

OPEN

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ONE CONFIRMATION, TWO CONFIRMATIONS,

MANY CONFIRMATIONS...

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Since my name has been associated with the rites for Christian Initiation in Prayer Book Studies 26, I have been getting questions: "What is this about confirmation being repeatable?" "Is someone really confirmed by the baptismal rite of PBS 26 (or now Authorized Services)?"

Such questions require me to make a distinction. Anglican vocabulary has used the term "confirmation" for a rite with a dual origin, dual meaning, and multiple functions. PBS 26 separates these two parts of "confirmation" and treats each in a different way. The merit of the new initiatory rites depends, to a considerable measure, on the validity of this distinction. Is the analysis of our inherited "confirmation" rite accurate and useful? Similarly, the acceptance in the church of the new initiatory rites depends on understanding them in terms of this distinction.

Some of the historical and theological material for grasping the distinction is given in the Supplement to PBS 26. But let me clarify the point by two lists of contrasting features. I have called them "Confirmation A" and "Confirmation B."

"Confirmation A" is largely the material on page 297 of the BCP 1928. It was all there was to the actual text of the Prayer Book confirmation rite from 1549 to 1662. "Confirmation A" is:

A sacramental rite: It belongs to the church's ministry of grace, to the shaping of the redemptive community, and to bringing persons into that community's life.

A rite that speaks of the Holy Spirit: The central reality in the actions and the prayer is the holy Spirit and his gifts.

A rite that emphasizes what God does: "Confirmation A" witnesses to the divine initiative. "The Lord and Giver of life" binds himself to us and us to him.

A rite of becoming a Christian: It is initiatory. It is part of the ritual by which a person gains full standing within the life of Christ and the Christian fellowship.

A rite to be done only once: As an initiatory rite, closely associated in origin and meaning with baptism, it is as unrepeatable as is baptism.

A rite which comes to us from the early church: This rite developed in some (but not all) portions of the early church as a part of the ritually enacted explication of the meaning of becoming a Christian. It has had a varied history (see Supplement to PBS 26), but our confirmation rite (or at least the "A" part of it) stands in traceable continuity with some early meaning and practice.

To turn to the other ingredient, "Confirmation B" is largely represented in the two questions on pages 296 and 297 of the BCP 1928. This meaning of confirmation was supplied only by rubric and by the relation of the rite to the catechism from 1549 to 1662. It became a part of the service in 1662. (Neither Confirmation A nor Confirmation B is very fully developed in the actual Prayer Book text. We have read extensive meaning into a minimal rite.) "Confirmation B" is:

A catechetical rite: It belongs to maturity, to understanding, to coming of age in the church. It is associated with adulthood, with commitment, and with some familiarity with the lore of the church.

A rite that speaks of the renewal of promises: It seems to supply the conscious, personal element missing in infant baptism. It is a responsible "owning" (to use an expressive, even if not very Anglican, old term) of the gift of baptism.

A rite that emphasizes what we do: Although any Christian act or utterance is a response to what God has first done, the heart of "Confirmation B" is a voluntary action which a person does because he is inwardly impelled.

Associated Parishes

Something a Christian does: "Confirmation B" is not initiatory. One must already be a Christian in order to be eligible to do it. This action belongs not to becoming a Christian but rather to obedience, to public confession of faith, to the responsible stewardship of life.

Repeatable: As an act of commitment made at a stage of Christian experience, there is no reason for thinking of "Confirmation B" as unrepeatable. In later situations or moments, the personal ratification of the baptismal promises might again be an appropriate thing to do.

A rite which comes to us from the 16th century: In the form in which we have most often used it (viz., the acceptance into full, communicant standing, after a period of catechesis, of persons baptized in infancy) "confirmation B" is the product of the Reformation. The churches of the 16th century, to be sure, had precedent in the early church for their emphasis on instruction. But in the early church, catechesis was a means of bringing converts into Christian faith and life from paganism; it preceded baptism.

Since the 16th century, it has been used to bring already baptized Christians to maturity; it has preceded first communion.

Confirmation A and Confirmation B have been united in our liturgical tradition. Some Anglicans have thought of confirmation in terms of A; others in terms of B. We have tried to emphasize the complementarity of the two elements. But increasingly the union has become unstable. To cite only one factor, the tendency in A is to push confirmation earlier so as to bring the divided sacraments of initiation into closer union with one another. The tendency of B is to push confirmation later so that it can be unambiguously adult. There are good reasons for both pressures, but the one rite cannot respond to both and retain its unity.

In PBS 26, Confirmation A is done by the minister of baptism (whether a bishop or a presbyter) immediately after the baptismal action. It is a part of a complex of initiatory acts -- baptism, post-baptismal signing, and communion. Whenever the ritual of becoming a Christian is used (except in emergency conditions), all of it is used.

In PBS 26, Confirmation B is an occasion, within Christian life, in which a person may declare the meaning of his or her present experience by renewing the promises of the baptism which is constitutive of one's very standing as a Christian person. Such an act would be made before the bishop, and the person making it would receive the laying-on of hands. Confirmation B might be done more than once -- as often as circumstances justified.

Each of these now separated parts of Anglican confirmation -- A and B -- is able to gather wordings, meanings, and pastoral practice appropriate to its character. Since we have used the one word "confirmation" (not a very ancient or universal word, by the way) for two rites and functions which were distinct and which are now separated again, it would, in my judgment, be best to drop the term altogether and adopt two new terms. But in PBS 26, Confirmation B has retained the old name.

Not all of the correspondents and questioners who have been in touch with me since the issuance of PBS 26 and its Supplement have grasped this distinction. I am asked: "Is confirmation really repeatable?" "Can infants really be confirmed?" "Does the rite of confirmation no longer specify the gifts of the Spirit?" Such questions are only answerable by asking whether one is speaking in terms of Confirmation A or of Confirmation B. I spell out this distinction here in the hope that clarity may cover the earth as waters cover the sea.

The Rev. Daniel B. Stevick, S.T.D., is professor of Homiletics and Liturgics in the Philadelphia Divinity School. Dr. Stevick received his theological education from Temple University School of Theology and was awarded an S.T.D. from General Theological Seminary. Among Dr. Stevick's numerous publications are "Beyond Fundamentalism", and "Language in Worship, Reflections on a Crisis". Most recently Dr. Stevick has written the Supplement to Prayer Book Studies #26. He has a long standing interest in viewing Christian initiation from an interdisciplinary stance, and it is this interest and expertise that he brought to the drafting committee on Christian Initiation.

**YOUR PARISH INSIGHTS + LITURGICAL CONCERNS ARE NEEDED --
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2. In 1968 he was a founding member of the Garland Civic Theatre, and a founder and member, Christians for a Better Garland (Texas), an interracial group of clergy and laity seeking community improvement and implementation of civil rights. A musician, he was a member of the University of Texas band.

As a priest his experience has included a curacy in St. Stephen Parish, Wichita Falls, Texas; chaplain to Midwestern University; vicar, St. John the Divine Church, Burknett, Texas; rector of St. Barnabas Parish, Garland, Texas.

Father Merriman has also been chairman of Youth Ministry, Diocese of Dallas, board chairman of Camp Crucis, director of Upper Division Camps, member, the advisory board, Cathedral Center for Continuing Education -- Diocese of Dallas; and member of the Province Seven Christian Education Task Forces.

He is married to the former Cherrie Stillwagon.

Throughout college, seminary and his previous ministry, Father Merriman has had a growing interest and study in the liturgical life of the Church, and has been a non-council member of Associated Parishes.

In his earlier history, Father Merriman was a Methodist with strong roots in the Disciples of Christ before coming into The Episcopal Church after careful study and conviction. Under a spiritual director he studied and became convinced of the principles of eucharistic centrality and of liturgical reform. He has been aware of the program of Associated Parishes for a number of years. In Episcopal parochial work he has been actively involved in Trial Use of proposed rites. His experience in implementing liturgical principles was enlarged when he became chairman of Youth Ministry for the Diocese of Dallas, which included liturgical workshops, study, and the personal involvement of young people. In his own words Father Merriman says of his liturgical perspective, "we have tried to see the Liturgy in terms and as a reflection of all other aspects of life and the Christian tradition."

Working with a coordinating committee of Associated Parishes, Father Merriman will begin his work by making contact with dioceses, seminaries, parishes and other

persons and groups to explore needs and to make his consulting services available. While having resources of his own, Father Merriman will also seek to make referrals to and find liturgically related resources to assist individuals and groups within the Church. Several dioceses and parishes have already requested his services.

3.

THE SUNDAY PROPER ✓

*weekly study
of the Lectionary will
be guided and suggested by
The Rev. Sam West, Marshall, Michigan*

22 Pentecost

November 3, 1974

Cycle C

(In 1974 this is also the Sunday of All Saints, providing an alternate set of Bible themes.)

Exodus 17:8-12 - The Amalekites mentioned, enemy of Moses and the wandering tribes in formation as the People of God, are also later the enemy of the idealized King David. While the image of Moses raising and lowering his hands as controlling victory or defeat of the People is a bit of magical nuance, it can be seen as a kind of sign of "sursum corda" (lifting up of hearts, and hands) with perseverance in the liturgy offered to God, in prayer -- the regular habit to which the People of God are called in relation to their citizenship in the Kingdom not of, though, in this world.

II Timothy 3:14-42 - As Timothy's ministry proceeds and the history of the Christian Community expands, there will be increasing evidence of the tendency towards distorted teaching. Unless the people are continually well taught "at all times and in all places" in each generation, while in time getting further away from the proximity of the great acts of God in Christ in history, watered down interpretation can come about. As for Timothy, so also for all of us, it is necessary to know well the prophets and promises, and the testimony, verbal and written, of the events of our salvation, as set forth in Scripture. Scripture itself had to be expanded as record of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

4.

A nation which does not know its historic roots and principles can drift away from its purposes and become corrupt. A "holy nation" with citizenship in God's Kingdom will experience loss of direction and corruption when it does not know its roots and purposes. Holy Scripture is the Christian "constitution" and "Bill of Rights" in the sense of being the record of The One who provides the way of The New Life in God's Kingdom. Biblical ignorance of our day accounts for much of the watered-down Christianity which becomes only polite and easy religion. When the Church sets about to provide renewal, and a restoration of the Tradition, as in the present day, those who really had not heard "The Good Word" as Hard news at times become upset. The Church may lose those who don't want to read, mark and learn the stern aspects of the Gospel, or will refuse to respond in study and cooperation to the signs of that renewal in its liturgical form, to be soothed by the old habitual ways and words, whether they were more accurate or not.

Luke 18:1-8a - The Stern Judge and the Determined Widow.

The story is a parable that if a persistent woman can, at the human level, wear down a tough judge, how much more will a heavenly, loving Father, the King and Judge of the Kingdom be ready to respond to a faithful, persistent response of any of his People? At times God seems to be "deaf", either bringing us to the test, or not answering in our way but His. Persistent faith is a mark of the citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Nov. 10, 74

23 Pentecost
Cycle C

Ecclesiasticus 35:12-14, 16-19 - "Do not offer the Lord a bribe, he will not accept it, and do not rely on a dishonest sacrifice (offering), for the Lord is also judge in the Kingdom, who knows no partiality."

This passage also helps understand the gospel reading (below) for this Sunday. Here is one among many of the two kinds of contrasts in the types of religious offering -- Cain and Abel; Elias (Elijah) and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40); and (below) the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

There is a warning here to some Christians, the respectable kind who make a token pledge, appear at Eucharist, but are yet unchanged.

II Timothy 6-8, 16-18 - Paul reports to Timothy his feeling that his (Paul's) court trial is near (he is already in prison); but as a testimony, even his imprisonment and the forthcoming trial with all the suffering and loneliness, are related to his calling in Christ as an apostle. He appeals to Timothy in his ministry to see this same interpretation, be ready for it himself, and instruct the Church to be a similar kind of witnessing apostolate in Christ -- this is a means of putting the Kingdom of God first, over and above the courts of human kings and judges.

5.

Luke 18:9-14 - The Pharisee and Tax Collector.

Remember, in this almost too familiar parable, both men told the truth about themselves. The Pharisee did all he said he did. The tax collector gave an honest testimony; he needed forgiveness badly, and was ready to accept it freely. The Pharisee, however, honestly "prayed within himself" not really making an offering of person to God. In effect, he was not witnessing to the sovereignty of Kingship of the Lord, but closed himself off from it, went with a legal religious performance, setting up himself in his own "godalmightiness".

Above all, this is a parable of the character of the King of Kings, who offers love and recognition to all kinds of sinners, but leaves open their freedom to respond in faith, or reject.

Nov 17, 74

24 Pentecost
Cycle C

Wisdom 11:23 - 12:2 - From this book of the Apocrypha this passage illustrates that while God works through "His People", he is concerned about his other people, Gentiles. Gentiles were all people outside the Hebrew Covenant - in effect, the out group, outcast. For them too God's love is offered, as his love is universal. When Pharisaic Jews read this, they'd be upset, or patronizing. Especially to the Jews of the 'Diaspora' (dispersion) who had been scattered from their homeland and were living as ghetto groups in Gentile territory, keeping to themselves. One must not underestimate the