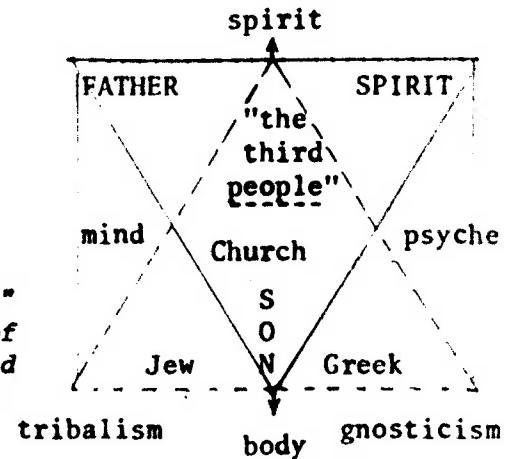


This thinksheet is an excerpt from "theology on the hoof," from p.18 of a lecture beginning a national convocation on Christian initiation. Notice how the various dimensions of religious studies--biblical, historical, theological, linguistic, psychological, sociological--are deployed to reveal and expound an ecumenical point of view....The whole paper is #1180. The "comprehensive interpretive methodology" here used was developed in my 1943 ThD thesis, which bore that as subtitle.

21. By "contextual translation" I mean finding in today's life the dynamic situation closest to that of the biblical world at the point of the biblical text being dealt with. Our increasingly minority status as Christians-and-Church-and-churches is, at it were, bending us backward toward, or bringing us closer to, the original Christian situation in the Hellenistic world. As they had to fight off tribalism (aggressive Judaism), etatism (the totalistic claims of the Roman Imperium), and both hot and cold winds from the East (various gnosticisms, libertine and ascetic), so we have to resist various levels of chauvinism from the town-dominance of the basketball team and the public school system all the way up or out to the Washington bureaucracy...and denominational sectarianism...and virtually the same gnosticisms (darkness from the East, as well as light--with the Sinic now added, for the Yangtse as well as the Ganges is now flooding westward). Along with trinity and christology, under these pressures a doctrine and praxis of Christian initiation emerged: under the pressures we face, how adequate is that doctrine-and-praxis and its historical and contemporary alternatives? "Interpretation" being first the recreation of the life from which the literature came, then the interpretation of the literature in the context of that life, and then the touch of that life on our life by the literature, what significance and shape should baptism have today in our celebrative and missionary situation? This paper offers some hints and probes toward the best answering of that question. Here, I limit myself to presenting a diagram to display the living dynamic under which baptism was originally shaped and interpreted.

EXPLANATION:

1. The down-arrow is the divine initiative (so solid lines), with the incarnation touching the human base.
2. The up-arrow is the human upreach, aspiration, yearning for transcendence, all that we mean by "spirit."
3. The diamond formed by the overlap represents two realities: (1) the four human energies (as in reflection #17, above), and (2) the Church as what I call, following some early Greek fathers, "the third people."
4. The solid vertical lines represent the polarities of Father/tribe (the Jewish revelation and temptation) and Spirit/inspiration (the pagan, chiefly gnostic, revelation and temptation).



22. None would deny that there's an awkward gap between infant baptism and essential baptismal doctrine, which is grace-oriented.... whereas anything a religion does ritually with infants is nature-oriented no matter how much is said about grace. One may argue that the infant is, under original sin, its own, so that pedobaptism is the infant's becoming not its own: an argument countering the question *How can the infant become not its own before it becomes its own, i.e. before it emerges into a self-claiming person?* But this answer is esoteric, abstruse, involuted to the point of ludicrousness. In theology, plausibility is nothing everything; but it is something, and I fear this argument will remain, and become even more, implausible as the years roll. We shall be working with a decreasing number of folk pious and patient enough to keep a straight face while priests and theologians expound with such doubletalk the single reality of Christian initiation. Here, water twice is some help: buried proleptically as infant, confessionally as believer....