

The role alternate states of consciousness played in the baptism and Eucharist of the earliest Jesus-followers

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Abstract

In this article it is argued that the baptism and Eucharist of the earliest Jesus-followers can be better understood when contemporary knowledge with regard to alternate states of consciousness is taken into consideration. During Jesus' baptism and all-inclusive meals, he experienced alternate states of consciousness, which can be understood as expressions of the direct influence the Spirit of God had in his life. In the rites of baptism and the Eucharist the early Jesus-followers re-enacted Jesus' alternate states of consciousness. This re-enactment is illustrated by means of a model termed "anti-language". The understanding of the earliest baptism and Eucharist, as described in this article, could aid contemporary Christians in experiencing these rites as being meaningful today.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, to investigate the rites of baptism and Eucharist in order to indicate that these two rites played an important role in the lives of the earliest Jesus-followers. Secondly, to derive insights from the investigation that may lead to an equivalent meaningful experience of baptism and the Eucharist today. The rites of baptism and the Eucharist

¹ This article is based on the doctoral dissertation "Baptism, Eucharist, and the earliest Jesus-groups – from the perspective of alternate states of consciousness". This dissertation, with Prof Dr A G van Aarde as supervisor, was submitted and accepted as part of the requirements of the DD degree (2006), Department of New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria.

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originated in a time before the church became an institution. Since the church is entering a phase of deinstitutionalization in the present day (cf Dreyer 2004:920, 929-932; Schutte 2004), this article could help postmodern believers in a Western world to realize once again what the value of baptism and the Eucharist could be, without the tag of “formalism” being attached to these rites.

Extensive research has already been carried out regarding the origins of baptism and the Eucharist (see e.g. Jeremias 1949; Cullmann [1950] 1969; Lietzmann [1955] 1967; Bornkamm 1963, 1971; Bultmann 1984; Collins 1989; Theißen 1999; Bradshaw 2002). However, it has not been investigated how contemporary knowledge of alternate states of consciousness could contribute to our understanding of these rites.

This anthropological phenomenon termed alternate states of consciousness has recently been applied to biblical studies, pioneered 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 meaning and value attributed to a specific alternate state of consciousness experience.

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 is that the initiation and participation, ritually expressed by the two “sacraments”, can be “better explained”² 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

² 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.”

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 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, the alternate states of consciousness which Jesus experienced and were witnessed to by his earliest followers were cast into words. A psychological state was transformed into a real state. It became a symbol in words.

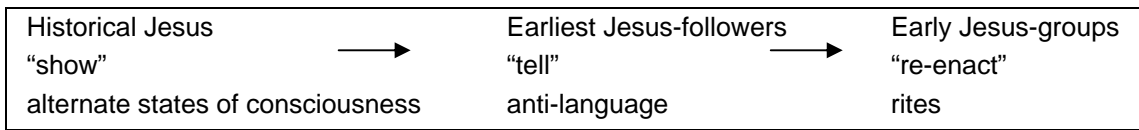
The distinction between enactment and recounting can be termed “showing” and “telling” (Funk & the Jesus Seminar 1998:27-28). This implies that the historical Jesus “showed” and the first gospel writers “told”. “Show” and “tell” constitute the dialectics between Jesus and the gospel writers. Afterwards 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? One may do so by making use of symbols (see Cassirer 1944:31-32; Turner 1967:19; Douglas [1973] 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.

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The following schema illustrates the contents of this article:



2. “SHOWING”: ALTERNATE STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

By means of experiencing alternate states of consciousness, Jesus of Nazareth “showed” what it meant to experience the presence of God directly in one’s life. These alternate states of consciousness were especially evident in Jesus’ baptism as well as in his all-inclusive meals. But what is an alternate state of consciousness?

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). 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).

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 n 1), Austin (1998:306), and Craffert (2002:65) that the term “alternate states of consciousness” describes this phenomenon adequately. Craffert (2002:65) indicates that on a homoversal³ 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) 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

³ The term “homoversal” was coined by Henry Rosemont (jr) (1988:52), to signify “for all human beings, physiologically and mentally constituted as they are.”

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 n 1) further exposes the term’s implicit pejorative and ethnocentric 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.”

In an alternate state of consciousness a person 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 & 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”⁴ is a concept deriving from Western culture and is of no help in understanding first-century Mediterranean concepts⁵ (Saler 1977:43-44, 46, 51; cf 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.”

⁴ 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 Horrocks & Jevtic [1997] 2001:39-46; Strathern 2000:43).

⁵ 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).

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In contemporary Western culture, alternate states of consciousness are generally thought of as irrational (cf Jung [1964] 1988:45, 82-83; Bourguignon 1973:3; Goodman 1988:3, 36; 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 [1980] 1982:244-245). Consequently, many of the values associated with it are quite arbitrary and specific to Euro-centric culture alone (Malina & Pilch 2000:5; see Craffert 2002:84; Pilch 2002a:105).

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. She also found that the first century Mediterranean world stands in continuity with this finding. 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 (see Bourguignon 1973:9-10; 1976:49-51; Goodman 1988:36; 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” (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:282-285; cf Kleinman 1988:123; see Pilch 1995c:49-50, 56-57; Crossan 1998:xviii).

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 consciousness⁶ (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,

⁶ Examples of this can be seen in rock engravings and cave paintings (see Dowson 1992; Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998).

according to Malina (1993:8), 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 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 Euro-centric 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; cf Price-Williams 1975:81-87).

We can distinguish between a variety of different states of consciousness (Krippner 1972:1-5; Tart 2000:258; Winkelman 2000:118-126). These states can also be induced in various ways.

Craffert (2002:59) perceives the two main ways by means of which these states can be induced as:

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- 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 over stimulation: can be induced by ritual practices like drumming, chanting, singing and dancing (cf Bourguignon 1976:47, 53; Richeport 1984; Lewis 1989:34; Pilch 1995c:53-54; Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998:14; Korn 2002:41).

The alternate states of consciousness that Jesus and his earliest followers experienced could have been induced by both physiological deprivation as well as physiological over stimulation, since we know that at least fasting, sleep deprivation and singing played an important role in these rites (see section 4).

3. “TELLING”: ANTI-LANGUAGE

The aim of this article 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 Lewis 1989:5; Davies 1995:136; 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*, alternate states of consciousness were verbalized and afterwards re-enacted in the symbolic rites of baptism and the Eucharist.

According to sociolinguists, language is the way in which people interact (Halliday 1986:10-13). Therefore we cannot study language without taking its social context into consideration. There can be no language without

society, and no society without language. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:7) demonstrate that if we study the language of the earliest Jesus-groups, we will 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 (1986:165) 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, 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”.⁷

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 article 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

⁷ For contemporary examples of relexicalization and overlexicalization, see e.g. *Dictionary of slang* [s a]:www.kindafunkyradio.com/extras/dictionary.htm; *A prisoner's dictionary* 1995-2003:www.prisonwall.org/words.htm.

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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” (cf Weber 1968:xliv-xlv; Giblett 1991:2-3). 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.

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 labelled 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.

If we keep in mind that metaphorical modes of expression are the norm in an anti-language (Halliday 1986:175-177; Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:13-14), 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

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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.⁸ 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.

4. “RE-ENACTMENT”: RITES

4.1 Introduction

In the previous section 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. 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.

⁸ 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 1994:79-80).

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 article, baptism can consequently be termed a ritual and the Eucharist a ceremony.

Baptism can be described as an initiation and status transformation ritual. 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 (Van Staden 2001:583; cf Eliade [1958] 1965:ix-x; McVann 1991:333). Baptism can be seen as such an entrance ritual, whereby outsiders legitimately enter the realm of God.

On the other hand, the Eucharist can be called a ceremony of integration (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).

4.2 Baptism

Jesus most probably did not baptize people, but was himself baptized by John the Baptist (see Schweizer 1970:177; Barth 1981:23-43; Hartman 1992:33-38;

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1993:195-197; Esler 2003:204). 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.

Numerous explanations exist for the reason why Jesus was baptized (see e.g. Cullmann 1969:16-22; Davies 1995:61-64). Pilch (1996c:19-21) explains that Jesus' choice to be baptized 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; Van Aarde 2001a:47; DeMaris 2002:130-144). At their baptism early Jesus-followers most probably also experienced alternate states of consciousness (as Jesus did), a ritual which confirms that they received the Holy Spirit (cf. Barth 1981:60-72).

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]: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.

Due to a lack of space, I will only be able to give one example, namely the description of baptism found in Romans 6:1-14. For Collins (1989:42) in “Romans 6:1-14 the ritual of baptism is explicitly interpreted as a re-enactment 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.”

Here one can 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 Pelsler 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 (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 (cf Sumner [1906] 1959:30; Weber [1963] 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).

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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 raising 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.

If we keep the description of induction techniques for experiencing alternate states of consciousness in mind while we take a look at some of the earliest descriptions of the baptismal procedure that we possess, it will become clear that during baptism the earliest Jesus-followers most probably experienced alternate states of consciousness. Oetting ([1964] 1970:28-30; Roy 1987:73; cf Duchesne 1909:366-367) summarizes the earliest descriptions that we have regarding the ritual of baptism 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, 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), whereupon he or she was immersed three times in the water. 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. 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*). 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 (Esler 1994:48; 2003:206-207).

This description of how baptism was 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. Favourable 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.

4.3 Eucharist

Jesus most probably was not the founder of the Eucharist (see Lohmeyer 1937:204-223; 1938:92-94; Lietzmann 1967; Feld 1976:4-39; Bultmann 1984:152-153; Bradshaw 2002:61-62), but Jesus' all-inclusive meals were of such a meaningful nature to the earliest followers of Jesus, that they were transformed into a ceremony by the early Jesus-groups (Smith 2003:221-223). Theißen (1999:124) 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."

Once again space only allows for one example, namely that of the meal described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, the story of the "Last Supper" (Smith 2003:189). 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. For Theißen (1999:132), 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 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

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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.”

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 [1964] 1968:234).

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 the importance of alternate states of consciousness is once again evident, because this was the way in which the risen Christ could be experienced as present at the Eucharistic table.

If we study the 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 “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 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).

None of the New Testament texts provides a liturgical “script” for the celebration of the Eucharist, but the *Didache*, Justin Martyr’s *Apologia*, and

Hippolytus' *Traditio apostolica* provide examples of how this ceremony probably took place. In *Didache* 9 and 10, for example, 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):

¹*About the thanksgiving: give thanks thus:* ²*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. ³*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. ⁴As 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.

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 section 3; 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.

5. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The purpose of this article 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 examined these symbolic rites according to the following schema: "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

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be expressed. Early Jesus-groups “re-enacted” these alternate states of consciousness in rites, such as baptism and the Eucharist.

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 neighbourly living together and the renunciation of status constituted prime values. In the entire process, I contend, alternate states of consciousness played an important role.

At the beginning of the article 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 1995; 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.

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. This was the case in Jesus' time and it could still be the case today. Yet, for this to be possible, we need to attach a similar meaning to baptism and the Eucharist to that which the earliest Jesus-followers attributed to these rites.

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