

Liturgy + Canada

MYSTAGOGY: LEARNING THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SACRAMENTAL VOCATION

Part 2: Methods of Mystagogy

If mystagogy is a time for new Christians to wake up to the realization of where they are and what they've gotten into, a time of savouring it to the full and readjusting their outlook on everything else because of this new sacramental existence, then we need to ask how they can be helped to do this. Let me suggest a number of possible approaches. **By John W.B. Hill**

Post-initiation sharing

New initiates usually have some surprising stories to tell about the experience of coming to the climax of their catechumenal formation, and about the initiation rite itself. Not only do they need an opportunity to tell these stories and be affirmed in their experience; the faithful need even more to hear these stories, and rediscover through them some of the excitement and wonder of the life they share. Often neophytes will be shy about telling their stories to large gatherings; but the audience needs to include others beside the members of the group with whom they have spent the last few months. Sometimes preachers will be able to obtain permission to relate some of these stories anonymously; sometimes new Christians can be persuaded to write their stories for the parish newsletter, once they have retold them orally. All this is part of 'savouring', of learning to correlate the subjective and the objective, of discovering the validity of one's own perceptions, of learning to trust the Spirit whose voice speaks from within.

Reflection on the Easter Lections

The readings for this season have been carefully chosen for mystagogy. Comparing our experience with that of the new-born Church through the Acts of Apostles; hearing again the apostolic instruction to the newly baptized from 1 Peter; learning from the beloved disciple the mystery of a loving community through 1 John; being built up in the courage of faithfulness to

Jesus through the Apocalypse; and above all, learning from the farewell discourses of the Fourth Gospel how to live in the time after the Great Passover – these are obvious pursuits during the season of mystagogy. This can be done with the same group that shared the catechumenal formation.

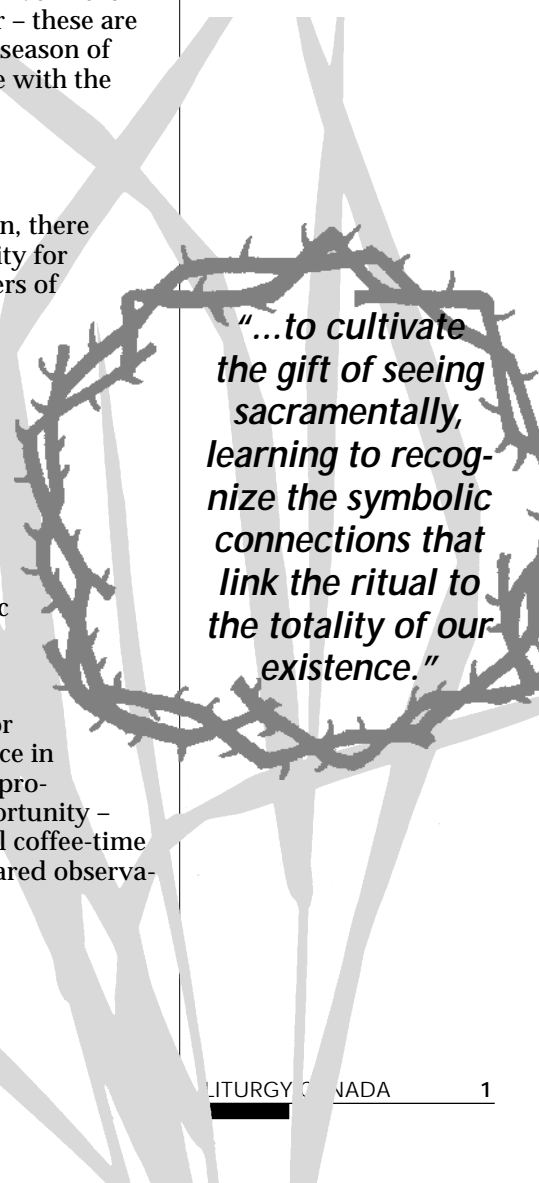
Post-Liturgy Reflection

Throughout the Easter season, there needs to be ample opportunity for neophytes to share with others of the faithful in a patient and persistent reflection on the action of the liturgy in order to develop a more acute consciousness of the intentionality of the rite, and a more confident ritual literacy. Above all, it is important to cultivate the gift of seeing sacramentally, learning to recognize the symbolic connections that link the ritual to the totality of our existence. It takes time to acquire even the language for this, let alone some confidence in using it; and for this we can provide plenty of time and opportunity – perhaps by making the usual coffee-time after the service a time of shared observations and reflections.

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"...to cultivate the gift of seeing sacramentally, learning to recognize the symbolic connections that link the ritual to the totality of our existence."

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Thank you! Thank you!

The good news is that with changes in the *Liturgy Canada* executive and editorial groupings we are looking forward to a new pattern of meetings and publication dates. As well, we are planning a first for Liturgy Canada, a retreat to focus on the concerns that you, our members, are bringing along with your continuing and patient support.

Easter has turned to Pentecost and as you receive this latest and very late edition of *Liturgy Canada*, we trust you have enjoyed the great Canadian summer. In this longest of seasons (of the Church year that is) we send this number to you with another apology for things promised and time passed. As we all know, excuses wear thin and, as with the sacrament of reconciliation, it is restitution and amendment of life which prove the sincerity of the penitent. In this spirit and with new resolve, the editorial committee humbly presents you with this latest number of *Liturgy Canada*.

We hope you are aware, gentle reader, that your paid up membership is by edition number and not by the year. This prudent (and penitent) decision is so that if and, as

in recent years, when we fall behind you are not penalized. Consequently, some of our faithful who have renewed their membership annually! will find that they are paid up well into the new millennium. John Wilton, who has done so much to get our accounts and membership lists up to speed during the past year, assures us that you will have ample notice when your membership fee is coming due.

So then, this Michaelmas number promises to be not the just the first of 1999 but comes with the prospect of a later fall edition for which we already have some articles. However, we need your help and input. We urge you to visit our website, recently updated at www.liturgy.ca. There you can contribute your thoughts and ideas for the editorial board to ponder and/or post them for wider discussion. Already underway are articles continuing the assessment of the Fifth International Anglican Liturgical Commission papers: *Our Thanks and Praise – the Eucharist in Anglicanism Today*.

With these encouraging developments, some new executive members, and the aforementioned retreat planned for early in 2000 we have great hope that we may serve you better as that milestone of chronos approaches the second millennium of the incarnation of our Lord, in whose service we offer, as always, our efforts to continue the dialogue for the renewal of Christ's Church in liturgy and mission. ☩

The Editorial Board

BOOK REVIEW

Patterns of Celebration

by Paul Gibson,
Anglican Book Centre, Toronto (1998).

Reviewed by John Wilton

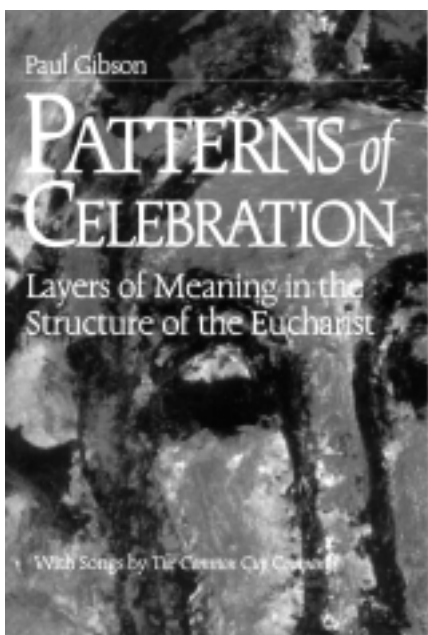
Subtitled *Layers of meaning in the structure of the eucharist*, this book should be on the "must-read" list for parish clergy, church musicians, worship committees and all those who are interested in reforming the weekly parish eucharist so that it more clearly proclaims the Gospel and empowers worshippers to carry the good news into the world. Gibson boldly walks the line between humanist reductionism and other-worldly piety, both of which can strip the eucharist of its profound meaning and

compelling relevance. He does so with wit, charm and grace.

The book is written in a highly readable style with enough historical commentary to interest the liturgically well-informed, along with explanations of the basics of modern liturgy which inform, yet do not overwhelm the neophyte. This is an excellent resource for a new parish worship committee to begin its work with a solid grounding in the principles of eucharistic theology.

The book is made even more interesting thanks to the inclusion of twelve new songs for eucharistic worship produced by The Common Cup Company. Each offering fits the accompanying chapter.

Gibson explores various theories about the structure of the eucharist presented by various groups and individuals (e.g., the Reformers, Dix, etc.). He then makes a case for a five-fold structure: gathering, telling the story, prayers of the people, the table and un-gathering. Each of these sections is explored historically, usually with an anecdote or two. Theological, psychological



and ecclesiological themes are touched on. Each chapter ends with practical considerations and suggestions as to how the rite can be adapted and modified by parish communities to celebrate most meaningfully what is intended. There is also a question or two at the end of each chapter to initiate discussion about the implications of what has been read. The book contains two postscripts:

The first deals with the admission of the unbaptized to communion in which Gibson agrees with Richard Fabian, and others, about what has been called the radical table fellowship of Jesus which welcomes all regardless of formal baptismal initiation into the community.

The second excursus discusses what Gibson calls the irony of the eucharistic liturgy – what others have described as metaphor or even paradox. He juxtaposes First Religion (concern with the ordering of the sacred and the division between sacred and profane) and Second Religion (seeking the sacred in the midst of life). He describes Jesus as the exponent of Second Religion, compassion as one of its hallmarks and the liturgy as the vehicle which exposes and empowers us to live out our mission of healing in the world.

I get the impression that Gibson, the former Liturgical Officer of the Anglican Church of Canada, could have said much more about the structure of the eucharist and its implications for mission. But I am glad that he resisted saying it here! That's because this is a book which, by being succinct, will make this topic accessible to non-scholars and folks who simply know there must be something more to Sunday morning worship than many of us are now receiving. Gibson's book opens the door to the richness and challenge of the question: what is our worship for? It's about time. ■

The Rev. John Wilton is the Incumbent of the Parish of St. George's, Willowdale, Diocese of Toronto.

BOOK REVIEW

Talking About Baptism

Anglican Book Centre, Toronto (1998).

Joe C. Fricker

Locked in the memory box of my earliest days as a parish priest is the way baptism was handled. A glance at the Saturday church advertisements in the local newspaper indicated that the Sunday liturgical routine in most Anglican churches included 8 a.m. Communion, 11 a.m. Morning Prayer, 2 p.m. Sunday School, 4 p.m. Baptisms (by appointment) and 7 p.m. Evensong.

Since my first two parishes were fast-growing, post-war developments comprised mostly of young families, I was baptizing most Sunday afternoons. One year I had baptized exactly 100 babies. If the parents were not on the parish list, they were put on automatically once they had requested baptism. I would see some of them in church from time to time, most certainly once again when they had another child to be baptized. Those were the fifties and early sixties, when most people belonged to some church, when baptism was a private family affair, and was considered everyone's right and with few, if any, questions asked.

But times have changed. While church-going and automatic baptizing have dramatically declined, at the same time our theologies of the Church and of baptism have just as dramatically changed. The Church now is more clearly defined as the community of the baptized whose commission is to be a baptizing community comprised of individuals, each having a baptismal ministry.

For such a change, a lot of help is needed. Clergy need help, lay people need help, parents of children to be baptized need help to understand and take leadership in this extremely important part of parish life.

Stephen Hopkins, Ginny Arthur and Margaret Murray of the Diocese of Niagara have written a manual for baptismal preparation entitled *Talking About Baptism*, which, in my view, offers just the right kind of help. It offers theoretical help based on a sound theology of baptism. It acknowledges the gap in assumptions

(Continued on next page)

"I was baptizing most Sunday afternoons. One year I had baptized exactly 100 babies. If the parents were not on the parish list, they were put on automatically once they had requested baptism."

TALKING ABOUT BAPTISM (Continued from page 3)

between the Church's renewed theology of baptism and inherited family expectations. It states clearly that the renewed place of baptism in the life of a parish requires an ownership of this renewed theology by the whole worshipping community, not just the clergy.

Five real stories of baptismal preparation from five real parishes of the diocese are offered as examples of this renewed theology. One of them is a parish I once served

as rector when that old style of practice to which I referred was the accepted norm.

That parish, and its one-time rector, have changed a lot! We both needed to.

I commend *Talking About Baptism* as an excellent theoretical and practical contribution to assisting our Church in the more responsible practice of baptism. ☒

The Right Rev. Joe. C. Fricker is a retired bishop of the Diocese of Toronto, is currently serving as interim Priest-in-Charge at St. Clement's Church, Toronto.

WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES

For some time I've felt the need to write about our rite of passage when a loved one dies to this life and goes on to be with the Lord in the eternity He promised.

by Patricia Blythe



It used to be that when someone died they were washed and dressed by the family (not unlike the women who anointed Jesus' body for burial) and placed in the parlour of the family home until the time of the funeral. Friends and relatives came to the home to pay their respects and often they came with food and took over the family's chores in order to allow them time to grieve. Death was very much a part of life and everyone participated in its rite of passage. It was a very healthy approach and took away much of the fear and denial that our society today seems to have developed.

The norm in recent years has been to have the deceased rest at a funeral home

until the time of the funeral and then have the service in the chapel or at the church. This carried on the opportunity for friends and relatives to gather and mourn together. It also gave them the chance to say "good-bye". We are people who use all our senses and it is easier for us to accept death, if we have not been present at that time, if we can see for ourselves that it has occurred. When the deceased was at home in the parlour it was easier to come to terms with the death than it often is today.

Our present society is a death-denying society. We don't like to think about death. We don't like to talk about death. We don't like to go to funeral homes. We don't like going to funerals. In addition, families don't

know how to handle death in many circumstances. Some people project their dislike for funeral rites into their own arrangements, not wanting a fuss made over them and not wanting to cause any undue grief for their family. Often there is no visitation and it seems that, increasingly, people are disposing of the body as quickly as possible or are opting for a private service, a memorial service at a later date, or nothing at all. Part of this is fuelled by people wanting to save money (often at the expense of their emotional well-being), but much of it is fuelled by the fact that death makes us uncomfortable.


When my father died I didn't want to see him. I thought I wanted "to remember him the way he was", but in the end I did see him and I'm glad I did because it helped me come to terms with his death and my loss. Do consider the healing process when you make decisions about viewing and visitation. It's very healthy for everyone. If you don't have a set time and place for family and friends to come and pay their respects and express their support, they may find acceptance of the death difficult. Those people that our loved ones have worked with or shared life with need an opportunity to pay their respects and to share in your loss and theirs. Their stories and reminiscences will also help you to celebrate the life of your loved one and to focus on his/her contributions and uniqueness.

Another issue I would like to address is children. When my Dad died one of our best friends came to the funeral parlour but with great fear and trepidation. He had never been to a funeral or to a funeral parlour in his life. He didn't know what to expect or what to say or how to act.... and he'd never seen a dead person. I'm telling you this so you won't shelter your children from life, and death is part of life. Our boys came with us to visitations and funerals of relatives and close friends. It gave them the opportunity to ask questions, to check out the casket, to see and feel for themselves what "dead" means and that it isn't terrible. It also taught them how to act and respond in such circumstances. It gave them the opportunity to be part of the mourning family so as not to feel left out. Children know when you are sad, they see your tears, and if they are part of the process they will be less likely to feel excluded and won't be tempted, as children are, to think they've done something wrong to make Daddy and Mommy upset.

Perhaps I can conclude these thoughts with two cautions: Remember that we human beings are created in the image of God and as such are worthy of respect and a Christian burial. The body is not merely a shell, it is not insignificant. Yes, it houses the soul for a time

and that soul, we know, goes on to be with God, but it is still worthy of honour because each person is a combination of body, mind and spirit and is totally precious in God's sight. It's not just the soul that's precious, but also the body. We need to bring the body of a Christian before the Lord and to offer that person back into God's safe keeping. I might add that it is especially appropriate for a Christian to be buried from the Church, the place where we celebrate our faith and gather to worship our Redeemer.

The second caution I have is around visitation and private services. Carefully think about the others who will be affected by your decision. Not having any visitation, in whatever form that takes, can deny people the opportunity to say goodbye and to express their grief and support. Private services, often chosen because the family is in a great deal of emotional pain, can be alienating and empty. We need others around us to support us in our grief and often it's those who are not so close who can help the most because those closest are grieving so much themselves. We need our friends and neighbours. We need to feel their love and support and we need to see them there with us to know we aren't alone.

All of these thoughts are not meant as a criticism of any services we've had or of the way you, as a family, have decided to bury your loved ones. They are meant merely to help clarify what's going on out there in society and as a reminder that as Christians we aren't bound by society's standards or expectations but by our faith and by what it has taught us about death, about life and about Christian community. 

The Rev. Patricia Blythe is the incumbent at St. Matthew's Anglican Church, Islington, Toronto, Ontario.

This article was originally written for the parish newsletter of St. Matthew's.

"We need others around us to support us in our grief and often it's those who are not so close who can help the most because those closest are grieving so much themselves. We need our friends and neighbours. We need to feel their love and support and we need to see them there with us to know we aren't alone."

CONFIRMATION RECONSIDERED

By William R. Blott

“If one thing can be learned from the Acts, and it is certainly confirmed in the charismatic movement in the churches today, it is that the Spirit cannot be restricted to particular liturgical events.”

John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople, in a catechetical address delivered at Antioch during Lent about the year A.D. 390, described what went on in the interval between the immersion of baptismal candidates in water and their first sharing in the Eucharist:

As soon as the newly baptized come forth from those sacred waters, all who are present embrace them, greet them, kiss them, rejoice with them, and congratulate them, because those who were heretofore slaves and captives have suddenly become free men and women and sons and daughters and have been invited to the royal table. For straightway after they come up from the waters, they are led to the awesome table heavy laden with countless favours where they taste of the Master's body and blood, and become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. Since they have put on Christ himself, wherever they go they are like angels on earth, rivaling the brilliance of the rays of the sun.¹

The average Anglican today, after reading that, might well ask, “What about confirmation?” Answers to this vexed question have not come forth readily, and any answer will be provisional upon the outcome of further scholarly research and pastoral experience. Some things, however, may be said. In the Prayer Books of 1549, 1552 and 1662, Confirmation was a brief and simple service at the conclusion of which the Bishop prayed “for these children [these thy servants in 1662], upon whom (after the example of thy holy Apostles) we have laied our hands. . . .”²

Although the phrase, “after the example of thy holy Apostles” clearly referred to events in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, there was no Scripture reading provided for in the rite until the publication of *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1892 when the Episcopal Church in the U.S. introduced Acts 18:14-18. This was done to show, for apologetic reasons, the biblical warrant for Confirmation, and its necessity:

The church in America, surrounded by denominations which reject Confirmation, thought it worthwhile to adduce in its own ritual this testimony that the rite is both scriptural and necessary.³

The Canadian Book of Common Prayer followed this lead, lengthening the reading from Acts

18, and adding Acts 19:1-7. In addition, there was a reading from Hebrews which suggested that Confirmation was a time for beginning a more sophisticated study of the Faith. The 1962 Canadian Book dropped the reading from Hebrews, but kept the two readings from Acts.⁴

These readings are introduced by a declaration that “it is evident from sundry places in holy Scripture that the Apostles prayed for and laid their hands upon those who were baptized; and the same is agreeable with the usage of the Church since the Apostles time.”⁵

Biblical Warrant

Even as the Canadian revisers wrote, the idea that such laying on of hands could be identified with Confirmation was being seriously debated and a decade later, the Drafting Committee on Christian Initiation of the Episcopal Church, commenting on the apostolic visit to Samaria⁶ (referred to in Acts), reached a conclusion which specifically contradicted the assertion in the Canadian Book:

A large proportion of biblical scholars question or flatly deny [that this passage refers to Confirmation]. The difficulty of finding in Acts 18:14-17 the justification for separating Confirmation from Baptism is that there is no other passage in the New Testament which indicates such a separation, and no evidence for such separation [exists] anywhere in the early Church until the third century. Therefore the episode in Acts, whatever its significance, would seem to be an exception rather than the norm.⁷

By 1982, David Holeyton, writing on Confirmation relative to the agreement *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Plenary Commission, World Council of Churches, Lima), was able to speak definitively:

It has become quite popular in a large spectrum of Confirmation material to characterize confirmation as encounter with or engagement in the Holy Spirit. This should be cause for considerable reflection. It must first be said quite clearly that biblical exegetes are quite unwilling to use any text from the Acts of the Apostles as a proof text for confirmation in the Apostolic church. The instances of the gifting of the Spirit

through the imposition of hands are atypical of the baptismal tradition received and practiced in the church and the use of Acts as a proof text for confirmation was never employed in any confirmation rite of the Western church until after the Reformation (and naturally does not find a place in Eastern liturgies of baptism). Yet there is no doubt that those who received Christian baptism in the New Testament also received the Holy Spirit. It is not at all clear whether or not this was associated with any particular rite. What is clear, however, is that life in Christ was also life in the Spirit and that incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Spirit-formed community, without also sharing in the Holy Spirit was unthinkable. Thus to treat confirmation as an engagement in life in the Spirit is erroneous, if not dangerous.⁸

If one thing can be learned from the Acts, and it is certainly confirmed in the charismatic movement in the churches today, it is that the Spirit cannot be restricted to particular liturgical events.

The Origins of Confirmation

The question about Confirmation arises: How did Confirmation become a separate rite?

The search for answers which bears heavily upon the liturgy and mission of the Church led Gabriele Winkler, Professor of Liturgy at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota to trace the use of the term "confirmation"⁹ in the earliest Gallican liturgical formularies, (Missale Gallicanum Vetus, Missale Gothicum, and The Bobbio Missal), the terms confirmare and confirmatio are never used. (The rites and ceremonies with water are indeed followed by an anointing by the priest, however, this anointing is associated symbolically with the anointing of David, with the image of Messiah and servanthood, and not with the gift of the Spirit.)

Winkler did encounter the term "confirmation" in juridical formulations found in the decrees of 5th century synods of southern Gaul. Here the perception is found that the validity of the rites of initiation done in individual parishes depended on the personal intervention of the bishop who had, on the occasions of his visits to rural parishes (i.e. churches other than the cathedral where he presided), to "confirm" or "ratify" the baptismal rites done by the presbyters.¹⁰ Winkler concludes that nowhere in these conciliar documents do we find the slightest clue that the term "confirmare" had any reference to the gift of the Spirit as such, however the provision for episcopal intervention opened the way for this unfortunate development.

It is in a 5th century homily on Pentecost attributed to the Gallican bishop Faustus of Riez that the term "confirmare" is used for the first time with reference to a separate laying on of hands. In the sermon, Faustus distinguished between the work of the Holy Spirit and Christ so as to give baptism a christological reference and confirmation a pneumatic one:

In baptism we are born anew for life. After baptism we are confirmed for battle; In baptism we are washed. After baptism we are strengthened.¹¹

In this text, Winkler says, we note two fateful shifts in meaning: The concept of baptism is no longer anchored in the original pneumatic imagery of John 3:5, (being born of water and the Spirit); and the pneumatic character of the post-baptismal rite changes its focus from messianic servanthood to being strengthened for battle. (This latter image of battle, Winkler notes, had its place in initiatory rites, but in those of the pre-baptismal context. They were associated with the renunciation and expulsion of evil spirits.)

Winkler described Faustus sermon as mediocre, but unfortunately, through a series of happenstances, it found its way into the Sentences of Peter Lombard and thus into a position of importance in the thinking of all scholastic theologians. These, in turn, determined the status of Confirmation in the Western Church.

Winkler's article set off a spate of research and controversy. An early respondent was Aiden Kavanagh who examined earlier rites of both East and West and concluded that "what we today call confirmation [was] in fact the dismissal or missa terminating the baptismal synaxis itself."¹² Confirmation, he decided, completes baptism but theologically does not add to it.

As a result of this finding, the quest for Confirmation moves back to its origin in the exploration of Baptism, and is centred in the rites associated with the preparation for, and completion of, the central act of Christian initiation.

The Necessity of Confirmation

The question now becomes, "Why does Confirmation remain a separate rite?" OR "Is Confirmation necessary apart from Baptism?"

In the Anglican Church, Confirmation seems to have been practised haphazardly until the latter part of the 18th century and

"Catholics emphasized the sacramental nature of the rite. It was an occasion of the outpouring of God's grace upon each candidate through the ministry of the bishop. In 1549 ...the bishop prayed over each candidate that God might, 'Confirme and strength them with the inward unccion of [the] holy gost.'"

(Continued on page 8)

“As Confirmation developed through the 19th and 20th centuries,... it was the pedagogical aspect of the sacrament that came to the forefront. [and] this public concern was reflected in the church by the growth of Sunday Schools devoted to religious education.”

CONFIRMATION RECONSIDERED *(Continued from page 7)*

early 19th centuries when in England the Evangelical movement and the Catholic revival both set out to renew a moribund Church by calling on its members to take Christianity seriously. One potential focus of renewal (since virtually all babies in the country were baptized on demand within a few weeks of birth) was Confirmation, the occasion upon which those children could “with their own mouth and consent, openly before the Church, ratify and confirm” the promises made for them by their godparents. From the beginning, however, Confirmation was given different interpretations by each group.

Catholics emphasized the sacramental nature of the rite. It was an occasion of the outpouring of God’s grace upon each candidate through the ministry of the bishop. In 1549, to the accompaniment of signing with the cross and laying on of his hands, the bishop prayed over each candidate that God might, “Confirme and strength them with the inward unccion of [the] holy gost.”¹³ In 1552 and 1662, this view of the sacrament continued, even though the signing was removed and the prayer re-worded to ask God to “defend” the candidate and continually increase in him/her his “holy Spirit”.

From the beginning, however, with Cranmer’s Catechism attached to it, Confirmation had a cognitive learning component whose roots went back to the early medieval Prone. With the Prone the ideal was that on each Sunday and Holy Day the congregation would memorize one line of the text (Lord’s Prayer, Creed or Ten Commandments) and the priest would teach them about that line. However, practice fell short of the ideal and it mostly came down to them simply memorizing a text, line by line.¹⁴

In the case of the Catechism, it seems that nothing more than memorization was expected although it is likely that some explanatory teaching accompanied its use. Whatever the case, it was this pedagogical element that appealed to the 19th century Evangelicals. They saw Confirmation as “the laying on of hands with prayer and the profession of faith on the part of a carefully instructed candidate.” For them, the characteristics of the Confirmation service were “intelligence, for the service is now in English, and competency, for no one can be confirmed now unless he has come to a competent age, has been thoroughly instructed, and is spiritually fit to be presented for Confirmation.”¹⁵

While in theory these emphases might not be mutually exclusive, their separation led to some unsustainable deductions. In the case of the Catholic position, for example, the idea that Confirmation was a kind of ordination to lay ministry ignored the fact that all are brought as servants into a royal priesthood by their baptism. Or, seeing the rite as a sacrament of ecclesial community, ignored the fact that the Eucharist is the great sacrament of our unity in Christ.

In the case of the Evangelicals, their emphasis seemed particularly prone to the idea that baptism did not bestow complete membership in the Body of Christ, and that such membership was open only to persons capable of cognitive and conceptual learning.

As Confirmation developed through the 19th and 20th centuries, though the theological emphases of each group were maintained, it was the pedagogical aspect of the sacrament that came to the forefront. In England, Canada and the United States the development of education was a major concern and this public concern was reflected in the church by the growth of Sunday Schools devoted to religious education.

The standard procedure was for children to be enrolled in Sunday School, (in the 20th century special curriculums replaced the Catechism) and to proceed from Sunday School directly into a “Confirmation Class” conducted by the rector. This “Class” might vary in length but consisted chiefly of cognitive learning and memory work. There may not have been any tests to assess the achievement of goals, nor any candidates refused Confirmation for not passing them, but some clear messages were sent. First and foremost, the medium was the message. One qualified for full, adult membership in the Body of Christ by means of an educational process; and only after its completion or an endorsement on the part of the rector, was the grace of God given.

Secondly, having learned all there was to know, one graduated; Sunday School was over, and since “church” had been equated with education, that meant church was over as well.

The appalling attrition of congregations attested to by Confirmation Registers could be borne until the social revolutions of the 20th century (e.g., the late 1960s in North America) removed church going from the norms of personal conduct. Since then there has been a lot of self-examination by churches, and a convergence in the trajectories of theological/historical research into Christian initiation and pastoral need for effective action in that field. Remedial work with both Baptism and Confirmation has gone through several stages with the result



that in very broad terms Baptism has been affirmed and Confirmation called into question. Some have argued that since Confirmation has a very dubious pedigree and a poor track record to boot, it should simply be given up. But though the difficulties with Confirmation seem only to increase with examination, the demand for it does not go away.

Nor should these difficulties, writes David Holeton, be regarded as grounds for dispensing with it:

Confirmation, can be disowned by exegetes, disproved by liturgists, descried by theologians and denounced by educators, but it continues. This resilience cannot be dismissed totally as misdirected popular piety. There is a very strong – felt need for some sort of rite in which there can be a mature profession of faith. This is sometimes diffused by using the paschal vigil or the baptism of others as a major occasion for all participating in the rite to renew their own baptismal vows.¹⁶

Yet the demand for a special rite of commitment remains.

Some Helpful Insights

To hear that “the demand for a special rite of commitment remains”¹⁷ may not sound very appealing to those who over the years have put so much labour into so many confirmation classes with such meager results. However, there have been positive aspects to the investigations around baptism/confirmation. The authors of *Prayer Book Studies 18* have arrived at some conclusions about faith which say a lot about the Christian community and the entrance of individuals into it.

Questions about faith arise with the controversy over whether infants are fit subjects for baptism. For several centuries some Christians have maintained that an infant cannot make an act of faith and therefore cannot be baptized. Echoes of this are heard in the thinking that Confirmation is necessary in order to complete baptism. The real problem, says *Prayer Book Studies 18*, is that for the past four hundred years faith has been conceived of by many as being exclusively an individual act.

Thus conceived, it is true, an infant cannot make an act of faith. But, thus conceived, to what extent can an adult make an act of faith? An adult may indeed declare his or her faith, but is it a true commitment? The adult may have many reasons for wishing to be baptized, none of which may involve an act of faith in God: a wish, for instance, to please someone, or to conform to a group, or to become a member of a desirable church community. The adult act of faith may be the product of some enthusiasm which melts away when life

returns to “the daily round, the common task”. The adult act of faith may be attached to some favourable event (a promotion, a healing, a rescue), and, like the memory of the event, fade with the passage of time. Or in the face of difficulty in reconciling knowledge of the universe, or of human nature or society with Christianity, a sincere adult act of faith may become buried beneath doubts.

Therefore, say the authors of *Prayer Book Studies 18*. Far more important [than individual faith] is the response of faith of the Church into which one is sacramentally incorporated by Baptism. This is true both for an adult and for an infant.¹⁸

The implications of this for the local congregation are nothing short of revolutionary. Since faith and commitment remain voluntary throughout one’s life, they are subject to variations as extreme as the circumstances of that life; the capacity for them, the opportunity, and the willingness to exercise them will be in constant flux. This situation must be met by continuous instruction geared to a person’s intellectual growth and experience, and by opportunities for the learners continuous response and commitment. Learning will involve cognition, but will also be non-verbal and non-rational. It will be holistic. In the case of infants and children, learning of the non-verbal, non-rational kind goes on from the time of birth. It is initiated by the body language of significant others, by tones of voice, by music, by colour, by all manner of symbolic forms and actions. It is conveyed in ways that correspond to the fields of heightened awareness that come at successive stages of development. Long before a child can be reached in verbal and rational ways, their life-style is being permanently shaped. Sacramental living therefore should begin in infancy and children should continue to worship with, and not be isolated from, the Sunday gathering of all the faithful. The Liturgy, rich in symbols, figures and actions, awakens the depths of the human psyche to a genuine relationship with God which continues throughout life in communion with others.

All this implies a change in a congregations self awareness from seeing themselves as passive clients of a religious institution to being active partners in an enterprise. No longer, that is, will they be like patients coming to a doctor, but instead they will be like workers at a barn raising or a Habitat for Humanity project. It implies a change from church as a place to learn

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“Since faith and commitment remain voluntary throughout one’s life, they are subject to variations as extreme as the circumstances of that life; the capacity for them, the opportunity, and the willingness to exercise them will be in constant flux.”

“...confirmation of one’s baptismal covenant might become a requirement for holding a responsible position in the community that lives by those vows. It might be appropriate to re-affirm these vows when moving to ...a new level of spiritual awareness, or when returning after an absence.”

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about God and the earthly career of his Christ, to church as a place where one becomes aware of Christ in the midst, comes to know and relate to God and to be motivated by his Spirit. It implies a congregation whose life-style is focused on, and revolves around, the Baptismal Covenant.

In such a congregation, confirmation of one’s baptismal covenant might become a requirement for holding a responsible position in the community that lives by those vows. It might be appropriate to re-affirm these vows when moving to a new congregation, to a new level of spiritual awareness, or when returning after an absence. And, of course, for the baptized infant, the confirmation of the vows made for one by sponsors would be a natural outcome of reaching the stage at which one’s self-concept is well enough established to require individuation and a voice of one’s own.

What this means for the sacrament of Confirmation in the practical terms of diocesan and parish life is an open question. It would seem to become more flexible, to be better described as “confirmation/affirmation”¹⁹, to be freed of its strict ties to the episcopate; to be more closely linked to the details of life in a parish; to be open to more than one meaning. It might occur a number of times in the life of a Christian with different levels of significance. In terms, however, of the living out of our one life, given and endowed by God, its greatest significance would attach to one’s coming to a mature role in the life of the Body and standing with the Bishop before that Body to make that declaration.

It may be, then, that the greatest change around Confirmation is not in the sacrament itself, but in the nature of the community practising it. Once that community moves from the passive – dependency of the patient/doctor model to the model of responsible co-workers with Christ, Confirmation begins to make sense. ■

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Notes

1. Whitaker E.C. *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*. SPCK, London, 1970, p.41. Quoted in *Holy Baptism: A Liturgical and Pastoral Commentary*. Associated Parishes, 1997.

2. The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI. (London, 1952). Pp.251 & 408. *The Book of Common Prayer*, etc.. Oxford: The University Press.

3. Shepherd, Massey Hamilton. *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*. (New York, 1953). P.297.

4. *The Book of Common Prayer* according to the use of the Church of England in Canada. (Cambridge) Pp. 331 – 333.

5. *The Book of Common Prayer* according to the use of the Anglican Church of Canada. (Toronto). P.557. It is noteworthy that the English Alternative Service Book of 1980 lists 23 readings for use at Confirmation, but the only one from Acts is 16:25-34, a baptismal story.

6. G.W.H. Lampe, “Acts”, in Matthew Black, ed., *Peakes Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Matthew Black (New York, 1962). P.897. In his article on Acts Lampe described the events in Acts 8: as “a Samaritan Pentecost, as 10:44 [was] a Gentile Pentecost.”

7. *Prayer Book Studies 18* On Baptism and Confirmation. (New York,1970). P.25, fn.2

8. Holeyton, David R. *Confirmation in the 1980s*, in Max Thurian, ed., *Ecumenical perspectives on baptism, eucharist and ministry*. Faith and Order Paper 116; World Council of Churches: Geneva, 1983. P.80f.

9. Winkler, Gabriele. “Confirmation or Chrismation? A Study in Comparative Liturgy.” *Worship*, (January, 1984), p.2 – 17.

10. Winkler, op. Cit. P.14

11. It would be a mistake to assume too quickly that bishops were simply seizing power for power’s sake. Merovingian Gaul had degenerated greatly from the days of Roman rule and was a place of ignorance and violence. Consequently, a good many things could no longer be taken for granted. Cf. Brown, Peter. *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Oxford, 1996) p.95f. or C. W. Previte – Orton. *The Shorter Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. I* (Cambridge, 1952) p.128f.

12. Kavanagh, Aiden, “Confirmation: A Suggestion from Structure”, *Worship*, September 1984, p.386f.

13. *Book of Common Prayer*, 1549, 1552 & 1662. Op. Cit. Pp.251 & 408 respectively. The Book of 1662 has no page numbers.

14. Proctor, Francis and Walter H. Frere. *The Book of Common Prayer*. (London, 1961) p. 599
15. Neil, Charles & J.M. Willoughby, Eds. *The Tutorial Prayer Book*. (London, 1963) p.427f.
16. Holeton, op. cit. p.84.
17. Trevelyan, G.M. *English Social History*. (London, 1944) p.580f. cf. Also Canada 1867-1967 (Toronto, 1967) p.361f. Morison, Samuel Eliot. *The Oxford History of the American People*. (New York, 1965) p.530f.
18. *Prayer Book Studies* 18, p.14f.
19. *ibid.* p.14



MYSTAGOGY: PART II (Continued from page 1)

A Seeing Journal

New Christians can be invited to keep a journal throughout the Easter season in which to record their growing ability to see meaning in all things. They can be encouraged to make notes or insert photos of places, objects, or situations that catch their attention as they learn to look for the hand of God.

Planning Alternative Celebrations of the Eucharist

If new Christians continue to meet together during the Easter season as they met before their Baptism, these gatherings might well include a celebration of the Eucharist. This would provide opportunity for them to plan the celebrations, learn more directly what makes a good celebration, and learn how the symbolic force and clarity can be enhanced. Such celebrations will always stand in tension with the great Lord's Day celebration; but this tension will itself be instructive, and will strengthen the practice of liturgical reflection.

Preaching the Sacraments

Those who preach during the Easter season need to be aware of the importance of expounding not only the lectionary but the rite. This was the great tradition of the early centuries: of Cyril of Jerusalem, of Augustine of Hippo. It is here that some of the most powerful connections may be made between the sacraments we celebrate and the sacrament which we are. "Behold what you are," says Augustine, holding before the people the consecrated bread and cup, "and become what you see." Preaching the sacraments, in other words, means more than expounding what goes on in the liturgy; it means expounding the sacramental way of life.

Weaning Neophytes into Other Parish Groups

Integration into the life and mission of the Church requires that new Christians come to experience their belonging beyond the bounds of the catechumenal group. Although it is important that they not be misled into thinking that their vocation is to keep the institution alive, there will be groups within which their experience of the mission of Christ can be expanded and enriched.

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"...a celebration of the Eucharist... will always stand in tension with the great Lord's Day celebration; but this tension will itself be instructive, and will strengthen the practice of liturgical reflection."

“... shift the focus of parish groups away from ‘church-work’ and toward ...connecting the gospel with daily life. For example, if Christians who are, say, teachers can be brought together to reflect on the Sunday readings in light of their shared experience of teaching, they will grow together in trust and mutual encouragement and accountability.”

MYSTAGOGY: PART II
Continued from page 11)

Scripture Reflection with People who Share a Common Life Situation

One of the great needs of congregations in general and new Christians in particular is to find ways to participate in Church that support them in their life of service to the world, rather than demanding that they support the Church. One way to do this is gradually to shift the focus of parish groups away from ‘church-work’ and toward the unending work of connecting the gospel with daily life. For example, if Christians who are, say, teachers can be brought together to reflect on the Sunday readings in light of their shared experience of teaching, they will grow together in trust and mutual encouragement and accountability. Or a group can be invited to reflect on the various spheres of daily life – family, work, leisure, politics, etc., in a disciplined way and in the light of scripture. Involving neophytes in such groups provides an excellent way to support them in their sacramental vocation.

‘Walk to Emmaus’

This is a method for directly cultivating awareness of the sacramental vocation. Members of a congregation can be given the opportunity to invite a group of other members into their work place for a

session. Each visit (to an office, classroom, kitchen, shop, institution, whatever) would entail a brief orientation to the place by the host, readings of some of the Easter lections (chosen by the host), dialogue between host and guests on the relation of this work to the Kingdom of God, prayer for the knowledge of Christ’s presence in this place and for the coming of the Kingdom (led by the host, possibly), and celebration of the Eucharist (presided over by a presbyter of the community, and using a desk, kitchen table, lunch counter, work bench – whatever the place affords – as the altar-table). The host may also appoint the reader and a moderator of the discussion. As far as possible the celebration will use articles provided from within the setting itself. Learning what questions to ask of the host will be as much a part of the growth in faith and vision as the learning on the part of the host. Questions to start from might be: How have you encountered the risen Christ here? In what ways are you learning to acknowledge the reign of Christ in the work you do, and participate in the reconciling work of Christ? (Taken from *Making Disciples* by J.W.B.Hill (Hoskin Books 1991), page 101.) ☒

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