cf Klijn 1994:140), is termed "the washing of rebirth". This term is not the usual one for being reborn; it is, rather, used apocalyptically (see Schweizer 1970:179). In the same verse baptism is termed "renewal by the Holy Spirit", which probably means the new

“eschatological” creation effected by God’s Spirit. This is an expression of the common “Christian” belief that in the work of the Spirit given by baptism the coming aeon has irrupted into this present one.

Paul understands baptism as the beginning of a path that leads to the final consummation. He does not deny that in baptism the old aeon of sin has been ended definitely and that in the Spirit the firstfruits of the coming life have been given to the “church”. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 Paul asserts that dying to the old life has already definitely happened in baptism, but that rising to the final state of eternal life still lies in the future. But in some way the future life penetrates the continuing earthly existence of the baptized, because the Spirit is already present (see also Rm 8:11-14, 29-30) (Schweizer 1970:180).

Thus, according to Schweizer (1970:180), Mark 10:15,<sup>28</sup> John 3:5 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 demonstrate that baptism was understood in a broad section of the early Jesus-movement as offering admission to the kingdom of God. For Paul, and also probably for the tradition which was taken up by John, this was a future event promised by God to the baptized. For John (and Col 1:13) the transfer into Christ’s kingdom has already been effected in baptism. Titus 3:5 shows that this result has probably been identified with the apocalyptic rebirth of the whole cosmos. It was the experience of the Spirit in baptism that led to the adoption of such apocalyptic views. Hebrews 6:5 states that the baptized are already tasting the powers of the future aeon, which leads Schweizer (1970:180) to conclude that Paul’s “corrections of a more enthusiastic understanding show that ideas of this kind were widespread and that the Corinthians understood the presence of the Spirit, not as a mere pledge of firstfruits like Paul, but as the new... apocalyptic ‘living with Christ’”. Hence, it seems as if baptism, in certain circles, was first conceived of as God’s guarantee of one’s participation in the coming kingdom of God. More and more, however, it came to signify admission into the present kingdom of God, and was understood as one’s being raised with

Christ to the life of the new aeon. The experience of the Spirit seemed to demonstrate that the new aeon in the church had already irrupted into this world – resurrection was already an accomplished fact, since it had taken place with Christ in baptism. Against this enthusiasm, Paul declares that the rising with Christ lies in the future. According to his preaching, the dying to the old life of sin takes place in baptism, because a person is baptized into the death of Christ. There is also a new life, but a paradoxical one – this life was required to validate itself in the obedience of the believer. This meant that a baptized person would suffer with Christ, but this suffering would lead to one's final glorification and life with Christ (Rm 6:4; 8:17) (Schweizer 1970:181).

In this section, I have indicated that anti-language, as the verbalization of alternate states of consciousness, was part and parcel of the baptismal procedure as this is described in the New Testament. However, the New Testament is not the only place where texts regarding baptism can be located. We find examples of anti-language in non-Biblical references to baptism as well. Certain instances follow.

#### **4.3.3 Baptismal formulae in non-Biblical texts**

Except for the texts in the New Testament (discussed in the previous section), other sources<sup>29</sup> also exist which contain information regarding the liturgical practices of the early church (Bradshaw 2002:73-117; cf Esler 2003:204). Examples of these include the following:<sup>30</sup>

Ancient church orders:

- *Didache* (first or second century, Syria).
- *Didascalia Apostolorum* (c 230, Syria).
- *Apostolic Church Order* (c 300, Egypt).
- *Traditio apostolica* (c 215, possibly Rome).
- *Canones Hippolyti* (336-340, Egypt).
- *Apostolic Constitutions* (c 380, Syria).

- *Testamentum Domini* (possibly fifth century, Syria).

Other major liturgical sources (arranged geographically):<sup>31</sup>

- *Rome*: Justin Martyr (*Apologia* [earliest extant substantial description of Christian worship]; c 150); *Shepherd of Hermas* (mid-second century); *Traditio apostolica* (attributed to Hippolytus; a very questionable testimony, about 215/217); Innocent I (letter to Decentius of Gubbio, 416); Leo the Great (sermons, 440-461).
- *North Africa*: Tertullian<sup>32</sup> (converted in c 195; reliability questionable); Cyprian (bishop of Carthage from 248-258); Augustine (bishop of Hippo Regius from 396-430).
- *North Italy*: Ambrose (bishop, c 339-397); Chromatius (bishop of Aquileia, c 388-407); Gaudentius (who became bishop of Brescia, c 397); Zeno (bishop of Verona, 361-c 375); Maximus (bishop of Turin, fifth century); Peter Crysologus (bishop of Ravenna, 5<sup>th</sup> century).
- *Gaul and Spain*: Irenaeus (bishop of Lyons, late second century).
- *Egypt*: Clement of Alexandria (c 150-c 215); Origen (c 185-c 254); *Canones Hippolyti* (early fourth century, reliability questionable); *Sacramentary of Serapion* (attributed to a fourth-century bishop of Thmuis in lower Egypt); Strasbourg Papyrus 254 (fourth or fifth century); Anaphora of St Mark (assumed its current form by the time of the Council of Chalcedon); Anaphora of St Basil (somewhere between 600 and 800, contents probably belong to first half of fourth century or earlier).
- *Syria*: Apart from the *Didache*, some of the main sources which may shed light on early liturgical practices in this region are the apocryphal scriptures, especially the *Acts of John* (late second or early third century),

the *Acts of Thomas* (third century, probably from East Syria), and the *Syriac Acts of John* (fourth or fifth century); John Chrysostom (c 347-407); Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles; Theodore of Mopsuestia (ordained as presbyter at Antioch about 383, served until 392, when he became bishop of Mopsuestia); Aphraates (early fourth century, East Syria); Ephrem (hymns, c 306-373); Cyrillonas of Edessa (fourth-century poet); Narsai (fifth century); Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari (parts of this Eucharistic prayer could be dated as early as the second or third century); Third Anaphora of St. Peter; Anaphora of Nestorius; Anaphora of Theodore.

- *Jerusalem: Catecheses ad illuminandos* (written by Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem from 350-387; his catechetical lectures were delivered while he was still a presbyter); *The Pilgrimage of Egeria* (travel diary by female pilgrim to the Holy Land in the fourth century); *The Armenian and Georgian Lectionaries* (the former dates from the first half of fifth century, while the latter represents a later stage of development of the same material); *The Liturgy of St. James* (ninth century).

A brief examination of some of these texts suggests a picture of what could probably have taken place during the earliest baptismal procedures, and the probable connection with alternate states of consciousness as expressed in anti-language once again becomes clear (see Pretorius 1980:18). Referring to *Didache* 7, Roy (1987:72) comments: "The spontaneity and immediacy with which baptism was first administered meant of necessity that the rite was kept simple; a simple washing in water as the latter was available." No restriction at first seemed to exist as to who performed the act of baptizing (Roy 1987:73; see Ac 11:19-21). According to Mitchell (1995:249) the instructions in *Didache* 7<sup>33</sup> concerning baptism were very brief at the earliest stage of redaction.<sup>34</sup>

They most probably read as follows:

<sup>1a</sup>Concerning baptism, baptize in this manner:

<sup>1c</sup>In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in running (“living”) water.

<sup>4a</sup>And before the baptism, both the one who is baptizing and the one who is being baptized should fast, along with any others who can.<sup>35</sup>

As early as the second century this simple ritual altered. As local churches became more structured, so did the preparation for baptism. Toward the end of the second century, we read of people called *catechumens*.<sup>36</sup> This word stems from the Greek word “to teach”. A *catechumen* was required to learn and live the meaning of Christianity before initiation could take place. According to Oetting ([1964] 1970:29) during this time inquiry was made into the motives, character, and occupation of the candidate. No one living in adultery, no civil or military official of the state, no actor, gladiator, artist, or magician was introduced until these occupations were given up.<sup>37</sup> Since there had existed no such restrictions in the *earliest* Jesus-movement, we can conclude (by taking note of these restrictions) that already in the second century, matters had changed.

Instruction was given in the “Christian” way of life as expounded in the life of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. Before a *catechumen* was admitted to baptism it was determined whether he or she lived soberly, visited the sick, and had grasped the “Christian” life. *Catechumens* were already considered as “Christians”. In the assemblies they could take part in the singing, the reading of the Scriptures, and in certain of the prayers, but they were not allowed to take part in the Eucharist and several other rites, such as initiation and ordination. They were sent out of the church after the first part of the Eucharist, just before the sharing of the peace and the preparation of the altar table. In some places the *catechumenate* lasted only a few months, while in others the period was three years (Stevenson 1989:38-39). When the *catechumens* were sufficiently



prepared, they had the right to present themselves for baptism.<sup>38</sup> This they usually did, but they were not obliged to receive it immediately, and some persons put off making any definite commitment.<sup>39</sup>

Even though we do not know exactly what the ritual of baptism entailed before this period, the way in which this ritual is described in both the New Testament and the non-Biblical texts at least bears witness to the likely presence of alternate states of consciousness, because of the anti-language employed to describe the ritual.

#### **4.3.4 Baptism and the Greco-Roman mystery religions**

As I have already mentioned, numerous similarities exist between the earliest baptism and some of the Greco-Roman mystery religions (Wedderburn 1987:90-98). In this section, I shall offer a cursory view of two examples of mystery religions, to highlight the important role that alternate states of consciousness as well as the verbalization thereof in anti-language, played in rites.

The first example relates to the cult of Kybele, the Great Mother of Anatolia, who was worshiped by the Greeks from ancient times in Phrygia (a region in the highlands of central Anatolia) and in Lydia (see Burkert 1987:5-6). She was honored as a mother goddess of fertility, but her particular power was evidenced in the untamed forests and mountains. In works of art she was commonly portrayed holding a *tympanon* (a tambourine) and wearing a towered mural crown (she protected towns and castles), and she was accompanied by her lions, since she was the mistress of the wild animals (see Finegan 1989:193-196). From the second century on, the Romans also began to worship her and her lover Attis. This worship was associated with exotic festivals, flamboyant *Galli* (eunuchs of the Great Mother) and *Metragyrtai* (mendicant priests of the Great Mother), and the gory *taurobolia* (ritual slaughter of bulls) (see Meyer 1987:113-115).

The connection with baptism can be perceived in the *taurobolium*. The “Christian” Latin poet, Prudentius (b. 348-d; after 405 CE) wrote with disgust about this ritual. It consisted of the sacrificing of an animal above a pit into which a devotee descended, in order to be drenched with the blood for the sake of spiritual purification. By the time of Prudentius, the *taurobolium* functioned as a bloody baptism, conferring rebirth upon the person bathed in this manner. One late inscription (376 CE) suggests that a person who submitted to the bath of blood was “reborn for eternity” (Meyer 1987:128-129).

The inducement of alternate states of consciousness in this mystery religion could have been caused by the passionate singing and dancing (Meyer 1987:113-114). Furthermore, when the spring ceremonies began, days were spent in fasting from bread, wine, and other food, as was also the case in the earliest baptism.

The second example stems from the Egyptian mysteries of Isis and Osiris (see Tam Tinh 1982:101-117). Of all the many gods worshiped in Egypt, Isis, Osiris, and their divine family were among the most influential. Isis, a mother goddess of remarkable magical powers, is closely identified with the throne of the pharaoh. According to the Egyptian myth, she guarantees an orderly succession on the throne of Egypt from one pharaoh to another. Osiris is Isis’ brother and husband. He possesses generative powers that enable the Egyptian land watered by the Nile to be fertile and productive of crops. Politically Osiris is the prototype of the pharaoh, specifically the deceased pharaoh who vacates the throne in the upper world and functions as ruler of the underworld (Meyer 1987:157). The “mysteries” of Isis and Osiris were different from Greco-Roman mysteries – the former comprised a mystery play about the succession of the pharaohs as well as the funerary ritual of mummification and burial. But by the Hellenistic period the worship of Isis and Osiris had become established in one or other form among the Greeks and slightly later also among the Romans (Meyer 1987:158; cf Finegan 1989:196-199; Pearson 1999:42-62).

Usually the experience of initiation was taken as an experience of death. During this ritual the initiate saw the sun. This could have been light in the darkness, created by priests manipulating torches at a key point in the ritual, but it is also in accord with ancient Egyptian descriptions of the realm of death – for they believed that the Sun traveled through the underworld during the night. The morning after the initiation the initiated person is thought to have been reborn. This day was consequently one of feasting and celebration (Meyer 1987:158). The similarities with the baptism of the earliest Jesus-followers are apparent. Another similarity is found in the custom that newcomers wore new clothes after the initiation (Meyer 1987:189-190). Alternate states of consciousness could have been induced because of the prescribed fasting that took place over the ten days before the initiation and which resulted in visions (see Meyer 1987:187).

These two examples illustrate that alternate states of consciousness most likely played an important part in rituals, whether these rituals were performed by early Jesus-followers or participants in mystery religions. Anti-language was the easiest way in which these experiences could be verbalized.

This concludes my discussion of the “telling” of the earliest Jesus-followers. To repeat what I remarked earlier – it was not possible to talk about this “out of the ordinary” happening, the experience of alternate states of consciousness during baptism, in ordinary language. By means of studying the anti-language employed to express this experience, we were able to argue that alternate states of consciousness played an important part in the earliest Jesus-followers’ initiation and status transformation ritual. This not only added *value* to their lives, but they also experienced initiation into the “family of God” as *meaningful*, and therefore they “re-enacted” the alternate states of consciousness Jesus “showed” during his own baptism, about which they were “told” in anti-language. In the following section, I shall consider the *meaning* the earliest baptism held for the followers of Jesus.

#### **4.4 MEANING: BAPTISM AS A CULTURAL RITUAL INITIATION SYMBOL OF AN ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE**

##### **4.4.1 Introduction**

As I mentioned in chapters 1 and 3, the earliest Jesus-followers formed an anti-society. People became members of this society because it imparted *meaning* to their lives; and this took place by means of the initiation and status transformation ritual of baptism. Once one became a member of this new society, the Eucharist served as a ceremony of integration.

Although Jesus was not the “founder” of the earliest baptism, I argue that in a sense his own baptism, during which he experienced an alternate state of consciousness as well as a status transformation, played an important role in the earliest Jesus-followers’ choice of baptism as initiation ritual. They thus “re-enacted” what Jesus “showed”.

To indicate what this “re-enactment” entailed, I shall firstly discuss baptism as a ritual of initiation and status transformation; then I shall consider the role alternate states of consciousness played in the earliest baptism; subsequently the place of baptism in an anti-society will be investigated and lastly I shall examine the *meaning* of baptism for the earliest Jesus-followers.

##### **4.4.2 Baptism as ritual of initiation and status transformation**

###### **4.4.2.1 Introduction**

By means of the ritual of baptism, people could become members of the anti-society which the earliest Jesus-followers formed (cf Barth 1981:11-12; Lindemann 2003:262). This implied that they also gained new identities, because in the “family of God” people were accorded new roles and responsibilities. The three stages characteristic of initiation rituals, namely separation, liminality-*communitas*, and aggregation (see chapter 3), can easily be distinguished in the

baptism practiced in the early stages of the Jesus-movement. Esler (2003:211-212) elaborates as follows:

#### **4.4.2.2 Separation**

This phase consisted of the period of instruction, the *catechuminate*. During this stage initiates were separated from their old identities and introduced to the norms of the group as well as to the skills needed for effective functioning as part of the group.

#### **4.4.2.3 Liminality-*communitas***

The liminal phase consisted of total immersion in water, which formed the heart of the ritual. Turner (1977: 95) describes this phase in another context as follows:

They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands. Their behavior is normally passive or humble....It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new status in life. Among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism.

In line with this description the candidates for baptism probably stripped naked and the women removed all their jewelry. This symbolized the abandonment of their old existence, especially the sinfulness that had been part of their old lives. After this action they handed themselves over to the baptizer, "...to be subjected to his will in pushing them under the water, thus humbly and passively letting themselves be fashioned anew" (Esler 2003:211). All the distinctions between the initiands disappear and equality and unity are emphasized (see McVann 1991a:153; 1991b:340). This situation can be described as one of *communitas*.

Esler (2003:211) emphasizes the powerful cognitive and emotional experience that this must have entailed. The cleansing immersion in living water underlined the distinctiveness of the Jesus-movement from the world the new members had left behind.

#### **4.4.2.4 Aggregation**

After the baptism, incorporation into the “family of God” took place. The candidates dried and clothed themselves and were brought into the assembly where the faithful were gathered. They gave each other “the kiss of peace” to indicate their kinship. For the first time they were allowed to participate in the Eucharist, the ceremony of integration into the community.

#### **4.4.3 The earliest baptism and alternate states of consciousness**

Oetting (1970:28-30; Roy 1987:73; cf Duchesne 1909:366-367) describes the ritual of baptism<sup>40</sup> as follows: In preparation for baptism the candidate was required to fast for one or two days, and was usually joined in this fast by certain friends. The baptismal water was purified by exorcizing the elemental spirits which dwelt in it, and was prepared for the sacred ceremony. In a special rite of exorcism the priest placed his hand upon the candidate, blew on him or her, and anointed his or her forehead, ears, and nose, which was followed by a renewed fast for the night. Early in the morning, at cock-crow (during Easter night), the baptism began. After the candidate undressed, he or she was required solemnly to renounce Satan and all his works, to which he or she had been subject up until then. Another anointing with exorcising oil followed. Subsequently, the candidate went down into the water, naked,<sup>41</sup> and took the new oath of service to God, the “sacramentum”, by uttering the three-fold baptismal creed (belief in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit),<sup>42</sup> whereupon he or she was immersed<sup>43</sup> three times in the water.<sup>44</sup> Afterwards, everyone moved from the place of baptism into the church, where the bishop transferred the gift of the Holy Spirit to the newly baptized by laying on of hands, anointing, making the sign of the cross, and giving a kiss.<sup>45</sup> The candidate then received his or her first communion, together with milk and

honey, symbolizing the entrance into the Promised Land (cf *Did* 7, Just, *Apol* 61; *Apocryphal Acts of Judas Thomas*).

Esler (2003:206) confirms this action and explains further that in at least the first generation of the Jesus-movement baptism was the occasion at which a believer received the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> The people who received the Holy Spirit experienced this event as God entering them. The result was a variety of alternate states of consciousness, including trances, audition, visions, glossolalia, and prophecy, which usually led to feelings of peace and happiness<sup>47</sup> (Esler 1994:48; 2003:207). Esler (2003:217) describes this union with Christ by means of baptism as follows:

Those who were baptized received the Spirit of God within and henceforth the Spirit lived there. For Paul this was virtually the equivalent of saying that they had the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:10). Thus baptism was an overwhelming encounter with God and Christ, an encounter charged with visionary experiences of light and manifested in an eruption of glossolalia and other ecstatic phenomena. For his early followers, Christ was actually present in baptism and this presence was central to the ritual. Immersion in the depth and silence of the water ritually corresponded to sharing in Christ's death, while elevation into the air and possession by the Spirit of God/Christ, with associated receipt of charismatic gifts, brought them into closest conjunction with the risen Lord.

This description of how baptism was probably performed at an early stage in the history of the Jesus-movement makes it clear that alternate states of consciousness played an important part in this ritual. Favorable conditions for inducing alternate states of consciousness included the fasting before the ritual took place, as well as the time it was enacted – right through the night until the next morning.

#### 4.4.4 Anti-society and the earliest baptism

##### 4.4.4.1 Introduction

Esler (2003:209) maintains that from the viewpoint of social identity theory, the subject of baptism falls under the rubric of joining, or becoming a member, of the group. As I indicated in chapter 1, the group which the earliest Jesus-followers formed can be termed an anti-society. In order for one to become a member of such a society, three phenomena are necessary, namely reconnoitering the group, changes in one's self-concept, and initiation into the group. Esler (2003:209-210) discusses these as follows.

##### 4.4.4.2 Reconnoitering the group

*Reconnaissance* is undertaken by people who consider joining a group voluntarily. It involves weighing the benefits against the costs, in other words, discovering what the group can offer them and what they will have to do in return. The benefits offered by membership of the Jesus-movement were many. Esler (2003:209) names the euphoria produced by experiencing the Spirit of God entering a person, accompanied by the charismatic gifts (e.g., Rm 8:1-17). The members were also expected to treat one another in a manner characterized by the type of love that typified the movement, namely *agapē* (see Rm 12:9-21; 13:8-10). In this regard, Esler (2003:209-210) observes:

In a society marked by social stratification, that all members were expected to treat one another in accordance with the (often countercultural) demands of *agapē* must have made the movement considerably attractive, especially when the poor and destitute could also expect support and sustenance from members with more resources....

A negative feature of membership in the Jesus-movement would have been the breaking of ties with practices such as idolatry that were embedded in local patterns of familial and civic life. Jesus-followers could be accused of atheism in



relation to the traditional gods and goddesses upon whose support the state relied, which could lead to persecution (see e.g., Rm 5:3).

Time spent in preparation for baptism (the *catechumenate*) would have ensured the newcomers' suitability from the point of view of the movement, while from the newcomers' perspective, this would have been the period when they would have reconnoitered the movement, weighing the advantages against the disadvantages (Esler 2003:210).

#### **4.4.4.3 Changes in self-concept**

Our sense of who we are is ultimately tied up with our group membership. Therefore, one of the major consequences of becoming a member of a group is a change in the way we see ourselves – a redefinition of who we are – which leads to implications for our self-esteem. This point also applies to a group like the Jesus-followers in the first century, in whose case major changes in self-concept would be involved, since after baptism one was a whole new person (Esler 2003:210). Esler (2003:210) maintains that since they would have gradually internalized their membership of the Jesus-movement as part of their self-concept, the high value and prestige they attached to membership (which had encouraged them to join) would have increased their sense of self-worth.

#### **4.4.4.4 Initiation into the group**

Initiation into the group was the final step in this process. It was regarded as very important and took place by means of a ritual (Esler 2003:210).

#### **4.4.5 The meaning of the baptism of the early Jesus-followers as acceptance into the “family of God”**

To become a member of the new group, described as the “family of God” by the earliest Jesus-followers, was therefore a major step. Esler (2003) utilizes Paul's letter to the Romans as an example to explain this issue. On the grounds of Paul's frequent usage of the first person plural in Romans 6:1-8,<sup>48</sup> Esler

(2003:212) is of the opinion that there is a strong personal dimension to what Paul writes in this pericope. He contends that this is the case because the Jesus-followers in Rome and Paul have something in common, namely the ritual (baptism) by means of which they entered into the “mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection” (Esler 2003:212). In Esler’s view, from a social identity perspective, Paul uses the repeated first person plurals to strengthen his claim to exercise leadership over the Jesus-followers in Rome, by making clear that he shares the same identity with them as well as the same means by which they acquired it.

In Romans 6:3 Paul begins with a general question: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Jesus Christ...?” By means of this question he is reminding his audience of some facts they most probably already know. Esler (2003:213) considers that baptism “into Christ” seems to be roughly equivalent to an older and more common expression, namely baptism “into/in the name of Jesus Christ”. Paul probably assumed that his audience thought that the ritual of baptism somehow united one with Christ, possibly in the sense of entering the community formed under his protection and lordship (cf Wedderburn 1987:54, 59). But in the next part of his question Paul appears to enter an area of interpretation with which they may not have been familiar: “[Don’t you know that all of us] were baptized into his death?” He needs to explain to them how the process of baptism relates to Christ’s death. In Romans 6:4-5 Paul then offers two parallel descriptions of how baptism relates to Christ’s death and resurrection. According to Esler (2003:213), the imagery involved seems only to be effective if Paul has baptism by means of total immersion in mind. He elaborates this as follows:

First, he says, “Therefore we have been buried together with (suneta&fhmen) him through baptism into death,” thus indicating the immersion stage of the ritual, burial in water, “in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so might we also walk in the newness of life” (v. 4), thus intimating, in turn, the emergence of the believer out of the water and his or her donning clothes

to commence the new life, or, in our terminology, the new identity in Christ. The next verse restates this with a different emphasis: “For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death we will also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection.” This clarifies that resurrection is involved in the new life.

In Luke-Acts we read that John the Baptist expected one “stronger” than he to introduce a final baptism – one with fire and spirit (Lk 3:16-17; Ac 8:14-17). This indicates that the followers of Jesus identified him as this “stronger one” (Jn 1:33; 3:22, 26; 4:1-2) (see Collins 1996:233-234). “Baptism with the Spirit” is synonymous with being baptized in the “name of Jesus” (Mt 28:19; Ac 2:38) (cf Oepke 1968:539-540; Collins 1996:235). This baptism was John’s baptism for the “forgiveness of sins” (Mk 1:4). The general conviction of early Jesus-followers was that the forgiveness of sins had been made possible through the death of Jesus (see 1 Cor 15:3-5; 2 Cor 5:21; Rm 4:24-25; 6:3-11, 22-23). In this regard Theißen (1999:129; cf Van Aarde & Pelsner 2001:37-40) writes:

Thus there was an intrinsic necessity for baptism for the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus also to be related to the death of Jesus. The salvation gained through the death of Jesus was promised to the baptized through baptism as the forgiveness of sins – through a verbal promise and the non-verbal language of the rite.

Two possible historical reasons exist for this later interpretation of baptism as a symbolic dying and being buried with Christ. The first comprises the symbolic dramatization of the experience of death in Hellenistic-Semitic and Greco-Roman initiation rites (e.g., the Isis cult) (cf Van Staden 2001:582). In an analogy to this practice, the early Jesus-followers interpreted baptism as a symbolic experience of death. Secondly, in “early Christianity” the metaphorical act of baptism could result in actual death because of Roman imperial antagonism towards this “superstition” (see, e.g., the reference, from hindsight, to the death of the sons of Zebedee in Mk 10:38) (cf Collins 1996:237; Theißen 1999:129).

In “early Christian” literature the link between baptism and death is first perceived in the writings of Paul (e.g., Rm 6:4) (see Hooker 1997:9; Campbell 1999:273-293). Paul’s message to the Gentiles called for a radical conversion, both mentally and socially. Symbolically, it required of the person to die with Christ, in order to begin a completely new life with Christ (Theißen 1999:129-130). For the Mediterranean personality this new life symbolized an alternate state of consciousness.

Cullmann’s (1969:30) opinion regarding Romans 6:3-6 holds that Paul describes *what* takes place in baptism here: the person baptized is “planted” with the dead and risen Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul defines *how* this participation in the death and resurrection of Christ in baptism proceeds: “...by one Spirit we are all baptised into one body....” From the context it is evident that this “body” is the body of Christ, the church. For Cullmann, in order to determine the meaning of baptism, both these passages must be taken together. The body of Christ is qualitatively increased by baptism.

Esler (2003:212) situates the emphasis a little differently, suggesting that in Romans 6:3-10 Paul explains baptism by focusing on why sin no longer has power over Jesus-followers. Esler points out how the actions of Christ and the experience of the people who believe in him are synthesized in baptism: “Yet the mythos concerning Christ is fairly sparse in its details: he was crucified, he died (a death in which he died to sin), he was buried, he was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, and he will never die again”. Paul does not describe precisely *how* Christ’s fate ended the dominion of sin, only *that* it did. According to Esler (2003:212), Paul’s interest in Romans 6:3-10 does not lie in the theological reason why Christ’s death and resurrection broke the power of sin and established human righteousness, but in describing how humans “obtain the benefits of his self-sacrifice by replicating his experience in baptism and thus being incorporated into him” (cf Berger 2003:122).

In Romans 6:6 Paul states that “we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin....” Esler (2003:213-214; cf Cullmann 1969:23) considers that here Paul is still referring to baptism and its effects.<sup>49</sup> It is in baptism that the old self of the believer is crucified with Christ, the word *sunestaurw&qh* matching “we were buried with” (*suneta/fhmen*) in verse 4. In the next verse Paul clarifies that this old identity is replaced by a new one, writing “for he who has died is ‘righteoused’ from sin”, he becomes a *di/kaioj* (“righteous person”).

Paul thus identifies baptism as being the locus of the destruction of the old identity and the acquisition of the new, the exalted status which is expressed by its necessary association with righteousness. Subsequently, Paul reminds his audience that this identity exhibits a future dimension. In verse 8 he points out: “Now if we died with Christ”, that is, in baptism, “we believe that we will also live with him”. In verses 9 to 10 Paul returns to Christ, who, being raised from the dead, is no longer subject to death’s lordship, for he has died once and for all to sin and lives for God (Esler 2003:214; cf Cullmann 1969:48-49).

Esler (2003:215-216) then poses the question how we are to understand the relationship between Christ and the person whose belief in him has been manifested in baptism. For him it is obvious that Christ did not literally die and rise at every baptism: “Yet a central part of ritual is to bring past events into the present *in a socially and religiously significant sense*” (Esler 2003:216; emphasis by Esler). Neunheuser (1968:143) remarks that baptism is an act of initiation “...whereby the redemptive death of Christ ...is cultically made present in the shape of a visible rite....” Perhaps the most extreme version of the presence of the past in ritual is represented in Lévi-Strauss’s ([1966] 1968:237) claim that “historical rites bring the past into the present”. He proposed that in “historical rites” the sacred and beneficial atmosphere of the mythical period is re-created and becomes a present reality. Thus, ritual regularly serves to make the past “present” in a way that effects real religious and social results (see chapter 3).

This point is evident if we keep in mind that the earliest Jesus-followers adopted an apocalyptic worldview and that they understood time in a different manner from than the way in which we do today (see chapter 1).

Esler (2003:217) contends that in using the expression “in Christ Jesus” (Rm 6:11-14), Paul desires his audience to understand the death and resurrection of Christ (made available to them in baptism) as providing a new foundation for their experience and identity. Every manifestation of the life of the baptized person is conditioned by his or her being in Christ; in fact a baptized person becomes a manifestation of the personality of Jesus Christ. Schweitzer (1953:125) maintains in this regard:

Though the expression has thus almost the character of a formula, it is no mere formula for Paul. For him every manifestation of the life of the baptized man is conditioned by his being in Christ. Grafted into the corporeity of Christ, he loses his creatively individual existence and his natural personality. Henceforth he is only a form of manifestation of the personality of Jesus Christ, which dominates that corporeity.

We come across the same expression in Galatians. Elliott (2003:178-187) remarks that Galatians 3:28 is a baptismal formula in threefold form that predates the Pauline mission and that is cited by Paul to assert the new social reality brought about by affiliation with Jesus Christ and baptismal conversion. For Elliott this three-fold statement declares that ethnic, social, and gender distinctions conventionally made in society are irrelevant for determining who is “in Christ” as a result of baptism and the confession of Jesus as Christ and Lord.<sup>50</sup> Such inclusion in Christ is determined by baptism and faith in God and in Jesus as the Christ, a faith of which “Judeans and Greeks”, slaves and free persons, males and females are all capable. This amounts to an elimination of discrimination, not an abolition of differentiation. Ethnic, legal, and social differences remain, but for followers of Jesus these are not determinative of union with Christ Jesus; faith alone is (see also 1 Cor 12:13; Col 4:1). People

who are distinguished from each other by law and separated by social practice and gender are integrated into one single community by means of baptism into Christ (cf Zizioulas 1985:28).

In contrast to scholars such as Crossan (1992:298), who uses the term “egalitarian” in reference to Jesus’ attitude regarding reversal of status, Elliott (2002:88) argues that to refer to the earliest Jesus-movement as egalitarian is an anachronistic statement which reflects a modern conception and valuation of equality. He considers that rather than mentioning equality, we should refer to the inclusiveness of the believing community and the oneness and unity of people who are “in Christ” (Elliott 2003:178).

Elliott (2002:84-85) elaborates this argument by saying that Jesus’ “teaching of reversal of status...did not constitute an elimination of status differentiation. Rather statuses of first and last, master-slave, rich-poor remained but were inverted.” To Elliott, within the Jesus-movement, differences of age, gender, class, and ethnicity were not eliminated, but remained as demarcations of status and identity. Children did not all of a sudden become leaders; slaves were not liberated and made equal to masters; women were not put on a social par with men; the disparity between poor and rich did not disappear. But – the sufferings caused by inequity were to be alleviated by almsgiving, generosity, and compassion toward one’s fellow human beings (cf Elliott 2003:181).

Elliott (2002:87; 2003:195) therefore concludes that Jesus did not proclaim a “radical egalitarianism”, eradicating the family and its structure of authority, because the family was in fact very important to Jesus. Rather, the new community of Jesus-followers led their lives according to the rules of the family – they could be described as God’s new “surrogate family” (cf Zizioulas 1985:28). What Jesus proclaimed, as the hallmark of the reign of God, was a “radical inclusivity” that relativized all conventional lines of discrimination and exclusion, as well as enjoining radical familial loyalty to God as Father and to one another

as brothers and sisters. Jesus consequently redefined the family along religious and moral, rather than biological, lines. Zizioulas (1985:28) concurs that baptism for the earliest Jesus-followers meant two things: a death of the “old person” – of the way in which personal identity was acquired through biological birth; and a birth – the emergence of an identity through a new set of relationships, provided by the church as the communion of the Spirit. Whereas, biological identity is always bound by necessity, spiritual birth involves freedom. The spiritual person does not simply act differently than the natural person; the spiritual person *is* different.

The family as the root metaphor of the believing community was crucial in terms of “achieving the social cohesion necessary for ensuring the independent viability of the movement and its resistance to external social and political pressures urging conformity and assimilation” (Elliott 2003:198). Elliott (2003:198-199) writes that the use of a household tradition served the aim

...not of assimilating to the Greco-Roman patterns of domination, but of resisting pressures to conform under the assurance that one’s place of belonging was in the *oikos tou theou*, not the emperor’s *patria*, that one’s father was not the Roman emperor claiming to be *pater patriae*, but the merciful heavenly father/progenitor who raised Jesus from the dead and brought about a regeneration to new life (1 Pet. 1:3; Tit. 3:5-7; John 3:1-18), that one’s closest allies and supporters were “brothers” and “sisters” in the faith, and that one’s ultimate familial loyalty (= *pistis*) was to none but this heavenly father, his resurrected child, and one’s fellow siblings in the faith.

Returning to Romans, Esler (2003:218-219) considers that by relating baptism to one’s liberation from the power of sin, Paul offers a totally different explanation from the one he provides in Galatians 3:26-28, where he celebrates the abolition of boundaries. In Galatians he argues that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, because all are one in Jesus Christ. But in Romans



Paul appears to be maintaining the importance of difference, especially in relation to the significance of “Judean” identity. To Esler (2003:218) the last thing Paul wants to say in Romans is that there is “neither Judean nor Greek”. In Romans Paul argues that all people are subject to sin, and subsequently he demonstrates that “non-Judeans” and “Judeans” succumb to the power of sin by means of different routes – “non-Judeans” in the absence of the law and “Judeans” while under it. Esler (2003:219) explains:

Paul’s strategy in reconciling Judeans and non-Judeans thus accords with the discovery of modern social psychologists that the establishment of a common ingroup identity will only succeed if the two subgroups concerned do not feel that their distinctive identities are threatened in the process – this is the ‘equal status-different dimensions condition’ that is a prerequisite to their successful recategorization.

When Paul then spells out the meaning of baptism in Romans 6:3-10 in relation to breaking the power of sin, Esler (2003:219) contends that he is not erasing the difference between “Judeans” and “non-Judeans”, because it is part of the picture that they fall victim to sin in different ways.

This view is confirmed in the way Paul structures his argument following Romans 6:1-15, by addressing himself first to the “non-Judean” Jesus-followers (Rm 6:15-23) and then to the “Judeans” (Rm 7):

That is, having spent much of chaps. 5-6 speaking of his addressees and himself as sharing the same ingroup identity, for example by the frequent use of first person plural verbs and pronouns, he now indicates that he has not forgotten the two subgroup identities that comprise his audience in the manner that modern social psychologists have suggested is essential if a process of recategorization is to be successful.

In conclusion it can therefore be suggested that the earliest Jesus-followers crossed taboo-boundaries in being baptized. They “re-enacted” what they were

“told” Jesus had “showed”. After being baptized they became members of a new society, in which they were required to live according to a specific ethic, which imparted *meaning* to their lives.<sup>51</sup> The ethics of Jesus brought about a “new world” (Duling & Perrin 1994:356). Although his ethics manifested itself throughout Jesus’ life, his death and resurrection constituted its zenith. The historical *foundation* of baptism among the Jesus-followers was based in the fact that Jesus abandoned the old value system (through his death) and led his followers (through his resurrection) to a new life in the service of God.

Particularly new in this value system were the love of one’s neighbor and humility (or renunciation of status) (Theißen 1999:63, 343-360; cf Schrage 1988:70-73, 76-78, 99, 106-107). These two *values* correlate with the fundamental dimensions of social relationships. Love of the neighbor has to do with the relationship between the in-group and the out-group (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:88-89). “Christian” love transcends this boundary. The renunciation of status encompasses abolishing a hierarchy of status: “high” or “low” positions for people (see Theißen 1999:64, 287).

This value system led to a *meaningful*, alternative lifestyle, made possible by means of the experience of alternate states of consciousness during baptism (and the Eucharist). Baptism comprised the initiation into this alternative lifestyle. In the first century a transition of this kind was imagined in an apocalyptic<sup>52</sup> worldview. In the Mediterranean culture of the first century a “spiritual” experience, such as a transformation of baptism with water to a baptism into death, pertains to what we would term “alternate states of consciousness”.

Alternate states of consciousness take their shape from the culture in which they appear (see chapter 2). Within the first-century Mediterranean social world these states usually manifested themselves where people believed that they were suffering on account of the powers of external demonic forces, which brought about disasters such as illness, death or conflict. Although they were powerless

amidst their crises, they “escaped” their world by taking refuge in a symbolic world where God was in control. Such a “spiritual” existence makes sense in the context of an alternative state of life in the presence of God.

Because of their apocalyptic worldview, Jesus-followers let themselves be baptized and by this ritual depicted their transition to this alternative lifestyle. The *reason* for baptism was to partake in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The *meaning* of their baptism denoted the appropriation of new *values* and a changed lifestyle. This new lifestyle not only impacted on their own lives. Their renunciation of status and their love for their neighbors also imparted meaning to the lives of others.

#### 4.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have theorized that the earliest baptism (like the earliest Eucharist) comprised an anti-language verbalization of alternate states of consciousness. By means of baptism, the earliest followers of Jesus experienced the presence of God directly in their lives, through receiving the Holy Spirit. They spoke about this in anti-language, since ordinary language was not adequate to verbalize such an extraordinary experience. These factors left a lasting effect on their lives – they were initiated into a community where they attempted to live according to the example Jesus has set, because they believed that they participated in his death and resurrection.

The *reason* why the earliest Jesus-followers placed such a strong emphasis on baptism, stemmed from the assumption that by means of his alternate states of consciousness, Jesus “showed” them what it meant to gain a new identity. The earliest Jesus-followers “told” this to others (by means of anti-language, which we can trace back in early texts bearing witness to the earliest baptism), because of the *value* baptism and the consequent membership of the “family of God” added to their lives. Every new member “re-enacted” Jesus’ baptism, because it imparted *meaning* to their existence.

I argue that baptism as a cultural ritual initiation and status transformation symbol thus explains the *reason* why the earliest followers of Jesus let themselves be baptized, the *value* they attached to their baptism and the *meaning* that it offered for their lives. Baptism reminded them of John's temple critique and Jesus' death as the termination of the temple ideology. It expressed the dissolution of selfish and exclusive social taboos. Not least, baptism provided the motivation for Jesus-followers to live ethically according to Jesus' vision and to discover existential meaning despite the threat of being killed themselves.

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## ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 4

<sup>1</sup> Much research regarding baptism focuses on the way in which baptism was performed in the early church and consequently on how it must be performed today (see e.g., Cullmann 1969; Barth 1981; Pelser 1981; Roy 1987; Yates 1993; König 1995; Wright 2002). The main point of debate is whether baptism must be performed on children or on adults, and whether immersion in or sprinkling with water was the way in which baptism was administered. This study does not focus on these issues.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Bradshaw 2002:1-20.

<sup>3</sup> One of the main reasons for this deduction is that the earliest baptism seems at first to have been “in the name of Jesus” rather than in that of the Trinity, as recorded in Matthew 28:16-20 (Bradshaw 2002:60).

<sup>4</sup> If proselyte baptism originated before the time of John, his baptism could be understood as a reinterpretation of that ritual, because similarities exist. But we have no evidence that the former emerged before the end of the first or beginning of the second century (Collins 1989:32-36).

<sup>5</sup> The baptism of John was most probably the best known baptismal practice in the early church; it features prominently in early Christian literature (see Ac 10:37-38; 13:24-25; Gospel of the Nazarenes, in Hiëronimus, *Contra Pelagius* 3.2; *GEb*, in Epiphanius, *Haer* 30.13.7 – see Tatum 1994:89-90).

<sup>6</sup> In order to comprehend the origins of the baptism of the early Jesus-followers, it is, thus, important to understand the nature of the baptism performed by John. The sources Collins (1989:28) thinks are the most reliable are Q (which is recoverable through a comparison of Mt and Lk), the four canonical Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and Josephus. Collins (1989:29-30) points out that the idea that John prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah reflects a typical Christian bias and is probably not historical. However, behind this Christian picture of John there might be a historical tradition that John presented himself as a forerunner, but that instead of speaking of a human messiah, he preached about a direct divine intervention.

<sup>7</sup> In Second Temple “Judaism” bathing was a common form of ablution. In the Hebrew Bible flowing (“living”) water was required for the most severe forms of uncleanness and it was also associated with repentance and forgiveness. John’s use of flowing water for his baptism of repentance for forgiveness is, thus, understandable (Webb 1994:188-189). Cullmann (1969:9-11), on the other hand, argues that John was influenced by the practice of Israelite proselyte baptism.

<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Pelser (1981:251-253) considers that there is no direct link between the baptism of John and the baptism of the earliest Jesus-followers. John saw his baptism and ministry only as a forerunner of that of Jesus. But this does not mean that John’s baptism did not influence the early Christian baptism. John’s baptism was primarily intended to symbolize repentance and conversion, and most probably also the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>9</sup> The parallelism between “being baptized” and “dying with Christ” is not only found in Rm 6:4, but is traceable through the whole of the New Testament. Examples are 1 Cor 1:13, Heb 6:4-6, 1 Jn 5:3 (Cullmann 1969:15).

<sup>10</sup> Collins (1989:37-42) points out that it is important to understand the connections between resurrection, eschatology and baptism. Among the Palestinian Jews of Jesus’ time, and also in the *Didache*, there was a widespread conviction that in the end time the dead would rise (Mt 24:30-31; 1 Cor 15:52; *Did* 16:6). To say that Jesus had been raised was, thus, not to declare a

fact about the fate of Jesus' body, but to affirm the conclusion that the new "eschatological" era has arrived, in which there will be a new relationship between God and humanity. To speak of a "christianized" Johannine baptism would most probably be the best explanation for this (see Hartman 1992:32-38). Mitchell (1995:247-248; emphasis by Mitchell) agrees: "It is the *eschatological horizon* that links John, Jesus, and the Christian rite. Of course, Christians did not simply repeat John's baptism. They altered its eschatological significance, exchanging John's emphasis upon repentance/forgiveness/God's wrathful judgment for Jesus' insistence upon God's compassionate presence as already arriving in the human world. Johannine 'forgiveness' suggested the cancellation of sins/debts, but Jesus' forgiveness implied...*God's own self-bestowal*. What is 'given' in forgiveness, according to Jesus, is nothing less than God's superabundant gift of self, God's self-communicating incarnation" (see Sheehan 1986:66). Hence, in the "early church", believers did not simply repeat John's baptism, they christianized it. Baptism became a ritual event that was carried out *in(to) the name of Jesus*, uniting the believer to the "eschatological" reality that was manifested by and experienced in Jesus' words and works, and confirmed by Jesus' resurrection. Although Jesus himself probably did not include baptism in his earthly ministry, the early Christians reappropriated it as a ritual means by which to link themselves (not so much to Jesus, but) to what Jesus stood for – the proclamation of God's gracious and definite arrival in turbulent secular life (see *Did 7*).

<sup>11</sup> Regarding the element of water in baptism, the following features are evident: water is rich in properties that allow for different functions. One of these functions is to promote life. Without water, life would not exist. Water not only produces life, but also beauty. Water is, thus, life-giving and life-enhancing. But water is also death-dealing. In huge amounts, it destroys all in its path. West (2001:127-128), therefore, arrives at the conclusion that in the sacrament of baptism, the "Christian" community, acting as the body of Christ, utilizes the image of water in both its death-dealing and life-giving functions. We observe this especially in the way the early church practiced baptism. The person being baptized first had to "die" by going down naked into the dark waters of a cistern or font located in or near the place of worship. Then the person would be "resurrected" ("come to life") when he or she emerged out of the waters. Baptism was (and still is) a sacrament of initiation whereby the person became a member of the "Christian" community, bound by the meaning that shaped the identity and mission of Jesus. Jesus took on a love that transformed him into a person who loved God and others. In the last word of his life, in his "Last Supper" and death, Jesus uttered the culminating and most dramatic expression of this love. This final word was answered by God's word of resurrection: Jesus went down into the "waters" of death and emerged into risen life as the climax of a lifelong pattern of dying and rising. To become a member of the "Christian" community is to share in Jesus' meaning, which is to accept a love that deals death to the selfish self so that the loving self might rise up.

<sup>12</sup> Circumcision was practiced by many societies in the ancient Middle East. However, the origins of circumcision are obscure. Although scholars originally thought that it had originated in Egypt and then moved east and north into the Semitic world, recent archeological discoveries hold that it began in the northwest Semitic world and moved south where the Egyptians adopted it. The meaning of the procedure varied (see Pilch 1996c:13-14).

<sup>13</sup> Cullmann (1969:65) holds the opinion that baptism became the fulfillment of circumcision. Roy (1987:85-86, 112) does not concur. He argues that if baptism replaced circumcision, then Israelite Jesus-followers would not have circumcised their children any longer, but this was not the case. Circumcision was emphatically retained and practiced alongside baptism. I consider with Roy that circumcision was still practiced among some of the early Jesus-followers who stemmed from the Israelite tradition, but the point I wish to make here is that baptism replaced circumcision as the *initiation* ritual (cf Ferguson 1988: 485-496).

<sup>14</sup> These criteria comprise:

- the “criterion of embarrassment” – Jesus’ followers would not have invented sayings or events that undercut their claims regarding Jesus and so provided evidence to those who opposed such claims;
- the “criterion of discontinuity” – words or deeds of Jesus that cannot be derived either from “Judaism” at the time of Jesus or from the “early church”;
- the “criterion of multiple attestation” – the presumption that the more numerous the independent sources that contain an account of a deed or saying of Jesus the more likely it is to be an authentic account;
- the “criterion of coherence” – that if a saying or deed is coherent with an established set of authentic sayings or deeds it is also likely to be authentic;
- and the “criterion of rejection and execution” – that an account of Jesus’ career must account for, or at least allow for, the fact of his execution (Davies 1995:53; cf Meier 1991:168-177; Van Aarde 2004a:127-129).

<sup>15</sup> One example is found in the explanation of Cullmann (1969:16-18). He poses the question: if people were baptized for forgiveness of sins, why did Jesus, despite his sinlessness, submit himself to baptism? He answers that at the moment of his baptism Jesus receives the commission to undertake the role of the suffering servant of God, who takes on himself the sins of his people. Cullmann’s motivation for this is that the heavenly voice in Mark 1:10-11 and Matthew 3:16-17 which commissions Jesus, is a citation from Is 42:1 (where it is stated that the servant of God must suffer for his people). Cullmann says that Jn 1:29-34 constitutes, so to speak, the first commentary on the Synoptic account. Cullmann (1969:20-21) is of the opinion that the author of the Fourth Gospel also understood Jesus’ baptism in the sense of proclaiming him the suffering servant: “Individual participation in the death and resurrection of Christ in Baptism is possible only after Christ has completed his general Baptism; and this is the reason why he himself was baptized by John, and why those received into the Church today are baptized” (Cullmann 1969:22). Another explanation is that by Davies (1995:54, 65; cf Strijdom 1998), who writes that Jesus’ baptism was the beginning of his career and that he underwent a spontaneous possession experience. Jesus saw the heavens torn open and a spirit descended in the form of a dove (Mk 1:9-10). During an initial possession experience visual hallucinations are not uncommon. Most likely, “Christians” believed that Jesus saw the spirit descend in the form of a dove because that was what Jesus saw and he told them about this event. Since a voice declared Jesus as the son of God (Mk 1:11; Jn 1:32-34), Jesus most probably believed that the spirit of God was such that when the spirit was active in him he was transformed into the Son of God (Davies 1995:61). Davies (1995:64) explains this as follows: “Throughout the story of Jesus’ baptism, the events related fit remarkably well with what one might predict in regard to an individual who came to baptism for repentance and who then received a spontaneous possession experience.”

<sup>16</sup> DeMaris (2002:147) understands the alternate state of consciousness that Jesus experienced at his baptism as possession trance (see chapter 2; Davies 1995:52-54). In cultures where possession trance comprises the typical alternate state of consciousness, spirit possession is triggered by ritual activity (see Goodman 1988a:37). DeMaris (2002:147-148) maintains: “Jesus’ baptismal scene as Mark describes it fits this sequence of features well: the ritual action of the baptism triggers spirit possession – the Spirit descending like a dove into Jesus – an altered state of consciousness – Jesus’ visual and aural encounter with the spirit world, that is, the heavens splitting and God speaking (Mark 1:10-11). The graphic language of possession softened over time; Luke and Matthew have the dove descending *upon* Jesus (*epi*; Matt 3:16; Luke 3:22) instead of *into* him (*eis*; Mark 1:10)...Moreover, Luke and Matthew eliminated Mark’s striking image of the Spirit driving or casting Jesus into the desert in the scene that follows (Mark 1:12; cf Matt 4:1; Luke 4:1). Only the Markan version preserves the vivid description of a spirit outside Jesus entering him and subsequently controlling him” (cf Davies 1995:171-172). DeMaris (2002:148) realizes that not every element in Mark’s account has an equal claim to historical reliability. The basic sequence of ritual action inducing possession trance is likely, but whether



John's baptism was the triggering rite is not certain. Another issue is that Jesus probably did enter an alternate state of consciousness in the form of spirit possession, but the features and content of what he encountered are historically less certain. Biblical scholars generally dismiss the historical reliability of what happens in Mark 1:10-11 because it resonates strongly with parts of the Israelite religious tradition, such as Genesis 22, Isaiah 42 and 64, and Psalm 2. But a social-scientific interpretation views such a resonance differently. In cultures with institutionalized alternate states of consciousness, people who experience these states will encounter what they have been socialized to expect. Since Jesus grew up in Israelite society we can assume that he knew and could have drawn from the stories of his culture in order to articulate what took place in his possession trance. DeMaris (2002:148-149) perceives another possible source for the specific features of Jesus' ritually induced possession trance in the experience of those who underwent baptismal entry into the Jesus-movement. He indicates that two key features of the Markan baptismal account recur in other passages in which baptismal language appears: Spirit bestowal and filial identification. Some groups in the Jesus-movement linked spirit possession or the bestowal of the Holy Spirit to baptism (Ac 2:38, 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; 2 Cor 1:21-22), and the Markan baptismal scene mirrors this link. DeMaris adds that filial or adoption language commonly occurs in the context of baptism (Gl 3:26-29; Rm 8:14-16). The same thing happened at Jesus' baptism, where the voice from heaven announces Jesus' divine sonship. Since baptism marked and enacted one's entry into the family of believers, it is not surprising that baptism evokes such language. These two common features suggest to many scholars (see DeMaris 2002:149) the shaping of Mark 1:9-11 according to the practice and perspective of the Jesus-movement. It is possible that some of the details of Jesus' ritual entry into a possession trance stemmed from the Jesus-movement and are, thus, not historically accurate, because if the Gospel writer intertwined community baptismal practice with a narrative about Jesus, what better place to begin the story than with Jesus' baptism (DeMaris 2002:148-149)? But the possibility also exists that activities other than the rite of baptism could have induced Jesus' alternate state of consciousness. These are sleep deprivation, solitude, fasting, or prayer. Or maybe there was no ritual. Alternate states of consciousness can occur spontaneously, usually in an individual's initial experiences of possession (see chapter 2). Since Jesus' baptismal vision represents the first report we have of Jesus going into a possession trance, perhaps it happened spontaneously. But because this is considered negative in many societies, as indicating demon-possession, apologetic motivations probably lie behind the introduction of baptism to the possession report (DeMaris 2002:149-151).

<sup>17</sup> This is also the case with the Eucharist (see Bradshaw 2002:144-145).

<sup>18</sup> In studies done during the early twentieth-century, there was a tendency to treat evidence from one geographical region as representing the custom of the universal "church", in the absence of any clear testimony to the contrary from other sources, and also to regard later Western practice as the normative standard against which deviations can be measured (Bradshaw 2002:144-145). One example of this is when Duchesne (1904:292-293), in his survey of "early Christian" worship, affirmed that "[t]he ceremonies of Christian initiation, such as they are described in authorities from the end of the second century onwards, consisted of three essential rites – Baptism, Confirmation, and First Communion." This tripartite ritual was preceded by a *catechumenate* and "ordinarily administered" at Easter "from the earliest times".

<sup>19</sup> See Bradshaw (2002:144-170) for a summary and critical survey of the information we have (and the reflection of scholars thereupon) regarding the origin and early practice of the initiation ritual of the early Jesus-movement.

<sup>20</sup> Although Mt 28:19 is not historically reliable (Van Aarde & Pelser 2001:37), it could reflect the importance of the baptismal practices in Jesus-groups.

<sup>21</sup> See Hartman (1992:32-33) for other views.



<sup>22</sup> For a differing perspective, see Morgan (1983:278-302). He holds the opinion that Rm 6:5 does not refer directly to baptism. According to him Paul referred to the believers' death to sin, a death which in its rejection of sin is a likeness of Christ's death. Davies (1995:184) on the other hand does regard Rm 6:1-11 as referring to baptism, but he describes Paul's understanding of baptism in this case in a distinctive way, namely, as a possession experience: "The experience of possession is...an experience of one's primary-persona exiting and of another persona entering. Diverse metaphors might be used for this...." Paul uses the metaphor to die and to rise again. The primary-persona identity declines and a second persona, the Spirit of Christ, arises. The significance of Christians' experience of death and resurrection was retrojected biographically back to the mythic occasion of Jesus' death and resurrection, giving personal and mythic significance to reports that some of Jesus' followers had seen him after he died. This most probably happened not long after the Pentecost event (Davies 1995:184).

<sup>23</sup> Collins (1989:42) adds: "These qualities of reenactment of a foundational story and the identification of the participant with the protagonist of the story are strikingly reminiscent of what is known about the initiation rituals of certain mystery religions, notably the Eleusinian mysteries and the Isis mysteries" (see Meyer 1987:17-30, 160-172, 176-193). Collins (1989:42) explains that at least forty years after Paul's death, the notion of death and rebirth was also attached to proselyte baptism in the Israelite tradition. Christian and rabbinic baptism both have their ultimate roots in the ritual washings of Leviticus (cf earlier discussion). Both came to function as rituals of initiation. The major difference is the relation of this ritual to "eschatology". Both expect a fulfillment but the two communities place themselves on different sides of the turning point between the two ages.

<sup>24</sup> To elaborate on the theme of burial, Petersen (1986:217) offers an interesting opinion that is worth mentioning, although his understanding of the "new society" of Jesus-followers differs from my view. He states that Pauline baptism can most comprehensively be explained in terms of the widely attested, cross-cultural phenomenon of secondary or double burial. Pilch (1995a:289) points out that although it is not mentioned in the New Testament, the practice of secondary burial was very common in the first century. Petersen (1986:218-222) argues that for Paul the baptismal burial marks the beginning of a process that will be completed when Christ returns, raises the people who have died, transforms the bodies of the believers into glorious bodies, and when all believers will become children of God in the kingdom of the Father. For the believer baptismal burial, thus, signifies the end of one form of life and the beginning of a transitional physical and social life that will terminate with the receiving of a new bodily form and a new social life in the kingdom of God (see 1 Cor 5-7; 12:13; Gl 3:26-4:7). This transitional period is of limited duration, because Paul expected Christ's return within his own lifetime: "For these reasons the church is a temporary form of social existence for those that have 'died' but have not yet been 'reborn' in their new bodily and social life" (Petersen 1986:218).

Secondary or double burial refers to the practice of a first, temporary burial in one place, which is followed by a final interment elsewhere. The second burial takes place after sufficient time has passed for organic matter to decompose and be separated from the bones: "The handling of the deceased's *remains*, however, is only a part of the total phenomenon because each of the three moments, the initial interment, the dessicatory process, and the final interment, is universally accompanied by a basically common concern for the fate of the deceased *person*" (Petersen 1986:222). The social actions undertaken with respect to the corpse from the first burial to the last are universally comprehended within a symbolic system oriented to the fate of the person during the whole process. These symbols vary according to the local cultural idiom, but are consistent in treating the fate of the person in terms of a transformation of social status. According to Hertz (1960:27-86) double burial shows that death is not completed in one act: it implies a procedure that is considered terminated only when the dissolution of the body has ended. Death is also not seen as destruction, but as a transition – while the old body falls into ruins, a new body takes shape, with which the soul will enter into another existence. To achieve this, the correct rites need to be performed. There is a kind of symmetry between the condition of the body (which must wait

a certain time before it can enter its final tomb), and the condition of the soul (which will be admitted into the land of the dead only when the last funeral rites are accomplished). Death, thus, marks the passage from one existence to another – from the visible society to the invisible. It is a temporary exclusion of the individual from human society (see Petersen 1986:223-225).

Although Paul never mentions secondary burial, Petersen (1986:226) claims that the ideas associated with it are present, especially in the notions of the believers' process of bodily transformation and incorporation into the kingdom of God as children of God. Petersen (1986:226), therefore, asserts that "Paul speaks of the deceased person who is involved in the process of social transition, not of the deceased's remains which are in the process of dessication. Viewed from this angle, Christ's parousia and subsequent actions in relation to the deceased person are the corollaries on a symbolic level of the society's actions in relation to the deceased's remains. Christ's parousia is therefore the symbolic corollary of a second burial. And corresponding to this corollary is the relationship between the dessication of 'flesh and blood' on the biological level and the 'putting on' of Christ on the symbolic level. Paul speaks from the perspective of the new man, not of the old one." Petersen (1986:226) concludes by arguing that modeled on the phenomenon of double burial, Pauline baptism is a ritual celebrating both the separation of believers from their former social states and their commencement of a transitional process of bodily transformation that will be completed at a certain moment in the future. Then they will be given a new form and will be incorporated into a new social reality (see 1 Cor 15:36b-38).

<sup>25</sup> According to Beattie (1968:215-216) the word "taboo" comes from Polynesia – there it means what is forbidden on pain of some ritual sanction, that is, of some penalty which is believed to be brought about by the mere fact of performing the forbidden act. It is believed that the breach of a taboo places the offender in a condition of ritual danger, and in many cultures this can only be relieved, if it can be relieved at all, by the performance of a specific cleansing ritual.

<sup>26</sup> Ac 8:37 is omitted in most manuscripts (in the NIV as well).

<sup>27</sup> Crossan (1992:267) makes an interesting remark regarding children in the *Gospel of Thomas*. He comments that here baptismal regeneration involved the destruction of duality, "...of that between the inner soul and the outer body, between the heavenly, androgynous image of God and its earthly, bifurcated counterpart, but most especially...between the female and male, so that sexual differentiation was negated by celibate asceticism." This fitted with the Gospel's overall asceticism, a world-negating isolation that mocked Jewish asceticism in favor of a far more radical, total, and cosmic abandonment (see *GTh* 6:1; 14:1, 27). According to Crossan (1992:267) this makes it clear why an infant is chosen as a metaphor for those entering the kingdom – a child is considered asexual and is, therefore, an appropriate image for the ideal "Christian" in the *Gospel of Thomas*, a Christian who is an ascetic celibate. A kingdom of children is a kingdom of the celibate.

<sup>28</sup> As mentioned earlier, Van Aarde (2004a) argues that Mark 10:15 does not refer to baptism.

<sup>29</sup> Whitaker (1960:1-218) provides translations of all the principal documents from which our knowledge of the church's baptismal rite is drawn (see Thurian & Wainwright 1983:5-8; Dix [1968] 1992:xi, xxxv-xxxvii, 23-39).

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed description of the origin of the ancient church orders, how reliable they are, their relationship and dependence on one another and the content of every church order, see Bradshaw 2002:73-97. For a critical discussion regarding the other liturgical sources, see Bradshaw 2002: 98-117.

<sup>31</sup> Since early sources are limited in number, later sources which may shed a light on earlier liturgical practices are also mentioned.

<sup>32</sup> Esler (2003:204) says that Tertullian's *De Baptismo*, written in Carthage (c 200), is the earliest Christian exposition of baptism that we have.

<sup>33</sup> According to Mitchell (1995:248), the baptismal liturgy of the *Didache* provides a reflection of a "Jewish-Christian" group (most probably from first-century Antioch) who wished to remain faithful to the *Torah*. It is a community who preached what Jesus preached, but who did not necessarily preach *Jesus*. They reappropriated practices which were repudiated by Jesus (e.g., fasting, liturgical prayer, baptism), explaining and defending these within an "eschatological" (and not a christological) horizon.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed discussion concerning the baptismal liturgy in the *Didache*, see Mitchell (1995:248-255).

<sup>35</sup> Greek text of *Did* 9:1-4 (see Pretorius 1980:20):

<sup>1a</sup> Peri\ de\ tou= bapti/smatoj, ou3tw bapti/sate:

<sup>1b</sup> ei0j to\ olnoma tou= patro\j kai\ tou= ui9ou= kai\ tou= a9gi/ou pneu/matoj e0n u3dati zw=nti.

<sup>4a</sup> pro\ de\ tou= bapti/smatoj pronhsteusa/tw o9 bapti/zwn kai\ o9 baptizo/menoj kai\ ei! tinej a!lloi du/nantai:

<sup>36</sup> The word "catechism" – the body of Christian teaching which became very popular in the later Middle Ages and thereafter – derives from the word "*catechumen*" (Stevenson 1989:38).

<sup>37</sup> In *Didache* 7 references are made to baptism, but none of the so-called "classical" elements that are regarded as essential for the celebration of "Christian" baptism in the course of the liturgical history are found here (Mitchell 1995:226-227). The community for which the *Didache* was written faced controversial issues about *Torah* observance and table fellowship (Mitchell 1995:238-240). According to Mitchell (1995:240) the redactor of the *Didache* implied that a minimum of adherence to "Jewish" *halakoth*, which govern ritual purity, is essential for baptism, which in turn is essential for participation in the community meal. Most probably, in the baptized community of the *Didache*, stricter members (e.g., Israelites with a Pharisaic background) would have found it impossible to conduct table fellowship with other Jews or with Gentile converts who observed less strict rules of ritual purity. Thus, in the *Didache*, baptism does not guarantee Eucharistic unity.

<sup>38</sup> A person could stay a catechumen as long as he or she wanted to. If such a person felt the desire to complete the initiation, and the rulers of the church deemed such a person worthy to be baptized, he or she passed into the category of the "elect" or "competents". At the beginning of Lent the names of those who were to be baptized on the evening of Easter were written down. During these solemn forty days they were obliged to be present frequently at church, in order to undergo exorcisms and to hear preparatory instruction on baptism. It was at Easter that baptism was ordinarily administered from the earliest times (Tert, *Bapt* 19). The vigil of Easter Sunday was devoted to this ceremony. If somebody could not participate in the initiation on this day, it was postponed to a later date in Eastertide. The last day for this purpose, Pentecost, soon came to be regarded as a second baptismal festival. The rites in regard to the *catechuminate* and baptism varied according to the country (Duchesne 1904:292-294; see Bradshaw 2002:118-122 for a critique of Duchesne's method of argumentation). After baptism the newly initiated participated in the holy mysteries for the first time. It was daybreak before this solemn ceremony came to an end (Duchesne 1904:315). These customs of course created the perfect circumstances for experiencing alternate states of consciousness.

<sup>39</sup> Baptism was regarded as so important that some people started to recommend delaying it, for example Tertullian toward the end of the second century. This brought about a debate whether

children should be baptized or not. Not to baptize children would mean excluding them from the Eucharist too. If children were not old enough to answer for themselves, sponsors from their families undertook this duty. Children were baptized first, before the adults. Anointing took place before and after baptism, and the bishop, who presided over the entire service, laid his hand on the newly baptized just before the second anointing. This laying on of hands began what was later on in the West called confirmation. As Christianity spread through the west of Europe in later years, the areas over which bishops presided (dioceses) became larger, with the result that the local bishop could not be present at every service of baptism. Hence, the part of the rite which consisted of laying his hand on the candidates became separated from the rest of the service and was performed as the giving of the Spirit when he could visit the local churches. At the Reformation, Anglicans and others kept the rites of confirmation but stipulated that it should be performed only when people were old enough to understand. It, thus, also became a rite of conscious commitment to Christ (Stevenson 1989:39-40).

<sup>40</sup> A similar account is available in the description of Judas' baptism of King Gūdnaphar, the king of India, in the *Acts of Judas Thomas*: "And the king gave orders that the bath should be closed for seven days, and that no man should bathe in it. And when...the seven days were done, on the eighth day they three entered into the bath by night that Judas might baptize them. And many lamps were lighted in the bath. And when they had entered into the bath-house, Judas went in before them. And our Lord appeared unto them, and said to them: 'Peace be with you, my brethren.' And they heard the voice only, but the form they did not see, whose it was, for till now they had not been baptized. And Judas went up and stood upon the edge of the cistern, and poured oil upon their heads, and said: 'Come, holy name of the Messiah; come, power of grace...come, Spirit of holiness, and purify their reins and their hearts.' And he baptized them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit of holiness. And when they had come up out of the water, a youth appeared to them, and he was holding a lighted taper; and the light of the lamps became pale through its light....And when it dawned and was morning, he broke the Eucharist and let them partake of the table of the Messiah; and they were glad and rejoicing" (Wright [1871] 1968:166-167). The seven days represent a time of preparation like the two days of fasting. We do not know when oil entered the baptismal liturgy. Eventually, it was used twice, once over the whole body before baptism and then just on the head as a perfume when the bath was over. The single use of oil in the baptism of King Gūdnaphar is a symbol of the descent of the Spirit. Symbolism is also evident in the light which is brought into the baptismal chamber. In time, this became a candle that was given to the newly baptized when they moved from the baptistery to the church. Everyone else would have had a candle or lamp, since the service began late at night and ended early in the morning. Being able to see in the dark became a symbol – possessing the light of Christ (Stevenson 1989:37-38). This description of baptism makes it clear that the candidates probably experienced alternate states of consciousness. The fasting beforehand, the darkness, and the lamps could all have played an important role in inducing alternate states of consciousness, which led to the experience of the presence of the Lord.

<sup>41</sup> Hippolytus describes baptism as taking place after the candidates had removed their clothing. It seems that the nakedness of male and female persons was not a matter of concern. According to Esler (2003:205) this could reflect the common practice of naked men and woman bathing together in the Roman public baths: "After disrobing, each candidate enters the tank with the person who will effect the baptism, the baptizer apparently pushing that candidate's head under the water. This happened three times according to Hippolytus...."

<sup>42</sup> In some other instances it is said that the elder stated the affirmations of faith while the initiate simply affirmed acceptance.

<sup>43</sup> According to *Didache* 7, immersion should take place in running water. But this was not a very strict rule: "If no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water. This should be cold if possible, otherwise warm. If neither is practicable, then pour water three times on the head...."

(Stevenson 1989:35). Esler (2003:204-205) remarks that in the early period at least, the person being baptized was probably pushed right under the water, head and all. He argues thus because of the suggestion in the Gospel accounts that Jesus saw the heavens rent asunder when he came up out of the water, as if the fact that his face was under water would have prevented his seeing this earlier. In Acts 8:38-39 we notice a similar effect in Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. The source of water used for this baptism in an urban setting is puzzling. It is possible that the people involved went to the nearest river, because in the *Didache* there is a preference for "living" (running) water. In *De Baptismo*, Tertullian comments that it does not matter what sort of water is used, in that "there is no difference between those whom John 'dipped in the Jordan' and Peter in the Tiber". Tertullian apparently made this remark incidentally while proving another point, which could, therefore, constitute evidence that he thought that Peter had baptized in the Tiber – using a nearby river, in other words. In the *Traditio apostolica*, Hippolytus mentions a baptismal tank which is fed with running water (probably from one of the city's aqueducts). This leads Esler (2003:205) to the conclusion that baptism in the Tiber may have become too risky after Jesus-followers began to be persecuted, in Nero's reign especially. He adds that another possibility is baptism in one of Rome's baths. If we take into account that the priests of Isis at Cenchreae made use of the "nearest bath" for the customary ablution of the initiate, this might be a possibility – especially if the baptism occurred when the baths were less frequented.

<sup>44</sup> Oetting (1970:29) argues that the *Didache*, Justin Martyr, and Hippolytus make it clear that the common form of baptism in the early church was immersion. This symbolized dying and rising again with Christ. But pictures in the Roman catacombs depict the initiate being drenched with water poured from a seashell; and Cyprian (*Letter* 69, 7-11) comments that the manner in which the water was applied was of minor importance as long as it was carried out by a priest of the true church.

<sup>45</sup> Although we know that the Eucharistic meal was a repeated event that involved the whole community as a community, baptism was an event that could not be repeated, and had an impact on an individual within the community. But Esler (2003:208) constitutes that it is highly likely that baptism occurred in the presence of the community. He bases his argument on the fact that Hippolytus records that after baptism the candidates could give the "kiss of peace" to the rest of the congregation for the first time, which is presumably evidence for the presence of the rest of the community.

<sup>46</sup> In this regard, Esler (2003:206) writes (my emphasis): "The presence of the Spirit that Christ-followers experienced so powerfully at baptism *may* have led to the reworking of Jesus' baptism by water in the Jordan so as to include the feature of the Spirit descending like a dove upon him."

<sup>47</sup> In Rm 8:1-17, Paul describes a life in the Spirit. Although he does not mention baptism as the direct beginning of this life, Esler (2003:208) contends that it is reasonable to impute this belief to him.

<sup>48</sup> Although I concur with Esler, I consider it worthwhile to mention the different opinion of Cranfield (1994/95:41-42), namely, that Rm 6:3-4a indicates that the Roman Jesus-followers' baptism is intimately connected with their relationship to Christ's death. They were baptized into his death; through their baptism they were buried with him into his death. But a number of passages in Paul's letters speak of the Jesus-followers' death with Christ and new life in him as based on the gospel events themselves yet make no mention of baptism (e.g., Rm 7:4, 6; 2 Cor 5:14-15, 17; Gl 2:19-20), which could indicate that Paul did not think of baptism as actually effecting this death with Christ. Baptism does not establish the relationship. It attests a relationship already established. Thus, for Paul, baptism, which, as the act of the person baptized, is the outward confirmation of the human decision of faith, is, as God's act, the sign and seal and pledge that the benefits of Christ's death for all people really do apply to this individual human being in particular. Cranfield (1994/95:42), thus, concludes: "Our baptism is God's



confirmation, God's guarantee, of the fact that Christ's death was for us," that God sees us as having died in his death.

<sup>49</sup> See Moo (1996:364) for a different opinion, namely, that after Romans 6:4 Paul never writes about baptism again.

<sup>50</sup> Davies (1995:185; cf Ludwig 1966:78) understands this passage from the viewpoint of possession theory. To Davies Paul insists that in a group possessed by the same spirit, all who are possessed necessarily have an identical new persona and so are metaphorically one body, and in theory, psychologically one person; all are one person in Jesus Christ. And because of this there cannot be any distinction on the basis of ethnic, gender, or class differences (Gl 3:26-28). The logic of Paul's paradigm regarding possession is based on two axioms. First, from monotheism: there is only one Spirit. Second, from possession theory generally: a person possessed acquires the identity of the possessing entity. Distinctions in the manifestations of the possession experience are distinctions in the "gifts" of one Spirit. Unpossessed people are individuated; but individuals possessed by one Spirit constitute one person. Paul writes that this one person in Jesus Christ may metaphorically be considered the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1-31).

<sup>51</sup> Symbols function as expressions of a new value system. Thompson (1998:55) describes the ethic of the earliest Jesus-followers, as the existential meaningfulness of the life of the baptized, using a contemporary metaphor: "Access to the holy internet started with the 'gateway' of faith and baptism, which was free, but not cheap. Belonging to the body of Christ meant immediate access to the network of Christian believers, but communication also depended on the 'protocol software' of hospitality, without which no church could meet and no message could travel."

<sup>52</sup> As I explained in chapter 1, apocalyptic thinking comes to the fore when religious people feel that they cannot alter their unbearable circumstances by themselves. Then they reach out to God for help. They believe that God will soon bring an end to this wicked world and call a righteous world into existence (cf Rist 1989:157; Van Aarde 1994b:79-80).

## CHAPTER 5

### THE EUCHARIST

#### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

The earliest Eucharist is a symbolic ceremony. In chapter 1, I suggested that symbolic rites carry *meaning* because they are performed for a *reason* and they add *value* to people's lives (cf Beattie 1968:69-70). Therefore, the aim<sup>1</sup> of this chapter is to investigate the *reason* why the first followers of Jesus participated in the Eucharist, what it *meant* for them and what kind of *value* it added to their lives. In addition to this, I shall also consider the origin of the earliest Eucharist, since this might indicate the role alternate states of consciousness (as discussed in chapter 2) played in the earliest celebrations of the Lord's Supper. Here the summary at the end of chapter 1 is relevant: By means of the rites of baptism and the Eucharist, the early church "re-enacted" alternate states of consciousness that Jesus "showed" dynamically during his lifetime, and which they were "told" about by means of anti-language employed by the earliest Jesus-followers.

In the previous chapter, I argued that by means of the ritual of baptism, Jesus-followers were initiated into a new group, the "family of God". This implied a transformation in status, which in turn conferred new roles and responsibilities on the baptized. Here the Eucharist, as a ceremony of integration (see Theißen 1999:121), plays an important role. Regular participation in the Eucharist confirmed these new roles and responsibilities. Neyrey (1991:363) describes this process as follows: "Meals-as-ceremonies replicate the group's basic social system, its values, lines, classifications, and its symbolic world." As I contended in chapter 3, ceremonies are predictable and occur regularly; they are determined, called for, and presided over by officials; and they function to confirm roles and statuses within the chief institutions of the group (Neyrey 1991:362).

My purpose in this chapter is as follows: I shall firstly accord attention to the *reason* why the earliest Jesus-followers participated in the Eucharist, which will entail an examination of the foundation of the earliest Eucharist. Then, I shall discuss the *value* that participation in the Eucharist added to the lives of the earliest Jesus-followers, which will encompass an examination of Eucharistic formulae for traces of anti-language. Lastly, I shall examine the *meaning* which participation in the Eucharist entailed for the earliest Jesus-followers, which will further entail a discussion of holy meals as cultural ceremonial symbols.

## **5.2 REASON: FOUNDATION OF THE EARLIEST EUCHARIST**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

In this section, I intend to discuss the foundation and origins of the earliest Eucharist in a cursory manner. This topic has been of great scholarly interest for many years and it continues to stimulate debate to the present day (see e.g., Jeremias 1949; Lietzmann [1955] 1967; Bornkamm 1963, 1971; Bultmann 1984; Theißen 1999; Bradshaw 2002; Smith 2003). As in the previous chapter, it is not my intention to offer a complete survey of all the issues at stake. I shall only refer to certain aspects that I regard as valuable for the topic discussed in this chapter.

In the following section, I shall indicate where one should start looking for the origin of the earliest Eucharist. Then, since the Eucharist is a ceremonial *meal*, I shall spend some time on the form of first-century Mediterranean meals. The formulae of institution as we find them in Paul and Mark are also important for the understanding of the foundation of the earliest Eucharist. Attention will also be given to the questions concerning the similarities with the Israelite Passover tradition, and the apocalyptic banquet. I shall conclude this section with a discussion of the last meal Jesus had with his disciples as well as his other meals, which I consider as the foundation of the earliest Eucharist.



In other words, this section of the chapter will describe Jesus' "showing", which was the *reason* the earliest Jesus-followers participated in the Eucharist.

### 5.2.2 Origins of the earliest Eucharist

In the search for the origins of the earliest Eucharist, one comes across more questions than answers.<sup>2</sup> Bradshaw (2002:72) observes that there "is relatively little about which we can be sure with regard to this subject," especially since the New Testament paints a pluriform picture in this regard (Bradshaw 2002:231; cf Pelser 1987:557; Theißen & Merz 1996:70-71).

Smith (2003:286; see Bradshaw 2002:122; contra Duchesne 1904:49-55) points out that church historians have come to recognize the need to rethink the origins of the Eucharist.<sup>3</sup>

Previously it had been widely assumed in scholarship that a straight line could be drawn from the earliest Christian meals, perhaps even the last meal of Jesus, to the fourth-century Eucharist. This assumption must now be rethought. We can no longer draw such a line. The earliest evidence testifies to significant local variations in early Christian community meal practices. In addition, the change from communal meal to the fourth-century form of the Eucharist is too severe.

Scholarship investigating early Christian meal traditions tends to concentrate only on certain aspects when investigating the issue of the origins of the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> In this regard Smith (2003:4) names the significant studies of Jeremias (1949) and Lietzmann (1967). He writes that although they appear to reach different conclusions, closer analysis reveals that they share similar perspectives. Jeremias identifies the Passover meal as the original setting of Jesus' Last Supper and therefore as the source for the orthodox form and theology of the Lord's Supper. Other scholars, like Bornkamm (1963:149), do not concur with this conclusion. Jeremias operates on the assumption that there is only one origin of the "Christian" Eucharist. This perspective has tended to dominate most

studies on its origins. This view, however, represents a retrojection onto the ancient sources of the form taken by the Eucharist in the later “orthodox” church. Lietzmann (1967) adopts a similar perspective. He begins with the later period and proceeds backwards to search for origins. He differs from Jeremias in that he makes no connection with Passover traditions and does not presuppose a single origin for the Eucharist. Instead, he posits two basic forms of the Eucharistic liturgy. He then traces these two forms back to two separate origins in the tradition of the “early church” (Lietzmann 1967:158-186). According to Smith (2003:4-5), neither Jeremias nor Lietzmann studies the ancient data in their own right and on their own terms, because they construct models for analyzing the ancient data based on the form of the Eucharist in the later church. Smith proposes a different theory for the development of the earliest Eucharist. He argues that the occurrence of meals in community settings and the symbolic value they bore comprised part of what he calls the “common banquet tradition”. “Early Christianity” was made up of varied groups, who adapted the common banquet tradition to their own situations (cf Neyrey 1991:364-365). Smith (2003:5) suggests:

This proposal fits the form of our data, which witnesses to a variety of ways in which early Christians practiced communal meals. The process eventually led to the collapsing of all these traditions into one orthodox form and liturgy. One would therefore expect to find a unified liturgy at the latter end of the process. In the early period, however, the liturgies of the church were just as diverse as were its other features.

Smith (2003:287) further indicates that a certain evolution took place (cf Duchesne 1909:385; Marxsen 1979:114):

The primary change from symposium to Eucharist is the evolution of the ritual from the dining table to the altar and from the social world of the banquet to that of church order. This change began to take place rather quickly, as documented in early Christian literature and supported by

archaeological evidence. It represented a transition from the social code of the banquet to another social code. The banquet tradition was carried on somewhat longer in the form of the *agape*, or fellowship meal. This ritual meal coexisted with the Eucharist for some time and tended to carry the traditions of the banquet. The Eucharist, on the other hand, soon lost its connection with banquet traditions. New Testament texts still maintain the connection, however, and provide a means for the church ever and again to reexamine its origins and renew its theology by recapturing and reconfiguring its own traditions.

As I mentioned in chapter 1, if we consider the background to the manner in which the earliest Jesus-followers worshipped, we can clearly perceive many influences, among which the Greco-Roman mystery religions and the Israelite tradition<sup>5</sup> stand out specifically (cf De Jonge 2001:227-228; Bradshaw 2002:21-46). Bradshaw (2002:22) explains that although “Judaism” as well as “early Christianity” were exclusivist in certain respects, neither of these religions existed in a vacuum, insulated from the language, images, and practices of the cultures and religions around them. Although this probably happened unconsciously, they were influenced by their contemporaries. The words and actions of their worship were shaped by the society in which they lived.

If one keeps the development of early Jesus-movements in mind, it is only logical that “Christianity” inherited many of its liturgical practices from “Judaism”. But we must remember that liturgical practices in the Israelite tradition were not fixed and uniform in the first century (cf Bradshaw 2002:23). Regarding meals in the Israelite tradition, Smith (2003:133; cf Soggin 2001) points out:

Meals held a special place in the social world of Second Temple Judaism. The religious calendar was marked by numerous feasts whose origins were traced to the very beginnings of Jewish tradition. The law or Torah included a number of dietary restrictions that marked off observant Jews from the rest of ancient society. Various Jewish groups who organized as

separate sects within Judaism tended to celebrate their separateness and cohesiveness by holding special meals together.

Smith (2003:134) also traces the Israelite meal tradition back to the Greco-Roman banquet tradition. He asserts that over a long period of Jewish history, beginning with the Second Temple period and extending into the early rabbinic period, meal traditions were strongly influenced by the Greco-Roman banquet tradition. The meal traditions in Israel are thus not a unique phenomenon. There were distinctive features in the Israelite tradition, but “the form taken by Jewish meals in the Greco-Roman period on any particular occasion or in any particular setting was that of the Greco-Roman banquet” (Smith 2003:171). In addition the literary tradition in Israel used to describe meals largely derived from the Greek symposium tradition (cf Mack 1988:116-117). Especially notable is the way in which meals functioned to define group identity within Israel. The dietary laws also represented a more precise way in which meals defined boundaries, and the messianic banquet represented a mythologization of the festive banquet that was part of the common banquet tradition (Smith 2003:171). Thus, Smith (2003:172) contends that:

Jewish meals of the Second Temple period are seen to be embedded in the Greco-Roman banquet tradition in form, ideology, and literary descriptions. Though there are some distinctive aspects to Jewish meal traditions, these are best interpreted as subdivisions of the general banquet tradition and often can be seen as variations of common aspects of that tradition.

In contrast to this view, Bradshaw (2002:71) argues that although recent studies (like this one by Smith)<sup>6</sup> indicate that the symposium could have been the model on which “Jewish” and “Christian” formal meal practices might have been based, it was probably not the only pattern which meals in the circles of Jesus-followers adopted during the first century.

The answers to two questions in particular could shed light on the origins of the earliest Eucharist, namely:

- Why did the early Jesus-followers meet at meals? Because that is what groups in the first-century world did. Jesus-movements simply followed a pattern found throughout their world.
- What kind of meal did the early followers of Jesus celebrate? They celebrated a meal based on the banquet model found commonly in their world<sup>7</sup> (Smith 2003:279; cf Mack 1988:115; Neyrey 1991:363-365).

The general form of meals in the first-century Mediterranean world is now considered.

### **5.2.3 Meals in the first-century Mediterranean world**

Since the Eucharist is a ceremonial *meal*, an understanding of the way in which meals were conducted in the first-century Mediterranean world – the historical context of this particular meal – could shed light on the origins and meaning of the earliest Eucharist.

Malina (1986:191) points out that as universal human behavior, “eating and drinking as well as non-eating<sup>8</sup> and non-drinking provide the raw, objective stuff that individual cultures or social systems might endow with meaning and feeling.” This “raw, objective stuff” forms part of human social experience and allows for the development of “‘natural’ symbols”<sup>9</sup> (see Douglas 1996:37-53). Although everyone eats meals daily, meals and table fellowship are highly complex social events. For this reason, Neyrey (1991:362) believes that the social sciences are particularly helpful in examining the available material concerning meals, food and table-fellowship. As natural symbols, consumption and non-consumption can bear both general and highly specific meanings. But the specific meanings that consumption and non-consumption might carry depend upon the manifold features of a given social system. In no society are people permitted to eat everything, everywhere, with everyone, and in all situations. The consumption of

food is governed by rules and usage which cut across each other at different levels of symbolization. Some anthropologists even speak of food as a “code”<sup>10</sup> which communicates a multi-layered message: “If food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries....Food categories... encode social events” (Douglas 1972:61; 1975:249).

Thus, to Elliott (1991:388), beyond supplying nourishment, food and meals exhibit a variety of social capacities: “They can serve as boundary markers distinguishing types and groups of participants and consumers: men/women, adults/children, humans/gods/demons, kin/non-kin, upper/lower classes, insiders/outsideers.” Food and meals also comprise the media of social and economic exchange. “Like the exchange of women in marriage or of other gifts and services across group boundaries, the sharing of food and hospitality plays an important role in the maintaining or modifying of social relations” (Elliott 1991:388; cf Van Staden 1991:217).

Formal meals in the Mediterranean culture of the Hellenistic and Roman periods (the period encompassing the origin and early development of “Christianity”) usually took on a homogeneous form. For Smith (2003:2), “[a]lthough there were many minor differences in the meal customs as practiced in different regions and social groups, the evidence suggests that meals took similar forms and shared similar meanings and interpretations across a broad range of the ancient world” (Smith 2003:2; cf Mack 1988:81; Neyrey 1991:364-365).

When the earliest Jesus-followers gathered, they regularly ate a meal together<sup>11</sup> (see e.g., Ac 2:46). Smith (2003:1-2) remarks that in so doing “...they were no different from other religious people in their world: for when any group of people in the ancient Mediterranean world met for social or religious purposes, their gatherings tended to be centered on a common meal or banquet.” The meals

also tended to follow the same basic form, customs, and rules, regardless of the group, occasion or setting (cf Mack 1988:114-115). The banquet, the traditional evening meal, became the pattern for all formalized meals in the Mediterranean world, whether these meals were “sacred” or “secular”. There was a religious component to every secular meal and every “sacred” banquet was also a social occasion (cf Smith & Taussig 1990:21-22; De Jonge 2001:209). Hence, the banquet can be called a “social institution” in the Greco-Roman world. If we thus desire to know more about Greek philosophical banquets, or Israelite festival meals, or the community meals of early Jesus-followers, we may gain insight from a prior understanding of the larger phenomenon of the banquet as a social institution.

In the first-century Mediterranean world meals, therefore, represented a social code that expressed patterns of social relations, which we can call the ideology of the banquet. This can be perceived in the function of meals as defining groups and their values. Eating together implied that people shared common ideas, values and social status (cf Van Staden 1991:200). People paid close attention to who ate with whom (e.g., Mk 2:15-17), who sat where (e.g., Lk 14:7-11), what they ate and drank (e.g., Lk 7:33-34) and where (e.g., Mk 6:35-36), how the food was prepared (e.g., Jn 21:9), which utensils were used (e.g., Mk 7:4), when the meal took place (e.g., Mk 14:12; Jn 13:1), and what was discussed at table (e.g., Lk 22:24-38) (see Neyrey 1991:368; Pilch 1996c:95). The patterns of social relationships that comprise ancient banquet ideology can consequently be divided into the following categories (Smith & Taussig 1990:30-35; Smith 2003: 9-12; cf Neyrey 1991:364-368; Crossan 1994:68-69):

- *Social boundaries*: The defining of boundaries is central to the social code of banquets. Whom one dines with defines one’s placement in a larger set of social networks. The social code of the banquet represents a confirmation and ritualization of the boundaries that exist in a social institution.

- *Social bonding*: A meal creates a special tie among the diners; it defines boundaries between different groups. In the New Testament Jesus is defined as a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Mk 2:15-17) on the grounds of dining with them. “[S]hared table-fellowship implies that Jesus shares *their* world...” (Neyrey 1991:364).
- *Social obligation*: Because a meal created a special tie among the diners, it led in turn to an ethical obligation between them (1 Cor 11:17-22) (cf Elliott 2003:194).
- *Social stratification*: People who dined at a first-century table were always aware of their different social rankings. Even the act of reclining indicated rank, for this posture was reserved for free, male, citizens. Women, children and slaves had to sit when they ate. Social stratification was also visible in the practice of ranking the guests by their position at the table as well as by the quality or quantity of food a person was given. We perceive this for example in the placement of individuals according to their rank in the community at the communal meal of the Essenes at Qumran (1QS 2.11-22).
- *Social inclusivity*: Although the social rankings of the guests were assumed, there was also a sense of social inclusivity among them. Those who dined together were to be treated in the same fashion. One observes this in the Passover liturgy specification that the poor should also recline equally at table on this occasion and receive at least four cups of wine (M Pes 10.1).
- *Festive joy*: A proper banquet could be judged by how well it promoted festive joy.



- *Banquet entertainment*: The first-century banquet presupposed entertainment as part of the event. This could take the form of anything, like party games, dramatic presentations, music, or philosophical conversation.

We can observe examples of some of these characteristics in the New Testament. Douglas (1966:126-127) points out that in cultures where the external boundaries of the social system are understood as being under pressure, purity systems distinguishing between pure and polluted, or clean and unclean, food and persons, may develop as a social mechanism for strengthening weak moral or legal structures. Elliott (1991:389) argues that this was the case in the post-exilic Israelite tradition, especially in Pharisaic ideology. For the Pharisees, food and meals formed a mediating link between the temple with its altar and the private home and its table. According to Luke-Acts, this purity system, linked with the temple and legitimated in the Mosaic law and oral tradition of the Pharisees, constituted the system with which Jesus and his followers came into conflict.<sup>12</sup> Elliott (1991:390) says: "Within the Lucan narrative, a new food code replicates and supports a new social code, a code consonant with a new vision of an inclusive salvation and an inclusive community of the redeemed" (cf Neyrey 1991:361; Esler 1996:71-109). Elliott (1991:391) adds that in Luke-Acts (e.g., Ac 10:1-11:18), the pattern of domestic relations and the intimacy and solidarity it presumes, serves as the decisive model for the identity and ethos of the "Christian" community as a whole:

This form of community ordered around the roles, relationships and responsibilities of the household stands in stark contrast to the exploitative system of the Temple, and embodies an alternative vision of salvation based not on cultic purity but on the gift of divine mercy and its imitation in the family of faith.

The following features were characteristic of the Greco-Roman banquet:

- Although the *posture* was that of sitting in Homeric times, it later altered to one of reclining.
- The *time* of the banquet was in the evening (cf De Jonge 2001:209).
- *Invitations* were assumed to be a normal part of a formal banquet. They were communicated verbally or in writing and were usually sent out a few days in advance for a practical reason, namely to fill the quota of guests (Sir 13:9; Xen, *Sym* 1.2-7).
- Archeological discoveries have provided us with plans for typical *dining rooms* in the Greek and Roman world. Usually an individual would host a banquet in his house. In a normal Greek city various public buildings also offered banquet facilities, including temple complexes (1 Cor 8:10). Dining rooms were designed so that couches could be arranged around a central axis and diners could share tables and communicate easily with each other (cf De Jonge 2001:210). The same design was used for domestic, public, and religious settings.
- The Greeks customarily included two *courses* in their banquet – the part where the meal would be eaten (*deipnon*) followed by the drinking party (*symposion*).<sup>13</sup> Roman banquets consisted of the same two basic courses, but they also served appetizers at the beginning of the meal. During the Roman period, the Greeks also added appetizers (Athan 2.58b-60b).
- The *menu* at a banquet consisted of bread and various vegetables, with fish or meat when the meal was extravagant. Wine was usually drunk mixed. Common proportions were five parts of water to two of wine or three of water to one of wine (Athan 10.426d).

- The end of the first course and the beginning of the second were marked off by special *rituals*, beginning with the removal of the tables and the bringing in of the wine bowl for mixing the wine. The beginning of the symposium would then be marked by the offering of a libation to the gods and by other religious ceremonies, such as the singing of a hymn (Pl, *Symp* 176A). In the Israelite tradition there developed a traditional benediction over the wine (M Ber 6:1).
- The seating of the guests always took place according to their *social rank*. The symposium began with the selection of a presiding officer or “symposiarch”, who set the rules for the drinking party to follow. The person occupying the highest position at the table was the guest of honor, and the other diners would be arranged according to their rank to his<sup>14</sup> right (Lk 14:7-11; Plut, *QConv* 615D) (cf Neyrey 1991:364).
- The *host* was responsible for the guest list, the menu, the provision of a place for the banquet, as well as for the arrangement of the places the guests would occupy at the table (cf Van Staden 1991:218).
- It was customary for the household servant to *wash the feet* of the guests before they reclined (Lk 7:44; Pl, *Symp* 175A) (cf Van Staden 1991:220). *Washing the hands* before the meal was also a normal part of Greco-Roman banquet customs (Mk 7:3; M Hag 2:5).
- The symposium represented a time for extended leisurely drinking of wine accompanied by *entertainment* or philosophical discussions (Xen, *Sym* 9.2-7; Pl, *Symp* 176E; Sir 9:14-15; M Av 3.3; Ac 20:7). The standard entertainment was provided by a flute girl (see Smith & Taussig 1990:23-28; Smith 2003:20-38).

All of these aspects can be noticed in Paul's arguments in his letters – he refers to the power of the meal to create *social bonding* and define *social boundaries*. His arguments for social ethics within the community probably draw on banquet traditions of *social obligation* toward one's meal companions. He responds to issues of *social stratification* at the table but especially develops the theme of *social inclusiveness*. Paul utilizes many features from the rules of *banquet entertainment*, suggesting that worship took place at the community table (see Smith 2003:175). Van Staden (1991:216) considers that since Jesus frequently taught during the setting of a meal, a connection can be made between Jesus' table talk and the literary genre of the symposium, where table talk was a significant feature (cf Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:142).

If we read the Gospels in this light, according to Smith (2003:219-221) meals in these documents also consistently reflect the Greco-Roman banquet tradition. One example is that in the descriptions of meals that Jesus ate, the posture seems to be one of reclining. If one keeps the schema suggested in chapter 1 in mind, the different layers of the Jesus tradition may identify the way in which the banquet motif is functioning in the Gospels:

- At the “showing” level, the level where Jesus of Nazareth acted, there are two usages of the banquet commonly referred to in the literature. One is the banquet used as a motif within the preaching of Jesus, as, for example, in the parables (Mt 22:2//Lk 14:6) (cf Scott [1989] 1990:161-174). The other type is represented by a collection of references to meals hosted by or participated in by Jesus. These types of meal texts are usually presented as a kind of “parabolic action”, by means of which Jesus would proclaim a particular message (Mt 11:18-19//Lk 7:31-35; the Last Supper). To Smith (2003:220) the presentations of these meals in the Gospel tradition function as idealizations of Jesus as a hero. The extent to which the motif of Jesus at table accurately represents the historical Jesus is a complex issue. At least, Smith writes, this data testifies to a Jesus

who self-consciously chose a lifestyle that was positive toward the banquet table as compared to the ascetic lifestyle of John the Baptist (cf Mack 1988:80-83).

- At the “telling” level, commonly referred to as the “oral tradition”, in the period after Jesus’ death, Jesus’ followers told stories about him in the context of the fledgling communities. The banquet emerged as a useful motif for defining aspects of the hero, Jesus. During this period Jesus-groups were also centering many of their communal religious activities on meals, which gave special significance to the stories of Jesus at table. At this point in the tradition, the typification of Jesus as a table companion of “tax collectors and sinners” became a symbol for the identity of these groups.
- At the level of “re-enactment”, the earliest written materials utilized these already existing motifs in the tradition and expanded them, drawing especially upon the varied usages of the banquet motif in Greco-Roman literature. Smith (2003:220) avers that the Gospels continued this trend, so that the banquet became a stock literary motif to serve the theological interests of Gospel writers. In addition, references to meal traditions in the Gospels served to enhance the communal meals being practiced in their communities. Smith (2003:220) also remarks that the presentation of Jesus at table in the Gospels must be understood in relation to the overall plot of each Gospel. Each of the Gospel writers imagines the table where Jesus dined according to a particular idealized model, one that is consistent with the overall picture of Jesus presented in their particular stories. In addition, these idealized models can be seen to correlate with a plot motif used in each of the Gospels, the motif of irony. The story of Jesus told in the Gospels takes place on two levels: “On one level, the values are those of the ‘world’ that crucifies him. On the other level, the values are those of God, who ‘glorifies’ him. The same is true when Jesus

dines. What happens to a normal meal setting is actually a ‘parabolic’ presentation of a heavenly reality” (Smith 2003:220).

Therefore, contends Smith (2003:220-221), throughout the various layers of the Jesus tradition, we are dealing with especially complex materials in which social reality and narrative world are significantly intertwined. He adds that it is clear that social reality is being represented in these texts and that the texts are true to the values of their social world. The question is where that social reality is to be located and how it is to be defined; that is, whether we are dealing primarily with the social reality of the storyteller or whether we have access to the social reality of the characters in the story, notably the social reality of Jesus of Nazareth.

#### **5.2.4 Formulae of institution of the Eucharist**

A large number of scholars participate in the debate regarding the formulae of institution of the Eucharist and whether, or what part of, these words can be traced back to Jesus of Nazareth (see e.g., Theißen & Merz 1996:366-373). I mention this because of the importance of the scholarly debate, but, as Feld (1976:5-6) points out:

Ist die historische Frage, und das heißt hier konkret: die Frage nach dem Ursprung des Abendmahls im Leben Jesu selbst, historisch möglich und theologisch legitim, oder: historisch nicht zu lösen und theologisch illegitim, oder: historisch sehr wohl möglich, aber für kirchliche Theologie und Praxis belanglos?

Still, Pelser ([s a]c:2) notes that if we are looking for sources regarding the origins and meaning of the earliest Eucharist, the so-called “words of institution” will naturally play an important role, although these are not the only texts that we need to take into consideration.<sup>15</sup> These texts comprise Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:26-29, Luke 22:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25<sup>16</sup> (cf Stevenson 1989:17; Meier 1995:340-344). Although there are no “words of institution” in the Gospel according to John, John 6:51-58 reminds us of the institution of the Eucharist.

Although these latter verses raise literary and historical-critical questions, they can be linked to the Eucharist, even if they represent only a later interpolation connected to the Eucharist (cf Meier 1995:343-344; De Jonge 2001:220-221; see Bornkamm 1968:60-67; 1971:51-64; Wilckens 1974:220-248; Hahn 1975:562). If we compare Mark and Matthew, it is clear that Matthew is dependent on Mark. Since Mark goes back to an earlier tradition and Matthew adds nothing new, Matthew can be omitted in this discussion (Conzelmann 1992:134). The tradition in Paul is richer than the one in Mark. After the words of interpretation one reads an *anamnesis*-command, regarding the bread as well as the cup. Paul views the Eucharist as a proclamation of Jesus' death, while, as in Mark (and Luke), he also adopts an "eschatological" perspective. The version in Luke exhibits similarities with Paul and Mark, as well as with another tradition. A second cup is mentioned, resulting in the order: cup-bread-cup. Text-critical problems exist regarding the version in Luke, namely whether the long or short version is the original. Although most scholars argue for the long version, there are others who select the shorter one (see Metzger [1971] 1975:173-177; Strack-Billerbeck 1924:256-258). Luke's version will also not form part of my discussion, since it relies strongly on Paul and does not really add more than what is already found in Mark and Paul (cf Marxsen 1979:92-93; Léon-Dufour 1987:96-98).

Pelser ([s a]d:52-53) lists the following differences between the institution of the Eucharist in Paul and Mark: Paul does not say that the institution of the Eucharist took place during the Passover festival, but on the night that Jesus was delivered. According to Paul the actions performed with the bread and cup must be done in memory of Christ, while Mark never mentions this. Differences also exist regarding the formulation of the words spoken over the cup (Pelser 1987:561; see Bornkamm 1963:161). It seems as if Mark perceived the body and blood of Christ as being spiritual food and drink for the believers at the Eucharist, while in Paul there is no mention of spiritual food and drink. He refers to two separate actions – what is done with the bread causes a person to share in the redemptive meaning of Christ's death, while the cup makes a person share in the

new redemptive era initiated by the death of Christ (Pelser 1987:561). Where Mark places *body* and *blood* parallel to each other, Paul places *body* and *covenant* parallel to each other. Paul regards participation in the Eucharist as a proclamation of the death of the Lord, until he comes. Past, present and future are thus combined in a single ceremony.

The first question that therefore needs to be answered is whether the tradition that we find in Paul (1 Cor 11:23-25) or the one that we find in Mark (14:22-24), is the oldest (see Pelsers [s a]:146-147). Although the oldest tradition is not necessarily the most authentic tradition, at least it stands closest to the original event. Reading these two texts, the oldest written tradition is most probably the one in Paul (see Grosheide 1932:393-394). The Pauline tradition already possessed a set liturgical form at the time of the writing of 1 Corinthians (54/55 CE) (see Grosheide 1932:388-397; Kümmel 1974:220-222, 247-248, 252-253) or even before the origin of the congregation (49/50 CE) (see Kümmel 1974:112, 115; Conzelmann 1992:130-140). Furthermore, Paul probably made use of an already existing tradition (see Pelsers [s a]:11-13). Meier (1995:340-341) concurs that the Pauline version is the earliest and he adds that it appears to be the most original, since the two parts of the narrative, the words over the bread and the words over the cup, are not gracefully paralleled as in other New Testament documents. In Mark and Matthew, for instance, we find: "This is my body...this is my blood". In Paul the "words of institution" are not balanced in their exact wording. But although Paul's is apparently the earliest version, this does not imply that it is the closest to the original event. Meier argues thus because there is no clause, "keep doing this in remembrance of me", in Mark, as in Paul, which suggests that in some respects the Markan tradition may be older than Paul's. Marxsen (1979:93-96) explains the Markan harmonization by commenting that the meal, which separated the two actions in the Pauline version, has disappeared. In his opinion the phrase *meta\ to\ deipnh=sai* ("after supper") in Paul indicates that the Lord's Supper was originally celebrated within the setting of a meal, while in Mark one only finds an abridged cultic meal-



celebration. Pelser ([s a]:149) comes to the conclusion that both traditions exhibit older and younger elements: we do not know whether they originally stem from the same tradition (contra De Jonge 2001:218), but we do know that we cannot possibly reconstruct this original tradition (cf Meier 1995:340-34).

Crossan's (1998:434; cf De Jonge 2001:221-223) explanation for the differences in the testimonies regarding the Last Supper is that the "common meal tradition" appears in twin but separate developments, as *Didache* 9-10 (from the Q tradition onwards till *Didache*) and as 1 Corinthians 10-11 (from the Jerusalem tradition onwards till Paul). In Crossan's view these two separate Eucharistic traditions are as old as we can trace the evidence. The difference between the two traditions comprises the following: One tradition, that in Paul and Mark, involves a ritual meal reported as being installed by Jesus himself and connected with his own execution. The bread and wine are separated from one another to symbolize the separation of Jesus' own body and blood by execution. The other tradition, that in *Didache* 9-10, contains none of these connections, and its prayers are very similar to standard prayers in the Israelite tradition. Both traditions show stages of development within themselves. Paul and Mark agree that it was a Last Supper, but Paul, unlike Mark, commands repetition for the purpose of remembrance, while Mark, unlike Paul, explicitly describes it as the Passover meal. The earlier *Didache* 10:3 speaks only about "food and drink", together, but the later *Didache* 9:2-3 separates, in this sequence, "the cup" and "the bread." Crossan considers these two traditions to be equally valid ritualizations of the meal tradition related to the historical Jesus.

Crossan (1998:434-444) identifies five elements of the common meal tradition that are common to both these traditions: they even predate both versions, indicating the earliest ritualization of the meal tradition related to the historical Jesus after his death.

These elements follow:

- *An actual meal:* By comparing the earlier and later versions of the two traditions mentioned above, Crossan reasons that the common meal tradition originally involved a full meal, ritualized precisely as such. Bread and wine should summarize, not substitute for, the Eucharist; otherwise, it is no longer the Lord's Supper.
- *A shared meal:* It was both an actual meal and a shared meal. There is an emphasis not just on bread but on *breaking* the bread, which is made symbolic of sharing by passing it around. The bread was broken and passed around. There is also an emphasis not just on the wine but rather on the *cup*. For Crossan this also constitutes a symbol of sharing, since the cup can be passed around.
- *Biblical Jesus:* Both developments connect the meal to Jesus himself, a Jesus who is embedded in the same scriptural background. Both traditions refer to Jesus in connection with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Crossan makes this connection on the grounds of the "servant/child" in the *Didache* and "handed over" (by God) in the pre-Pauline tradition. This means that Jesus' death was explicitly present in 1 Corinthians 10-11 and implicitly in *Didache* 9-10.
- *Symbolic unity:* Crossan perceives an apocalyptic ingathering of the church now scattered across the world in the earlier and later version of the *Didache*. In his view Paul emphasized the bread as symbolic of future and present unity. Many grapes become one cup of wine. Many grains become one loaf of bread. The symbolism of many becoming one is inherent in the very ingredients of the meal itself – they serve to underline the unity of the shared meal.

- *Apocalyptic sanction:* The food of the Eucharist is holy because participants commit themselves to sharing together as the Father taught them through his servant Jesus. Apocalyptic consummation acts as a sanction against those who abuse the holy shared meal either from below (with the *Didache*'s freeloaders) or from above (with the Corinthian patrons).

It is abundantly clear that many attempts have been made to reconstruct an original historical event underlying these differing texts. The presumption behind many of these reconstructions is that Jesus foresaw his death and provided an interpretation of its meaning by means of a creative use of benedictions over the bread and wine. But such presuppositions must be weighed against the assessment of Jesus as a human rather than a divine being. The tradition makes him a divine figure of whom such premonitions can be expected, but this cannot be applied to a historical figure. Although Jesus most probably knew that his life was being threatened, it is too much to expect that he knew exactly what would happen, then applied a meaning to it and finally ritualized it into a highly complex theological form. This also does not cohere with what tradition informs us about the history of the Jesus-group immediately after his death. Rather than witnessing a smooth transition for which Jesus' followers would be prepared, the tradition witnesses to a period of confusion and reassessment. This period produced the early theologizing about the meaning of the life and death of Jesus. The Eucharistic sayings present a rather advanced stage of this theologizing, since his death has been accorded a sophisticated and complex interpretation utilizing a variety of biblical and ritual motifs and symbols (Smith & Taussig 1990:40-41). Smith and Taussig (1990:41) write in this regard: "Consequently, it is highly unlikely that one could reconstruct a credible historical event based on the eucharistic sayings texts." They conclude that the tradition does not support the view that the Last Supper tradition derived from any hypothetical single original event, whether that event be located in the life of Jesus or in the life of the early church.

In a sense scholars thus arrive at to the following broad consensus: In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Paul quotes a meal tradition that has been conveyed to him, while a variation of the same tradition is found in Mark. Smith (2003:188-189; cf De Jonge 2001:215-217) posits the following theses regarding this text:

- He is of the opinion that *banquet ideology* lies behind this text, which he explains as follows: The meal pictured here possesses the following features of a normal Greco-Roman banquet:
  - benediction over the food, represented by the bread;
  - division of the meal into *deipnon* (mentioned in the text), followed by *symposion* (implied by the wine blessing);
  - and benediction over the wine, marking the transition from *deipnon* to *symposion*.
- Another feature that characterizes this text is that it is presented in the form of a *Jesus story*. The Gospels place it in a narrative recounting the life of Jesus. Here its narrative context is strictly “on the night that he was handed over” – the night he died. In contrast to the Gospels where Jesus is “betrayed”, here Jesus is “handed over” (*paredidoto*). In the light of Romans 8:32, Smith (2003:188) contends that the term “handed over” in 1 Corinthians does not refer to Judas’s betrayal, but to the theological concept of Jesus being handed over by God.
- The text is more likely to be *etiological* than historical in both form and content (cf Mack 1988:80, 120). In other words, it functions as a story that arose to explain a practice in the church. Smith (2003:188) argues that meals were already being eaten and given significance specific to the “Christian” context. This story is narrated to give particular meaning to the practice, drawing on an interpretation of Jesus’ death. To Smith, it is not clear *how* this interpretation developed in Paul.

- Smith (2003:189) writes that the *function* of this text at the communal meals of the earliest Jesus-followers remains unclear. It cannot be read as a script for liturgical action, unless one can imagine someone in the community acting out the part of Jesus in some kind of divine drama, which seems unlikely. But in some sense it was seen as a text defining the community meal.

Smith (2003:216-217) notes that the following aspects of the ideology of the banquet are utilized by Paul:

- The significance of the meal in creating *social bonding*. If the people to whom he is writing dine as one community, and thus symbolize that all are one before God, then they will thereby “proclaim the Lord’s death” (1 Cor 11:26), which is the means whereby such unity among human beings has been established by God.
- The tradition whereby a meal symbolized *social obligations* within the community. Here Paul utilized traditional arguments from Greco-Roman meal ethics to define the basis of community identity and social ethics.
- The dichotomy of social stratification versus *social equality* at the banquet. Paul argues that equality before God is to be realized in community life by means of a community meal shared in common and equally by all.

In conclusion, for Smith (2003:276-277; cf Mack 1988:80) the table of Jesus as sketched in the Gospels is a literary phenomenon, which suggests that the Last Supper functions simply as another Jesus story, without a clear indication that it constituted a model for a ritual activity in the life of the community any more than any other Jesus story did. On the other hand Smith acknowledges that it was highly likely that the Gospel communities did celebrate meals together and that those meals were significant moments for the formation of community identity.

These meals would have been to some extent reflective of the idealized model for meals presented in the story of the Last Supper.

### 5.2.5 The Eucharist and the paschal meal

The Passover feast was one of the major festivals in Israel. Smith (2003:147) says that it was primarily a sacrificial meal prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, that required a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where the sacrifice was held. The most elaborate description of a Passover meal is found in the *seder* (“order”) in the Mishna. The earliest date for the completion of this *seder* is the second third of the second century, but it continued to be adapted for many centuries afterwards.

Whether or not the Last Supper was a Passover meal has been a topic of considerable debate (see Theißen & Merz 1996:373-376). Some scholars accept the claim of the Synoptic Gospels that it was a Passover meal,<sup>17</sup> and regard the different chronology of the Fourth Gospel (which situates the Supper on the day before the Passover) as an adjustment made by the Evangelist for a theological purpose – so that the death of Jesus would coincide with the very moment that the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the temple. Others note that a number of details in the Synoptic versions do not cohere with the Passover explanation, and they prefer John’s chronology as being historical. Some have even attempted to harmonize the apparent contradiction (Bradshaw 2002:63).

According to the version of Mark, the Last Supper is a Passover meal (14:1-2; 14:12-16), but many scholars agree that Passover themes are not present in the actual description of the meal (Lietzmann 1967:211-213; see Jeremias 1949:10-15; Bornkamm 1963:149). Meier (1995:345) concurs that the Last Supper was probably not a Passover meal, and that the context of the Passover meal is that of a theological framework created by Mark and followed by Matthew and Luke (cf Pilch 1996c:94). To Smith (2003:249) the description focuses rather on the special ceremony connected with the eating of bread and the drinking of wine.

He adds that like any other narrative segment of Mark, this ceremony derives its primary meaning from the story world of Mark as a whole (cf Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:140-141). The words over the bread: "Take...this is my body" (Mk 14:22), can be explained as follows in the story of Mark: The term "body" apparently denotes a single meaning in Mark – it is the term for a corpse or a physical body that will become a corpse (Mk 5:29; 6:29; 14:8; 15:43). This point brings Smith (2003:250-251) to the conclusion that Jesus is referring to his death: "But it is not the efficacy of his death that is the referent, for it is not 'body' (*soma*) but 'life' (*psyche*) that is given as a 'ransom' (10:45). Rather, it is the manner of death that must be meant." Thus, the disciples' sharing of bread with Jesus means their uniting with him in discipleship and eventually sharing in his fate. A parallel attitude is developed in regard to the cup at the Last Supper. Discipleship is described as encompassing the taking up of a cross and following Jesus (Mk 8:34), and in another verse it is described in these terms: "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with" (Mk 10:39).<sup>18</sup> In both cases the reference is to the death of Jesus as being the death of a martyr. Thus, when Jesus prays in the garden on the evening of his death, he begs: "Take this cup from me" (Mk 14:36). Smith (2003:251) concludes, therefore, that when the cup is related to the "blood of the covenant" at the Last Supper and it is specifically said that "they all drank from it" (Mk 14:23-24), we must understand that it is the cup of martyrdom that they drank: "In the memory of the church, though not in the story world of Mark, that is exactly the fate that awaits the faithful disciples. Therefore, although Mark ends his story with the disciples having failed to 'follow' Jesus, he embeds in the Last Supper story the promise that, eventually, they will" (Smith 2003:251). This could be viewed as a clear example of anti-language, because drinking the cup that Jesus drank implies dying with him. But in the end, to *die* with Jesus means to gain *life*.

While Mark (and the other Synoptic Gospels) places this text in the context of a Passover celebration, for Paul it is also very important that Jesus instituted the Eucharist "on the night he was handed over" (e0n th= | nukti\ h[|

paredi/deto; 1 Cor 11:23). We do not know exactly what Paul had in mind by using these words, but he does not mention a Passover context (Pelser [s a]a:138; 1987:560; see Bornkamm 1971:149). The most important point for Paul appears to be that the Eucharist is not the same kind of cultic celebration as the timeless mysteries, but that it concerns something that took place in history, a history determined by God.<sup>19</sup>

If we take all the above arguments into consideration, it seems as if the Last Supper was probably not a Passover meal (cf Theißen & Merz 1996:376). Nevertheless, correlations exist between the earliest Eucharist and the Passover. For the House of Israel the Passover was a ceremony that celebrated redemption from foreign bondage. For the earliest Jesus-followers the Eucharist likewise constituted a ceremony that celebrated the participants' newly found "freedom" from oppression, as members of the family of God.

### **5.2.6 The Eucharist and the apocalyptic banquet**

Smith (2003:166) illustrates that an important metaphorical use of banquet ideology in Jewish thought is found in the tradition of the so-called messianic banquet. He remarks that this was a widespread motif found in various stages and forms of Jewish literature and that it made an important contribution to the banquet ideology of the Greco-Roman period. The term "messianic banquet",<sup>20</sup> according to Smith (2003:166), refers to the general symbolism of food and/or a festive meal to signify immortality and/or the joys of the end-time or afterlife. He points out that the terms "eschatological banquet" and "apocalyptic banquet" are often used in this more general sense. Smith (2003:166-167) adds that the messianic banquet motif is especially associated with apocalyptic traditions in Israel. But, like other apocalyptic motifs, the messianic banquet originates in a complex mythological heritage from the ancient Near East and is supplemented in the later periods by Hellenistic parallels: "One motif connected with the messianic banquet theme places the emphasis on the numinous quality of



certain symbolic foods. The characteristic theme here is that of the ‘food of the gods’, which confers immortality on anyone who eats it” (Smith 2003:167).

Prominent images include basic foods such as water, wine, bread, and fish. In the Greek tradition, wine is considered as the gift of the god Dionysus to mortals and its effects are viewed as the blessings of the god. This idea is echoed in some Jewish traditions as well. Bread is related to the miraculous bread from heaven – manna – and is also associated with the miraculous water from the rock (Ex 16:1-17:7; Nm 11:7-9; 20:2-13). Smith (2003:168) indicates that Paul interprets manna and water from the rock as “spiritual food” and “spiritual drink” and thus as symbolic of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 10:1-13). The motif of the divine banquet comprises the primary messianic banquet motif, since it places the emphasis on the banquet itself, a banquet at which the Messiah is deemed to be present. Apparently, the roots of this theme can be discovered in another pattern of certain ancient Near Eastern creation myths: “These myths tell of a great battle being waged in the divine sphere. When the battle has been won, the gods assemble and celebrate the victory with a great banquet. Since apocalyptic literature takes up the combat and victory motif, the banquet of celebration becomes a part of its repertoire as well” (Smith 2003:168; see 1 Chr 12:38-40; Is 25:6-8).

The messianic banquet is sometimes represented as a wedding banquet, a motif that is closely related to the victory banquet in its mythological origins and its connections with the themes of victory and the kingship of the god. This brings to mind the concept of the “sacred marriage”, once again a concept with a rich heritage stemming from ancient Near Eastern myth and ritual. In biblical texts this theme is often used as a symbol for the relationship of God to the people of Israel, or, in the New Testament, as a symbol for the relationship of Christ with the church (Hs 2:1-22; Is 54:4-8; Ezk 16:7-8; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:23-32). In its role as a representation of the numinous, now being made available to humans, the messianic banquet is in its essence a mythological meal. It represents food and

beings stemming from a timeless, mythological world. Smith (2003:170-171) explains: "To the extent that reference is made to real people and real history, such references are by definition made mythological as well. Indeed, the texts in which messianic banquets are presented are by and large literary idealizations. They do not describe real meals, but rather idealize meals on a divine plain."

Smith (2003:284) further describes the messianic banquet as a tradition in which the joys of the end-time are symbolized as a great and bountiful banquet:

The central meaning of the symbol is that it is a time of festive joy, when the entire community of God gathers not in a temple, synagogue or church, for example, but in a greater banqueting hall and celebrates a great festive party with tables that overflow with food and wine. It is a symbol that lies behind each of the meal stories in the Jesus tradition. It provides the ideology of the numinous for early Christian meals, for it is when the community forms itself in anticipation of the messianic banquet that it experiences the presence of the divine.

The way in which the divine could be *experienced*, was by means of creating alternate states of consciousness.

According to Zizioulas (1985:29), in the first centuries the Eucharist was understood as the event that brought the dispersed people together in the same place, to constitute the eschatological messianic community in the here and now. Only baptized people possessed the right to be part of this community. He says that the Eucharist offered positively what baptism meant negatively, namely that the death of the old, biological identity was replaced by the birth of the new identity, which was given in the Eucharistic community. The old biological identity leads to death, because it is based on natural necessity. On the other hand, the new identity given in the Eucharist, which is based on free and undying relationships, offers eternal life. The church as the image of the eschatological community promised a foretaste of eternal life through the Eucharist, by providing

a set of relations that would accord the participants an internal identity and the experience of a life in which all natural (e.g., age, race, gender) and social (e.g., profession, social or economic status) divisions would be overcome by the unity of the body of Christ.

In relation to banquet imagery, Mark operates with an implicit model of the apocalyptic or messianic banquet. In an ironic way, in Mark, Jesus dines as a king. The other side of the ironic event, its “real” meaning in opposition to its apparent meaning, tends to exist in the realm of the apocalyptic (Smith 2003:240). In Mark, Jesus is almost always the host, and the meals that he hosts are viewed as being in contrast to the meals provided by his opponents. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus dines with tax collectors and sinners (Mk 2:15-17) and with a leper (Mk 14:3). The critique that Jesus eats with “tax collectors and sinners” is also given prominence in the tradition which Luke inherits (Lk 7:34). But Luke expands this theme so that Jesus’ entire ministry in Luke is characterized as being to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (e.g., Lk 4:18-19; 6:20-26; 7:22: 14:15-24) (Smith 2003:269).

In the world of Jesus outcasts are welcome at the table, and dietary laws are abolished. On the contrary, the banquets of Herod are sketched as contrasting with the banquet of Jesus – in this world Jesus is king, although in an ironic sense; in the other world Herod is king. The world of Jesus is placed on a different plane – it partakes of the realities of the apostolic age. It is the apocalyptic “Son of Man” who can break Sabbath and dietary laws (he is the “Lord of the Sabbath”). His disciples do not fast because they already partake in the new age; they have the bridegroom with them (Mk 2:19). Jesus in effect offers the messianic banquet to those he invites to his table (Smith 2003:241-242). The contrast between the two worlds is vivid and deliberate.

In the parable of the wedding feast or great banquet (Mt 22:1-14; Lk 14:16-24; GTh 64), we also perceive a relation to the messianic banquet. Scott (1990:172)

avers that the meal stands for the kingdom and that admittance to the meal defines those who are saved. If one keeps Isaiah 25:6-9 in mind this parable seems to be referring to the messianic banquet. Although the parable does not refer directly to the Isaiah text, in both these texts the oppressed are restored to honor by an all-powerful God. In Deuteronomy 20:5-7, the excuses for not going to war are enumerated, and this corresponds with the excuses the original guests utter in Luke's version of the story. Scott (1990:171) concludes, therefore, that at the discourse level, this is a banquet held before a holy war is to be waged. Both the banquet and excuses suggest that God's final vengeance is about to take place, yet the dinner never escalates to the expected messianic banquet, because the master is powerless to attack those who have snubbed him. Scott (1990:173) writes:

In this village there is no upward mobility, for the master loses his upper-class status and must join those who live in the streets. In a dyadic culture, self-worth or -value is determined by significant others. In the passage from Isaiah, the poor and distressed receive new value from being associated with God: God raises such people to high status by destroying their enemies. In the parable, the householder cannot raise the poor up but must himself join them.

Schnackenburg (1981:40-41; cf Käseman 1969:89) concurs that an "eschatological" outlook is evident in the earliest Eucharist – it already bore a character of "eschatological fulfillment". He comments: "The central act of worship of the early Church testifies to its characteristic eschatological awareness of already having experienced the happiness of the time of salvation, and yet of still looking forward to the 'restoration of all things' at the Parousia.... (cf. Acts 3:20f.)" (Schnackenburg 1981:41).

One last aspect needs to be considered here; it is explained by Marxsen (1979:111). In his view, we need to understand the way in which Israelites understood *time* in order to appreciate the meaning of the Eucharist. He points

out that Israelites think historically, in that the *eschaton* becomes for them a present reality by representation or anticipation (see chapter 1). We can observe this in the Passover (cf Soggin 2001:87-91):

In the Passover ritual every generation is told to celebrate the festival as if it had itself come out of Egypt. The Exodus of the past is celebrated today. This has nothing at all to do with our modern memorial celebrations; it is a co-celebrating (*mitfeiern*), at which there is a “repeating” of that event so as to bring the past into the present. Among other ways, this comes out very clearly in the effort to make the “repetition” of the celebration imitate as much as possible the original event. The past is “re-presented.” Correspondingly, the future is anticipated, perhaps in a meal, in concepts and representation of the Feast of Tabernacles, etc.

This manner of experiencing time was characteristic of the earliest Jesus-followers. By means of re-presentation they celebrated the previous table fellowships with Jesus and at the same time during them anticipated their consummation as the community of the new, the “eschatological”, covenant. But since the Eucharist was also influenced by the Hellenistic world, Hellenistic aspects likewise played a role. For instance, here the *eschaton* is not important, but the “divine” is. And this “divine” was imparted by material means. This is clear in the Corinthians’ attempt to celebrate a meal according to Israelite customs. At the end of the social meal, they held an abbreviated meal-celebration. Customs at meals, usual in the Corinthians’ world, also entered in. Apparently, eating bread and drinking wine were understood as the reception of sacramental elements. Marxsen (1979:112) argues that the slow emergence of the emphasis on the elements and their significance represents a Hellenistic interpretation of the original Palestinian meal. Marxsen (1979:114) adds that after Paul and Mark, the “eschatological” community became the *cultic* community: “Soon, the food is no longer partaken of at a table but received at an altar which one must approach. Hand in hand with this, the development of the notion of ‘office’

occurs. One can even take the food (as holy food) to the sick who could not be present at the church service.” The logical development is thus clearly evident – “the action is asserted, then the action is reflected on, finally he who performs the action is, upon reflection, given explication” (Marxsen 1979:114). Marxsen (1979:115) continues:

At the beginning stood the meal as an eschatological event. The meal is interpreted at two points. Then these two points are lifted out of the entire meal complex. The interpretation goes on but is now related only to what happened at these two points – consuming bread and wine. Finally, the bread and wine are themselves interpreted; and this interpretation is expanded christologically.

### **5.2.7 The “foundation” of the Eucharist in the last meal of Jesus with his disciples and the other meals of Jesus**

Did Jesus of Nazareth establish the Eucharist? This question has been posed over many years by different scholars (see e.g., Feld 1976:4-39; Lohmeyer 1937:204-223; 1938:92-94; Lietzmann 1967; Bultmann 1984:152-153). Bradshaw (2002:61-62) observes that one of the major difficulties faced by scholars with regard to the origins of the Eucharist is the question regarding to what extent the accounts of the Last Supper in the New Testament (Mt 26:17-30; Mk 14:12-26; Lk 22:7-38; 1 Cor 11:23-6) can be treated as reliable descriptions of an actual historical event and how far they have been affected by the later liturgical practices of the first generation of “Christians”. From Bultmann (1984:144-151) onwards, a number of scholars have argued that, while Jesus may have held a final meal with his disciples, the narratives as we have them are creations of the “early church” and do not tell us anything about the actual historical roots of the Eucharist. These records only bear witness to its later development. On the other hand, other scholars would accept that the accounts have been influenced by the liturgical practices of the “early Christians”, but maintain that they contain a firm historical core<sup>21</sup> (see Marxsen 1979:92; Léon-Dufour 1987:85; Meier 1995:335-351).

Theißen (1999:130) states that Jesus' "Last Supper" was preceded by other communal meals which contained a symbolic surplus of meaning, and that there is a possibility that at his Last Supper Jesus made a connection between his death and the supper. We see this in the "words of institution". But the reference to Jesus' death could have been created after Easter (on the basis of his execution which had taken place in the meantime) (see *Did* 9 & 10, where no reference to Jesus' death has been preserved; and the Gospel of John, where the foot-washing has replaced the Eucharist and where at the Last Supper there is no interpretation of the elements in terms of the death of Jesus – although John knows of this concept). This link can also be perceived in the Pauline variant of the words of institution, where the Last Supper is associated with the promise of the new covenant, which has nothing to do with sacrifices (Theißen 1999:130).

Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998:141-142) contribute to this discussion by concluding that the Last Supper as depicted in Mark 14:22-26 was probably not an historical event. On the other hand, they acknowledge that since Jesus ate frequently with his followers,<sup>22</sup> there must have been a last meal with them. Crossan (1992:360-367) agrees that Jesus and the people closest to him would have had a last supper, that is, a meal that later and in retrospect was recognized as having been their last one together. He comments: "That is all that happened before the death of Jesus. I do not presume any distinctive meal known beforehand, designated specifically, or ritually programmed as final and forever" (Crossan 1992:361). Crossan (1994:178) further points out that if Jesus himself had ritualized a meal in which he identified bread and wine with his body and blood, it would be difficult to explain the absence of such symbolization in Eucharistic texts like *Didache* 9-10. This leads Crossan (1994:178-179) to conclude that it was open commensality during Jesus' life, rather than the Last Supper before his death, that was the root of any later ritualization.<sup>23</sup>

Crossan (1994:68) defines the word “commensality” as “the rules of tabling and eating as miniature models for the rules of association and socialization”, from the Latin word *mensa* which means table. According to him commensality refers to table fellowship as a map of economic discrimination, social hierarchy, and political differentiation. Crossan (1994:66-69; cf Scott 1990:161; Van Bruggen 1994:388-392) refers to the parable in Matthew 22:1-13, Luke 14:15-24 and in the *Gospel of Thomas* 64, in which a person hosts a feast, sends a servant to invite his friends, all the friends make excuses, and then the host replaces the absent guests with *anyone from the street*. This could lead to a situation in which classes, genders, and ranks could be mingled – anyone could be reclining next to anyone else. This, according to Crossan (1994:69), is open commensality – “an eating together without using table as a miniature map of society’s vertical discriminations and lateral separations.” Since Jesus lived out this parable, he was called a glutton, drunkard, friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mk 2:18-20; Mt 11:18-19; Lk 7:33-34). This suggests that Jesus did not make “appropriate” distinctions and discriminations. Hence, Crossan (1994:70) arrives at the following conclusion: “The kingdom of God as a process of open commensality, of a nondiscriminating table depicting in miniature a nondiscriminating society, clashes fundamentally with honor and shame, those basic values of ancient Mediterranean culture and society.” For Jesus’ contemporaries, with their group-centered personalities, the “idea of eating together and living together without any distinctions, differences, discriminations, or hierarchies is close to the irrational and absurd. And the one who advocates or does it is close to the deviant and the perverted. He has no honor. He has no shame” (Crossan 1994:70; cf Van Staden 1991:224-229).

In contrast to the Qumran community (1QS 6:4-5; 1QS 2), where the emphasis is placed on hierarchy, precedence, and the order of dignity, a very different emphasis appears in Jesus’ commensality.



Crossan (1992:403, emphasis by Crossan) describes this as follows:

The four key verbs of *take, bless, broke, gave* from Mark 6:41 reappear at the Last Supper in Mark 14:22; similarly, the four verbs of *take, blessed, broke, gave* from the Last Supper in Luke 22:19 reappear as *take, blessed, broke, gave* in Luke 24:30; and the expression “took...given thanks...distributed...also the fish” from John 6:11, within a eucharistic context underlined by 6:53-58, reappears as “took...gave...so with the fish” in John 21:13.

Verbs such as *took, blessed, broke, gave* possess, therefore, profound symbolic connotations and may well stem, according to Crossan (1992:404; 1994:180-181), from that inaugural open commensality itself. They indicate a process of *equal sharing*, but imply even more than this. The first two verbs, *took* and *blessed*, are actions of the master, while the last two, *broke* and *gave*, represent actions of the servant. Jesus, master and host, performs instead the role of servant, and all share the same food as equals (since, as mentioned earlier, in Greco-Roman times more important guests were given better food and wine). Crossan (1992:402) considers that most of Jesus’ disciples would know about being served at table by slaves, but would not have experienced this. His male followers would also think of females merely as those who prepare and serve the family’s food. Jesus thus not only took on a role as servant, but also as female. Within the framework of the present study, this is a very clear example of Jesus “showing” what the implications of living in the “kingdom of God” are. The earliest Jesus followers “told” others about this, which resulted in the earliest church “re-enacting” Jesus’ open commensality in the Eucharist.

Schweitzer (1982:50) focuses on another facet of this issue. He asks what the motives could have been which led the first congregation to observe a celebration like the Eucharist, which is associated with Jesus’ last meal. Were they the result of arbitrariness or necessity? In the earliest celebration of the Lord’s Supper a double aspect lies hidden. A common meal is repeated. In doing

so, a historical moment, unique in itself, is in some manner supposed to be reproduced. What is the relationship between the repeated “Lord’s Meal” and the common religious meals of the earliest Jesus-groups?

Lietzmann (1967:249-255; see Richardson 1979:693-697) developed a theory that two different types of Eucharistic liturgy were performed by the earliest Jesus-groups.<sup>24</sup> One was the joyful fellowship meal of the early Jewish-Christian communities, the “breaking of bread” as in Acts 2:42; the other arose within the Pauline churches and was dominated by the theme of being a memorial of the death of Christ. Lietzmann argues that the former type comprised a continuation of the meals shared by the disciples with Jesus during his earthly ministry and was not related to the Last Supper; it contained no narrative of institution, did not involve the use of wine, and exhibited a strong eschatological dimension, being the anticipation of the messianic banquet. The second type arose from Paul’s belief that Jesus intended the Last Supper to be repeated as a liturgical rite (“Do this in remembrance of me” – found only in 1 Cor 11:24, 25 and Lk 22:19); it was characterized by Hellenistic sacrificial concepts and eventually supplanted the former type everywhere. Several other scholars adopted variations of this thesis (e.g., Lohmeyer 1937:168-227; 1938:81-99; Cullmann 1958:5-23). But the majority of scholars rejected Lietzmann’s (1967) theory of a dual origin of the Eucharist as being based on extremely tenuous evidence and as making the improbable assumption of a radical dichotomy between the thinking and practice of the early Jerusalem church and the Pauline communities (Pelser [s a]:9; Bradshaw 2002:65-66). However Bradshaw (2002:67) remarks that “...there seemed to be a general consensus that in the earliest period of the Church’s existence it was the eschatological theme which dominated eucharistic practice, but that it became combined with the remembrance of the death of Christ in the early Palestinian tradition.”

Although some scholars continue to pursue variations of the concept of the dual origin, two other principal trends can be seen in more recent New Testament

scholarship. One is to discuss the Last Supper within the context of the significance of human meals in general and of the cultural background of Greco-Roman practice in particular, and especially the pattern of the *symposion*, where the drinking of wine followed the meal. The other is to locate the roots of the Eucharist more broadly within the context of other meals in Jesus' life and not merely the Last Supper, and, largely following the trajectory established by redaction-criticism, to take seriously various layers of meaning that can be discerned within the New Testament, and the different ways in which that the individual New Testament writers describe those meals. In this regard, (Bradshaw 2002:68) comments:

Whereas earlier generations of scholars were concerned to find the common core behind the variety, scholars today tend to be more interested in what the variety says about the particular theologies of the Eucharist which were espoused by the individual writers and their communities, even if they cannot always agree on the specific layers of meaning that exist in the New Testament texts or on the special emphasis being given to the material by a writer.

Bradshaw (2002:70) concludes that, in the light of the general pluriformity of primitive Christianity, early Eucharistic meals may have varied not only in theological emphases between the different traditions, but also in the very form of the meal itself. We cannot easily dispose of these variations by consigning those that do not fit our ideal to the supposed category of an *agaphe* rather than an Eucharist, since the evidence will not allow us to divide the practices of the earliest Jesus-followers neatly in this way – for some communities, *agaphe* was the name given to their Eucharistic meal. Moreover, while in some places the Eucharistic action proper may have become detached from the meal at an early stage, in others the two may have remained united for much longer than is often supposed.

Perrin (1967:102-108) also views the tradition that Jesus offered table fellowship to outcasts as historical (Mt 11:16-19).<sup>25</sup> He considers that Jesus' table fellowship utilized the symbolism of the messianic banquet, as defined in Matthew 8:11. He perceives these texts as authentic to the historical Jesus, because they represent perspectives more appropriate to Jesus' setting than to that of the "early church". Perrin indicates that Jesus' table fellowship explains how he came to die: his actions defiled the boundaries of the community and thus functioned as an act of such offensiveness to Israelite sensibilities that the leaders of Israel called for his death. He asserts that this also explains how the earliest Jesus-groups came to eat a communal meal together; a practice that came into existence so early that it must have been a continuation of the practice of Jesus himself.

Perrin (1967:104-105) adds that the practice of communal meals amongst the earliest Jesus-followers existed long before there was a specific "Christian" theology to accord it meaning. In his opinion we cannot argue that the meals are an echo of the "Last Supper" held by Jesus with his disciples during the Passion, because, even if such an occasion as is reported in the Gospels is historical, it did not, in itself, give rise to the "early Christian" practice. All of our evidence indicates that the kind of theological emphasis associated with the "Last Supper" in the Gospels was by no means the major emphasis in the communal meals of the earliest Jesus-followers. He concurs with my earlier indication that these early communal meals also did not originate in the religious practice of ancient Israel, the reason being that the Passover meal was a yearly affair. The Qumran communal meal anticipating the "messianic banquet" could also not have constituted the origin of the communal meals among the earliest Jesus-followers, because this was simply a special significance accorded to the regular communal meal at Qumran. The earliest Eucharist was something out of the ordinary which the earliest followers of Jesus enacted and which helped to give them a special identity. The most reasonable explanation is thus that the communal meals of the earliest Jesus-followers are a continuation of a regular practice of the ministry of Jesus.

Perrin (1967:107-108) describes this point as follows:

The central feature of the message of Jesus is...the challenge of the forgiveness of sins and the offer of the possibility of a new kind of relationship with God and with one's fellow man. This was symbolized by a table-fellowship which celebrated the present joy and anticipated the future consummation....In all probability, it was the vividness of the memory of that pre-Easter fellowship between the disciples and the earthly Jesus that provided the pattern for the development of that remarkable sense of fellowship between the early Christians and the risen Lord which is such a feature of primitive Christianity – and which has such an effect on the Jesus tradition. At all events, we are justified in seeing this table-fellowship as the central feature of the ministry of Jesus; an anticipatory sitting at table in the Kingdom of God and a very real celebration of present joy and challenge.

Theißen (1999:124) likewise holds that the “[E]ucharist came into being from the meals that Jesus held. In remembrance of the last supper it is related to the death of Jesus. And this death of Jesus in turn takes the place of the ancient sacrifices.” In other words, Theißen’s (1999:126; cf Hooker 1997) thesis is that the Eucharist originated from the prophetic symbolic action with which Jesus delivered his “eschatological” message (in opposition to the traditional rites). Only by its reference to the death of Jesus could this symbolic action become an early “Christian” sacrament, because this reference gave it the power to supersede the traditional sacrifices.<sup>26</sup>

Theißen (1999:124) understands sacrifice<sup>27</sup> as a symbolic depiction of the fact that life is lived at the expense of other life – a person’s own life can be safeguarded and enriched by the surrender or destruction of another life. In “early Christianity” we can see a shift taking place here: The replacement of the many sacrifices by the one sacrifice of Christ “could mean that the enhancement of life does not just take place through the surrender of other life and at the cost

of other life; gain in life can also come about through the offering of one's own life in favour of other life" (Theißen 1999:125).

The one sacrifice of Jesus (which replaces the many sacrifices) was originally a unique martyrdom. At a secondary stage it was connected with repeated ceremonial processes. Then subsequently a symbolic action exhibiting an eschatological orientation came into being: an ordinary meal became a forerunner of the "eschatological meal", in memory of the death of Jesus (Theißen 1999:125-126).

This argument concludes the present section on the origin of the earliest Eucharist. It is argued that the foundation of this ceremony can therefore be found in the symbolic meals Jesus of Nazareth shared with other people ("showing"). Jesus had an alternative view of the world, which he displayed by means of inclusive meals, in which anyone could share, here and now. But to be a part of this world of Jesus, which can be termed the "kingdom of God", while at the same time still living in the ordinary world, called for alternate states of consciousness. In the next section the "telling" of the earliest Jesus followers will be described.

### **5.3 VALUE: EUCHARISTIC FORMULAE AS ANTI-LANGUAGE**

#### **5.3.1 Introduction**

In chapter 1, I proposed that, like baptism, the ritualization of the earliest Eucharist is a verbalization, in anti-language, of an alternate state of consciousness. In this section, I shall examine Eucharistic formulae in the New Testament and other early Christian literature, in order to show that anti-language is recognizable in what was said around the Eucharistic table. To say that you eat the body of Christ and drink the blood of Christ, while in practice you are eating bread and drinking wine, is nothing else than making use of the rich symbolism of anti-language. I shall also undertake a cursory examination of

similarities between the earliest Eucharist and the Greco-Roman mystery religions, since this should help to highlight the role which alternate states of consciousness, as expressed in anti-language, played in the earliest Eucharist. In other words, this section of the chapter will be devoted to the earliest Jesus-followers' "telling". They started to "tell" other people what Jesus "showed" in his meals, because it added *value* to their lives.

Before I begin, a few preliminary remarks regarding the elements of the Eucharist may shed light on the later discussion. The Eucharist does not contain complicated liturgical aesthetics as established rites do (Theißen 1999:127). Everyday happenings are given symbolic content. There is an iconic relationship between everyday performance and the symbolic sense – it is easy to see why an earthly meal can anticipate the eschatological joy at the banquet in the end-time (Theißen 1999:27). Smith (2003:190) agrees that the choice of bread and wine as elements to be interpreted is not remarkable in itself. In the Greco-Roman banquet tradition, bread represented the food of the *deipnon*, and wine the drink of the *symposion*. The question is: Why did the earliest Jesus-followers identify the bread and wine with the death of Jesus?

Theißen's (1999:132) answer to this question lies in the association of symbolic actions with the death of Jesus. For him, these symbolic actions cross taboo thresholds in a form that is protected by the rite. This does not occur through the external performance of the actions (because eating and drinking are harmless), but in the religious imagination that is associated with them. In the narrative of the Eucharist a crucified man's death is represented ritually. In this (although it is only in the imagination) an inhibition regarding human sacrifice is touched upon. The death of Jesus on the cross was not a ritual sacrifice, and in the Eucharistic ceremony no killing takes place, but by means of the association of the death of Jesus with the Eucharist a unique martyrdom<sup>28</sup> became the foundation of a rite that could be repeated.

But the association of bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ touches upon an even bigger taboo in the Israelite tradition – the prohibition against consuming blood. In Genesis 9:4-6 we read that blood was regarded as the seat of life. In the way they slaughtered animals, Israelites avoided the consumption of blood and thus showed that they respected the life in the animals they slaughtered. The invitation to drink blood, even if it was only in a symbolic way, would necessarily have been an abomination to any Israelite. Although the Eucharist could be perceived as symbolic cannibalism (something that was taboo for both Israelites and non-Israelites), the Eucharist was nevertheless established precisely by these anti-moral interpretations. Theißen (1999:133) argues that the “...barbarism in the rite which is allowed in the imagination is a contribution towards overcoming the barbarism in everyday life, addressing the anti-social impulses, grasping them, and transforming them into pro-social motivation. They are worked on and transformed in the ritual.”

According to Paul (1 Cor 11:27) the Eucharist could potentially symbolize a “crime”. He proclaims that if anyone eats the bread or drinks from the cup of the Lord in an “unworthy manner”, he or she will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. In other words, if the Eucharist becomes an occasion for acting out social differences, it becomes a crime. Then it is as if the people who partake in the Eucharist had killed Jesus themselves. “It is only its ritual shaping in the sense of Christian faith and Christian ethics that transforms this potential crime into a sacrament which conveys salvation” (Theißen 1999:133).

What implications emerge? Making use of the dogmatic patterns of explanation in traditional theology, Theißen (1999:135) contends that a sacrament communicates salvation by creating a non-verbal language (through the combination of word and element), which, if it is heard and accepted in faith, can change people. The “re-enactment” of Jesus’ inclusive meals *changed* the members of the earliest Jesus-groups.



Theißen (1999:135) notes a drifting apart of the elements and the words that accompany them:

What happens with the elements, with...bread and wine, is an everyday, undramatic event without any violence. By comparison with the ritual sacrifices of antiquity there is a consistent reduction of violence here. But what is added by the word as the inner meaning of this event represents an extraordinary increase in imagined violence: ...the [E]ucharist is based on the killing of another human being. In my view the effectiveness of the sacrament...is grounded in precisely this tension.

In referring to the death of Jesus, the new rite lost its visible or “iconic” character. Earthly food can easily be understood as an image of the heavenly meal. In contrast to this, the Eucharist exhibited an aniconic character. For Theißen (1999:131) there exists a “pictorial analogy between the earthly meal and the heavenly meal; however, there is none between the consumption of bread and wine and the crucifixion of Jesus”. Bread is not flesh. When “this is my body” is said, there is a semantic tension between the signifier and the signified. Therefore, the words can only be meant in a metaphorical sense. The same can be said of the wine. The link to the significance of the ritual is made by the religious imagination – by remembering Jesus’ Last Supper and the passion. In this regard, Theißen (1999:132) points out: “The passion is present through words and through the imaginative power of faith. Word and faith bridge the drifting apart of signifier and signified.”

Jesus kept on “showing”, even in his crucifixion. The “telling” of this “showing” required anti-language, because, as Theißen described, that which is said possesses a much deeper meaning than is observable on the surface.

### 5.3.2 Eucharistic formulae in the New Testament

A close look at Eucharistic formulae in the New Testament should make the use of anti-language apparent. The texts I refer to in these two sections only serve as illustrations; I do not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of all the available Eucharistic texts.

The first example comprises the miraculous multiplication of loaves (Mk 6:30-44//Mt 14:13-21//Lk 9:10-17//Jh 6:1-14; Mk 8:1-10//Mt 15:32-39). Van Aarde (1994a:195) considers that this narrative does not report a “miracle” as such. Like the parallel to this narrative in the Old Testament regarding manna from heaven (cf Dt 8:3 in respect of the Exodus from Egypt/the celebration of the Passover), the story recounting the multiplication of bread was interpreted within the framework of the tradition of the Last Supper by the earliest Jesus-followers (cf Gerhardsson 1979:56). Van Iersel (1964/65:189-190) argues that the theme of the “theological meal” is present in this narrative, but that Mark is more concerned with the “equality” of Israelites and Gentiles around the table of the Lord. Van Aarde (1994a:197, emphasis by Van Aarde) concurs with this (cf Neyrey 1991:380):

[T]his also becomes clear in the topographical progression from the *particular* focus on *five thousand* (Jewish) men on the *western side of the Sea of Galilee across from Bethsaida* (Mk 6:45) to the *universal* focus on *four thousand* (Gentile) men in the *region of Decapolis* (Mk 7:31). This progression from a particular focus to a universal one could also be indicated by the *number* of baskets in each instance that were filled with leftovers, namely *twelve* as opposed to *seven*....The report that it was the disciples (with a particular focus) that took the initiative in the first part of the double narrative, while it was Jesus (with a universal focus) that did this in the second, is thus more clearly defined.

In the opinion of Van Iersel (1964/65:180-181) the *Sitz im Leben* of the narrative is the catechesis of the “early church” – in particular within the framework of the

Last Supper tradition which had not yet been separated from ordinary meals (see Gerhardsson 1979:57). The catechesis element is especially noticeable in Mark 6:34 and 8:17-21. Thus, the narrative of the multiplication of loaves, from the point of view of a form critic, can be described as a “catechesis of communion”. The *Sitz im Leben* is the *communion* (Mk 6:41; 8:6) and the *whole congregation* partaking in the *communion table* (Mk 6:42a), what also concerns the *intermediary function of officials* at the celebration of the communion (Van Iersel 1964/65:182). From the *traditionsgeschichtliche* viewpoint, the narrative probably originated in “Judeo-Christian” and “Gentile-Christian” tradition circles: In the “Judeo-Christian” tradition the miraculous element is scaled down by the integration of the themes of both shepherd and communion. In the “Gentile-Christian” tradition it is related even more closely to the celebration of communion in which Hellenists, like Israelites, took part (Van Iersel 1964/65:189-190). Anti-language can be perceived in the disciples’ misconception that there is not enough bread to feed everyone – Jesus made sure that every single person could be fed. In the family of God no-one has to be sent away or remain hungry.

A second example narrates the story of the walk to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-32), although scholarly debate exists regarding whether this passage must be understood in the context of the Eucharist (see Grundmann 1971:442-448; Schmithals 1980:234-235; Moessner 1989:178; Nolland 1993:1206). According to Crossan (1994:170-174), this story signifies that the “presence and empowerment of Jesus remain in the community as it studies the scriptures ‘about’ him and shares a meal of bread and fish together” (Crossan 1994:172). For Stevenson (1989:45) the seeds of every Eucharist are contained in this story. The two disciples walk on the road – the “way” is a codeword for the new religion. This once again constitutes an example of anti-language. They are intent upon the Scriptures, but cannot understand them without receiving an explanation, which only Christ can give. The mysterious stranger comes upon the scene to fulfill this function. As the walk ends, Jesus starts to leave, but they ask him to stay behind and break bread with them. At the point where he breaks the bread

(a traditional practice for Israelites at home), they recognize him at last. Stevenson (1989:45-46) considers that the two parts of this story (the walk, together with the Scriptures and the meal at the table) correspond to the two essential ingredients of every Eucharist. The first part<sup>29</sup> is focused on the reading of Scripture followed by a sermon and prayers. The second part leads to the preparation of the table, the thanksgiving, and the sharing of the bread and wine.

A third example is that of the meal described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (the story of the “Last Supper”), which evokes several banquet models (Smith 2003:189). It contains overtones of the funerary banquet, in which friends and family would gather to commemorate the death of a loved one. But such events were normally held only once a year, on the deceased’s birthday, and not as frequently as this which leads Smith (2003:189) to the conclusion that the funerary meal tradition lent credence to the event, for the participants, but that it was not the sole model for the meal. A variation of the funerary meal was the memorial meal. According to Smith (2003:189) this seems to be the significance of the phrase: “Do this in remembrance of me”. The closest parallel is the memorial meal of the Epicureans, to which an etiological tradition was also connected to it. Epicurus is said to have founded this meal in his own honor just before his death, as with Jesus in this text. Smith (2003:189) remarks that *what* is to be remembered is vaguely described. In Paul one does not read a narrative of the life of Jesus as in the Gospels, which would fit in here. The Christ story for Paul operated on a mythical level. For Smith the phrase “Christ crucified” virtually summarizes the entire plot. To Paul it represented a negotiation between Jesus and God – no human actors played any part in this drama. The Lord’s Supper that Paul presents is pictured as a meal of the “Lord Jesus” (cf Mack 1988:116). This phrase removes the text from any historical occurrences, because to call Jesus *ku/riōj* (“Lord”) in the way Paul understood this term was to place him within the realm of the divine. This leads Smith (2003:189) to conclude that the meal being pictured here takes place on a mythological level, borrowing by

implication the motif of the messianic banquet, a meal that takes place in the heavenly sphere.

In addition, the language of the covenant adds another dimension to the tradition, for it is not in itself inherent to either the martyr or the memorial meal traditions. Smith (2003:190; cf Mack 1988:118) observes that the term “new covenant” derives from Jeremiah 31:31. He considers that to Paul the notion of the new covenant would have had immediate application to the issues he was facing in all of his churches, namely, how the inclusion of the Gentiles was to be understood. In 1 Corinthians 11:20 Paul refers to the community meal as the *kuriakon dei=pnon* (“Lord’s Supper”). The term “Lord” accords this meal a sacred character, which Smith (2003:191) views as comparable to the terminology found in the Sarapis cult, where the meal is termed “the couch of the Lord Sarapis”. Terminology such as this denotes that the meal functions in a ritual context, most probably a sacrificial one, but sacred meals are merely variations on the generic Greco-Roman banquet (cf Mack 1988:114-119). Distinctive was the way in which the deity was perceived as in some sense a participant in the meal. A close tie existed between the ideology of the meal and the religious values to be expressed. Sarapis, like the “Christian” “Lord”, would provide banquets that met the highest ideals of the culture. They would be banquets at which equality, friendship, and joy would prevail over disputes at the meal (Smith 2003:191). Numerous examples of anti-language occur in this passage. That Jesus refers to bread as his body and wine as his blood is probably the most obvious example of anti-language found in all of the texts.

A fourth example comprises John’s description of the last supper which Jesus and his disciples ate together (Jn 13:1-17:26), a version that differs from the description of the Last Supper in the Synoptic Gospels (as I have already mentioned). It is not a Passover meal and there are no references to any words of Jesus being uttered over bread and wine. But it is still a meal that refers symbolically to the death of Jesus and includes a command that the disciples

should do as he has done (Jn 13:14-15). This supper is described in a parallel section to those where the Last Supper is described in the other Gospels. But the interpretation of this meal is associated with a new ritual, the foot-washing, which indicates that the real significance of the shared meal is one of mutual service and mutual love (Theißen 1999:138). This is another example of Jesus “showing”. Smith (2003:274) explains:

The meal utilizes a motif from banquet tradition for its symbolic reference. The motif is the washing of the feet of the guests by a servant before the meal is to begin. Here Jesus moves from his position as a table participant, puts aside his clothing, and takes on the dress and role of the servant who washes the feet (13:4-12). It is a powerful symbol for the servant image of Jesus, a symbol first used to interpret the death of Jesus in Mark (10:45), then placed in the table-talk scene at the Last Supper by Luke (22:24-27), and now elaborated further by John. It carries a dual symbolism in John, as an interpretation of the death of Jesus (13:6-9) and as a model of servanthood for the disciples to follow (13:12-16).

Although John does not describe a traditional Last Supper scene, he does include words of Jesus pronounced over bread and wine in another text (Jn 6:53-54), but without offering a profound religious interpretation of the elements (Theißen 1999:138). The reference to “eating flesh and drinking blood” refers to the radical boundary now drawn between the Johannine community and its neighboring synagogue community. And this border is created by means of anti-language. From the point of view of the Johannine community (now no longer a synagogue community but rather a meal community) it is the meal that constitutes a new boundary marker between the two communities, effectively supplementing, if not replacing, the synagogue as the boundary marker (Smith 2003:275).

A fifth implicit reference to anti-language can be found in Theißen’s (1999:135) description of the Eucharist as replacing sacrifices. He writes that in the

Eucharist the guilty consciousness that all life lives at the expense of other life is ritually stimulated. It is kept alert by the notion that another person is sacrificed<sup>30</sup> for the believers, who appropriate this life that has been surrendered for them in a primitive way – by symbolical cannibalism. Thus, the Eucharist expresses the hidden anti-social nature of human beings, in order to alter it into a motivation for maintaining pro-social order.

This notion can be illustrated by the following texts: What is performed outwardly in the Eucharist is in tension with the violent interpretations thereof, because in this sacrament everyday food is divided equally. The external celebration of the Eucharist demonstrates that life does not need to exist at the expense of other life, but that all have their share. Therefore, the Eucharist serves as an argument for strengthening the solidarity in the community. We notice this process in 1 Corinthians 11:17-26. Some prosperous members of the society displayed their status in order to shame the poor and either began the common meal early or claimed better food for themselves. Paul regards this violation of equality as an offence against the meaning of the Eucharist. The participants again become guilty of the death of Christ, because they again practice that life lived at the expense of other life which has become visible in the dying of one for all – and which is to be overcome by this death (Theißen 1999:136).

The drifting apart of religious meaning and outward celebration can result in the two being separated, as in John 6:51-59, where one may detect barbarian overtones in the religious interpretation of the Eucharist – the flesh of the Son of Man has to be eaten and his blood has to be drunk in order to gain eternal life. Then Christ will be in the believers and they in him. Theißen (1999:136-137) comments:

However, this crude archaic and magical notion is detached from the outward celebration of the eucharist and associated with the miraculous distribution of the bread. In it Christ himself is eaten as the 'bread of life' –

and in the context that clearly means that the revelation which is made possible through him is received.

This passage constitutes another example of anti-language. Theißen (1999:137) points out that “bread” and “food” are old images for wisdom. The magical Eucharistic words thus possess a spiritual significance (see also Jn 6:63), which leads Theißen (1999:138) to the following conclusion:

[T]he interpretation of Jesus’ death as a sacrificial death is only one of many interpretations in primitive Christianity. However, this very interpretation is extremely important. For there is much to suggest that only by being interpreted as a sacrificial death could the death of Jesus bring about the end of the centuries-old practice of sacrifice.

### **5.3.3 Eucharistic formulae in non-Biblical texts**

Since most of the available data for banquets comes from literary sources or is influenced by literary traditions, it is necessary to posit a distinction between social reality and literary idealization. Smith (2003:6) illustrates this point as follows: “Though we are purporting to study social forms, we do not in fact have access to ‘field reports’ or other objectively gathered observations of social behavior at banquets.” Smith (2003:8-9) argues that in the literary data, descriptions and allusions to meals tend to presuppose an idealized model to which the meal in question is being compared. One example is the philosophical banquet, as presented in the tradition of the symposium literature. This becomes a dominant model to which later descriptions of banquets are consistently compared. When analyzing data we must thus ascertain whether the author is presupposing an idealized model of the banquet as the point of reference<sup>31</sup> (cf Mack 1988:114).

According to Smith and Taussig (1990:15) the earliest texts that afford clear, unambiguous evidence for early forms of the liturgy of the Eucharist are not New Testament texts but those of the church fathers. Thurian and Wainwright



(1983:111-115) agree.<sup>32</sup> This does not mean that the New Testament is not important in this regard, but it is considered to function in the form preserved in the church's traditional interpretation rather than as an independent witness in itself.

Many documents outside of the New Testament furnish an account of early Eucharistic practices, for example:

- The *Didache*: This document was rediscovered in 1873. Opinions differ as to where and when it was written, but there is a general cautious agreement that it dates from the latter part of the first century (although it is likely to contain traditions from earlier periods) (see Layton 1968:343-383; Vööbus 1968; Niederwimmer 1989). It is roughly parallel in date and provenance to many of the New Testament documents. It may have been written in Syria. It was written in Greek and translated into Coptic, which means that it must have been used in Egypt. It is a document dealing with church order, which includes rules about baptism, fasting, and (it is generally agreed) about the Eucharist.
- The writings of Justin Martyr: He was born in Syria and converted to Christianity in 130 after experimenting with some of the other religions offered in the ancient world. His most important work is the *Apologia*, written about 150 in Rome: a defense of the Christian faith. Justin Martyr's intention is to show that it is possible to be a practicing "Christian" as well as being an intelligent person and a loyal Roman citizen. This work of his contains two important descriptions of the Eucharist, avoiding esoteric Christian terminology, because he is writing for outsiders.
- The *Traditio apostolica* of Hippolytus: Hippolytus was a presbyter in Rome at the start of the third century, and the *Traditio apostolica* can be dated to about 215. This document is a church order describing the discipline in

and arrangements for a Christian community. It was only identified recently, thanks to the work of scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century. As indicated in the title, it purports to have come straight from the hands of the apostles, but we know that (at least in editing) it was the work of Hippolytus. It contains detailed prescriptions for daily prayer, baptism, Eucharist, and ordination, and evidences a well-organized community. Though it was originally written in Greek, the earliest text we possess is a fifth-century Latin translation (see Stevenson 1989:16-19; Smith & Taussig 1990:66-67).

If we study these early texts describing the Eucharist, a faint picture emerges of how this ceremony might have taken place in the early days. Only baptized people could participate in the Eucharist. After baptism members of the congregation exchanged the kiss of peace, expressing reconciliation with each other, to mark the beginning of the Eucharist, the joyful response to Christ, expressed in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Just, 1 *Apol* 65) (Oetting 1970: 35).

The earliest celebrations of the Eucharist most probably took place in the setting of an actual meal, which is sometimes called the *agape* (love feast). Each individual brought food, the congregation partook of it together, rich and poor alike, and any food that was left over was given to the poor (see 1 Cor 11:18-22; Ignatius, c 110). By the time of Justin Martyr (c 150), the Eucharist<sup>33</sup> seems to have been celebrated separately (Oetting 1970: 36-37).

Leavened bread was used and the wine was mixed with water. The deacons took the elements to the worshippers. In addition, the newly baptized were given milk and honey to symbolize that they were babies in Christ but also to show that they were now in the Promised Land, the land "flowing with milk and honey." Participants in the Eucharist believed that they received Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist (Iren, *Haer* IV.xviii; V.ii).

As was indicated earlier, none of the New Testament texts provides a liturgical “script” for the celebration of the Eucharist, but the *Didache* provides an example of a text that does. In chapter 9 and 10 one finds the earliest recorded Eucharistic prayers. A portion of the text reads as follows (*Did* 9:1-4 – see Jasper & Cuming 1975:14-15):

<sup>1</sup>*About the thanksgiving: give thanks thus:* <sup>2</sup>*First, about the cup:* We give thanks to you, our Father, for the holy vine of your child David, which you made known to us through your child Jesus; glory to you for evermore. <sup>3</sup>*And about the broken bread:* We give thanks to you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you made known to us through your child Jesus; glory to you for evermore. <sup>4</sup>*As this broken bread was scattered over the mountains and when brought together became one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth in your kingdom; for yours are the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for evermore.*<sup>34</sup>

The *Didache* further differs from the Eucharistic texts we have in the New Testament, because there is no reference to a Last Supper tradition in the *Didache*, or to the death of Jesus, or to any words of Jesus interpreting this death. The meal is not presented as a continuation of something started by Jesus, nor as a commemoration of Jesus or Jesus’ death (Smith & Taussig 1990:66-67).

On the other hand, in his *Apologia*, Justin Martyr describes two Eucharists,<sup>35</sup> one following a baptism and the other an ordinary Sunday morning service. According to Jasper and Cuming (1990:25), these are the earliest surviving accounts of the Eucharist. Putting the two accounts together, the following outline is obtained:

- readings from the apostles or the prophets;
- discourse on the readings by the president;
- common prayers (standing);
- the kiss of peace;

- presentation of bread, mixed wine, and water (the last only after a baptism);
- prayers and thanksgiving<sup>36</sup> by the president (“praise and glory to God”);  
reply by the people (“amen”);
- distribution of the “eucharistized” elements by the deacons.

In his *Traditio apostolica*, Hippolytus records an early text of a Eucharistic prayer.<sup>37</sup> The translation raises problems, since the original Greek is largely lost. Like Justin Martyr, Hippolytus describes two Eucharists, one after an ordination, the other after a baptism. Put together, they produce the following outline (Jasper & Cuming 1990:31):

- the prayers;
- the kiss of peace;
- the offering (in baptism, with milk and honey, and water);
- the *anaphora* (including blessings over produce);
- discourse by the bishop, “giving a reason for all these things”;
- the fraction;
- the distribution.

The *anaphora* falls into six sections:

- the *Sursum corda*;
- the preface;
- the “installation” narrative;
- the *anamnesis*;
- the *epiclesis*;
- the *doxology*.

#### 5.3.4 The Eucharist and the Greco-Roman mystery religions

Numerous similarities are evident between the earliest Eucharist and some of the Greco-Roman mystery religions (Meyer 1987:226). To illustrate this point, in this section, I shall provide a cursory commentary on two examples of mystery

religions. My purpose is to emphasize the important role that alternate states of consciousness, as well as their verbalization in anti-language, played in rites.

My first example comprises the mystery religion in honor of the Greek god Dionysos, also called Bacchus (see Finegan 1989:172-173). Meyer (1987:63) points out that he was manifested in numerous ways and was worshipped in diverse rites. He may have originated in Thrace, but also had connections with Phrygia and possibly Crete. Sometimes he was depicted as assuming the form of a mighty bull (the embodiment of animal maleness) but he could also appear with fair skin and long curls (Meyer 1987:63):

At times his followers roamed the forests and the mountains, clothing themselves in fawn skins and wielding thyrsi (the long shafts, topped with ivy or vine leaves, that are symbols of the god), but actors also appeared in the official festivals and theaters of Dionysos, the god of drama, and wore their masks in the public performances of Greek plays.

Meyer (1987:63) explains that the worshipers of Dionysos acknowledged his presence in the raw flesh of wild beasts as well as the goblet of wine, in the phallus concealed in the *liknon* (a winnowing basket that might be used as a cradle for a baby), and also in the immortal human soul. A person who was confronted by the presence of Dionysos and became possessed by him, could feel his power in many different ways: in ecstasy, in inebriation, in sexuality, or in spiritual bliss. Such a person became one with Dionysos, and could even be called Bacche (feminine) or Bacchos (masculine) after the god himself. Little is known of the actual mysteries of Dionysos, but it appears as though they usually included eating and drinking. In the archaic mysteries, the initiates were said to tear animals to pieces and eat the flesh raw, as a way of assimilating the Dionysian power embodied within the animal. In more serene rites, the meal was a banquet. The holy drink was ordinary wine, the gift of the god.

There is a very clear resemblance between this mystery religion and the earliest Eucharist, especially in the eating of the “flesh” of the god and the drinking of wine, which was sometimes called “blood so sweet” (Meyer 1987:93-94).

My second example stems from the mystery religion in honor of Mithras (see Betz 1986:336). According to Meyer (1987:199) the evolution of the divine Mithras from his origin in the ancient past to his position as bull-slayer in the Roman mysteries is a long, complex, and largely unknown process (cf Finegan 1989:203-209). In the form in which this mystery is known to us, it was a Roman phenomenon that flourished in the Roman Empire from the second century CE onwards. The men devoted to Mithras entered the Mithraea, designed as caves, and participated in various purifications, initiatory rites, and ceremonial meals. Justin Martyr (*Apol* 66.4) records that the initiates took bread and a cup of water (or a mixed cup of water and wine – these elements may have been symbolic of the body and blood of the bull) and uttered certain formulas at a holy meal. The purpose of the Mithraic rituals was to effect salvation and transformation (Meyer 1987:199-200).

Once again the parallel with the earliest Eucharist is easily recognizable, especially in the ceremonial meals, in which the elements probably symbolically depicted the body and blood of the bull.

These similarities are once again explicable in terms of the shared milieu of the Greco-Roman world (Meyer 1987:226). People participated in the mystery religions because the latter enriched their lives, just as participation in the Eucharist added value to the earliest Jesus-followers' lives. The important role that alternate states of consciousness played in rites can perhaps be perceived more easily in the mystery religions than in the earliest Eucharist – this reinforces my theory that in the early Mediterranean world, alternate states of consciousness were part and parcel of ceremonies and that anti-language was used to verbalize these states (cf Burkert 1987:114).

This concludes the present section regarding the “telling” of the earliest Jesus-followers. The word about Jesus’ way of life, as illustrated in his open commensality, spread fast, because it added *value* to believers’ lives. Because participation in the Eucharist was an extraordinary event and because the Eucharist acted as the integration ceremony of an anti-society, ordinary language was not adequate to illustrate the way it enriched participants’ lives; therefore anti-language was employed. To be a part of early Jesus-groups imparted meaning to believers’ lives; they expressed this meaning by “re-enacting” what they were “told” Jesus had “showed”, by means of participating in the symbolic integration ceremony they called the Eucharist. In the next section this “re-enactment”, and the *meaning* it gave to their lives, will be discussed.

#### **5.4 MEANING: HOLY MEALS AS A CULTURAL CEREMONIAL SYMBOL OF INTEGRATION INTO AN ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY**

##### **5.4.1 Introduction**

As indicated in chapters 1 and 3, the earliest Jesus-followers formed an anti-society. People became members of this society because membership gave *meaning* to their lives; and membership was imparted by means of baptism. Once they had become members, the Eucharistic table was the occasion where they demonstrated their solidarity with one another. Hence, the Eucharist can be termed a ceremony of integration (see Theißen 1999:121). The Eucharist can be described as a “re-enactment” of Jesus’ open commensality.

To indicate what this “re-enactment” entailed, I first intend to discuss the Eucharist as a ceremony of integration; then I shall investigate the role alternate states of consciousness played in the earliest Eucharist; subsequently, the place of the Eucharist in anti-society will be discussed and lastly, I shall examine the meaning of Jesus’ open commensality.

#### **5.4.2 The Eucharist as ceremony of integration**

As remarked in chapter 3, the function of ceremonies is to co-ordinate life in communities. According to Theißen (1999:122-123), this process took place mainly through sacrifices<sup>38</sup> (see Hanson 1979:28), especially where these were connected with shared meals. This leads him to conclude that the earliest Eucharist is a ceremony of integration, which is constantly repeated and renews the cohesion of the community, especially because it replaced the earlier sacrifices, as I noted above (cf Pilch 1996c:95-96; Meier 1997:267; Koch 2001:239).

As a rule, rites are ancient and have been practiced since primal times. In contrast, the Eucharist is a new rite, because it originated with a charismatic figure of the recent past – Jesus (see Theißen & Merz 1996:359-360). To Theißen (1999:126) “Jesus provided the stimulus for the eucharist by associating with his person at his last supper...meals which were held repeatedly.” The meals that Jesus hosted were originally prophetic symbolic actions (i.e., patterns of action focused on a unique situation, in order to convey a message) (cf Pilch 1981:109; 1996c:95-96). The unique situation of these meals encompassed the fact that they were held in the face of the imminent end of the world, and that they could not be separated from their founder. Their message proclaimed that God’s salvation is made present through fellowship with toll collectors and sinners – with a view to the “eschatological” feast in the kingdom of God to which all people will stream from all over the world (Theißen 1999:126-127).

Theißen (1999:127), therefore, concludes that the Eucharist is a threshold ritual, which opens the way to a new world. Jesus held his meals in anticipation of the eschatological feast in the kingdom of God (Mk 14:25). In threshold rituals we find an anti-structure to the traditional forms of life: “In celebrating a meal with his disciples in Passover week...to which he gives a special significance by words of interpretation, Jesus is implicitly, perhaps even deliberately, constructing an



alternative to the temple ritual” (Theißen 1999:27; see Theißen & Merz 1996:380-383).

In the opinion of Theißen (1999:128), a “sacrament” could develop from Jesus’ meals because they contained traces of a confrontation with an eschatological end that was about to break in immediately. Because of this, the people who participated in such meals experienced eternity as breaking into their ordinary time.<sup>39</sup> But before a “sacrament” could come into being, the symbolic meals had to be reinterpreted. This occurred by means of a threefold change (that has already been described throughout this chapter):

- the reference to the death of Jesus;
- the tension between outward performance and religious significance;
- and the crossing of taboo thresholds.

The reference to Jesus’ death highlights an aspect that has already been perceived as present in his meals: the forgiveness of sins. To Theißen (1999:130) “[t]he earthly Jesus’ acceptance of the sinner at table on an equal footing now becomes possible – after his death and in his absence – by a reference to his ‘dying for us’ (and by the conviction of his mysterious presence at the eucharist as the risen Christ).” Here is once again evident the importance of alternate states of consciousness, because this was the way in which the risen Christ could be experienced as present at the Eucharistic table.

The reference to the death of Jesus in the Eucharist thus reinforces the link with the forgiveness of sins. In this way, such forgiveness becomes independent of the earthly Jesus, whose presence at meals represented the presence of salvation for those around the table. By being grounded in the death of Jesus, forgiveness of sins remains accessible even after his death. Since the rite of the Eucharist was now detached from Jesus (who had “invented” it), it could be repeated. The original reference to future salvation is supplemented by a

reference to the past – the death of Jesus, in which salvation has already been realized (Theißen 1999:130).

It is now appropriate to discuss the role that alternate states of consciousness played in the earliest Eucharist.

#### **5.4.3 The earliest Eucharist and alternate states of consciousness**

As I suggested earlier, participation in the earliest Eucharist implied the experience of alternate states of consciousness. The notion of eating together with gods or spirits is found in many cultures. The idiom of commensality is one of mutual respect and good will; sharing food or drink with a ghost or spirit, as with anybody else, implies amity and especially reconciliation (Beattie 1968:234).

In all the Gospels we notice the last meal of Jesus being adapted to the specific situation of that community (see Smith & Taussig 1990:51-58). In Acts the community meal is called “the breaking of bread” (Ac 2:46; 20:7, 11; 27:35). This is most probably the case because of the special significance given to the breaking of bread in the Jesus story (Lk 22:19). We do not know what form the bread ceremony took nor how it functioned, but in Luke 24:30-35 one may perceive that in the “breaking of the bread” the risen Lord is somehow “known” to them. From Galatians 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 we can assume that in Paul’s time communal meals already constituted a regular part of the worship gatherings of the various “early Christian” communities (Smith & Taussig 1990:59-66).

Crossan (2003:29) argues that unlike John, Jesus did not announce a monopoly but a “franchise”, so that both his own life and all others so lived entered into the kingdom of God.<sup>40</sup> Jesus claimed that he could *already* enter the kingdom of God and that the kingdom of God could *already* be realized for people who lived their lives as he did (Crossan 2003:49). This was symbolized by participating in the Eucharist. The Eucharist made the kingdom of God a reality in the present lives

of the participants. We should keep in mind that the earliest Jesus-followers adopted an apocalyptic worldview (see chapter 2; Van Henten & Mellink 1998:12). In the earliest Jesus-followers' practice of regularly celebrating the "Last Supper" until Christ would return ("in memory of Christ"), this apocalyptic worldview is foregrounded. By doing this they experienced "another" time, the time of God, as breaking into ordinary time. This is nothing else than the experience of an alternate state of consciousness.

We know that sharing the same cup implied sharing in the meaning of that cup as well (as in the Israelite Passover tradition). This is why Jesus asked God to let the cup pass him by in Gethsemane (Mk 14:35-36), because he knew what this image implied (cf Smith 2003:251; see Bolkestein 1977:328-329). The two disciples (Mk 10:35-40) did not understand the implication of their request to sit at the left and right hand side of Jesus in his glory (Bolkestein 1977:237-240). The second most important person (after the host) always sat at his right hand side was required to drink first. The implication of this is that if one drinks from the cup at the Eucharistic table, one shares in Jesus' fate, since the cup is placed in conjunction with the cross. But by choosing to die, in actual fact one gains life. All of this makes sense if understood from an apocalyptic perspective, in conjunction with alternate states of consciousness and anti-language.

Marxsen (1979:107) also affirms that fulfillment in the kingdom of God is often thought of as taking the form of a table fellowship. If we bear in mind that Jesus ate with people who were considered culturally unclean, it becomes clear that the early Jesus-followers perceived the meals of Jesus apocalyptically. Marxsen (1979:108) observes that after Easter, the community continued to celebrate meals (Ac 2), and they did so with joy. They believed Jesus to be present at these meals.

What might this imply for a first-century Mediterranean Jesus-follower? In other words, on a practical level, if one announced that God's new creation, God's

justified world, was already present, what would one do if somebody asked one to show them where this newness could be found? Crossan (2003:50-51) explains a possible scenario as follows:

Imagine Paul explaining Jesus' resurrection to a polite pagan colleague as they worked together in a leather canvas shop? Or, even better, to the woman who owned the shop? What could possibly convince them that a new creation was all around them, not just imminent but already present, not just coming soon but already started? What would have been at stake for them in such a conversation? What would move them, if movement were at all possible, from 'how very nice for Jesus' to 'I believe'? This? The God of all creation to whom this world belongs is a God of distribute justice and not just of absolute power. That God has begun the climactic justification of the world by raising Jesus from the dead and thereby negating the official, legal, and public power of imperial Rome. But where and how, Paul, is that at work? What could Paul answer? Something like this? There is a small group of us who meet for prayer in that sardine-shop at the corner before it opens each day. And once a week we meet there to share half of all we made from the preceding week's work. We call that meal the Lord's Supper because we believe that all creation belongs to the Lord and that we must share the Lord's food equally among us. We share what is not our own and that is the Lord's type of meal, the Lord's style of supper. So, I invite you. Come and see if God is not already making a more perfect world right under your very noses. And, by the way, we have small groups like this one here in every city of the Roman Empire. It is not just how many we are but how everywhere we are. And whenever one of you turns from Caesar, who crucified Jesus, you participate in this justification of the world. It is a choice between the divine Caesar and the divine Jesus. Come to the sardine-seller's shop the day after tomorrow and see and decide for yourself. Come and see how we live, and then you can choose to join us or to depart in peace.

By means of taking part in the Eucharist the earliest Jesus-followers, thus, already participated in the kingdom of God.<sup>41</sup> Since the world around them was continuing its natural course, this experience must have taken place in alternate states of consciousness. In John 21 we read of another instance where the disciples experienced an alternate state of consciousness. This occurs after a night of fishing, so that it could be attributed to a lack of sufficient rest, a psycho-psychological condition which can induce an alternate state of consciousness. Initially the disciples fail to recognize Jesus, but then they do recognize him (Jn 21:4, 7, 12) and lengthy, non-verbal communication follows, namely the eating of bread and fish (Jn 21:9-14). Subsequently, they communicate verbally (Jn 21:15-23) (see Pilch 1996a:137; 1998a:54-55). This is one of the earliest descriptions of communion with the risen Lord as a result of alternate states of consciousness.

In the next section, I shall describe the context within which the Eucharist as a ceremony of integration played such an important role.

#### **5.4.4 Anti-society and the earliest Eucharist**

In chapters 1 and 3, I argued that the earliest Jesus-followers formed an anti-society, structured on the basis of a fictive kinship. If we bear in mind that at a very early stage Jesus-movements were already characterized by great diversity (Pelser 1987:557), we need to ask the question how a sense of cohesion could develop so easily. How could individuals from diverse ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds come to call one another “brothers and sisters”? How were these bonds created and experienced? Smith (2003:184) theorizes that the most likely locus for this development is the community meal, with its unparalleled power to define social boundaries and create social bonding.

Smith (2003:184-185) suggests that we see this development taking place especially in Paul. The meal had already become a focus for communal identity prior to Paul. To meet for a meal was a natural thing to do, and to develop social

bonds as a result was expected. But soon there developed a distinctive theological rationale for the community meal – it came to be defined as a memorial feast commemorating the death of Jesus. This was the shape of the meal that Paul inherited. Smith (2003:184-185) also writes that with this development a “new wrinkle” was taking shape with the wholesale inclusion of Gentiles in the Jesus-groups. Up until this point, the “people of God” had been the people of Israel, and their status was indicated by the boundary markers of circumcision and some level of adherence to laws of purity. As long as the community was drawn primarily from an Israelite and proselyte constituency these boundaries could still be assumed. But when Gentiles began to claim community membership as Gentiles, something new was starting to occur. How could Gentiles come to believe that they were part of God’s people without being circumcised? This process had begun with the initiation rite of baptism, as described in chapter 4. But Smith (2003:185) illustrates that it was participation in the meal that provided the catalyst for this development. It was the meal that created a sense of belonging, of social bonding with the community.

Elliott (1991:387) confirms this analysis in his assessment of Luke-Acts. He writes that in contrast to the Jerusalem temple and the exclusivist purity and legal system it represents, in Luke-Acts, “food and meals, together with their associated domestic relations, are used to depict an inclusive form of social relations which transcends previous Jewish purity regulations and gives concrete social expression to the inclusive character of the gospel, the kingdom of God and the Christian mission.”

#### **5.4.5 The meaning of Jesus’ open commensality**

In Luke 7:31-35 and Matthew 11:16-19 an early tradition contains significant data about the meals of Jesus. These accounts stem from Q. In these texts Jesus’ enemies call him a “glutton and drunkard”, a “friend of tax collectors and sinners”.<sup>42</sup> By contrasting Jesus and John, these texts demonstrate that meal habits can represent a lifestyle in a larger sense, and that the choice of lifestyle

can be perceived to function as part of the total message of the teacher. Jesus is also viewed as creating bonds of friendship, simply by dining with certain individuals. These texts have been widely interpreted as representing a tradition of the historical Jesus. But in its present form the narrative is clearly a product of the early Jesus-movement. Therefore, it also provides information about the form and function of meals in the Q-community (Smith & Taussig 1990:44-45). The only point that we can affirm about the historical Jesus in this regard, is that Jesus probably attended banquets and that this action was seen to be consistent with his overall message (cf Mack 1988:80-81). But this statement does not represent a consensus in scholarship – the problems connected with research into the historical Jesus are too complex and laden with theological weight for any consensus to emerge (Koester 1992:15; cf Perrin 1967:102-108; Smith & Taussig 1990:47).

What did the Eucharist signify for the earliest followers of Jesus? The Greek word *eucharisteō*, is normally translated “thank you”. But since the words “thank you” in the Mediterranean world meant the termination of a relationship (and in the Eucharist participants are definitely not terminating a relationship with God), the phrase should rather be translated as “be thankful” or “feel obligated to thank” (Danker 2000:415), because this is exactly what the earliest Jesus-followers probably attempted to do by participating in the Eucharist – expressing their indebtedness to God. In this action is perceivable a sense of obligation to acknowledge God publicly as beneficent beyond any imagination (see Pilch 2002b:49-53). De Jonge (2001:210; cf Pelser [s a]b:167) considers that the purpose of the community meal was the realization of the communion (*koinōnia*) which the members of the congregation felt they missed in the outside world.<sup>43</sup> They believed that Christ was present, both in the reading and preaching of the Word and at the table in the sharing of the bread and wine. They prayed that they would be united with one another and with Christ and would share in the joys of eternity (Stevenson 1989:62-63). In chapter 4 it was argued that by means of baptism, a *person* participates in the death and resurrection of

Christ. In the Eucharist the *whole community* participates in the death and resurrection of Christ (Cullmann 1969:29-30).

Bartchy (2002:175) argues that in word and deed Jesus of Nazareth sought to undermine traditional meal practices that provided easy opportunities for males in his culture to seek honor and display their acquired or ascribed honor. In Bartchy's opinion Jesus' vision of human relationships submitted to the rule of God required a reversal of expectations regarding the giving and receiving of honor. He writes:

One distinctive feature of the historical Jesus' public life was his practice of a radically inclusive, status-leveling, and honor-sharing fellowship at table as a central strategy in his announcement and redefinition of the in-breaking ruling of Israel's God. In so doing, Jesus of Nazareth presented a living parable and model of his vision of a renewed Israel. His actions profoundly challenged the inherent exclusivism and status consciousness sustained by the prevailing cultural values and social codes.

In the same vein, Van Staden (1991:233) explains the purpose of open meals as being to advocate compassion. He adds:

On the basis of this value [compassion], derived from the symbolic universe, the asymmetrical relationship between patron and client, directed at generating as much [sic] reciprocal benefits as possible, would be changed into a relationship of compassionate caring on the part of the elite for the non-elite.

For Van Staden this purpose can be clearly perceived in Luke, whose main strategy for accomplishing it, is to have the main character in his narrative, Jesus, proclaiming and demonstrating this value in his life story, thereby giving divine sanction to it. And the exercise of compassion can most clearly be seen in Jesus' meals. Van Staden (1991:244) adds that even today, as in Luke's time, compassion should be the essence of life (cf Hancock 2005:268).



As I commented earlier, table fellowship was very important amongst the cultures of the Mediterranean basin in the first century: Mealtimes were “laden with meanings” that exceeded consumption of food (Bartchy 2002:175). Being welcomed at a table to eat with another person was a ceremony richly symbolic of friendship, intimacy and social unity. The context within which meals were consumed comprised the extended family. Beyond the household, people preferred to eat with persons from their own social class. Invitations to meals were given to people with the same social, religious and economic status, in order that the invited person could return the favor in a relationship of balanced reciprocity. Even in everyday meals fundamental social values, boundaries, statuses, and hierarchies were reinforced. Bartchy (2002:176; see Douglas 1972:79-80) explains: “Anyone who challenged these rankings and boundaries would be judged to have acted dishonorably, a serious charge in cultures based on the values of honor and shame. Transgressing these customs consistently would make a person a dangerous enemy of social stability.” Bartchy (2002:176-177) believes that solid evidence exists for concluding that the historical Jesus threatened the social order encoded in the meal tradition of his culture. He contends that everyone in the first-century Mediterranean world would expect that meals would constitute exclusive occasions in which honor was given to those to whom honor was due. In contrast to this Jesus did exactly the opposite. For him honor was still a key value, but he made honor by birth and acquired honor irrelevant: he bestowed everyone (without regard for social status, personal accomplishment, purity or health) with honor in the name of Israel’s God. Instead of seeking honor for himself, Jesus was prepared to be humiliated. For him, in contrast to the popular understanding, honor was not in limited supply. His God offered an unlimited supply of honor; in turn, those honored by God possessed the social resources to accord honor to others without fear of diminishing their own. Non-retaliation, thus, became the only honorable response to a challenge to one’s personal honor. Meals became an especially prominent occasion for this outrageous giving of honor to all, around a radically inclusive table (Bartchy 2002:181-182).

In conclusion, the two basic ethical values among the earliest Jesus-followers, according to Theißen (1999:63), were love of neighbor and renunciation of status. Since everybody who believed in Christ and was baptized could participate in the Eucharist on an equal level, the Eucharist could be viewed as *the* place where the “early Christian” ethic was lived out.

## 5.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that the earliest Eucharist (like the earliest baptism) represented an anti-language verbalization of alternate states of consciousness. By participating in the Eucharist, the earliest followers of Jesus experienced the presence of God among them. They spoke about this experience in anti-language, since ordinary language was not adequate to verbalize such an extraordinary experience. All of this exerted a lasting effect on their lives – they lived according to the example Jesus set, because they believed that they participated in his death and resurrection. They were now part of a new family, who even kissed one another before partaking in the Eucharist, so as to illustrate their kinship. If you shared a meal in the first-century Mediterranean world, it meant that you shared this kind of relationship. The earliest Jesus-followers shared a special relationship with each other as well as with Jesus (in alternate states of consciousness), and they illustrated this by means of the ceremony of the Eucharist.

The *reason* why the earliest Jesus-followers placed a strong emphasis on participating in the ceremony of the Eucharist, was that Jesus “showed” them what it was like to be part of the kingdom of God, by means of the meals in which he participated. The earliest Jesus-followers “told” this to others, by means of anti-language, which we can trace back to early texts bearing witness to the earliest Eucharist, because of the *value* which participation in the Eucharist added to their lives. Then early Jesus-groups “re-enacted” what they had been told by means of the ceremony of the Eucharist, because the latter gave *meaning* to their lives. Although they were persecuted, they apocalyptically experienced

the presence of God directly in their lives, by means of alternate states of consciousness. This experience changed their lives, because they now lived according to a new ethic, as “brothers and sisters” in faith.

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## ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 5

<sup>1</sup> Although practical issues such as whether one cup (chalice) or small individual cups should be used during the Eucharist (see e.g., McPartlan 1995:97-112); or whether children or only adults are allowed to participate in the Eucharist, predominate in some conservative churches' discussion of the Eucharist today (see e.g., Holmes [1972] 1982; Vos 1999), these issues fall outside the scope of this study.

<sup>2</sup> See Theißen & Merz (1996:361-366) for a summary of the history of research into the Eucharist.

<sup>3</sup> Bradshaw (2002:118) points out that at least up to the middle of the twentieth century the majority of liturgical scholars believed that all the early Eucharistic rites were ultimately derived from a single apostolic archetype. But as more and more evidence for early practices emerged, they had to qualify their theories to some extent. One example is the work of Duchesne (1904, 1909), which became a standard work for the first half of the twentieth century. He maintained that while there must have been variation in the details of early Eucharistic rites and that the celebrant would have had some freedom, e.g., in improvising the prayers, "[a]t the beginning the procedure was almost identical everywhere...." But he had to admit that it was not long before "local diversities" had "crept into the ritual. The uses of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria must, in the third century, have departed widely from the primitive uniformity..." (Duchesne 1904:54). Bradshaw (2002:119) says that on the other hand there were also scholars who argued on dogmatic grounds that Christ had prescribed no particular form of Eucharistic rite for the church to follow, while others opposed the single-origin theory on textual grounds – later Eucharistic rites showed such diversity among themselves that it was difficult to see any real evidence to suggest that they were descended from a single archetype. The publication of the *Didache*, with its unusual liturgical provisions, in 1883, presented a challenge to the majority view: "*Didache* 9 contains prayers for what it describes as a *eucharistia*: a short prayer of thanksgiving to be said over 'the cup' followed by a somewhat longer prayer to be said over the 'broken bread' (*klasma*); and *Didache* 10 a lengthy prayer of thanksgiving to be said 'after being filled', ending with the direction the prophets were to be allowed to give thanks (*eucharistein*) as they wished. Chapter 14 also gave the brief instruction that on the Lord's Day its readers were to 'break bread and give thanks' (*eucharistesate*). Clearly, if Chapters 9 and 10 were describing an actual Eucharist, it was of a very different kind from those otherwise known from Christian antiquity" (Bradshaw 2002:119).

<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw (2002:119-139) offers a critical summary of contributions regarding the origins of the Eucharistic rite. He concludes this discussion by saying that there have been three main obstacles to real progress in the search for the origins and development of early Eucharistic practices among the earliest followers of Jesus (Bradshaw 2002:139-143):

- There has been a widespread belief that it is necessary to trace both the overall pattern of the rite and the prayer used in it back to a standard fixed "Jewish" liturgy. Here we must keep in mind that we do not know the precise form of either of these "Jewish" institutions nor how much they were subject to variation in the first century. Nor do we know exactly when that pattern became universal in "Christian" practice. Regarding the "Jewish" prayer – it certainly exerted a significant influence on the "Christian" Eucharistic practices, but it was definitely not the only influence.
- There has been a general desire to situate all extant examples of later "Christian" rites and prayers within a single line of development. But to pick from the debris of history only those pieces that fit our preconceived pattern and to ignore those that do not is to distort the picture.
- There has been an unquestioned assumption that an early "Christian" community's Eucharistic prayer, whether in written form or orally transmitted, would always have been a single, flowing, seamless whole. "Jewish" prayers were most probably composed of short, individual units which might be combined together, and there are signs of similar

patterns in the earliest Jesus-groups. It is, therefore, not surprising that we find a diversity of patterns of *anaphoras* in the evidence of “early Christianity”, originally formed more often by the combination of small pre-existent units as the situation required than by the creation of unitary compositions. While some of these may well have their roots in “Jewish” meal-prayers, others are likely to have arisen out of quite different contexts, both “Jewish” and “Christian”, especially once “Christianity” had moved away from its “Jewish” roots and perhaps no longer distinguished so sharply between *euchological* forms which had originally been used for other purposes. In most cases, these prayers probably circulated orally rather than in written form until perhaps the late third or even fourth century, when the relatively fluid prayer traditions began to crystallize and more stable, written texts began to appear. We can conclude that a measure of selective evolution took place. Then apparently there began a phase of standardization and cross-fertilization, to complete the classical shape of the Eucharistic prayer with its different regional variants which characterized later “Christian” history.

<sup>5</sup> The local communities among the earliest Jesus-followers for the most part stemmed from the pre-existing Israelite communities; therefore, a strong resemblance existed between the organization of the church and that of the synagogue. This resemblance is especially apparent in the sphere of worship. We should keep in mind that there was a major difference between the temple in Jerusalem and the synagogues. The former did not influence the “Christian” liturgy. Although the “early church” took over some of the basic elements of the service of the synagogue, they also added a few elements, like baptism and the Lord’s Supper. After the Eucharist, certain inspired persons began to preach and to make manifest before the assembly the presence of the Holy Spirit. But this soon disappeared: from the beginning of the second century onwards we find only isolated instances thereof (see Duchesne 1904:46-49).

<sup>6</sup> Although Smith’s explanation makes a lot of sense, I suggest that it is risky to trace *all* traditions back to *one* common tradition. But for the most part his model is applicable to many of the data we possess regarding the earliest Eucharist, and, therefore, I am going to employ the information he provides, although critically. What is distinctive about Smith’s approach is that contrary to a large body of previous scholarship, he does not argue that Paul utilized a particular form of meal, such as the Passover meal or the meal of the mystery cults, as his model. Instead, he refers to a generic meal model stemming from the culture, one which is utilized by groups throughout the Greco-Roman world, including Judaism and the mystery cults. He also does not use the Lord’s Supper tradition quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 as the primary determinant of his meal theology, because this is a tradition Paul derives from other sources, not one that he created. He quotes it as an authoritative resource and then interprets it. Paul accords it his own singular interpretation, one that derives from banquet ideology. In Smith’s (2003:175) words: “Thus his overall discussion and model for the meal does not, in fact, come from the Lord’s Supper tradition but from the generic banquet tradition. But once more that should not surprise us, for the Lord’s Supper tradition is itself to be seen as a variation on generic banquet tradition; indeed, that is how Paul reads it.”

<sup>7</sup> For Smith (2003:20; cf Mack 1988:114) the differentiation of social class played a role in the preservation of material regarding the Greco-Roman banquet tradition: “By and large our evidence will reflect the values and customs of the upper classes. We cannot easily account for differentiations of customs and values in the lower classes, since we have very little evidence to go on. However, since we are dealing with a specific social institution, namely, the banquet, rather than meal customs in general, we can expect some uniformity of customs and values to be connected with it in whatever level of society it might be found.”

<sup>8</sup> Wulff (1997:70) makes an interesting remark regarding fasting and alternate states of consciousness. He says that fasting (the partial or complete abstention from food and drink for a specific period of time) was not ordinarily undertaken with the goal of creating an alternate state

of consciousness, but since it led to alternate states of consciousness, it also became a means of seeking prophetic revelations and a technique of spiritual discipline.

<sup>9</sup> Smith (2003:64) shows that in satire, the banquet was seen as a symbol for the excess of luxurious living: "The banquet worked as a symbol because it was perceived as the preeminent social event for the exhibition of refined living. And as a symbol, it was widely utilized in ethical discussions, for it indicated what the cultured life should not be, in the case of satire, or what the cultured life should be, in the case of philosophical ethics. Thus the banquet as cultural symbol transcended genre and literary context. It carried such a symbolic force in itself that it could function as a paradigm for comments and social ethics in a variety of contexts."

<sup>10</sup> An adequate reading scenario for understanding the "code" of a meal, according to Neyrey (1991:362), will consist of five parts. He says that meals should be examined:

- as ceremonies;
- as mirrors of social systems;
- in terms of body symbolism;
- in terms of reciprocity;
- and in terms of social relations.

<sup>11</sup> In this regard, Smith (2003:38-39) observes: "Much like we do today, ancients tended to mark special events and rites of passage with banquets....Birthdays, weddings, and funerals were also occasions for festive meals."

<sup>12</sup> Den Heyer (1997:84-89) comment that we need to keep in mind the findings of historical criticism, namely, that the bigger the gap between "Christianity" and "Judaism", the more negatively the Pharisees were depicted by the Gospel writers. Therefore, we cannot be sure exactly what Jesus' attitude was towards the Pharisees. On the other hand, Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998:530) assert that Jesus did most probably infringe the Sabbath codes on occasion.

<sup>13</sup> This form is reflected in the Lord's Supper traditions in the New Testament in which the wine is drunk "after supper [*deipnon*]" (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). The appetizer course at the beginning of the meal is reflected in the early Israelite Passover liturgy ("When they bring him the food, he dips the lettuce in vinegar before he comes to the breaking of the bread"; M Pes 10:3) (Smith & Taussig 1990:25-26).

<sup>14</sup> I write "his", because in the first-century Mediterranean world men ate alone. Women and children younger than the age of puberty did not eat with them. Only a widow was allowed to serve the men (see Pilch 1997c:98). In general the symposium of the classical Greek period was a celebration of aristocratic male culture. Flute girls and prostitutes were the only females allowed. Later this custom was altered. Because reclining was a posture that required that one be served, it tended to be associated with a class which owned servants (Smith 2003:42-45).

<sup>15</sup> De Jonge (2001:234) argues that when reconstructing the earliest history of the Eucharist, 1 Corinthians and the *Didache* should be used as the main sources, because they are mutually independent sources of a common, earlier, tradition. I do not hold that they necessarily come from the *same* tradition, but I take note that the *Didache* is also an important source regarding the Eucharist and will take this into consideration later in this chapter.

<sup>16</sup> See Schweitzer (1982:60; cf Feld 1976:18-31) for a detailed explanation regarding the variations among the Synoptic accounts. He views the Markan version as authentic, but I do not consider that we can single out one version as *the* authentic version.

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<sup>17</sup> According to Jasper and Cuming (1990:8) we find “pre-echoes” of the Eucharist in the Passover. The ritual as recorded in c 200 can be summarized as follows:

- Blessing over the first cup.
- *Hors d'oeuvres* (herbs and sauce).
- Explanation (*haggadah*) by the head of the house.
- First part of the *hallel* (Psalm 113 or Psalms 113-114).
- The second cup.
- Blessing over the (unleavened) bread.
- The Passover lamb.
- Blessing (*Birkath ha-mazon*) over the third cup (“the cup of blessing”).
- Second part of the *hallel* (Psalms 114-118 or 115-118).
- Praise over the fourth cup.

<sup>18</sup> In this verse one should note the resemblance between Jesus and Socrates. Socrates also taught by means of the Greek symposium, and he also had to die because it was the correct thing to do. But Socrates died by *literally* drinking a cup (filled with poison) (see Stumpf 1988:43-45).

<sup>19</sup> For a commentary on the debate whether the Eucharist was indeed installed at a Passover celebration, see Conzelmann (1992:130-140) and Bornkamm (1963:149).

<sup>20</sup> The *Symposion* tradition also demonstrates ties with the messianic banquet. It provided a means to idealize a hero, as Socrates was idealized in Plato's *Symposion*. Smith (2003:284-285) considers that Jesus was idealized in the same way in the Gospel tradition. Whenever Jesus dined, the messianic banquet lay somewhere in the background: “One of the more interesting meals of Jesus is the wedding feast at Cana, found only in John's Gospel. Here the components of the meal are all present, including the wine, which is essential for festivities. What is remarkable about the story, which occupies a prime position in John as the “first sign” or miracle of Jesus, is what the miracle consists of. What Jesus does by changing water into wine is, in effect, to guarantee that the festivities will continue, and for a long time too, considering how much wine is provided. The value being reinforced here is the festive nature of the messianic banquet.”

<sup>21</sup> Since there are significant differences between the various narratives, scholars have been divided over which of them, if any, has best preserved the historical details. A few instances follow: Jeremias (1949:57; 1973:274-277) opted for the Markan version of the interpretative words of Jesus over the bread and wine as coming closest to the original, Schürmann (1968, 1970, 1977) expressed a strong preference for the Lukan narrative with its eschatological emphasis, and Schweizer (1967:10-17) considered the Pauline account the most primitive in form, in spite of its more obvious liturgical character. More recently, Léon-Dufour (1987:82-85, 96-98) argues that older and newer elements are combined in all the traditions, but he still considers that a careful analysis should begin with the Pauline tradition, because the “polishing effect of continued use would explain quite nicely the strict parallelism evident in the Marcan tradition” (Léon-Dufour 1987:98). Regarding any influence on the narratives by the liturgical practices of the first “Christians”, Bradshaw (2002:62) concludes that the most we can say is that, because the narratives were passed on within “Christian” communities which celebrated the Eucharist, their liturgical experience may have had some effect on the way in which these groups told the story of the Last Supper.

<sup>22</sup> As I have already mentioned, the tradition that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, is most probably historical (see e.g., Perrin 1967:102-108). There are two basic versions: a description of a meal with Jesus at the home of a tax collector and a sayings tradition in which Jesus is criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners. The meal tradition is found in its earliest form in Mark and the sayings tradition is to be seen in its earliest form in Q. Both texts



can be understood as types of the *chreia*: a form of rhetoric that is described in ancient literature and was taught in the schools. It can be defined as “a saying or act that is well-aimed or apt, expressed concisely, attributed to a person, and regarded as useful for living” (Robbins 1988:2; cf Fischel 1968:373). *Chreia* was originally utilized to characterize a sage-philosopher or sage-hero (see Fischel 1968:373-374). Two types of *chreia* were widely used, namely, the Stoic *chreia* and the Cynic *chreia*. The former places emphasis on moral teaching and the latter contains a final statement about the sage-hero that becomes the basis for a demonstration of Cynic ideals and values. The *chreiai* in the Jesus tradition tend to be of the Cynic type (see Kloppenborg 1987:324-325; Smith 2003:227-228).

<sup>23</sup> Crossan (1992:398-404; 1994:178-179) adds that open commensality could be ritualized into Eucharists of bread and fish just as well as bread and wine – hence, the bread and fish Eucharists in the early tradition. He concludes this on the grounds of the fact that the latter could not have been created if a bread-and-wine symbolization had already officially antedated them.

<sup>24</sup> See Schweitzer (1982:58-137) for a detailed description of the scholarship regarding the Eucharist in the nineteenth century.

<sup>25</sup> His theory regarding the table fellowship theme has been widely employed by subsequent authors.

<sup>26</sup> According to Stevenson (1989:63), sacrifice was an important theme in the lives of the earliest Jesus-followers. He says that to the early followers of Jesus “sacrifice was something experienced all the time, with the ritual slaughter of animals at pagan altars. But they were anxious to explore the *moral* aspect of sacrifice, that the Eucharist is not a cozy habit to get into but implies (and requires) mutual commitment, right relationships within the congregation, and “Christlikeness” both during the service and also when it is over and the world makes its obvious and often crushing demands.”

<sup>27</sup> See Stegemann (2001:310-327) for the difference between an ancient and a modern understanding of sacrifice.

<sup>28</sup> Seen against the martyrological background, the language of “body for you” and “shedding of blood” had already become established as terminology for the death of a martyr (Mack 1988:118). Smith (2003:190) writes that Jesus’ death could easily have been interpreted very quickly as martyrdom: “What the saying of the words over the bread and wine represents is the idea that with the sharing of the bread and the wine one is sharing in the results brought about by that death. That result is the creation of the very community that is thus being circumscribed and affirmed by the act of sharing. Passing around the cup to be shared by all was common in wine ceremonies. This text suggests that a similar bread ceremony must have been common as well. Thus both parts of the meal are knit together with a focus on a single interpretation.”

<sup>29</sup> In the *Apologia* of Justin Martyr (Just, *Apol* 67 – see Jasper & Cuming 1975:19-20) we find evidence for the first part of the Eucharist:

<sup>1</sup>And...we continually remind one another of these things. Those who have the means help all those in need; and we are always together.

<sup>2</sup>And we bless the Maker of all things through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit over all that we receive.

<sup>3</sup>And on the day called Sun-day an assembly is held in one place of all who live in town or country, and the records of all the apostles or writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows.

<sup>4</sup>Then, when the reading has finished, the president in a discourse admonishes and exhorts (us) to imitate these good things.

<sup>5</sup>Then we all stand up together and offer prayers....



Stevenson (1989:47) demonstrates that this account reveals several things, even if they only reflect what Justin Martyr knew about Roman practice in 150 CE. We see that Jesus-groups gathered at a local center every Sunday (which was then a normal working day). Portions of (what we would call) the Bible were read. Because this took place long before printing was invented, the Scriptures were treated with great care. Local communities owned their own copies of parts of the Old and the New Testaments, the versions often differing slightly (Stevenson 1989:48-49). Then a sermon was preached, to link the people of that community with the passages just read. Subsequently they prayed, while standing up. This led into the Eucharistic liturgy. Consciously or not, this service of the Word is most probably based on the synagogue liturgy with which many of the earliest followers of Jesus were familiar (which would explain the similarities).

<sup>30</sup> Beattie (1968:236) observes that to bring a sacrifice, is to symbolically give a part of oneself.

<sup>31</sup> When analyzing the data regarding first-century meals, we should establish what is real and what is fictional. The reporting of meals tended to assume the literary form of the symposium as a matter of course – that was simply the way one talked about meals in written form (cf Mack 1988:114). Even the rules at club banquets and the order of the liturgy at the Jewish Passover exhibit the influence of the symposium form. We should, thus, always keep in mind that we have two interrelated phenomena that go by the name “symposium” (Smith 2003:47): “On the one hand, there is the symposium as social institution, in which actual meals were conducted according to a social pattern of codes and customs. On the other hand, there is the symposium as a literary form, in which meals, particularly those of the famous philosophers, were idealized according to established literary patterns and topoi. Distinguishing where the one begins and the other leaves off calls for exercising extreme care and subtlety in reading the data....The symposium genre was highly popular and influential far beyond philosophical circles. It enjoyed a long period of popularity extending from at least the sixth century B.C.E to the medieval period and beyond....Aspects of the genre lie behind meal descriptions and allusions in all of ancient literature, including especially Jewish and Christian writings of the period of this study” (Smith 2003:48-49). When we consider the symposium as a social institution, we realize that the term “symposium” was simply another name for the banquet, although it tended to emphasize the latter part of the banquet – the drinking party during which the entertainment of the evening would be presented. The philosophical symposium comprised the best-known subcategory of this institution. Although the literary genre of the symposium is largely connected with the philosophical tradition, it was also an actual social institution utilized as a normal feature of the philosophical schools (Smith 2003:49-50).

<sup>32</sup> According to them the earliest texts that contain the patterns to be followed in later liturgies are those of Justin Martyr (c 150) and Hippolytus (c 215).

<sup>33</sup> “The celebration of the Lord’s Supper gets the name ‘Eucharist’ from the prayer of thanksgiving that was said over the offerings [of food for the poor], as Justin suggests, ‘that we might give thanks to God for creating everything for the sake of man, for delivering us from the sin in which we were born, and for destroying the dominions and powers through Him who suffered’” (*Dial* 14 – see Oetting 1970: 37).

<sup>34</sup> Greek text of *Did* 9:1-4(see Pretorius 1980:20):

<sup>1</sup>Peri\ de\ th=j eu0xaristi/aj, ou4tw eu0xaristh/sate: <sup>2</sup>prw=ton peri\ tou= pothri/ou: Eu0xaristou=me/n soi, Pa/ter h9mw=n, u9pe\r th=j a9gi/aj a0mpe/lou Dauei\d tou= paido/j sou, h[j e0gnw/risaj h9mi=n dia\ 0Ihsou= tou= paido/j sou: soi\ h9 do/ca ei0j tou\j ai0w=naj. <sup>3</sup>peri\ de\ kla/smatoj: Eu0xaristou=me/n soi, pa/ter h9mw=n, u9pe\r th=j zwh=j kai\ gnw/sewj, h[j e0gnw/risaj h9mi=n dia\ 0Ihsou= tou= paido/j sou: soi\ h9 do/ca ei0j tou\j ai0w=naj. <sup>4</sup>w[sper h]n tou=to to\ kla/sma

dieskorpisme/non e0pa/nw tw=n o0re/wn kai\ sunaxqe\n e0ge/neto e4n, ou4tw sunaxqh/tw sou h9 e0kklhsi/a a0po\ tw=n pera/twn th=j gh=j ei0j th\n sh\n basilei/an: o4ti sou= e0sti\n h9 do/ca kai\ h9 du/namij dia\ 0Ihsou= Xristou= ei0j tou\j ai0w=naj.

<sup>35</sup> Here is one account Justin Martyr gives of an early Eucharist, in his *Apologia* (Just, *Apol* 65 – see Jasper & Cuming 1975:18-19):

<sup>2</sup>When we have ended the prayers, we greet one another with a kiss. <sup>3</sup>Then bread and a cup of water and of mixed wine are brought to him who presided over the brethren, and he takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of all in the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and gives thanks at some length that we have been deemed worthy of these things from him. When he has finished the prayers and thanksgiving, all the people present give their assent by saying “Amen”....<sup>5</sup> And when the president has given thanks and all the people have assented, those whom we call deacons give to each one present a portion of the bread and wine over which thanks have been given, and take them to those who are not present.

Stevenson (1989:57-60) indicates that the prayers of intercession which follow the sermon and Bible readings lead straight into a special greeting. This serves as a sign of the unity between the people. Then the table is prepared – bread and wine are brought forward. After this a prayer of thanksgiving is said over the bread and the cup. The Trinitarian formula is included in this prayer. Finally, everyone present shares the bread and wine and the gifts are taken to people who are hindered from attending Sunday worship).

<sup>36</sup> This is also called a “Eucharistic prayer”. Most of these prayers linked the Eucharist with the cross and gave thanks for the privilege of offering serviced to God. This is the prayer in the *Traditio apostolica* 4:11 of Hippolytus (see Jasper & Cuming 1975:23):

<sup>11</sup>Remembering, therefore, his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the cup, giving you thanks because you have held us worthy to stand before you and minister you.

<sup>37</sup> For a translation of the text, consult Jasper & Cuming (1975:22-23); Cuming (1976:24-28); Thurian & Wainwright (1983:113-115); Dix (1992:6-9; 40-53).

<sup>38</sup> Smith (2003:67-69) holds the opinion that sacrifice constituted the primary religious ritual of all people in the Greco-Roman world, which leads him to the conclusion that the sacrificial banquet was the heart of the religious life of those people. After a sacrifice the meat that was to be eaten was taken away to be prepared and eaten elsewhere. But this does not mean that the sacrifice belonged to the sacred and the meal to the secular sphere. The two were closely interconnected. In the Greek ritual the deity could be present in different ways: The deity could be a guest, but this was a very distinctive kind of ritual. The deity could be the host, in which case the meal was perceived as being provided by the god. The deity could be understood as miraculously present in the food. This phenomenon is most clearly observable in the Christian Eucharist of late antiquity (Smith 2003:77-79). Any banquet in the Greco-Roman world could be connected with a sacrifice in some way, “in fact, among Greeks and Romans, they almost always were” (Smith 2003:85).

<sup>39</sup> For a description of how first-century Mediterranean people understood time, refer to chapter 1 as well as to [Hall \(1976:14-18\)](#); Malina (1996:180).

<sup>40</sup> People in the first-century Mediterranean world understood the final “eschatological” event as the establishing of a perfect world, a divine utopia upon this earth. They did not expect that heaven would replace earth, but rather transform it. An eschatological world was, therefore, justice and righteousness established definitively and forever here below upon a divinely perfected earth. If eschatology was imminent, apocalyptic eschatology meant the destruction not

of time and space, earth and world, but of evil and violence, injustice and unrighteousness (Crossan 2003:43-44; see Crossan 1992:285).

<sup>41</sup> Applying this point to today, Crossan (1998:424) notes that the Christian Eucharist today is just a morsel and a sip. It is not a real meal. He asks: "You may reply, of course, that such is sufficient to symbolize the presence of Jesus and God in the community of faith. But why symbolize divinity through a medium of food that is non-food? Maybe non-food symbolizes a non-Jesus and a non-God" (Crossan 1998:424)? Crossan accepts that the Eucharist is a symbolic meal. But he wonders if this means that it should be a morsel and sip symbolic of a real meal or a real meal symbolic of God's presence. He proposes that in "early Christianity" those meals were *real meals* in the form of *share-meals*. The community shared together whatever food it had available, which both symbolized and ritualized but also actualized and materialized the equal justice of the God of Israel. Crossan (1998:444) adds: "The Common Meal Tradition can look at the Last Supper in the past, to a communal meal in the present, or to a messianic banquet in the future – or quite validly, to all of those at the same time. But it can never get away from this: *it is in food and drink offered equally to everyone that the presence of God and Jesus is found*. But food and drink are the material bases of life, so the Lord's Supper is political criticism and economic challenge as well as sacred rite and liturgical worship. It may be all right to reduce it from a full eat-and-drink meal to a token nibble-and-sip meal as long as it still symbolizes that same reality – namely: Christians claim that God and Jesus are peculiarly and especially present when food and drink are shared equally among all."

<sup>42</sup> Smith (2003:233) states that at the earliest level of tradition, "tax collector" and "sinner" are linked and function as symbolic terms to define social position through the use of a set of apparently traditional terms of slander. Smith (2003:234-235) asks what the "tax collectors and sinners" were supposed gain from this. He answers that the literary or oral narrative serves as an example of irony. That Jesus dines with "tax collectors and sinners" functions as a criticism of Jesus and is understood to be a true statement. But to the reader or listener it has a different meaning: The motif assumes that Jesus characteristically dines with what appear to be unsavory individuals, but these are in fact the types of individuals of which the kingdom is made up: "Seen from this perspective, this motif would be scandalous at the earliest level of its occurrence in this form. It would always have represented a characterization of the companions of Jesus with which the church would identify. It would serve as theological rationalization in story form to justify the situation in which the early Jesus movement found itself, one in which it was living on the fringes of its society" (Smith 2003:234). A further assumption of the story is that table fellowship with Jesus breaks down barriers that are present in the social world. Thus, Jesus had to be assumed, by all the parties involved, to be something more than just a normal teacher; that he somehow symbolized in his person the presence of the "kingdom". An explanation that is common with the Gospel narrative tradition is that Jesus somehow made table fellowship with him take on the aura of a messianic banquet. Smith (2003:124) notes that this idea is successful at a literary level, but that it is difficult to envision at the historical level. He says that it is only in a narrative form that this whole motif can function. The motif in which Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners and, thus, blessed them in some way would, therefore, originate in the form of a *chreia*, functioning to characterize the self-consciousness of the earliest Jesus-movements. It cannot succeed if placed in a historical context, because in a literary context the situation and characters can be carefully controlled. Smith (2003:235, emphasis by Smith) explains this as follows: "A prior motif, which in fact may be historical, would be that Jesus directed his preaching toward a critique of the norms of social stratification in his society. Early Christian teachers would have taken up that tradition and created a *chreia* that utilized the stock motifs of the hero at table and the generic slanderous term *tax collectors and sinners*. In this way, Jesus was characterized as the sort of person who would do such a thing, and the *chreia* itself served as a theological justification for the self-identity of the community in which it originated." In conclusion, Smith (2003:238-239) contends that what is being identified as the historical Jesus at table is more likely the idealized characterization of Jesus at table produced by the earliest followers of Jesus: "The social realities of such meals are still being correctly assessed, but the one who presents parabolic messages by means of meal

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practices is more likely to be the idealized Jesus than the historical Jesus” (Smith 2003:238). He adds that the social realities defined by these meals – in which table fellowship is equated with a new community self-consciousness – are more likely to be those of an already developing “early Christian” community than those of the crowds who came to hear Jesus teach. But he also perceives a consistency between these traditions and the historical Jesus. Jesus was most probably known, therefore, to have chosen a lifestyle different from the monastic style of John and this lifestyle was probably understood to be consistent with the tenor of his teachings as a whole. “Consequently, since the ministry of Jesus was seen early on to function in tandem with that of John, for Jesus to accept feasting as opposed to fasting might have been a change worthy of note” (Smith 2003:239).

<sup>43</sup> See Koch (2001:245-255) for a critical discussion of De Jonge’s interpretation of *koinwni/a* (1 Cor 10:16).

## CHAPTER 6

### RESUMÉ

#### 6.1 THE PROBLEM ADDRESSED

The purpose of this study was to investigate the way in which the earliest followers of Jesus experienced baptism and the Eucharist. I argued that these two rites of the earliest Jesus-followers can be understood as symbols. Beattie (1968:69-70) demonstrated that symbols exhibit three characteristics: there is a *reason* why a symbol is important, it adds *value* to people's lives, and it is *meaningful*. I applied these characteristics of symbols to baptism and the Eucharist, and examined them according to the schema I referred to as: "show"–"tell"–"re-enact".

Experiencing alternate states of consciousness, Jesus "showed" his contemporaries what it meant to come in contact with the presence of God in their lives. The earliest Jesus-followers "told" others what Jesus "showed", and did so by means of anti-language, since "ordinary language" is not a medium through which experiences of alternate states of consciousness can be expressed. Early Jesus-groups "re-enacted" these alternate states of consciousness in rites, such as baptism and the Eucharist.

Rites consist of rituals and ceremonies. In this study the earliest baptism is described as a *ritual* of initiation and status transformation, while the Eucharist is termed a *ceremony* of integration. Baptism symbolized the symbolic crossing of a boundary – by being baptized a person became part of a new group. At the same time such a person experienced a transformation of status – he or she became a "new" person with new rights and responsibilities. Once a person was part of this new group, regular participation in the ceremony of the Eucharist served as confirmation of the person's new role as well as integrating him or her into the group.

In chapter 1, I explained that the *reason* why the earliest followers of Jesus participated in these rites could be that Jesus' example (expressed by his words and enacted by his deeds) demonstrated that it is *meaningful* to live in an unbrokered relation with God. Previously the only way in which an Israelite could experience a relationship with God, was by means of participating in the sacrificial rituals in the temple. Once the earliest Jesus-followers became part of this new group, *value* was added to their lives, because, in contrast to the ordinary society of their time, every person who became a member of this non-hierarchical group was treated in the same manner. This group was structured on the basis of a fictive kinship. Slaves, women, cultically unclean people – people who were excluded from full participation in the customs of the broader society – were all welcomed and treated in the same respectful manner. Since all of this occurred in a period where they experienced themselves as being marginalized, it gave *meaning* to their lives to be part of a community where the resurrected Christ was “present” and where the neighborly living together and the renunciation of status constituted prime values. In the entire process, I contend, alternate states of consciousness played an important role.

Yet, I argued that a serious objection to my hypothesis consists in the fact that, since an alternate state of consciousness is an individual, psychological phenomenon, it is very difficult to determine today, two thousand years later, what the earliest Jesus-followers actually experienced during their alternate states of consciousness. In other words, without empirical evidence of what an individual has really experienced during such a state, the findings of research may be jeopardized, because of the impossibility of ascertaining the religious meaning and value attributed to a specific alternate state of consciousness experience.

In chapter 2, I therefore described the phenomenon “alternate states of consciousness”. I indicated that we can be quite sure that Jesus as well as his earliest followers *did* experience alternate states of consciousness, since these

were part and parcel of first-century Mediterranean culture. John J Pilch<sup>1</sup> carried out extensive research on many instances of such experiences encountered in the Bible, and as a result thus opened our eyes to the importance of these states in the lives of first-century Mediterranean people.

I would not have been able to conduct this study solely on the *assumption* that people experienced alternate states of consciousness in the first-century Mediterranean world. Yet, because of the influence of these states on people's lives, it was documented. We find evidence for the existence of alternate states of consciousness in early texts, as well as in archeological and paleontological discoveries of artifacts from a period long before the New Testament was written. Since the first-century Mediterranean world exhibited "high context" culture, as I have indicated, the characteristics of these states are not explicitly expressed. Nevertheless I proposed that these states can be inferred from *texts* recording the experiences of the earliest Jesus-followers. A model for such references is available in a linguistic phenomenon that Halliday (1976:570-584; 1986:164-182) termed "anti-language". In other words, the method I employed for tracing alternate state of consciousness experiences in the rites of the earliest Jesus-followers was that of anti-language.

Anti-language constitutes the language of an anti-society, which in turn can be described as a conscious alternative to another society. In chapter 3, I argued that the earliest Jesus-followers formed an anti-society because they were marginalized by the institutions that controlled their world, namely the hierarchical Israelite temple tradition as well as the Roman Empire. I also described the important function which the two rites of baptism and the Eucharist fulfilled in the formation of this anti-society. Because the earliest Jesus-followers experienced themselves as marginalized, they longed for a better world. This gave way to an apocalyptic mindset, which made it possible for them to experience the kingdom of God as a present reality, in contrast to their experience of the kingdom of



Caesar. Their “new” experience was manifested ritually by means of participation in the Eucharist.

Since apocalypticism has to do with the revelation of God's alternative world in the real world, it can be perceived as an alternate state of consciousness phenomenon. The earliest followers of Jesus projected a better future promised by God – a promise that functioned in their present circumstances as a kind of coping mechanism.

Thus, for them to be able to experience the kingdom of God as a present reality, amidst oppressive circumstances, alternate states of consciousness were required. I argued in my study that these alternate states were expressed by means of language patterns that are characteristic of rituals and ceremonies when they are collectively experienced by individuals in a group. In chapter 4, I described the origin of the earliest baptism, as well as the reason, value and meaning in terms of which the followers of Jesus participated in this ritual. In chapter 5, I likewise considered the earliest Eucharist. I indicated the probable instances of anti-language regarding these two rites in the early texts that we have at our disposal and emphasized the apparent reference to alternate states of consciousness in these texts.

The baptism and Eucharist of the earliest Jesus-movement may consequently be understood as rites that re-enacted alternate states of consciousness. Although this kind of state is an individual psychological affair, it can be transformed into words by perceiving such a consciousness in terms of a symbol. In other words, that which was witnessed to by the early Jesus-followers, the *kerygma*, was cast into words. That is, a “psychological” state was transformed into a “real” state. An alternate state of consciousness became a symbol in words.

Another possible way of indicating that alternate states of consciousness played an important role in rituals and ceremonies is by investigating the Greco-Roman



mystery religions. In these religions alternate states of consciousness are easily recognizable. A comparison between the earliest baptism and Eucharist and the mystery religions identifies similarities (which I considered in chapters 4 and 5). These similarities might aid us to recognize the presence of alternate states of consciousness in baptism and the Eucharist as well.

Meyer (1987:6-8) has illustrated how early agrarian or fertility festivals developed into mysteries. For this to be able to happen, the worshippers had to be convinced that the cycle of nature related directly to human life. They believed that plants, animals, and human beings participated in a cycle of life and death. Death came to all the divine forces of nature, but in the end life was victorious. If humans could therefore assimilate the power that made life triumphant in the world of nature, they too might live in a more complete way. How the initiates appropriated this power we do not know, but they may have understood themselves to have experienced an immediate or mystical encounter with the divine. As I have reasoned, it was precisely the close relation that Jesus of Nazareth apparently enjoyed with God that was imitated by his followers.

Sometimes the experiences in mystery religions seem to have entailed an approach to death and a return to life. Initiates even sometimes underwent rituals of dark and death and emerged afterwards in new light and life, or they were declared to have been reborn. This situation was also the case in the earliest baptism. Usually the initiates partook of food and drink in the ceremonial celebrations of the mystery religions, and sometimes they even became one with the divine by participating in a sacramental meal. This in turn is analogous with the earliest Eucharist (cf Reitzenstein 1978:77-78, 336).

Some of the mystery religions held lively public celebrations that preceded the secret ceremonies, while others included rites of purification such as fasting, abstaining from certain foods (such as meat or wine), refraining from sexual intercourse, and submitting to cleansings and lustrations before the initiation took

place. Prayers and sacrifices were also offered to the deities (Meyer 1987:9-10). Afterwards the devotees assembled at a sacred place for the ritual of initiation. In chapters 4 and 5, I outlined an argument that similar practices were associated with the earliest baptism and Eucharist. In this regard, Meyer (1987:12-13) asserts:

Initiation was not classroom education, but an eye-opening experience that transcended earthly realities and mundane learning. Just as any mystical experience ultimately cannot be put into words or described adequately in books, so also the blessed *mystai* heard, saw, and performed the ineffable. They claimed to have tasted death and life and to have been touched by the divine. United with one or another of the deities of the mystery religions – including, some scholars would say, Christ – they beheld the light, and their lives were renewed.

Shamanism comprises another phenomenon that is closely related to the study of alternate states of consciousness. In this study I have suggested that Jesus could be described as a shaman-like figure, or in Israelite terminology, a “holy man”. One of the main characteristics displayed by shamans is the experience of alternate states of consciousness. Jesus was no exception. We possess evidence in cave paintings and rock engravings that alternate states of consciousness constituted an important part of the lives of shamans (see Dowson 1992; Lewis-Williams 2001). Jesus’ alternate state of consciousness experiences began at his baptism and continued through his life. The result of these states can perhaps best be seen in his healings, exorcisms and all-inclusive table fellowship.

It would not have been possible to arrive at this conclusion by merely asking historical questions. The cultural plausibility of alternate states of consciousness needs to be taken into consideration as well.

Craffert and Botha (2005:31-32) maintain that questions of historicity in Jesus research have mostly been answered within a fixed structural pattern which can be described as:

...the linear model of peeling off the inauthentic additions in order to arrive at the historical kernel. It focuses only on the one side of the coin namely verifying of evidence that something could have happened. What anthropological research and reflection about cross-cultural interpretation suggest is that the other side of the coin, namely, what was culturally plausible, must be part of the question.

They aver that criteria for authenticity in historical Jesus research tend to assume a simple measure of reality – that utilized by the contemporary Western world. Such “methodological” aspects are fully interrelated with culturally determined aspects: “What is ‘real’, ‘authentic’ and ‘historical’ can only be indicated with regard to specific cultural experiences and assumptions.” Craffert and Botha contend that the historical questions under consideration cannot be answered merely by reducing the data to “reliable” evidence, but rather by finding new ways of looking at the data.

In this study I have attempted to discover these “new” ways of perceiving the data.

## **6.2 THE PAY-OFF**

In chapter 1, I expressed the hope that in the end this study might assist us to understand what kind of value baptism and the Eucharist could add to our lives today. Institutionalized churches are entering a phase of deinstitutionalization (cf Fox 1990:15-18; Van Aarde 1995b; Dreyer 2004:920, 929-932) and rites such as baptism and the Eucharist were developed before formative Christianity became an institution.

Although these rites still play an important part in the liturgy of most Christian churches today, it seems as if the spiritual dimension that played such an important part in the first century is lacking in institutionalized churches within a Eurocentric context. From a first-century perspective, to be baptized implied that a person needed to take on the roles and responsibilities associated with “Christianity”. To a great extent baptism today is performed as a custom. It is no longer viewed as an “initiation” into the kingdom of God. The Eucharist symbolized an all-inclusive ethical lifestyle, while today people are excluded from the Eucharist on the grounds of not having fulfilled all the necessary “liturgical requirements”. A Eucharist where “Jew” and “Greek”, “slave” and “free”, “male” and “female” cannot share in the body and blood of Christ on an equal footing, has the opposite effect to the original intention of the Eucharist.

The historical era where we live at the moment can be described as “post-ecclesial”. In this regard, Hancock (2005:267-268) asserts: “Rather than treating the eucharist as a measure of power or exclusivity, a qualification of who’s in and who’s out, the Church should begin to understand the eucharist as the very thing that shatters the boundaries between inside and outside.” As postmodern believers we should try to understand the meaning originally attached to baptism and the Eucharist, which could assist us to realize the possible value of baptism and the Eucharist today, without the tag of “formalism” being associated with them.

Hancock (2005:271-272) suggests that we can compare watching a film today with a rite: “The narrative worlds generated by literature and film grab hold of us, transport us from the ordinary into the extraordinary.” It takes place in a designated space. Everybody behaves appropriately and upon completion of the “rite” all the participants return to the “real” world. According to Hancock, although everybody gazes at the screen in a cinema, in reality *nothing* lies behind the screen.

Hancock (2005:271-272; first emphasis mine) describes this phenomenon as follows:

What we perceive as we gaze upon this projection is the illusion of the movement of life, the illusion of real people involved in real situations, expressing real emotions, etc, when in fact our perception is being *altered* as our gaze is doubly manipulated by the lens, first of the camera recording the activity and then of the projector reproducing and amplifying it on the screen....Our perception is...tricked as we regard the on-screen images as actually taking place, as if the frame of the screen were actually a window into some parallel universe – the plot unfolds in real time, but at the end, the film is rewound onto its reel and projected again for the next congregation, again as if for the first time. In this way, the illusion that we are coerced, by the medium itself, into believing is only as real as we perceive it and as we submit to its mythic power. If we view a film with the constant awareness that what we perceive is *false* – in other words, if we fail to willingly suspend our tendency to doubt – the effect is ruined, and the film cannot carry out its illusion. Even more simply, if we close our eyes (and plug our ears), refusing to receive the visual (and aural) input from the movie which seeks to transport us into this elusive, illusory space, the film's illusion loses its efficacy, and hence ceases to be real.

In similar fashion to a film that transports viewers to “another world”, alternate states of consciousness – through the medium of anti-language – transported the earliest Jesus-followers into the realm of the “kingdom of God”. This could occur again for believers today if they are “open” to it, and do not “close their eyes and plug their ears”.

### 6.3 IN CONCLUSION

In this study I have indicated that baptism as a ritual of initiation and the Eucharist as a ceremony of participation can be understood anew if one takes

the contemporary knowledge of alternate states of consciousness into consideration. Because of the “institutionalization” of the alternate states of consciousness experienced by the earliest Jesus-followers, an alternative community was formed. Although it is difficult to study alternate states of consciousness because of their psychological individuality, the result of experiencing them – the formation of an alternative community – can be studied much easier because of its empirical nature and witnessed evidence.

Baptism and the Eucharist represent the symbolic “re-enactment” of that which Jesus “showed”. Each is the re-experiencing of an alternative state. By one’s participating in baptism and the Eucharist, the “ordinary” world is interrupted by something out of the ordinary. That which Jesus experienced in his alternate states of consciousness, can also be experienced in these rites, namely that the kingdom of God is immanent, that it differs from the ordinary world, and that people can share in it, in an inclusive manner. As I commented in chapter 1, this was the case in Jesus’ time and it could still be the case today. Yet, we need to attach a similar meaning to baptism and the Eucharist to that which the earliest Jesus-followers attributed to these rites.

By way of summary it can be suggested that:

- Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed an alternative lifestyle;
- he advocated this alternative lifestyle by means of his experience of alternate states of consciousness;
- alternate states of consciousness formed a common part of first-century Mediterranean people’s lives;
- in contrast to this, contemporary Eurocentric people usually feel skeptical about these states;
- the earliest Jesus-followers participated in Jesus’ alternative lifestyle;
- to be able to continue to live in the way Jesus did after his death, his earliest followers founded a new group on the grounds of a fictive kinship model;

- to be able to become a member of this group, a person was required to undergo the initiation rite of baptism;
- at the same time baptism also constituted a status transformation rite, because in the new “family” everybody took on new roles and responsibilities;
- for this status transformation to take place, an alternate state of consciousness was needed;
- once part of the new group, members regularly participated in the integration ceremony called the Eucharist;
- this was a symbolic, ceremonial meal based on the all-inclusive meals that Jesus hosted;
- these meals were an expression of their alternative lifestyle;
- which implied a valuable and meaningful way of living despite oppressive circumstances (marginalization by the Israelite temple tradition as well as by the Roman Empire);
- which was made possible because of their apocalyptic frame of mind and alternate states of consciousness;
- in contrast to this, in a Eurocentric world we have interpreted baptism and the Eucharist as cognitive dogmatic constructs;
- the significance and relevance of this research are to be found in the enhancement of social inclusivity within an ecclesiastical context as an ideal in the present day.

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**ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 6**

<sup>1</sup> See Pilch 1981; 1988; 1993; 1995a; 1995b; 1995c; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 1997d; 1998a; 1998b; 1998c; 1999a; 1999b; 1999c; 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2001; 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2002d; 2002e; 2003a; 2003b; 2004 for examples and explanations of alternate state of consciousness experiences in the Bible and the first-century Mediterranean world, as well as related issues.



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## SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to examine the way in which the earliest followers of Jesus experienced the rites of baptism and the Eucharist, which in turn could aid us to comprehend what kind of value baptism and the Eucharist might add to our lives today. My point of entry reflects that of current research which indicates that baptism and the Eucharist can be perceived as symbolic rites. Rites consist of rituals and ceremonies, and in this case baptism can be described as an initiation and status transformation ritual, while the Eucharist can be seen as a ceremony of integration and participation. As with other symbols, the earliest baptism and Eucharist carried *meaning* because they were performed for a *reason* and they added *value* to people's lives.

Extensive research has already been carried out on the origins of baptism and the Eucharist. However, it has not been investigated whether this ritual of initiation and ceremony of participation could be understood anew if one takes the contemporary knowledge of alternate states of consciousness into consideration.

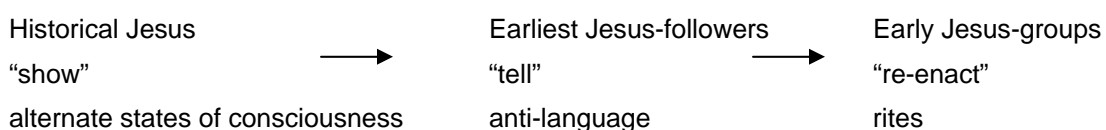
As a result of cross-cultural anthropological investigations we know that only ten percent of people all over the world today do not experience common alternate states of consciousness, while the rest of humanity do. The premodern mythical world of the biblical period displays continuity with this finding – people who lived in the first-century Mediterranean world experienced alternate states of consciousness as an ordinary part of life. Only in the Eurocentric world have we – the ten percent exception to the rule – attempted to interpret baptism and the Eucharist as cognitive dogmatic constructs.

The hypothesis of this study aims to demonstrate that the initiation and participation ritually expressed by the two “sacraments” can be “better” explained against the background of alternate states of consciousness. However, a model

is necessary to verify or falsify the legitimacy of this hypothesis. Research into alternate states of consciousness creates a theoretical problem because, even though these states can be experienced simultaneously by more than one person in a group, experiences of alternate states of consciousness represent individual mental and psychological states. Each experience is unique and in the first instance a personal experience. In other words, without empirical evidence of what an individual has really experienced during an alternate state of consciousness, some research findings may be jeopardized, because of the impossibility of ascertaining the religious meaning and value attributed to a specific alternate state of consciousness experience. Yet, we do have access to texts as well as archeological and paleontological findings which show that there is a correlation between alternate states of consciousness and certain rites. The study illustrates that these alternate states of consciousness were verbalized in “anti-language”, which is the model I employ.

“Anti-language” constitutes the language that is used by an anti-society, which in turn can be described as a conscious alternative to another society. The earliest Jesus-followers formed such an anti-society, into which they were initiated by means of baptism and in which they participated by means of the Eucharist. Consequently, the purpose of the study is to indicate that the ritual initiation and ceremonial participation of the earliest Jesus-followers were the result of alternate states of consciousness as expressed in anti-language. The study aims at redirecting extant research concerning the origins of the “Christian” baptism and the Eucharist by means of a multidisciplinary methodological approach. One of the import and relevant issues addressed in this study can be found in the enhancement of social inclusivity as an ideal in the present day.

#### Summary:



**Keywords:**

- Alternate states of consciousness
- Anti-language
- Anti-society
- Rite
- Ritual
- Ceremony
- Baptism
- Eucharist
- Initiation
- Status transformation
- Integration