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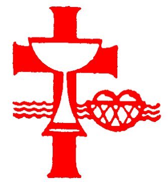

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Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission: Standing at the threshold of the years

MAYLANNE MAYBEE

A great debate raged among participants in the Associated Parishes Council e-list (as distinct from the members e-list) just prior to our annual meeting this spring at the Sorrento Centre in British Columbia. Should we do an in-depth review of the texts of past AP statements in order to be true to what we have stood for over the years? Or should we take stock instead of our passion and the church's challenge *now*? After all, said one Council member, "If our markers are the 1979 BCP and the AP statements for the past 25 years, we may close off some significant parts of our conversation."

Well, the agenda setters opted for both/and–let's review our past statements, *and* let's bring our current passions and interests to bear, and *then* let's look toward the future where they point us. As one who was feeling some malaise about the confusion and fuzziness in recent Council discussions, I volunteered to review and comment on the fifteen past statements issued by the AP Council since 1969. What a task that was!

My first encounter with "Associated Parishes" was at a conference on "The Deacon" that I attended at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana, in 1981. At the time I had my infant son with me. He has grown up and matured since that time, and so, in its own way, has "AP."

It was at that conference that I discovered the so-called "Wewoka Statement" issued by AP Council in 1977:

> The AP Council is committed to the renewal of the order of deacon as a full, normal ministry in the church, alongside the priesthood. . . . We feel that candidates for the priesthood should be ordained directly to that order. Deacons should be eligible to be elected as bishop and ordained directly to that order.

I had never heard of "Wewoka" before, and initially the title made more

Inside

A First Nations eucharistic prayer 6

Breaking barriers: Rethinking our theology of baptism, by Donald Schell 7

The changing face of confirmation, by Linda L. Grenz 11

What does blessing bless? by Charles Hefling 13

Music, by M. Milner Seifert .. 17

By water and by fire, by Sara Miles 20

of an impression on me than the statement! In the end, however, the text of that statement and of the subsequent "Waverly Statement" [1981], also on deacons, provided some of the clarity and direction I was looking for in my vocational journey, and this had a great deal to do with my decision to remain a deacon rather than seek ordination to the priesthood. I suspect AP's ideas and statements have influenced many other people in ways we could only guess.

That same infant son that I brought to South Bend, Indiana, in 1981 received his first communion at age two and a half. Without prompting on my part, he simply put out his hands for the bread one Sunday and became a communicant. The next summer, while on vacation and away from home, he was refused communion by a priest "of the old school" and was grief stricken. "I want the wound bwead!" he cried, wrapping his fat little fingers around the brass communion rail. "I want the bwead of heaven!" Fifteen years earlier, AP had foreseen such a problem and had led the way by insisting that children should be admitted to communion after baptism: "We believe our children should not be able to remember when they had not received communion. When they were baptized they were admitted to the *koinonia*, and the *koinonia* expresses its commonness in the eucharistic meal." [1969 statement on the admission of children to communion]

As one Council member pointed out, sometimes our statements have been timely and effective, sometimes avant-garde, and usually well written. They have at times led the church in the right direction. We don't draft and issue statements unless there is a clear or emergent consensus, and meetings without a statement are by no means fruitless.

Behind many of AP's pronouncements lies a vision of the centrality of baptism. Baptism is full initiation into the Christian communion. Therefore, children should be admitted directly to communion after baptism [1969]. Therefore, the church should ordain persons directly to the order to which they have been called: "The only sacramental prerequisite for ordaining a bishop, priest or deacon is baptism. All members of the church should be eligible for ordination directly to any of the three orders." [1992 Toronto Statement on direct ordination]

I would later learn that "AP" was started by a group of clergy who, in despair over Matins at the 11:00 a.m. Sunday service, sought to restore the eucharist as the main Sunday service and to introduce a Book of Common Prayer that reflected the core principles of the liturgical movement. Upon review, the first wave of statements from the AP Council following the appearance of the "new" BCP in the Episcopal Church in the USA seemed to be about cleaning up the cosmic crud that had accumulated in Anglican liturgy:

> There should be one prayer book, for "in our oneness of book and church we have unity without uniformity; we have order without rigidity." [1977 Prayer Book Statement]

The *filioque* clause should be removed from the Nicene Creed, as an "intrusion" that is and has been "a scandal to all Christians of the eastern church" and "a source of embarrassment to some in our own church." [1978 New Orleans Statement]

> There should be no more confusion relating to Christian initiation and the reception of holy communion. [1982 Resolution on baptism]

There was an elegant simplicity to this vision of the church's life and mission, which in turn opened up space for greater variety in language about God and people and for richer liturgical expression.

The AP Council's next project was to tackle the language of worship. The 1986 Lone Mountain Statement on inclusive language prescribed that:

· Language which applies to human beings should "indisputably refer to human beings, rather than males or females."

· Language which applies to God should "employ feminine as well as masculine symbols and images" and should not "depersonalize" God.

· At the same time, the Church's understanding of God as Trinity in unity should be maintained and respected, and the traditional formula for baptism, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," should be kept.

· Finally, the language of the Nicene Creed should be unambiguous about God's full and free participation in human nature and about Mary's active participation in the Incarnation, and should avoid the masculine pronoun for the Holy Spirit.

Space and symbols used in worship should be clear and uncluttered. Church spaces for worship should invite focus on the principal symbols of wine, water, the Word and God's people. Bread should smell and look like bread. Water for baptism should be copious. Vestments and

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furniture should be made of honest material and be designed for their intended use–altars as tables, fonts as places of abundant water (not as vases or planters!) [1989 Gold Bar Statement on art and architecture]

Later statements show an increasing concern for social justice, care for the environment, and mission, though these themes are by no means absent in earlier statements. They present a point of view that departs radically from an English-village, chaplaincy view of church life that emphasizes individual salvation and personal, private piety.

> In Latin America the Anglican churches are developing their own identity. Several of them are moving toward self-determination. This movement stands firmly within Anglican tradition, which includes the right of national churches to develop their own liturgies, pastoral styles, and methods of theological reflection. [1988 Cuernavaca Statement on cultural diversity].

> We see evangelism in terms of unselfish spiritual awakening in which we proclaim the good news of God's love in Christ to a world greatly in need of reconciliation. . . . If we are to answer the call to evangelization, we need to become a people of humility and love, confident in our own standing in God's grace. That can happen if we become the church which the liturgy proclaims us to be: the people of the baptismal covenant, formed by word and sacrament. [1990 Statement on the Decade of Evangelism]

The first AP Council meeting that I attended was in Rochester, New York, in 1991, when it made, in my opinion, one of the more forgettable statements on Supplemental Liturgical Materials, about which I knew nothing at the time.

In retrospect, I believe the Honey Creek Statement made in 1993 marked a turning point in the life of AP Council. That was the meeting where we wrestled with questions of the environment, the daily office, the service of celebration of a new ministry, non-verbal culture and print culture in the church. Again we were able to tie these disparate issues together by a shared understanding of the centrality of baptism. Baptism is about priesthood and offering the whole of creation to God through Christ. Baptism is about our vocation to treasure the environment and strive for justice. Baptism challenges the practice of ranking one form of ministry over another.

But the early 90s seemed to mark a sea change in more than the life of the church. It was a time when our economic and political worldview began shifting from state governments to transnational corporations, from national and regional economies to globalization, from modernism to postmodernism. The Honey Creek Statement wasn't just about the centrality of baptism, but about mourning "the loss of old certainties and familiar liturgical forms." It was a time for affirming "the power of the Holy Spirit, moving over and through chaos, to transform our lives and way of being the church."

In 1996, we met in Fort Worth, Texas. No statement was issued that year, but we did meet with the Episcopal Women's Caucus and enjoy an unforgettable celebration of the eucharist using images and language from Julian of Norwich. The homily was a reflection on the passage in John where Jesus taught at the synagogue at Capernaum: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. . . . Whoever eats me will live because of me." And many of his disciples said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But those who stayed said, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

The next statement to appear after Honey Creek came eight years later in a quite different tone, emerging out of our 2001 meeting in Santa Fe. At that meeting "our hearts burned within us" as Council members learned about the situation in the Anglican Church of Canada, about its history of embracing and implementing the government's policy of assimilation of Indigenous peoples in order to further its mission.

Our statement called upon the church "to rethink completely its practice and understanding of mission," predicated not solely on individual conversion to a relationship with Jesus, but on the "formation of faithful communities as signs of healing and reconciliation," and "always beginning with God's purpose for creation and the reign of justice on earth."

This year, the Sorrento Statement went even further. The context for our reflections was no longer a sense of despair over Morning Prayer as the Sunday service, but a sense of anguish over the events of September 11, 2001, over the escalating conflict in the Middle East, and over the devastating effects on Indigenous peoples of the legacy of colonialism in which the Anglican Church colluded.

Our theological response continues to be one that asserts the centrality of baptism, but with a deeper understanding of what that might mean. "We call upon all faithful people to make the daily and difficult choice for nonviolent and peacemaking action rather than revenge and violence. In the face of the United States government's reaction to the events of September 11… we call upon our churches to be advocates and agents of justice, respecting the dignity of every human being."

The reaction among our membership–and beyond–to the Sorrento Statement has been very mixed, and mingled among the voices of dismay, anger or support are the words of the disciples at Capernaum: "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

AP Council started with The Book of Common Prayer and found in it the words of life. As this ginger group of theologians and liturgists worked north and south of the border on revised books, we realized that the baptismal rite alone demanded a clear rethinking of our practices of initiation, formation, ministry, architecture and music, congregational life and mission.

Our statements have been about declericalizing and diversifying leadership, about widening the circle of our Christian

communities, about simplifying and enlivening our liturgy, about deepening our sense of mission and our interaction with culture, and more recently, about changing our assumptions about mission and evangelism altogether. It's also interesting to note the omissions and biases. There is no statement that speaks clearly about the episcopate. While there is plenty said about baptism, there is little about the eucharist and what it means to achieve reconciliation through communion. There are no statements that comment specifically on the ordination of women to the priesthood or the episcopate, nor on same-sex unions. None refers to postmodernism, nor to the emergent perspective of "Generation Xers" and "Millennials."

With some notable exceptions, the statements tend to focus on the structures and politics of parish and synodical life in the Episcopal Church in the USA. Prior to the Santa Fe Statement, the views expressed by the AP Council on mission and evangelism paid little attention to the experience and perspectives of those, in North America and the wider communion, who have been recipients rather than agents of the church's mission. And while there is fleeting reference to the environment in some statements, there is no mention at all of the economic context in which we live as a western church, nor of the Jubilee 2000 movement and its powerful focus on global debt which seized the imagination of people of faith around the world.

Some would say that such things are not the business of a think tank about liturgy. And of course, there never has been any expectation that AP statements should be comprehensive, regular or even topical. Nevertheless, until last year the "mission" part of our mandate has tended to be an add-on.

What then are the issues and opportunities presented by these statements and by the current interests and passions of Council members? And what do they suggest for the future agenda of "APLM" (a new form of abbreviation reminding us that mission as well as liturgy falls within our mandate)?

One place to start is simply to examine the extent to which our commitments as represented in these statements have taken root. What's happening in our churches on Sunday mornings? Has the practice and meaning of baptism been transformed as we had hoped, or does baptism essentially continue in the old pattern? What do our spaces look like now? Is there any noticeable trend in the symbols and furniture being used? How well are Christian communities being formed and what new leadership styles–if any–are being developed? Are there any new trends evident in the way we prepare people for the presbyterate? What kind of people are being drawn to the diaconate? Who are we electing as our bishops and how and what are they doing in that office?

While we're at it, we should probably ask whether our past commitments continue to hold the same kind of importance they once did as we move into a new future. For example, while I personally long for the day when direct ordination will be a natural practice of a church in which baptism is seen as the primary sign of a person's identity and commitment, I'm not sure it is as high a priority. We should probably be paying less attention to formal structures and ministerial authority, and more attention to effective ways for creating communities of healing, engaging the entire *laos*, developing and diversifying leadership, discovering anew symbols and rituals that work.

Another direction on which we have already embarked is to deepen our inquiry into the nature of mission and inculturation, and to look for and reinforce the lived connection between liturgy and mission.

Certainly the Council was galvanized in Santa Fe in 2001 by the story of the Anglican Church of Canada as it wrestles with its colonial legacy and seeks to make room for a new relationship–a new *agape*–with a self-determining church of Indigenous People. What was new, however, was that we took it another step by meeting the next year in the interior of British Columbia, where we visited the site of a residential school, spoke with the Indigenous priest in that community about her work, and attended a Sunday liturgy with a local Indigenous congregation.

On that occasion, we did more than observe some form of "inculturation" in which a distinctive people draw from their culture to shape a distinctive style of worship. There were indeed some culturally unique aspects to the service and the space where it was held–banners with eagle feathers, bannock (traditional Native bread) for eucharistic bread, sweetgrass on the altar, and in the eucharistic prayer, a reference to "ancestors" and to God's gift of "salmon and clear rivers." What mattered more, however, is that we were crossing a line, entering unfamiliar territory, and allowing ourselves to see and receive gifts from people *not* just like us . . . a kind of reverse mission.

I believe this movement toward others beyond and unlike ourselves is an urgent project for us and our respective churches. Our Council statements need to emerge not only from the exchange of ideas, but from relationships with people–the kind of people that Jesus would choose as his companions. By doing so, we will learn that it is impossible to compartmentalize the language and shape of baptism and eucharist from God's work of constantly overcoming mutual isolation and individualism, of constantly opening up the possibility of new relatedness. We need to do more of this, when we meet and when we go home to our own neighborhoods and communities.

A third focus for the future of APLM, as suggested in the Fall 2001 issue of *OPEN*, is for us to learn how to be a "practically postmodern church." We need to find ways of articulating the significance of baptism in a context of radical plurality and fundamental uncertainty about the standards of truth, and indeed we have already begun to do so. And we need to understand and practice liturgy not simply as creating a "worship experience" cut off from life and living, but in its original sense as accomplishing a public work–giving due worth to God and offering forgiveness, healing and reconciliation for the entire human household. And perhaps we should be open to doing this with or without another version of The Book of Common Prayer.

If we are going to become a postmodern church, however, we must go about it reflectively and critically, never losing sight that our worldview is defined and limited by the privilege and power we enjoy as North Americans relative to the rest of the world. We need to see the global market economy that forms the backdrop for postmodernism as an idol that offers a simulated unity and a fake eschatology while effectively increasing social and economic disparity among peoples. We need to be aware that postmodernism is a largely western phenomenon and not assume it is a paradigm shift for all peoples of the world.

My son Richard who came with me to the conference on the diaconate in 1981 is now 21, a student of philosophy at McGill University, standing at the threshold of the years. He is still a faithful Christian and Anglican. The Council of Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission, though some 50 years young, is also standing at the threshold of the years, also still faithful to its Christian and Anglican roots. I wonder what statements it will make in the future, and what stories they will tell?

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By water and by fire

Continued from back page

interview, made me take his chair, then went out in broad daylight to find me some milk. And at a political rally held by the leaders of the death squads, a furious young man spat at me. "Whose bastard is that?" he said.

I had no idea what was going to happen. Katie would be born, a miracle. Six months later, in San Francisco, I would hear from a stranger that Ignacio Martin-Baro had been dragged out of his house by the army, along with five other priests and two Christian women, and shot in the head. The next ten years would unfold in a dizzying blend of joy and anguish, as the war lurched to its desperate end, as my two closest friends sickened with AIDS and died, as I fell in and out of love with Katie's father, as my own father died, as Katie stood up and spoke and laughed and reached for more.

Choosing to get pregnant in a war is the closest experience I've had to the experience of getting baptized.

I'd never gone to church in my life until I walked into the small, quiet eight o'clock service at St. Gregory's, San Francisco, early one winter morning. I was forty-six and had no earthly reason to be there. I'd never heard a Gospel reading, never said the Lord's Prayer. My hands shook when I took the chalice.

I drank from it. I ate the bread. I came back until I couldn't stop coming back. For a year and a half I received communion, flooded with hunger and gratitude. I became a member, then a deacon, then set up a free grocery pantry at the church, all so that every week I could be at the altar, feeding others and being fed.

But baptism didn't really feel like my idea: when it first came to me, it seemed dangerous. I would stand there at the table, looking out the doors at the font, a rough slab of rock split open, and try not to see the fresh water spilling forth.

I wept and wept as I felt myself being pulled closer. I wasn't ready. I didn't deserve it. I couldn't understand or control it. I still wasn't really a Christian, I kept protesting. I didn't even know what the Trinity was. Lynn Baird, a priest at St. Gregory's, told me the only question that I had to answer was right there at the beginning of the vows: Do you desire to be baptized? Oh, I desired it so much.

I wanted new life, but I also slipped into the same kind of romantic fantasies I'd had during pregnancy. Sometimes I felt so uplifted by the thought of being special, marked as Christ's own, that I forgot baptism wasn't about me. And it wasn't about the event, the particular day the water would wet me. I was just one of millions of people making a promise to suffer and to love. And God's covenant, like a growing child, was going to be there for the rest of my time on earth.

Nobody gets baptized alone. I walked out the doors to the rock because of the prophetic witness of Martin-Baro, because of that cup of milk on a hot morning in a Salvadoran slum, because beloved friends and total strangers had carried faith for me in the war years when I was unable to feel it. I walked out there because of the people I'd somehow found at St. Gregory's, and Mark, my godfather; because of my missionary grandparents and my atheist parents and Martha, my wife, who taught me how to pray. I walked out because somebody had been tortured and murdered, and because Katie was alive and beautiful.

I was baptized, grateful and undeserving, into the crucifixion of the world. And into living, daily redemption.

Sara Miles is a journalist who lives in San Francisco. This article originally appeared in God's Friends*, the journal of St. Gregory Nyssen Church, San Francisco.*

A First Nations eucharistic prayer

When the Council of Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission met in Sorrento, British Columbia, this spring, we worshiped on Sunday with the parish of Scw'exmx near Merritt, BC. This First Nations community uses the following eucharistic prayer written for the community, blending English and their native language. The transcription of the First Nations words uses a phonetic alphabet developed by the University of Hawaii; a dictionary is published by the University of Montana. The prayer is reprinted here with permission of Mike Watkins (priest in the congregation), who put it together. It is published here as an example of the way in which one congregation is finding its voice in liturgical prayer.

The Lord be with you
Lift up your hearts
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

Xe?l k(w)upi? Sqacze? Kt [God], k(w)uk(w)steyp [we give thanks] for the wonders of creation. K(w)uk(w)steyp for all of creation that sustained and nourished our ancestors in ages past and continues to sustain us now. K(w)uk(w)steyp for the forests, the land, the water, and the salmon which give us life in abundance.

K(w)uk(w)steyp, xe?l k(w)up? Sqacze? kt, for the wisdom of our ancestors that came to this land. They have gone before us and provided us with stories that have guided our lives from generation to generation. K(w)uk(w)steyp for all that was entrusted to our ancestors and handed down to us. K(w)uk(w)steyp for Abraham and Sara and all the guides and prophets that have enriched our faith. Therefore with them and all the saints and ancestors that have served you in every age we say k(w)uk(w)steyp and we raise our voices to proclaim the glory of your name, xe?l k(w)up?

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the highest…Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Xe?l k(w)upi? Sqacze? kt, you are the source of all life and goodness and all of creation praises your holy name. At your appointed time, xe?l k(w)upi?, you sent your Son to us to point out the path for our journey and to travel with us in our healing and growth. Jesus lived as one of us. He taught through stories like our ancestors and welcomed all people to come near him. He was good medicine for those who were sick or whose spirit was broken. He loved those who the community pushed aside. Although he loved greatly he was arrested, crucified and died but death could not hold him. He overcame death through His resurrection so that we might rise with him to new life and come fully to that joyful feast that you have prepared for all people.

In our continuing journey, xe?l k(w)upi?, You have given us a feast as a memorial when on the night before he died Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said: "Take, eat: This is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me." After supper he took the cup of wine and when he had given thanks he gave it to them and said: "Take this all of you, this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me."

In our memorial feast your death and resurrection is proclaimed and we proclaim our faith.

Christ has died
Christ is risen
Christ will come again.

Recalling his death, proclaiming his resurrection and waiting for his coming again in Glory we offer you xe?l k(w)upi? Sqacze? kt these gifts of bread and wine. Send your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts so that they will become for us the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. We receive with heartfelt thanks for your continued favor that you show us and we receive them in memory of all those who have gone before us (especially…….). May we with them come fully to that joyful feast that you have prepared for all people.

Through Christ, with Christ and in Christ, in unity with the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours xe?l k(w)upi? Sqacze? kt '?ekmix el tk '?ekmmix.
Eks y'es

Breaking barriers: Rethinking our theology of baptism

DONALD SCHELL

Breaking barriers frees the transforming power of our sacraments. I discovered this to my shame one Saturday in 1981. Our diocesan jail chaplain and I were offering weekly eucharist in the county jail to the "trusties," prisoners with jail jobs locked up separately from other prisoners and entrusted to do laundry and cook meals for their fellow prisoners.

One Saturday they proudly told us they had permission to serve us lunch after eucharist the next week. I felt sick. Despite our weekly eucharist, I was afraid to eat with them. I told myself I was afraid of getting hepatitis, but I knew this made no sense; I eat in restaurants anywhere without that fear. The vestigial quality of our sacred meal stared me in the face. I valued the barrier that divided me from the prisoners. Eating with them would take the barrier down. I had a long hard week. I couldn't talk myself out of the fear, but the next Saturday after eucharist I did eat lunch with them and saw gratefully how the meals they cooked us deepened to our eucharist through the year.

Paul touches this identity-shaking sacramental ground when he claims in 2 Corinthians, "For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). He says that God uses Jesus to break the boundary between God's righteousness and us sinners, and to establish one goodness of God. The 1979 prayer book collect for the Last Sunday after Pentecost approaches this understanding,

> Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule . . .

Paul goes further than this divine will. He sees God actually ending human division and slavery by restoring universal freedom in Christ. Just before saying that God made the sinless one into sin for our sake, Paul says,

> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Cor. 5:18-19)

Will Campbell calls Paul's claim that we can only carry the news and live into the accomplished fact of God's reconciliation, "the most radical passage in the Bible." As a Baptist preacher, storyteller and advocate for civil rights, Will Campbell worked for reconciliation among black and white poor in the rural South. His reading of Paul left him no room to treat Ku Klux Klansmen as *the enemy*.

Archbishop Oscar Romero was preaching the same Gospel of reconciliation when he was shot at mass in San Salvador. Archbishop Romero's work and martyrdom remind us that dangerous, frightened people still resist and reject God's completed victory; they battle on like unreconciled partisans even though God's peace has already ended the war.

Fear of those who have not (or cannot) hear the news can't teach us how to enact our sacraments of eucharist and baptism. For that, we must "pattern the sacraments after Christ," to quote the phrase my colleague Rick Fabian used to title in his article in *OPEN*.[1] We shape our practice of both eucharist and baptism from Jesus' example and from Paul's teaching of God's accomplished reconciliation.

Patterning the sacraments after Christ begins with Jesus' meal practice. Of this meal practice, the Lutheran liturgical scholar Maxwell Johnson writes

> Entrance to the meal of God's reign, anticipated and incarnated in the very life, ministry, and meals of Jesus of Nazareth, was granted by Jesus himself and granted especially to those were *not* prepared and *not* (yet) converted, to the godless and undeserving, to the impure, and the unworthy. Conversion itself, it seems, was a *consequence* of, not a pre-condition for, such meal sharing.[2]

Two recent articles in *OPEN*, "Baptism and Eucharist: Challenges," by Andrew Waldo (Summer 2000), and "Baptism and Communion," by Stephen Reynolds (Winter-Spring 2001), concluded that an open table invitation to eucharist, like Jesus' meals with sinners, is hospitable at the expense of full sacramental intent. Waldo frames the distinction between the "hospitality" of Jesus' meals with sinners and a sacramentally richer "community memory and identification with Jesus" that Jesus gave separately to the church in the Last Supper.

Following Johnson (and ultimately Norman Perrin in *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*), practitioners of an open table find hospitality, identification and formative memory to be an imitation of Jesus' risky prophetic hospitality which included and converted those who ate with him and so also defined his followers' "identification with him" and the "community memory." Jesus in his teaching and practice overturned an old "set-apart" holiness, and any fully renewed understanding of Christian baptism (whether our congregations administer baptism before or after communion) must find its way back to this universalizing context of Jesus' hospitality. I claim that this context of Jesus' divine welcome is clearer in both eucharist and baptism where receiving eucharist precedes baptism.

When Paul speaks of the different, new holiness Jesus instituted, he calls it

God's "new creation": if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! (2 Cor. 5:17). Exercising Jesus' hospitality in this new creation, a Christian eucharist must find some way to enact what Jesus enacted in his rabbinic teaching meal with unprepared, unclean sinners and outcasts.

Because in all his meals Jesus claimed to enact God's hospitality, any eucharist will risk being

· a deliberate prophetic welcome to alienated, outcast sinners,
· a dangerous confrontation with the religious, political and social establishment, and
· a sacramental enactment of the Kingdom of God.

Our experience (and courage) may fall short of such divine hospitality. Nonetheless, discovering that the sacraments actually do accomplish what they promise (rather than imaging or reminding us of something we pray God will accomplish later), each eucharist manifests the God-created unity of humanity and all creation in feasting with Christ. The Byzantine liturgy says it wonderfully, "Thine own of Thine own we offer Thee, on behalf of all and for all." We count on the power of Christ's body and blood offered on behalf of all and for all to transform ordinary daily living into what God has already made our life, life in God that breaks boundaries and unites what is divided.

With all that we pray that our eucharist will accomplish, open communion appears to me simply faithful. Open communion is plain sacramental realism, letting God use our sacraments to reveal locally God's already accomplished peace. It is as counter-cultural and uncomfortable as eating with prisoners in the county jail.

This logic echoes through the Passion material in the Gospels, fusing eucharist and baptism in surprising ways in Jesus' death on the cross. Following Jesus in his baptism, we will suffer a painful washing away of all that separates us from even the worst condemned criminal or most despairing misjudged victim. To speak fully of baptism we must pay careful attention (as the Gospels do and Paul usually does) to Jesus' companions in suffering and death and to where he dies.

Norman Perrin, like other Gospel scholars since, argued that Jesus suffered crucifixion because he wouldn't stop welcoming all to feast with him. Jesus in the Gospels does speak of John baptizing at the Jordan, but when he speaks of his own baptism, he always refers to his coming death. Paul and Pauline material once attributed to him see communion with estranged sinners in this same death. The strands are inseparable. Jesus' Last Supper, his shameful dying with criminals, and his (and our baptism) all signify and all accomplish universal reconciliation, breaking down what divides us. The Bible and our tradition say Jesus went freely to this baptism/death to unite himself to sinners like those with whom he feasted.

Anyone entering St. Gregory Nyssen Church in San Francisco will see these words carved into the base of the holy table, "This guy welcomes sinners and eats with them." It is the ancient (very probably original) accusation Jesus' disciples heard. On the other side of the table, the congregation re-entering the church from a baptism meets this startling sixth-century text from Isaac of Nineveh:

> Do not distinguish between the worthy and the unworthy;
> All must be equal in your eyes to love and serve.
> Did not the Lord share the table of publicans and harlots,
> Without putting the unworthy away from him?[3]

Knowing *ourselves* welcomed unconditionally at Jesus' table and glimpsing how we are like the outcasts and condemned criminals Jesus dies with outside the walls, a longing stirs to be like Jesus, to live and die like Jesus. Our Lord Jesus who died outside the walls continues to draw us out to new, riskier, more loving discipleship. At St. Gregory's, as we practice open communion, people do ask to be baptized like Jesus, imitating his committed practice of not holding himself apart from anyone. To be baptized like Jesus we join a fellowship with all the unwelcomed others, every imaginable, dreaded "them."

Jesus' death does not make his teaching meals mean less, but unlocks the meaning of his whole work within them. At the Last Supper Jesus made his impending death a sign of his self-offering and the forgiveness it brought, that is, everything he did as a teacher. In the institution narratives Jesus interprets what he had been doing through his ministry by pointing toward his baptism of suffering and death. In the words which accompanied the administration of the Last Cup, he says, "for you and for all ['many' reflects the Aramaic idiom for 'all'] for the forgiveness of sins," that is, for release and freedom from all that divides us.

The Last Supper was emphatically not a gathering of the faithful for a closed meal. The Last Supper, just like all the other meals of his ministry, was an unmerited, reconciling act of divine hospitality. Facing death, Jesus offered his kingdom feast to his betrayer and a few frightened disciples prepared only to prove their faithlessness and abandon him. In the institution narratives when Jesus says, "do this in remembrance of me," we can only wonder that he is commanding them(!) and us(!) to carry on those meals.

Whenever we feast with sinners and outcasts and declare this feasting in Jesus' name, we enter God's accomplished peace of universal, unconditional forgiveness. Though the church through history has multiplied conditions and requirements on those who receive, Christians have never denied this core–we and all who communicate at Jesus' table are wholly unworthy. Jesus' eucharist makes reconciliation and universal forgiveness present.

Those who practice an open table also believe and sometimes see that Jesus' prophetic sign destroys the root divisions in human history and culture. Both eucharist and baptism take us beyond simple initiation "into" a closed group to lead us into the new creation, an undivided hu-

manity. Sinners rejoice in a welcome that can include even *us*. At Jesus' feast we meet Jesus as our Risen Lord to be healed and reconciled to all. Continuing the meal, disciples must enact God's humble, loving service to *all* humankind.

At least one of the possible biblical understandings of atonement taken together with Jesus' meal practice offers solid theological grounding for open communion leading to baptism. As I set out and comment on that line of biblical thinking, I ask that readers consider the argument texts make together before mustering counter-arguments. Both argument and counter-argument are in the Bible, so Bible and tradition do not stand above this controversy. This contradiction and strain have been in our tradition from the first apostolic preaching.

We can begin with Jesus' response to the request by the sons of Zebedee to sit at his right hand and left hand in his glory:

> You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant." (Mark 10:38-40)

Skeptical Gospel scholars will hear in these words the apostolic community's retrospective knowledge of Jesus' passion. For our purposes this only makes the text more interesting. We hear in it sacramental theology from a very early community; the community's concerns for sacraments in community life and the community's experience facing persecution shape the saying.

Note the recurrent and seemingly nontraditional order in this passage: first cup, then baptism. Notice Jesus in the Gospels speaks of his baptism to refer to the death he anticipates; that is, Jesus' words about drinking his cup or receiving his baptism point to the cross. Notice also Jesus here portrays himself neither as priest nor minister of sacrament, nor as sacrificial victim, but as the communicant and as the one baptized. His crucifixion will be his own communion and his baptism.

The synoptics offer cup imagery again in Jesus' anguished prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: "He threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want'" (Matt. 26:39). In the Gospel of John, Jesus uses identical language of "drinking the cup" when he reproves Peter for attacking the high priest's servant with his sword: "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (John 18:11). Asking, "Am I not to drink?" Jesus claims his freedom in the choices he will embrace until he cries, "It is finished." John completes this fused sacramental interpretation of Jesus' death, saying that when Jesus hung dead on the cross, "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out" (John 19:34). As sacramental theologians, the four Gospel writers consistently identify cup and baptism with Jesus' dying on the cross.

In New Testament epistles, Jesus' cross is also his "shame." Gathering texts around this theme, we will see a crucial way that the discursive, explicitly theological writers of the epistles see the sacraments. Jesus' *shame* is not one piece of suffering among others, but a central theological theme, what he chooses, exercising his freedom as the means by which God accomplishes the reconciliation of all.

In Jesus' shameful death outside the city gates and with the worst sinners he freely chooses communion with them. The eucharistic prayer of the *Apostolic Tradition* attributed to Hippolytus is on solid New Testament grounds here, imaging Jesus' outstretched arms on the cross as a willing embrace:

> Fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people, he stretched out his hands when he should suffer, that he might release from suffering those who have believed in you. And when he was betrayed to voluntary suffering that he might destroy death, and break the bonds of the devil, and tread down hell, and shine upon the righteous, and fix a term, and manifest the resurrection, he took bread...[4]

Jesus' chosen shame takes him deep into the desolate territory of exile and curse. His freedom in suffering undoes the helplessness we impute to a victim. Dying willingly with those who have no freedom, Jesus' death completes his chosen, unconditional fellowship with sinners. We might imagine Jesus' (or anyone's) human terror in the face of such suffering, but like this ancient eucharistic prayer, still proclaim his freedom to the very end. It is an article of faith and flows from his courageous choices throughout his ministry.

Jesus accepts being condemned and accursed and cast out of his community in order to die in communion with thieves and murderers. All who pass him on the execution hill outside the city gates can gawk and mock. The place he dies is ritually out of bounds. He dies "forsaken" by God, dreadfully beyond reach of any piously conceived grace or righteousness. And when he has drunk his last communion cup to its dregs, the cup of reconciliation with sinners, in John's Gospel he says, "It is finished." Jesus' solidarity in suffering in that place of exclusion *is* the final redemption and inclusion of all.

His words at the supper as he offered the final cup had already defined this moment, so his suffering and death are the final cup at the feast with its prayer for ultimate reconciliation. The cup literally does end the feasting ritual, as we hear in 1 Corinthians 11:25 ("he took the cup also, after supper"; 1 Cor. 11:25). The *Didache* gives a blessing prayer for the final cup that recalls the Jewish models. The last cup ends the meal in prayers for reconciliation and union: "gather [your church] from the four winds, into the kingdom which you have prepared for it."[5]

Or as Jesus says it in John, "I, when I

am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).

The cross shows open table and baptism to be one sign. This death is also his "baptism," because again he submits to be joined indiscriminately to ordinary people (making one sign of his baptism by John, his feasting with harlots and tax collectors, and his dying with condemned murderers and terrorists). As the Gospels tell it, supper (rhetorically this concluding cup) leads to baptism.

The epistles untiringly return to this theme of shame, curse and degradation, often combining it in startling ways with joy and freedom, Jesus' or our own. I first heard this clearly in Hebrews thanks to James Alison (in *Raising Abel*)

> . . . looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith who, *for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame*, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:2)

Matching shame and freedom continues in Hebrews. After likening Jesus' death outside the camp to the burning of temple refuse (the discarded, unclean portion of the temple sacrifice) the writer says, "Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured" (Heb. 13:12-13).

The cross gives us and all humanity freedom exactly *because* it is "shame," "abuse," and "curse." "For the sake of the joy that was set before him," Jesus willingly goes where good people and pure community cannot go. He seeks the same communion with those who die there as he had established with those who lived beyond any welcome to temple or synagogue. We become his community as we learn to go to him outside the camp and share his abuse.

Paul is just as stark in his explanation of what this means and what it accomplishes for us. Jesus, he tells us, *is* cursed, *is* sin (2 Cor. 5:21). We cannot legitimately draw back from such designations or confidently claim that God only imputes sin, curse or abuse to Jesus; Jesus' absolute and complete identification with curse and sin gives us our freedom and the promised Spirit of God:

> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us–for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"–in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Gal. 3:13-14)

In other words, Jesus identifies with and is cursed with outcasts, and his identification with them is so complete there is no "as if" left to it. For this we thank God. It is our Life.

Jesus goes to the place of our shame to make it the place of God's feast, the place of baptismal cleansing and newness. Cursed Jesus hanging on the tree brings us blessing because in communing wholly with the suffering and death of the worst of us, Jesus' baptism on the cross completes what he began feasting with sinners. He has taken on our secret, stripped it bare, and said, "me too." We find Jesus (and our communion and baptism) wherever anyone abandons privilege, holiness or insider status to reconcile human divisions. Our baptism is not an initiation into set-apart status, but our free fall into God's community without boundaries. Jesus' embrace of outcasts in his baptism on the cross enables Paul to say,

> . . . in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:26-28)

The Byzantine hymn we sing at St. Gregory's after every baptism translates it this way, "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia."

Is that Alleluia realistic *now* in the life we live? Consider how unerringly these passages from writers in Paul's tradition speak of God's completed peace and the ending of division and hostility in the past tense:

> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaving, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:19-20)

Jesus makes peace by dying horribly and absorbing in himself all the violent rejection of those who died with him and as he did. We aren't even talking about resurrection yet. To reconcile all things, he must go to the place of no reconciliation and there be baptized into suffering. Just what Paul calls "being made into sin" the writer of Ephesians calls "all perfection":

> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility, between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. (Eph. 2:13-16)

So Paul and the writers of Ephesians, Colossians and Hebrews repeatedly assert that Jesus' death completed God's work of reconciling all humanity. When Jesus suffers the worst that divides us, our brokenness is then and forever broken open and made whole. Here we taste and feel the power to live the truth of God's own torn brokenness in Christ's dying. Here in this place of freedom, we can make new choices.

As we have tasted God's welcome at Jesus' table, we will follow Jesus into baptism, stepping outside our religion as we know it and into the single renewed

humanity that church walls cannot contain and prison walls cannot keep out. This was the baptism Jesus promised his death would be. Can we be baptized with his baptism?

FINAL NOTE: James Alison and I have discussed open table and though he sees the theological rationale in our reading of the Gospels, as a faithful Roman Catholic he respectfully questions any congregation's ability to remake sacraments as we have received them. Gil Bailie, Rene Girard, James Alison, Rowan Williams and others do see in Jesus' enactment of the divine hospitality, whether at his table or on the cross, the destruction of in-group and end of its rationale for scapegoating violence. I do not claim that they or Maxwell Johnson are advocating an open table, though I will be interested to see where this conversation over the coming years takes any of them and all of us. Theologians and biblical and liturgical scholars whose understanding of atonement rides on the issue of scapegoating and the outsider do point where the Gospel scholarship takes us in understanding Jesus' table fellowship.

Notes

[1] Richard Fabian, "Patterning the Sacraments after Christ," *OPEN* (Fall 1994), pp. 1-4.

[2] Maxwell Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 6; italics in original.

[3] *Ascetic Treatises* 23, condensed from Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (London: New City, 1993), pp. 285-86.

[4] R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, eds. *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 3rd edn (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), p. 35.

[5] *Didache* 10.5, in Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), p. 155.

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The changing face of confirmation

LINDA L. GRENZ

Since the 1979 Book of Common Prayer's emphasis on baptism as full inclusion in the church, confirmation has become a sacramental rite without any significant justification. Many bishops are reluctant to give it up, but most acknowledge that it is not clear what the liturgy actually does. While these issues relate to both adults and youth, this article focuses on youth and how the *Journey to Adulthood* program has and might continue to impact confirmation.

The *Journey to Adulthood* program has greatly accelerated the move to an older confirmation age for youth (now generally sixteen years of age). A decade ago the common age of confirmation was between eleven and fourteen years of age. *Journey to Adulthood* was developed in response to the fact that, beginning in the mid-1960s, about 80% of our youth left the church within eight months after confirmation. Confirmation became graduation. And, to be honest, it largely functioned as a rite for parents more than for the youth. Most young people "got confirmed" to please mom and dad. The most concrete result that occurred was that parents felt good after the service. I've often felt that confirmation is the only sacramental rite performed on one person for the benefit of someone else!

Journey to Adulthood

The *Journey to Adulthood* is a six-year program of spiritual formation that attracts, instructs and nurtures eleven to eighteen-year-olds at the time when they are most likely to drift away from the church. Beginning with the first two-year segment, Rite 13 (6th and 7th grades), the program celebrates the gift of gender and creates a safe haven for youth to explore their creative power. The second two years, J2A (8th and 9th grades), is the heart of the program, teaching six basic skills of adulthood and helping youth to understand Christian living. The third section, Young Adults in the Church (YAC), encourages older youth to take on adult responsibilities in all aspects of congregational and community life. For more information contact LeaderResources at 800-941-2218.

Does Rite 13 replace or reform confirmation?

While some twelve-year-olds find confirmation meaningful, they tend to be the exception rather than the rule. The statistical fact that youth responded to confirmation by leaving active church life is significant. Part of the success of the *Journey to Adulthood* program is the rite of passage which occurs around age thirteen. This "Celebration of Manhood and Womanhood" (more commonly known as Rite 13) is a powerful liturgical rite. Most adults attending the service find themselves teary-eyed, wishing that the liturgy had been available for their child or even themselves at that age. Youth who have experienced a Rite-13 ceremony will gently (or not so gently!) correct you if you call them a child. They clearly understand that something real happened–they have passed from childhood to manhood or womanhood and experienced God's blessing, their parent's blessing and the blessing of the congregation in that passage. They have entered that liminal space between childhood and adulthood called adolescence.

I believe this liturgy is so powerful because it is, in fact, an outward and visible sign of something that really happens. Because it "rings true" for all participants, it has power. It meets the needs

parents have when their youth reach that age–a need previously met by confirmation. But confirmation is not intended to be a rite of passage in this way, so it never functioned effectively either as a rite of passage or as an adult affirmation of faith. Because most youth at that age are not developmentally ready to make *any* adult commitment, they simply went through the motions.

Is sixteen too young for confirmation?

Sixteen is an age that has some adult associations in our culture. Most of us get our first driver's license at that age, and that serves as a significant adulthood marker.

While sixteen thus has some justification as an appropriate age for confirmation, we have discovered that a number of J2A youth choose not to be confirmed at age sixteen. This is, in my opinion, a good sign. They understand the significance of what they are being asked to do, they are aware of their own spiritual development, and they have acquired the skills and strength to make their own decisions. It does, however, raise questions about the appropriate average age for confirmation and what, exactly, we think is happening in this sacramental rite.

If confirmation is an adult affirmation of faith, are most sixteen-year-olds ready to do that? If it is making a public, lifelong commitment to Christ, are sixteen-year-olds ready to do that? A comparable question to ask is: are most sixteen-year-olds are ready to make a public lifelong commitment to a marital partner? In some cases the answer may be "yes." But in most cases we consider sixteen too young to make this kind of commitment. So, why do we assume that sixteen-year-olds are prepared to make a public adult commitment to Christ? Note, I am not talking about their ability to *have a relationship with* Christ–infants and children can do that. I'm talking about making a *public adult affirmation and commitment*.

Confirmation as part of a process

If we see Christian formation as a process, then confirmation could be the time when one understands where one is in one's spiritual formation and is prepared to make a public "statement" about that. It would function much like the marriage service, which is not an *event* that creates a marriage, but rather a step in the *process* of a couple making a commitment to one another. The couple is saying: "We have built a marital relationship and we are now prepared to say that publicly and ask your blessing and God's blessing on it as we continue to build that relationship." In this context, confirmation would assume that the confirmand is self-aware, already functioning as an *adult* Christian and wishes to make a public affirmation of this.

If we followed the model of marriage, rather than baptism, we also could examine the role of the actors and the action in the sacrament. In baptism the priest or baptized lay person pours water on the baptismal candidate, an action which is the outward sign of God's action. In marriage, the couple themselves act by saying the vows to one another. The priest and congregation witness the vows.

The current actors in confirmation are the bishop and candidate. The traditional view is that the sacramental action is the giving of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. But if baptism is complete, isn't the Holy Spirit given then? If so, could we see the sacramental action in confirmation as witness–an affirmation of one's faith and one's relationship with Christ? The biblical basis for this could be Matthew 16:13-20 ("Who do people say that the Son of Man is? …And you, who do you say I am? …You are the Messiah. …You did not learn that from any human being, it was revealed to you by my heavenly Father. …on this rock I will build my church"). Confirmation, then, would be the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace of being given the power by God to witness to who Jesus is and to be the church–the Body of Christ.

There are several additional questions which arise: Does the bishop have to be the sole actor opposite the candidate? Is it possible to see the confirmand as the primary actor whereby the act of making a public affirmation in the midst of the congregation becomes the outward and visible sign of the spirit who groans within us? If so, then the bishop would join parents, sponsors and other members of the congregation in witnessing that affirmation and praying for God's blessing on the candidate.

Confirmation as a rite of passage for youth?

We are considering refocusing the last two years of the *Journey to Adulthood* program to address these questions. The program currently invites youth to assess their own spiritual formation needs and design a process to meet those needs. It gives them models, ideas and plans to use in their work. We are thinking about having these two years focus on two primary issues:

· Who has God called me/formed me to be? What am I called to be/do? What are my spiritual gifts, my vocation, my ministry?

· What do I believe? What commitment am I prepared to make? How can I best make a public affirmation of what I believe and what I am committed to be and do?

Youth who have spent two years on understanding and building Christian community, followed by two years focusing on adulthood skills and a pilgrimage, would then spend two years focusing on vocation and ministry. Older youth are best engaged by doing ministry. They are asking the question: What will I be and do when I leave high school? Developmentally, they are settling into the beliefs and behaviors that they will have as adults. In a short time, they will go off and have to function in society as independent adults. Confirmation preparation would then be doing ministry, articulating what one believed and was committed to and developing an understanding of one's vocation.

What if confirmation for youth became a rite of passage into adulthood and generally occurred at the end of high school? Yes, I know that isn't what the sacramental rite is designed to do, but this might give life and power to the service–especially if the expectation was that the

youth would design the liturgy. They would decide what their adult affirmation would be–a poem, a hymn, the sermon, a work of art, a dance, a play, a discussion. They would decide when and where it would occur. Perhaps it would not even be a single event but a longer celebration, including a blessing from the bishop in the cathedral on Wednesday night and a celebration with the congregation on Friday night. It could include youth receiving the blessing of their parents, sponsors, mentors or other significant members of the congregation in the midst of a liturgy they designed to celebrate their faith and God's call to them.

This would shift the way we do the liturgy and how we understand confirmation for youth. I suspect it would unleash the same power we now see in the Rite-13 liturgy. We need a way for our youth to say:

This is who I am. This is what I believe. This is what I'm doing. This is where I'm going. This is where I feel God leading me.

We need a way to say to our youth:

You are now an adult. You are now going out on your own. We give you our blessing. We give you our love. We give you the assurance that no matter where you go, God will be with you, God will love you and God will bless you.

If we could find a way to make confirmation that kind of experience for our youth, I believe it would help them make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. And I believe it would be a powerful witness to the adults of every congregation who, in experiencing this liturgy, would be challenged to ask themselves those same questions.

I believe liturgies can have power. I think we need more ways to sacramentalize our lives. So instead of trying to eliminate confirmation or continuing to live with an ineffectual liturgy, can we find a way for it to function with real power and meaning? I welcome your suggestions, thoughts and challenges. Write or e-mail: Linda@LeaderResources.org; LeaderResources, Box 302, Leeds, MA 01053; or call 413-582-1860.

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What does blessing bless?

CHARLES HEFLING

If agitation for and against liturgies for same-gender couples brings no other benefit, it will have served to stimulate serious theological reinvestigation of liturgical rites such as matrimony–what they are, what they mean, and what they do. My purpose in this article is not to take a stand, one way or the other, on the propriety of ceremonial events of the kind that has been the center of so much dispute. It is to address the more general question I have used as my title. In some sense, however, the way I have posed the question does take its bearings from the fact that the name for these events that seems to be favored in church circles at present is "blessing"; hence the slogan, "Claiming the Blessing," adopted by a consortium of groups that hope to influence the Episcopal Church's General Convention. The rites advocated may not be marriage ceremonies, but the advocates evidently hold that they are *like* marriage ceremonies inasmuch as both are ceremonies of blessing–blessings, for short.

Blessings, then, of what?

Perhaps the most straightforward answer is that blessing blesses a relationship. I have seen a service leaflet headed "The Celebration and Blessing of the Relationship of A. B. and C. D.," obviously modeled (as was the shape of the service itself) on The Book of Common Prayer, where the "Solemnization of Matrimony," as it used to be called, is now "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage." The reasoning appears to be this: marriage is a relationship of two people, husband and wife. The corresponding relationship between two men or two women has no proper name, but it is anyhow a *relationship,* on which a blessing can therefore be bestowed or invoked, just as it can on the relationship called marriage.

Now the idea that a wedding is the blessing of a relationship is unobjectionable, as far as it goes, precisely because it does not go very far. "Relationship" by itself tells us almost nothing. Human beings form and leave relationships of vastly different kinds. What is it, exactly, that constitutes *this* relationship? Traditional theologies of matrimony have this much to be said for them: they give concrete answers, though not always the same answer. Explanations of the "nuptial blessing" in particular have varied somewhat. According to one theory, this blessing blesses the bride, and specifically her fertility. The clergy were instructed accordingly: no blessing is to be given at the second marriage of a widow or the marriage of a woman past the age of childbearing.

Today it would be hard to find anyone who follows such instructions, although they can be found in Anglican manuals not long out of print. Quite the contrary. The blessing of a marriage is widely understood in a way that inverts the theology which the instructions apply. For that theology, blessing is prospective: it concerns something that (God willing) is going to happen. The more recent notion I have in mind would have it that blessing is retrospective: it concerns something that has already happened. This notion, I am convinced, is mistaken. But I have found it helpful in clarifying, by contrast, my own opinion of what blessing blesses, and so I propose to elaborate it here, as fairly as I can, in order to uncover its theological presuppositions. From there I will go on to offer an alternative.

By way of introducing the theology of blessing I am going to examine, I will report an argument that brings it to bear on a practical matter, as I heard it delivered at a meeting of supervisors and instructors in my diocese's training program for the vocational (permanent) diaconate. The topic under discussion was a seemingly unrelated liturgical question: whether to allow deacons-in-training, not yet ordained, to take the deacon's role at the eucharist when it is celebrated, say, in their field-education parishes. May they prepare the altar, read the gospel, say the dismissal and so on? Yes, someone urged, they may. In fact, they *should*. Why? Because there is an analogy between holy orders and holy matrimony, such that the meaning and function of the ordination and marriage rites are analogous too. The point of this analogy was explained as follows.

Everyone knows (so the argument went) that when a man and a woman come to church for their wedding they have already been living together in physical intimacy as husband and wife. That is what *makes* them husband and wife. The ceremony in church acknowledges this. It ratifies and celebrates the fact that there now exists a particular instance of the institution, the practice, of marriage. The institution has been brought *into* existence by the "marriage act" which the two parties have been performing. At the wedding, the church puts a seal of approval–its blessing–on the couple as already coupled. By the same token, the church's blessing of a candidate for holy orders at the laying-on of hands puts an *imprimatur* on another social fact–the set of practices that relate a deacon to laity, presbyters, bishop, church and world. And what brings that fact into existence, similarly, is performing what might be called the "deacon act," the *leitourgia* that constitutes *diakonia,* namely preparing the altar, reading the gospel and so on. That is not all there is to *diakonia,* any more than sex is all there is to marriage. Nevertheless we, the church, should presume and expect that those who are being ordained to the diaconate will already be *being* deacons in this primordial way, just as we presume and expect that couples who are being married are already being spouses in the primordial sense.

Such was the argument. It draws a practical conclusion about liturgical policy from an analogy that rests on a certain understanding of two "sacramental" acts of blessing. I put "sacramental" in quotation marks so as to leave it undecided whether holy matrimony and holy orders are to be ranked as true and proper sacraments, on a par with holy baptism and the holy eucharist. The decision rests on how a sacrament, properly so called, is defined, and at that point Anglicans tend to become studiously reticent. Notice, however, that the argument I have just summarized implies that matrimony and orders are *not* sacraments by at least one standard definition. They are not "*effectual* signs." They do not begin anything or change anything; they provide occasions to rejoice in what, of themselves, they only register–the fact that certain persons are deacons or spouses, as the case may be.

What makes these occasions holy, then? The answer would seem to be: the sacredness of what already *is*. To put this in somewhat more theological terms, we might draw a further analogy. A marriage or an ordination, on the view I am discussing, is like a service of thanksgiving for harvest. God brings forth the fruits of the earth in their seasons; when that has happened, we return thanks. Likewise, God from time to time raises up ministries and marital relationships; when that happens, we give thanks too. What God "does," in other words, is what takes place in the ordinary, "natural" course of things. Sacredness is there to be found, and when found, celebrated. We bless what is already blessèd. In a word, the theology that underlies this view of ritual blessing is a theology of creation, and that is in fact how many of those who adopt the view understand it. When the created order of things becomes transparent, as it were, so as to disclose its inherent holiness, the church gives public, communal expression to the disclosure. That is what blessing blesses.

I have analyzed what I take to be the theological presuppositions involved in drawing a certain kind of analogy between ordination and marriage. In themselves, they are admirable presuppositions to adopt. The holiness of creation does call for celebration. However admirable, though, these presuppositions are inadequate. Christian sacramental practice cannot be explained on the basis of creation alone. The most important reason why it cannot is that to make the doctrine of creation central tends to make *history* peripheral. By history I mean, not simply the sum of all events in time, but, more specifically, what happens in time insofar as human beings decide it is going to happen and choose to make it happen. I mean the ongoing, open-ended process that takes its direction from the more or less intelligent, reasonable, responsible, deliberate acts of women and men. The analogy between marriage and ministry I have discussed, and the sacramental theology it is bound up with, leave out history in this sense inasmuch as they leave out newness, purpose, expectation, hope, intention and commitment. They have no orientation to the *future*. Absent that orientation, weddings and ordinations can only be construed in the way the analogy does construe them–as endings, not beginnings, as conclusions, not initiations, as sacred counterparts to secular events like graduating from high school, not like commissioning an officer or inaugurating a president.

It might seem that there is nothing here to object to in principle. After all, the Christian church is certainly in the business of celebrating accomplished facts, chiefly "the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ," to quote the General Thanksgiving. But just as certainly, that is not all there is to Christianity. The same prayer goes on to bless God for "the hope of glory," by which it presumably means the glory with which Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. That is to say, Christianity is *eschatological*. Whatever else that very slippery word means, it means that while Christians do affirm and celebrate what has happened and what does happen, they continue to look towards what is to be.

The redemption of the world is achieved "already," *and* it is "not yet" accomplished. History is not over. It is going somewhere it has not been.

Whether and in what sense eschatology is essential to Christianness can of course be debated. At present the debate is especially lively among scholars of Christian origins. As a theologian I can only note that there is no way for theology to be "somewhat" eschatological. It is a case of "in for a penny, in for a pound." If Christians have their Christian identity in what is yet to be, all their theological reflection has to take that into account, not least their ecclesiology. One implication is that the church does not exist only to praise God for creation, or even for the "mighty acts" God has done in the past. It does exist for that. Also, however, and centrally, it exists to be the thing that God is doing "in these last days," and to become the thing that God will be doing until the eschaton. For it is the church's claim–in some sense its *only* claim–that it knows what "the thing that God is doing" consists in.

Archbishop Rowan Williams has articulated what this "thing" is in an article on– significantly–liturgical worship. The characteristic form of God's "doing," the archbishop writes, is the formation of community: the formation of Israel, the formation of the church. God's eschatological "thing" is the ordering of common life in such a way as to manifest not just the inherent goodness of creation but the pattern of *new* creation, *re*-creation, through healing and restoring and forgiveness.[1] The entry of humans into community which anticipates the kingdom that is coming is the effectual sign of the "new covenant of reconciliation" established in the paschal mystery, which is the eschatological event *par excellence*. For the church to be its eschatological self is for the church to be what God intends the human race to become.

Let us return now to the original question. Has an orientation to the "eschatological" future any bearing on how the church's practice of liturgical blessing is best conceived? It has. Consider the scripts for the two dramas enacted in the services of ordination and marriage. In the light of what I have said so far, one feature common to both these liturgical performances stands out very clearly. Each has a climax, a turning point. The action pivots on one act, which begins when the church, in the person of the presiding minister, asks certain of its members whether they will be and do something rather than anything else–not whether they *are* this already, not whether they *have* done this, but whether they *will* this, whether they are *willing* to be this and do this. To specify "this" in prayer book words: Will you be loyal to doctrine, discipline, and worship? Will you obey your bishop? Will you be faithful in prayer and the reading of scripture? Will you love, comfort, honor and keep, in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, be faithful? Will you, in sum, set yourself on the way to a certain kind of future? Will you make it *be* this kind of future? Will you define, in terms of these practices, these obligations, these expectations, what you are going to become?

Such questions ask for the answer "I will," which seems to be a statement of fact. So it is; but the fact it states is a future fact, a fact that begins to be when "I will" is spoken. The questions at a wedding or an ordination invite a *promise*. To respond "I will" is to perform what has been termed a speech-act, an utterance that actualizes and makes real what it speaks about. Otherwise stated, it effects what it signifies–the definition of a sacrament mentioned above. It is no accident that the very word *sacramentum* had as one of its meanings a pledge, an oath, a solemn vow.

The direction my discussion is taking is probably plain. An analogy does hold between matrimony and ordination. What we bless in both these rites is the same thing. But the analogy does not lie where the view I discussed earlier tries to find it. What we bless is not an existing state of affairs. We bless an act, a set of promisings. The making of these promises may take place at the end of a preparatory past. It commonly follows courtship or formation or engagement or professional training. But it does not follow inevitably, and when it does it is not just an extension of what has preceded it. Something new begins. If we ask why the church should take notice of this beginning, and bless these promises in particular, the reason is that brides and bridegrooms and ordinands are promising to order their living so as to promote and embody new creation. To keep these promises is to determine the indeterminate future in a way that brings closer the "eschatological" community that is coming, the community for which God made the world and that God is making for the world.

That is my answer to the question of what liturgical or sacramental blessing blesses. It blesses a future-in-the-making. It blesses an incipient history, a change in human self-constitution, a willing and choosing of life ordered to a common end. It blesses vows. There is a good deal that my answer leaves unanswered, and my argument needs more detail than I can provide here. But four points that expand it can be mentioned by way of conclusion.

In the first place, although I have concentrated on only two rites, and those two "occasional services" only, the position I have outlined can be generalized. Blessing "eschatological" promises that regard a certain kind of future–that, I would hold, is what all blessing most essentially is. Incense or pets or buildings or vestments or palm branches can be blessed, no doubt. In some communities they are. But these are secondary blessings or subliturgies. They have their meaning and their function within the Christian way of life in relation to the "sacramental" blessing of human commitment and self-determination that builds up healing, reconciling, forgiving community.

In the second place, although I have said that blessing ordination vows or wedding vows is blessing in the full and proper sense, it does not follow that these are the promises which define Christian living, much less that the church's primary mission is to get people married or ordained. Marriage and ordained ministry are special vocations. To be a spouse or a cleric is to be a certain *sort* of Chris-

tian, by particularizing the future that baptism inaugurates. It is the baptismal promises that constitute the church's fundamental order of ministry and define its "eschatological" character.

In the third place, if baptism is *the* sacrament of Christian community, whereas marriage and ordination regard roles and institutions and practices internal to that community, it would follow that it is for the church to determine which *other* sub-orderings of its common life, and thus what other kinds of promises, it will sanction and celebrate and bless. It is, at least, pretty clear that this is what the church has always done. Not until some time in the middle ages did western Christianity embrace what had been until then a matter of secular custom and civil law, namely marriage as it was understood and practiced at that time. Later, following a lapse of some three hundred years, the Church of England decided that it would once again bless the promises made by monks and nuns, and celebrate as one of its special vocations the common life of a monastic household. Another hundred years or so, and we find the Episcopal Church adding to its prayer book an office that blesses yet another kind of community, the one established by adopting a child.

The service for adoption confirms one part of the argument I have presented, by making the point that motherhood and fatherhood are *historical* relationships in the sense I used earlier. They come to be, that is, because persons deliberately bring them into being, with or without–and in this case without–an already-existing "natural" fact of biology. Thus the presider is instructed to ask the candidate much the same question as in matrimony: do you take this woman to be your mother, this man to be your father? And there is confirmation of another part of my argument in another service new to the current prayer book, the "Blessing of a Civil Marriage." Here the significant point is that the couple whose promises are to be blessed are already husband and wife, and are so named. Nevertheless, they are asked to make exactly the same promises as a bride and bridegroom would be asked to make. The implication is that what matters to the church is willingness to take on a special Christian vocation, not status in civil law–or, to extend the implication a bit, status in common law either. Recall that the argument I began by criticizing takes it for granted that weddings in church are, in effect, blessings of common-law marriages.

In the fourth and final place, I said at the outset that I have no stand to take on whether there should be an officially recognized service for couples of the same gender. But if my argument is sound it does single out the question on which such a decision ought to turn. What the Christian community needs to ask is whether two men or two women can make a set of promises such as would define a vocation which that community can recognize as "eschatological" in the sense I have discussed–promises which it might, therefore, bless.

Note

[1] See Rowan D. Williams, "Imagining the Kingdom: Some questions for Anglican worship today," in *The Identity of Anglican Worship*, ed. Kenneth Stevenson and Bryan Spinks (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1991), pp. 1-13, esp. p. 10.

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Music **by M. Milner Seifert**

How can we keep from singing?

When discussion turns to music and liturgy, we have heard more times than we can number Augustine's "Those who sing pray twice." We have heard equally as often how birthdays are never celebrated without the singing of a certain song. Though these are venerable approaches, I would like to offer three others.

Alice Parker is a strong advocate for congregational song. Participation in a hymn-sing led by her is true delight. Ms. Parker reminds those who participate in these gatherings that we are creatures who vocalize long before we speak. I recall my three-month-old granddaughter vocalizing at her baptism.

A common public ritual is the baseball game. At a major or minor-league game, the singing of the National Anthem is an integral part of the event. Personally, I have a sense of loss that the singing is often done by an individual or a designated group rather than all those assembled. However, at Wrigley Field (and many other places), during the middle of the seventh inning, all participate in the singing of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."

I am told that the aboriginal people of Australia refer to their land as the Dream-time Land and themselves as the Dream-time People, because they and their land originated in the Dream-time. They sing Dream-time Songs in the belief that, if they do not, the Dream-time Land will disappear.

I believe that these three illustrations are evidence that: 1) song is a primary mode of human expression; 2) corporate singing unites those assembled in participation in the ritual in a profound way (even when the song is less-than-profound); and 3) singing together the songs of our heritage helps us to root ourselves in the fertile soil of that heritage.

Having said all that, it is interesting to look at our own worship tradition which includes weekday celebrations of the eucharist and "early services" on Sunday in which music is explicitly absent. How can we reconcile these things? I have come to believe that we cannot.

It is worth noting that in The Book of Common Prayer there are times that a preference for singing is indicated in the rubrics (e.g., p. 356 where the *Gloria in excelsis* "or some other song of praise is sung or said"). In addition, there are often permissive rubrics for singing (e.g., the first rubric within Rite II: "A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung."). There is also the statement within the section "Concerning the Service of the Church" that reads, "Where rubrics indicate that a part of a service is to be 'said,' it must be understood to include 'or sung' and *vice versa*" (p. 14). These directions are evidence of the value placed upon singing within our tradition.

Perhaps we can learn something from our Lutheran brothers and sisters with whom we now share a special relationship. It is significant that in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* there are three orders of Holy Communion, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline–all of which have musical settings of the "ordinary" congregational songs printed within the liturgies themselves. The Litany is also presented in a musical setting rather than as text alone. This presentation makes it apparent that these texts are normally sung.

An experience of my own parish may also be of interest here. Two years ago, we began a process of evaluating our Sunday morning worship. Over the preceding years we had experienced an increase in attendance at our 10:15 a.m. Sunday eucharist while the 8 a.m. had diminished. One of our stated hopes was to entice some worshipers to choose the earlier service in order to enliven that celebration and to make room for newcomers and visitors at the later service. As the parish went through a rather extensive discernment process, it became clear that one of the factors most essential to the accomplishment of our goal was the integration of music into the earlier service on a Sunday by Sunday basis. The results since we made several changes, including regular employment of congregational singing, have been very positive.

So what am I advocating? Hiring an organist for every worship service throughout the week?! Adding hymns and

New music columnist

With this issue, we welcome M. Milner Seifert as our music columnist. Milner serves as Choir Director of St. Augustine's Parish, Wilmette, Illinois, where he has ministered since 1982. He also chairs the parish liturgical commission. His "day job" is as choral director at the Evanston Township High School, a position he has held since 1969. Milner has a Master of Music degree from Northwestern University and a certificate in liturgical studies from the University of Notre Dame. He is a member of Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission, the Association of Anglican Musicians, and the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada. Milner currently serves as a member of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music.

Our thanks to Mark DeW. Howe, music columnist from 1998 until 2001.

anthems to every worship service?! By no means! Any community which has an vocalist capable of leading a willing assembly can incorporate *a cappella* music into their worship.

I suggest three places for the regular employment of singing in all eucharistic liturgies. The first, and most obvious to me, is the song of the "heavenly chorus," the *Sanctus*. Two settings that are very accessible to smaller congregations are David Hurd's setting found at S124 in *The Hymnal 1982* and the *Land of Rest* hymn-tune setting found at 858 in *Wonder, Love, and Praise*.

The second element I would encourage is an Alleluia prior to the Gospel reading. The plainsong setting we use regularly is "Alleluia VI," which may be found in several places within the various volumes of *Gradual Psalms, Alleluia Verses and Tracts* published by Church Publishing. Using a verse with the Alleluia is possible, but I do not believe it is necessary.

My third suggestion is the song of praise (normally the *Gloria in excelsis* or *Kyrie eleison* in most communities). Possibilities which might be useful here include: the *Kyrie* setting found at S95 in *The Hymnal 1982*, the "Jubilate Deo" canon of Praetorius found in the *Music from Taizé* (among other places), and Hymn 377 (a metrical setting of Psalm 100).

In any case, consistency is the key to success. I recommend selecting one setting of the *Sanctus* and sticking with it. The same with the Alleluia. It might be possible to change the song of praise seasonally, but your sense of your own situation will let you know what will work for you. The important thing to remember is that the goal is to "make a joyful noise" in order to deepen the community's worship experience, so that they once again become who they are–the Body of Christ.

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By water and by fire

Sara Miles

The night I got pregnant someone was tortured and murdered nearby. I was a reporter living in El Salvador, and the road past my house ended in an overgrown ravine. I can't be exactly sure which night it happened, but I know that pretty much every morning during that fall of 1988 I'd go out and learn that a body had been dumped in the ravine.

Getting pregnant in the middle of a war wasn't an accident, but it wasn't a rational choice either. There was death everywhere; there was unspeakable cruelty and loss. There was this wrecked country and my own shaky, overwhelmed self. But I wanted this new life so much. I longed for more life.

As much as I wanted to be a mother, though, I felt unprepared, irresponsible, unworthy. One time, when the fighting got really bad in the capital, I'd gone to cover a battle on the edge of town. It was a crummy little barrio, with unpaved streets and families jammed on top of each other. The guerrillas were trying to shoot their way out of a cul-de-sac, and army troops were firing blindly at them. I got pinned behind a yellowish wall, along with a group of people from the neighborhood. Every once in a while, as the afternoon wore on, someone would try to dash across the street to safety, but the crossfire would drive them back. I remember the woman next to me cried a little bit, quietly; there was a guy with a gold tooth who was holding his kid tightly by the shoulder. I tried to decide if it would be better to keep my belly towards the wall, to protect the baby, or better to face out so I could see what was happening and maybe make a run for it.

I got home okay that night, but I was badly scared. I couldn't do this right. My child wasn't even born yet, and already I was endangering her. I felt undeserving and ashamed.

Then there were the romantic daydreams. Sometimes having a baby seemed like the single great gesture that was going to save me, redeem the mess I felt I'd made of my life, create enough joy to dim all the suffering around me. I imagined I was making a noble promise to the future, a vow that would transform everything.

But all around me other real people were living with that promise, and as their children grew and the sweetness of their love increased so did their heartbreak. I saw hungry kids, maimed kids, lost kids, scared kids, sick kids, shot kids. I saw a mother holding a dead child with the plastic barrettes still in her hair. I saw the relatives of soldiers, sitting outside the gates of the military hospital with their legless boys. Night after night, I knew mothers and fathers were still awake, waiting for their children to come home alive. I was heading straight into that suffering, as well as into love.

I thought a lot about fear, that year in El Salvador, and I asked everyone I knew about how they dealt with it. Some of my friends, like Ignacio Martin-Baro, a wry Jesuit priest teaching at the university, or Linda, a Maryknoll sister who ran a human rights office, or Gene Palumbo, a radio reporter who carried a Bible in his Jeep, were Christians. Some, like Hector or Leo or Guadalupe, who lived underground, "in the catacombs," as they liked to say, were dedicated communists. All of them had a faith that I could only dimly see, only guess at–only wish for, without much hope.

But I could feel something moving inside me. As a foreigner, a journalist, I'd been able to at least pretend to have a certain distance from ordinary humanity. Now I was just another pregnant lady, inescapably marked as sharing it. I kept being drawn closer to people I didn't know. Women patted my belly wherever I went. A labor leader who was in hiding stopped our

Continued on page 5

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