



Baptism and communion

STEPHEN REYNOLDS

Christendom is dead—I mean, the way of things when the western world identified itself with the Christian religion, and Christian churches claimed whole societies and peoples for their own. Christianity itself is still alive, and I am reckless enough to think that it has a future. But not as the religion privileged by statutory law and social custom, in a world where belonging to a Christian church is an ordinary part of belonging to one’s society and the *sine qua non* of respectability. That was the world of Christendom, and that world is extinct.

What does the death of Christendom have to do with the way we order our life and worship? We are not hindered from assembling in our churches on Sunday or at any other time; Anglicans are as free to perform their services of worship as Muslims, Roman Catholics, Jews, Greek Orthodox, Buddhists, Presbyterians, or any other religious group. So the end of Christendom does not appear to have any serious impact on our liturgy. And indeed, governments and the courts have tended to treat the internal life of the churches as a “no go” zone. Neither the federal government nor the courts show any eagerness to compel the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, or the Pentecostal assemblies, to ordain women as well as men; it seems unlikely in the extreme that they will seek to regulate the number of baptisms, or the proportion of eucharistic celebrations to services of Morning Prayer, that we Anglicans can perform. So our liturgy would seem to be safe from

the consequences of Christendom’s demise.

But the death of Christendom was not a government initiative, nor was it the result of a judicial conspiracy. The Parliament of Canada, the provincial legislatures and the courts merely followed where society at large led the way; and society at large decided long ago that religion was a wholly private matter, without any relevance in public affairs. We are talking about a social, a cultural revolution, not a political program.

The proof lies in a much quieter phenomenon than judicial decisions and governmental policies, a phenomenon which

is taking place in the Christian churches themselves, including our own. In the old world of Christendom, baptism was not only a religious obligation, it also had the nature of a social entitlement. As a result, mainline churches did not feel that they had the moral (or, as is still the case for the Church of England, the legal) right to refuse baptism to anyone. Within the past few years, however, we have begun to notice the appearance of unbaptized adults at our Sunday worship. They come as inquirers, “checking out” our church and the faith we confess to see if we and our faith are really for them. These unbaptized inquirers are in their twenties, thirties and forties—which means that their parents saw no need for baptism and church membership over a generation ago. It is as if a full generation had to pass before those who went unbaptized in the 1950s and 1960s could begin to show up in our midst. For they had to grow up and mature and come to realize for themselves that something might be missing in their lives, and that the something might be Christianity.

But the fact that it was missing at all means that society had already lost the reflexes of Christendom—that Christendom had already failed—when they were infants. The church now stands—and has been standing for some time—in a society where a great many people have, at best, only a secondhand memory of *any* religion. To all intents and purposes, Christianity is new to them, and those who have come to us as inquirers are reconnoitering the Christian religion for the first time in their lives. What we are seeing now are

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people coming out on the other side of Christendom's collapse, where Christianity is not a settled expectation which might as well be accepted, but a possibility which may be worth exploring. In many respects, we are in a situation akin to that of the primitive church, communities at the center of reality and on the fringes of society. We are an ancient option which, *because of* the failure of Christendom, has once again become new.

The very fact that such inquirers are showing up in our pews is, of course, a very good sign. Christendom may be dead, but there is (as I say) life in the old church yet. The arrival of inquirers "not previously baptized" gives us reason to believe that there is—and always was—more to Anglicanism in particular than aerating

white Anglo-Saxon culture with the affluence of religion. Their presence also challenges us to identify what is authentically Christian about Anglicanism, what is at the very center of our life together, for the sake of welcoming them all the more deliberately and including them all the more genuinely.

But that is how the arrival of unbaptized inquirers, in itself a sign of hope, may also be a problem for our church. Identifying "what is authentically Christian about Anglicanism" is no easy task. What makes it difficult, of course, is the sheer diversity of standpoints that Anglicanism harbors. This may be why, in recent years, several parties within the Anglican mix have sought to outflank the diversity by forging a common front and producing quasi-confessional statements of "Anglican essentials."¹ Such statements might make the parties involved feel better about being Anglican, insofar as they can project an Anglicanism which "stands for something"—or rather *against* certain things. But I am not sure that they will make inquirers feel better about us and our faith.

On the contrary, I suspect that confessional formulas are more likely to puzzle inquirers and put them off. For inquirers are not yet part of the internal conversation (or debate) which has given rise to the formulas. One has to be already "in the loop" to figure out the point of the exercise. I am all for the Anglican Church of Canada "standing for something," but I tend to think that the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed together provide a sufficient statement of what it does in truth "stand for" in the confessional sense.

To uphold the two creeds as sufficient statements of faith is, of course, to suggest that "authentic Christianity"—and therefore "authentic Anglicanism"—will include sound belief. But sound belief itself is and always has been much, much more than a matter of knowing and repeating the correct answers to certain doctrinal questions. The church does not have doctrines for the sake of making everybody toe the same ideological line. Doctrines are in place for the sake of *living*: they are meant to enable the whole

community, and each of its members, to grow toward God more deliberately, more authentically and more fruitfully. It is a matter of integrating the way we behave with what we know of God in Christ—and of knowing and loving God in Christ with such consistency that our behavior manifests a pattern of divine grace.

The primary locus of that integration is the public worship of the gathered Christian community. If our Sunday worship does not make it clear that we do indeed "stand for something," promulgating articles of religion will not help the inquirer. But here we encounter the real challenge posed by the presence of such inquirers at our services of worship. We want to make inquirers comfortable with and in our community, so that they will *want* to join us. Name-tags, "welcome teams," inviting visitors to stand up and introduce themselves during the service, after-service coffee hours all help, but only up to a point. There is still the service itself; and if this or that inquirer never comes back after one visit, it is probably not because we failed to be welcoming enough, but because he or she found the liturgy so hard to follow. At the same time, of course, there will be other inquirers who come back and stay with us *because of* the liturgy, because the very mysteriousness of the liturgy made sense to them.

Nevertheless, the liturgy remains an issue simply because our celebration of it is how inquirers first experience us. Do we try to celebrate "inquirer-friendly" liturgy, that is, fit our services to the presence of seekers in order to make them feel more comfortable? Or do we try to practice our worship with such integrity that our very respect for the mystery we celebrate will commend us to them? In other words, just how far do we go in welcoming inquirers?

This question has lately gained a very particular focus around the issue of unrestricted communion, also known as the "open table." That is because celebration of the eucharist has become the norm of Sunday worship in most Anglican parishes. So the question arises: how far do we go in welcoming unbaptized visitors and

OPEN is published four times a year by the Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission. Copy deadlines are March 1, June 1, Sept. 1, and Dec. 1 for publication the following month. Editorial office: Ruth A. Meyers, OPEN Editor, Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 2122 Sheridan Rd., Evanston, IL 60201, office (847) 328-9300, FAX (847) 328-9624, E-MAIL: r-meyers@seabury.edu

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The Associated Parishes, Inc., is a nonprofit organization. Office: PO Box 27141, Baltimore, MD 21230-0141, (410) 752-0877, call before faxing. Membership dues of \$30 per year (\$15 for students) include subscription to OPEN and all brochures.

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Web site

www.associatedparishes.org

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ISSN 1071-5614

inquirers—even as far as inviting them to share in communion?

Answering this question is complicated by the policy of the Anglican Church of Canada. The official position of our church is to welcome everyone *who has been baptized in the name of the Trinity* to receive communion. The presence of unbaptized inquirers at our services has led a good many clergy to query the condition. If we welcome everyone to our services and invite all who show up to share in our worship, how can we suddenly withdraw the invitation at communion-time, just because some of the visitors may not be baptized? Isn't it appropriate to invite everybody present at a celebration of the Holy Eucharist to receive the sacrament, whether they are baptized or not?

Note the wording. The question is not about sharing the eucharist with unbaptized people, if and when they happen to present themselves for communion. In a tacit, almost "closeted" way, we already practice unrestricted communion. The Anglican Church of Canada does not demand that someone produce proof of baptism prior to receiving communion, and most clergy administer the sacrament first and ask questions later (if at all). So the problem is not—or at least, not *immediately*—unrestricted admission to communion. The problem is the issuing of an unrestricted or condition-free *invitation* to communion. It is one thing to share communion with each and every person who comes to the altar, without exception. It is another thing to go out of your way to invite everybody present to share communion, without any conditions. The first way, that of a tacit "open table" in practice, is to uphold the baptismal rule while giving strangers in our midst the benefit of the doubt. The second way, that of a condition-free invitation, is to change the rule itself. It is to alter the official policy of the church—and behind that, the basic identity of the church, what it means to be the church.

There are, of course, several ways of describing the identity of the church, mainly in the way of analogies and metaphors. But none is so *sociologically* exact

as "the assembly of the baptized." Whatever the service of worship we have gathered to perform—Eucharist, Morning or Evening Prayer, a Service of Lessons and Carols—the one constant has been the fact that we have done so precisely as a society of baptized people. That all changes if baptism is no longer the one precondition for communion. The church ceases to be the assembly of the baptized. It becomes instead a caucus of the religiously minded, in which the gospel of Christ may, but need not, be proclaimed.

Advocates of the "open table" most certainly do not intend or want such a bland church. On the contrary, they want to make their parish churches more effective venues of evangelism. So far as the advocates are concerned, requiring inquirers to be baptized in order to share in communion—and excluding them from communion until they *are* baptized—prevents the creation of such an evangelistic community. For if eucharist is a sign and seal of the gospel promises, to exclude anybody from it on any grounds would seem to deny or even betray the gospel which had just been proclaimed.

Not that the advocates of the "open table" question the importance of baptism; it is, they insist, still necessary—but not as the one nonnegotiable condition for eucharist. In effect, baptism would cease to be a (much less *the*) rite of initiation, for those inquirers who choose to be baptized will have already initiated themselves when they decided to receive communion for the first time. Baptism would be more on the order of confirmation, a rite of ratification whereby candidates publicly affirm a commitment already made and acted upon. In that case, baptism could be taken at any point after a person has entered full communion.

But such a view prompts two observations. First of all, whatever some advocates of the "open table" may have said, it will surely become increasingly awkward to justify the *necessity* of baptism. If the sacrament no longer initiates people—if it does not grant new birth, even new creation, but only ratifies a status previously adopted by the candidate through reception of communion—why bother with it at

all? For we would no longer be doing what our baptismal liturgies (both in *The Book of Common Prayer* and in *The Book of Alternative Services*) say that we are doing. Could we then celebrate those liturgies with integrity? Better, it would seem, to suspend or suppress the baptismal liturgies altogether, at least when the candidates are adults, and use (with appropriate modifications) the rites of confirmation.

The divine welcome

Many might wonder why I am making such a fuss about this issue. If we already give communion to those who (we suspect) are unbaptized, what is the problem with issuing a condition-free invitation? Who's kidding whom? The doors of our churches are open to anyone and everyone. If we practice an "open door" policy and welcome everybody to our services, why not practice an "open table" policy and welcome everybody to communion as well? Indeed, since we welcome everybody to our services, don't we have an *obligation* to make them completely welcome? Surely, Jesus himself practiced unrestricted communion, in the sense that he ate and drank with tax-collectors and sinners. Can we, the body of Christ, be any less hospitable and welcoming to seekers who lack (as yet) only a baptismal certificate? Does baptism have to be "the one thing needful" for communion?

Paul. I do not for a moment believe that such questions arise from a low regard for the sacraments. They arise from a high regard for our duty to welcome and include everyone who comes into our midst, and this sense of duty itself arises, I am sure, from a high regard for one seam of the gospel. In this seam, the scriptures bear witness to the inexhaustible abundance of divine mercy and to the God who seeks out and welcomes sinners.

Now, it was the argument of Saint Paul that all human beings, without exception, are sinners (Rom. 5:12). If that is true, some would extend his argument and say that there can be no difference between baptized Christians who regularly share

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in the worship of the church and unbaptized inquirers who are wondering if our God is for them. According to Paul, *of course* our God is for them, for “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11). As Bishop Rowan Williams has said, God does not forgive our sins in order to make us welcome; God forgives our sins *because* God has already welcomed us in Christ.² Forgiveness is a consequence, not a cause, of the divine welcome. In other words, God’s welcome comes with no strings attached. So where do we get off attaching a baptismal rider to our own eucharistic welcome?

As it happens, we get it from Paul—the same Paul who argued that Christ has broken down all the barriers which separate humans. For if “all of you are one in Christ Jesus,” it is because “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27-28). The barriers which separated Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, male and female, were not broken down—and the divided individuals did not become one—until they had actually “clothed themselves with Christ.” And baptism was that clothing.

Paul was not a closet universalist. He certainly believed that God’s invitation was unrestricted when it came to race, ethnic origin, gender and social class. But he also argued that the divine invitation came with a condition. The condition was faith. For unless the invitee believed in the message of the gospel, the invitation was thwarted. Paul, of course, did not think that God could ever be *finally* thwarted. This is why he spoke of God’s *call* rather than of God’s *invitation*. Humans did not come to Christ because they themselves happened to think it might be a good idea; they came because God had chosen and called each one of them by name (Rom. 8:28-30). Nevertheless, whether we speak in terms of call or invitation, it is designed to elicit the response of faith. Paul himself focused on the fiduciary dimension—faith as personal trust in and commitment to God. This

trust-and-commitment was not a warm fuzzy; it had specific doctrinal content. You committed yourself to God because you trusted in the good news that God had raised Jesus from the dead.

So far, so good. Here, however, we need to be wary of anachronism. Living in a North American culture, we take it for granted that faith, like religion, is a private matter, something between you and your conscience (and perhaps your God) alone, and nobody else’s business. Paul, living in the Roman empire around the middle of the first century, did not share this opinion. For him, faith was a public act. Not public in the sense of making a spectacle of it or buttonholing strangers on street corners, but public in the sense of professing that faith in the midst of the community of believers.

We might call it face-to-face faith, where each believer is known as such to other believers by name. How else do we explain the way Paul addresses the church at Corinth, most especially in regard to the way they ate the Lord’s supper? When they came together, several groups remained separated from the rest, “not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:29). In other words, such groups treated other believers in the same assembly as if they were faceless, not really there. The scandal for Paul was not their lack of hospitality so much as their failure to recognize the faith of the brother or sister for whom Christ died. For it was not the mere fact of humanity that made all believers equal in God’s eyes, and as a consequence in the community. It was faith that made them all equal—and faith not only attested in the individual believer’s conscience but also acknowledged in each believer by the community in whose midst she or he professed it. There could be no such thing as an anonymous believer.

In Paul’s teaching, then, the divine invitation was to be welcomed by a public commitment to Christ in faith; and God, having enabled the responding welcome of faith, always welcomed the believer who had accepted the invitation. Now, Paul also saw this divine call or invitation as a calling *out*—out of the ordinary run of humanity, where divisions, rivalries, vio-

lence, and ghettos prevailed—to a new unity where the called were conformed to the image of Christ Jesus. And this conformity to the image of Christ was accomplished through baptism. For Paul understood baptism to be the means by which humans are embodied into the passover of Christ: by immersion in the water one was buried with Christ, and one was raised out of the water as a sharer in Christ’s resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4). If we follow Paul’s lead, then, God’s invitation is an unrestricted invitation to *baptism*, for the sake of sharing in the risen life of the crucified Lord.

The Synoptic Gospels. The church has often seen Paul as having an authority second only to that of Jesus Christ. Some may see that as precisely the point—Christ’s authority comes first, Paul’s second. So we appeal from Paul’s teachings to the teachings and practices of Jesus himself. We have already noted how the Lord welcomed himself into the lives of strangers in order to welcome them into the kingdom of heaven. He barged unbidden into the lives of Simon and Andrew and bade them follow him (Mk. 1:16-18 / Matt. 4:18-20 / Lk. 5:1-11); he sauntered past Levi’s tax booth, called him, and stayed for dinner (Mk. 2:13-17 / Lk. 5:27-32); he walked up to Zacchaeus sitting in a sycamore tree and invited himself to stay at Zacchaeus’s house (Lk. 19:1-10). Jesus initiated the welcome so that others could welcome him into their lives.

But perhaps the term *welcome* is not quite right; it implies a certain passivity at odds with the initiative that Jesus normally displays in the gospels. The problem with portraying Jesus as one who initiated a welcome is revealed when we consider the curious fact that the reverse did not always hold true. According to the gospels, certain individuals took the initiative and tried to welcome themselves into Jesus’ life, only to get a stiff demand in response. In Matthew’s gospel, for example, we hear of “a scribe” who came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” An unnamed disciple said

to Jesus, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matt. 8:19-22). Likewise in the story of the rich young man: he ran up to Jesus, knelt before him, and hailed him as "Good Teacher"—and was slapped down, told to do what he been doing since his youth, and called to sell everything he owned and give the proceeds to the poor (Mk. 10:17-22 / Matt. 19:16-22 / Lk. 18:18-25).

It is almost as if no one could welcome Jesus until he had welcomed them. When he had the initiative, as in the cases of Simon and Andrew, Levi, and Zacchaeus, his invitation was unconditional. When others took the initiative with him, he immediately reversed it and charged them to test themselves. These stories show the flip-side of Christ's "welcome," or rather his call: it was a proactive decision to embrace particular persons by name, not a passive acceptance of just anybody who showed up.

The evangelists do, of course, tell other stories in which Jesus relents when others take the initiative. Perhaps the most spectacular of these other stories is the one which recounts Jesus' encounter with "a Gentile woman of Syrophenician origin" (Mk. 7:24-30 / Matt. 15:21-28). As a Gentile she was by definition a "sinner" (cf. Gal. 2:15), and the accounts of the episode in Mark and Matthew imply that she herself recognized the fact. Nevertheless, she came up to Jesus and begged him to heal her daughter. He ignored her. She persisted, and, in Matthew's version of the story, Jesus was finally moved to tell her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." When the woman still persisted, "he answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the masters' table.'" Such an insight, arising from the faith that Jesus had all too rarely met among his own people, moved him to relent and grant her petition. This was the happy denouement of a story in which Jesus for the most part (we may think) behaved rather badly. His mission was only to "the lost sheep of the house of

Israel"—that is, exclusively to Jews and more particularly to those Jews who had sinned against God's unique covenant with their people. Levi and Zacchaeus, as tax-gatherers, were not representatives of generic humanity; they were "lost sheep of the house of Israel"—Jews who had gone wrong *as children of Abraham*. In other words, Jesus originally confined his welcome to persons of his own religion and ethnic heritage.³

And yet the point of the story of the Syrophenician woman remains—that even Gentiles, who did not belong to "the house of Israel," could have saving faith. In a sense, then, this story marks the moment when Jesus' mission turned out to be universal and his message of salvation became a message for all humanity. But only in a sense. For the gospels show no sign that Jesus followed up on that encounter with the Syrophenician woman in any consistent way. He never sought out a Gentile and invited her or him the way he invited (or welcomed) himself into the lives of Simon and Andrew, Levi, and Zacchaeus. His relations with such Gentiles as the gospels report him encountering were acquiescent rather than active, and his response to them did indeed take the form of "crumbs that fall from their masters' table," rather than full-blown admission into the covenant of salvation.⁴

This may help to explain the most curious aspect of Jesus' encounters with Gentiles—the fact that none of those Gentiles is ever named. The Syrophenician woman, the Gerasene demoniac (Mk. 5:1-20 / Matt. 8:28-9:1), the centurion at Capernaum (Matt. 8:5-13 / Lk. 7:1-10), the Samaritan leper (Lk. 17:18)—all remain anonymous, unlike Simon and Andrew, Levi, Zacchaeus, Jairus, Mary and Martha. It is hard to see how one could make someone else a full partner in a covenant without naming her or him, or practice genuine "commensality" (table fellowship) with the anonymous.⁵ In this light, then, Jesus did not welcome Gentiles so much as make this or that individual Gentile an exception to the rule of his mission—and that rule was, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of

Israel."

To be sure, the gospels also recount episodes where Jesus dealt with Jews, children of Abraham, who are never named—not only the various scribes and Pharisees who challenged him but also those who had faith in his power to heal them and were healed, like the paralytic let down through a hole in the roof (Mk. 2:3-12 / Matt. 9:2-7), the woman who had suffered hemorrhages for twelve years (Mk. 5:25-34 / Matt. 9:20-22 / Lk. 8:43-48), the deaf man with a speech impediment (Mk. 7:31-37), the blind man at Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22-27).

So the evidence of the gospels regarding Jesus' invitation (or welcoming) of others is rather more ambivalent than we might have expected or wanted it to be. We may take his willingness to consort with sinners and outcasts of the Jewish nation and, filtering it through the gospel according to Paul, apply it across the board to all humanity. After all, this is precisely what the church has done ever since the council of Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1-10; cf. Acts 15:1-19).

But this resolution of the ambivalence in Jesus' attitude towards Gentiles is a post-resurrection event. Remember that the great commission in Matthew—"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you"⁶—is a word of the *risen* Jesus. The resurrection was the watershed from which the apostolic church saw the stream of salvation flow out of "the house of Israel" to "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). We thus find ourselves coming back into the orbit of Paul. For it is Paul's interpretation of what Christ means for humanity that allows us to resolve the ambivalence of Jesus' relations with Gentiles (as opposed to his relations with "the children of Abraham") and to assert the universality of God's saving love in Christ.

As I argued above, Paul sees God's love in Christ as an initiative which ex-

pects the response of faith. It is a covenant-making initiative and a covenantal love. That is to say, it is a love which calls for, even as it enables, the beloved to make a public commitment of faith in the community of believers. Even if Jesus himself did not baptize people, he did expect and often demand a commitment of a very public sort when he invited himself into a person's life.

Paul also expected and demanded such a commitment; and what is more, he implied an intimate connection between that commitment and baptism, as in Romans 6. There Paul blasted those who said (or accused him of saying) that we should "continue sin in order that grace may abound." This was impossible, Paul retorted, because believers have "died to sin." How? By means of baptism: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:1-4). I do not think that I am pressing Paul's argument too hard if I say that, in this passage, he considered baptism to be something more than a symbolic representation or confirmation of a person's prior (and private) commitment to Christ. It actually *made* that person a participant in the life of the crucified Lord who is risen again.

Baptism and eucharist

If Paul saw baptism as *making* a person to *be* a participant of the life of Jesus Christ, what relation does it have to the Lord's supper? The question might be dismissed either as purely speculative or as simply futile, because Paul himself nowhere made an explicit connection between the two. But such a dismissal goes too far. It is not a summons to responsible exegesis; it is the despair of all exegesis and undercuts the legitimacy of preaching. For theological exegesis is not merely a matter of thinking the same things as Paul, in the same way as Paul. It

is a matter of thinking *with* Paul, of discerning the principles of his thought and teasing out their implications for issues which confront us in our day. So it is possible to look at Paul's handling of baptismal themes and his discussion of the Lord's supper, then see whether the two concerns have any thread in common. I suggest that they do, in the way Paul deployed the theme of *soma Christou*, the body of Christ.

In Romans and in 1 Corinthians, Paul used the image of the body to deal with the problem of discerning the unity of the church in the face of its members' all too obvious diversity (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12-14; cf. Eph. 4:1-16). One solution to the problem, which seems to have been the favored option at Corinth, was to reject diversity and insist that the possession of one or another quality alone determined who was a real Christian. 1 Corinthians 12-14, where Paul exploited the image systematically, is directed against a group which had identified speaking in tongues as the one and only necessary quality.⁷ Paul would have no truck with such reductionism. He insisted that the unity of the church was to be known precisely in the diversity of its members' gifts and ministries, even as a body was known to be single entity in (not despite) the variety of its organs and limbs. And he specifically linked this unity-in-diversity with baptism:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:12-13)

Baptism incorporates believers into the body of Christ, with the same life's-breath (*pneuma, spiritus*) that animates his risen body; and it is only as the body of Christ by baptism that the diversities which divide humans—such as ethnic heritage ("Jews or Greeks") and social condition ("slaves or free")—are reconciled in a new

principle of unity, namely, Christ's own life.

Now this same image occurs in Paul's earlier discussion of the Lord's supper. As I have already noted, he was outraged by the way certain groups at Corinth excluded other believers when the whole church "came together . . . to eat the Lord's supper" (1 Cor. 11:20). Some gorged themselves on the contents of well-stocked hampers, while others munched on dry bread and still others even went hungry. Paul then reminded the Corinthians of what the Lord Jesus did "on the night when he was betrayed" (1 Cor. 11:23-26). This account of the institution of the Lord's supper is one of the most frequently quoted and analyzed passages in all of Paul's letters. But it is the preamble to his argument, not the point of it. The point is:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves. (1 Cor. 11:27-29)

Modern Christians tend to dislike this passage for its menace. Paul *intended* it to be menacing—but not in such a way as to discourage Christians from receiving communion at all. His purpose was to overbear the exclusionary practices of certain groups at the Lord's supper.

In this light, Paul's remarks about eating and drinking "in an unworthy manner" and "discerning the body" take on a broader, inclusive meaning. The body in question is certainly Christ's body, but that body is the whole community of believers gathered for the Lord's supper. So "discerning the [Lord's] body" means recognizing the one Christ in each and all of his members, and an "unworthy" eating of the supper means any behavior which denies the worth, and thus the dignity, of anyone who has been made a member of the body of Christ. And we

have seen that Paul considered baptism to be the means by which someone is made to be a member of Christ's body.

If this interpretation is faithful to Paul's teaching, it is not hard to tease out the implicit relation between baptism and the Lord's supper. Since baptism makes the individuals *be* members of the body of Christ, baptism is what allows communicants to *discern the body*—and thus to eat and drink the Lord's supper in a *worthy* manner. Whether baptized people always do discern the body is another matter. Clearly, by Paul's account, several groups in the church at Corinth had failed miserably in this respect. But in Pauline terms their sin was not want of hospitality; it was their betrayal of the baptismal truths of their lives as members of Christ's body. It is as if Paul were saying: "Baptism has made you members of the body of Christ. So *be* members of that one body when you come together to eat the Lord's supper with other members of the same body." Baptism had given them the power to discern themselves and all other baptized persons as belonging to Christ; but they had flipped the breaker of that power and so had thrown the Lord's supper into darkness.

This is on the negative side. If we took Paul's strictures to heart, so far from debating whether we should invite everybody to communion, we would be debating the terms for admitting anybody to communion, including ourselves. But what about the positive side of Paul's teaching? In Pauline terms, I said, baptism is what gives communicants the power to "discern the body" and thus to make "a worthy communion." Paul does not tie communion-worthiness to repentance and faith, as the prayer book tradition has done. For Paul, communion-worthiness is tied to discernment of the Lord's body *in the assembly of the baptized community* as its members eat the bread which "is a sharing in the body of Christ" and drink the cup which "is a sharing in the blood of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16).

A question then arises. What kind of discernment is this? Paul, of course, does not address this question. A hint—and

only a hint—of how he might have dealt with it comes in 1 Corinthians 12, when he applies his metaphor of the body to the life of the Christian community. "In the one Spirit," he wrote, "we were all baptized into one body." So discerning the body is an act of inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

In this case, inspiration does not mean the bright-eyed "Aha!" of sudden discovery, such as we commonly (and for the most part naively) associate with writers, composers, artists, inventors and scientists. No, in this case inspiration is more like the act of breathing than the sudden spark of imaginative genius. Call it inspiration-in-ordinary.

Such seems to be the point of Paul's opposition of "flesh" and "the Spirit of Christ" in Romans 8. "You are not in the flesh," he wrote; "you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.... If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Rom. 8:9,11). The Spirit is now the element, so to speak, that the spirit of the baptized person breathes. At the resurrection God will complete the process: our physical bodies (*somata*) will be transformed according to the Spirit from the inside out and become *somata pneumatika*, "spiritual bodies," bodies entirely animated by the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:42-53). But Paul's whole argument turns on his conviction that those who are baptized already have the Spirit breathing within them, as a kind of down payment on the resurrection. And it is this divine life's breath that enables the baptized to discern and honor of the body of Christ when they gather to share the Lord's supper.

"*You receive your own mystery*"

But what is "the body of Christ" that we are supposed to be discerning? A very long history conditioned Christians to focus almost exclusively on the eucharistic elements and to

talk about the presence (or absence) therein of the individual body that was born of Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and buried, and rose again.

The relation of "the eucharistic body of Christ" to "the historical body of Christ" is indeed an unavoidable issue, and not merely because Reformation controversies continue to shadow our ecumenical dialogues. At the same time, the western tradition itself bears witness that the body of Christ has a third dimension beyond the historical and sacramental. If the real body of Christ himself is sacramentally present, it is for the sake of mediating *corpus Christi mysticum*, "the mystical body of Christ." This third dimension is the final, fulfilled significance of the eucharist—and if the theological tradition followed its own rules, this should mean that the *corpus mysticum* provides the category which should govern discourse about the eucharist.

Such was certainly the case for Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa from 395 until his death in 430 and arguably the single most influential theologian in the western tradition. No other teacher of the faith did more to shape how Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants spoke and thought about the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of grace and predestination, the doctrine of baptism, and the nature of theological discourse itself. Curiously enough, though, his treatment of the eucharist has not had anything like the same impact. Part of the reason is that Augustine never devoted a whole treatise, much less a series of treatises, to the topic; he discussed the eucharist only when a text, a correspondent, a line of argument or a festival gave him occasion.

Another and perhaps more telling reason is that, even when he did talk about the eucharist, Augustine had little interest in the issues which would come to obsess the later tradition. Not that he denied the presence of Christ's body in the sacrament. "The bread which you see on the altar," he once told a class of the newly baptized, "when it is sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. The cup, or rather what the cup contains, when

it is sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ.”⁸ But Augustine refused to stop there or even to dwell on the point; he always moved on into the communion, into what the communion itself signified. “If you wish to understand the body of Christ,” he told another group of newly baptized on Pentecost a few years later,

hear the apostle speaking to the faithful: *You are the body of Christ and members of him* [1 Cor. 12:27]. If you are the body of Christ and members of him, your own mystery is placed upon the Lord’s table. You receive your own mystery. To that which you are, you respond “Amen”—and by your response you give your assent. For you hear, “The body of Christ,” and you respond, “Amen.” Be a member of Christ’s body, so that you may speak a true “Amen.”⁹

In this same sermon, Augustine immediately went on to explain in what sense we “receive [our] own mystery” by reference to 1 Corinthians 10:17 (“There is one bread and we, being many, are one body”). “Who is this one bread?” he asked. “The many who are one body.... Be what you behold, and receive what you are.”¹⁰ In other words, Augustine was striving to maintain Paul’s broader, more inclusive understanding of *soma Christou*. The eucharist signified, and was identical with, the body of Christ, yes—but the body of Christ included all the members that had been baptized into the body. Augustine expressed it in his *Discourses on the Gospel of John*:

Let us therefore rejoice and give thanks: not only have you been made Christians, but *Christ*. Do you understand, do you grasp the grace of God that is upon us? Stand in awe and be glad: we have been made Christ! For if he is our head, we are his members; the whole human being is he and we.... The fullness of Christ is therefore head and members. What is it, this head and members? It is Christ and the Church.¹¹

Whatever may have been true of Jesus in the days of his earthly sojourn, there is now no other Christ—Christ has no other body—but Jesus and the community of the Church together, living one common life. *That* is what the eucharist signifies, and that is how we receive our own mystery when we receive the eucharist.

Here we may see the true basis of the church’s rule that one must be baptized in order to be eligible for communion. A sign is not a discrete reality; it depends on the reality which it signifies. Thus, if the eucharist signifies “the whole Christ”—Jesus and his members *together*—it depends upon the communicants’ being real members of the whole Christ; and we have seen how Paul bears witness that baptism creates—makes *be*—that membership, that participation of Christ and mutual relation with him. The eucharist sustains and nourishes what baptism has created anew. If one has not been “born of water and Spirit,” the new creation that the eucharist is designed to feed is not there to receive the nourishment.¹² Baptism, then, generates the condition which makes it possible for a Christian to discern and actually share in the body of Christ. This, in turn, suggests that the eucharist, considered as a sign, not only depends on the reality of the whole body of Christ, but also depends upon baptism, considered as a sign which effects new birth into the order of the new creation that is the body of Christ.

In this light, the call for condition-free invitations to communion—and, *a fortiori*, for the “open table”—become questionable. For what then are we saying about the eucharist? That it signifies the whole Christ, the mutual integrity of Jesus and those who have been baptized into his paschal life? Or that it signifies a sort of holy Sunday brunch where the Christianly minded attest their warm fellow-feeling by sharing blessed bickies and sips of prayed-over plonk? I am not sure who is being served in this way. Are we doing ourselves any but transient favors? Even more to the point, are we doing honest and honorable inquirers any favors? For they come to us seeking “a still more excellent

way” for their lives and, perhaps, for their children’s lives—a way which practices, even as it enables, true integrity in the world whose structures deceive and cultivate self deceit. If we do not practice the eucharist with integrity, if we do not celebrate the mystery with its meaning intact, what are we doing but deceiving ourselves and, worse still, the very inquirers who have come to us because we promised authenticity to them?

Condition-free invitations to communion and “the open table” may not be the way to revive Christianity; they may only be the final rattle of Christendom.

Notes

¹ *Editor’s note*: An allusion to the Canadian alliance amongst evangelicals, charismatics, and the Prayer Book Society which has attempted to claim the mantle of orthodoxy and promote “family values.”

² In an address delivered during the clergy conference of the Diocese of Toronto, University of Guelph, June 1999.

³ Paul appears to recognize this very point at Rom. 15:8: “For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.”

⁴ As John P. Meier remarks concerning Matthew’s presentation of Jesus and Gentiles: “The few Gentiles who do come into contact with Jesus are not objects of Jesus’ missionary outreach; they rather come to him unbidden and humble, realizing they are out of place” (*A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, 1: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* [New York: Doubleday—Anchor Bible Reference Library, 1991], p.64).

⁵ The term *commensality*, designating table-fellowship without conditions, restrictions or rankings, gained currency (and even a kind of vogue) as a result of John Dominic Crossan’s best-selling tome, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediter-*

ranean Jewish Peasant (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991). Crossan argued that commensality was part of Jesus' attempt to inaugurate "the brokerless kingdom."

⁶ Matt. 28:19-20. The Matthean great commission is, of course, a commission to unrestricted *baptism*, paired with a commission to teach. The same may be said about the story of Peter's vision at Joppa and its consequences (Acts 10:9-11:18). Neither is to the point when we are discussing a policy of invitation to communion without conditions, prior to baptism.

⁷ It is worth noting that at the very start of the same letter (1 Cor. 1:11-17) Paul lambasted several rival factions, each of which made the apostolic genealogy of their baptism ("each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ'") the sole defining quality of a real Christian.

⁸ Augustine, *Sermon 227.1*; cf. *Sermon 272.1*: "What you see [on the altar] is bread and a cup. This is what your eyes report to you, but your faith asks to be instructed about the meaning of what you see. The bread is the body of Christ, the cup is the blood of Christ."

⁹ Augustine, *Sermon 272.2*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 272.3.

¹¹ Augustine, *Discourses on the Gospel of John* 21.8. Cf. Augustine, *Homilies on the First Letter of John* 10.3: "The children of God are the body of the only Child of God; and since he is the head and we are the members, there is but one Child of God. So whoever loves the children of God, loves the Child of God; and whoever loves the Child of God, loves the Father—and it is not possible to love the Father unless one loves the Child. Whoever loves the Child, also loves the children of God. And who are the children of God? The members of the Child of God.

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And by loving each makes himself a member, and through love comes to be in the structure of the body of Christ—and there will be one Christ loving himself. For when the members love one another, the body loves itself."

¹² Jn. 3:5; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17 ("So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!").

This article is excerpted from the Introduction to McCausland's Order of Divine Service 2001 (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 2000) and is reprinted by permission of the Anglican Book Centre, 600 Jarvis Street, Toronto M4Y 2J6. Dr. Stephen Reynolds is Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity College, Toronto.

What meaning has infant baptism in a post-Christian world?

JOHN W B HILL

Conformity or intentionality?

In the New Testament, baptism was something that happened for converts, for example, people who heard Peter on the day of Pentecost, the Ethiopian befriended by Philip, the household of Cornelius visited by Peter. They heard the news of what God had done through Jesus, they opened their hearts to accept its implications, they joined the community of disciples, and they began to experience the power of the Spirit. And baptism was the sign and seal of this conversion.

Over the first three centuries or so, the Christian movement continued to develop its wisdom and skill in making disciples, in a process they called “catechumenate,” a process that climaxed in baptism. Christian contacts with non-believers were cultivated with compassion and in response to their spiritual interest, and inquirers were helped to understand something of the story and lifestyle of believers and the costliness of it. If they still wanted to know more and were prepared to undertake the basic disciplines of the Christian life, they were inducted as apprentices—called “catechumens”—and shared the company of the believers who gathered week by week, hearing the scriptures read and taught. The Christian friends who first connected with these apprentices would become their sponsors, testifying to the seriousness of their interest, and then as the apprentices grew in faith and obedience to the way of Christ, the sponsors would have to testify to the authenticity of their devotion. Only then they could be accepted as candidates for baptism, once it was clear they were ready to make a lifelong commitment.

Candidates would then begin to prepare for baptism through prayer and fast-

ing and the testing of their hearts. Customarily, this would come to a climax at the Great Vigil of Easter; they would be baptized and brought into the community as full members, sharing at the Lord’s table. Evidence suggests that parents would also bring their children with them to baptism, a family solidarity that the church had always recognized and supported. During the weeks immediately following their baptism, they would be guided into an appreciation of the sacramental life which they now shared.

Such was the care the church exercised in making disciples. By the time candidates got as far as a decision about baptism, their intentions were usually very clear—something of no little importance considering the weighty responsibility they bore as witnesses to Christ in a hostile society.

But then, as if by some special grace of God, the Roman emperor converted, apparently deciding that the Christian faith was the best tool available for uniting his empire. He actively encouraged the public acceptance of the Christian faith, and soon it was no longer costly to be a Christian—in fact it became costly to hold out against it! Soon, candidates for baptism were no longer being scrutinized concerning their real intentions; they were being accepted in droves because conformity had become the new Christian virtue.

Needless to say, it was not long before the majority of baptismal candidates were infants; all the adults had already been baptized. Eventually, baptism became a matter of conformity, and laws were enacted to ensure that people did not hesitate to bring newborns to the font. This made a lot of sense when the whole culture was professedly Christian. Why leave out the children, when they were loved by God as much as anyone else? In the early middle ages, children were also commu-

nicants, until clergy began to think that the sacrament of the table was holier than the people who came to eat it, and started worrying about children spitting out the bread or spilling the cup.

But with the Enlightenment, things began to change in the so-called Christian world. There was a growing rebellion against the authority of the church, and more and more people opted out of the Christian faith, some by degrees, some by wholesale rejection of its teachings. It became fashionable to be skeptical, and skepticism was one of the foundations of the emerging new authority: the authority of science. By our own day it has become clear that conformity no longer leads people into church membership; people no longer have to opt out of the church. In fact, they have to opt in, consciously and intentionally, if they are going to be Christians in the modern world. We are back to the position of the early church, at least in this respect. It is vitally important that the way we celebrate baptism should reflect and support this new reality: that people become Christians and members of Christ’s church not by conformity but by choice and intention.

Life-stage sacraments (conformity)

The pattern of sacramental life we inherited is one shaped by the long centuries of Christendom and reshaped in the sixteenth-century Reformation. The historic Book of Common Prayer (including the 1962 BCP of the Anglican Church of Canada) offers us an image of human civilization ordered by God’s grace: morning and evening prayer, by which daily life is sanctified; weekly remembrance of the Lord’s death which won for us this Christian civilization; and a series of pastoral offices: Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony, Churching of

Women, Ministry to the Sick, and Burial of the Dead, all of which are geared to the ages and stages of life, sanctifying the times and seasons of our lives from cradle to grave.

The difficulty for us in using such an order today is its assumption of a Christian civilization, in which every citizen will of course share this sanctified cycle of life. When baptism and confirmation are life-stage sacraments, the assumption is that they are celebrated automatically when a person is of the right age. Babies are baptized just because they are babies, even when their parents apparently have no intention of living as members of Christ and his church. Young people are confirmed just because they are the right age, even if their greatest concern happens to be conformity to the youth culture. All of this happens in the radically altered context of a post-Christian culture. In the process, the authentic character of Christian discipleship is quietly betrayed, over and over again, until no one, not even the faithful, really believes what we say any more.

A conversion sacrament (intentionality)

One of the seldom observed characteristics of *The Book of Alternative Services* and of other contemporary revisions of the prayer book, is that the order of Holy Baptism has been moved out of that series of pastoral services that is tied to the life-cycle and now stands as the first of the two gospel sacraments that define the life of the church. What will our sacramental practice look like if it expresses and celebrates the very real phenomenon of the Gospel taking root in people's lives? What will have to change in our practice of the sacraments if they are to express *intentionality* instead of *conformity*, response to God's call instead of capitulation to the pressure of grandparents?

We know we cannot go back to the practice of the early church and pretend that we are a mysterious little movement distinguished for its courage of faith and

its stamina under persecution. Inquirers do not bring great curiosity about the source of this mysterious power; instead they bring a lot of baggage of expectations from past experience or hearsay, and more often than not, they bring wildly corrupted notions of both the church and the Gospel. So we cannot respond to them in the same way the first Christians responded to inquirers. Nevertheless, something like the ancient church's care and thoroughness in making disciples is going to be essential in our ministry from here on in.

Some of us have been working very hard over the past few years to reconstruct the shape of that ministry, a contemporary catechumenate, in the expectation that the day will soon come when inquirers will once again approach us to find an experience of God's grace. They will be people disillusioned with the rat-race of consumer culture and the empty-headed spirituality of new-age trendiness; they will be suspicious of our institutions, to be sure, but hungry for true wisdom and healing power in their daily living. We need to know how to serve them faithfully, how to guide them beyond cynicism to open-hearted trust in the way of Christ, how to incorporate them, step by step, into a community of faith. And that is what a catechumenal ministry is all about.

In the meantime, this vision calls into question our inherited patterns of ministry to people who bring their babies for baptism. The problem is not theirs, for we taught them the path of sacramental conformity. The problem is ours: it is we who must learn to do better and offer these young parents a path toward responsible participation in the community of the covenant.

Some very large hurdles confront us, however. For one, unless our congregations can share this vision, we will only be spinning our wheels. But involving members of the congregation in sponsoring young families for baptism can certainly help to rebuild the vision within the congregation.

Another hurdle is the clash of expectations. Let me name just two. First, there will often be the clash between the expect-

tations of the *parents*, who want to know when the baptism can be scheduled, and *our* expectations that they may need to explore the meaning of discipleship first. Second, there will be the clash between *our* expectation that we must incorporate them, by hook or by crook, into our common life because we cannot turn them away, and the *Gospel's* expectation that only those who take up a cross can follow the way of Christ.

Household Christendom

Another change which *The Book of Alternative Services* has brought to the tradition of the BCP is that instead of having two rites for baptism (one for children and one for "such as are of riper years"), it provides one rite only, although it shows us how to modify the rite when the candidates are too young to answer for themselves. What this makes clear is that normally candidates *are* expected to answer for themselves. When this is not possible, we must face some major questions.

Of course, the prayer book knew this all along. In the 1662 BCP catechism, the explanation of baptism applies only to *adult* baptism, and the question that immediately follows is, "Why then are infants baptized?" The catechism goes on to offer a rationale, but clearly, infant baptism (even if it is the commonest form of baptism) is seen as an exceptional practice, the normative form being the baptism of those who can answer for themselves.

Of course, as we all know, in infant baptism, the parents and sponsors answer for the child, something which they certainly cannot do unless they can first answer for themselves. So our ministry to families bringing children to baptism must begin by *preparing the parents to reaffirm their own baptismal covenant*.

However, my argument for the appropriateness of baptizing all infants during those long centuries of Christian civilization was that you couldn't grow up in that culture without sharing in the Christian world-view; you couldn't be a non-Chris-

tian unless you opted out! Nowadays, *nobody* grows up that way *unless* they live in a household that has a distinctly Christian culture! Is it possible to imagine such a household whose daily life is so shaped by the Christian story, Christian prayer and Christian assumptions that a young child growing up there cannot even imagine not being a Christian? I propose to call this phenomenon “household Christendom.” And I want to propose that a child born into such a household Christendom cannot conceivably be left out of the Christian covenant. That is the situation in which infant baptism is entirely justified. It is not, however, merely a household in which the parents happen to be churchgoers.

At the beginning, I recalled what the New Testament tells us about the circumstances in which baptism was first administered. People heard the news of what God had done through Jesus, they opened their hearts to accept its implications, they joined the community of disciples, and they began to experience the power of the Spirit. And baptism was the sign and seal of this conversion.

Likewise, infant baptism is the sign and seal of the Christian identity of a child who hears, from its earliest days, the story of what God has done through Jesus, whose heart is led to explore the implications of that story, who is physically included in the community of disciples, and who experiences in a child’s way the power of the Holy Spirit. This, I believe, is the meaning of infant baptism in a post-Christian world, and this meaning must replace the popular notion of baptism as inoculation against God’s wrath.

Thus, the other dimension of ministry to parents who bring their children to baptism must be a ministry that guides them in the quest for a Christian household, one in which their baptized infant will grow up with a Christian imagination, conscious of being a child of God and a follower of Jesus Christ, and unable to imagine not being a Christian.

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Books

edited by Elizabeth Morris Downie

Giles, Richard. *Re-pitching the Tent: Reordering the Church Building for Worship and Mission*. Revised and expanded edition. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999. Xv + 255 pages. \$29.95 (paper).

I read *Re-pitching the Tent* with a mixture of delight, enthusiastic interest and discomfort. It wasn’t my friend Richard Giles’s text that made me uncomfortable, but musings the book provoked on the sad state of liturgical reform among us practitioners. I think the discomfort was useful.

Giles has written an important book for anyone who cares about Christian liturgy. It is accessible to a non-expert (and would make a useful study text for a parish committee working to develop liturgy and mission in new ways). The presentation is appealingly provisional, lively, pragmatic and suitably opinionated. With courageous lay and clergy leadership to follow up on it, a parish study using *Re-pitching the Tent* could lead to well considered pastorally and evangelically appropriate change in a congregation.

Will the people who should read this book read it? My strong impression is that many of our liturgist colleagues (clergy, musicians and lay planners of liturgy) regard concerns for church architecture as a pastoral luxury and an irrelevance to mission. In the 1960s and 1970s, buildings were dismissed, as our most outspoken leaders dreamt of church communities without buildings. At the turn of the millennium, the judgment of luxury has a note of discouraged “realism” about how much change is possible. In fact, such dark “pastoral pragmatism” haunts every

aspect of liturgical reform and practice, so I hope that readers of *OPEN* who dismiss questions of liturgical space as irrelevant to their own liturgical practice will read on (and read Giles’s book).

Richard Giles is the energetic and appealingly controversial Dean of the Episcopal Cathedral in Philadelphia. He was invited from England to transform and enliven a tiny downtown congregation of thirty or so people meeting in a collapsing building (a literally collapsing floor in a building that cried out for new vision). Along with his English parish and diocesan responsibilities, he had an at-large assignment from the Archbishop of Canterbury as a missionary and congregational consultant for such work. “Reordering” as he uses the word in his subtitle and throughout the book is the usual Church of England term for remodeling church spaces.

How many AP members are ready to engage a bold, creative conversation about the actual spaces we use for worship? How many times have we heard someone say, “Don’t fight the building, the building always wins?” Louis Weil is the source of that valuable warning; he didn’t intend it as a counsel of resignation or despair, but as an imperative to face the problem of the church building’s implicit messages and liturgical limitations and to remake the building for gospel community.

When Weil was professor of liturgics at Nashotah House, he led worship in the Red Chapel, an alternative, flexible space that allowed that community to develop and share an interactive, transformative experience of eucharist. Weil shared leadership among imaginative colleagues (ordained and lay), included children wholly in the gathering, and clustered everyone close around the table. He tells of that community’s discovery of how radically a holistic enactment of liturgy could touch and change people’s lives. In like vein, Giles asserts that church space that serves liturgy will transform community.



Giles writes convincingly of the cost we pay in mission for the huge effort we put into maintaining worship spaces that do not serve our real work. He writes practically about how to teach a congregation to look at itself, to see and talk about its work and its space. He offers enough concrete suggestions about how to accomplish change that reading this book generates quite specific local thoughts and a path for one's own congregation. Giles is a liturgical optimist who believes in the possibility and power of larger changes than most congregations have yet seen. He believes that the public rituals we enact in our public spaces drive the work of church. He believes that the liturgy *can* embody God's holy transforming power and *can* embolden and train our people to act for justice, compassion, creativity, peace-making and joy throughout their lives.

Repitching the Tent is a call to patient but relentless practical steps toward transforming ourselves through renewing our liturgy. The questions in it could easily stir up conflict and bring confusion and pain. Along with confusion and pain, conflict leads us toward process, education, conversation and discovery. Giles observes (with Speed Leas, Nancy Ammerman and others) that clergy who are untrained in managing conflict and become conflict-averse cannot touch the healing and creative potential of conflict or work for positive change.

I recall many occasions when colleagues, people who care deeply about liturgy, have gone quickly to one of two stopping points—"Been there, done that; we moved our altar twenty years ago"; or "Our space is a terrible problem, but there's nothing more we can do until certain people die."

These are not remarks about church furniture or architecture, they are declarations of our commitment (or lack of it) to the power of liturgy to shape and change people's lives and experience of God. The familiar dispirited refrains raise grave questions about liturgical reform. Do we trust its practical, spiritual and evangelical value? Are we committed to making our liturgy a place for people to discover

together new, braver, more creative selves by meeting God present in the holy community at prayer? Or are we content with sacraments that offer only therapeutic and individualistic comfort and encouragement, or a theological significance that hardly anyone can actually discern?

The 1979 prayer book is an unfinished work of reform. It was a textual reform that did not systematically address practice. It is a verbal reform of sacramental prayers with little or no systematic address of the matter of sacrament. Inherited spaces shaped the 1979 texts toward old 1928 models. In buildings that severely limit participation, we continue an old liturgy that valued ideas and interpretation of experience over experience itself.

Most Episcopal liturgies are observed passively from a distance by all but the few vested leaders. Reasonably progressive, well-intentioned, Rite II Episcopal congregations symbolize or represent the liturgy they actually intend to present. Visible actions of the clergy and assistants "on the altar" symbolize invisible (theoretical? imagined? symbolized?) actions of the whole people. How can our wholly delegated and physically distanced ritual re-present or even symbolize actions of the whole people? When do our people speak? When do they touch one another or sacred symbols? How do they move? What is the dynamic between scripted and unscripted words and action? When in our usual liturgy do we experience the whole people gathering and moving together into Christ?

Space is not ultimately about taste or ideas. People experience and respond to space with feelings and behaviors; the implicit flow of eye and traffic, the light and sound of particular space change the character of the assemblies in the space. Think of how flat a liturgy in a carpeted, windowless hotel conference room can feel. Compare spaces that seem to invite prayer, movement, singing, spaces in which strangers look promising and familiar people look more alive. Good space opens an assembly's readiness to participate in God's acts of salvation. Difficult space does not prevent us from meeting

God, but can significantly impede our readiness, our response, our listening.

Giles argues that intentional ordering of space and furniture marks the authenticity and faithfulness of Catholic Christians (since in every previous generation since we first had buildings, we have remade church buildings to serve our theology and mission). And he argues that buildings which do not empower us to enact our mission will hinder us (and even more hinder our visitors) from experiencing it. Serious missionary sense won't leave us content with buildings that severely compromise our effectiveness as missionaries. Given our church's huge capital investment in buildings and the enormous annual commitment we make keep them up, our choice is literally paying to support mission or paying to hamper it.

I strongly recommend this book for any church leader or any congregation that cares about the vitality and integrity of congregational life. Read it whether or not you think you are interested in space and architecture. It is a book about community, about experience in liturgy, and about the whole enterprise of bringing community to life by good liturgy. Richard Giles's writing voice is compassionate, quick, contradictory, witty, impassioned, opinionated, persistent, curious, observant and intuitive. Occasionally he's funny, always interesting, but alongside his helpful effort to captivate us, Giles never falters in arguing on historical and theological grounds that reordering space will be a priority in any truly missionary church.

Re-pitching the Tent isn't the last word. Other tastes and other cultural sensitivities might teach us startling different lessons, and there are evident gaps such as no real discussion of natural acoustics or natural light, and no arguments pro and con about amplification. Other gaps I noticed included one mislabeled photo (Pennant Malangel in Wales, bottom of p. 108, is identified as St. Paul, Willington Quay, Wallsend). The index doesn't always help find ideas and places I had already read and wanted to find again. My sense is that the book was created with a

suitable sense of urgency and is meant to engage and challenge us to do our own work. I hope *Re-pitching the Tent* is an early new word in a large conversation and larger project, the project of fully enacting our uncompleted reform of the liturgy.

DONALD SCHELL
Rector

St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church
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d' Aquili, Eugene, and Newberg, Andrew B. *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience*. Theology and the Sciences. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. 240 pp. \$20.00 (paper).

Some books provide a structure for insights still unfamiliar or which lie just beyond the reach of one's grasp. Other books offer a careful structure and a versatile vocabulary for what is known intuitively or experientially. Less frequently a book may lay bare new perspectives, perhaps even chart novel approaches. This remarkable little book—comprising just 210 closely written pages, with 18 more for endnotes and index—does all that and more.

The authors, colleagues and professors, one of psychiatry and the other of radiology and psychiatry, at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, harvest twenty-five years of research in the neuro-physiology of religious experience to offer this engaging study of the biological realities that underlie and shape religious experience. How does the mind experience the sacred? Why does the mind create myth? What makes something spiritual? Why are religious experiences so powerful? Is myth-making, even engagement in ritual, a necessary—perhaps even predictable—moment in the evolution of human knowing, or of human being?

The study begins with a surprisingly perceptive overview of theology and its universal quest for answers to the questions: “Why are we here?”; “How does the universe work?”; “What determines good and evil?” Having outlined the pa-

rameters of the theological enterprise in careful, broad strokes, the authors proceed, using scientific language accessible to patient and thoughtful liturgists, to discover how the brain is involved in mystical experiences, mapping the functions of the brain and exploring the biological structures relevant to experience, emotion and cognition.

There is much here with profound implications for our understanding of ritual, the shaping of liturgy, and the ceremonial nurture of the human spirit. Chapters on myth-making, ritual and liturgy, meditation and near-death experiences attempt to understand what is happening in the brain and to measure the changes in the rest of the body that accompany the various brain states involved.

Practitioners (for good or evil) in ev-

ery age and place have known the power of myth and ritual. For the most part they have used their instincts, intuitions and guesswork more or less consciously to shape the religious experience of their peers. This exhilarating and fascinating book provides parameters to challenge and hold accountable those of us who share the custody of the people's ritual life, it offers a vocabulary that goes far to keep us honest in the service of that custody, and it keeps us aware in a refreshing and poignant way that we are mystery in the face of the tremendous and spellbinding mystery whom we approach, fascinated and trembling.

BRUCE JENNEKER
Associate Rector
Trinity Church

Copley Square, Boston, Massachusetts

We'd hate to see you go!

We regret that for a number of members this will be their last copy of *OPEN*. Please take a minute to check the address block on the back cover. The top line gives the month and year of your membership expiration. For a number of readers it says “LAST COPY”.

Given the part-time nature of the Coordinator position and the press of other business, renewal notices are mailed in the anniversary month, and there is no other follow-up. Please don't lose your membership by inadvertence or mail error. Please check the address with each issue and renew in a timely fashion.

There are important issues facing the Church on which you will find *OPEN* of use and interest.

Music

by Mark A. DeW. Howe

Christmas is about to end as I write this, and last night the choir I direct had its first practice of the new year. They're a committed bunch, and they have a considerable degree of consensus as to the demands of their vocation as a musical ensemble: prayer, praise, heightened corporate expression of joy or sadness, and the capacity of sung words to be more precise than spoken ones. In early November we were able to sing J. S. Bach's early funeral cantata *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit (God's Time Is the Best)* in the context of Evening Prayer for the feast of All Faithful Departed, and in early December we offered the community a sung liturgy reflecting on Advent themes. The point of these events was not to present one dazzling and heroic musical show after another, but rather to invite others to join in sung prayer.

The liturgies, and the public response to them, were exhilarating. But preparing for them was exhausting, both to me and to the choir, many of whom had commitments to family, to other arenas of parish life, and to the wider community. The common reservoir of energy that we would need to prepare for Christmas was sorely depleted, and by mid-December attendance at rehearsals was down. Nor could I find instrumentalists to play on the evening of December 24. I had, in fact, planned quite a lot of elaborate music for the late-evening service—music that was to be accompanied by a small orchestra. To make matters worse, the constant commercial soundtrack of Christmas music in the air (beginning, as we all know, before Advent) seemed to wear more abrasively on me this year than it usually does.

Members of the parish were persistent in asking me what the Christmas Eve repertoire would be, and I was grouchy

unwilling to answer their queries until I was sure I had the necessary forces lined up. Musical expectations are high in this cathedral parish; after all, people travel from all over the state to St. Paul's on Christmas Eve and on Easter morning to hear "the glorious music." What irked me was not the fatigue, either of me or the choir, but the twice-a-year commodity-consumers appearing for a concert; what I wanted, rather, was to help people pray.

While talking to some friends about this, one said to me, "Mark, quit complaining about the Christmas-and-Easter crowd. People will come to a show if a show's what you're putting on."

Oof! That stung! Yes: I had to admit that the best way to encourage the concert-consumers was, in fact, to put on a show. Conversely, the best way to encourage deep prayer at the mystery of God's incarnation was to keep things uncomplicated. It was easy to invite people into sung prayer outside of the major feasts, but until this conversation I'd been assuming that Christmas and Easter were, in fact, occasions for concerts.

So I changed plans. We did not have a string orchestra this year, for the first time in anyone's memory, nor did we do an overblown program of music. We sang good, nourishing and simple fare from *The Oxford Book of Carols*, a Russian setting of the Song of Mary, a rousing chorus from early 20th-century France, an austere setting of an early English carol. And, of course, the choir and congregation together sang favorites from the hymnal and other sources.

There were, as usual, plenty of visitors and home-comers in the congregation that evening. I don't know whether anyone missed the orchestra, though one choir member told me the other day that it was much easier to focus on prayer this Christmas Eve. The liturgy was no less festive than it might have been otherwise: festive does not necessarily mean elaborate; certainly for the choir I directed on Christmas Eve, festive meant direct, unfussy and competent.



Editor's note

This combined winter-spring issue of *OPEN* comes to you very belatedly, with apologies from your editor. The summer issue now underway will include the Santa Fe Statement from the April meeting of Associated Parishes Council, along with articles exploring the issues raised by the statement. The statement is now available on the AP website:

<http://www.associatedparishes.org>

It is my hope with the summer and fall issues to return to a more regular schedule of publication.

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A change of direction for ADLMC?

NIGEL RENTON

Last year's conference of the Association of Diocesan Liturgy and Music Commissions (ADLMC), in Bloomington, Minnesota, close to the Minneapolis/St. Paul airport, had a relatively small attendance, but the business meetings were certainly lively. We had much to talk about.

With over one hundred attendees in some years, registration fees could pay travel expenses, registration and honoraria for the keynote speaker and several presenters. Those days appear to be over.

The 2000 conference was originally scheduled to be held at Kanuga in beautiful western North Carolina, but the staff at Kanuga could not meet ADLMC's requirements, hence the return to Minnesota.

In heated discussions over the years, and with various resolutions, one faction had virtually demanded the comforts of a pretty good hotel in a hub city, while others preferred less expensive board and lodging at a conference center, usually out of town.

Developments reached a critical point last year. The prospect of a lower attendance meant either an early decision to increase the registration fee to a point of diminishing returns, or reducing the number of those paid to attend as speakers or workshop leaders, the chosen solution. The problem with having no guest speakers is that there is then even less incentive for folks to attend. No figures have been released yet, but it was expected that the recent conference would be a money-loser, as there were fewer than fifty registrants.

There are several reasons why numbers have been falling at ADLMC's annual meetings, including:

1. Return visits to dioceses that have previously hosted meetings. One of the joys of earlier meetings is that we would

be invited to different dioceses, especially ones where there was an opportunity to meet Episcopalians who were glad to hear the word about the 1979 prayer book.

2. The disbanding of liturgy and music commissions in some dioceses as the 1979 prayer book became better known and more widely used.

3. Increasing expense, especially when the conferences are held in hotel space.

4. Less willingness by some bishops and dioceses to fund travel to attend conferences in these days of list-serves and other "virtual" conferences.

Increasingly, those attending the conferences have been individual members with an abiding passion for liturgy, and fewer and fewer attendees accredited as representatives of their dioceses.

Meantime, at the Executive Committee's 2000 meeting in Dallas, a new vision emerged. The newsletter which followed treated the Executive Committee conclusions as a *fait accompli*. One paragraph read:

This is a new organization now with a new purpose. This calls for a new name. It is "Transforming Common Worship." The Executive Committee will now become the Council.

The change was symbolized in the newsletter's letterhead, with "ADLMC" shown in faded type and the new name imprinted on top of it. Underneath that were the words "Formerly The Association of Diocesan Liturgy and Music Commissions." The President became *Convenor*. Under the heading *New Name...New Look...New Vision...* was a clearly-worded mission statement:

We are called to be Christ's body in the world—

*a people of justice and truth
created in baptism and held in life-giving relationship by our baptismal promises*

*a feasting and rejoicing community
gathered around the table to be nurtured and transformed by Word and Sacrament*

We are the Church.

The mission of Transforming Common Worship is to embody this vision and equip the church to fulfill it.

Our ministry is to create for those with a passion for worship a safe context for dialogue, collaboration and mutual encouragement through

*annual gatherings
curriculum development
electronic and print communications
consultation teams
grassroots efforts*

There isn't very much in this with which any active member of Associated Parishes would wish to disagree. However, it does make one wonder whether we need two parallel organizations to accomplish similar goals.

When the changes were discussed (at great length) at the conference in November, there were many voices. The main criticism of the Executive Committee was that it had taken decisions beyond its assigned role, and that the exciting new vision should first have been brought to the conference, with all the necessary planning to make proper changes in the organization's bylaws. The chief concern about the new mission statement was that it seemed to leave very little place for diocesan commissions. While the point that there were fewer and fewer dioceses sending representation was well taken, nevertheless there were a number of folk present whose way was being paid by their diocese; to them, and to those whose dioceses had not seen fit to furnish fund-

ing, it seemed important to retain that aspect of ADLMC's previous life.

After a good night's rest, a sensible conclusion was reached on the last full day. The Executive Committee agreed to do some further thinking at its forthcoming meeting and to bring back specific recommendations, notified in advance, to the 2001 conference. Many apologies were made and accepted graciously, and the conference then voted overwhelmingly in favor of a motion of confidence in the actions of the Executive Committee.

On a personal note, having attended twenty-five consecutive annual conferences, I should be greatly distressed if they should come to an end; and I pray that those we have charged with the responsibility of resolving the organization's problems will find the inspiration to continue these annual gatherings in some form or other.

Following the winter meeting of the Executive Committee, a newsletter was published and the website updated. Plans are underway for ADLMC/TCW to meet jointly with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music over the weekend of November 9-11 and then to continue with its own meeting until the following Tuesday.

Nigel Renton is a member of Associated Parishes Council.

Continued from page 20

postmodern, suspicious of all motives and all claims of truth, dismissive of all statements except the most limited "I feel..." or "I think..." comments. In face of such skepticism, there is a temptation to pull up the drawbridge and circle the faithful. The challenge is to remember that this is the age to which we are called to proclaim the Good News of faith, hope and love. Wright observes:

And how long must it be before we learn that our task as Christians is to be in the front row of constructing the post-postmodern world? The individual *angst* of the 1960s has become the corporate and cultural *angst* of the 1990s. What is the Christian answer to it? The Christian answer is the love of God, which goes through death and out the other side. What is missing from the postmodern equation is, of course, love. The radical hermeneutic of suspicion that characterizes post-modernity is essentially nihilistic, denying the very possibility of creative or healing love. In the cross and resurrection of Jesus we find the answer: the God who made the world is revealed in terms of a self-giving love that no hermeneutic of suspicion can ever touch; in a Self that found itself by giving itself away; in a Story that was never manipulative, but always healing and recreating; in a Reality that can truly be known, a Reality that, being known, reveals a new dimension of knowledge, the dimension of loving and being loved.

We have a chance, as this century draws to a close, to announce this message to the world that so badly needs it. I believe we have this as our vocation: to tell the story, to live by the symbols, to act out the praxis, and to answer the questions in such a way as to become, in ourselves and our mission to God's work, the answer to the prayer that now rises, not just from one puzzled psalmist, but from the whole human race and indeed the whole of God's creation: "O send out your light and your truth; let them lead

me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling."²

The entire set of lectures bears searching out and reading. In his two big books, Wright has drawn a convincing picture of the first-century world of Judaism and Greco/Roman paganism in which Jesus as portrayed in the synoptic gospels can be seen and understood (without the artificial skepticism of the Jesus Seminar and some other contemporary writers) as the one who fulfills Israel's vocation and God's promises through dying where, when and as he died. The lectures given at Sewanee show that the resurrection is truly cosmic in the same manner (*pace* the fundamentalists who try to make it a simple resuscitation of a corpse and the modernists who dismiss its historical value and cosmic character in other ways). We don't have language to picture or describe what happened, but Wright makes a strong case that the church and its mission from earliest days can be understood best as based on some such event.

The church is called to show this kind of new life in its worship and fellowship and to empower the individual believer to incarnate such a vision in everyday life. Then we would reach people as the early church reached people and draw them into the new life. Such a vision would demand a different attitude to the surrounding society and a different way of being the church and individual believers in the world. This is already happening in some places. I hope that AP and its members can point to such new visions and provide tools to build such a new church. With this kind of renewed story, this kind of transformed vision, and worship which incarnates such newness, the mission of the church can move forward. Doubling in size may be too little!

Notes

¹ *Sewanee Theological Review* 41 (1998): 142.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 154-5.

Ron Miller is Coordinator of Associated Parishes.

Water, element and elemental,
paired with Triune name—
so unspeakable a gift:
pure grace.

Splash of promise; watery embrace; wet kiss of welcome—

wet, yet fire-filled
reflecting dove's descent and blazing tongues
Spirit put within

—by God

—and we are Spirit-born.

Spirit-laced, this saving flood.

A celestial flood:
the watery demarcation
of vice's end
and virtue's start,

the pool of reconciliation
for a parched world,

the water-walk
of newness.

The purifying wave
a bath in blood,
a washing like no other:

a holy dipping in God-sprinkled water
that cleanses
skin
and soul
and heart.

And so we enter the living fount,
the source of all glories,
the womb for sacramental birth,
the holy, certain flow
from tide of death
to splay of life.

We enter that we may die and live;
we enter that we may know Resurrection:

that, dripping like Christ,
drenched with Christ,
dripping *Christ*,

we may rise again—

anew,
awash in grace,
our spirits freshly born.

Anne Kirchmier, a recent graduate of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois, is a participant in the "Transition into Ministry" program at Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia.

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20/20 vision?

RON MILLER

The Denver General Convention called on the Episcopal Church to commit itself to double in size by 2020. Success at this challenge will transform the church, but such success will come only through a new way of thinking about and living out the Gospel. I suspect that the church is indeed on the brink of a new period of life with great potential and with a great need for the renewal of its life and of its mission in the world Christ came to save.

AP's full name is the Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission. For much of our first fifty-five years, major attention was focused on the renewal of corporate worship, its practice and its resources. Although such attention to the renewal of worship will continue to be necessary, it seems to me important for us to focus on the "mission" part of our title.

"Living the Covenant," the 1999 conference cosponsored by Associated Parishes, gave valuable attention principally to ministries in the church, with less attention to mission in the world. We still need to rethink the ministry of all the baptized as we move into this new century, but there is also need to rethink and reformulate the basis of those ministries we are called to live out and the message we are called to proclaim in this new world. Who are we as God's people, how are we called to live, and what are we to say to those who ask, "Why we are the way we are?" Questions like these have a renewed urgency as the old liberal convictions lose their certainty. I found some answers in N. T. Wright's "The Resurrection of the Messiah," the William Porcher DuBose Lectures given at Sewanee in October 1997 and reprinted in the Easter 1998 issue of the *Sewanee Theological Journal*. He has also covered much of the same ground in his recent book, *The Challenge of Jesus*, but the argument is clearer in the Sewanee lectures.

There seems to be a failure of nerve in understanding how and why we should address the contemporary world and a lack of vision of what makes us different as Christians. Wright describes the modernity which many of us, myself included, absorbed with our education in college and seminary, and shows why this was challenged by what came after modernity. I quote from his third lecture, "Resurrection and the Postmodern Dilemma":

Modernity implied a narrative about the way the world was. It was essentially an eschatological story... the industrial revolution and the philosophical enlightenment would burst upon the world, bringing a new era of blessing for all... Modernity [now] stands condemned of building a new tower of Babel. Postmodernity has gone on to claim, primarily with this great metanarrative as the example, that ALL metanarratives are suspect. They are all power games. Collapsing reality, deconstructing selfhood, and the death of the metanarrative—these are the keys to understanding postmodernity. It is a ruthless application of the hermeneutic of suspicion to everything that the post-Enlightenment western world has held dear.¹

Many of us have plugged away in parish ministry and life in general as though the old certainties still worked. No one stands up during sermons and accuses us of "modernity" or of being "old-fashioned" (and these terms now mean the same thing), but there is an occasional attitude among the younger clergy and laity in the church that the church doesn't "get it." What then must those outside the community of faith believe about us? One sometimes wonders if "getting it" is understood to mean being

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