

Frank Quinn

MADE, NOT BORN: THE CHURCH AS BAPTISMAL COMMUNITY

An editorial in a recent issue of *Time* magazine notes that the real failures of the past decade have been future planners.

Changing scripture slightly, the editorial states:

The decade just ended left behind a great many fresh reminders of why prophets have always had difficulty winning honor on their own turf.¹

The decade just ended differed radically from the social, political and economic predictions made for it. The consequence of such failure is that only the fool plays the prophet in the 1980's. So, taking a lesson from the secular sphere, you will understand why I will be short on liturgical predictions in this paper.

But I do want to set the stage for the talks and discussions that will follow. In order to do this I would like to explore with you some of the work done on Christian initiation during the past decade and a half and the problems that have risen because of this work. The presentation is in two parts: (1) Liturgical Revisions of the Rites of Initiation and the Implications for Present Practice; (2) The Importance of Christian Initiation for the Community, the Church. Both parts of this talk assume that, for us, baptismal initiation is more than a failsafe method for automatically escaping damnation.

Father Quinn is Prior of St. Dominic's Priory and a faculty member of Aquinas Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.

I. Liturgical Revisions of the Rites of Christian Initiation and the Implications for Present Practice

Introduction

Continuing with the theme with which we opened -- the failure of those who predict the future -- it should be noted that despite the best efforts of liturgists, theologians and ministers no one can predict the effect of particular liturgical revisions. In the course of Christian history there have occurred major reforms of liturgy, reforms that set the stage for the way people expressed their faith. A study of liturgical revision in the fourth century, the eighth and ninth centuries in the Carolingian west, the sixteenth century in western Europe and now in the west in the last fifty years of the twentieth century tells us how belief patterns were changed by a changing liturgy. But did a Cyril of Jerusalem, a Benedict of Aniane or Alcuin, a Luther or Cranmer or Council of Trent know ahead of time what the results of such revisions would be? Would they have embarked on these changes if they had known what would have happened? I think it can be argued that the answer is "no!"

For liturgical revisors, as other men and women who implement forms of social change, come from and react to their own times and cultures; they not only do not know what the results of change will be, the results that they are looking for quite often do not occur. The same can be said for reformers in the twentieth century. An example for me is the liturgical reform voted on by the bishops at Vatican II. The bishops, for the most part, voted for rather innocent reforms in the liturgy. These reforms, so they hoped, would "clarify" the unintelligible and make cosmetic changes so that ancient rites would have a more modern cast. This is not too

surprising; their theological model was a neo-scholasticism that would have been unrecognizable to the greatest of all scholastics, St. Thomas Aquinas. Relative to Christian initiation the bishops voted for new rites of baptism and confirmation and the restoration of a prebaptismal formative period called the "catechumenate" (presumably, thinking of missionary countries). They also demanded that the relationship between baptism and confirmation, as well as eucharist, be made clearer.²

Since the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of December 4, 1963, massive changes have taken place in the liturgy of the Roman church and in her sister churches in the western world. This is particularly true in the matter of Christian initiation. Many think that, of all the changes, the revision of the baptismal rites and the reintroduction into Christian sacramental and liturgical terminology and into Christian consciousness of the notion of Christian initiation is the most important and far-reaching reform of the post-Vatican II western Christian churches.³ Allowing for our *caveats* on prophesying the future these intrepid liturgical futurologists may just be correct.

Revision of Baptismal Initiation Rites

In just a little over a decade three Christian communions have presented completely revised rites of initiation to their people, rites that raise new questions for theology and practice. A brief summary of the rites follows:

1. Roman Catholic

Roman Catholic liturgical revisors prepared two sacramental rites, *Baptism for Children* and *Confirmation* (promulgated, respectively,

in 1969 and 1971). These rites responded to the cultural/pastoral situation of Roman Catholics today where infant baptism is the normal practice and adolescent confirmation, in the United States, is both a rite completely separated from baptism and yet, because of infant baptism, for many a "substitute" for baptism. The rite of baptism for children is a rite that for the first time in history, is arranged for those who cannot respond in any fashion.

Both of these rites are now spoken of as rites and sacraments of initiation and fall under the General Introduction to all the rites of initiation that have been produced and that is entitled "Christian Initiation."⁴ The normative order for the administration of the sacraments of initiation is presumed to be baptism, confirmation, and then first eucharist. The actual order of administration in the United States is: baptism, eucharist, (first penance) and confirmation.

More radical than any of the rites so far mentioned was the publication of the series of rites known as the *Christian Initiation of Adults*. So unprepared was the Roman church in the United States for these rites that only now are they beginning to be found in books for actual liturgical use.⁵ In number, in quality, in the work that went into them and in the rich theology that can develop from this series of rites it would seem that *Christian Initiation of Adults* is now *the locus* in the Roman church for a full theology of baptism; certainly it is the model whereby the pastoral theology of the Roman church can go beyond the admittedly defective theology that flows from the sole consideration of infants as the subjects of the primordial sacrament of faith.

2. Episcopal

The American Episcopal church has for years had a Standing Liturgical Commission engaged in liturgical revision. However, it is only since 1970 that revised rites have been proposed (and allowed) for actual use. Beginning with *Holy Baptism with the Laying-on-of Hands* (1970) the Standing Liturgical Commission has proposed fundamental changes in Episcopal liturgy and polity. The result of the continuing series of revisions during the 1970's --including the compromises that had to be made-- is found in *The Book of Common Prayer*.⁶ There the rite of baptism is quite different from any of the past Prayer Books including, as it does, such elements as postbaptismal chrismation (and the prebaptismal prayer of consecration of the chrism) and the epiclesis prayer for the Holy Spirit (though without the traditional gesture of imposition of hand).

New repeatable rites of affirmation are also provided. Through these rites an individual may profess faith before the assembled community and bishop, return to the church, enter the Episcopal church from another Christian community or --because of the insistence of the bishops-- be "confirmed". In other words, although the "traditional" confirmation elements have been returned to the baptismal rite, the insistence upon the retention of the word "confirmation" for one of the rites of affirmation (and including some changes in the prayer formulae) and the decision that this particular rite be a nonrepeatable rite of personal acceptance of baptism has brought confusion into terminology and into thinking about the new rites of baptism and of affirmation. It is stated quite clearly that baptism is the full rite of initiation by water and Spirit. One wonders if the retention of the word "confirmation" for the nonrepeatable form of the affirmation rites will not negate such a statement. The reason

for the development of the affirmation rites in the first place, which is the same for both Episcopalians and Lutherans (see below), is the desire to retain in a revised state the Reformation rite of "confirmation."

3. The Lutheran Churches

In America the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship has also produced new rites of baptismal initiation and affirmation that have gone from study edition to final revision and publication in the service book.⁷ Strongly influenced by the revisions of the American Episcopal church the Lutheran rites include a baptismal celebration which reintroduces (optional) postbaptismal anointing with oil (though this oil is never blessed) and the classic, epicletic prayer for the sevenfold Spirit, accompanied by its gesture of handlaying.

As with the Episcopal church so among Lutherans new repeatable rites of "Affirmation of Baptism" appear in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Again, as with Episcopalians, one of these rites is a "nonrepeatable" rite called "Confirmation." This rite is an attempt to continue the Reformation development of a rite that concluded the Christian education of those baptized as infants, a rite that unfortunately came to be called confirmation. As with the Episcopal church, Lutheran polity does not see this rite as part of baptismal initiation, in the sense that it adds anything to baptism. Will the people see it this way?

It should also be pointed out that all three communions have promulgated thoroughly revised eucharistic rites, the final rite or sacrament of initiation.

Baptism, confirmation, affirmation, rites of Christian initiation of Adults; a large number of revised rites that have implications for the theology both of an individual church and ecumenically; agreements on certain rites as being part of the western tradition of initiation. But as of yet there is little understanding, still less agreement, by ordinary lay men and women and even pastors.

Christian Initiation

We will return to these rites later. Now, however, a consideration of the term "Christian initiation" is in order since this term has been used in a number of different ways. Though a technical term with roots in the ancient past, Christian initiation is a relatively recent addition to the ordinary liturgical vocabulary, apart from use by liturgists and some theologians. Moreover, this terminology, which is not Christian in origin and which entered into Christian usage in the fourth century --at a time when it is safe to employ the language of the mystery religions-- is understood in various ways by scholars and churches.⁸

In general Christian initiation refers to the entrance into or incorporation within the Christian community, an entrance fully accomplished with the celebration of the paschal sacraments of baptism, (confirmation) and eucharist. Presumably, the early church would have thought of Christian initiation as referring to the final sacraments of initiation and not to the catechumenal period of religious formation. Quite often liturgical writers have spoken in this fashion. And when infant baptism is considered normative, the words generally refer only to the rites or sacraments of initiation and the order of administration. Thus, the problems we have had with the word confirmation and the various rites that this term has been applied

to. Does it, whatever it is, come before eucharist? Is it a part of Christian initiation?

But it is also true that Christian initiation, especially in the Roman church and because of the whole complexus of rites entitled *Christian Initiation of Adults* refers to more than the sacraments of initiation. In this extended usage (based upon the rites and found in commentaries on the rites, such as the book by Kavanagh)⁹ the term is a technical expression for a dynamic process of conversion and faith formation which concludes with full membership in the Body of Christ and which is surrounded by various rites of Christian initiation, the final rites of which are the sacraments of initiation --for Catholics, baptism, confirmation and eucharist-- which are celebrated in one liturgical ceremony, normatively at the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil. This meaning of Christian initiation --a series of rites that surrounds and makes visible passage into full life in Christ and membership in his body, the church-- becomes gradually clearer in the documents of Vatican II¹⁰ and fully operative with the appearance of the 1972 *Christian Initiation of Adults* (see Tables with outline of the rites and processes of Christian initiation, page 28).

If adults, i.e., those who can answer for themselves, are the subjects of Christian initiation then quite clearly we are considering more than the performance of external rites. The actual rites of initiation --entering into the order of catechumens, being chosen or elected for baptism and finally receiving the sacraments of initiation are the major rites-- surround and make visible a human being's passage from initial faith to full membership in the faith-filled community, a passage that is accomplished within a community over a period of time, perhaps several years.

As we begin the 1980's the issue of rites of passage and passage itself is a popular subject, not only with theologians and liturgists but also with men and women in other professions and ordinary men and women who read Sheehy or Levinson. Some liturgists and theologians worry about the equation of the process of Christian initiation with the mechanism of passage, since they assume that passage and its rites are not only based upon primitive religious practices but also strictly bound to biological life-crises.¹¹ In reply, let us simply note that the conversion journey called Christian initiation is in no way bound to biological passage. It occurs at no particular biological stage. In fact, passage in general has been applied to a number of social situations that are unrelated to anything faintly biological by Victor Turner. The latter has taken the idea of Van Gennep but gone beyond him by using the latter's insight to interpret a number of social transitions.¹² Many European authors, e.g., those found in the Concilium volume alluded to above, have discovered the Gennepian "rites de passage" but not the American or British authors who have furthered Van Gennep's work.

Passage and its rites are then a convenient tool for understanding what Christian initiation as a conversion journey is all about. There is no equation with rites bound to biology or culture. Ironically, it is baptism of infants and the use of later confirmation (whether Roman Catholic, Episcopal, or Lutheran) that are tied to the biological stages of human development --particularly, infancy and adolescence-- and that, consequently, limit the theological meaning of these rites to the quite often trite and unimportant, such as that confirmation gives moral strength to help the candidate through adolescence.

Problems and Unresolved Issues

Christian Initiation of Adults, affirmation rites, a proper sequence in administration of the sacramental rites of initiation --all of these fly in the face of contemporary American practice and create problems in three areas: baptism of infants, later participation in eucharist and separate confirmation or affirmation.

Baptism for Children

The baptism of those who cannot answer for themselves is phenomenologically different from the baptism of adults. This is certainly clear from experience. Note the following descriptions:

The child, to whom at this moment a most important thing is happening, knows nothing about its baptism, or at least this is what we must assume. In any case he is still oblivious of what here takes a visible form in human actions and words . . . When an adult has become aware of his freedom and his own destiny and is freely directing his life, then God speaks to him as to a colleague or a partner. There is a free, loving intercourse between God and the soul. God speaks to it in order to be answered. . . .¹³

Thus Karl Rahner meditates upon baptism. The next description comes from the *Lutheran Book of Worship: Ministers Desk Edition*:

Candidates for Holy Baptism are infants born to members of the congregation or those for whom members assume the responsibility of nurture, and older persons who, after adequate preparation and instruction, declare their faith in Jesus Christ and their desire for Baptism.¹⁴

Experientially different. Is there more to it than this? Could it also be said that there is a difference because baptism has a fuller meaning than simply the external rite? Here is where there may be some problems ecumenically. Although both Episcopal and Lutheran churches have but one baptismal rite, for both adults and infants, the Roman church has two distinct rites. The 1969 *Baptism for Children* is a rite for those children who cannot answer for

themselves, the first time in history that such a rite has been promulgated (before this, even though infants were the normal subjects of baptism, the rite was the adult rite with cosmetic changes). The rite may *not be used* with candidates who can freely respond for themselves.

The infant rite is clearly directed to parents or guardians. It is not only their responsibility to provide Christian nurture for the candidates; they must also profess their faith before the congregation. No longer are the faith questions answered *for* the infants *by* the parents or guardians. The Augustinian solution to the problem of infant faith, that one is baptized in the faith of the parents or the church, can no longer be taken to mean that the faith of parents or church can in some way substitute for the lack of personal faith on the part of the candidate for baptism. Personal faith is simply not present. Baptism is incomplete to this extent. And so, for the Roman church, there is a strong demand for formation which is understood to be part of the baptismal process:

To fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament, children must later be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized. The foundation of this formation will be the sacrament itself, which they have already received. Christian formation, which is their due, seeks to lead them gradually to learn God's plan in Christ, so that they may ultimately accept for themselves the faith in which they have been baptized.¹⁵

How different this is from, e.g., Rahner's description of an adult candidate for initiation:

When an adult is baptized he is already what he would have become through baptism, a believer, and he is already sanctified and justified by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

So far I have been talking about the difference between baptism of infants and Christian initiation of adults. This difference has been magnified by the new rites and because of twentieth century practice, which can only be called "indiscriminate baptism." The

latter is the readiness to grant baptism to the children of parents (or to any individual) who seem to be ignorant of the meaning of, and requirements for, baptism and who do not (or will not) recognize their duties to bring up their children as both Christians and as practicing members of a Christian communion --or who will not provide the basic minimum which is required so that the child has the opportunity to make his or her baptism "true." What has happened is that a consideration of baptism in terms of Christian initiation has made us realize that there is more to the sacrament than pouring water in the name of the Trinity in order to be rid of "original sin." There are, instead, stipulations to be met if baptism is to be granted. No one, whether adult or child, may be baptized because of socio-cultural necessity.

Briefly, a community of faith must exist in order for baptism to take place. Secondly, especially in the case of the baptism of infants, a nuclear community is required--parents or those who take the place of parents. This community must be willing to take on the responsibility for the formation of a baptized Christian. The third requirement results from the first two: there should be some assurance that the baptized will actually have the chance to convert at some point in the future, i.e., to personally choose to live in God's kingdom and repudiate the domain of darkness.

Of course, other questions about infant baptism arise. I was concerned here with one aspect, the difference between the initiation of those who can and those who cannot make personal choices. If we acknowledge this difference we will avoid confusion in the construction of our models of baptismal initiation. The subject of initiation does make a difference to our theology.

By way of a coda to this section let me comment on a practice that is developing in some communions today, i.e., rebaptism. Because of infant baptism, that is, because the experience of baptism is lacking to those baptized as infants and, I would submit, because baptism is considered to be of little importance as a consequence of such practice some Christian men and women want to have a personal experience of baptism. They feel cheated of the experience. And so when they are ready to make a decision for Christ they are demanding rebaptism. A prominent Catholic charismatic leader proposed this to me, in private discussion. He believed that "rebaptism" was possible as long as it was clearly noted that it was not the one "baptism." The candidate could experience the "feelings" generated by the rite of baptism but not submit himself or herself to the charge of actually being re-baptized!

This development concludes the evolution of a rational approach to sacraments --only pointers-- combined with the contemporary need for religious experience that is sometimes excessively individualistic. There is no thought whatsoever that such an approach not only trivialized baptism but puts in jeopardy one of the most precious heritages of the Christian churches, that baptism, focused in the liturgical rite, is a once-for-all entrance into the kingdom of God because God's covenant, which God will not break, is established with men and women through water and Spirit. And yet, this practice, contrary to our history as it may be, does indicate a realization that baptism places some kind of demands on individuals. It does involve the person.

Infant Communion

A minor debate broke out among some Lutherans concerning the question of infant communion.¹⁷ This type of discussion enables us to recall the richness of traditions and praxis and keeps us from canonizing one way of doing things. The fact that communion is a right of the baptized, that first communion concludes the initiation process (ritually speaking), that the elements of the ancient rite of confirmation are now found in the baptismal rite itself and that the eastern churches celebrate the sacraments of initiation all together, no matter what the age of the candidate--all of these reasons lead us to question present practice.

I am in no way opposed to concluding baptism with eucharist. I am against any practice that might give the impression that baptism is only an external rite and that by putting the sacramental rites of initiation in order all is taken care of. There are certain unquestioned assumptions in this discussion, chief among them being that infant baptism is normative pastorally and theologically. Return communion to baptism and initiation is complete. This attitude prohibits questions about religious formation, about a candidate's journey in faith, about the prior necessity for the existence of an actual Christian community, etc. So, in any discussion of infant communion I always try to find out what the attitude towards baptism itself is.

Confirmation/Affirmation

Some of the reasons for the appearance of affirmation rites have already been given, along with the further note that both Episcopal and Lutheran bodies demanded the retention of the word confirmation

for one of the rites of affirmation. It was also stated that the Roman Catholic rite of confirmation was promulgated as a later ritual conclusion to *Baptism for Children*. It should be emphasized that, contrary to the Episcopal and Lutheran baptismal rites, no prayer for the Holy Spirit, with handlaying, nor "confirmation" chrismation occurs in the Roman Catholic infant baptismal rites.

Given the revisions of the past decades, the similarities and differences, several misconceptions need to be cleared up: chief among them is the assumption that there is one meaning that can be applied to the word "confirmation." Rather there are a number of meaning and rites. There are at least three confirmations in Christian history:

(1) The postbaptismal rites that eventually were separated from baptism but that, even when separated, were still thought to conclude or "perfect" baptism were given the name confirmation in fifth century South East Gaul. The term referred to the episcopal action in baptism, particularly the imposition of hand with prayer for the Holy Spirit. This rite was not as immediately related to the pouring of water as was anointing. Its focus was more pneumatic than christic.

(2) The separated episcopal rite became, in medieval theology, the Lombardian sacrament of confirmation. Despite the evident reference to the prophetic Spirit in the classic confirmation prayer theologians no longer focused on the pneumatic character of this postbaptismal rite. Reference was made to the moral virtue of fortitude--a strengthening to live the Christian life. In Thomas' anthropology confirmation was analogically related to physical maturity as baptism was related to birth and eucharist to nurture.¹⁸ Both of these notions were founded on a too ready willingness to canonize the supposed words of two popes.

The statements were, in reality, fictitious, since they originally came from the pen of a minor fifth century French bishop, Faustus of Riez.

(3) In the sixteenth century the abysmal ignorance of Christian doctrine on the part of ordinary Christians led the reformers -- and later the Roman Catholics-- to call for instruction. Luther invented the catechism and was followed by other churches. At this time, the normative subjects for baptism were, of course, infants. Instruction was, therefore, postbaptismal. Since baptism could not conclude instruction, as it did in the early church, most of the Protestant churches, while they rejected the medieval "sacrament" of confirmation, developed rites of baptismal ratification that concluded the period spent learning the catechism. These rites of closure centered on the personal acceptance of the baptismal vows made for one at the time of baptism by godparents. It seems rather evident that liturgical revisors, such as Cranmer, thought it was perfectly clear that no one would think these rites added anything to baptism, i.e., that they were "sacramental" in the medieval/reformation meaning of the term.

And it is true that the concept of the ratification of baptismal vows looked more to the past than to the future or the present. Culturally, the rites concluded childhood or early adolescence and introduced the candidate into the "adult" community. The confirmand was now admitted to participation in the Lord's Supper. As time went on, the admission to the Lord's table was the last religious act of some candidates. Confirmation freed one from childhood and the activities of childhood, including religion.

The rite of affirmation of baptismal vows acquired sacramental overtones in both the Lutheran and in the Anglican churches. Up to our own day there has been heated debate over the character of these rites. And, unfortunately, these rites also acquired the name "confirmation."

Three confirmations, then, in the history of Christianity. The first can be related to the form of "confirmation" found in *Christian Initiation of Adults* and the postbaptismal rites of the Lutheran and Episcopal churches, *mutatis mutandis*. The second is, despite changes, still thought of as the present Roman Catholic rite of confirmation. The reformation form of confirmation was consciously reintroduced as the contemporary rites of affirmation found in the Episcopal and Lutheran service books. Repeatable forms of affirmation were thought the rites best suited to contemporary men and women baptized as infants.

Three confirmations from the past, still found in various ways in the current revisions. No wonder the confusion or the desire to get rid of the word "confirmation." And yet it would seem that we are almost back to where we started. Almost; some progress has been made.

II. The Importance of Christian Initiation for the Community, the Church

In the third volume of his history of doctrine Jaroslav Pelikan makes an important observation relative to the church's focus on baptism: contrary to the patristic period (and to a certain extent the early medieval), for medievals eucharist, not baptism, was the most important sacrament.¹⁹ This concentration, it is now evident, shifted

ecclesiological viewpoints and led theologians to concentrate on certain aspects of the eucharist, such as real presence and the notion of sacrifice, bugbears for the western churches even today. Pelikan claims that the medievals knew the difference between their focus and that of the fathers of the church:

It was a recognition of this contrast when defenders of the doctrine of the real presence felt obliged to account for the omission of the Eucharist from the creeds, which did refer to baptism; this was, they said, due to the absence of attacks on the faith of the church in the real presence.²⁰

It is the position of this writer that the concentration of the western churches on the eucharist and medieval/reformation eucharistic theology has ill prepared us for a return to the ecclesial views of an earlier period of the church's history, an old/new view of the church brought about by revisions of baptismal initiation. For it is in baptism that we ask questions about the church. And it might be noted that it is with a strong focus on Christian initiation that we approach the eucharist as the celebration of the redeemed Christian community and not simply the occasion for Christ's appearance in bread and wine.

The latest revisions have indeed raised questions about the theology and practice of baptism as well as about the theology and shape of the church. The ecumenical movement has been affected by such considerations. Up to now much has been accomplished relative to respect for each communion's baptism. But recently churches have begun to realize, in a striking expression of Geoffrey Wainwright, that ". . . whole ecclesiologies are at stake in the matter of Christian Initiation."²¹ And so agreement among Christians about the meaning of baptism is now a much broader issue than simple agreement on minister, intention and liturgical rite.

Some of the questions that are being asked today are the following: is the subject of baptism important in a full theology of baptism? Both Rahner and the Ministers' Desk Edition of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* seem to indicate that the subject is of no real importance.²² Is it necessary to emphasize the need for the later full and free commitment of those baptized as infants or is this an accidental consideration? Is our model of baptism or baptismal initiation enriched by viewing adult baptism as the theological norm; in other words, that what baptism is about is the full, free response of human beings to God's call, under grace,²³ and entrance into a community through the baptismal rite, a community of life and worship and apostolic activity? In discussing our passivity before the baptismal call, the priority of God's grace, is it really necessary to have as our model infant baptism?

Let us take the practice of a number of churches today and ask ourselves what type of Christian community is being established through baptismal practice. For many baptism is a cultural necessity; its effect is almost magical. Salvation seems to be something that is applied externally, much like paint is sprayed on a new car; salvation costs less, however. Where this type of approach is dominant, where indiscriminate baptism is the norm, the traditional images surrounding Christian baptism fall flat and are best forgotten. The opening statement of the Roman church's introduction to Christian initiation rings hollow where such practice is thought to be theologically defensible:

Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, men and women are freed from the power of darkness. With Christ they die, are buried and rise again. They receive the Spirit of adoption which makes them God's sons and daughters and, with the entire People of God, they celebrate the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection.²⁴

A strange way of speaking, indeed, when all some want to do is keep up with the Joneses or make sure the kid is wiped clean of original sin. Or else God's gifts are cheap where no commitment is demanded.

It must be remembered, of course, that God's call, through the church, is prior to anything we can do. After all, Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism were condemned centuries ago. But the person God's call is addressed to is a person who can or, someday, will respond. Thus, the early Christian communities saw themselves as a fellowship of those who, receiving God's gracious invitation, freely committed themselves to one another in Jesus' name. And these communities continued to preach this message to other "adults." And so we have the ending of Mark's Gospel (also, cf. the ending of Matthew's Gospel):

Go out to the whole world: proclaim the good news to all creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mk. 16:15-16)

Such demands for conversion, following on kerygma, put teeth into the baptismal washing in water. The New Testament pattern of preaching/conversion/baptism is gradually developed into a more definite process of incorporation into the church which would later be called Christian initiation.

It is the church that makes demands that is worth entering. It is this view of baptism that led Paul to the most profound theological insight of the New Testament writings relative to baptism: that we participate in the very death of Jesus Christ and are given a pledge of his resurrection.²⁵ The eucharist, the fellowship meal of men and women who have committed themselves to Christ in his body, the church, is quite clearly the conclusion to baptism as Christian initiation. It is the liturgical action of the whole community and celebrates what baptism did, in another fashion, for individuals.

From one's baptism until one's death it is the eucharist that recalls Christ's death and the pledge of resurrection which we have shared in initiation. Perhaps the trend of the past 1000 years can be reversed. Perhaps the churches can again focus on baptism as the important sacrament because then eucharist takes its place as a dynamic celebration of the whole community.

Implications for a View of Baptism as Christian Initiation

There are a number of implications that result from our considering baptism in terms of Christian initiation and by including in our model of initiation the adult who can respond for himself or herself. The first conclusion is that we will not consider Christian initiation to be only the sacramental rites of initiation. Rather, we will acknowledge that initiation includes other rites and that the purpose of all the rites is to make visible one's journey to full incorporation into Christ.

Secondly, it follows that conversion is of the essence of Christian initiation and not simply accidental to it.

Thirdly, there will be new insights into Christian community and how the local church must be visible and viable. One is initiated into a people, a community. This is what baptism is about: formation within the Christian community. The latter is essential for Christian initiation which is meaningless if no local community exists.

The fourth result is the realization of the ministerial nature of the whole people of God. One aspect of Christian initiation is ministry within and without the community. Apostolic concerns are

part of the religious formation of the catechumen and grounded in the baptismal and postbaptismal rites in the images of the royal priesthood of Christ and of his ministry as prophet. Christian initiation surfaces a number of ministries, clerical and lay, so that baptism does not only let theologians talk about the ministry of the baptized; instead baptismal initiation demands actual ministries, sponsors and godparents, parents of infants, teachers of faith and friends of the candidates who provide models of Christian life, etc.

Fifthly, and most important for pastoral theology, a view of the rites of initiation that insists upon the impersonal nature of baptism and the personal character of confirmation/affirmation will be discountenanced. This corruption of baptismal theology and history--like its cousin, the strange idea that confirmation is the ordination of the layperson-- is an explanation whose time has gone. But because of infant baptism we have misinterpreted baptism and created, in confirmation, a substitute for the baptism those baptized as infants can never experience. Simply put: baptism is *the* sacrament of maturity and personal commitment. Any explanation of confirmation/affirmation must start from this sacramental principle.

Finally, and very important for our contemporary situation, a healthy respect for Christian initiation will enable the church to better organize its pluralistic initiatory practices. The new rites and the theology they enshrine are not in any way demanding an end to all other forms of initiation, particularly infant baptism and adolescent confirmation/affirmation. But they do demand a better organization of our initiatory activities. In particular, we must take seriously the different aspects of Christian formation that are part of baptism, known, in the Roman *Christian Initiation of Adults* as evangelization, catechesis and sacramental formation.

And we cannot misinterpret baptism in order to concentrate some of its meaning on other rites that candidates can experience. Rather, Christian initiation challenges us with the goal that must be striven for: strongly committed and caring Christians. There is no excuse for indiscriminate baptism.

The rites of Christian initiation continuously remind us that each candidate is incorporated into a community. Too often initiatory practices have been conducted in private: candidates have had neither the attention nor the challenge of the community into which they have been supposedly incorporated; the community has not been brought face to face with the zeal of the new convert. Our converts have had to put a special act of faith in the concept that the people of God is visible; the result has been the view that faith is a purely private matter.

Conclusion

You might say: what does all of this have to do with Jesus Christ? It may not seem so but everything that I have said is about Jesus and the way we approach him and follow him. From the first proclamation of the kingdom and the need for repentance and belief we find Jesus forming those who listened to his voice and answered his call. Jesus led the disciples from first commitment, initial conversion, through the formation that lasted several years and that encompassed a number of hurdles--the stormy development of Peter's faith--and one very notable defection--Judas. Finally, the disciples experienced Jesus' death and resurrection and, with the resurrection gift of the Spirit, they began a preaching mission that proclaimed Christ to the world and that announced to all men and women the

opportunity to experience the Lord through conversion and, now, baptism.

Is not this what Christian initiation, no matter how shaped, is about? Is not the model of initiation founded upon the journey of the disciples in the gospel, as they gradually become fully committed followers of Jesus Christ? Those interested in incorporation in the body of Christ, those already so incorporated but not really converted or formed, need Christian formation, which is a journey to Christ. This is what the disciples of Jesus had to do. Those who desire baptism need to integrate their lives and personal stories with the lives of members of the church and the story of the church which continues the Jesus event.²⁶ What kind of church would result from taking initiation seriously? What kind of people would be those men and women who, answering God's call, journey, as did the apostles, for a number of years until, finally, through water and Spirit they experience the death of the Lord and are given a promise of resurrection. What kind of ministers and prophets would these people be who, answering the Lord, are sent to preach to others in the power of the Spirit of the risen Christ? Are we yet those people?

NOTES

- 1 Frank Trippet, "Why Forecasters Flubbed the '70s," *Time*, January 21, 1980, pp. 91.
- 2 The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963, 64-71.
- 3 The development can be observed while the council was yet in session. Following on the, at times jejune, paragraphs of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, are the more probing statements of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964, 14; Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 7 December 1965, 13-14. The responsibilities of official ministers of the church, relative to Christian initiation, are insisted upon in The Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, 28 October 1965, 14; and Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7 December 1965, 6.
- 4 Most conveniently found in *The Rites of the Catholic Church* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 3-11.
- 5 The typical edition was published in Latin in 1972. A study edition was published in its first English draft in 1974. Only in 1978 were those parts of the Christian initiation rites that pertained to a bishop published in a liturgical edition (the English being revised): *The Roman Pontifical* (Rome: International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 1978), pp. 3-52. The most convenient publication for all the rites of initiation--Christian Initiation of Adults, Baptism for Children, Confirmation, etc.--is the publication mentioned in the previous footnote, pp. 3-334.
- 6 The first revision of baptism and confirmation by the Standing Liturgical Commission was made in 1950. This was a very conservative revision, never used. The first major revision was made in 1970. A further revision, with the addition of the New Affirmation rites, was published in 1973. This was followed by a further revision in 1975 and a final revision for the *Proposed Book of Common Prayer* of 1977. The fully approved rites appear in *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation and the Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 299-314 (baptism); 413-419 (confirmation and other rites of affirmation).
- 7 The revisions were published in the Contemporary Worship series: no. 7, Baptism (1974), no. 8, Affirmation (1975). A further revision of both of these proposed rites was also circulated. The final rites appear in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Mpls: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), pp. 121-125 (baptism); 198-201 (confirmation and rites of affirmation).

- 8 On the origin of this term and its first use by the Christian church see Pierre-Marie Gy, "La notion chretienne d'initiation: Jalons pour une enquete," *La Maison-Dieu* 132 (1977): 33-54; "The Idea of 'Christian Initiation'," *Studia Liturgica* 12 (1977): 172-175.
- 9 Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo, 1978).
- 10 See footnotes 1 and 2 above.
- 11 Cf. the articles by Dionisio Borobio and David Power in *Liturgy and Human Passage*, Concilium 112 (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 85-99, 100-111 respectively.
- 12 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, tr. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1967); *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1979).
- 13 Karl Rahner, *Meditations on the Sacraments*, A Crossroad Book (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), p. 1. The quotation has omitted a very important line that connects Rahner's description of the baptism of infants and adults: "The real and distinguishing characteristic of this sacrament is that here God is dealing with a human being." And later: "A man's actions are always the fruit of the free activity of God within him. . . . Since this is so, a child too can be baptized." Is this is correct way of getting at our passivity before God? No one denies the priority of God's call (Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians have been long condemned). But the fact that the call can be answered and, in fact, should be may be more important for our ecclesiology than we think.
- 14 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, Ministers' Desk Edition (Mpls: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), p. 30.
- 15 *Baptism for Children* 3 (In *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, p. 188).
- 16 Rahner, p. 5. The expression "would have been through baptism, a believer" is strange, because believer reflects the personal side of faith. But Rahner's model is actually infant baptism. Although he is trying to justify infant baptism in this "meditation" here he is trying to justify the use of the liturgical rite of baptism for adults who believe!
- 17 Eugene L. Brand has already broached the question of infant communion for the Lutheran church in 1976: "Baptism and Communion of Infants: A Lutheran View," *Worship* 50 (January 1976): 29-42.
- 18 *Summa Theologiae* III. 72.1.
- 19 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 3: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300) (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 2-3.

- 20 Ibid., p. 3.
- 21 Geoffrey Wainwright, "Christian Initiation in the Ecumenical Movement," *Studia Liturgica* 12 (1977):77.
- 22 Cited in, respectively, footnotes 13 and 14.
- 23 An excellent book on the subject of human freedom before God's call is Alexander Ganoczy, *Becoming Christian: A Theology of Baptism as the Sacrament of Human History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976).
- 24 Christian Initiation, "General Introduction" 1 (in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, p. 3).
- 25 Romans 6; cf. on this Reginald Fuller, "Christian Initiation in the New Testament," in *Made, Not Born* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), esp. pp. 18-21.
- 26 Note the use of story language made by James B. Dunning, "The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Model of Adult Growth," *Worship* 53 (March 1979):142-156.

OUTLINE OF THE RITES OF INITIATION

PERIOD	STAGE	LITURGIES	TIME
PRECATECHUMENATE		<i>Minor Exorcisms*</i> <i>Blessings</i>	
	I. ENTRANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS		
CATECHUMENATE		Celebrations of the Word of God Minor Exorcisms Blessings Anointings <i>Presentations of the:</i> <i>Professions of faith</i> <i>Our Father</i> <i>Ephphetha</i> <i>Recitation of the Profession of Faith</i>	
	II. ELECTION OR ENROLLMENT OF NAMES		1 Lent
PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT (FINAL PREPARATION)			
	1st Scrutiny		3 Lent
	Presentation of the pro- fession of faith		3rd Week
	2nd Scrutiny		4 Lent
	3rd Scrutiny		5 Lent
	Presentation of the Lord's Prayer		5th Week
	Recitation of the pro- fession of faith		Holy Saturday
	Ephphetha		Holy Saturday
	Choosing Christian Name		Holy Saturday
	Anointing		Holy Saturday
	III. CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION		
	BAPTISM		
	CONFIRMATION		
	EUCCHARIST		
PERIOD OF POSTBAPTISMAL CATECHESIS OR MYSTAGOGIA			
	Places of Honor at Eucharist		
	Concluding Celebration		Pentecost Sunday

**Italics are used when it is a question of options*

THE PATTERN OF RCIA

PERIOD	STAGE
<i>Pre-catechumenate; period of evangelization</i>	Entrance into the Order of Catechumens
<p>Catechumenate</p> <p><i>Period of Christian formation of those who have manifested their (initial) faith and who have been made catechumens by the church. Period includes catechesis (=learning of faith, living in faith, prayer in faith and demonstrating faith in apostolic works) within the Christian community. Liturgies of the catechumens are particularly celebrations of the word of God (including the Liturgy of the hours), minor "exorcisms," blessings, anointings, etc.</i></p>	Rite of Election (or Enrollment of Names)
<p>Period of Election. Purification and Enlightenment</p> <p><i>An intense and brief period (usually Lent) of preparation for the sacraments of initiation on Holy Saturday night. Liturgies of the Elect include Scrutinies (3), Presentations of the Creed and of the Our Father, rites of anointing and ephphetha etc.</i></p>	Sacraments of Initiation: Water-Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist
<p>Period of Mystagogia (=postbaptismal formation in sacramental life)</p> <p><i>Now that one is a full member of the church, i.e., the baptismal journey is complete, the neophyte is introduced into the sacramental practice of Christians who themselves have finished their initiation. The Christian life of the catechumen is brought into full flowering through the sacraments of initiation so that now the newly baptized take part in the</i></p>	

full worship and responsibilities of the Christian community.

Although no rite of initiation concludes this period, some type of celebration may be held to mark the end of the postbaptismal catechesis