

# THE AGES OF THE LIFE OF JESUS: THE MYSTERY OF THE BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN

• José Granados, D.C.J.M. •

“When it describes the ages of Jesus’ life and identifies the laws that shape his time, the theology of the mysteries unlocks the meaning, not only of Christian existence, but of history and of the world itself.”

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The twentieth century saw great interest in the mysteries of the life of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Certain theologians gave Christology an original focus by structuring it around the mysteries. The idea was to begin with the history of Jesus, with his concrete life in the flesh, and to consider this life precisely insofar as it is salvific for man, which is to say, capable of leading him to communion with God. Consequently, the central focus was on the relation between the concrete human

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<sup>1</sup>A. R. Batlogg’s study *Die Mysterien des Lebens Jesu bei Karl Rahner. Zugang zum Christusglauben* (Innsbruck, 2001) shows that the theology of the mysteries is one of the keys to Rahner’s work. Something similar could be shown in the case of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The theology of the mysteries was also the main focus of the collective work *Mysterium Salutis*. Other Christologies also followed this line, for example, C. Duquoc, *Christologie. Essai dogmatique* (Paris, 1968), 17–126.

history of Jesus, on the one hand, and the eternal God who is beyond the flow of time, on the other.<sup>2</sup>

This Christology of the mysteries made it possible to respond to what had always been a major concern of modernity. Modernity, after all, considered itself to be the *New Era*, and so asked insistently about the meaning of history. Many questions having to do with the passage of time began to be posed from the eighteenth century on.<sup>3</sup>

The theology of the mysteries promised to shed light on this problem, and so to illumine an important sector of reality. At the same time, despite its achievements, it did not produce all the fruit that had been hoped from it.<sup>4</sup> It is important to ask why, since there are signs of reawakening interest in the mysteries of the life of Jesus today.<sup>5</sup> It thus makes sense to consider how the investigation might become more fruitful than in the past.

To this end, we will begin by surveying rapidly the problem of history as modernity has posed it and continues to experience it in our day (1). We will then consider an attempted response: narrative theology (2). This will help us see the advantages of the theology of the mysteries. At the same time, it will also help us to identify some of its deficits (3). Our task will then be to supply these deficits; we will do so by means of a consideration of the mystery of the Baptism of Jesus (4). This will suggest some strategies for responding to the modern question about time (5).

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. A. Grillmeier, “Das Mysterium und die Mysterien Christi,” in *Martyria, Liturgia, Diakonia. Festschrift für H. Volk*, ed. O. Semmelroth, K. Rahner, and R. Haubst (Mainz, 1968), 71–91.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. R. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, 2002), 154–169.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Batlogg’s assessment in *Die Mysterien*, 405–406 (Bilanz eines Scheiterns); 413.

<sup>5</sup>This is attested, for example, by the series on the mysteries of the life of Jesus begun in the pages of *Communio* in 2002, as well as some recent work in Christology, such as C. Schönborn, *Dio invidò suo figlio* (Milan, 2002). Two pontifical documents, *Novo millennio ineunte* and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, also propose the contemplation of the face of Christ in his mysteries. For a Mariology whose exposition follows the mysteries of the life of the Virgin, see R. Laurentin, *Queen of Heaven. A Short Treatise on Marian Theology* (Dublin, 1961), 74–127; H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama III: Dramatis Personae. Persons in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 294–295; 318–339.

### 1. Modernity and history

The modern mentality can be described in many ways. One such way passes through the concept of “time” that was forged with the rise of modernity. This is a privileged approach, because modernity presented itself to the world as a new age and a new time—as if this one characteristic were sufficient to explain it.<sup>6</sup> When modern man described his present moment as “new,” he evinced a way of understanding his past and his future that set him apart from his ancestors. Something had changed: at bottom, man had come to see himself as inhabiting a new configuration of his time, which is one of the basic coordinates of personal life.

Man does not only live *in* time, as if time were a ready-made thing that came to him from the outside. Neither, however, can man construct time according to his arbitrary wishes. Man is rather a laboratory of time: he takes yesterday and tomorrow and combines them in his today in different proportions. Using R. Koselleck’s terminology, we can speak of a tension between the space of experiences (having to do with the past) and the horizon of expectations (which looks to the future).<sup>7</sup> This tension is an essential part of human life. Each one of us has to learn how to resolve it in his own way. In order to do so, he needs to conjugate the past and the future, decide their relationship, and determine the weight that they have in the present.

We can begin by considering how the ancients resolved the problem of time. We can say that they configured their time with an eye to the past, because they regarded history as the true *magistra vitae*. One could deal with the uncertainties of the morrow, with the tension between experience and expectation, by attending to past ages. The past and the future were made of the same material.

Now, as we have already said, modernity brings a change of perspective. A new equation captures the formula of time. A huge gulf yawns between the past and the future, between inherited experiences and the time to come. The future comes to be perceived as the bearer of an unsuspected novelty, which cannot be predicted by looking back to the past. The past, for its part, loses its authority

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 154–169, esp. 168.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 100–114, esp. 111, where the author notes that the difference between the space of experience and the horizon of expectations varies throughout history.

to guide our way, and ceases to have any weight in our lives. A great distance opens between the experience bequeathed us by our ancestors and the expectations that man happens to have for his future.<sup>8</sup>

The very fact of this distance is bound, by its nature, to be disturbing. Man, back exposed, has to pick his way along unknown paths. How has modern man sought to escape this disquieting anguish?

### 1.1. *The time of progress*

The answer, as it turns out, hinges on the introduction of a new element into the time-equation. The future, man came to see, was not totally unknown, after all. The prediction of the future lay in man's hands. But how was this possible, given that past history was unable to provide much in the way of guidance for the future? In answer, a new variable entered the scene: the idea of progress, which included both technological advancement and the emancipation of freedom in an inextricable interpenetration. The notion of progress had a great calming effect, as it were, for it offered man the reassurance that there was nothing to fear from the future. After all, it was progress itself that would determine how the future would be.

It is worth pausing to note the change in mentality that this new notion of progress supposes. We cannot know the future by studying the maps of history, because the future is not written in them. If, then, the knowledge of the future is still somehow within man's reach, it is because it is man who makes the future. Man knows the future because he can create it. By the same token, time, taking on the structure of progress, becomes something to be molded by human effort. The power to mold the future is conceived, in its turn, as an obligation to which man is bound. Progress, in other words, imposes itself as an imperative. Man must dedicate his entire effort to unfold the potentialities of progress to the highest degree as quickly as possible.

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. R. Koselleck, "Fortschritt," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon der politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland II*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Koselleck (Stuttgart, 1975). See also N. Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society* (New York, 1982), 274. According to Luhmann, time is "the social interpretation of reality with respect to the difference between past and future."

It goes without saying that this new configuration of time was greatly attractive in certain respects. It enabled man to broaden his horizons, enlarging his capacity to hitherto unseen limits. The new vision also had its dangers, however. Many of these arose from the solitude in which man now had to face the problems that the future would pose for him. The new equation of time had room only for man and his freedom, understood now as pure self-determination. The reference to God and/or nature that had once helped him find his place in the world dropped out of the picture.<sup>9</sup>

Consider, for example, the appearance at about this time of a new way of measuring time by means of the mechanical clock. This new method of measurement favors the idea that time is independent of natural rhythms, which are usually marked by the rising and setting of the sun.<sup>10</sup> Time becomes universal, inasmuch as it possesses a single measure for all points of the earth; local measures of time get standardized. All of this makes it possible to forge an empty concept of time, unbound from any condition, like a vacant lot for man to take up his abode in.

Man found himself alone before the task of creating his own future—and it was precisely in this future that he had placed the meaning of his existence. The meaning of history thus came to be conceived as the final result of a process enacted by man, as another product alongside all of the others man was capable of making. Man tended to identify the value of his own time with the value of the technical procedures of his own creation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Koselleck, "Fortschritt," 403: "Hitherto superhuman processes that once worked through men to drive them to move forward are now thought to be plannable and, in the end, even producible. In this new situation in intellectual history, the notion of *progress* imposed itself around 1800. As a concept it sums up early modern experiences and, at the same time, opens up expectations that it becomes an imperative to fill through conscious action."

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Koselleck, "Time and History," in *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 104: "We are dealing with a longterm process of increasing acts of abstraction designed to remove humans from what was naturally pregiven to them. . . . One can also call this a denaturalization of the division of time and of the experience of time included in it. In the course of mechanization, physical instruments of measurement have increasingly contributed to divesting the course of everyday life of its natural preconditions, a process that has been interpreted both as a relief and a burden."

<sup>11</sup>Cf. H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 1977), 75–86.

All of this had implications for personal time, as well, which now took on a peculiar configuration. Since the present moment is new, one can look back on the past in a totally objective manner, as one looks on a stranger. Yesterday may have done its part to make today, but it is no longer relevant, rather like the results of industrial production. And the future? The future is something that can be molded, planned, and possessed given sufficient preparation. The future is a resource in the chain of production.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2. Utopia and fear of the future

The evolution we have been describing places the idea of progress before a paradox. In order to catch sight of this paradox, we can usefully consider one of the ways in which modernity speaks of time: utopia. The author of a utopia is the opposite of a historian. While the historian looks to the past, the utopian concentrates on the future. In this respect, the utopian is like the prophet or the dreamer. How, then, does he differ from them? Utopia is not limited to seeing or imagining the future. In the case of utopia, the description of the future is a will to create it. Utopia is therefore the literary genre of progress. Man's way of going forward into the future is to realize it himself, to make himself its author.<sup>13</sup>

There is, however, a difficulty with utopia. The source of the difficulty is that, as we have seen, man perceives progress as a duty. It is up to him to ensure the forward march of time. But how far does this obligation extend? Since man's own will has imposed it on him, it knows no limits, and the faster he progresses, the better. This, too, fits with the logic of industrial production: the point is to shorten the time to obtain a higher yield. Hence the acceleration of history that marks our era.<sup>14</sup> But this very acceleration makes it impossible to predict exactly what the next gain will be. Progress is supposed to enable us to know the future, but it ends up leaving the

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Luhmann, *The Differentiation*, 281.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 84–99, esp. 90.

<sup>14</sup>These words of Robespierre bear this out: “The time has come to call upon each to realize his own destiny. The progress of human reason has laid the basis for this great Revolution, and the particular duty of hastening it has fallen to you” (cited by P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 [Chicago, 1988], 325).

future open once again. Which means that man lapses back into his fear of the future.

But there is more. Let us suppose that the future has indeed surrendered to man's dreams. What is to prevent those dreams from turning into nightmares? Consider the change that has come over the utopian genre as a chronicle of the future. On the one hand, the conviction that mankind is advancing remains firmly in place. On the other hand, the advance is thought to be purely technical, and to involve no overall improvement. A sign of this is the appearance of dys-topias, which portray a de-humanized world in which man is enslaved to the logic of his machines. The paradox of progress is thus finally unveiled: at the very moment when man believed he held the future in his hands, the future turned out to be the greatest threat.

In the end, we are left with a strange dissociation of time. On the one hand, we have public time, the time of technological progress. This time enfolds all in its accelerating pace. On the other hand, we have private time, the time of each personal life, which resists absorption into the brutal terror of public, technological time.<sup>15</sup> Given this dissociation, there is only one solution left, it seems. Since the one global time is neutral, each individual can create his own time within it. This leads to the discovery that each culture has many times. Personal time becomes separate from universal time and can be "tailor-made."<sup>16</sup> Next to the unity of global time a growing number of fragmented and relative times proliferates.

### *1.3. A crisis in the configuration of time*

The panorama that we have just sketched enables us to conclude with a diagnosis: we are currently in the midst of a crisis in the configuration of time.

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<sup>15</sup>Two factors that prevent this absorption are the remembrance of death, which rules out any notion of indefinite progress for the individual, and the sphere of personal love, which does not fit into the horizon of technique. Cf. Koselleck, "The Temporalization," in *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 98.

<sup>16</sup>See the interesting analysis offered by S. Kern, *The Culture of Space and Time 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 20.

For the technological mindset, the future is in man's hands, and man uses the future as a resource for production. Whenever time refuses to be compressed, forcing us to obey its natural rhythms of expectation, it is perceived as an obstacle to man's freedom. Our desire is to anticipate the future, to transform it as soon as possible into the present. But when we do that, we lose the extendedness of time. By the same token, time, now contracted, loses its structure.

But on the other hand, our small private histories are equally incapable of giving form to our personal time. Since they now lack an ultimate meaning in which to unfold, they fragment into little adventures. Stuck between an inert and immobile time, on the one hand, and a future about which there is nothing to say, on the other, the only option left is to take refuge in the passing moment.<sup>17</sup> We find ourselves under the dominion of the immediate, which lacks the meaning that comes from building a life, and where the patience of maturity and growth no longer exist. It is not an accident that our society is accused of perpetual adolescence.<sup>18</sup>

The question now becomes this: does theology have any answer to give to this unstructuredness of time in which we moderns live?

## 2. Narrative theology and the configuration of time

The modern understanding of time and history we have spoken of was bound to have effects on theology. One such effect was research into the life of Jesus, which undertook to return to the authentic Jesus of history, supposedly hidden beneath the veils of Church dogma. The idea that the present represented a novelty, a clean break with past ages, fostered the belief that it was possible to approach the past with total objectivity, as if it were a completely foreign body. In biblical studies, this meant shaking loose from the

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<sup>17</sup>In the end, time comes to be structured as a multitude of presents to be lived with unflagging excitement. There is no more room for ordinary hours. Since they are no longer part of an encompassing architecture of time that might give them depth, such common moments become unbearable and have to be replaced by the continual excitement of diversion. See G. Greshake, "The Spiritual Charism of Nazareth," *Communio* 31 (2004): 16–34; 31.

<sup>18</sup>On this score, I agree with the analysis of S. Crites in "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (1971): 308–309.



present situation and leaping across the centuries that separate us from Jesus.<sup>19</sup> But a past understood in this way is by definition incapable of having any vital influence on us today. The biblical scholar was like the archeologist: he could dig up bones, but not living beings.<sup>20</sup>

One result of this was a tendency to seek the importance of Jesus, not in what he did and suffered (*acta et passa Jesu*), but in the supposed perennial significance of his “message.” It was necessary to distill an a-temporal Christ who was valid for all times. The conception of the future was not left unaffected, either. The future remained, when all is said and done, in the hands of man, who fancied himself able to recover Jesus’ true message and put it into practice—in the future.

We are all familiar with the outcome of this project. Jesus could speak to all only because everyone portrayed him with his own features. The Church’s faith and dogma was peeled away from the Gospel, but then another interpretation—the scholar’s own—was put in its place as the sole claimant to objectivity. Liberal theology, like the modernity it closely followed, ended up losing the sense of the past. It thus proved incapable of offering any solution to the problem of the configuration of time. What was needed was another focus altogether, one that would not be guided by foreign presuppositions, but by the specifically Christian. It was to this task that a good part of twentieth-century theology was devoted.<sup>21</sup>

One of the new approaches to our problem is narrative theology. It is interesting for us, because it focuses on the configuration of man’s time. It thus promises to open a way to a Christian response to the questions we have posed.

There are, of course, many narrative theologies, not just one, and they differ in method, and sometimes even in aim.<sup>22</sup> These theologies combine the results of several disciplines, ranging from literary criticism to history to psychology. This interdisciplinary

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 167.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. J. Ratzinger’s reflections on this point in “Zur Lage von Glaube und Theologie heute,” *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 25 (1996): 359–372; 368.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. the overview in W. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (Mahwah, N.J., 1977), 26–40.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. G. J. Fackre, “Narrative Theology: An Overview,” *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 340–352 for a *status quaestionis*.

character can be an advantage, but it also carries a risk: the theologian has to avoid forgetting his own specifically theological angle of vision.

Narrative theology began in the Protestant world. A number of factors presided over its birth.<sup>23</sup> Let us pause to mention those that are relevant to the question at hand.

At the beginning of narrative theology we find an ongoing debate between the disciples of Bultmann. Whereas liberal theology had sought above all the datum of history, supposedly located beyond the biblical text, Bultmann insisted instead on the importance of faith and preaching. So much so that the actual history of the Savior became irrelevant. It was enough to know that he had existed and died on the Cross. Narrative theology aims to correct this exaggeration of Bultmann's thought. It therefore finds itself before the problem of relating historical facts and their meaning. Its solution to this problem is a distinctive way of reading the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

In this respect, narrative theology is certainly correct. After all, Scripture is not a quarry from which to extract the remains of a supposedly true history of Jesus, as liberal theology had thought. The liberal approach disintegrates the text and fails to respect its distinctive character, which, to a large extent, is narrative. It is a mistake to abstract from the form in which the Gospels structure their accounts of the life of Jesus. This form is itself essential for encountering Jesus truly.

In order to understand why, we need to notice a second ingredient on which narrative theology has insisted. Every life is a narrative. An essential dimension of every life is its temporal structure, the way in which past, present, and future are interwoven in it. Now, only a narrative account can capture this decisively

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<sup>23</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 342: "Anticipations of [narrative theology] are found in circles that sought to bring together religion and the arts, efforts to relate Jungian themes to counseling theory and practice, the 'myth and truth' disquisitions of Reinhold Niebuhr, and the symbol theory of Paul Tillich, the mid-century 'salvation history' principals, and developments in biblical scholarship, especially those influenced by the new literary criticism. Cultural factors played their role."

<sup>24</sup>The work of H. Frei is important in this regard: *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, 1974). For an analysis of Frei's intellectual development with respect to Bultmann, see W. C. Placher, "Introduction," in *H. W. Frei. Theology and Narrative. Selected Essays*, ed. W. C. Placher and G. Hunsinger (New York, 1993), 11–13.

important aspect of our existence. By the same token, the key to Jesus' history is to read it with full respect for the Gospel narrative as the evangelists actually structure it. The reading of the Bible can now become life-changing. By placing faith in the Gospel accounts, the believer learns how to shape his identity in time; he discovers the value of his past and finds guidance for his future.

Narrative theology underscores the importance of literary realities such as symbol and metaphor. Symbol and metaphor are accessible to man, yet they open him up at the same time to a deeper dimension. They are the means by which God makes himself present in the corporeal world man inhabits. The specificity of narrative theology is its stress on time. Metaphor and symbol fit into a temporal structure and so become narrative. This justifies speaking of the sacramental character of narrative: narrative gives us animated sacraments, told and enacted in story form. God has revealed himself in the story of Jesus, and this story is the only means for approaching the mystery of God.

As we have seen, narrative theology opens up interesting horizons and promises to shed light on the relation between God and man's time. That said, if narrative theology is to be fruitful, it needs to clear up two ambiguities that seem inherent in its basic approach.

First of all, at the origin of narrative theology is a certain opposition to discursive reason in theology. Narrative theology evinces a preference for the intuitive, for what can be grasped without reasoning, and so seems to be fresher and more vivid.<sup>25</sup> The imagination thus comes to play a major role in explaining the act of faith.<sup>26</sup>

There is certainly much to recommend this approach, but it also runs the risk of uprooting systematic and rational discourse from theology and so frustrating any unified vision of the Christian mystery. In the end, this would make communication of that mystery impossible. Rather than oppose reason and system, narrative

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. Fackre, "Narrative Theology: An Overview," 342–343: "The reclaiming of imagination in countercultural and other movements of the sixties and seventies is inextricable from the growing interest in story. Disenchantment with things abstract, rationalistic, cerebral, didactic, intellectualist, structured, prosaic, scientific, technocratic, and the appeal of the concrete, affective, intuitive, spontaneous, poetic, contributed to the story focus."

<sup>26</sup>Cf. M. L. Cook, *Christology as Narrative Quest* (Collegeville, 1997), 8–17.

theology should enrich the concept of reason, showing what sort of reason and system are compatible with the temporal and narrative structure of human life.<sup>27</sup>

Second, narrative theology lays great stress on the literary elements that give narrative its structure. These elements enable us to lay hold of the plot of a life, and give us the key to the conjoining of past, present, and future in it. This emphasis on the literary is understandable given narrative theology's focus on biblical exegesis. Narrative theology attempts to connect with this scripturally communicated modality of shaping time. And such a connection is possible only through what the evangelists recount. Hence narrative theology's insistence that only the biblical text can bring home to us the story-character of the Savior's existence.

The interest in narrative forms is certainly legitimate, but their use has to be properly balanced. We must always bear in mind that revelation, whose center is the existence of Jesus Christ himself, transcends the text that bears witness to it. Scripture is at the service of the encounter with Christ, and does not stand above him.<sup>28</sup> Certain strands of narrative theology have tended to emphasize the written accounts to the point of neglecting the reality of the life of Jesus itself. Some find it difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to give unity to the history of salvation, lest they infringe on the multiple narrativity of the Scriptures.<sup>29</sup>

If it is to become fruitful, narrative theology has to free itself from these difficulties. There have already been attempts to do so.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>I find Cook's statement that "[i]n the beginning was the story and the story was in relationship to God and the story was God" (*Christology as Narrative Quest*, 67) to be exaggerated. After all, what existed in the beginning was not history, but the Logos. Only then does the evangelist tell us that the Logos was made flesh. Of course, this Logos is not merely "reason," but the efficacious, saving word of Scripture, God's saving decree that unfolds in a history of salvation; the Logos is not opposed to history, but assumes history in himself. But this Logos cannot be reduced to history, or made posterior to it, either. Otherwise we lose the distance that mediates between the mystery of God and the economy of salvation.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. J. Ratzinger, "Revelation and Tradition," in K. Rahner and J. Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* (New York, 1966), 35–36.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 332.

<sup>30</sup>Fackre, it seems to me, strikes just the right balance: "Both the propositionalist, who ignores the function of the symbol as the port of entry to the ultimate reality or treats it as dispensable once we 'get the point,' and the 'imaginationist,' who

Our aim has been to highlight how the narrative approach attempts to respond to the problem of the configuration of time. This attempt links it in certain respects to the theology of the mysteries, to which we now turn.

3. *The theology of the mysteries  
and the configuration of Jesus' time*

The theology of the mysteries, for its part, is also a response to the problem of history and its meaning. The life of Jesus is the center of time, understood as a *historia salutis* in which God reveals and communicates himself to man. By ascertaining the shape of the Lord's time, then, we shed light on the shape of every man's time as well.

The key term is no longer narrative, as it was in the case of narrative theology, but mystery.<sup>31</sup> "Mystery" indicates the Father's eternal saving design, manifested and carried out in history, with Christ at its apex. "Mystery" also bespeaks the way in which the presence of the risen Lord finds a sacramental prolongation in the Church through the Holy Spirit.

When we say that the concrete facts of Jesus' life are mysteries, we mean that in them the Father reveals himself and saves man. Note: we must not misunderstand "mystery" as some higher plane of reality of which earthly events would merely be a weak reflection. In this context, "mystery" has meaning insofar as it is linked with the concrete life of Jesus, just as the life of Jesus is not important except as a mystery, that, seen with the eyes of faith, can lead us to the knowledge of the Father.<sup>32</sup>

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derides the function of intellectual analysis or treats it as of lesser consequence in the quest for truth, violate a critical parity and unity" ("Narrative Theology: An Overview," 343).

<sup>31</sup>It goes without saying that there is a point of contact with narrative theology here, inasmuch as the latter takes account of the sacramental value of narrative and so displays an interest in metaphor and symbol. Cf. J. B. Metz, "A Short Apology of Narrative," in *The Crisis of Religious Language*, ed. J. B. Metz and J.-P. Jossua (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 84–96; 87.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. the exposition of Rahner's theology in Batlogg, *Die Mysterien*, 260–261; cf. Schönborn, *Dio inviò suo Figlio*, 177: the mysteries are to be contemplated with the eyes of faith.

The synthesis between the divine and time, between the Logos and history, is thus at the center of every theology of the mysteries. Such a theology does not stand in opposition to speculation and system, as narrative theology risked doing. Of course, the speculative theology that flows from consideration of the mysteries will be one that puts the history of Jesus at the center, without diluting its temporal dimension.

Another new feature of the theology of the mysteries is that it emphasizes, not the biblical story, but the life of Jesus to which the Scripture bears witness—the mysteries. We thus have an approach that enables us to present the unity of the *historia salutis* of which the many narratives give an account. This unity is to be found in the very life of Jesus. The patristic tradition speaks both of “the Gospels” and of the one Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup>

The consideration of the mysteries aids us in overcoming certain problems of narrative theology. There is, however, one aspect that the theology of the mysteries has not succeeded in incorporating so far: the configuration of time as a defining moment of the identity of the person and the value of time for Christian salvation.

Consider, for example, the collective work *Mysterium Salutis*.<sup>34</sup> Its authors intended to make the mysteries the keystone of the edifice of Christology. As they themselves acknowledged, however, their project did not achieve the success for which they had hoped.<sup>35</sup> Why? Because they had not given the whole of Jesus’ life its full due. They had continued to regard the mysteries as

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<sup>33</sup>Cf. Chromatius of Aquileia, who follows Ireneaus: “*Et quamuis propter numerum euangelistarum quattuor euangelia dicantur, unum tamen in omnibus euangelium est, dicente Domino: Et praedicabitur hoc euangelium per uniuersum orbem. Non dixit euangelia, sed euangelium. . . . Unde manifestum est quattuor quidem libros esse euangelii, sed in quattuor istos libros unum euangelium computari. . . . Verum unum euangelium iuxta auctoritatem Domini vel apostoli et confitemur et credimus*” (*Tractatus in Mathaeum*, Prologue, 11 [CCL IX A, 191]) [And although four Gospels are spoken of on account of the number of the Gospel-writers, there is one Gospel in all. For the Lord says, “And this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world.” He did not say “Gospels,” but “Gospel.” . . . It is therefore obvious that there are four books of the Gospel, but that it is one Gospel that is being reckoned as four books. . . . But we confess and believe one Gospel on the authority of the Lord or Apostle].

<sup>34</sup>J. Feiner and M. Löhrer, eds., *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik III/2. Das Christusereignis* (Einsiedeln, 1969).

<sup>35</sup>Cf. the summary in Batlogg, *Die Mysterien*, with reference to the judgment of D. Wiederkehr.

isolated extraordinary acts, so that the emphasis continued to fall on the same two pillars: the Incarnation, on the one hand, and the death and Resurrection, on the other. As a result, *Mysterium Salutis* failed to valorize an insight that its authors had wanted to underscore: the insight, namely, that the whole life of Jesus is a mystery. What was needed was to give shape to the plot of Christ's life, to link and relate its moments in a single history.

We note the same problem in C. Schönborn's latest account of Christology.<sup>36</sup> This work rightly perceives and aims to recover the richness of the mysteries of Jesus. This enables Schönborn to approach Christology from the perspective of the *historia salutis*. Christology becomes more concrete and incorporates exegesis, the liturgy, and the witness of the Fathers without undue forcing.

Despite all these merits, however, there is a lacuna that confirms our diagnosis. Schönborn dedicates a chapter to the mysteries of Jesus' earthly life. But he does not link the mysteries or investigate the relationship among them. We are thus left with no sense of how Jesus' life was progressively built up through time.<sup>37</sup>

Generally speaking, the theology of the mysteries has not considered the life of Christ as a continuous trajectory, as a true story with an actual plot. This is a point that narrative theology has kept in focus. Can this lacuna be filled? Can we develop a theology of the mysteries that considers precisely their relation, their order, and their sequence as steps in the construction of the life of Jesus?

At this point, we can usefully turn our attention to an author who set great store by the historical development of human life: Romano Guardini. Guardini displays this interest in his work *The Stages of Life*, in which he analyzes the different forms of existence that follow each other in the course of time. These forms, Guardini says, are crucial steps in personal maturation.<sup>38</sup> Guardini is aware that the fullness of a life requires a passage through these stages, a passage on the way to maturity. The life of man thus appears as a many-staged construction, in which the flow of time becomes meaningful.

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. Schönborn, *Dio invidò suo Figlio*.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 182–191.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. R. Guardini, *Die Lebensalter. Ihre ethische und pädagogische Bedeutung*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Würzburg, 1959).

The hypothesis we want to test now is that the same holds for the life of Christ. Is it possible to give an account of the mysteries following “the ages of the life of Jesus”?

Significantly, Guardini himself poses a similar question.<sup>39</sup> Guardini considers the crises which every person has to go through in the course of his life. In such crises, the subject undergoes a transformation, a deep change in his way of being. Once the crisis is over, he feels that he is someone new and, at the same time, who he was supposed to be. Did Jesus’ life pass through situations like these? Guardini’s answer is negative. He examines three moments that, at first blush, might seem to suggest a positive answer: the baptism, the temptation in the desert, and Gethsemane. None of these moments, Guardini concludes, represents an actual crisis. Every development in Jesus’ life presupposes, after all, an already given plenitude. What Christ is at the end he was already from the beginning. By the same token, we cannot speak of the authentic evolution in Jesus’ life.<sup>40</sup>

Guardini’s position aims at defending a vital point. It is important to avoid at all costs any naturalistic reduction of the mystery of Christ. That is, we cannot take a purely human psychology, which attempts to define the normal rhythm of growth, with its moments of ecstasy and failure, as our basis for trying to understand Christ. We have to proceed in the opposite way: we must attempt to make sense of the unfolding course of our lives in light of Christ. This is why Guardini says that Jesus eludes every sort of historical explanation, inasmuch as he sinks the roots of his being in the very will of the Father, which is at the very center of Jesus’ person from the beginning.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Cf. R. Guardini, *Die menschliche Wirklichkeit des Herrn. Beiträge zu einer Psychologie Jesu* (Würzburg, 1958), 78–85.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. R. Guardini, “Die Daseinsgestalt Jesu [1941],” *Romano Guardini. Unterscheidung des Christlichen. Band 3: Gestalten* (Mainz, 1963), 177–187; 184: “Does this life [the life of Jesus] amount to the development of a great figure? Obviously not. First because there is no question of an actual development. There is no evolution on view in Jesus, not only because the Gospels have no biographical interest, but also because his being has nothing to do with development. Second because no real ‘figure’ emerges. What is at stake is not a ‘consummation,’ but rather a fruitful rupture. One need only imagine how it would have been if Jesus had lived longer.”

<sup>41</sup>Cf. R. Guardini, *The Lord* (Chicago, 1954), v–vii.



So much for Guardini's account of things. But there still remains a question. We can accept Guardini's presuppositions. But, even so, is it not possible to structure the ages of Jesus' life in light of the data of revelation? Now, precisely the consideration of Christ's life as a mystery suggests how this might be done, without any concession to naturalism.

In order to carry this project through, we will have to pay special attention to the growth that Jesus underwent. Guardini denied any evolution in Jesus because, thanks to the hypostatic union, any possible progress was always already accounted for in the beginning. We need to ask, though, whether there is not an equally valid theological reason for enlarging the horizon, even while affirming the principle Guardini defended.

If that were the case, Jesus' earthly life and its different stages would become of central importance from a theological (and not only a psychological) point of view.<sup>42</sup> We could thus develop a contemplation of the mysteries focusing on Christ's history that would help man in the task of giving shape to the time in which he is given to live.<sup>43</sup> Scattered patristic testimonies to the effect that Jesus died on the Cross at age fifty bear witness to the interest that this approach had awakened already in Christian antiquity. The Master had to pass through all the ages of life, from infancy to old age, in order to sanctify his disciples' entire way through time.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>The focus on Jesus' life is also the only means for achieving one of the goals of the theology of the mysteries: the avoidance of any reduction of Jesus' history to its two basic poles of Incarnation and Paschal Mystery. A robust theology of the mysteries will be one that lays emphasis on the rest of the Lord's history, too: the whole life of Jesus is a mystery. Cf. on this point Batlogg, *Die Mysterien* (271–305; 405–406).

<sup>43</sup>K. Rahner argued that this was precisely the point of speaking of "degrees" of Christian perfection. Cf. Karl Rahner, "Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection," in *Theological Investigations* III, 3–23; 22: "our reflections lead us . . . to the sporadic attempts made in the history of Christian spirituality . . . to build a step-by-step development of the spiritual life. . . . A conceivable construction . . . would be that of becoming more and more like Christ, of coming to act in accordance with the inner laws of his life. But such a conception leads immediately to the question as to what is the inner structure of Christ's life and what is, if we may put it that way, the developmental formula of that life."

<sup>44</sup>Cf. St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adv. Haer.* II, 22 SC 294, 220ff): "*Magister ergo existens, magistri quoque habebat aetatem, non reprobans neque supergrediens hominem neque solvens suam legem in se humani generis, sed omnem aetatem sanctificans per illam quae ad*

#### 4. *The baptism in the network of the mysteries*

In order to find the desired theological grounding, we will attend to a singular episode in the history of Jesus: his baptism, when the Spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove. We will see how this moment gives us a key to discovering the configuration of Jesus' time.

##### 4.1. *The Holy Spirit and Jesus' lived time*

It is remarkable that studies of the mysteries of Jesus' life have paid scant attention to the baptism.<sup>45</sup> This is all the more remarkable when we consider the interest this episode has awakened among

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*ipsum erat similitudinem. Omnes enim venit per semetipsum salvare: omnes, inquam, qui per eum renascuntur in Deum, infantes et parvulos et pueros et iuvenes et seniores. Ideo per omnem venit aetatem, et in infantibus infans factus, sanctificans infantes; in parvulis parvulus, sanctificans hanc ipsam habentes aetatem, simul et exemplum illis pietatis effectus et iustitiae et subiectionis; in iuvenibus iuvenis, exemplum iuvenibus fiens et sanctificans Domino: sic et senior in senioribus, ut sit perfectus magister in omnibus, non solum secundum expositionem veritatis, sed et secundum aetatem, sanctificans simul et seniores, exemplum ipsis quoque fiens; deinde et usque ad mortem pervenit, ut sit primogenitus ex mortuis, ipse primatum tenens in omnibus, princeps vitae, prior omnium et praecedens omnes” [Being, then, the Master, he also had the age of a master, for he did not reject or leap over man or dissolve the law of the human race in himself, but sanctified every age by means of the one whose likeness he was in. For he came to save all through himself: all, I say, who through him are reborn into God, infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. Therefore he came through every age. He was made an infant among infants, sanctifying infants; a child among children, sanctifying those who had this very age, while at the same time he was made an example both of justice and of subjection for them; a youth among the young, becoming an example to the young and sanctifying them for God. So, too, he also became an old man among old men, so that he might be a perfect master in all things, not only in the setting forth of the truth, but also according to age, in that he sanctified old men at the same time, becoming an example to them, too. Finally, he reached death, that he might be the first-born from among the dead, he himself holding primacy in all things, the prince of life, before all and preceding all].*

<sup>45</sup>Cf. W. W. Müller, “Die Salbung Christi—ein Stück vergessener Christologie?” *FZPhT* 43: 420–435. Schönborn's recent monograph on Christology also does not consider the baptism among the mysteries of Jesus' earthly life.

recent Spirit-Christologies.<sup>46</sup> A number of studies have highlighted the fact that the Spirit who begins to act in the apostles on the day of Pentecost had been at work in Jesus during his earthly life. The Gospels attest to this fact in many places, and most clearly in the accounts of the baptism.

This presence of the Spirit in Jesus has been understood in different ways. In particular, it is necessary to articulate the action of the Spirit in Jesus with the hypostatic union.<sup>47</sup>

One noteworthy contribution to this issue is the work of F. Malmberg, who analyzes the role of the Spirit in the Incarnation, which is clearly attested in the Gospels.<sup>48</sup> Malmberg asserts that it is the Spirit who acts as the bond of union between the Logos and Jesus' human nature. The anointing of the Spirit thus becomes an integral part of the Incarnation itself.

Malmberg's position has not gone without criticism. First, it does not distinguish adequately between the work of the Logos and the work of the Spirit. Moreover, Malmberg treats the Spirit as the bond between the human nature and the person of the Logos, whereas, as the Tradition has maintained since Augustine, the property of the Spirit is to be the nexus of love between persons, and not between a person and a nature. It follows that the activity of the Pneuma has to be seen, as we will see later, in Jesus' union with his Father.

Following Malmberg, H. Mühlen argued that the anointing is a different event from the Incarnation.<sup>49</sup> Mühlen's interest was primarily ecclesiological. His concern was to go beyond the idea that the Church is the continuation of the Incarnation, without rupturing the link between the life of Christ and the life of Christians. What

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<sup>46</sup>See M. Bordoni, *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito* (Brescia, 1995), 201–290; L. F. Ladaria, *La Trinidad, misterio de comunión* (Salamanca, 2002), 186–202. I will be following these two authors in what follows. Cf. also the *status quaestionis* drawn up in R. del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit. Spirit Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York, 1994), 147–184.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. L. F. Ladaria, “La unción de Jesús y el don del Espíritu,” *Gregorianum* 71 (1990): 547–571; 549.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. F. Malmberg, *Ein Leib—Ein Geist* (Freiburg, 1960); I follow here Bordoni's analysis in *La cristologia*, 219–220.

<sup>49</sup>H. Mühlen, *Una Mystica Persona. Die Kirche als das Mysterium der heilsgeschichtlichen Identität des Heiligen Geistes in Christus und in den Christen*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Munich, 1968), 189–200.

continues among Jesus' disciples is not the hypostatic union, but the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The anointing presupposes the habitual grace that fills Jesus thanks to the Spirit, a grace that is different from the *gratia unionis*. Christians cannot participate in the latter, which is the sole prerogative of Christ, but they can participate in the former.<sup>50</sup>

While distinguishing Incarnation and Anointing, Mühlen holds that they both occur in the same chronological moment. Both take place in Nazareth. Jesus thus enjoys the fullness of the Spirit from the first moment of his existence. Of course, Mühlen takes account of Jesus' growth: both the hypostatic union and the anointing of the Spirit take shape gradually in history. But he does not explain what it is that structures and initiates this temporalization.

In order to supply this lack, let us attend to an element that Mühlen leaves aside: the distance that, according to the Gospels, stands between the Incarnation and the baptism at the Jordan, which is the moment of anointing in the strict sense. Obviously, we have to maintain, with Mühlen, that the Spirit is present from the first instant of Jesus' conception, as Luke seems to suggest. On the other hand, the Gospels are equally clear that the baptism marks a decisive novelty in Jesus' relation to the Spirit. To overlook this is to risk sliding into an a-temporal vision of the mysteries, as if they could have happened to Jesus at any instant and in any order. But if this is true, then history itself is meaningless, as is the sequence of present, past, and future in our personal lives.<sup>51</sup>

But there is more. Isn't the separation between Nazareth and the Jordan precisely what gives us the clue we need to explain the temporal unfolding of the mystery of Christ? For the action of the Holy Spirit seems to be connected with the step-wise course of Jesus' temporal life: the Spirit's specific way of operating is to give himself progressively in time. Thus, rather than saying with Mühlen

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<sup>50</sup>When D. Coffey speaks of an "incarnation" of the Spirit in Jesus (cf. D. Coffey, "The 'Incarnation' of the Holy Spirit in Christ," *Theological Studies* 45 [1984]: 466–480), he forgets that the Spirit is precisely that about Jesus in which we can participate (and, in this sense, is distinct from the hypostatic union). Coffey draws a parallel between the presence of the Son and the Spirit in Jesus: on both counts the Master is different from his disciples (cf. 476). This tends to blur the proper action of each divine person.

<sup>51</sup>See Ladaria, "La unción," 556: "If we do not pay enough attention to the temporal unfolding of Jesus' life, we blur the saving import of this mystery [the baptism] (and of all the others)."

that there are two simultaneous temporalizations (that of the Son and that of the Spirit), it would be better to think of there being just one temporalization, in which the Son and the Spirit would play different roles.<sup>52</sup> The mystery of Jesus' life is that, even as man, the incarnate Son is both always already complete and develops genuinely in time—and both the Spirit and the Son are involved in this mysterious structure. Let us now develop this point in two steps.

(a) We can begin by noting the importance of the development Jesus undergoes in time. If the whole life of Jesus is to have real weight as a mystery, it must be that every aspect of it contains something decisive for man's salvation. For this reason it is not enough to acknowledge an advance in accidentals that do not touch the center of Jesus' mission.

What, then, is this center? Jesus' mission consists in bringing man to divine sonship and putting him in communion with God. It follows that Jesus' growth ought to affect precisely this dimension. The question before us is therefore this: can we see Jesus' life as a growth in his union with the Father?

This idea can find support in the Letter to the Hebrews, which states that Jesus, although a Son, learned obedience and so was perfected (cf. Heb 5:8–10).<sup>53</sup> To be sure, divine sonship is given from the moment of the Incarnation, since Jesus is the Son of God from the beginning. But Jesus must also live out his divine sonship in his human freedom. In this sense, the divine sonship must become “history” in acts of obedience to the Father.<sup>54</sup> The earthly life of

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<sup>52</sup>Cf. H. Mühlen, “Das Christuserignis als Tat des heiligen Geistes,” in *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, ed. J. Feiner and M. Löhrer, III/2: *Das Christuserignis* (Einsiedeln, 1969), 513–544; 532: “when it comes to the relationship between the created grace of Jesus and its self-giving origin, the Holy Spirit, we must say that it involves a dialectic between immutability and historicity similar to the one that holds for the relationship between the Logos and his human nature.” D. Coffey advances a similar position: “Parallel to the progressive actualization of the divine sonship, there was a progressive actualization of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' transcendental love of the Father” (“The ‘Incarnation’ of the Holy Spirit in Christ,” 477).

<sup>53</sup>Cf. A. Vanhoye, *La lettre aux Hébreux. Jésus-Christ, médiateur d'une nouvelle alliance* (Paris, 2002).

<sup>54</sup>Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One. An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco, 1986), 38–39: “The Council of Constantinople . . . resolutely maintains that, as man, Jesus has a human will which is not absorbed by the divine will. But this human will follows the divine will and thus becomes one will with

Christ can therefore be seen as an apprenticeship in sonship, in which the Son, having become incarnate, has to learn—truly—what he always already knew. Jesus has to experience his sonship within the realm of a human existence whose shape coincides with the continuous pattern of interconnected events known as the economy of salvation. Indeed, by experiencing his eternal sonship within the realm of human existence, Jesus enables us to become adoptive sons of the Father in our turn. By the same token, he does not grow merely in secondary matters. Rather, his growth touches the very center of our salvation. For our salvation consists in nothing less than becoming sons in the Son, by participation in Jesus’ divine sonship.<sup>55</sup>

(b) This brings us to our second step. The action of the Spirit in the life of Jesus needs to be understood in the context of his divine sonship. At Jesus’ baptism, the Father’s voice (“this is my Son”; cf. Mt 3:17 and par) bears witness to this connection. Luke places it in the context of Jesus’ prayer (cf. Lk 3:21), and so points to the mystery of his filial relation to the Father.<sup>56</sup> The Spirit who appears here is the same one who will be at work in Christians enabling them to cry out “Abba, Father” (cf. Gal 4:6).

What this suggests is that the Spirit, the bond of love in the Trinity, is at work bringing about the Son’s eternal sonship within the realm of human time. This work is intimately connected with the assumption of human nature into hypostatic union brought

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it, not in a natural manner but along the path of freedom. The metaphysical two-ness of a human and a divine will is not abrogated, but in the realm of the person, in the realm of freedom, the fusion of both takes place, with the result that they become one will, not naturally, but personally. This free unity—a form of unity created by love—is higher and more interior than a merely natural unity.” Cf. also Ladaria, “La unción,” 556–557.

<sup>55</sup>In this sense, Christ’s experience is not foreign to the experience of the Christian, which also unfolds in time. We have tried to show this by starting from the idea of sonship. By doing so, we avoid the complications facing theories about Jesus’ supposed “faith,” complications that are on display in *La fede di Gesù. Atti del convegno tenuto a Trento il 27–28 maggio 1998*, ed. G. Canobbio (Bologna, 2000). For an exegesis of Hebrews that goes in the same direction we are proposing here, see F. Manzi, “La fede degli uomini e la singolare relazione filiale di Gesù con Dio nell’Epistola agli Ebrei,” *Biblica* 81 (2000): 32–62.

<sup>56</sup>Any further development of the “spiritual Christology” proposed by J. Ratzinger in *Behold the Pierced One*, which takes Jesus’ prayer as the place where his mystery is unveiled, would therefore have to take account of the action of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s life.

about by the Logos of God, but is not reducible to it. Furthermore, while this work already begins at the first moment of Jesus' existence, it continues afterwards. Why? Because the whole of Jesus' life forms a salvific pattern in which the whole man, in all his stages, is to be formed into the gift of adoptive sonship that comes from above. In becoming man the Son, in order to make himself the source of the Christian life of adoptive sonship, set out as the first to walk the path of Christian life in our stead—under the guidance of the Spirit. In this sense, the incarnate Son grows for and with us into the perfection of sonship, a sonship that he possesses from the first moment of his Incarnation. The agent of this growth is the Holy Spirit.

There is no lack of patristic testimony to support the thesis we are advancing here. For Justin Martyr, for example, the Spirit, descending upon Jesus in the Jordan, brings about in him a new generation, as the Father's voice attests: "you are my Son, today I have begotten you" (Ps 2:7). Given Justin's clear opposition to Ebionitism, this explanation is above any suspicion of adoptionism. Christ pre-exists the creation of the world, and he is the Son of God from the moment of his Incarnation.<sup>57</sup> What Justin sees happening, then, is this: the Son is born in the Jordan—today—"for men."<sup>58</sup> Justin's point is that Jesus' humanity is now making itself ready, by the gift of the Spirit, to transmit divine sonship to Christians. In this sense, Jesus' own divine sonship grows and is perfected, for now the Master is able to communicate it to his disciples.<sup>59</sup>

We find a similar theology in Irenaeus.<sup>60</sup> Hilary of Poitiers also speaks eloquently in a number of texts of the Lord's growth and progress. This growth, which comes about on account of his anointing at his baptism, does not pertain to his divinity, but to "that which by growth in the mystery needs the progress that the unction

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<sup>57</sup>Cf. *Dial.* 87–88 (ed. Bobichon, 422–428).

<sup>58</sup>Cf. *Dial.* 88, 8 (ed. Bobichon, 428). Cf. Bobichon's note on this passage, vol. 2, 809–810.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. *Dial.* 49–51 (ed. Bobichon, 304–314); 87–88. For a commentary on these texts, see A. Orbe, *La unción del Verbo. Estudios Valentinianos III* (Rome, 1961), 21–94. See also my forthcoming *Los misterios de la vida de Cristo en Justino mártir* (Rome, 2005), which confirms Orbe's account.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. A. Orbe, "¿San Ireneo adopcionista? En torno a adv. haer. III, 19, 1," *Gregorianum* 65 (1985): 5–50.

causes; that is, Christ is anointed so that he might thereby be sanctified insofar as he is man like us.”<sup>61</sup> For Jesus, according to Hilary, this sanctification is connected with the perfection of sonship.<sup>62</sup>

Christ’s progress in sonship occurs through the action of the Spirit in Jesus’ free human obedience. It is the Pneuma who shapes Christ’s divine sonship in time, bringing his filial obedience to the Father to maturity in history. Speaking in Mühlen’s terms, we could say that the Spirit is the agent of the temporalization of the hypostatic union, who brings to completion its translation into the language of time.

Here we find ourselves in agreement with Marcello Bordoni’s Spirit Christology.<sup>63</sup> In order to understand the place of the Spirit in Jesus’ life, we need to adopt a dynamic understanding of the Incarnation, which does not occur only in a given moment, but also embraces the Lord’s entire earthly existence.<sup>64</sup> The Spirit, then, is the one who guides Jesus’ growth throughout his existence; he is the dynamic personal power that throws into relief the saving significance of the Lord’s entire life. All of this allows us to do justice to the difference between the hypostatic union and the anointing by the Spirit while taking full account of the salvific weight of Jesus’ entire earthly career after the chronological point of his virginal conception.

Now, it is not enough to ascribe Jesus’ growth simply to the developmental laws of human nature. To do so would be to doom

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<sup>61</sup>Cf. *De Trinitate* IX, 19 (CCL 62A, 550). For a commentary on this and other passages, see Ladaria, *La Trinidad, misterio de comunión*, 178.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. *Tract. Psal. 2, 29* (CCL 61, 57–58): “*Scriptum est autem cum ascendisset ex aqua: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te. Sed secundum generationem hominis renascentis tum quoque ipse Deo renascebatur in filium perfectum*” [Now, it is written, when he had come up out of the water, you are my Son, today I have begotten you. But according to the generation of man being reborn he himself was also at that time being reborn for God as a perfect Son].

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Bordoni, *La cristologia*.

<sup>64</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 239: “I would like to call attention to this work of *actualization* and *historical expression* on the part of Jesus’ *human freedom*; to the ‘*personalization*’ by means of which he actively lives the grace of his hypostatic assumption by means of a concrete-historical exercise of his human will *under the action of the Holy Spirit*. When we consider the Incarnation from this dynamic point of view, the *unction* of the Holy Spirit is closely bound up with the Incarnation itself.”



our attempt to give Jesus' growth independent importance in its own right to conflict with the primacy of divine initiative. Salvation would in the end lie with humanity and its natural laws of growth. The suspicion that a theology of Jesus' growth and development has awakened among some theologians can probably be traced back to the difficulties with this approach.<sup>65</sup>

The approach that we are defending here is quite different. Jesus' natural human development is not sufficient to explain his growth. It is a necessary condition of that growth, of course, and the Father treats it with the utmost respect. Taken by itself, however, it can be no more than that—a necessary condition—and not the cause of Jesus' growth in filial obedience. What makes this latter growth possible is the Spirit whom the Father has sent.<sup>66</sup> This fact, as we will see shortly, has important consequences for the way in which Jesus configures his time.

For the time being, however, let us note that the action of the Spirit, while occurring throughout Jesus' entire life (cf. Lk 2:52), is not characterized only by imperceptible gradualness, but by moments of discontinuity as well. One such moment, and a particularly intense one at that, is the baptism in the Jordan. And yet the baptism is not an isolated event. Rather, it marks Jesus' whole subsequent life, which is about to begin with his preaching and his miracles.

What we have said so far suggests a method for identifying the ages of Jesus' life theologically. What gives shape to Jesus' life is precisely the varied dispensation of the Spirit, who distinguishes its several stages. The gift of the Spirit to Jesus reflects a plan, and Jesus'

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<sup>65</sup>We have already made note of Guardini's reservations. Something analogous can be said about C. Schönborn's opposition to Pannenberg's theory of a progressive filiation in Jesus. Cf. C. Schönborn, "Aporie der Zweinaturenlehre? Überlegungen zur Christologie von Wolfhart Pannenberg," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 24 (1977): 428–445; 439: "It is hard to see how one can plausibly maintain the passage from the earthly Jesus' trustfulness to his total self-gift in death on the cross as a *human* event. How do we make the step from the psychology of Jesus' trust vis-à-vis the Father to the ontological reality of the Son's trinitarian self-donation? Is not Jesus' human attitude being asked to make a leap whose scope exceeds human possibilities? A total gift of self to the Father, without holding anything back, is simply impossible for human beings."

<sup>66</sup>What we are proposing, then, is not just a Christology from below, but also a Christology from above. It is, to repeat, the Spirit who is the true artificer of Jesus' progressive growth.

life is divided and structured according to this plan. The baptism is one of the moments when the Spirit changes his way of acting—in such a way as to shed light on the coming years of Jesus’ public ministry. The task of a theology of the mysteries of Jesus’ life, then, is to identify the other variations in the modality of the Spirit’s gift, and so to consider each mystery within the whole ensemble of Jesus’ Spirit-led life.

We have already seen that the term “mystery” refers to the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who makes Christ present in the Church’s sacraments. This point alone would be enough to show the inseparable connection that ought to exist between the mysteries and pneumatology. In the foregoing, we have enlarged the scope of this claim: it is also necessary to study the presence and action of the Spirit during Jesus’ earthly life itself.

#### 4.2. *The configuration of Jesus’ time*

What we have said so far enables us to sketch the laws that give structure to Jesus’ time.

The first and fundamental thing that we must keep in mind is the hypostatic union, thanks to which Jesus is fully the Son of God from the first moment of his earthly existence. Now, we might think that this basic truth makes the remaining time of Jesus’ life superfluous. Once the eternal God enters into history, time has no further value to him, or so it would seem.

In reality, just the opposite is the case. The Incarnation makes it possible for there to be time in Jesus’ life. After all, the one who becomes incarnate here is not simply the divinity, but the Person of the Son of God, whose being consists in receiving everything from the Father. The Son always leaves the initiative to the Father, and so is able to make room in his life for time. Time is a dimension that is not under man’s control, and so can be lived out as patient waiting. By the same token, it can become the economic translation of the disponibility to do the Father’s will that lies at the very heart of the Son’s being as eternal self-reception from that Father.

The time of the Christian thus finds its foundation in the Father-Son relation. Balthasar underscores this point in his *A Theology of History*. While sinful man wishes to take possession of things immediately, without having to wait, the Son opens himself

to accept the Father's dispensation of time. Indeed, he lives out his time as openness to do the Father's will. In this sense, time is the medium through which the Son can obey God's plans in the economy.<sup>67</sup>

We must now take a further step. The Incarnation lays the foundation for the possibility of there being time in the life of the Son. But this time has to be set in motion. The distance it represents has to be filled to the point of perfect communion. Hence the need for the Spirit to act.

What, then, is the Spirit's role? The Spirit ensures that the Son's time does not remain a matter only of patient waiting, but enables God to come to man and man to respond to God within a progressive enactment of reciprocal communion. God can give himself to the creature with full respect for the latter's temporal condition. And he can do so precisely because he has a Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit personally embodies the Christian God's ability to go out of himself and to call to communion with himself what is other than he, with full respect for its distinctive properties.

The Spirit, then, sets Jesus' time in motion and, within that, unites Jesus with his Father in an ever-more perfect filial obedience that reaches its apex in the Cross and Resurrection. Now, if we speak here of a progressive perfection in filial obedience, it is not because Jesus does not respond perfectly to the Father until some given moment late in life. Jesus, as incarnate Son of God, always responds perfectly. But this perfection is measured also according to the state of his flesh, of his bodily human existence, that needs to grow in time. Jesus always responds perfectly to what is asked of him *hic et nunc*. The point is that the flesh assumed by Christ, his existence in the body, needs to be progressively disposed to fulfill the pattern of ever-new demands that come from the Father. This pattern reaches its apex in the "hour." The point we have been insisting on here is the Spirit's role of mediating that trajectory to the Son in the economy.

The Spirit is thus the true agent of progress in Christ's existence. The ages of his life take account of the normal human growth process, but they are ultimately established by the donation of the Father's Spirit. They therefore remain inaccessible to a

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<sup>67</sup>Cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (New York, 1963), 25–33.

naturalistic psychology.<sup>68</sup> Jesus' future thus remains truly open, because it is decided by God in ever new ways, beyond any merely human possibility of progress.

The next task would be to attend to the life of Jesus in order to ascertain the actual steps through which the Spirit led Jesus. These steps are the ages of Jesus' life, each of which represents a moment of special significance in the enactment of communion between God and man in the New Covenant.

The Lord's earthly way begins with the hidden life. Here there are no extraordinary actions of the Spirit. Jesus grows up in the way common to all men. This particular stage is important because it underscores how the Spirit, as the true agent of Jesus' growth, does full justice to the laws of human development.<sup>69</sup> Because the donation of the Spirit comes in progressive stages, it safeguards two things. On the one hand, it ensures respect for the times of man. On the other hand, it ensures that the true progress of these times, as the locus of communion between God and man, is always moved from above, by the love of the Father who awakens his creatures' free response.

This last point is vividly illustrated by the scene at the Jordan. We have focused here on the baptism precisely as a novelty in Jesus' life; at the Jordan, the Spirit intervenes in a special way to inaugurate a new phase in that life. This new phase, as we have already noted, brings out a new trait in Christ's divine sonship. After his baptism, in fact, Jesus begins to preach the word of his Father and to perform miracles that reveal his Father's face as Creator. We would need to study the public life of Jesus in order to identify more precisely its distinctive features and to show the new traits that the Pneuma

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<sup>68</sup>In this respect we agree with Guardini. This helps us understand, for example, the mystery of the "good who die young," a mystery whose supreme model is Christ himself. Jesus can go beyond the natural phenomenon of the ages of life because the fundamental factor in his life is the Spirit. Thanks to the Spirit's action, for example, a young man can have the wisdom of the old. By the same token, the ages of Christian life exceed the scope of philosophical analysis.

<sup>69</sup>A few recent studies of the mystery of the hidden life have underlined its significance for a theology of history. Cf. R. Brague, "Du temps perdu?" *Revue Catholique Internationale Communio* 29 (2004): 15–22 (Eng. trans.: "Wasted Time?" *Communio* 30, no. 1 [Spring 2003]); G. Greshake, "Die Spiritualität von Nazareth," *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 33 (2004): 20–34 (Eng. trans., "The Spiritual Charism of Nazareth," *Communio* 31, no. 1 [Spring 2004]).

imprints on Jesus' relation to his Father. At the same time, such a study would shed light backwards on the event of the baptism in the Jordan.

From this point on, the theology of the mysteries needs to continue its analysis of the life of Jesus as a growth in sonship. The Spirit works variously according to the Father's plan to bring man into communion with himself. The history of Jesus is the history of the Pneuma's action in him. We do not need to enter into a detailed description of all the stages of this history here. It is clear, though, that a new stage begins when Jesus' "hour" strikes. When that hour comes, Jesus no longer works miracles or answers his accusers with wisdom. The Spirit begins to act, as the tradition attests, in a hidden manner.<sup>70</sup> The Spirit continues to perfect Jesus' sonship, but does so in silence and weakness. Here we glimpse the foundation of what will be a law of Christian existence: "when you were young, you girded yourself . . . when you are old another will gird you and lead you" (Jn 21:18). We could continue in the same vein with a study of the remaining mysteries, beginning with the Resurrection, in order to show the different ways in which the Spirit shapes the work of filial adoption.

Our work would not be finished with that, however. The baptism points to another important characteristic of Jesus' time.

On the one hand, the Spirit who descends upon the Savior at the Jordan is the same Spirit of prophecy who reappears throughout the entire history of Israel. At the baptism, the Spirit not only effects a turning-point in Jesus' time, but also brings to a close a stage in the history of Israel, the stage of the Law and the Prophets that had continued until John the Baptist (cf. Lk 16:16).

On the other hand, the scene at the Jordan has an ecclesial significance, both in the biblical texts and in the early patristic tradition. There is a clear relation between the baptism of Christ and the baptism of believers. The Spirit that Jesus receives is the same Spirit he will give to his disciples in order to reproduce in them the laws under which his own earthly existence unfolds. The open

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<sup>70</sup>Cf. the following text from Justin Martyr: "You can see, therefore, that the hidden power of God was in the crucified Christ, before whom the demons and shortly all the powers and authorities of the earth tremble" (*Dial.*, 49, 8 [ed. Borbichon, 308]). This hidden power of God at work in Jesus on the Cross is the Holy Spirit (cf. the context, *Dial.*, 49, 1–8 [ed. Borbichon, 304–308]); cf. also Granados, *Los misterios de la vida de Cristo en Justino mártir*.

readiness to the Father's will that the Spirit realizes in Jesus is what Jesus will communicate to his disciples.

The coming of the Spirit thus brings to a close one economy—the economy of the Old Testament—and inaugurates another—the economy of the Church. The two stages differ according to the way in which the Spirit acts in them. After Easter, the Spirit is poured out upon all flesh (cf. J1 3:1–2) as the Spirit of sonship (cf. Gal 4:6).

Indeed, the Spirit who comes upon Jesus at the Jordan is the same Spirit who, according to Genesis, hovered over the waters, just as he will renew creation at the end of time. This Spirit is the Spirit of life, the dynamic agent of all creatures' growth towards God. This fact gives Jesus' time continuity with the time of the cosmos, with the entire dynamism of the creation that the Spirit drives towards its consummation.

Thanks to the Spirit, then, Jesus' past and future look beyond his earthly life, reaching out to encompass the whole of history. The configuration of his time is not limited to the narrow compass of one private life among others. When it describes the ages of Jesus' life and identifies the laws that shape his time, the theology of the mysteries unlocks the meaning, not only of Christian existence, but of history and of the world itself.

##### *5. Conclusion: from the time of Christ to the time of man and the cosmos*

The project of modernity disclosed promising horizons: the future lay open and at man's disposal. This change brought with it the urgent task of combining present, future, and past into a form within which human life could continue to be intelligible.

The attempts to fulfill this task have by and large failed. The reason for the failure is not so much the emphasis the moderns placed on the future as it is their claim that man could build his own future by himself.<sup>71</sup> Left alone with himself, man has suffered a

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<sup>71</sup>Man no longer thinks of his own history as a *conversatio Dei* in the manner of Augustine and re-tells it monologically, listening only to himself. Cf. M. Lamb, "The Resurrection and Christian Identity as *conversatio Dei*," in *Reincarnation and Resurrection*, ed. H. Häring and J. B. Metz (New York: Orbis, 1993), 112–123.

degradation of his own humanity; he has come to identify himself with his own creations, and so has ended up measuring his time by the impersonal chronometer of technology. Time now takes the form of yet another resource in the chain of production that man has to try to shape to his own ends. Together with this universal time there comes into being a multitude of private times that lack any interconnection and whose shaping is left to the liberty of each individual. These private oases seem to provide a last refuge for the human. Inasmuch as they lack any meaning beyond themselves, however, they often sink back into apathy before the task of constructing an existence. Only the present moment counts.

Does Christianity offer any response to these difficulties? We have tried to answer this question in the affirmative through a consideration of the mysteries of the life of Jesus. At the focal point of this consideration is Christ, who stands at the center of history and brings it to its consummation: communion with his Father.

Now, an important point that has emerged in our discussion is this: the theology of the mysteries needs to rescue from oblivion the question of the shape of Jesus' own time. This requires attention to the moment when each mystery occurs and to the way in which the mysteries are connected. Otherwise Christ cannot shed light on how man is to shape his time. But Christ is not just a model for our lives. He is the form in which our lives are to be built up. By the same token, Christ's perfect humanity must itself be built up in time.

Our study of this point has been limited to one of the mysteries of Jesus' life: the baptism. Nevertheless, the baptism gives us important clues to understanding the shape of Jesus' time.

(a) We have seen that the baptism has implications beyond Jesus' earthly life. The coming of the Spirit places the history of the Savior in the context of the entire history of salvation, beginning with the creation of the world. The time of the Lord therefore appears as the center of time. Christ's own person overcomes within itself the opposition between public time and private time, personal time and cosmic time. The laws of Jesus' time thus give us a unitary understanding of the world's time.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Cf. J. A. Di Noia: "Universal meaning is embedded in the particularistically depicted and narrated story of the passion, death, resurrection and glory of Jesus of Nazareth, delivered to us as Christ the Lord. The motto of von Balthasar's theology is pertinent here: the greatest possible radiance in the world in virtue of

(b) The mystery of Jesus' time first appears in the context of his divine sonship, which is the center of his mystery. It is here that the baptism finds its place. While Jesus is in prayer, he hears the Father's voice. Jesus' divine sonship is the foundation of his time. On the basis of this sonship, the time of Jesus is a time of waiting and of gift. It is the time in which the Son exercises himself as Son in the conditions of the economy of salvation, receiving himself from the Father now in those conditions, too.

In our attempts to find the formula for time, we moderns have forgotten this personal dimension. Man has read the measure of his time off a mechanically conceived universe, and has considered time as a resource to be mastered. The Christian message invites us to see things differently. For the Christian, time unfolds within the framework of a communion. Man can therefore open himself to God's gift in an attitude of filial waiting. This also sheds light on the significance of cosmic time, which man tends to perceive as a barrier, as an obstacle to his freedom. Thanks to the Redemption, time recovers its transparency: it reveals itself as a distance that allows the presence of the other and the fruitful expectation of his gift.<sup>73</sup> This temporal distance is no longer opposed to the inner time of the person, but takes its meaning from it.<sup>74</sup>

(c) The baptism also displays another factor that structures Jesus' time. The coming of the Holy Spirit inaugurates a new stage in his life, a growth in communion with the Father. "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." Christ's life is the gradual shaping in history, along the path of free obedience, of the divine sonship Jesus has from the beginning. That means that time, understood as

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the closest possible following of Christ. The replication of the pattern of Christ, in the *imitatio Christi*, is not only the vehicle through which Christian personal and communal identity is shaped. It is also the particularistic medium in which the universally applicable, though not universally accessible, truth of Christ is made known to the whole world beyond the visible ambit of the Christian community" ("American Catholic Theology," *The Thomist* 54 [1990]: 499–518; 516f).

<sup>73</sup>It is an effect of sin that man perceives his own body, and the body of others, as an obstacle to communion. Redemption restores man's original gaze. Man regains the ability to see the body in its transparency to the vocation to love. This idea, which is drawn from John Paul II's theology of the body, could be applied to the analysis of time as well. Temporal distance is not an obstacle, but, lived in patient expectation, is a way of filial communion.

<sup>74</sup>This opposition is at the basis of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*.



expectation and patient waiting, does not end in disappointment. It becomes a time of new gift, a path to perfect communion.

Jesus' time, like the time of modern man, has an open future and knows genuine progress. The decisive difference is that this progress is not simply a matter of human will and decision. True, the Spirit gives man's response its full value, because the Pneuma moves to free obedience and self-gift. At the same time, the Spirit shows clearly that human seriousness is not enough. The Spirit takes up natural human growth, but he makes clear that all true growth comes from above. Only thus, in fact, is the future truly open, for now God enters into man's time in order to lift it beyond its own limits.

These three elements give us the "motor" of Jesus' history. Further study of the stages of the Spirit's action in him would bring to light the phases in the path of filiation leading to perfect communion with the Father.

The foregoing considerations underscore the power of the contemplation of the face of Christ in his mysteries. This contemplation can teach man to shape his time and the time of the world. Past, present, and future are no longer disconnected elements of life. They are linked according to a special law, and this law is none other than the communion to which man is invited. Time becomes the place where God realizes his plan of filial communion, and in which it is given to man to make the divine gifts his own.<sup>75</sup>—*Translated by Adrian J. Walker.* □

**JOSÉ GRANADOS, D.C.J.M.,** is a priest of the Disciples of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and is assistant professor of theology at The John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at The Catholic University of America.

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