

# Open

*Journal of Associated Parishes for Liturgy & Mission*

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FROM THE EDITOR

## *Welcome, Join, Share*

What is Baptism for?

Sometimes, the lovely ordinariness of our rites can prevent us from approaching them with fresh eyes, and when we stop and ask such a simple question, we discover that our rites reveal meanings waiting to be experienced and applied to the entirety of our lives.

In this issue of *Open*, "What is Baptism for?" is the organizing question, whether it is directly addressed by our authors or not. The gifts of the font in each of our lives reaches far beyond its immediate environs, and when a church community begins to really live out the power of God's blessing in water, we all take note. Joe Doss and Robert Brooks report on recent events which show that we continue to struggle with living into this full vision. Our other authors, all in one way or another, offer other visions where the acts of

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God in empowered sacramental community have taken on breathtaking form.

This work of careful awareness and creation has been the work of APLM since its founding. When Episcopal liturgists gathered in the 40s yearning to bring renewal and life to average United States (and now Canadian) parishes, they were attempting to re-engage a worshipping people with the spirit of the living God inherent in the ancient liturgies we had inherited. The work continues, with passion, scholarship, joyfulness, and enormous trust in the God we together worship and serve.

If you are an old friend of APLM's, welcome back to *Open*. If you are new to us and our work, enjoy this fruit of our shared exploration and practice. When you are done, I invite you to a series of possible actions:

### **NOTICE**

Go back to your parish with new eyes, appreciative of the ways in which the liturgy engages God's own holy life, and notice your desire for that when the liturgy falls short. Engage your imagination and engage your community.

### **RESPOND**

If you had a reaction to an article, please email me at [lnipps@gmail.com](mailto:lnipps@gmail.com). We are looking for both short letters to the editor, and longer responses.

### **WRITE**

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### **NETWORK**

If you belong to another organization or have a blog, please link *Open* and/or [APLM's](#) website where it is appropriate. And let us know!

Peace,  
Leslie Nipps  
*Open* editor

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# “Public Work” at Ground Zero

by Donald Schell

First published on the website [Episcopal Café](#), October, 2007.



For two wonderful days last October, I helped lead a workshop on “Music that Makes Community” at [St. Paul’s Chapel of Trinity Church Wall Street](#), the colonial church that fronts on Broadway and whose churchyard faces the World Trade Center/Ground Zero site. The Sunday after the workshop, I sat in the congregation at St. Paul’s for their 10am liturgy. It was one of the most powerful experiences of our church’s work and worship I have ever had. The murmur of visitors, the impossibility of handling four to five hundred pilgrims an hour with greeters, the pilgrims themselves finding their own way and having their own private reasons for their visit all destroyed any hope that the church could be a place of seclusion, refuge or pious meditation. This was the great work of the church, the public work of liturgy.

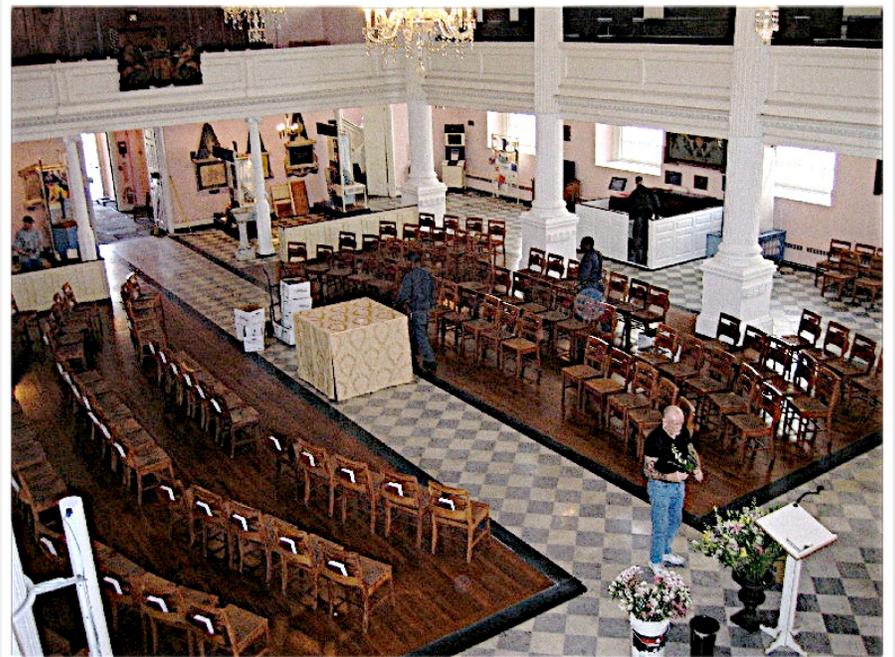
When I first visited St. Paul’s in the late 1960s, it was essentially a museum, George Washington’s Church in New York City. The stunning human losses of 9/11 changed that beyond recognition. When Trinity’s staff saw that St. Paul’s Chapel was undamaged by the fiery collapse of the twin towers next door, they boldly chose to dedicate the historic chapel for the duration of demolition and recovery as a holy place of hospitality to the New York firemen, police and construction workers at the Ground Zero site. Trinity staff and hundreds of volunteer chaplains from around the country offered rest, comfort, counsel and help for those whose brutal work was combing through hot rubble for genetically identifiable fragments of the dead that grieving family members might bury.

Trinity’s hospitality to a nation’s heroes made St. Paul’s a pilgrimage site. Something like a million and a half visitors a year – imagine an unbroken stream of 400 strangers an hour – wander through to remember, see and reflect on 9/11 displays. As at the Viet Nam Memorial in Washington D.C., some do come to pray, but few kneel or make any outward show. Others seem to be tourists, muted tourists who want to include this bit of history in their trip and tell people at home ‘I was there.’

For any who remember the pre-9/11 St. Paul’s and have not been there recently, I should add that less than a year ago, Stuart Hoke and the other Trinity staff took another bold step to make the chapel’s welcome more evident –

hoping to gather people into a circle of prayer, they removed the long forward-facing pews from the 1960s to make space for a barrier-free oval of chairs around a central altar. St. Paul’s website has a good [slide show](#) picturing the changes and giving its rationale.

At my workshop, twenty of us – clergy and church music leaders from around the country – gathered in the open space around the table for our workshop to talk, reflect and make music, specifically developing a practice of the most traditional and modern kind of church music: learning music by ear and by heart, singing without books. All day our workshop sessions, our worship and even our midday meal were at the center of a swirling sea of people, all of America, the world. When we were singing we could feel the music touch them (and sometimes we forgot they were there and lost ourselves in music-making and praise). Sometimes we saw curiosity, joy or even healing on people’s faces. It came in swells, both for us and in their response. Sometimes they walked with their backs to us, continuing their quiet murmur of background conversation as they surveyed the 9/11 displays and the story of workers and a city who turned the terrorist attack into a sign of mutual support and courage. Then a piece of sacred song, something hearty or haunting, maybe some improvised bluesy jazz on a text from the Bible, or even our laughter at a shared discovery – something drew their attention and they were with us in



*The interior of St. Paul’s Chapel, New York City, after the reordering.*

church, both the community of people and the place of worship. So it went all day, hundreds of people an hour and flashes of grace and glory as our little group joined our Public Work to Trinity's.

In the evening I thought of how strangely intimate and public the days were. Trying to describe our experience on the phone to my wife, I said it felt like street preaching on Times Square, or maybe like participating in a life drawing class with a nude model in the main rotunda of the Metropolitan Museum. We were aiming for truthfulness and Gospel, but we were unequivocally doing intimate heart work, speaking and singing our faith in a very public place. The work itself guided us from our fear and self-consciousness.

But even two full days of our workshop could not prepare me for the joyful wonder of the 10am liturgy in this place of pilgrimage. I sat in the third or fourth row of the oval of seats so I could both join in and watch the congregation and the pilgrims on the perimeter. The tourist buses do not stop just because it is Sunday, and as a worshipper and as part of a larger, more diffuse group, I felt the strangeness (and joy) of it very strongly. We were a hundred or so people, a solid, diverse congregation, and we were together in faith, in prayer as publicly as if we had made our circle in Grand Central Station.

**Marilyn Haskell**, Music Associate at St. Paul's and our musical leader that morning, offered us welcome, guided us through the service leaflet, got us singing with piano and a capella, and joyfully encouraged us. The Rev. Mark Bozzuti-Jones, a Jamaican Anglican priest new to Trinity's staff, presided and preached his first liturgy at St. Paul's. His sermon and the way he engaged us all was breathtaking—bold and comforting, confronting and sweet. And even as he drew our hearts into the center of the circle to hold one another in our reflection on scripture, he generously, and without the least notice, lobbed an occasional word or prayer over our heads to the sea of pilgrims.

The liturgy was an even stronger magnet than the music workshop. Strangers slipped into the circle to join us. Many stopped to listen and pray and seemed to wish they could linger longer. A few seemed perplexed to hear a Gospel of such forgiveness, inclusion and challenge. Many blessed themselves with a touch of water from the front.

I wish everyone thinking about inclusion and welcome in our church could spend a Sunday with St. Paul's, Manhattan. Having experienced it as a blessed and unequivocal Public Work, I don't think our liturgy will ever look the same to me again.

Public Work, as it turns out, may be a better translation of 'liturgy' than the 'public work' I learned in seminary in the 1960s. In the 1960s and 70s our church was beginning to make our liturgy shared, collaborative work in new ways. 'The work of the people' was a useful etymology. It turned our attention to from the priest's performance to what WE were making together.

Now friends who teach liturgics and history have been telling us that *leitourgia* ('liturgy') in the first century Mediterranean world was 'public work,' more like we think of with a Department of Public Works making or fixing a road or a bridge. In fact, in the ancient world public work often referred to the generous works of public-minded rich people, like the medieval queen of Spain who built a bridge at Puente la Reyna for the pilgrims walking to Santiago or like Andrew Carnegie building libraries across America.

Today, we have found enough shared authority in liturgy-making to begin recovering this other, earlier sense of liturgy as work for or on behalf of the people. What we have to offer is holy, vibrant, and flexible enough that it can truly be public work. At St. Paul's the 'public work' made very good sense. For me every question we can frame about welcoming strangers to liturgy will look different to me after three days of singing and praying at St. Paul's Chapel.

*For information about future workshops of "Music That Makes Community" contact [info@allsaintscompany.org](mailto:info@allsaintscompany.org) or 415-558-6958.*

**The Rev. Donald Schell**, founder of St. Gregory of Nyssa Church in San Francisco, is Creative Director of All Saints Company, working for community development in congregational life focusing on sharing leadership, welcoming creativity, building community through music, and making liturgical architecture a win/win for building and congregation. He wrote *My Father, My Daughter: Pilgrims on the Road to Santiago*.



# When Signs Signify

## *The Baptismal Covenant in its Sacramental Context*

by Louis Weil

*A Lecture presented at "Inclusive Church National Conference: Drenched in Grace" Swanwick, Derbyshire, November 21-23, 2007*



A few years ago two friends of mine were in Rome for a holiday. One day they went to visit the cathedral church of Rome, [St. John Lateran](#). While there, they spent time in the marvelous baptistery of that church. But when they arrived at the baptistery, they were shocked by what they saw.

Within the enormous octagonal walls which anciently held a great amount of water in which Baptism took place, they found no water at all. Rather, in the middle of the octagon, there was what appeared to be an Italian bathtub, perhaps of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Across the two sides of the tub there was a wooden plank; and resting upon the plank was a small bowl. The bowl was the vessel for holding the water for Baptism as the rite was currently being performed. My friends reminded me that on the walls of the baptistery was carved an extraordinary baptismal passage written by St. Leo the Great in the early 5<sup>th</sup> c. The current set up, however, betrayed everything that Leo's words proclaimed.

Less than a year later, I was in Rome and decided to go to St. John Lateran to see the baptistery for myself. When I arrived there it was exactly as my two friends had described. But as I stood there in amazement, I heard voices coming from a nearby chapel. I went to see what was going on, and lo! it was a Baptism—not in the great baptistery in which I had been standing, but in a small adjacent chapel. In addition to a priest, a few adults were present, parents and family of the infant, I

presumed. And on a table a very small bowl contained the water for the rite. I am not sure that St. Leo would even have recognized what was taking place.

Why tell this story? Why does it matter? Quite simply, it matters because our sacramental rites embody meaning, and when the mode of celebration undermines the meaning, then we are on a slippery slope toward trivializing the meaning, toward the impoverishment of what is being signified.

I must make something clear at the outset or else I risk being misunderstood. I am talking about signification—not about validity. I have not the slightest doubt that even a minimal amount of water can be used for a valid celebration of Baptism. The rite I observed that day was certainly valid. The problem is that historically the Church came to see validity as the primary goal of sacramental celebration. But validity is not at the top of the scale: validity is at the bottom. Validity answers the first basic question as to whether the Church can recognize this ritual act as effecting what the Church intends. In an extremis situation, of course a minimal amount of water is adequate. Unfortunately, this minimum standard historically became the common practice even when there were no extenuating circumstances, and when water was available in abundance. The extremis model became the common practice.

It was my great privilege in the 1960s to study sacramental theology with Marie-Dominique Chenu, the distinguished Dominican theologian and one of the great lights of Vatican II. One day in class, Father Chenu startled us by saying that "in

their celebration, the sacraments must border on the vulgar." He then explained that their signification should be made abundantly clear by the manner in which a rite is celebrated. One should not have to explain that Baptism is a spiritual bath, or that the Eucharist is a sacred meal at which people actually eat and drink.

The sacraments touch our humanity in ways which correspond to human experience: in our physical humanity, you and I understand what it is to wash and become clean; we understand what it is to eat and drink and so sustain our lives. The whole sacramental system of the Church is built upon that foundation in our humanity. Father Chenu's teaching had an indelible impact upon my own ministry as a teacher of liturgy, and specifically upon my own understanding of sacramental acts and how they signify meaning.

I do not know if it is as true in Britain as it is in America, but as a society Americans have enormous difficulty in claiming the meaning of a symbol. This may be the result of the literalism of American frontier religion. Whatever the source is, Americans tend to look at religious symbols merely at the literal level. For us in the Anglican tradition for whom religious meaning takes embodied form in ritual actions, within those rituals, the physical elements, water and oil, or bread and wine, become multivalent. This means that the sacraments operate at many levels of meaning; to try to understand them merely at a literal level leads only to the erosion of their meaning and significance in the life of faith.

We do not explain a symbol: we enter into a symbol, and there we are grasped by its meaning. If the signification of a symbol is eroded, then we are left only with its outer shell. The fundamental symbols of Christian faith—which are essential in Catholic practice for the living out of that faith—embody for us the Paschal Mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through these symbols, you and I are caught up into God's redemptive work in the history of salvation.

But when the power of their signification is undermined, what are we left with? Earlier I referred to the problem which results when the mode of celebration undermines the meaning. Remember, I am not talking merely about

validity: the Church has been generally clear about the minimal standard for validity in our sacramental rites. Again, I am talking about their signification, because without attention to that higher level of sacramental meaning we risk reducing the rites merely to a liturgical routine, a religious drill the clergy address on behalf of the laity.

I plead not only for modes of celebration which embody as adequately as possible the meaning of the rite. More than that, an impoverished sacramental practice works in parallel, in a mutual inter-relatedness, with the impoverishment of their meaning. In other words, not only is the richness of the ritual undermined—as in the case of the baptistery in Rome—there is a corresponding trivialization of the theological content which the ritual is intended to embody. The result is minimalism concerned only with validity.

A casual look at the history of the liturgy reveals many examples of this, including the history of the Eucharist. For centuries the Sacred Meal of Christians was celebrated in the Church without the laity receiving the Holy Gifts. The theology of priesthood had evolved so that the celebrant was the only necessary communicant; therefore, the laity might attend Mass frequently without their non-communication raising a question. As a minimalist response, in the early 13<sup>th</sup> c., the bishops decreed that laity really must receive the Sacrament at least once a year.<sup>1</sup> This could only have happened because Communion—sacred eating and drinking—had ceased to be understood as essential to the meaning.

At the level of common sense, a meal at which people do not eat and drink is rather strange. But this is the whole point of Father Chenu's comment: the signification of a sacrament is not obscure; it is manifest. At a meal people eat and drink together; so at the central act of Christian worship, as Sacred Meal, it is evident that reception of the sacrament is normative. The signification is not theoretical, it is embodied. That is the way sacraments work. Hence my title: "When Signs Signify"—when our rituals manifest their meaning.

With this as background, let us consider the Baptismal Covenant, both as implied by the rite of baptism itself, and

in its explicit form as found in the American Book of Common Prayer of 1979. To do this, we are assisted by an extraordinary passage in the final chapter of "The Great Catechism" by St. Gregory of Nyssa (330-395).<sup>2</sup> Gregory writes of those who have "come to the grace of baptism," and yet who are "only seemingly, and not really, regenerate." This is a startling comment since it suggests that the sacramental act of baptism was somehow invalid. Gregory then speaks of the necessary link to which I have pointed: "For that change in our life which takes place through regeneration will not be change, if we continue in the state in which we were." In other words, the meaning of baptism as a new birth, a dying and rising with Christ, is undermined if that new being is not somehow manifest: "I do not see how it is possible to deem one who is still in the same condition, and in whom there has been no change in the distinguishing features of his nature, to be any other than he was [since] it is for a renovation and change of our nature that the saving birth is received."

We need to be clear at this point that the terms 'valid' or 'invalid' are not in Gregory's vocabulary. Those terms, familiar enough to us, did not appear with reference to the sacraments until well after the Reformation, and at first simply meant 'true' or 'untrue'.<sup>3</sup> In other words, a true sacrament meant that it conformed to the Church's intended meaning; the Church could recognize it as fulfilling its intended meaning. You can easily see how this might contribute to minimalism: just how little water can be used for the rite still to be valid? For the early centuries of Christianity this would simply have been seen as a silly question. The sign and the meaning signified were in accord: the rites embodied their meaning.<sup>4</sup>

As Gregory of Nyssa says: "It is for a renovation and change of our nature that the saving birth [baptism] is received." In other words, the purpose of baptism is the creation of the new being in Christ—a new being, a changed nature. Gregory continues: "It is evident that when those evil features which mark our nature have been obliterated, a change to a better state takes place. But if, when the bath has been applied to the body, the soul has not [been] cleansed, but the life after

initiation keeps on a level with the uninitiate life, then, though it may be a bold thing to say, yet I will say it and will not shrink, in these cases the water is but water, for the gift of the Holy Spirit in no way appears in him who is thus baptismally born.”<sup>5</sup>

I suspect that this last phrase made some of you rather nervous, especially those who have received theological training. Gregory says that the rite can be celebrated and yet not effect what it signifies. Traditional Western theology has taught us that the sacraments “be certain and sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the sacraments effect what they signify. How do we reconcile that with what Gregory says in this passage?

Remember that Gregory is writing in the fourth century. The persecution of Christians had ended only one generation earlier. The memory of the potential cost for professing Christian faith is still vivid. For Christians who were living in Gregory's time, conversion to Christ was the meaning of Baptism, and was the basis of a transformed way of living. In that context, it is easier for us to understand Gregory's teaching: if your life does not demonstrate this transformed way of living, then apparently “the water is but water.”

Can we reconcile that with the later teaching that the sacraments effect what they signify — or, to invoke the classic phrase, *ex opere operato*? It is important for us to remember that this phrase refers to God's action in the sacraments. The Church was right to affirm in later centuries that if we celebrate the rites faithfully, we can depend upon God's action to make them a means of grace. But what about the human dimension? What about our stewardship of the sacraments? The rites may be the instrumental means of God's grace, but they are not magic. If we plant a seed within a block of cement, it is no surprise if it does not grow and blossom.

Gregory is pointing us to the human side of the sacraments. He asks, what does it mean if what is signified is in no sense manifested? It should sober us to remember that both Hitler and Stalin were baptized. I think that infant baptism offers us insight on this matter. Remember that in Gregory's time, most candidates for baptism were adults; a

hundred years later, the shift to predominantly infant baptism was well underway.

Infant baptism reminds us that the embodiment of the meaning of baptism in transformed lives is always proleptic: on God's side, the rite effects what it signifies, and the infant becomes fully a member of the Body of Christ. But the living of a transformed life must await growth into maturity, and this depends upon an array of “embodiments” on the human side in the care and nurture of the child, and in due course in the Christian formation which will bring the child later to make a profession of faith which an infant can not make.

I am not trying to explain away Gregory's teaching by noting the particular circumstances of a fourth century Christian. We cannot know if Gregory would or would not have found a vocabulary of ‘validity’ useful. The concept was simply not part of the sacramental vocabulary at his time. But I do think that the vigor of his declaration — and he admits that “it may be a bold thing to say” — confronts us with a question as relevant to us as it was in his time: Is our baptismal liturgy simply a ritual pattern of words, or do we really mean what is said?

Have we for many centuries lived with a situation in which doing the ritual form — be it baptism or Eucharist, or any other of the Church's sacramental rites — has somehow been accepted as sufficient? Is this the negative underside of *ex opere operato*? It is God who acts, so we are off the hook!

Two recent publications have looked at this question in the context of our situation today. Since my focus here is Christian Initiation, I shall mention one of these only in passing because it is concerned with the Eucharist, but the underlying question is the same. My colleague at the Graduate Theological Union, the Franciscan sacramental theologian Kenan Osborne, recently published a book titled *Community, Eucharist and Spirituality*. In his first chapter, Fr. Osborne discusses the relation of the Eucharist to authentic Christian community as he sees this relationship revealed in the New Testament. Like Gregory of Nyssa, Kenan Osborne startles us. He asserts that in Paul's letters “there can be no Eucharist in a community

whose members do not love one another.”<sup>7</sup> Put another way, the lack of love invalidates the Eucharist. Osborne develops a passionate attack on any attempt to understand the Eucharist in terms of individual piety. The Eucharist for Osborne always presumes a community — not merely a congregation, but a community — and more, a community of love.

Osborne then steps back just a bit from this precipitous edge; it is as though he suddenly remembers “Oh yes, *ex opere operato*” and so he says in his concluding summary that without such a gospel community “any and every celebration of Eucharist becomes a diminished Eucharist.” But then he adds that without such a community “Eucharist is meaningless.”

As with Gregory of Nyssa we see that the sacraments embody meaning. But if that meaning is undermined or eroded, what remains? This question is aimed not at the issue of validity, but rather at signification. “When signs signify,” then the outward ritual form and its meaning confirm each other. As Fr. Chenu taught, the depth of meaning is manifest: the sign and what is signified are one.

The second recent publication is an article by David Batchelder. His title startles us: “Baptismal Renunciations: Making Promises We Do Not Intend to Keep.”<sup>8</sup> As the title indicates, the focus of the article is the renunciations which, in one form or another, are an essential part of all baptismal liturgies. As the subtitle of this address indicates, my purpose here is to examine “the Baptismal Covenant in its Sacramental Context.” So my focus is different from that of Batchelder. But I have found some of his comments on the renunciations useful with regard to the Baptismal Covenant as well.

The problem Batchelder's article discusses is the same one that we heard about from Gregory of Nyssa. Batchelder writes,

*I worry that our communities have learned to practice a way of speaking ritually that not only permits false witness at the font, but establishes it as a norm. We make claims concerning sin and evil, but often live as if we have not really considered the implications. Sometimes I wonder whether the church believes there are any serious*

implications at all. Ritual practice can give the appearance that accountability is fulfilled simply by one's participation in the rites with the moral weight residing in the rhetoric.

Batchelder continues his passionate cry of the heart with these words:

*The ethical responsibility of baptismal vows seems more associated with using strong language that, paradoxically, absolves the community from the cross rather than obligates it to the cross. As a result, ritual performance at the font is in danger of becoming a scandal of saying what we do not really mean.*<sup>9</sup>

Batchelder concludes:

*I am concerned that we have claimed permission to speak a strong truth without the ethical obligation to live the strength of it as suggested by the language. In such a practice, the potency of the ritual speech itself is sufficient to excuse weak practice. Even more dangerous still, the speech is accepted as a substitute for practice. The late Neil Postman spoke of this as the 'demeaning of meaning'.<sup>10</sup>*

Can we hear an echo of Gregory of Nyssa's word in what Batchelder is saying?

Keeping this in mind, let us apply what has been said to what is called in the *American Book of Common Prayer* (1979) the 'Baptismal Covenant.' The use of that title is new to prayer book evolution. I believe, however, that what it says grows out of what has already been present in the evolution of the *Book of Common Prayer* over the centuries. In the 1979 rite, the title 'The Baptismal Covenant' comes at the point where historically, in all of the English Books from 1549 to 1662, the Apostles' Creed was recited by the Minister of Baptism. In 1549 in fact, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer kept the medieval Sarum pattern in which the candidate simply responded "*Credo*," "I believe." In the American books, from 1789 onward, the candidates were asked to affirm belief in "all the Articles of the Christian Faith, as contained in the Apostles' Creed," which substituted for the actual recitation of the Creed by the Minister as indicated in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*.

In the 1979 book, the Creed is proclaimed in response to the threefold questions, "Do you believe in God the Father? Son? and Holy Spirit?" I want to emphasize that this affirmation of faith in the Triune God is the first and foundational part of the Baptismal Covenant. The Creed is followed by five questions which have become the focus of criticism and are even treated negatively as though these questions stood alone to form the Baptismal Covenant. And so I emphasize again, the foundation of the Covenant is the affirmation of faith in the Triune God.

For those of you who are not familiar with the American rite, I shall list the questions:

- "Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?"
- "Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?"
- "Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?"
- "Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?"
- "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?"

To each of these questions, the candidates for baptism and the entire assembly respond "I will, with God's help." This inclusion of the assembly thus makes the occasion of baptism the occasion also for the renewal of the baptismal commitment of all who are gathered at the liturgy. Peter Toon, a priest of the Church of England who now lives in the United States, has been harshly critical of these five questions. Toon isolates the questions from their context. I shall give you his own words.

What is taken absolutely seriously is the so-called 'Baptismal Covenant,' and within it the part where the baptized commit themselves to striving for peace and justice in the world and recognizing the dignity of all persons. This commitment is roughly the equivalent of the social

and political agenda of the United Nations to improve the world.<sup>11</sup>

Toon insists that the Church is a divine society and that baptism is incorporation into that society, a statement with which we agree. He makes this assertion, however, as though the Baptismal Covenant somehow contradicted it. The Church must not, he says, take its agenda from the world. The American Baptismal Covenant, he says, is primarily concerned only with social implications. This seems to reflect an inadequate understanding of the theology of Incarnation: "God so loved the world that he came."

Toon is only able to make this assertion by ignoring the fact that the Covenant begins with the affirmation of creedal Trinitarian faith. Since I was a member of the Commission which wrote the 1979 rite, I know what we intended: for us the questions flowed from the affirmation of faith. It is important to note that in the English rite of 1662, the Creed is followed by a question which was taken into the American prayer books prior to that of 1979. The question is: "Wilt thou then obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life?"

Our intention in the five questions of the American rite was quite simple: we felt that it was necessary and pastorally useful to spell out—as it were, to flesh out—the implications of keeping God's holy will and commandments. There is a danger that we can read these questions and, as we learned from David Batchelder's article, end up saying "what we do not really mean." But that danger has existed in the liturgy at least as far back as Gregory of Nyssa; the members of our Commission knew that full well. But it was our hope that by being explicit about some of the basic implications of our baptismal commitment—"to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship; to continue in the breaking of bread and in the prayers; to persevere in resisting evil, and if we sin to repent and return to the Lord; to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; to seek and serve Christ in all persons; to strive for justice and peace among all people; and to respect the dignity of every human being,"—that the Baptismal Covenant would become a reliable basis

for reflection and a reference point for catechetical instruction. The final commitment – to strive for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of every human being – was for us on the Commission the fulfillment of Paul's teaching that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female"; we intended to extend its implication that there must be neither black nor white, neither gay nor straight, neither rich nor poor...and the list continues as long as human beings struggle for justice in the name of Christ.

The hope that the Covenant would assume a significant place in the general life of the Church has been abundantly fulfilled. The Covenant is now often used in preaching and teaching, and has sent down its roots deeply into the awareness of many in our Church. And it has become very common for the Covenant to be renewed not only at a baptism and at the Easter Vigil, but also at other major events in the life of the Church, and increasingly at ordinations so that those who are to be ordained renew their baptismal commitment with the whole assembly before they go on to make their ordination vows. This is theologically significant in that ordination is thus seen as the fruit of the discernment of particular gifts for the ministry of Word and Sacrament for the People of God rather than as an elevation to a higher status. The ordained person lives out his or her baptismal identity within the larger context of the common baptismal vocation.

With respect to Mr. Toon, but I have seen nothing but good fruit springing from the recovery of a baptismal ecclesiology. At the same time, we cannot be naive or unrealistic in our expectations. No liturgical text can of itself renew the life of the Church. And so I come to my final point: it is an absolute imperative that much more energy be devoted on the part of all of us to the ministry of Christian formation. Now as I am nearing the time for retirement, I often find myself saying to my students, "Teach, in season and out of season, teach. Our people are hungry to deepen their understanding of the faith. I have had this confirmed for me time and time again. Whether it be the catechumenate, or adult education during the coffee hour, or an open forum where questions can be asked and engaged respectfully: all such

occasions should be seen as opportunities to nourish God's people, to strengthen faith. It is imperative for the Church to claim such opportunities at every level of our corporate life."

I am convinced that much of the conflict in our Communion today has resulted from not making basic education and continuing education a higher priority for laity and clergy alike: education in scripture, education in basic theology, exploration of moral issues, and mining the riches of our extraordinary liturgical tradition. Throughout my ministry as a teacher of liturgy in seminaries, now for over four decades, I have regularly been involved in lay education in parishes. And this has not meant asking people to read big, fat books; my goal has always been to enable people to reflect on the meaning of their faith and to connect faith in Jesus Christ with the realities of their daily lives. The fruit of this has been to enter more deeply into the symbols of our redemption which form the central meaning of the sacramental life.

To end, I want to return to the baptistery at St. John Lateran in Rome. On the walls of that great baptistery we find the extraordinary words of St. Leo the Great which continue to proclaim to us the meaning of the wonderful gift of incorporation into Christ:

Here is born in Spirit-soaked fertility  
a brood destined for another City,  
begotten by God's blowing  
and borne upon this torrent  
by the Church their virgin mother.  
Reborn in these depths they reach for  
heaven's realm,  
the born-but-once unknown by felicity.  
This spring is life that floods the world,  
the wounds of Christ its awesome  
source.  
Sinner sink beneath this sacred surf  
that swallows age and spits up youth.  
Sinner here scour sin away down to  
innocence,  
for they know no enmity who are by  
one font, one Spirit, one faith made  
one.  
Sinner shudder not at sin's kind and  
number,  
For those born here are holy.

They were drenched in grace.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lateran Council IV, 1215.

<sup>2</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5, Second Series: Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, pp. 507-9.

<sup>3</sup> John A. Gurrieri has made an important contribution to discussion on the meaning of 'validity' in two articles: cf. "Sacramental Validity: The Origins and Use of a Vocabulary," *The Jurist*, Vol. 81, No.1 (1981), pp. 21–58; and "Sacraments Shaping Faith: The Problem of Sacramental Validity Today," *Fountain of Life* (Gerard Austin, O.P., ed.). Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1991, pp. 165-181.

<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with the earlier teaching of Tertullian in *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, Ch. 8, where we find the theological principle that "the flesh is the hinge on which salvation depends (*Caro cardo salutis*).

<sup>5</sup> *The Great Catechism*, p. 508.

<sup>6</sup> *The Articles of Religion*, XXV.

<sup>7</sup> Kenan B. Osborne, O.F.M., *Community, Eucharist, and Spirituality*. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2007, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> *Worship*, Vol. 81, No. 5 (September 2007), pp. 409-25.

<sup>9</sup> *Baptismal Renunciations*, p. 411.

<sup>10</sup> *Baptismal Renunciations*, p. 412.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Toon, "Sacraments and Their Social Implications." Typescript of internet article.

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# Membership in the Institutional Church: Baptism or Confirmation?

Care must be taken not to elevate confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation to an importance equal to or superior to baptism.

APLM Brochure: *Holy Baptism: A Liturgy & Pastoral Commentary*

by Joe Morris Doss



## Asleep at the Wheel

The alarm went off in my head only faintly. The House of Bishops was in session during the 2003 Episcopal Church General Convention in Minneapolis, and we were so focused on the conflicts swirling around

Gene Robinson's election that it was difficult to give full attention to the many other matters of importance before us. At the moment, I was moving from table to table, organizing the co-sponsors to speak in favor of a resolution to fund a death penalty study. Out of what felt like a remote corner of my consciousness I heard a widely respected bishop, one of my fellow attorneys, respond to a question about the resolution before us, A044, with the assurance that, given the broad agreement on the substantive issue, the vote was simply on an innocuous amendment to canon law. The House, happy to have something clear and non-conflicted on which to vote, was ready to move on. I really had not been paying attention and even when I found myself standing straight up I was still trying to get a handle on why I was upset. Certainly I could see no harm in providing for the laying on of hands by a bishop in the rites of confirmation and reception. But the rite of reaffirmation of baptismal vows was not being mentioned. Why not?

Quickly, I returned to my table, flipped to page 412 of the *Book of Common Prayer* to check the rubrics for the three alternative rites of confirmation, reception, and baptismal vows, and meekly rose to my feet to try to head off something wrong, though I had not yet figured out just what. It was all intuitive and the only thing I could say in defense of getting in the way of what everyone clearly wanted to do was to suggest that we might be violating the Constitution, that is, the Prayer Book. Eyes rolled, heads wagged, friends looked the other way, and an immediate, overwhelmingly voiced vote sat me back down.

Shrugging it off, I tried not to spoil the pleasant mood around our table of five good friends, and made ready to return to my organizing effort. But the next item for business was being introduced, and I saw the connection with the previous action. We were having a series of canonical resolutions placed before us in which we were to clarify that confirmation is a requirement for election to various offices of the church (A113-118). With painful clarity I realized what had gone wrong.

My mind went back to a debate within the House of Bishops in 1970. It was the first I had ever witnessed and it had proved to be a genuinely historic moment. I became resolute, though it was apparent enough that there was little chance of stopping the steam-roller that was moving to define confirmation as the de-facto standard for membership in the Episcopal Church. What most hurt my feelings was the dull realization that I, and others who had fought for the 1979 Prayer Book understanding of baptism as the fundamental sacrament of membership, must have been asleep at the wheel—and for a long time. I rose to ask for a chance to meet with the Commission on Constitutions and Canons to sort out concerns that “perhaps had been missed” and moved to table the motion to a time certain after lunch. This time the negative voice vote was impatiently thunderous. The votes for confirmation as a requirement to hold offices in the Episcopal Church soon followed.

I went straight to the booth of APLM and those who happened to be present quickly composed a fine statement. With that in hand, I went back to the people who were in position to promote reconsideration of the issues, but they helped me accept the reality that we would do well to “retire from today's field and live to fight another day.” As one friend put it, “Everyone's brains are good and fried at this point in the Convention, and no-one is ready to deal with anything except the controversy at hand.”

This is a call for the Episcopal Church to wake up and reinstate the wisdom of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

## The Fundamental Theological Issue

Baptism in the Prayer Book is now understood as the one sufficient rite of Christian initiation. In baptism, a person is fully initiated into the life of Christ and fully endowed with the gifts of the Spirit. This includes the fullness of the authority to participate in the ministry and governance of the church. It is especially important to avoid any suggestion that would lead us back to an understanding this church has rejected, one in which the Holy Spirit is required to complete baptism.

There are times in the life of a Christian when public commitment to the responsibilities of baptism may be desirable and the Anglican tradition values the practice of having all members make such a public profession and receive the laying on of hands by a bishop of the church in the apostolic succession. Thus the Prayer Book states that it is “expected” that Episcopalians, both those baptized in infancy and those baptized as adults (who have not already received the laying on of hands by a bishop at baptism) will receive the laying on of hands by a bishop. Very carefully, however, the language does not specify confirmation.

“In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared, to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop.

“Those baptized as adults, unless baptized by the laying on of hands by a bishop, are also expected to make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism in the presence of a bishop and to receive the laying on of hands” (p. 412).

The Prayer Book then provides for three equally alternative rites by which this may be accomplished: confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation of baptismal vows. “Care must be taken not to elevate confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation to an importance equal to or superior to baptism.” The Prayer Book was most careful in equating the three alternatives and pointedly did not mention confirmation except as one of the three alternatives. Why is it that the Episcopal Church gradually began to assume that the intention in stating an

expectation must have been that of confirmation?

## The Legislative History

It was at the General Convention of 1970 meeting in Houston, Texas, that the House of Bishops came to crucial decisions about baptism that subsequently were instituted in the prayer book. In a day-long debate, the House of Bishops changed its collective mind. By this time, the Episcopal Church had been engaged for three years in a formal process of liturgical renewal with the purpose of producing a revised prayer book. The issue the House took up that day was the communication of children prior to confirmation. The question of how children could be eligible to receive communion before they received the full rites of initiation led to unsettling questions about the meaning of baptism and its relation to the meaning of confirmation. If children could receive the sacraments without confirmation, what was it that confirmation conferred that baptism did not? What was the relationship of baptism to confirmation, and what did the latter have to do with the initiation of Christians into the membership of the church?

Each of the bishops had been taught, and had themselves taught, that confirmation was the completion of the rituals of initiation. From ancient times baptism took place through four distinctive actions: (1) the imposition of water, (2) in the name of the Holy Trinity, (3) the anointing with oil by a bishop, (4) the laying on of hands by a bishop. At a certain point in history the church had separated the four out into two separate sacraments. The first two acts occurred at the sacrament of baptism, normally performed by a priest, and the second two were completed in confirmation, performed by a bishop. Thus baptism was incomplete without confirmation; confirmation provided the full reception of the Holy Spirit, and the action of a bishop was necessary for that.

The House of Bishops reassessed this doctrine, aided by the consultation of notable theologians, such as Urban T. Holmes for pastoral theology, Robert Wright for history, and Boone Porter for liturgy. They first agreed that any baptized person was a full member of the church, without need of “completion” or additional reception of the Holy Spirit, and should be

able to participate in all sacraments. Specifically, children were to receive communion. Conforming to the practice of the early church the bishops stipulated that provision was to be made in the new prayer book for the administration of all four actions of the rite of initiation at the time of baptism, even if a bishop was not present for the anointing with oil and the laying on of hands. It was reaffirmed that priests can celebrate baptisms, but recognized that baptism is the responsibility of all members of the church and under extraordinary circumstances is to be administered by any Christian. The blessing of the oil was to remain the responsibility of the bishop. Confirmation simply was no longer necessary.

Did this mean that confirmation was to be redefined or eliminated? The bishops of that time could not define the meaning of confirmation, but nor could they let go of it. This was the famous occasion when a bishop asked the House: “If bishops don’t confirm, what will we do?” One assumption that seemed to remain inviolate was the value of the participation of the bishop and the apostolic laying on of hands. Thus it was decided to retain it in some form, but determining that form was dicey. The anxiety was voiced that if the practice was continued, no matter how it was explained, confirmation would still be seen as the reception of something that was lacking in baptism. Action speaks more loudly than words of explanation. What they wanted was the opportunity for each member to appear before a bishop representing the apostolic succession, profess her or his acceptance of the responsibilities of membership in the church, and receive an apostolic blessing. In the memorable words of one bishop, each Christian should receive a “holy touching” that symbolized their direct connection with the universal church of the living and the dead. That was quickly redefined to be more than an opportunity; it should be an expectation. Still, children were to be receiving communion prior to this action. What was required to make sure that parishes allowed children to receive without prior confirmation? The House of Bishops at that moment was clear. The holy touching was not a requirement and it did not have to be confirmation. It was an expectation, which would be met by those for whom it would be fulfilling. It should not be a requirement, for that would imply

that the holy touching conferred something more than baptism and was necessary for full membership in the church. It should not of necessity be confirmation because too many would continue to view confirmation as the completion of baptism in conferral of the Holy Spirit.

The idea was floated that confirmation should not be the only way of making one's profession of faith and receiving the "holy touching" of a bishop. Multiple rites would eliminate the possibility that anyone should be able to view confirmation as a completing or a competing sacrament. Eventually, it was recognized that reaffirmation of baptismal vows would really mean exactly the same thing as the rite of confirmation, and that the ritual for reception into the membership of the Episcopal Church would be as appropriate for the purpose of a public affirmation of the individual's mature acceptance. It was decided that the three rites would be offered as equal alternatives, and that an individual could choose any one of the three, depending on the personal situation and personal appreciation of the prayers offered. This was instituted in the carefully worded rubrics for the three rites which were authorized for public profession of commitment to membership before a bishop and the apostolic blessing received (page 412, BCP). Confirmation was in no way granted a more important status or a different meaning than reception or reaffirmation of baptismal vows. These three were to be equal alternatives for fulfillment of the expectation. Thus was confirmation to be protected from usurping the role of baptism in conferral of full membership in the church.

As deliberations for the new prayer book proceeded it was assumed that the practice that had become normative for confirmation at around the age of puberty would fade away. Instead the writers of the rubrics for the rites thought the profession for faith, be it any one of the three alternatives, would wait until the member became mature enough to make a genuinely adult commitment before a bishop. I can recall vividly the response to the question of age during the debate on that historic day in Houston. Reference was made to modern psychology, and in particular to Piaget's system of childhood development, and the answer was that a person was mature as an adult around the age of 27, women perhaps somewhat

sooner and men perhaps somewhat later. However, it also was suggested that, as with Protestant baptism, the communal nature of the decision would mean that most faithful youth probably would decide to make their personal profession before their bishop at an earlier age.

It was not long before concern was raised on behalf of the full participation of youth in the ministry and governance of the church. If young people were not *required* to be confirmed, but were *expected* to make a mature affirmation of their baptismal commitments and responsibilities, then it was seen as inappropriate to refuse them the fullness of participation in the church in the meanwhile. Making room for youth within the structures of the church was a high priority at the time, and at that convention there were more high school, college, and seminary students in attendance than at any convention before or, I judge, since. Their voice was forceful in the convention, and their concerns for future youth participation were addressed. It might even be worth remembering that this was the first convention when women were seated as deputies and were voted permission to be ordained as deacons—and the first at which there was a vote on the ordination of women to the priesthood. The focus on inclusivity was elevated, and no one wanted to lose the opportunity to have young people—who were faithful but who had not yet made their adult commitment—serve in the offices of the church, such as on vestries or as delegates to conventions. Therefore, the canons were revised to allow full participation by those who had not yet taken the step of mature adult commitment expected by the prayer book.

### **Creeping Backward to the 1928 Book of Common Prayer**

In so many painful ways the Episcopal Church has refused to receive the most important changes made in the 1979 BCP, many of them of profound theological and liturgical importance. We have not begun to offer the level of congregational participation it envisioned; gotten beyond our long preoccupation with validity rather than the fullness of experience and symbolical participation; reshaped our worship spaces to allow the anticipated liturgical life to blossom; or fully grasped the dynamic relationship between liturgy

and mission. Is it possible that the problem is the defeat of the foundational baptismal theology recovered from the early church? However unintentionally, baptism is not truly understood as full entrance into the church. Confirmation, despite the prayer book language, is still understood to make us full members of the Episcopal Church, full enough to attain office and be licensed to serve. In an email to the Council of APLM following the 2003 General Convention, Donald Schell summarized the situation: "Despite everything else we say, despite the logic of the rest of the book, confirmation practice in many of our parishes still encourages people to believe that baptism needs various completions.... Continuing unreflective practice of 1928 BCP confirmation has won out." A comprehensive analysis of why the theology and the liturgical renewal set forth in the 1976 BCP has been rejected awaits a good and full book, but for our purposes it may be helpful to examine at least the canonical actions, some of which have become constitutional violations.

The General Convention of 1982 began the process of reinstating the practice of confirmation as ritual conferring full membership in the Episcopal Church. It is worth noting that it did so unconsciously, using assumptions carried over from the 1928 BCP and, most importantly, reflecting the actual practice of the parishes of the Episcopal Church in its quiet refusal of the 1979 book. Matters of sacramental theology often get lost in grand controversies as they rage within the church and the larger society, even when it is to the fundamental understanding of the sacraments that the church must finally turn to define, and even resolve, the issues at stake. My reading of the legislative history suggests that the passion about prayer book and worship had subsided in the decisions of 1976 and 1979, and we may assume that the theologians, bishops and deputies who had worked for the concept of Christian initiation and church membership indicated in the new prayer book took their eye off the ball while those fixed on other important concerns took center stage and, unintentionally perhaps, made the real sacramental decisions.

The Standing Liturgical Commission presented A-78 and The Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations presented A-48. The issues about the fullness of membership in the church by

1982 had passed from strictly defined sacramental theology into the pressing needs of inclusivity, specifically for (1) sensitivity to racial, ethnic and gender diversity and (2) increased ecumenical openness, especially to participation and membership in the institutional life of the Episcopal Church of those who had not become Episcopalians in accord with the previous forms. Remaining prejudice, combined with the direction of ecumenical relations (in particular the increasingly fluid way people seemed to move among the congregations of different denominations), seemed to call for action. The two resolutions reflected two specific and differing points of view extant at that time, and the controversy was strong enough that the effective date of the most divisive amendment was established as January 1, 1986, in order to give ample opportunity for the dioceses and the several interim bodies of General Convention to study and adjust to the revised canon.

The controversy was not, however over the relation of baptism to confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation of baptismal vows in Christian initiation, nor to the sacramental subtleties of how the door opened to the fullness of church membership as newly defined in the 1979 BCP. The issues were, on the one hand, prejudice and inclusivity, and on the other, clarification about the sense and extent to which a baptized person can be counted as a member of, and be allowed to participate in, the Episcopal Church even if they are members of other denominations.

The revision of 1982 began in Section 1 (a) with a declaration of the new orthodoxy that baptism was the sole deciding requirement for membership in the church, and explicitly recognized that this is so in the Episcopal Church for those baptized in any Christian Church. It went from there to distinguish levels of membership, with an eye particularly on statistical consistency and record keeping: adult membership for those over 16 years of age, communicants for those who have received Holy Communion with a certain regularity in a given year, adult communicants for those over 16 who do so, and communicants in good standing who additionally within the given year give, work and pray for the spread of God's Kingdom.

In the process of defining these levels of membership, new language was introduced. The canonical change

suggested by The Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations introduced an understanding that was rejected at the time, but which would come back to enjoy its day. We will put it aside for the moment. Nevertheless, the canon that was passed did two other things, each of which violates the prayer book, and thus is unconstitutional. First, after defining the age for adult membership at 16 years of age and then setting forth the expectations for adult members, it changes an expectation into a necessity; that is, in order to be a communicant, a member must have already been confirmed or received. Then, as may have been noticed, it leaves out all reference to the reaffirmation of baptismal vows.

The change from an expectation to a mandatory requirement, in order to attain the fullness of membership and to participate fully in the ministry and governance of the church, is a violation of the prayer book intention, and thus of the Constitution. (There will undoubtedly be those who will claim that the rubrics are not part of the Constitution. I do not believe this is a sustainable position under any circumstances, but even if so, this would violate the substance of the original Constitutional intent.)

The harm in leaving out the third alternative should be clear as well, though rather more obliquely. Take the example of how one friend, for whom I have the utmost respect, responded to my concern for leaving out reaffirmation. This was during the momentary discussions at the General Convention when the realization of what omitting the alternative of reaffirmation of baptismal vows means hit me. He asked if I could think of any pastoral reason to use reaffirmation instead of confirmation. This criterion for whether it should be an alternative was based on his assumption that reaffirmation was something to be done after confirmation or reception, perhaps a sort of recommitment or an expression of a newly inspired sense of what baptism means to an individual. First, it must be said that such an assumption is founded on nothing but the practice with which one has become familiar, but the plain meaning of the prayer book language and the structure of the section clearly offers it as an alternative. And yes, I can offer a pastoral reason: people have selected the prayer for reaffirmation of faith as the most

appropriate of the three alternatives for them, especially in its pneumatological implications about their baptism while avoiding any sense that baptism did not fully endow them with the gifts of the spirit. Of the three distinct prayers offered in the prayer book for confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation (BCP p. 418-419), the reaffirmation clearly states that the Holy Spirit "has begun a good work" in the person already baptized and presented for the laying on of hands by the bishop. Finally however, I must say that I think the question is the wrong one. The relevant question is, what does confirmation impart that reaffirmation does not? Why, that is, should one be expected to be confirmed first in order to partake in the rite of reaffirmation? The House of Bishops' effort to eliminate the prayer book's reaffirmation of baptismal vows as a way of entering fully into the church is asserting anew that the rite of confirmation is based on a pneumatology that implies "reception of the spirit" and "completion of baptism."

Thus did this canon begin a practice in which confirmation has gradually subverted the entire prayer book concept of Christian initiation. The next step was taken at the General Convention of 1986, when the language of the 1982 proposal of the Ecumenical Commission was adopted. Not only was the third alternative omitted, and the term "expectation" converted in favor of language requiring confirmation, but from that point it becomes explicitly necessary that the person will already have been confirmed or received. Notice that the canons all use much of the same language that is constitutionally established on page 412 of the prayer book. At first blush, it may seem to be merely repeating what it already says, perhaps for convenience sake so that the reader will not have to look back to the actual text. It does not purport to redefine anything, or to establish any new canonical requirements beyond or conflicting with what is stated in the prayer book. The new language merely seems helpful, at best; at worse, it simply appears to be redundant.

However, what the prayer book says is, "In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared..." The canon in 1986 read (and each since has so read), "It is expected that all adult members of this

church...will have made ...and will have been confirmed or received (emphasis mine) ...."

With this the coup is complete. Confirmation is re-enthroned, and baptism is reduced to lip service. I suspect this was done largely without conscious intent, except for the assumptions made by some about the routine of life in the church as they know it and can imagine no other, going from baptism to confirmation to leadership. If one wishes to be eligible to participate in the leadership of the church, that is, in the fullness of membership, one must already be confirmed. By leaving out pertinent language from the prayer book that eliminates the reaffirmation of baptismal vows as an alternative to reception and confirmation, and by establishing the assumption that all adults should be confirmed before entering into the fullness of the church's institutional life, ministry and membership, the entire understanding of Christian initiation has been changed from the prayer book theology back to the understanding the church intentionally reformed in 1970. The newly approved canons at the 2003 General Convention, which so raised my instinctive if confused alarm, are merely the culmination of this many years' process, as we failed to fully engage the church about the meaning and purpose of the 1970 reforms and the 1979 BCP's baptismal theology. We have been asleep at the wheel; it is time wake up.

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# Ministering Baptismal Communities: A Second Chance

*A report on APLM's recent efforts to return the Church to its baptismal vision*

by Robert J. Brooks



When the Episcopal Church adopted the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, there was an expectation by many that it could be implemented in congregations by simply placing it in the pews and removing the 1928 Prayer Book. Some did not fully perceive that a vision of what I call "ministering baptismal communities," not just a change in language, was the central reform of the 1979 Prayer Book. Even almost thirty years after the Prayer Book's adoption, the Church continues to wrestle with faithfully implementing the vision of the baptismal liturgy.

Of course, many aspects of the Rite of Holy Baptism have been received joyfully by the Church over the years. The "Baptismal Covenant" has been a guide for individual Episcopalians in their lives. It has influenced preaching; Christian education resources and formation; and the mission of congregations, dioceses, and the national Church. The impact of the baptismal liturgy has been ensured by its expectation that it be celebrated during the principal Sunday service on major baptismal feasts, on the bishop's visitation, or the Lord's Day. This bringing together of baptism with the Eucharist on Sundays advanced the inclusion of all the baptized in receiving communion regardless of age or having been confirmed.

Yet all of these things, important as they are, were only signs pointing beyond themselves to a comprehensive vision of "ministering baptismal communities." In the places that grasped that vision, the life of the parish was transformed in every aspect. For most, the possibility of a transformed community was glimpsed only momentarily in the celebration of Holy Baptism in the context of the Great Vigil of Easter with adults and children as candidates. Those moments are an epiphany of Holy Baptism as "full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church." Those moments show forth the dignity of the baptized as the neophytes are grafted onto the ministering baptismal community, the embodiment of Christ's Risen Body, and the continuation of Christ's ministry in that place.

But, as described in the companion article by Joe Morris Doss in this issue of *Open*, this realization has not taken root universally throughout the Church. Having failed to make the connections between those powerful initiatory moments and every aspect of parish community life — as well as the daily lives of all the baptized — it is not surprising that in the last two decades or so changes have crept into the national canons at General Conventions that undercut the full initiation of baptism given to all. There was no comprehensive plan to pass canons to diminish the full initiation conferred in baptism; a canon here and a canon there over many General Conventions chipped away at the full ministry of the baptized. By the General Convention of 2003, this "canon creep" had undermined the theology of baptism in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Joe Doss played the role of Paul Revere, alerting APLM of the situation and summoning us to address this critical situation at our meeting after the 2003 General Convention. APLM has served the Church since 1946 not only as a prophet calling the Church to its truest self in liturgy and mission; not only as a think tank exploring the cutting-edge of liturgy and mission; but also as an advocate for these matters in parishes, dioceses and the national Church. Because of this, the Council designated

Joe Doss and myself, in collaborative association with the late Bishop Jim Kelsey (who was a passionate and consistent advocate for the ministry of the baptized), to seek repeal of canons at the 2006 General Convention that undermined the baptismal theology of the Prayer Book.

Over the next two years, APLM pursued this goal in several ways:

- We awakened the grassroots in dioceses in different regions to the need for canon change. I, in the Diocese of Connecticut, and council member Donald Schell, in the Diocese of California, inspired our respective diocesan conventions to pass the same resolution on canon change to submit to the 2006 General Convention. Bishop Kelsey achieved the same result in Northern Michigan.
- Joe Doss and I led the effort to include support for these resolutions in the General Convention [platform of \*The Consultation\*](#), a coalition of progressive organizations which was enthusiastically ready to see the issue of baptism as a justice issue for its constituency.
- Council members Clay Morris, Associate Council members Ruth Meyers and Bill Petersen, and I ensured the unanimous endorsement of the Anglican Colloquium (the Anglican members of the [North American Academy of Liturgy](#)). The Anglican liturgists signed an open letter to the House of Bishops critiquing the rationale for some of the changes which had crept into canon law, including confirmation practices which seemed to undermine the full initiation of baptism, and offering to have a conversation with the bishops on these issues.
- Bishop Kelsey also secured the endorsement of the Standing Commission on Ministry Development for a resolution calling for canon changes.

- Joe Doss arranged for Associate Council members Lee Mitchell and Louis Weil, along with John Westerhoff, to testify before the Prayer Book and Liturgy Committees of the Deputies and Bishops at General Convention on the intent and vision of the baptismal liturgy in the Prayer Book. The authority of these speakers was immense, as each had been involved deeply either as drafters or providing educational resources for its implementation. They also provided forums on the issue over two days at the Convention.

In the years and months leading up to the 2006 General Convention, and in the days of Convention itself, it became clear that there were serious and legitimate concerns, especially among the bishops, about issues of Episcopal identity, training and certification for office in the Church. It also became clear that some bishops were relying on Confirmation as a means to sort out issues of Episcopal identity and qualification for office, including ordination. As a result of these conversations – in an effort to fully address all the issues and bring an appreciative spirit to the concerns of identity and qualification – the Prayer Book and Liturgy Committees expanded the original resolution from the dioceses to provide for an inclusive national consultation on baptismal theology, with all stakeholders at the table (bishops, liturgists, Christian educators, canon lawyers, justice advocates, parish priests); to provide resources to the 2009 General Convention on formation for Christian and Episcopal identity, training and certification for office; and possible canon law revisions. The amended resolution passed unanimously out of the committees. House of Bishops' Prayer Book and Liturgy Committee Chair and Council member Henry Louttit (another member of APLM's Council), and House of Deputies' Prayer Book and Liturgy Committee Secretary Ruth Meyers played a major role in the unanimous support given the amended resolution.

Unfortunately, this work was sidetracked by a parliamentary device when the resolution was presented on the floor of the House of Bishops by Bishop Louttit. On the last morning of Convention Joe Doss, Clay Morris and Ruth Meyers met briefly with the Presiding Bishop-Elect about what had happened and obtained her commitment to continue moving forward with the effort, regardless of the final 2006 General Convention conclusion.

Bishop Kelsey and I met separately with the new Presiding Bishop in February and March, 2007. She reaffirmed her commitment and asked that we give her a detailed plan for implementation for what had been envisioned in the resolution passed by the Prayer Book and Liturgy Committees at General Convention. At the annual Council meeting in April, 2007 in Montreal, a group of council members prepared a proposal for the Presiding Bishop. That group included Nigel Renton, Clay Morris, Bill Petersen, Joe Doss, and me.

At the end of July 2007, the Presiding Bishop met with Joe Doss, Clay Morris and me to discuss the proposal. The Presiding Bishop offered to co-sponsor with APLM a national consultation on baptismal theology to accomplish the agenda set forth in the resolution passed by the Prayer Book and Liturgy Committees at the 2006 General Convention as laid out in APLM's proposal. She appointed a diverse and inclusive consultation that included bishops, liturgists, Christian educators, theologians, canon lawyers, justice advocates, and parish priests to carry out the proposed agenda. The Presiding Bishop chose APLM member Byron Rushing as convenor.

The National Baptismal Theology Consultation had its first meeting on October 15, 2007 at the Episcopal Church Center. The Presiding Bishop convened the session and remarked on "all the energy in this room." With that observation, she gave voice to the excitement felt by all who were present as we perceived a second chance to

implement more faithfully the vision of baptismal ministry in the Prayer Book.

The Baptismal Theology Consultation adopted the goals and deadlines outlined in the APLM proposal. They created task forces on "Christian Formation," "Episcopal Identity," and "Training and Certification," and an oversight task group to coordinate the work and handle administrative needs. The task forces will articulate the theology related to their area and provide educational resources and any necessary canons to facilitate the Church's second chance on implementing its baptismal theology. Deadlines are driven by the process to publish the General Convention Blue Book (the book which sets forth the resolutions to be considered) so that both the report and any resolutions can be received by deputies and bishops.

The task forces will report at a meeting of the entire consultation in the near future. The results of that meeting will be shared with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music at their May meeting. Based upon their input, revisions will be made and sent back to the Standing Commission for their Blue Book meeting in October, 2008.

In addition to the consultation's work, in an attempt to include bishops more widely in the conversation, Bill Petersen extended an invitation, on behalf of the Anglican Colloquium which he co-convenes, to Bishops Henry Parsley and Joe Burnett, and through them to all members of the House of Bishops' Committee on Theology, to meet with the Colloquium at its annual meeting on January 3, 2008 in Savannah. Both bishops attended along with The Rev. Dr. Kathy Grieb, theological consultant to the committee. Also included was Henry Louttit, the local diocesan and Chair of the House of Bishops' Committee on Prayer Book and Liturgy. Ruth Meyers and Jim Turrell, liturgy professor at the School of Theology at Sewanee, developed a series of discussion questions to guide the conversation. The result clarified the issues concerning implementation of the baptismal theology of the Prayer Book and what would be

helpful to address the issues. The agenda of the national Baptismal Theology Consultation comprehends the response needed. At the end of the meeting, it was clear that there was a shared commitment between the bishops and liturgists to stay in conversation and work together.

Over the last several years, APLM has brought to the Church the core issue of faithful implementation of the baptismal theology of the Prayer Book, and organized the means to respond to this issue. APLM is playing a major role in the content of that response in the national Baptismal Theology Consultation and will assist in bringing forward comprehensive recommendations to the 2009 General Convention.

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# Against Inclusivity

## *Reclaiming the Latino Liturgical Agent*

by Juan M. C. Oliver



As a Latino Episcopalian, I am against being “included.”

The interpersonal dynamics of “inclusion” always involve an “includer” and an “included.” The first is active, the second passive. “Hispanics” (an Anglo name for us) are always being offered inclusion. In the

Episcopal Church, Latinos are always being invited, included and ministered to. We never get to do anything for ourselves. This usually means that we are welcome guests in someone else’s house. In what follows I attempt to sketch a different model of intercultural relations, using worship as the arena in which this model might be lived out.

If Latinos are going to be active, free agents of our ministry, Latino theologians have the task of developing our theology as we see fit, within the wider context of a catholic tradition. We have taken great strides in the last decade. One area of success is the location of our theology firmly in the Latino experience of poverty and privation. For Latino theologians, poverty is rightly a place of revelation. This insight connects Latino theologians in the U.S. with Latin American theological movements of the last thirty years.

But Latinos in the U.S., unlike our counterparts in Latin America, have another experience, which to my knowledge has not yet been named as a theological starting point: our experience of learning another culture: Anglo culture. Like poverty, our experience of learning a second culture is a theological gold mine.

Once we are “over here” (sometimes even before we arrive), Latinos in the United States spend most of our time learning Anglo ways. For instance, we learn, slowly and patiently, the myriad ways in which the verb “to get” can be combined with prepositions to mean almost anything. We learn that life is possible without subjunctives. We learn to tell time in a different way. We learn that people here are individuals, and that the family has usually just four people if you are lucky. We learn that religion is a matter of free choice and that “if you can think it, you can do it.” We learn that it is possible to be “a self-made man.” We learn that “net worth” is a dollar amount, not a feeling inside—what we would call *honor*. We learn that here being poor makes you morally suspect.

In short, since we spend all our time learning Anglo culture, most Latinos with a few years’ experience in the United States—even Latinos with very little education—are experts in multicultural ministry. We minister constantly to people of a different culture from ours: clean their homes, care for their children; pick their vegetables—some of us even teach their seminarians and grade their term papers. So I suggest that we Latino theologians include the experience of learning to be

bicultural, in addition to Latino poverty, as a theological place of revelation.

This may lead us to discover that our experience of learning Anglo ways reveals to us something about God and life which we did not know before; something that forms us as a people and which makes us who we are as immigrants to the United States: *Anglo culture is not God*.

By dint of having to survive and thrive through a process of learning another culture, we have discovered that culture and its components—language, manners, rituals, body language, etc.—is multiplex. We have discovered that the world created by a given culture for those who belong to it is a world *among other worlds*. Our experience reveals that there are many ways of being in the world, not only our own way, and that each way builds up its own world with its traditions, assumptions, values, virtues and sins. The bicultural person knows—from actual experience, not merely theoretically—that “the way things are” is *many* ways, and that there are other ways of doing whatever must be done “just this way.”

The immigrants’ place of revelation is also a place of dangerous knowledge. In the eyes of monocultural people, our “other ways of doing things” undermine the stability of their world. (This insight may throw light on the current nasty dialogue about immigration.) It is no wonder then that we, who have found out that the world is many worlds, are considered best ministered *to*. For the fact is, even monocultural people are sensitive enough to feel that if we Latinos are permitted to act out our world, we may well construct and express a different world from theirs.

What might we do if we were allowed to be active agents of our ministry? As Latinos we might, for example, paint the church in loud colors. Or we might insist that there cannot be worship without offering something (candles, flowers, *ex-votos*) to God. We might insist on being accompanied in worship by the saints, the Church triumphant. We might develop a long entrance rite to allow every one to arrive before the first reading. We might recover our lost sense of the dignity of the poor. We might insist that the two-track system of preparation for ordination (Commission on Ministry followed by seminary) be integrated into a single track so that the seminary’s daily experience of the ordinand features in his or her discernment process. We might consider the practical work in field education parishes every bit as creditable as academic work in the classroom. And, we might decide that since there are so few Latinos with Bachelor’s degrees, our seminary education must seek ways of assisting promising candidates to complete their advanced education. These are just a few creative examples. Clearly, Latinos *doing* (rather than receiving) ministry could be a dangerous lot.

Latino bicultural ability is not only a source of great anxiety for monocultural folks who realize in their bones that we truly are beyond their control, it is also source of spiritual development for Latinos, and a foundational experience for our liturgical praxis. Our spirituality as bicultural people is shaped by the knowledge that the dominant culture is not God. This frees us to let God be God, unconfused with “the way things are” and allows our experience of God to be a God who contemplates – even promotes – different worlds coexisting cheek by jowl.

As a liturgist I find this deeply consoling. It means that liturgical do’s and don’ts are relative, for they are determined by cultural context, not by God, and so they are fallible and always in need of being reformed, like the Church itself.

If my experience as a bicultural person is that ways of worship are many – as many as there are cultures and subcultures – I can relax my grip on liturgy and allow my hand to open to receive liturgical practices from another world (in my personal case the Anglo world in the United States). And so, this Latino has grown to enjoy not only good Anglo hymns but even occasionally bad interminable boring ones, too. I have learned to talk *about* my feelings instead of *being* my feelings. I have even grown to learn that less can be more and can enjoy an Anglo liturgy designed with Zen aesthetics even though my Latino self keeps wanting a profusion of flowers, saints, candles, litanies, incense, gold leaf and color, for in the Reign of God, there is no poverty.

Experiencing the multiplicity of cultural worlds teaches me to free myself from cultural determinism in worship, such as “Anglican worship must have Anglican chant in it” or “Hispanic prayer books in the Episcopal Church must be translated literally from Anglo prayer books.” This cultural determinism has brought us to the sad state of Latino worship in the Episcopal Church today, where Latino worship is basically Anglo worship in Spanish. Only after our Latino congregations have actively developed their ways of worship as Latino Episcopalians will we have a real Latino Episcopal liturgy.

This will not happen overnight. First, the Episcopal Church must return

liturgical agency to its minority populations. This means, practically, that instead of sending out liturgical resources translated from English, our dioceses and the national church need to spend more time and resources encouraging liturgical creativity and praxis in our Latino congregations. Our national officer for Hispanic Ministries, Anthony Guillen, has already begun this process of encouragement.

Second, it means that Latino Episcopalians must grow up as liturgical agents and stop living off Anglo liturgical welfare. We must take up our ministry – even our liturgical ministry – and create it, developing new forms of worship, some brand new, others rooted in our centuries-old history as a people. We have begun to do some of this at the General Theological Seminary, where for example, the customary for the Spanish language Eucharist on Saturdays is different from the customary employed in English language liturgies. Latino seminarians are also encouraged to engage many expressions of popular religiosity in Latin America and the U.S., and to integrate them with a sound Anglican liturgical theology.

Latinos, of course, should invite Anglos to join us in our ministry. The fields are white and there are not nearly enough of us to harvest them all. But Anglos who generously want to assist Latinos in our ministry must be extremely careful lest their imposing presence shut us up in the process; careful lest their liturgical praxis swallow up our nascent Latino Episcopal liturgy. Moreover, since we spend our entire time learning Anglo culture, it is very tempting for us to just give up our own Latino liturgical instincts and do things the Anglo way. Sometimes this even gets us promoted.

It turns out then that our liturgical agency is deeply connected to our biculturalism. But it must be agency, not passivity. Our homework as Latino worshippers is to create our worship.

Finally, this process is a good thing for monocultural Anglos in the U.S. as well. Despite some pain and discomfort in the process of change, the monocultural Episcopalian can gradually learn to be comfortable in the “other world” of a different culture. Even more rewarding, monocultural people may learn to integrate that experience without fear or

anger, neither fleeing nor fighting, but contemplatively and respectfully joining these “others,” patiently embracing the feeling of being at sea in a different context from his or her own. This is fertile soil for spiritual growth, as it requires the monocultural person to let go of his or her certainties and be a learner in the “other world.”

Thus, the most important liturgical statement an Anglo can make to a Latino is not, “Here’s how you do it,” but “Tell me, how do you do it?” We would love to tell you.

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# Going to Church in the First Century

*One Community's Exploration of its Ancient Eucharistic Roots*

by Jamie Howison



Inspired by a form developed by Marion Hatchett for a contemporary celebration of a pre-Nicene liturgy, and borrowing a title from a little book by Robert Banks, over the autumn of 2007 our church community offered a series of four home-based communions we called “Going to Church in the First Century.” Saint benedict’s table is a fairly young worshipping community, designated a mission of the Diocese of Rupert’s Land of the Anglican Church of Canada. After discovering Hatchett’s very helpful resource, I decided that for several reasons saint benedict’s table was particularly ripe for this home-based format. On a very practical level, we have found that after just over three years of life as a worshipping community we still have some distance to go in forming as a people together, and I suspected that some smaller gatherings in homes might help in this regard. Secondly, as a Eucharistic community with a majority of its members drawn from church traditions of a less Eucharistic focus – predominantly Anabaptist, Salvationist, and Baptist – it seemed important to demonstrate the ancient roots of our liturgical spirituality and current practice. Further, the very name of our community – saint benedict’s table – signals the centrality of Eucharist, and also indicates our mission to relate the communion table to all of the other tables of shared food and hospitality in our lives. Intuitively, our community knows that Eucharist is a meal; not only is our communion bread Indian naan – which one actually chews and tastes – but people take a real swallow from the cup, which means that weekly we consume twice the amount of wine as any other parish I have ever served!

We arranged for four different households to host one of these evenings, scheduling two for weeknights and two for weekends. The hosts were asked to set what they considered a manageable maximum number for their home (which ranged from 14 to 20 participants), and people were encouraged to sign up to attend one of the gatherings. Parents were encouraged to bring their children, though we were quite clear that this was not meant to be narrowly a “family” event. Participants all signed on to bring something to share at the meal with bread, wine, cheese, olives and hummus as the options. The evenings were set to begin at 7:30pm, though taking a cue from John Koenig’s reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 – “Those who arrive later (11:33) are probably slaves, women married to nonbelievers, and others who cannot make independent decisions about their personal schedules” and thus most vulnerable to exclusion – we always waited until everyone had arrived before beginning. In fact, by sharing Koenig’s insight, that period of waiting actually illustrated something of the oftentimes socially scandalous inclusiveness of the early church.



While there were some variations based on the design of each home’s living space, essentially the gatherings had the same set-up. Participants gathered seated around a central table, and once everyone was in place a reading from the Old Testament was shared, followed by a reflection by the presider. A second reading followed, this a fairly long excerpt from 1 Corinthians 11 on worthy reception and on discerning the Body. A second reflection by the presider followed, a teaching very much indebted to the work of Koenig and of Michael Welker on these texts. While we tried to avoid any sense that we were play-acting the parts of early Christian worshippers, an attempt was made to be sensitive to the interpretive habits of the early church writers.

Prayers of intercession followed, with one person assigned to take the role of a deacon in offering the biddings, and space left for others to offer their own prayers and petitions. Following the intercessions was the exchange of the Peace.

At the offertory the table was set with all the food and drink which had been brought to share, with some of the bread and wine placed in front for communion. A simple piece of music was sung at this point, drawn either from the psalms or from one of the New Testament texts generally recognized to have been an early church hymn or confessional statement. In the style of the music of Taizé, these songs were sufficiently simple and repetitive to require no printed copies. In fact, aside from the two readings and the presider’s copy of the Eucharistic text, these were paper-free evenings.

At the Eucharistic prayer, the gathered assembly stood and everyone adopted the *orans* prayer position, with hands raised. The Eucharistic prayer itself was something of a hybrid, combining much of the Eucharistic material of *The Didache*, from the late first century, with elements of a second or third century rite as outlined by Hatchett. Specifically, these later additions were the *sursum corda* and a blessing of cheese and olives from the late second century Syriac liturgy, *Addai and Mari*. This latter addition was extremely useful in demonstrating the fundamental integrity of the Eucharist as a shared meal. In the style of the prayer from *The Didache*, a repeated refrain was used, but because we chose not to vary the content of the refrain, it was not necessary to distribute printed copies.

The prayer in the *The Didache* does not include the words of institution, which have long been considered an essential part of a valid Eucharistic prayer. In addition, the normal order for the blessing of the bread and wine is reversed, with prayers over the cup preceding those over the bread. Further, as noted above, we inserted elements of later rites, which, I suspect, some liturgists will see as a butchering, rather than as a more innocent hybrid. While I

am not about to take a primitivist stance and defend a prayer based on *The Didache* as being superior simply because it is old, I do think that in an extraordinary context such as a home-based gathering—one with an explicitly instructional component—the use of this prayer is justified. The addition of the texts from *Addai and Mari* has been addressed above, while the use of the *sursum corda* offered both a point of community participation and a familiar structure by which to anchor the community's prayer.

The one section from *The Didache* not used was the caution that only the baptized are to receive communion. Because all who took part in these gatherings were regular communicants in our church, this warning seemed unnecessary. Further, as Banks has argued, the earliest first century practice may have included an extension of Eucharistic hospitality to all in attendance.

We remained standing for the sharing of the consecrated bread and wine and for the prayers after communion, and after singing another song we shared the rest of the food on the table. There was no blessing or dismissal, but rather just an invitation to share food, drink and company together. Typically, this part of the evening extended until after 9:30 pm, and in one case people stayed on well past 11:00 pm.

Were these gatherings successful? All four evenings were fully subscribed, and numerous requests have been made to hold a second series over the winter months. In real terms, this meant that a total of 60 people took part over the course of the four gatherings, this in a community that averages 125 people at its weekly Sunday liturgy. Roughly 50% of participants were people who had come to saint benedict's table within the past 12 months, many of whom commented that they welcomed the opportunity to worship and socialize in a smaller and more intimate setting.

In terms of the educational aims of these evenings, several people did comment that they could see the connections between our current practice and its roots in the early church. Several also commented that the clear connection between the Eucharistic meal and the community's shared meal made a deep impression.

Ultimately, to draw together circles of people for the sake of offering worship and prayer is always life-giving to a Christian cocommunity. On that level alone "Going to Church in the First Century" was a most valuable thing in the life of what is a twenty-first century church.

## Liturgy Outline

### 1. THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

- reading from the Old Testament
- homiletic response
- reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
- homiletic response
- intercessory prayers, with biddings led by someone designated as "deacon"
  - I invite you to offer prayer for the church
  - I invite you to offer prayer for the nations and peoples of the earth
  - I invite you to offer prayer for all who suffer and are inflicted in body and mind
  - I invite you to offer prayer for those who have not yet received the gospel of Christ
- exchange of the Peace

### 2. THE LITURGY OF THE TABLE

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We give thanks to you, our Father, for the holy Vine of your servant David, which you have made known to us through your servant Jesus.

**Glory to you for ever and ever!**

We give thanks to you, our Father, for the life and knowledge you have made known to us through your servant Jesus.

**Glory to you for ever and ever!**

As this broken bread, once dispersed over the hills, was brought together and became one loaf, so may your church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

**Glory to you for ever and ever!**

Now sanctify this cheese—milk which has solidified—and solidify us in your love, and let now your sweetness depart from this fruit of the olive tree, which is a type of your mercy which you caused to flow from the Tree for life to those who hope in you.

**Glory to you for ever and ever!**

Glory to you, Father and Son with the Holy Spirit in the holy church both now and always and world without end.

**Amen.**

### 3. THE COMMUNION

Thanks be to you, holy Father, for your sacred name which you have caused to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and everlasting life which you have revealed to us through your servant Jesus Christ.

**Glory to you for ever and ever!**

You, O almighty Lord, have created all things for your own name's sake; to all people you have given meat and drink to enjoy, that they may give thanks to you, but to us you have graciously given spiritual meat and drink, together with life eternal, through your servant. Especially, and above all, do we give thanks to you for the mightiness of your power.

**Glory to you for ever and ever!**

Be mindful of your church, O Lord; deliver it from all evil, perfect it in your love, sanctify it, and gather it from the four winds into the kingdom which you have prepared for it.

**Glory to you for ever and ever!**

Let His grace draw near, and let this present world pass away.

**Glory to you for ever and ever!**

Whosoever is holy, let that one approach. Whoso is not, let that one repent. O Lord, come quickly!

**Amen.**

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## What Faith Looks Like on the Ground

*Using the Sanctoral Cycle*

by Amy McCreath



The theology and practice of mentoring was on my mind last summer while on sabbatical from my work as a campus minister. I spent time remembering people who had mentored me as a college student and young adult. Some mentors were people whom I knew. But some were people I never met, but rather studied: Trevor Huddleston, Dag Hammarskjöld, Simone Weil, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Desmond Tutu. As a politics major not quite yet clear about my calling, I was fascinated by the way these people lived into the interstices of the sacred and the political. I quoted them; I studied photos of them in textbooks and newspaper clippings; I drew courage from them. I was in conversation with them in my soul.

So I was intrigued when Reid Hamilton, the Episcopal Chaplain at [Canterbury House in Ann Arbor](#), serving the University of Michigan, told me that his community uses a sanctoral cycle for the weekly Eucharist. With permission from the bishop, and making room for major feasts and a full celebration of Holy Week, he regularly holds before students the lives of the saints. Through this practice, Reid hopes to help students see what faith looks like on the ground; to show them how actual people lived holy, courageous lives; and to reveal potential mentors.

Reid, Canterbury Music Director Stephen Rush, and the student leaders

together determine which saint to celebrate, choosing from the preceding week in the liturgical calendar. They use the appointed readings from the *Book of Common Prayer* or *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* (LFF), usually adding a non-scriptural reading from the saint's writing or in keeping with the theme of the saint's life. Sources vary tremendously, from [The Life of St. Macrina](#) to [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#). The hagiography from LFF is printed in the service leaflet so that worshippers can read it during the extended period of meditation that precedes the service.

Reid points out that few college students know much church history; encountering the saints gives them a chance to learn some of it. Having grown up in the 1990s, when the Christians who made the news most often were espousing rather narrow values or working for strategic political gains, they have not heard much about heroes of the Church from earlier eras, and who worked for justice, freedom and peace. (For example, it became clear to me this fall that most of the students in our ministry at MIT did not know who Desmond Tutu was – a wake up call about my assumptions!).

Today's college students usually have seen Christianity presented as a set of propositions to which one adheres or not. Jesus' life in this model is held up as something you simply choose. In the last few decades the idea of faith as a way of life – an ongoing journey shaping daily decisions and patterns of

encounter, rather than as a decision made at a moment in time – has been obscured. Reflecting on the lives of real people who made real decisions – often courageous, sometimes imperfect; who had sometimes honorable, sometimes messy relationships – gives this generation an answer to the question that they yearn to answer: so what does faith *look like*? What should I *do*, today and long-term? Can I be imperfect – as I know I am – and still serve Christ?

Reid reports that sometimes it is easy to relate a saint's life to the lives of the students: [Thomas Aquinas](#), [Robert Grossteste](#) and other scholars provide a chance for reflection on the meaning and purpose of study, for example. Sometimes, doing this is rather hard: [Wolfstan of Worcester](#) – where do you take this story? But the connections are usually there, and gifts come from the struggle to find them.

In an era when myriad options for identity and meaning present themselves to a frenetically information-seeking generation, holding out examples of people who rooted themselves in God through Christ and lived into that faith is particularly important.

Reid notes that he enjoys helping the students see how certain saints' lives were like theirs in interesting ways: [Daniel Oakerhater](#), an outsider to the faith by birth, eventually claiming ground as a creative, effective leader and teacher; [Jonathan Myrick Daniels](#), a young adult going to Alabama to revive

its soul through justice-work, just as many young adults are undertaking to do in the post-Katrina South these days.

In *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, James Fowler notes that the "generation of virtues" is part of how the Christian community forms people for vocation. We show people "how love acts." These stories and the chance to discuss them are tools for doing this with young people who are at a critical stage in discerning their vocations.

Reid believes the impact is evident in student's lives, including two former U of M students now in the ordination process, and a student who has spent the last two summers in the US/Mexican border desert, rescuing people from dying in their attempt to cross into the United States.

After talking with Reid and reflecting on this practice, I am not ready to adopt it whole-cloth at MIT. But it did make me wonder whether we ought to do more with the great resource that is LFF. It made me wonder how we might honor several saints in the course of the academic year in ways that are meaningful and helpful to students. I wonder how else parishes and chaplaincies mentor students and others, not only through building relationships with parishioners, faculty, staff, but also through pointing to those far away.

Many parishes use LFF mid-week. I wonder how often it is done in a rote or unthinking way, and how worship leaders who are pressed for time might still think creatively about how to bring the saint's lives to people. Please be in touch to share your thoughts.

**The Rev. Amy McCreath** is in her seventh year as Episcopal Campus Minister and Coordinator of the *Technology and Culture Forum* at MIT. She is also Coordinator of Ministries in Higher Education for *Province I of ECUSA*. A graduate of *Seabury-Western Theological Seminary* in Evanston, IL, she serves as Vice-President of APLM.

**Reid Hamilton** and **Steve Rush** are now writing a book for Church Publishing, tentatively titled *Better Get It in Your Soul: What Liturgists Can Learn from Jazz*.

# "I Am So Happy Now"

## *The Gift of Living Out on Earth the Kingdom of God*

Sermon on the Feast of Constance and Her Companions at Canterbury House, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor on September 9, 2007

by Rebecca Wolf



I will describe to you two stories. Two scenes. If you can at all help it, don't distance yourself. Imagine them and let them in.

Memphis. 1878. A city of 47,000. It was the city of the plague. A description of the fever by Dr. Pease of the *New York Tribune*:

*Yellow fever is here. The wealthy, some 27,000, have almost all departed, leaving the poor to shift as they may for themselves, and to the horrors of the plague are added those of a condition approaching to famine. The provision stores are all closed, and the only way to obtain supplies from them is to break them open, which is sometimes done. All the drug stores except three are closed, and it is difficult to get medicine, even when medical attendance has been had and prescriptions written.*

And from Sister Constance herself:

*Yesterday I found two young girls, who had spent two days in a two-room cottage with the unburied bodies of their parents, their uncle in the utmost suffering and delirium, and no one near them but a rough negro drayman who held the sick man in his bed. It was twenty-four hours before I could get those two fearful corpses buried, and then I had to send for a police officer to the Board of Health, before any undertaker would enter that room. One grows perfectly hardened to these things – carts, with eight or nine corpses in rough boxes, are ordinary sights. I saw a nurse stop one today and ask for a certain man's residence – the negro driver just pointed over his shoulder with his whip at the heap of coffins behind him and answered, 'I've got him here in his coffin.'*

When the epidemic broke out Constance and Thekla weren't even there. They had just finished a year of teaching at St. Mary's School for Girls, and were taking a much-needed summer vacation and rest at the Motherhouse on the Hudson; they were away and they were safe. Moreover, they were not nurses but teachers. In short, they could have chosen not to return to Memphis, and they had plenty of reasons to avoid the city until the epidemic was done and then return for a long life in their old professions.

But they heard the news and left that night.

Yellow fever is an illness that can be survivable if a person has decent nursing and care, but most of the sick in Memphis did not. So the community nursed day and night, even after the nurses proper had given up; they refused to sleep outside the city, where it would have been safer, so they could continue to work at all hours; the reports were that they seemed animated by a common indefatigable spirit.

The community of religious and clergy who tended to the sick in Memphis were: Constance, Thekla, Hughetta, and Frances, Episcopal nuns and teachers at St. Mary's School for Girls; Margaret, who lived with the Sisters; George and Charles, Episcopal clergy; Ruth, Helen, and Clare, nuns and volunteers from New York and England; and Louis and William, clergy from outside. One by one they caught fever and died; only Clare, Hughetta, and William survived.

That is the feast we are here to celebrate today.

Let me bring you to a scene a little less dramatic, but very real and happening today. Four to six hundred migrants per day exit buses with tinted windows and walk 300 yards from Nogales, Arizona to Nogales, Sonora. They have spent between zero and ten days trying to cross a 110-degree desert with nothing but a change of clothes, a little bit of food, and a little bit of water; but they were caught by the Border Patrol and their attempt has failed. Nearly all arrive dehydrated; some are heatstruck; all have the glazed eyes caused by years of poverty and days of pain. Some report abuse by the Border Patrol. None report

having received medical care for the blisters on their feet, blisters so bad they can't walk, blisters as big as your fist.

It was my first day back in Nogales, Mexico, after a prior summer's work and a year's absence. About twenty people from the last busload of deportees were sitting around, waiting.

There was a little girl running around in the dust. Maybe five. She had a little white plastic toothbrush someone gave her. Her eyes were wide and bright; she was obviously intelligent. But that dead look of everyone else here, the vacant stare caused by years of poverty and days of pain, was already starting to seep in.

I asked myself, if she were, if she could be, if she could have been Mozart or Hemingway or Coltrane, how would we know?

I started crying. And I still can't stop.

The suffering of the world is real and it is awful. And as Christians we have to let it in. The Gospel tells us that those who love their life lose it, but that those who die to their lives save them. I don't presume to know what this means, and even if I did I couldn't explain it in words. The best I can do is tell you my story; whether that has something to do with this Gospel, only you can judge.

My story is, I didn't want this career. I didn't want to do this, at least not in the conventional sense of wanting. Mexico was not my plan. My plan was to be a clarinetist the way I had been for the previous eight years, to have my own separate life in my own separate subculture in my own small part of the world. But I knew it wasn't the right plan, knew it wasn't God's plan.

But, I told myself, Nogales seemed too hard; there was too much risk and too much pain. There were the obvious risks and sacrifices -- that 110-degree heat in mid-afternoon is not conducive to comfort, and that working in a border town whose economic base is organized crime is a bit riskier than an office job. But those weren't the reasons for my recalcitrance.

The reason was the risk and the pain in the heart. Social justice isn't a performance you prepare for and leave. It's not a 9-5 job where you wear a mask for a while and go home. And in the field there's no psychological anesthesia available. There's no space to hide out for a few hours when it's just gotten to be too much. There's no Internet to play with, no TV to watch at the

end of a bad night. Everyone with whom I was living and working would know me, know me completely, at my best and my worst hours; all of my faults and failures would stand out in broad daylight and there would be no way to escape being accountable for them. And if I did the work well, the reward would be living in suffering that I could not end.

But finally I couldn't get up in the morning. Finally I couldn't survive knowing they were there and needed me and I was here ignoring them. So I wrote some grants, blew off my parents, sold my car, and got on a plane.

The Gospel tells us that "Father, save me from this hour" is not what we should pray. God's not here to whitewash. He's not here to make the world of suffering miraculously OK so we can go back to our lives. The truth is that we have to live with it. Live with the suffering of someone else.

The Mexican volunteer in Nogales taught me the word *acompañar*: "to accompany" -- to do nothing but be with someone. One day at the port there was no bread. Either lack of funds or lack of infrastructure or intra-organization bickering -- there was no bread. So we asked, "Should we leave? There's nothing here for us to do!" Isabel, a Mexican deportee-turned-aid-worker, answered, "Why do you work so much? We don't care what you do. We just want you to be here."

There was no "fix"; hundreds of deportees would continue to come through; the problems were in the short- and medium-terms unfixable. But for people to come, understand what was going on, and stay with them through it -- that's what they wanted more than anything else.

And it seems to me that that is what these readings are about: taking in the suffering of others and counting it as our own. And if we do that -- if we just understand, in our hearts and in our experience as well as in our heads -- the actions just follow. Constance and Margaret didn't work twelve hours per day because they should. They saw the suffering and it just happened. They could not do otherwise.

I can't tell you where the strength comes from to live with the suffering of others. I don't know. But I can say from my experience that if it is God's will, it does come. Even if we think we haven't got it.

Even when we ourselves are doing so badly that there cannot possibly be space in our hearts for another person, let alone the other side of the world...it does show up. It does show up. God gives us "consolation" so we can answer the suffering of the world.

But Paul's word "consolation" doesn't mean feeling better. It means having the strength to work through and even because of our affliction. And just because we know where we'll get food tomorrow does not mean there isn't affliction among us.

I can't promise that transcending our own afflictions to respond to the suffering of the world will make the world "better," because it won't. Migrants in the desert still suffer in the same numbers; the poor in Memphis still died. But I will promise that the community that responds to suffering -- whether it's a group of nuns, a campus ministry, or the people who happen to come together on the ground -- becomes a community living in the kingdom of God.

I can tell you stories about the tortillas that are passed around the circle to American and Mexican alike. I can tell you that, three days after my shoes were "redistributed" in Nogales, a \$200 check arrived in the mail. I can tell you about the friends who work twelve-hour days with joy, without ever counting the cost. I can tell you that a man from Phoenix, despite being relieved by immigration from his \$20-an-hour job and deported late at night to a country he was born in but knew almost nothing about, was laughing under the stars. I can tell you the extraordinary feeling of security I finally had from living with people whose only priority was caring for the needs of other human beings regardless of wealth or race or nationality.

And I can tell you Constance's words on her arrival in Memphis: "How could I ever have left you! I have been so unhappy, but I am so happy now." For a few short days they had the gift of living out on earth the Kingdom of God. And there is nothing so beautiful.

*Rebecca Wolf has spent the last two summers with [No More Deaths](#), an organization of people of faith and conscience working to end suffering and death on the US-Mexico border. She attends Canterbury House in Ann Arbor, MI and studies philosophy at the University of Michigan.*

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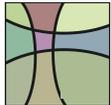
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