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'I Abjure Satan, his Pomp, and his Service': Exchanging Religious Dependencies in the Early Church

1 A Piece of Ecclesial Gossip

In a letter from 428 or 429 CE, Augustine (354–430), bishop of the North African port Hippo Regius, told his friend Alypius, bishop of Thagaste (some sixty miles south of Hippo), a piece of ecclesial gossip.[1] The protagonist of the story, which Augustine had only heard second-hand, was a certain Dioscorus, the chief physician (*archiater*) of an unknown location.[2] Dioscorus must have enjoyed a considerable reputation as a doctor because Augustine did not feel it necessary to provide further biographical information about him. Dioscorus was a kind man but a fierce critic of Christianity. Thus, it came as a great surprise that when his daughter fell seriously ill, Dioscorus prayed to Christ and vowed to become a Christian should she be saved. His prayers were answered, and his daughter recovered. Yet, the good doctor reneged on his vow. As a result, he was afflicted by a temporary loss of sight, which he interpreted as a divine punishment for breaking his promise. Here is the central sequence of the story in Augustine's own words:

> He cried out and confessed [*confitens*] and vowed again that he would fulfil what he had vowed [*voverat*] if light be returned to him. It returned; he fulfilled [his vow], and still the hand [of the Lord] was raised. He had not committed the creed [*symbolum*] to memory, or perhaps had refused to commit it, and made the excuse that he was unable. God saw. Immediately after all the ceremonies of his reception [*post festa omnia receptionis suae*], he was undone by a paralysis in many, indeed almost all, his members. Then, being warned by a dream, he confessed in writing

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1 Augustine, *Epistula 227* (FaFo § 636i). The date is uncertain. In the title and the explicit of the letter Alypius is called an old man (*senex*). This may, however, also be an honorific title; cf. André Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du C.N.R.S., 1982): 53, 64, s.v. 'Alypius'. The letter is also discussed by Todd S. Berzon, "Between Presence and Perfection: The Protean Creed of Early Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 29 (2021): 593–96, but his conclusions are very different from mine.
2 Cf. J.R. Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (PLRE)*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 367, s.v. 'Dioscurus 3' (cf. also PLRE, vol. 1: 261, s.v. 'Dioscorus 2'); Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne*: 279, s.v. 'Dioscorus 1'. It is unlikely that Dioscorus was *archiater* in Hippo. In that case, Augustine would no doubt have known the story first-hand.

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that he had been told that this had happened because he had not recited the creed [*quod symbolum non reddiderit*].

> After that confession [*post illam confessionem*], the use of all his members was restored to him, excepting only the tongue; nevertheless, he, being still under the same affliction, disclosed in writing that he had nonetheless learnt the creed [*symbolum*] and still retained it in his memory; and so that frivolity which, as you know, blemished his natural kindness and made him exceedingly profane when he mocked Christians, was altogether destroyed in him.

Unfortunately, the sources do not tell us what exactly happened *before* Dioscorus turned to Christ in prayer. The famous physician must have tried several cures which may have involved certain pagan rituals but which, in the end, remained unsuccessful. He may then have resorted to praying, perhaps, first to some local deity, again to no avail. At this point, he may have realized that his gods were, ultimately, less potent than he had assumed, and in his distress he turned to the God of the Christians and took a vow, or, in more modern words, he struck a deal: he promised to become a Christian and, in return, expected his daughter to be cured by divine intervention. Dioscorus' behaviour was by no means eccentric. He continued to operate within the parameters of Roman religion, which were based on the principle *do ut des*, i.e., I promise the gods veneration if they do something for me in return.[3] Dioscorus' actions appeared to bring about the long-expected success. Indeed, his daughter recovered.

But Dioscorus tried to cheat God. Although he had taken a vow and was, therefore, committed to honouring his obligations,[4] he tried to withdraw. The repercussions of his decision were severe: he was twice struck by illness. After first going blind, Dioscorus decided to register for the catechumenate. However, in the end, he hesitated to go through with the preparatory rites for baptism. One part of the catechumenate was the *traditio* and *redditio symboli*. At some point before the date of baptism (usually Easter), the bishop 'handed over', that is, explained, the creed (*symbolum*) to the candidates for baptism and asked them to memorize it. Then, some days later, the candidates had to solemnly 'give it back', that is, recite it in the presence of the bishop. Here, at the *redditio*, Dioscorus had managed to withdraw from the recitation of the creed. He may have pretended some illness, shyness, or poor memory – in any case, he had obviously been excused. We do not know why Dioscorus sought such a recusal. It may have been due to the stubbornness of an elderly man, or the decision

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3 Cf. Kurt Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte*, Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 5.4 (1967; repr. of 2nd ed., Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992): 46–47; Karl Hoheisel, "Do ut des," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, eds. Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, Matthias Laubscher, and Karl H. Kohl (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990): 229; Jörg Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007): 149.
4 Cf. Bernhard Kötting and Bernhard Kaiser, "Gelübde," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 9 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1976): 1078–80; Jörg Rüpke, *On Roman Religion: Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome*, Townsend Lectures / Cornell Studies in Classical Philology (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016)*:* 121–24.

may have been based on fear of what would happen to him if he gave up the traditional worship which his forefathers had practised for centuries and which, in his view, had guaranteed his professional success. Be that as it may, in the end, Dioscorus seems to have been baptized.[5]

But then something happened which made him change his mind once again. His daughter's cure may have triggered this conversion process, but ultimately it was accelerated by the series of illnesses that struck Dioscorus. After having suffered a stroke, and as the result of a dream, Dioscorus finally understood that the traditional gods no longer determined his fate. Instead, the Christian God had taken over. Thus, a new system of religious dependency was established. In the end, unable to speak, Dioscorus performed the *redditio* in writing.[6]

2 Preparation for Baptism in the Early Church

Whatever the details of this story (and I will come back to some aspects of it later), it makes clear that the ancient Mediterranean world operated within a system of dependencies that transcended the empirical realm. The social order that structured society and in which most people lived as members of the lower classes or even slaves in a situation of utter dependency on the goodwill of their masters or owners[7] was embedded in a broader hierarchy. This structure also included the realm that was believed to exist beyond what could be perceived by human bodily senses and which could only be accessed by those endowed with a philosophical intellect, if at all.

This metaphysical realm encompassed the gods and all other spiritual beings, including angels, demons, and the devil. The visible world was generally considered subordinate to the will and actions of these supernatural beings. In early Christianity, it was thought that humans could extract themselves from the power of the devil and the traditional gods (who were considered evil demons) via a system of rites that had

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5 At least, this is what the words *post festa omnia receptionis suae* suggest.

6 Apparently, after having suffered a stroke subsequent to his baptism, he first disclosed that he had not taken part in the *redditio symboli.* He then partly recovered from his illness but remained unable to speak. Only then does he appear to have written down the creed. Augustine does not say whether Dioscorus' health was fully restored in the end. It is equally unclear whether the words *post illam confessionem* imply some kind of formal penitential act.

7 According to recent estimates, 90 percent of Roman society was unable to afford a slave (and were hence considered of lowly status), whereas slaves constituted just under 10 percent of the imperial population. Cf. Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Roman World AD 275–475* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 24–25, 58–60.

legal implications. Through these rites, Christians could forsake all other supernatural allegiances and place themselves under the sole authority of Christ. It is this change of allegiance and replacement of one relationship of dependency with another that I want to explore in this article.

Ultimately, conversion to Christ was, of course, sealed by baptism itself. Yet, the submersion of the convert in water was only the end of a longer process known as the catechumenate. I do not want to explain the system of the catechumenate here as its details are quite complicated. Instead, I will briefly sketch its fundamental structure and then deal with two aspects in greater detail.[8]

By the end of the second century, Christian initiation was a three-stage process: the first stage was called "conversion", or "turning about". The technical term ἐπισ-τροφή (*epistrophé*; Latin: *conuersio*) already indicates that conversion implied a fundamental change in the convert's life. Conversion denotes the turning away from a person's old life and the adoption of a new moral code. Converts to Christianity were expected to control their sexual lives, display a certain self-control as regards food and drink, promote social cohesion and social justice through almsgiving, and, finally, avoid all acts and rites associated with their former gods and beliefs. Once the convert sought to enter the Christian community, he became a catechumen. At this stage, he was taught for a certain period about the central beliefs and tenets of Christianity. Finally, he or she was baptized and was thus, at last, fully incorporated into the Christian congregation.

Before they could be baptized, the catechumens had to undergo an examination and, if they passed it, were repeatedly exorcized so that they were cleansed of all evil spirits. The clergy had to make absolutely sure that no demons remained in the baptizands and that they were pure enough to receive baptism. These exorcisms were accompanied by the two rites of ἀπόταξις / ἀποταγή (*apótaxis / apotagé*, renunciation) and σύνταξις / συνταγή (*sýntaxis / syntagé*, engagement) and / or *traditio / redditio symboli* (handing over and recitation of the creed). I will focus on these two rites in what follows. They symbolize or even enact the change of religious allegiance to which I referred in the title of my paper.

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8 For what follows cf. Wolfram Kinzig and Martin Wallraff, "Das Christentum des dritten Jahrhunderts zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit," in *Das Christentum I: Von den Anfängen bis zur Konstantinischen Wende*, ed. Dieter Zeller, Die Religionen der Menschheit 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002): 339–52.

3 The Rite of apótaxis / apotagé and sýntaxis / syntagé

In order to explain what the rite of *apótaxis* (or *apotagé*) and *sýntaxis* (or *syntagé*) was about,[9] I turn to one of the most influential theologians of the fifth century, Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia (bishop 392/3–428 CE).[10] A series of *Catechetical Homilies* has come down to us in Syriac translation in which Theodore explains the creed, the Lord's Prayer, baptism, and the Eucharist. In what follows, I will focus on the rites that precede baptism.

According to Theodore's description (which is also found in the works of many other Christian authors of the period), the world is dominated by two competing systems of dependency, one headed by Christ (who is ultimately victorious) and the other by the devil. Satan had laid a claim on humankind ever since the Fall of Adam. In his sermon, Theodore stages a veritable courtroom drama: Satan's ownership of humankind had been challenged by his slaves, i.e., humans. He takes his case to the divine court. In response, humankind defends itself against its devilish accuser as follows:

> But it is necessary that a judgment should be given for us against the Tyrant, who is fighting the case against us, that is to say, Satan, who is always envious of our deliverance and salvation. He shows here also the same ill will towards us and tries and endeavours to file suit against us as if we had no right to be outside his ownership. He pleads that from ancient times and from our being in legal succession to the head of our race we belong to him by right.[11]

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9 Fundamental discussion in Hans Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage: Eine Untersuchung zu Gestalt und Geschichte der Taufe nach den altkirchlichen Taufliturgien* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1960): passim, esp. 76–81, 124–33; Alois Stenzel, *Die Taufe: Eine genetische Erklärung der Taufliturgie*, Forschungen zur Geschichte der Theologie und des innerkirchlichen Lebens 7–8 (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1958): 98–108; Henry A. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). In addition, cf. Wolfram Kinzig, trans., *Asterius: Psalmenhomilien*, 2 vols., Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 56–57 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2002): 465, n. 13.
10 For what follows, cf. also Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism:* 148–51; Nathan Witkamp, *Tradition and Innovation: Baptismal Rite and Mystagogy in Theodore of Mopsuestia and Narsai of Nisibis*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 149 (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 182–216.
11 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 12*: 18 (trans. Alphonse Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, Woodbrooke Studies 6 [Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1933]: 27; altered). In what follows, the translations in Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia* were revised according to Raymond Tonneau and Robert Devreesse, *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste: Reproduction phototypique du ms. Mingana syr. 561 (Selly Oak Colleges' Library, Birmingham)*, Studi e Testi 145 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949) and Peter Bruns, *Theodor von Mopsuestia: Katechetische Homilien*, 2 vols., Fontes Christiani 17 (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1994).

Theodore then gives the floor to the accuser, who recapitulates the story of the Fall of Adam and God's pronouncement against Adam in Genesis 3:18–19, which entitled Satan to ownership of Adam and all his descendants. Satan concludes:

> From the fact that by his own will he [Adam] chose my lordship you clearly belong to me, as I am the prince of the powers of the air and of the spirit, but now I work in the children of disobedience [cf. Ephesians 2:2]. How, then, is it possible that this man, who from the beginning and from the time of his forefathers belongs to me – as a just death sentence was passed against him in this mortal world, where he still is and where I hold sway over him – should be taken away from this world and from this way of life, and consequently from my lordship also, which he himself chose willingly? And should he now become immortal, a thing which is higher than his nature? And should he be seen in the life and occupations of the abode of heaven? This does not pertain to humans or to beings who have this (human) nature, who are different from those who are endowed with a higher nature.[12]

Humankind, therefore, is forced to show and establish the title it possesses:

> [. . .] that originally we did not belong to Satan and to our forefathers, but to God who created us while we were not and made us in his own image [cf. Genesis 1:27], and that it was through the iniquity and the wickedness of the Tyrant and through our own negligence that we were driven towards evil. Therefore, we lost also the honour and greatness of the [divine] image, and because of our malice we further received the punishment of death.[13]

Finally, it was Christ who, through his death, came to humankind's rescue by abolishing human sin and transgressions.

In the end, after having listened to both sides, God issues a sentence:

> He condemned the Tyrant for the ill will of which he had made use against him [Christ] and against all our race, and pronounced judgment against him. Therefore, he raised Christ our Lord from the dead and made him immortal and immutable, and took him to heaven. And he vouchsafed to all the [human] race the joy of [his] gifts so that no room might be left to the Slanderer from which to inflict injuries on us.[14]

The rite of *apótaxis* (renunciation) and *sýntaxis* (engagement) encompassed the moment when the individual believer could transition from the tyranny of the devil to the merciful reign of Christ. Here, the candidates for baptism formally declared their change of ownership from Satan to Christ. The words of this rite varied in the Greek Church,[15] but its basic formula looked like this:

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12 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 12:* 18 (trans. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia:* 27–28; altered).
13 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 12*: 19 (trans. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia:* 28; altered).
14 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 12*: 20 (trans. Mingana *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia:* 29; altered).
15 Cf. Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage*: 39–51.

Ἀποτάσσομαί σοι, Σατανᾶ, καὶ τῇ πομπῇ σου καὶ τῇ λατρείᾳ σου,
    καὶ συντάσσομαί σοι, Χριστέ.

I abjure you (*apotássomai*), Satan, and all your pomp and your (worship) service,
    and I engage myself (*syntássomai*), Christ, to you.[16]

The verb *apotássomai* is often translated into English as 'I renounce' and understood as an expression of abstention or even of asceticism.[17] However, other semantic nuances were also attached to this term and, therefore, to the rite of that name. In papyri, *apotássomai* is used in a legal context to designate withdrawal from legal obligations proceeding from a contract.[18] In contracts and other documents, the term was also used as part of a formula that indicated the renunciation of legal support.[19] Finally,

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16 John Chrysostom, *Catecheses baptismales (Taufkatechesen)*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Reiner Kaczynski, Fontes Christiani 6.1–6.2 (Freiburg: Herder 1992): 23.

17 This is, of course, correct and recalls Luke 14:33, where Christ tells the crowds travelling with him: 'So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not renounce (*apotássetai*) all your possessions.' Therefore, *apótaxis* was translated into Latin as *abrenuntiatio* and hence into English as "renunciation". Regarding the history of the verb, cf. Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage:* 76–78; Gerhard Delling "τάσσω κτλ," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 8 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969): 33–34.

18 P. Oxy. 6 904 (fifth c.; Bernard Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, eds. and trans., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, part 6 [London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1908]: 242): A certain Flavius sends a petition to the governor (*praeses*) of the Thebaid. He has acted as a substitute for Philoxenus, who holds the post of police official (*riparius*) in Oxyrhynchus. However, Flavius feels unfairly treated by Philoxenus and asks the governor to be released from his duties. ll. 7–9: 'Accordingly I make my entreaties to your highness that I should be released from so grievous an office, and that the original holder should be compelled to finish it either himself or through some other person, as I renounce (ἀποταξαμένου / *apotaxaménou*) it, being unable to endure any longer an office so severe and onerous [. . .]' (trans. Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri:* 242–43). As regards this papyrus, cf. also Alexander H. Macnaghten, "Local Administration in Egypt under Roman Rule, Fourth to Sixth Centuries AD: The Element of Corruption" (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 1993): 185; https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;6;904 = TM 35311; https://www.trismegistos.org/text/35311 [accessed 03.09.2021].

19 In several papyri, a formula like ἀποτάττομαι πάσῃ βοηθείᾳ νόμων ('I renounce all legal help / support') is used. Cf. (in roughly chronological order):

BGU 17 2685, l. 30 (585 CE), https://papyri.info/ddbdp/bgu;17;2685 = TM 69756, https://www.trismegistos.org/text/69756 [accessed 03.09.2021];

P. Oxy. 83 5395, l. 6 (592/602 CE), https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;83;5395 = TM 786169, https://www.trismegistos.org/text/786169 [accessed 03.09.2021];

SB 18 13585, l. 4 (sixth/seventh c.), https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;18;13585 = TM 35167, https://www.trismegistos.org/text/35167 [accessed 03.09.2021];

SB 6 9151, l. 3 (*c.* 600 CE), https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;6;9151 = TM 17861, https://www.trismegistos.org/text/17861 [accessed 03.09.2021];

SPP 20 218, l. 36 (624 CE?), https://papyri.info/ddbdp/stud.pal;20;218 = TM 18752, https://www.trismegistos.org/text/18752 [accessed 03.09.2021];

SB 18 13173, l. 96–7 (629/644 CE?), https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;18;13173 = TM 18404, https://www.trismegistos.org/text/18404 [accessed 03.09.2021];

apotássomai and *syntássomai* could indicate withdrawal from or submission to someone's command. It could also be employed upon leaving or joining either a group of troops or, more specifically, a commander's entourage (τάξις / *táxis*).[20] Hence the terminology used here could also evoke both juridical and military associations.

The idea of a change of allegiance and its legal consequences may also be indicated in the use of the much-discussed term πομπή / *pompa*.[21] According to the explanations given by the Church Fathers from Tertullian onwards, the *pompa diaboli* (devil's pomp) is simply everything that early Christians considered sinful and associated with the devil. In particular, they used the term to denote the theatre and the circus, pagan cults and their festivals, inappropriate songs and music, and other licentious or cult-related behaviours. Nevertheless, πομπή / *pompa* originally designated a procession associated with a cult or an escort, such as that which followed the emperor, some other important magistrate, or parades conducted for other purposes.[22] The candidates for baptism may always have associated this nuance with their act of abjuration. For them, leaving Satan also meant leaving his retinue and joining the cohort of Christ, who was superior to the prince of darkness.[23]

A series of outward gestures and signs accompanied the recitation of the formula by the candidates. Theodore described the candidates when he wrote that they stood barefoot on sackcloth. They then removed their outer garments and thus ended up standing there in their underwear. Once stripped, they stretched out their hands towards God and looked towards heaven as if to pray. Finally, they genuflected while keeping the rest of their body erect and said the formula of *apótaxis* and *syntaxis.* In Theodore's congregation, the formula was recited in a comparatively extended version:

P. Paramone 18, l. 29 (incomplete) (641 CE?), https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.paramone;;18 = TM 78713, https://www.trismegistos.org/text/78713 [accessed 03.09.2021];

SB 6 8988, ll. 46–7 (647 CE), https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;6;8988 = TM 17841, https://www.trismegistos.org/text/17841 [accessed 03.09.2021];

P. Herm. 35, l. 9 (seventh c.), https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.herm;;35 = TM 39260, https://www.trismegistos.org/text/39260 [accessed 03.09.2021].

The use of ἀποτάττομαι in the papyri would require further investigation.

20 Cf. Hugo Rahner, "Pompa diaboli: Ein Beitrag zur Bedeutungsgeschichte des Wortes πομπή – *pompa* in der urchristlichen Taufliturgie," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 55 (1931): 248–55, largely followed by Franz Bömer, "Pompa," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 21.2, ed. Georg Wissowa (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1952): col. 1992–93. For criticism, cf. Jan Waszink "Pompa Diaboli," *Vigiliae Christianae* 1 (1947); Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage:* 77, n. 11.

21 Cf., in general, esp. Bömer, "Pompa."

22 As regards the use of the lexeme cf. Bömer, "Pompa": col. 1879–92. In general, cf. John F. Baldovin and Susanne Heydasch-Lehmann, "Prozession," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 28 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2017).

23 Cf. esp. Bömer, "Pompa": col. 1990–93.

> I abjure Satan and all his angels and all his works and all his service and all his earthly decep-
> tion; and I engage myself and believe and am baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son
> and of the Holy Spirit.

Then the priest, clad in shining robes, signed the candidates on their forehead with
chrism and said: 'So-and-so is sealed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit'. Finally, the godfathers spread an *orarium*, i.e., a linen stole, on the
crown of their heads, raised them, and made them stand erect.[24]

Theodore offered an extensive explanation for each element of this rite. In this
context, his comments on the words of *apótaxis* and *sýntaxis* are the most relevant:

> This is the reason why you say: 'I abjure Satan.' Formerly, even if you wished it, you did not dare
> to make use of these words, because you were afraid of his servitude, but as you have, by a di-
> vine decree, received freedom from him through the exorcisms, you proclaim and abjure him
> with confidence and by your own words, and this is the reason why you say 'I abjure Satan.'

Through the *apótaxis,* the converts renounced their association with Satan and with-
drew from 'that cruel and ancient contract, which resulted in the calamitous servi-
tude to him', under which they lived. The new Christians could do this because Christ
had freed them from the yoke of the Tyrant, delivered them from his servitude, and
granted them a share in his merciful gifts.[25]

On the surface, Theodore's explanations may look like a sort of freedom dis-
course. Indeed, in many baptismal homilies – building upon the New Testament[26] –
liberation from the devil and sin was described as liberation from slavery.[27] However,

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24 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 13*: synopsis (tr. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of
Mopsuestia:* 34–35; altered).

25 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 13*: 5 (Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsues-
tia:* 37–38; altered).

26 Cf. e.g. Galatians 4:3–7; Hebrews 2:14–15.

27 Cf. e.g., Chrysostom, *Catecheses baptismales 3.2*: 27, 29; *3.3*: 3; *3.4*: 22. Cf. also Basil of Seleucia, *Hom-
ilia paschalis* 3. Sometimes the enslavement by the devil is seen as being replaced by adoption through
Christ (cf. Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:1–7); cf., e.g., Pseudo-Hippolytus, *Sermo in sancta theophania* 10:
'For he who comes down in faith to the laver of regeneration, renounces the devil, and joins himself
to Christ; who denies the enemy and makes the confession that Christ is God; who puts off the slavery
and puts on the adoption, – he comes up from the baptism brilliant as the sun [cf. Matthew 17:2], flash-
ing forth the beams of righteousness, and, which is indeed the chief thing, he returns a son of God and
joint-heir with Christ [cf. Romans 8:17]' (trans. in Philip Schaff et al., eds. and trans., *Ante-Nicene Fa-
thers. Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, vol. 5 [Grand
Rapid, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1885]: 237; altered). On this passage (which was pointed
out to me by Dr Maria Munkholt Christensen), cf. also Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church:
History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009): 334–35. As
regards the liberation from Satanic debt bondage, cf. the examples in Kinzig, trans., *Asterius: Psalmen-
homilien*, vol. 1: 118, n. 70; and Arkandiy Avdokhin, "(Il)Legal Freedom: Christ as Liberator from Sa-
tanic Debt Bondage in Greek Homilies and Hymns of Late Antiquity," in *Slavery in the Late Antique*

this does not, in any way, imply that newly baptized Christians were thought to have thenceforth enjoyed some kind of legal, social, or moral autonomy. On the contrary, in all ancient Christian writings, freedom from the devil meant service to Christ, which consisted in adopting the moral conduct prescribed by the new Master and laid down in the New Testament.[28] Theodore concludes his section on the *apótaxis* and *sýntaxis* by asserting:

> As when you say 'I abjure [Satan]' and keep entirely away from him you indicate never to revert to him nor to wish to associate yourself with him anymore, so also when you say 'I engage myself' you show that you will remain steadfastly with God, that you will henceforth be unshakeably with him, that you will never separate yourself in any way from him. And you will consider it most precious to be and to live with him and to lead a life that is in harmony with his laws.[29]

Both relationships, the old one with Satan and the new one with Christ, are regulated by contracts obliging one partner to serve the other. Through the *apótaxis,* one of these contracts is dissolved, and through the *sýntaxis,* a new one is established.[30] Neither of the contracts were believed to have been concluded between equal partners. Instead, both the old contract with Satan and the new with Christ are understood as contracts regulating a relationship of asymmetrical dependency in the strongest sense

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World, 150–700 CE, eds. Chris L. de Wet, Maijastina Kahlos, and Ville Vuolanto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022): esp. 73–86.

28 Cf. also Avdokhin, "(Il)Legal Freedom": 82.

29 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 13*: 13 (Minganga, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia:* 44; altered).

30 In a baptismal catechesis, John Chrysostom also emphasizes the legal aspect of the *apótaxis* / *sýntaxis* but phrases it slightly differently (*Catechesis baptismalis 3.2*: 17): 'Now let me speak of the mysteries themselves and of the contracts (συνθηκῶν / *synthekôn*) which will be made between yourselves and the Master. In worldly affairs, whenever someone wishes to entrust his business to anyone, a written contract (γραμματεῖα / *grammateîa*) must be completed between the trustee and his client. The same thing holds true now, when the Master is going to entrust to you not mortal things which are subject to destruction and death, but spiritual things which belong to eternity. Wherefore, this [contract] is also called faith, since it possesses nothing visible but all things which can be seen by the eyes of the spirit. Therefore, an agreement must be concluded between the contracting parties. However, it is not on paper nor written in ink; it is in God and written by the Spirit. The words which you utter here are registered in heaven, and the agreements (συνθήκας / *synthékas*) you make by your tongue abide indelibly with the Master.' (trans. Paul W. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions*, Ancient Christian Writers 31 [New York: Newman Press, 1963]: 49–50, altered). For contract terminology cf. also Chrysostom, *Catecheses baptismales 2.1*: 5; *2.3*: 4; *2.4*: 20–23; *3.2*: 17–22; *3.3*: 31–32; Asterius, *Homilia in Psalmos 27*: 2. Sometimes baptism is also described as a marriage contract; cf. Chrysostom, *Catecheses baptismales 2.3*: 6; *3.1*: 16. Further examples in Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage*: 78–80; Michel Aubineau, *Hésychius de Jérusalem, Basile de Séleucie, Jean de Béryte – Homélies pascales (cinq homélies inédites): Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index*, Sources Chrétiennes 187 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1972): 262–64.

of the term.[31] However, the new contract no longer leads to the perishment of human-kind because of Adam's and its own sins, but ultimately to its liberation from sin.

John Chrysostom, the most famous preacher of the ancient Greek Church (presbyter in Antioch 386–98 CE; patriarch of Constantinople 398–404/7 CE), expressed this change of dependency even more forcefully in one of his baptismal homilies. He declared:

> And I ask you who are about to be initiated to learn these words [of renunciation]. They constitute a contract [συνθήκη / *synthéke*] with the Master. When we are buying slaves,[32] we first ask those who are for sale if they are willing to serve us. Christ does the same. When he is about to take you into his service, he first asks [you] if you are willing to put away that cruel and harsh tyrant, and he accepts from you your contracts [συνθήκας / *synthékas*]. He does not force his mastership on you.
>
> And consider God's loving-kindness [φιλανθρωπίαν / *philanthropían*]. Before we pay out the price, we question the slaves who are for sale, and only when we learn that they are willing [to serve us] do we pay out the price. But Christ does not deal in this way; he paid the price for all of us, his precious blood. 'You have been bought with a price', says [Paul] [1 Corinthians 7:23]. And even so, he does not force those to serve him who are unwilling to do so. Unless you are grateful, he says, and are willing of yourself and of your own accord to be enrolled [ἐπιγράψασθαι / *epigrápsasthai*] under me as your Master, I do not force or compel you.
>
> We ourselves would never choose to buy wicked slaves, and even if we ever should so choose, we buy and pay the price because of a bad choice. But when Christ buys reckless and lawless slaves, he pays the price of the first-class slave; rather, he pays a much greater price – so much greater that neither mind nor reason can grasp its greatness. For he has bought us, not by giving the heavens, the earth, and the sea, but what is more valuable than all of these, by paying down his own blood. And after all this, he does not demand witnesses of us nor written documents (ἔγγραφα / *éngrapha*), but he is satisfied with our bare statement; if you say from the heart: 'I abjure you, Satan, and your pomp,' he has received all that he asks.[33]

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31 Regarding the term, cf. Julia Winnebeck et al., "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency," *Journal of Global Slavery* 8 (2023): 1–59.

32 The following example is not easy to understand, as the slaves are asked for their willingness to serve and some kind of contract is involved. Perhaps in this case, the servants were, in principle, free and contracted their labour in return for a loan. Cf. *Codex Iustinianus* 8, 42, 20 and Harper, *Slavery in the Roman World*: 382. For the present passage, cf. Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 16: 'Chrysostom also says that possible buyers asked slaves if they wanted to be in their service – this may have happened in some cases, but it was perhaps more a courtesy; essentially slaves did not have any choice in the matter; they had to accept their fate after being sold.' Furthermore, De Wet, *Preaching Bondage*: 57–58.

33 Chrysostom, *Catechesis baptismalis 1*: 19; trans. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*: 188–89, altered). Cf. also (Pseudo)Serapion of Thmuis, *Euchologion* 9 (entitled: 'prayer after the *apotáxis*'): 'Almighty Lord, seal the assent which has now been made to you by this your slave and preserve unchangeably his character and manner of life in order that he may no longer serve worse things but be a servant [= give worship; λατρεύῃ / *latreúê*] to the God of truth and be a slave to you, the Maker of all things, so as to be declared perfect and genuinely yours.' (trans. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*: 462; altered).

The new master does not act in the way we might expect. In economic terms, his behaviour is foolish: he pays the highest price for his new slaves. Christ's buying behaviour is thus out of conformity with the practice of slaves' markets in the Roman Empire. Therefore, Chrysostom describes servitude to Christ as transcending traditional structures of asymmetrical dependency because Christ acts out of loving-kindness for his slaves. In so doing, Christ subverts these structures.

4 The Creed as Contract

The second rite, which was closely connected to the change of religious allegiance through conversion to Christianity, was the 'handing over' and recitation of the creed (*traditio / redditio symboli*). As I mentioned above, instruction in the basics of Christianity was a central aspect of the catechumenate. This entry-level formation comprised an introduction to Christian worship along with the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. It also included an exposition of the Lord's Prayer (which was seen as the archetypal prayer) and of the fundamental tenets of doctrine as contained in the creed. The creed was primarily understood as a summary of the Christian faith, which the candidates had to memorize. Its purpose was not only didactic – it also served as a token of membership: the worshippers recited the creed at the beginning of the eucharistic service as proof that they were full-fledged members of the Christian congregation and were permitted to take part in Mass.

However, in explanations of the creed, especially by Latin authors, we find that it had yet another function. From the late fourth century onward, Latin explanations abound with legal terminology. The creed is often described as a contract or treatise, much like the *sýntaxis* in the case of Theodore of Mopsuestia.[34] This interpretation rested upon the etymology of the word *symbolum,* which is the technical term for the creed. *Symbolum* was a Greek word, but strangely enough, the Greek Fathers did not use it as a designation for the creed until much later.[35] *Sýmbolon* had a great variety of meanings. Here we are only interested in those that concern the legal sphere. *Sým-*

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34 For what follows cf. also Wolfram Kinzig, "Symbolum," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 5, fasc. 3/4, eds. Robert Dodaro, Cornelius Mayer, and Christof Müller (Basel: Schwabe, 2021): 621–26; Wolfram Kinzig, "Symbolum," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 31, eds. Christian Hornung et al. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2021): 381–93. Apart from the references quoted in the following notes, cf. also Eucherius, *Instructiones ad Salonium* 2: 15 (FaFo § 20); Fulgentius, *Contra Fabianum fragmentum* 36: 2 (FaFo § 35); *Tractatus symboli* (CPL 1751): 6 (FaFo § 673); Pseudo-Facundus of Hermiane, *Epistula fidei catholicae in defensione trium capitulorum* 11–12 (FaFo § 37); Martin of Braga, *De correctione rusticorum* 15 (FaFo § 608); Eligius of Noyon, *De supremo iudictio* 2 (FaFo § 609); Pirminius, *Scarapsus* 12 (FaFo § 610); baptismal interrogations in FaFo § 764 and § 765; Elmenhorst Homily (FaFo § 772); medieval glossaries quoted in FaFo § 78b and h.

35 Cf. Kinzig, "Symbolum," in *Reallexikon*: 387.

bolon designated 'a tally or token serving as proof of identity and also as guarantee, warrant, official document, contract, or receipt in various contexts; the lexeme can also be used as term for "treaty" or "contract"'.[36]

In their explanations of the creed, the Latin Fathers always felt obliged to explain the meaning of *symbolum* at some point in their work because the term was largely unknown in Latin outside of catechesis.[37] Many Fathers translated *symbolum* as "contract" or "pact". In many cases, their translations are followed by a religious interpretation. Most often, they assert that *symbolum* is the contract the baptizands made with the Lord,[38] witnessed by angels and humans.[39]

The Fathers use a variety of terms to describe this particular contract. For example, Peter Chrysologus (bishop of Ravenna 424/9–451 CE) repeatedly calls it a 'contract of faith' (*pactum fidei*),[40] a 'contract of life' (*vitae pactum*),[41] a 'contract of hope' (*spei pactum*),[42] and a 'pledge of life' (*vitae placitum*),[43] a 'pledge of salvation' (*salutis placitum*),[44] a 'pledge of grace' (*placitum gratiae*),[45] a 'pledge of faith' (*placitum fidei*),[46] and a 'guarantee of faith' (*fidei cautio*).[47] It is an 'insoluble bond of faith' (*fidei insolubile vinculum*) between the believer and God, which grants salvation to the person who professes it.[48] *Fides,* in these contexts, means "faith", but it also means "reliability" in contracts made between business partners.

Therefore, in early Christian explanations of the creed, the spheres of business and religion overlap to a large degree. It is difficult to ascertain whether this terminol-

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36 FaFo, vol. 1: 4.

37 Cf. Kinzig, "Symbolum," in *Reallexikon*: 386–87.

38 Only rarely is it defined as a "collection" or "treaty" which the apostles made among each other in composing the creed; cf. Leidrad of Lyon (?), *Explanatio symboli* (FaFo § 49).

39 Cf. Nicetas of Remesiana, *Competentibus ad baptismum instructionis libelli* 5: 13 (FaFo § 14b).

40 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 59*: 1–2 (FaFo § 22d1); *Sermo 60:* 18 (FaFo § 22e2).

41 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 57*: 16 (FaFo § 22b); *Sermo 58*: 2 (FaFo § 22c); Jesse of Amiens, *Epistula de baptismo* (FaFo § 50).

42 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 59*: 18 (FaFo § 22d2).

43 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 60*: 18 (FaFo § 22e2).

44 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 59*: 18 (FaFo § 22d2).

45 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 59*: 1 (FaFo § 22d1).

46 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 60*: 2 (FaFo § 22e1). Cf. also Maxentius of Aquileia, *Epistola ad Carolum Magnum Imperatorem de significatu rituum baptismi* (FaFo § 786): *pactum vel complacitum fidei.*

47 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 59*: 18 (FaFo § 22d2).

48 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 58* (FaFo § 22c). Cf. also *Sermo 59*: 1–2 (FaFo 22d1). Isidore of Seville even says that *two* treaties (*pactiones*) were made; *De origine officiorum (De ecclesiasticis officiis)* 2, 25, 5 (FaFo § 661a): 'The first treaty is the one in which one renounces the devil, his pomp, and all association with him. The second treaty is the one in which one professes to believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.' Similarly, Hrabanus Maurus, *Liber de ordine baptismi 13* (FaFo § 787c).

ogy is used metaphorically or if the preachers thought an *actual* contractual engagement took place in baptism by way of performative utterances.[49]

A good example of this kind of baptismal discourse is found in a sermon by Peter Chrysologus, who admonishes the candidates for baptism as follows:

> We are taught that, even in a human pact, a pledge or a contract [*placitum vel pactum*] which contains hopes for immediate or future gain is called a 'symbol' [*symbolum*]; nevertheless, duplicate documents [*geminata conscriptio*] always confirm that agreement [*symbolum*] between the two parties, and human wariness is appropriate with respect to a debt obligation [*stipulationis cautum*] lest treachery, always the enemy of pacts [*contractus*], might creep in and deceive. But this is the case between human beings, among whom fraud damages either the one by whom it is done or the one to whom it is done.
>
> But between God and human beings the agreement [*symbolum*] of faith is confirmed by faith alone; it is entrusted not to the letter, but to the spirit; it is entrusted and committed to the heart, not to a sheet of paper, since divine credit [*divinus creditus*] has no need of any human pledge [*humana cautio*]. God does not know how to commit fraud and is incapable of suffering it, since he is not hindered by time, nor restrained by age, nor deceived by concealment; he sees what is hidden, he retains what is stolen, and he possesses what is refused him. For God's account is always solvent [*deo salva est ratio sua semper*] since there is nowhere for what he has entrusted [*crediderit*] [to another] to be lost. The following is the case for the human being, not for God: what is lost to the one who rejects it is not lost to the one who lends it.
>
> But you say, 'Why does someone who cannot be deceived demand a pledge [*placitum*]? Why does he want an agreement [*symbolum*]?' He wants it for your sake, not for his; not because he has any doubts, but so that you might believe. He wants an agreement since the one who entered into your death does not disdain entering into a pact [*contractus*] with you. He wants an agreement because although he is always lending everything he wants to be in debt [himself]. He wants an agreement because now he is calling you, not to a [present] reality, but to faith; through the present pledge [*placitum*] he also entices and invites you to future gain.[50]

In this excerpt of Chrysologus' sermon, we again see that God's behaviour is economically eccentric: unlike human actors, he demands no written agreement and grants us all the profit.

Explanations such as these were part of the *traditio symboli*, i.e., the ceremony in which the bishop disclosed the content of the creed. As I indicated above, following its disclosure, the creed was to be learnt by heart and recited in front of the congregation shortly before the actual baptismal service. The liturgical framing of the creed and the solemn setting of the *traditio* and *redditio symboli*, which was accompanied by the

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49 An analogous semantic field which poses a similar hermeneutical challenge is that of Christ as liberator from Satanic debt bondage, which is based on Colossians 2:14. Cf. the discussion in Claudia Rapp, "Safe-Conducts to Heaven: Holy Men, Mediation and the Role of Writing," in *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown*, eds. Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis (London: Routledge, 2009): 191–95; Claudia Rapp, "Late Antique Metaphors for the Shaping of Christian Identity: Coins, Seals and Contracts," in *Fuzzy Boundaries: Festschrift für Antonio Loprieno*, vol. 2, eds. Hans Amstutz et al. (Hamburg: Widmaier, 2015): 731–36; Avdokhin, "(Il)Legal Freedom".

50 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 62*: 3 (FaFo § 22g); cf. also Jesse of Amiens, *Epistula de baptismo* (FaFo § 50).

insistent admonitions of the preachers not to write it down lest it fell into the hands of non-believers,[51] led to the sacralization of the credal text. I cannot address the historical complexity around this development in detail here. Suffice it to say that regardless of the bishops' warnings, creeds *were* written down and used as charms. They were also recited as protective sayings by Christians on dangerous journeys and to enhance the efficacy of medicinal herbs.[52]

5 The Combination of *apótaxis* and the Creed

Occasionally, the *redditio* seems to have replaced the *sýntaxis* in the Eastern Church. This substitution appears, for example, to have been the case in Jerusalem.[53] We have a description of the rites in a series of *Mystagogical Catecheses,* which may, perhaps, be ascribed to Cyril of Jerusalem (bishop 348–386/7) and may have been preached in the 380s. Here the candidates entered the antechamber of the baptistery, faced towards the west, stretched out their hands and said: 'I renounce you, Satan, and all your works and all your pomp and all your service.' The preacher explained that the west was the region of darkness, the realm of the prince of night.[54] This act entailed the annulment of the covenant (*diathéke*, *synthéke*) humankind had concluded with Satan after the Fall:

> Therefore, when you renounce Satan, trampling on your entire covenant with him, you break that ancient compact with the underworld [cf. Isaiah 28:15], God's paradise is opened to you, [the paradise] which he planted in the East [cf. Genesis 2:8], whence our first father was banished because of [his] transgression [cf. Genesis 3:23]; a symbol of this was your turning from West to East, the place of lights. Thereafter you were told to say, 'I believe in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and in one baptism of repentance.'[55]

Here it appears that the creed replaced the simple formula: 'I engage myself, Christ, to you'. The candidates were then led into the baptistery itself, where they were asked, one by one, whether they believed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Following an affirmative answer, they were immersed in the water.[56] Thus the creed appears to have been doubled: once in declaratory form in lieu of the *sýntaxis* and once in interrogatory form at the baptism proper.

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51 Cf. numerous references in Wolfram Kinzig, *Neue Texte und Studien zu den antiken und frühmittelalterlichen Glaubensbekenntnissen,* Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 132 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017): 340, n. 54.

52 Cf. Wolfram Kinzig, *A History of Early Christian Creeds,* De Gruyter Textbook (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024): 540–542.

53 For what follows, cf. Juliette Day, *The Baptismal Liturgy of Jerusalem: Fourth- and Fifth Century Evidence from Palestine, Syria and Egypt,* Liturgy, Worship and Society (London: Routledge, 2007): 48–65.

54 Cf. (Pseudo-)Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogia 1*: 2, 4–5, 11.

55 (Pseudo-)Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogia 1*: 9 (FaFo § 631a).

56 Cf. (Pseudo-)Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogia 2*: 4 (FaFo § 631b).

By and large, however, the number of occurrences where the brief formula of *sýntaxis* was replaced by the much more elaborate creed or credal questions in the Eastern Church is limited.[57] There are also some cases where both the formula of *sýntaxis and* the creed (or some credal formula) were recited.[58]

In the Latin West, however, we find no equivalent to the Greek formula of *sýntaxis* at all – it appears never to have been used: instead, here, the creed or credal questions followed upon the renunciation. Sometimes, the *redditio symboli* and the reply to the renunciation with either the entire creed or some briefer formula were two separate rites. In other places, the *redditio* and the *sýntaxis* may, in fact, have coincided.[59] As a result of this process, the two separate legal discourses about the meaning of baptism, that of the *apótaxis* and that of the creed as *symbolum*, were also amalgamated.

The combination of *apótaxis* and credal questions persisted in the Roman church over the centuries and is still found in the present Roman Missal. In its rite of baptism, the Missal contains the following dialogue:

Celebrant: Do you renounce Satan?

Parents and Godparents: I do.

Celebrant: And all his works?

Parents and Godparents: I do.

Celebrant: And all his empty show?

Parents and Godparents: I do.[60]

These inquiries are followed by the credal questions.

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57 Cf., perhaps, also Narsai of Nisibis (discussion in Witkamp, *Tradition and Innovation*: 193–99).

58 Cf., e.g., canon 19 of the *Canons of Hippolytus* (Northern Egypt?, 336–40 CE or later; FaFo § 606; sequence: *apótaxis* – anointing with the oil of exorcism – *sýntaxis* – credal questions and immersions); *Testamentum Domini* 2:18 (Syria, late fourth–fifth c. CE; cf. FaFo § 615; sequence: *apótaxis* – anointing with the oil of exorcism and final exorcism – *sýntaxis* – credal questions and immersions); *Apostolic Constitutions* 7, 41, 3–7 (Antioch, *c.* 380 CE; FaFo § 182c); the *Ordo of Constantinople* in the *Barberini Euchologion* (seventh c. or earlier; FaFo § 677a, b).

59 This depended on the position of the *redditio* and of the renunciation in the liturgy. In many medieval Western sacramentaries, the *traditio / redditio* preceded the baptism as a separate rite. During baptism, the renunciation was followed by credal questions, which led to a doubling of the confession. For the various options, cf. Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage*: 94–119; Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism*: 201–54.

60 International Commission on English in the Liturgy, ed., *The Roman Ritual: The Order of Baptism of Children. English Translation According to the Second Typical Edition (For Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America)* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020): 27. There is another dialogue as an alternative option.

6 Summary Remarks

In conclusion, allow me to summarize the results of our glimpse into the rites and interpretations of early Christian baptism:

1. Baptism in the Early Church constituted a change of religious allegiance. Conversion involved replacing one system of asymmetrical dependency (that of depending on the traditional gods) with another (that of dependency upon Christ).

2. In the Greek Church, the catechumens seeking to change allegiance were ritually prepared by exorcisms and performed through the rite of abjuration to Satan and his dominion and a pledge to Christ. Their change of allegiance was then sealed by baptism. In the Latin Church, the pledge to Christ consisted not in a separate pledge formula but in the recitation of the creed or in answering questions related to the creed.

3. In order to explain this exchange of religious dependency in baptism, the preachers in the late antique Church used two overlapping discourses of dependency: one was attached to the Greek rite of *apótaxis* and *sýntaxis*; the other was attached to the creed.

4. Both the relationship between Satan and his followers (often identified with the old gods, which were now seen as demons) and that of Christ and his believers were described as patronage, slavery, or military service for which terms from contractual law were used.

5. Consequently, asymmetrical dependency characterized the old relationship with Satan, but the new relationship with Christ, established through baptism, was by no means symmetrical either. On the contrary, it required total obedience and trust by the believers, which they were to express via certain moral behaviours and through their faith in the salvific action of Christ as formulated in the creed. However, unlike the relationship between Satan and his followers, that between Christ as master and believers as his slaves was marked by Christ's unconditional love for his servants.

This background may help explain the enormous significance that Dioscorus, the protagonist of our initial story, attached to this transition. It clarifies why he initially hesitated to fully embrace the creed, and why he eventually interpreted his paralysis as a punishment for not having recited the formula. Dioscorus ignored the fact that his divine owner had changed from Satan to Christ. As a result, he suffered divine retribution.

On the surface, the religious systems of dependency that I have described appear to have had no immediate bearing on late-antique social systems of dependency: free persons remained free, and slaves remained slaves. Nevertheless, the central commandment in the new moral code, the commandment to love one's neighbour, also included slaves. For early Christians, slaves, just like all other marginalized and oppressed people, were welcome in the Church as full-fledged members and were in-

vited to share in its promises of salvation. John Chrysostom expressed this new state of affairs in his inimitable style:

> Did you see the abundance of his goodness? Did you see the munificence of his invitation? 'Come to me', he says, 'all you who labour and are burdened' [Matthew 11:28]. His invitation is one of kindness, his goodness is beyond description. 'Come to me all', not only rulers but also their subjects, not only the rich but also the poor, not only the free but also slaves, not only men but also women, not only the young but also the old, not only those of sound body but also the maimed and those with mutilated limbs, 'all of you', he says, 'come!' For such are the Master's gifts; he knows no distinction of slave and free, nor of rich and poor, but all such inequality is cast aside. 'Come', he says, 'all you who labour and are burdened.'[61]

Thus, a new standard of ethical behaviour was established. Whether, in the wake of the Christianization of Europe, this did indeed lead to the formation of a more humane society would be the subject of another paper.[62]

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61 John Chrysostom, *Catechesis baptismalis 3.1:* 27 (trans. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom:* 33, altered). Similarly, *Catechesis baptismalis 2.3*: 4.

62 Cf. some reflections in Wolfram Kinzig, "Die Ausbreitung des Christentums als Humanisierungsprozess. Eusebios verteidigt die Neuheit seiner Religion," in *Eusebius, Porphyry, and Augustine in the Struggle for Interpretational Sovereignty*, ed. Irmgard Männlein-Robert (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming).

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