



HELLO

I AM

Named

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The passage from the world of sin into God's life has long been marked by water, fire, and the manifestation of God's name. In the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt, God's name was revealed as a mysterious path across the Red Sea to freedom. In Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan, the divine Name was shown as a threefold love belonging to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In our own Baptism, we discover that God has taken our names up into the Trinitarian life, and we are given this threefold name for our own. How can we see our way by the light of this name?

In February 2013, my third child was born. She has an older brother and an older sister, so when she was still a nameless and invisible being about the size of my thumbnail, I was packing up kids' clothes, carefully labeling them, and putting them in boxes in the basement, storing them up for this person I had not yet met. When she finally arrived, my husband and I named her after the newest Doctor of the Church. I took her to my first postpartum appointment, where my doctor asked her name.

"Hildegard," I said.

"That's a big name for such a little peanut!" she crooned, bending over the car seat to peer at the baby's face.

Yes, I thought. Like all the other hand-me-downs, it's just waiting for her to grow into it.

In the following weeks I made many explanations. "Is she named after someone in particular?"

"Yes, a twelfth-century Benedictine abbess, theologian, composer, philosopher, naturalist, and mystic."

Responses ranged from blank stares to enthusiastic approval, with most hearers bewildered but supportive. One of my funniest and most beloved colleagues even offered to contribute to her future therapy bills.

I began to have some sympathy for Moses, who was delegated to carry a new name for God to the Jewish people, and found it rough going. God, speaking from the burning bush, begins by announcing the liberation to come:

I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.¹

Pretty decent offer. Does Moses say, "Good deal, sign me up"? No, he says, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"² I think this wonderful humility was Moses' way of saying, "Thanks, but I'm really busy, and I really think this is more Aaron's department. Or yours! You don't really need my help. I think I'll stay here on the mountain with my new family and my herds." Moses is an exile from both his own people and from their Egyptian overlords, and this sounds like a dangerous mission for even the most skilled ambassador. Moses expects quite a chilly reception, not only from the Egyptians, but also from his own people. "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"³ God responds by giving Moses three slightly different versions of the unknown and incomprehensible divine name: "I AM who I am; ... you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"⁴ This doesn't seem to satisfy God, because the text goes on: "God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, [that is, YHWH,] the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my

name forever, and this is my title for all generations.”⁵ It seems even God has a hard time pronouncing the divine name. It’s hardly surprising that by the first century Jews refused to do so, wrapping this deeply personal, deeply difficult revelation in a reverent silence.

Jesus, on the other hand, in the Gospel of John, boldly claims the divine name. *Ego eimi*, the emphatic Greek translation of the Hebrew I AM, falls from Jesus’ lips many times in John. The scene in the garden is the most dramatic, when Judas leads the soldiers and religious leaders to Jesus to arrest him: “Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, ‘Whom are you looking for?’ They replied, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus replied, ‘I AM.’... When Jesus said to them, ‘I AM,’ they stepped back and fell to the ground.”⁶

This claim is powerful enough to silence the leaders, temporarily, but it also has radical and cosmic implications: that familiar name, Jesus of Nazareth, “whose father and mother we know,”⁷ is the same as the ineffable Name. *Ha’Shem*, the Name of the Lord, at which Isaiah said “every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear”⁸ is now, for Christians, “Jesus the Christ.”⁹

And that name becomes ours in Baptism.

Of course, like Moses, we might seek to be excused. Who am I to claim the divine name? Jesus is, after all, God by nature and God’s own Only-Begotten Son. That he takes up the dangerous name does not mean I can do so. But there is one other person in the Gospel of John who boldly claims, *Ego eimi*. The unnamed man blind from birth in John 9—which the Lectionary designates as part of the Lenten preparation for Paschal Baptism—is also subject to a mistaken identity. After he “went and washed and came back able to see,” the “neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some were saying, ‘It is he.’ Others were saying, ‘No, but it is someone like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I AM!’”¹⁰

After he was washed and enlightened, the man became unrecognizable to his neighbors, just as Jesus becomes unrecognizable after the Resurrection in the Gospels. The name the man born blind identifies himself with is not his own, but the divine Name given to Moses and claimed by Christ. It is a kind of juggling, sleight-of-hand with names. In the Gospel of John, both Jesus and the man born blind take the name and identity their neighbors think they know—Jesus of Nazareth, the man who sits and begs—and claim that within it lies the mystery and the danger of *Ha’Shem*, the great I AM.

The baptismal rites, too, juggle with names. Both the Roman rite of infant Baptism and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) begin with a ritual request for the candidate’s name. This is of course in part a pragmatic matter: we need to know what to substitute for *N.* through the rest of the rite! But no naming is merely pragmatic. Our human name is the one God is calling. In fact, the rite is filled with naming: “N., the Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its *name* I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of his cross,” the welcoming proceeds. The Litany of Saints names a cloud of witnesses, most especially those who share the name of the baptizand or the one given to the place where he or she is baptized. The candidate is anointed “with the oil of salvation in the *name* of Christ our Savior.” The rite associates the Christian name of the baptizand with the names of the covenant community, local and universal, dead and living, and ultimately with the name of Christ the Lord. Then, at last, he or she is baptized “into the name” of the great Christian theophany: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Like the “I AM” statements of the Gospel of John, this initiatory naming is radical and potentially challenging. An infant’s name seems to be under our control—I, after all, named this child Hildegard; yet that name immediately takes on a mysterious resonance, as I note fortuitous or providential aspects of her personality that were hidden from me when I chose it. An adult’s name, too, seems familiar and comprehensible, invoked on numerous documents, a matter of everyday communication. Yet somehow, Baptism asserts that these names have been assumed into the enigmatic fact of the Godhead; that within them, in the sacramental grace of the “Christian name,” we can find the whole depth of the Christian mystery. How is this possible? How is it possible for a name chosen by human beings to be the name by which God knows each of us?

In order to think about this question, we have to consider the ambiguity, indeed, even the ambivalence, of Christian names and naming. I am aware that the divine Name, in the context of a history that did not hear women’s contributions, has its own ambivalence. Historically, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” has been interpreted to reinforce the idea that maleness is normative for human beings, and that women are less capable of the divine image or of God’s work. Let me be clear: the Godhead has no gender, and the works of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit also should not be reduced to the gendered stereotypes of human imagination. Nonetheless, I wish to consider here our cultural prejudices about human names. Conversations on the divine name and gender continue, but I feel the parallel ambivalence of human naming is sometimes forgotten.

What does it mean to have a “Christian name”? On one hand, taking a saint’s name or a Biblical name is a powerful way of claiming one’s integration into the redeemed covenant community. On the other hand, Mia, Mason, and Mvam Zambe are as powerfully converted into I AM by the baptismal rite as Michael or Macrina. Perhaps we too easily overlook this truth when we are distracted by saints’ names or the practice of renaming. Our human names are taken up into the covenant work of God by Baptism, and not found wanting; the divine Name is the one we are given, and must grow into.

Gebhard Fugel (1863-1939); *Moses and the Burning Bush* (ca. 1920);
Diocesan Museum of Freising

Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons



PART 1: INDIGENOUS NAMING

Giving a baptismal name has been a moment in the “culture wars” since long, long before there was a term for the culture wars. Or, in fact, the language of modern English. Archbishop John Peckham of Canterbury’s *Constitutions at Lambeth* from 1281A.D. prescribes, “Let priests take care that names which carry a lascivious sound be not given to Children at their Baptism, especially to those of the female Sex. If they be, let them be altered by the Bishops at Confirmation.”¹¹ One wonders how the priests decided what sounds were lascivious. Taking a clue from the rest of the *Constitutions*, I suspect they were names associated with pre-Christian worship in the British Isles—in other words, indigenous names. Not Aidan and Brigit, of course. Those names of a Celtic god and goddess were, by the time Archbishop Peckham wrote, also names of multiple saints in the British Isles (some of whose miracles bear a distinct resemblance to the works attributed to their namesake gods). Those names had been redeemed, taken up into the Christian story of salvation history. Hildegard, too, which probably once would have evoked the Valkyries, now belonged to the Sibyl of the Rhine. But other indigenous names were beyond the pale, demonstrating a suspicious familiarity with paganism.

In the *Roman Ritual* promulgated by the Council of Trent, this concern is integrated into the rubrics for the baptismal rite: “A pastor should see to it that the person baptized is given a Christian name. If he does not succeed in this, he must add the name of a saint to the one chosen by the parents, and inscribe both in the baptismal register.”¹² As in medieval Britain, this posed a challenge for modern mission areas, where pastors frequently misunderstood or simply disapproved of indigenous names, associating them with superstition and non-Christian religious practices. In the RCIA, this rubric has been ameliorated: “The elect *may* choose a new name, which is either a traditional Christian name or a name of regional usage that is not

incompatible with Christian beliefs.”¹³ If the elect has chosen a new name, he or she is addressed during the rite of choosing a baptismal name by both names: “N., from now on you will [also] be called N.”

In some regions, prejudice against indigenous names and the heritage they represent continues to the modern day. Uduakobong E. Umoren, in his 1972 essay “African Names in Christian Initiation,” critiqued the practice of avoiding African baptismal names: “Unfortunately, one of the effects of the pious practice of giving a Christian name to a baptized African was that the African names, although meaningful and religious, came to signify paganism. ... Only a ‘Philomena,’ a ‘Christopher’ etc. sparked respect. ... ‘Mvam Zambe’ was obviously a ‘pagan.’”¹⁴ “Mvam Zambe,” Umoren explains elsewhere in the essay, means “God’s gift.” By this time, the issue is not simply misunderstanding, or oppression, by unenlightened missionaries: it had become systemic, so that Africans themselves disregarded the possibilities of their own indigenous names, and the “authentic African experiences with God” they represent.¹⁵ Graced encounters with God, and lives that are God’s gift, are expected to follow European patterns. African patterns are suspicious.

But the indigenous patterns of religious possibility are where the Christian picture of the God of Jesus Christ is transformed and renewed. Saints Aidan, Brigit, and Hildegard did not become saints because they had saints’ names; they became saints because they were willing to hear the triune God calling their names. Christian initiation is not about getting the *right* name, but about *being* named, about the experience of being called into intimacy by God and the Christian community.

African naming rituals also establish the communion of the living and the dead, the shared name that links the fellowship of living mortals with the transcendent. Gurli Hansson, in an article entitled, “The New Name and Wholeness in Life: A Comparative Study of Name Giving, Baptism and Initiation in Zimbabwe,” describes some African naming rituals as a positive context for Christian naming. Hansson notes a traditional naming practice among the Karanga tribe, in which the *Vadzimu*, the ancestral spirits, and the *Musikavanhu*, the Creator, are told a new child’s name. The child is shaved and washed in the preparation to signify the passing from the fetal to the infant stage, but during the naming rite itself, no water is used, as it would offend the spirits. Rather, beer and snuff are sprinkled liberally around the child and the name is announced loudly so that the spirits and the Creator will hear and recognize it. The name is given by the paternal grandmother, for a girl, or by the oldest man in the extended family, for a boy. In these traditional ceremonies, washing is only a preparation for naming; the latter is more important, as it “initiates the child into the extended family and the wider social environment.”¹⁶ Indeed, before the rite, the child is considered too dangerous for any male, even his or her father, to touch; afterward, he or she is a full member of the family. Hansson also treats infant baptism in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Zimbabwe (ELCZ), which “does not contain the same external expressions of initiation into the social community.”¹⁷ This may be because the ancestral spirits, the *Vadzimu*, were the connective tissue between the social and religious community of the traditional society. Baptism initiates the child into the religious community, but not the social community, because the *Vadzimu* are outside the Christian family.

Hansson records responses from members of the ELCZ regarding why they wish their children to be baptized, and these responses reflect a range of theologies for infant Baptism. Two families interviewed gave responses that might echo the social connections expressed in the naming ceremonies: one wanted their child “to be close to Jesus and close to God,” and another said that Baptism makes children “members of the Christian family.”¹⁸ These answers are not affirmed by the author, however; a third family gave what Hansson called “the most orthodox answer,” that “through baptism children are freed from sin.”¹⁹ This answer is, of course, thoroughly traditional, but it would be unfortunate for it to overshadow the incorporation into the community, living and dead, which is equally traditional and may be highlighted by the cultural surroundings of African social and religious identity. Suppose we use the cultural and social integration enacted in these naming rites to take a closer look at the name juggling of contemporary Roman baptismal rites.

First, it is significant that the “naming moments,” in which the initiand’s name is used or the divine names are invoked, are often associated in the rite with tactile and olfactory sensation. In the African rite, in which the naked and shaved infant is held on an adult’s lap while beer and snuff are sprinkled all around, and especially near to the infant (in order to bring the spirits close to him or her), the sensory experiences of touch and smell must be utterly overwhelming. Touch and smell are also important in the contemporary Roman rites of initiation. In the rite of welcome during infant Baptism, the child’s forehead is signed with the Cross as he or she is addressed by name. In the RCIA at this point, there is the signing of the senses as the community’s response to the proclamation of the candidate’s name. In both cases, chosen representatives of the local Church—celebrant, parents, and sponsors—respond with touch to the name of the initiand and the

request that he or she be baptized. By this touch the candidate is affirmed with the sign of Christ crucified, and initiated, as the invitation makes clear, into living the Gospel.

In the prebaptismal anointing, when “the name of Christ our savior” is invoked, the initiand is anointed with the sweet-scented oil of catechumens. The Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names is even more clear on the close relationship between the name of those preparing for Baptism and the gesture of touch by which they are received. After the *electi* are called forward by name and their faithfulness to the Gospel has been affirmed by their baptismal sponsors, the celebrant asks their consent: “Do you wish to enter fully into the life of the Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist?”²⁰ After their affirmative reply, candidates are invited to “offer your names for enrollment,” which are then inscribed. Finally, the celebrant entrusts the *electi* to the continued care of their sponsors, and this trust is to be expressed by touch, as sponsors “place their hand on the shoulder of the candidate whom they are receiving into their care, or . . . make some other gesture to indicate the same intent.”²¹ Acceptance into the social and cultural community of the Church is expressed by means of touch in these two rites. At the same time, the recognition of the candidates’ names on the part of the community plays a role similar to that within the African naming rites. The sponsors’ touch and recognition is offered on behalf of the community as a whole.

The moment when Baptism juggles the name of the baptizand and that of the Trinity can now be considered. The formula, “N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” is punctuated with three immersions or infusions with water. Obviously, this washing is the primary symbolic moment expressing a theology of cleansing from sin, the “most orthodox” baptismal theology as Hansson put it. Yet the act of naming also evokes a community held together by loving bonds—first the Trinity, but also the community constituted by the Trinitarian profession of faith that immediately precedes the Baptism. In the African naming rites examined by Hansson, it was critical that the spiritual and invisible part of the community—the Creator and the ancestral spirits—come to recognize the name given to the child. This recognition signaled the full incorporation into the living community as well. Similarly, in Baptism, it is the giving of the divine Name that completes the welcoming into the community that was begun by asking the candidate’s name.

When it comes to scent, we might well be inspired by our African neighbors. In his essay “The Mute Sense,” Nathan Mitchell points out that “our theology of initiation is shaped—indeed *determined*—not by ideas but by *sensations*, by how things *smell*, how they *taste*, and *feel*.”²² He continues, “Chrism was meant to be *pleasurable* before it was ‘meaningful.’ Or better, perhaps, chrism acquired meaning precisely because it was first an exquisite source of pleasure—aromatic, silky, spicy as olives and sticky as resinous bark.”²³ The foundation for the meaning of being anointed, chosen, called is the experience of being anointed, marked out by scent.

All too often this experience is minimized. This impoverishment of the baptismal rite, Mitchell notes, is part of a more general tendency: “I suspect that the sensory impoverishment and deprivation of so much liturgy today results from our rush to make *intelligibility* the centerpiece of reform and renewal. In this we have unwittingly affirmed that ancient apartheid which pits mind against matter, exalting thought over action, spirit over body, doctrine over doxology, and belief over behavior.”²⁴ How can we revitalize our understanding of the symbols of initiation, so that initiation becomes a moment when spirit and body, belief and behavior are one?

PART 2: “A PILLAR IN THE TEMPLE OF MY GOD”

In Revelation, the Risen Christ sends a message by the author to one of the persecuted churches: “If you conquer ... I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God..., and my own new name.”²⁵ Susan Wood, in *One Baptism*, argues, “To understand baptism and the beginnings of Christian life we must begin at the end, with eschatology.”²⁶ Baptism is, as she puts it, “an inaugurated eschatology,” the beginning of life after death. If, as Paul says, “all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death,”²⁷ then Christians are initiated at Baptism into eternal life, in which “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.”²⁸ In the eschaton—which means today—“spirit” and “body” are not two poles of human existence; rather, we are called to be a “spiritual body”²⁹—that is, the Body of Christ, infused with the Spirit. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”³⁰ In the end, Baptism is about belonging, through the Spirit, with Christ, to God who will be in the end, “all in all.”³¹

If we begin from the end, we see the reason that limiting the effect of Baptism to the forgiveness of original sin is so impoverished. Although this is one aspect of a robust eschatology, it certainly does not address the full gift of Christian initiation. Compare the treatment of the Church in *Lumen Gentium*:

[God has gathered] one people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness. . . . The state of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in his temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us. Its end is the kingdom of God, which has been begun by God himself on

earth, and which is to be further extended until it is brought to perfection by him at the end of time...that messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth, it is also used by him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth.³²

If this describes the results of incorporation into the Church, limiting our understanding of Baptism to the forgiveness of personal sins does ourselves an injustice! Baptism is an initiation into God's covenant people, not for an individual's own salvation, but in order to serve the world. The effect of Baptism is intensely personal, but at the same time, the baptizand delivered from sin and integrated into God's Church is "an instrument for the redemption of all."

This brings us to divinization and back to the question of how the human name of a baptizand can be "taken up" into the divine name of the Trinity. It is a truism of Trinitarian theology that all three Persons act in unity *ad extra*, that is in the world. Whenever the triune God performs a work in the world for the benefit of humanity, all three Persons are working, although not all in the same way. The Father is, as Eastern writers say, the "unoriginate origin" of all the works of God in the world. The Son exists by "filiation" as the divine child, doing all things in love and honor for the Father. The Spirit exists as the principle of love and unity, binding the Father and Son together even across the infinite divide of mortality and death. In the redemption accomplished in the Paschal mystery, for example, the Father offered his Only-Begotten Son because of his love for the human race; the Son suffered in obedience

to the Father's will; and the Holy Spirit inspired Jesus' human will to make this enormous sacrifice. This divine reality of love is eternal, in which the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit, returns the infinite love the Father first bestowed on him. However, within the Godhead and outside the time of the Incarnation, it is a love without lack; it only takes the form of suffering in the humanity of Jesus. At the same time as this divine drama was enacted on the Cross, Son and Spirit, which are, as St. Irenaeus put it, the two hands of God, were also reaching out towards humanity. With respect to the relationship between God and humanity, the Son handed himself over to sinners to endure their hatred, because he loved them. The Holy Spirit held the Son in unity with the human race, even those who were rejecting him. Because of this mysterious bond, manifested by the suffering Lord's forgiveness of his enemies, Christ's suffering and victory were beneficial not only for himself, but for the whole human race. As the First Letter of Peter puts it, interpreting Isaiah, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."³³ If we see Baptism as an initiation into this complex of relationships, by which God continues to save human persons, we can see the moment in which someone is baptized into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a new way.

Baptism into the name of the Father signifies that the Origin of all things invites the human covenant community into partnership with the work of redemption. The Origin of all, I AM WHO I AM, is the one thing that can stand on its own power; God is self-sufficient, but not self-satisfied. Rather, the Father's vastness makes room for the real and distinctive contributions of Another, the Second Person who is like the First—and another and another, all made like to the Origin by Baptism. I AM does not need human help, of course; neither that of Moses, nor that of Pope Francis, nor mine. Nonetheless, I AM, who seems unwilling to

take a polite *no* for an answer, chooses to call human persons out of their isolation and into cooperation, for their own sake. The rite gives ample evidence of this partnership. One rich place is the Litany of Saints, which invokes at length the astonishing diversity of remarkable, sometimes reluctant, partners in the work of reconciliation. The mere line, “Saint Peter and Saint Paul” evokes not only the familiar melody, but also the impetuous fisherman, known for leaping out of boats, who was able in one evening to cut off a man’s ear for arresting Jesus and then boldly deny he knew Jesus to the man’s relatives. And in contrast, it recalls the antagonistic, well-educated Jewish rabbi who, after his dramatic conversion, used the best rabbinic methods of exegesis to understand the Resurrection. Clearly, there is no one pattern for Christian discipleship. Sharing in the work of the Lord also means the gift of a remarkable centering. One’s own traits—on their own, perhaps, flaws—are transformed into precisely the gifts that the world needs. God does much more than forgive sins in Baptism; God recreates the universe with the help of human beings.

Baptism into the name of the Son signifies that the baptized human person is initiated into the place of Christ, both with respect to the relationship to the Father and with respect to the rest of the human race. The Father generates the Son and also gives birth, in Baptism, to Christian sons and daughters. If we look to Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan, we can see an icon of the Baptism offered to Christians. Jesus comes to be baptized in water, is anointed by the Holy Spirit and acknowledged by God the Father as the divine Son. Then, he is led by the Spirit into the desert, and out into the world to call others into the Gospel. In the baptismal rite Christians are also made temples of the Spirit and children of the Father, because their bodies are the Body of Christ. But there is more than this. By his Baptism in the Jordan, Jesus opened the doors of

creation to the new work of God. Eastern baptismal theology often says that Jesus sanctified all the waters of Earth by being baptized in those of the Jordan; water, like human nature, is changed forever by this act. The presence of Jesus Christ renders God present in a special way. Of course God is present in creation everywhere, but in Jesus, the Trinity is directly present in human touch, word, and symbol, making creation redemptive for human beings.

By Baptism, the Church (to use the traditional language) extends the cosmic transformation of the Incarnation. It is not enough that Christians be made holy; it is not even enough to give thanks for being made holy; it is up to the baptized to be led out to make the world holy, to give praise and blessing to God for its fullness. In this way we both glorify the Father with Christ and sanctify the world with him. Baptismal eschatology should not be turned inward, toward the individual, but outward toward the world. Being the Body of Christ, after all, is naturally going to lead Christians in the Spirit into the desert.

Baptism into the name of the Spirit signifies that the Christian is offered the gift of prophetic recognition and sacred unity. What is prophetic recognition? It is the ability to see and recognize God’s work in the world, always offered to the prophets so that God’s people can take part in that work. The prophet Isaiah sees something God is doing in the desert:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.³⁴

Today, the prophets who follow Isaiah are probably those transforming urban food deserts into blossoming community gardens. It is the Holy Spirit who allows us to recognize that this too is God's work. People are longing for that spiritual gift of recognition and compassion—longing to sit still long enough to discover that there is a love that will outlive both money and politics, more certain than death or taxes.

The liturgy, where body and mind work and pray, listen and rest together, does more than instruct us about God's work; it builds a space within which we can see that work. In his *On Liturgical Theology*, Aidan Kavanagh calls liturgy "an enacted ecclesiology, a realized eschatology,"³⁵ and we must remember that Thomas Aquinas believed the unrepeatable sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation bestowed a character because they commissioned Christians to the public service of God, that is, to Christian worship.³⁶ The liturgy is there to give people permission, and a little bit of reflective time, to hear the Spirit's voice in their ordinary lives.

I AM is the Namer, and to be divinized, to be adopted into the Trinitarian name, is to become namers as well. To name rightly, though, we need to stop and listen, to be able to hear the essence of a thing. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ursula K. LeGuin's wizard says, "For a word to be spoken, there must be silence. Before, and after."³⁷ Or, if you prefer, Wendell Berry's "Words" on the calling of a poet:

...Don't praise the speechless
starlight, the unspeakable dawn.
Just stop.

Well, we *can* stop
for a while, if we try hard enough,
if we are lucky. We can sit still,
keep silent, let the phoebe, the sycamore,
the river, the stone call themselves

by whatever they call themselves, their own
sounds, their own silence, and thus
may know for a moment the nearness
of the world, its vastness,
its vast variousness, far and near,
which only silence knows. And then
we must call all things by name
out of the silence again to be with us,
or die of namelessness.³⁸

The ultimate gift of being named, being named Christianly, being called "of God," is the need to name all things, and to name them in love, call them "to be with us," because that is what the Namer does.

If we begin from the end, we can see Baptism as the initiation into these divine relationships. Too often, it seems to me, our baptismal theology, especially in religious formation, is too narrow. I recently had a student ask me, "How can I make people care about this?" But the question is formulated wrongly. The question is, "What do God's people care about?" Somewhere in their ordinary experience, yes, maybe even on Facebook, God is calling their names—their ordinary names, the ones that their mothers and brothers and lovers call them. Divinization is about hearing that call, and hearing in one another's names the name of the triune God.



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NOTES

- 1 Ex 3:7-8; all Biblical quotations are from the NRSV.
- 2 Ex 3:11.
- 3 Ex 3:13.
- 4 Ex 3:14.
- 5 Ex 3:15.
- 6 Jn 18:4-6, modified NRSV.
- 7 Jn 6:42.
- 8 Is 45:23.
- 9 Cf. Phil 2:10-11.
- 10 Jn 9:7-9.
- 11 John Peckham of Canterbury. *Constitutions at Lambeth*, §3.
- 12 *Roman Ritual* (1614), §30.
- 13 *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* [RCIA], §200, my emphasis.
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- 21 RCIA, §133.
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