

Geoffrey Wainwright

CHRISTIAN INITIATION:
DEVELOPMENT, DISMEMBERMENT, REINTEGRATION

The Fact of Liturgical Change

Worshippers tend to assume that the patterns of worship that they know have been practiced since time immemorial. A little familiarity with liturgical history soon reveals that that is not in fact the case. You in your churches, with your new *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978), have inevitably been introduced to some liturgical history as you had to come to terms with new things that were really old things.

If we are Protestants, we may perhaps be willing to admit, after all, that liturgical patterns *have* changed slightly in the course of history; but at least we Protestants have been pretty close to what the apostles did in their day! Now the matter is not so simple as that, because in fact there is very little direct liturgical information in the New Testament writings. We are given certain sorts of evidence in the form of stories of baptism and theological arguments based on baptism, but we really do not have a full set of rubrics or a description of the words that were used in admitting Christians to the church in New Testament times.¹

What we have to do, therefore, if we want to start tracing the history of Christian initiation, is to begin a bit further on: I will begin at the beginning of the third century and will then,

The Reverend Dr. Wainwright is Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York City.

in the light of what we discover there, go back to the New Testament to see if we have some means of interpreting what is found in its writings. After that, I will start to move forward again and take us through the course of the history of Christian initiation, showing the developments and dismemberments which have occurred. Much of what you hear now will provide the necessary information that will enable many of the things that were said in Father Quinn's fine paper this afternoon to be appreciated more directly against their historical background.

"The Apostolic Tradition" of Hippolytus of Rome

We begin around the year 215 with a document which modern liturgical scholarship has persuaded us is a treatise on *The Apostolic Tradition* by St. Hippolytus of Rome. Hippolytus' treatise on *The Apostolic Tradition* was pieced together in our century, and we now have access through it to the opening decades of the third century. That is the prevalent view among liturgical scholars, though it does not go uncontested. For the sake of the presentation this evening I will accept the majority view. This view has certainly dominated the recent composition of liturgies in all our confessions. That magnificent achievement about which Father Quinn spoke this afternoon, the Roman Catholic *Order for the Christian Initiation of Adults* (1972), is based on the conviction that the treatise in question supplies us with early Roman history. Hippolytus has provided the basis for the revised Roman Catholic rite for the Christian initiation of adults.

How were Christians made? That is what we are really talking about when we talk of Christian initiation: we are talking about rites that bring to focus, that give shape to, the making of

Christians. How were Christians made in Rome about the year 215? You will see from my description how different our customs in the Protestant churches over the last generations have been from the full rite that is represented in Hippolytus' treatise.²

How did one become a Christian? You were introduced to the local church by an existing member of it as someone who was interested in becoming a Christian; and initial inquiries were made about your seriousness, about the desire you had to become a Christian. One of the tests of the seriousness of your desire to become a Christian was whether you were willing to renounce an occupation that might be incompatible with professing the Christian faith. There were many such occupations which brought you into contact with rites that were idolatrous or activities which, for moral reasons, were considered to be incompatible with being a Christian. And so the first test was, "Is this person in a state of life that is compatible with becoming a Christian?" If the answer was in the affirmative, then for three years (that, according to Hippolytus, is the normal length of the time of preparation of catechuminate) you were trained in the Christian faith in a preliminary way.

The instruction of the catechuminate seems to have been mainly on moral issues, and a great concern on the part of the teachers was to expel from you the evil spirits you had within you. I think it would be fair to say, if we demythologize a little, that those expulsions of spirits, in fact, had to do with an ethical training. That would be more how we would put the matter.

Each year at Easter there would be baptismal ceremonies. Hippolytus does not actually say that the rite he is describing took place in

the Easter Vigil Service, but we know from contemporary evidence, for instance in Tertullian, that Easter was the most favored time for baptism. Some weeks before Easter (the date is not specified by Hippolytus), those who were ready that year for baptism would have their names inscribed and become "the elect", one of the phrases to which Father Quinn introduced you this afternoon. This took place at the beginning of what we now call Lent, the period of proximate preparation for baptism. Now the more detailed preparation for their baptism would begin.

From later evidence we know some of the features of that more detailed preparation. There was, for instance, at some point in it, the "handing over" of the creed to the candidates and then they "gave it back". It went so: the detailed wording of the creed, up to that time probably not known by the candidates, was first taught to them and explained to them. Then at a time shortly before their baptism they would have to "give back" the wording of the creed.

There were also other ceremonies. The exorcisms built up as the time grew closer, for the church was quite determined that no trace of evil should remain among those who were to be baptized. The candidates, and the church with them, fasted and prayed for two days before the Easter Eve Vigil. On Easter Eve, the very last rites before baptism itself would take place, and then baptism and the rites after it in the course of that night between the Saturday and Easter Sunday morning. At cockcrow, Hippolytus tells us, prayer was said over the water. We have no indication as to the content of that prayer, but we know that in some sense there would be a blessing of the baptismal water.

Then the candidates, away from the main assembly of Christians, who would meanwhile be listening to scripture readings concerning the Passover and Old Testament prefigurations of the death and resurrection of Christ, would be taken to receive a final pre-baptismal anointing over the whole body. This seems, once again, to have been mainly exorcistic in character. There is some later evidence that it was interpreted in slightly different ways, especially in the East (and I will say something about that shortly). Still in the West, and not too far away from Rome, at Milan, this pre-baptismal anointing of the whole body of the candidates was for instance taken to be anointing them as "athletes of Christ." The notion was that they were being prepared for the "good fight", to fight for Christ against the devil. According to Hippolytus, the anointing accompanied the candidates' renunciation of Satan and all his works.

Baptism itself followed. What happened was this: The minister who was giving baptism (who was not the bishop; I'll talk about the bishop in a moment -- but was either a presbyter or a deacon or deaconess) would go down with the candidates into the water. The minister would address three questions to each one of them. First, "Do you believe in God the Father almighty?" When the candidate said, "I believe," then, says Hippolytus, the candidate was baptized. We are not quite sure how the water was applied. We know from Theodore of Mopsuestia, writing around the year 400, that in his neck of the woods, for instance, the candidates and the ministers went down into the water, and the minister dunked the candidate fully under the water at the point of baptism. But there are other pictures from the catacombs which suggest rather that people stood in water up to the knees or up to waist, and

then at the baptism the minister scooped the water up and poured it down over the head of the candidate.

The questioning continued with, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary?" -- and so on, roughly the second article of the Apostles' Creed. The candidate responded, "I believe," and so was baptized again. "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy church, the resurrection of the flesh?" -- something of that sort, a fully developed version of which came to be the third section of the Apostles' Creed. The candidate responded, "I believe," and again was baptized.

Now notice, there is no indication that the minister said, "So and so, I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." The words of baptism -- the central words -- were the questions of faith, and the responses, "I believe."

When the candidates came up from the water they would receive another anointing of the whole body -- again by a presbyter. The meaning of this is not terribly clear, but it is something like being made a sharer in the anointed Christ.

Then came ceremonies that were reserved to the bishop, and this fact is important, because it affects the history of what we later came to know as confirmation, though I certainly agree with what was said this afternoon, namely that confirmation has a very checkered history, and one has to use the term carefully. But the beginnings of some sort of confirmation, at any rate, lie in the post-baptismal ceremonies performed by the bishop after the presbyter or deacon has performed the other ceremonies. The bishop

extends his hand over the candidates and says a prayer. The prayer exists in two forms in the texts of Hippolytus as we have them. In one form, the Latin form, the import of the prayer is this: "You have already been reborn of the Holy Spirit in baptism, may God now give you grace to serve him." But in the Eastern versions of the document, the phrasing is rather different and it means: "You have been reborn in baptism, may you now be filled with the Holy Spirit." Notice the difference. In the Latin version, the Holy Spirit has apparently already been given in the water baptism; but in the Eastern versions, there is a special focus for the coming of the Holy Spirit which is that prayer now as the bishop extends a hand over the candidates. The bishop then anoints the head of the candidates and traces the sign of the cross on the forehead. That ceremony is reserved to the bishop also. Then the bishop gives the kiss of peace to the candidates and finally, newly-baptized and, to use an anachronism, confirmed, they are led into the main assembly of the Christians.

For the first time the candidates now join in the full solemn prayers of the Christian assembly. Then they exchange the kiss of peace with the whole congregation and take part in the holy communion for the first time. Hitherto they had been excluded from the holy communion. They make their first communion early on that Easter Sunday morning. They communicate in bread and wine, but they receive also two other cups apart from the wine. They receive a cup of water, which is said to signify the cleansing of the inward person just as water in the bath of baptism had been an outward washing; and they receive also milk and honey, and that is interpreted as a sign of entry into the Promised Land. They are now fully-fledged Christians. They have been through the rites of Christian initiation (to use another anachronistic term³), they

have been through the whole catechumenate, they have been through exorcism, renunciation of Satan, the confession of faith in the water baptism, anointing after baptism, the acts performed by the bishop, and their first communion.

Now you don't find much of that in the New Testament, do you? There has obviously been a fairly considerably development between, let us say, the year 70 and the year 200. Or has there? Well, let us try to trace our way back.

Back to the New Testament

The earliest sound evidence that we have between Hippolytus and the New Testament period is found in Justin Martyr, writing in Rome about the year 160. St. Justin gives this description of baptism which I will now read to you. It's quite a brief one.

"As many as are persuaded and believe that these things which we teach and describe are true, and undertake to live accordingly, are taught to pray and ask God, while fasting, for the forgiveness of their sins; and we pray and fast with them. Then they are led by us to a place where there is water, and they are reborn after the manner of rebirth by which we also were reborn; for they are then washed in the water in the name of the Father and Lord God of all things, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. . . . After we have thus washed him that is persuaded and has declared his assent, we lead him to those who are called brethren, where they are assembled, and make common prayer fervently for ourselves, for him that has been enlightened, and for all people everywhere, that embracing the truth we may be found in our lives good and obedient citizens, and also attain to everlasting salvation."

Then an account of the Eucharist follows.

Now perhaps that is more like what we are used to. There is an account of some preparation by prayer and fasting (though the fasting went out quite a long time ago); but then apparently a simple water rite, no mention of episcopal ceremonies, and then the per-

son is led into the assembly, joins in the prayers of the people of God, and takes part in the holy communion.

But the matter is not so simple as that, and some liturgical scholars have found even in that account by St. Justin some hints of that richer ceremonial that we found in *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. And so you go back to the New Testament and you ask, "Can you find hints or traces there of something of those other ceremonies?"⁴

Now, the big question is: Was there another rite or rites in addition to the baptism of water which was considered to be normally part of "making Christians" in the apostolic period? Here it must be said that scholars diverge very widely. It would not be totally unfair to say that scholars from those Christian traditions which have only the water baptism tend to notice only the water baptism in the New Testament, and scholars from those churches which have hand-laying and unction and so on tend to find traces of these also in the New Testament.

Now, what is the kind of evidence with which we are dealing? Nobody disagrees that water baptism is present in the New Testament, and it is fairly clear in the Acts of the Apostles, for example, that the word is preached, people believe, and then they are baptized in water. On that much all can agree. But what about some stories in Acts where it appears that other events took place after the water baptism? Let us look at Acts chapter 8 for instance: Philip's converts in Samaria. They had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, but it is said they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, and the apostles had to come down from Jerusalem, lay hands upon them, and then they received the Holy Spirit. Does that

mean that they had not been properly baptized in the first place? Or does it mean that they simply had not got that rather spectacular manifestation of the Spirit, that is the speaking in tongues, in which Luke is interested? Or, if they had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, might their faith have been incomplete? We know that Samaria was the scene of the arch-heretic Simon Magus. It may well have been that they had a wrong or incomplete faith which somehow needed to be corrected or completed before they could have been properly said to be Christians.

There is a somewhat strange story in Acts 19: the "disciples" at Ephesus. They had received, it is said, only John's baptism, and they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit. So Paul baptizes them in the name of the Lord Jesus, lays hands on them and they receive the Spirit.

Think of the Cornelius story in Acts 10 and 11, where the Holy Spirit falls upon Cornelius before his baptism. That does not mean to say that he does not need to be baptized; indeed, the conclusion is that he may and must now be baptized.

So you have a somewhat complex picture in the Acts of the Apostles. There are other, more indirect evidences that some see for there being a separate focus for the gift of the Spirit in the New Testament texts. There are mentions, for instance, of sealing or anointing in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 1:13-14 and 4:30, and the First Letter of John 2:20 and 27. Some have said that these references to sealing and anointing are metaphorical and have no rite corresponding to them. Others say that if a rite does correspond to them, it is the baptism in water. Others again say that these words which were later to become technical terms associated with

the post-baptismal ceremonies, are, in fact, the first signs of what came to be confirmation.

Scholars are not agreed on these points, or on some even more subtle points as, for instance, Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized and you will receive the Holy Spirit." We readily take that to mean you will receive the Holy Spirit through your baptism. But some scholars have argued, "Repent and be baptized and *thereafter* you will receive the Holy Spirit"; and there are other subtleties of that kind (as in connection with Titus 3:5). Scholars vary in their interpretation, and so we cannot be sure exactly what the normal standard rites of Christian initiation were in the New Testament period. It may well be that in different places and at different times and on different occasions the admission of Christians varied, though water baptism appears constant.

The Conversion of the Empire

Now let me take you forward again just a little bit from the year 200 where we started off with Hippolytus. We know more and more about the rites of Christian initiation from the fourth and fifth centuries, because that was when the church went public with the conversion of Constantine. The gradual establishment of Christianity as the religion of the empire was sealed under Theodosius at the end of the fourth century. With all that, more and more people flocked into the church, and we have descriptions as to how they were admitted as members of the church. One thing that very clearly happened was that the total time of preparation was reduced, and what we now know as Lent, a matter of a few weeks, became the normal period of preparation instead of the three years that had been the case about the year 200.

We have descriptions from several of the major bishops of the fourth and fifth centuries of the kind of teaching that they gave to the candidates for baptism or the newly baptized. In most cases, teaching on the sacraments was given *after* baptism. In other cases, notably in the case of St. John Chrysostom at Antioch, teaching on baptism was given *before* baptism. We know the kind of teaching they gave, the way they gave it, and how they explained the meaning of baptism as the dying and rising with Christ, as the washing away of sins, as the gift of the Holy Spirit and so on.⁵

But when was the Spirit given? I have already indicated that that is a controversial matter. It has haunted the history of Christian initiation and still does until this day. It seems that in the earliest East, in the Syrian parts of Christianity, there was quite likely an anointing or an imposition of hands *before* the water baptism which was held to convey the gift of the Holy Spirit. It may very well have been linked with that exorcistic notion of anointing and imposition of hands before baptism, because, you see, if you chase out the evil spirits, then, as you know from the Gospels, you must not leave the place empty or they will come back and matters will be seven times worse than before. So that empty space has to be filled with the Holy Spirit instead of by evil spirits.

That pattern did not persist. By the fifth century, except perhaps in the furthest Syrian East, it was practically everywhere established that there was a special pneumatological focus for the gift of the Spirit *after* baptism: the laying on of hands and anointing. So what we find in both East and West is that the central rite is baptism with water, followed by imposition of hand or anointing or both; and that although the Spirit is sensed to

be active in some way throughout the rite, the special focus of his gift is *after* the water baptism in the laying on of hands or the anointing of the head or the forehead with oil.

Now that's where things start to go wrong, or at least where there is the potentiality for things to go wrong. You may start by saying that within a total rite there is one particular moment which is a focus without being the exclusive occasion for the gift of the Spirit: the imposition of hands or anointing. But you can move from that position to saying it is *only* at the imposition of hands or anointing that the Spirit is given; and you can make a distinction between water baptism, which is for the forgiveness of sins and rebirth, and the imposition of hands and/or anointing, which is for the gift of the Spirit. That is still not too bad as long as you are doing it all roughly at the same time in a single rite. But what happened in the West was that those two parts of the single baptismal rite became separated, for reasons which I will give in a moment. You are then left with the problem that there could be an interval between water baptism, which cleansed of sin and gave rebirth, and the imposition of hands and anointing, which gave the Spirit. All kinds of theological problems resulted: What is the state and status of such a person in that period between baptism and what became known as confirmation (which could be a period of several years)?

In the East they managed to keep water baptism and anointing with imposition of hands together in a single rite. They did that because the bishop did not insist on being personally the agent of the imposition of hands and of the anointing when a presbyter had performed the water baptism. Rather, the bishop consecrated oil and allowed the presbyters to anoint immediately after they had

performed water baptism. The presbyters performed water baptism and immediately anointed on the forehead for the gift of the Holy Spirit with oil previously consecrated by the bishop.

With the increasing number of converts to Christianity, the pattern of a single or a few occasions of baptism in the year, presided over by the bishop, broke down. People were being baptized at different times of the year away from the bishop's church, and baptisms were being performed by presbyters in the parishes on their own. The East took one solution, as I said, to keep the bishop's presidency of the initiation ceremonies alive: The expedient was used of oil consecrated by the bishop. But in the West, that solution was not taken, and presbyters could only baptize with water and give a first post-baptismal anointing of the whole body, but not the really significant post-baptismal anointing of the head or forehead and the signing of the cross. At least where Roman influence extended, the bishop reserved that to himself. So in the West, when dioceses grew, and more and more people became converted to Christianity, and the bishops became involved in the civil administration (as they did with the establishment of the Christian religion), the presbyters would be performing the baptisms and nobody, perhaps for several years, would be giving the episcopal rite of laying on of hands and anointing with oil on the head or forehead. A gap therefore grew up between an infant baptism and an episcopal rite performed in later years. You cannot say, "Why didn't they just save up all the babies until Easter Eve and then take them to the bishop's church and have them all baptized together?" because there had grown up simultaneously the view that baptism was essential to salvation in a very rigorous sense, and that if a child died before receiving baptism then its fate was at the

best uncertain (and it might be a very nasty fate indeed, if you took the full rigors of Augustine's position on original sin).

So infants were baptized very soon after birth, and then a gap of several years could intervene before the bishop made a tour round the diocese, and parents and godparents were then expected to bring their baptized children to the bishop for confirmation. But it seems that in many cases that never took place, and that confirmation was never given at all. Nevertheless, infants still received communion: they received communion from parish priests, the presbyter who had baptized them, and they continued to receive communion though not confirmed. Now that is how the order of baptism, confirmation (to use a term that came into use from the fifth or sixth centuries for these episcopal rites) and first communion got upset. That sequence got so upset that we had water baptism and communion -- those went on -- and then perhaps a gap of several years before confirmation took place, if it ever did.⁶

The Middle Ages

That was the situation through the early Middle Ages, but then a new development -- or further dismemberment -- took place around the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There grew up from about the eleventh century onward, let us say, an increasingly realistic understanding of the presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements. The church had always, as far as we know, believed that the presence of Christ was associated with, symbolized or signified by, the bread and wine; but there arose a more materialistic (I think it would not be unfair to use that word) understanding of the presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements. And so people started to get worried about giving communion to infants

round about the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Infants had not been receiving communion under the sign of bread: since they were only a few days old at baptism, they had received wine only. With the danger of the baby emitting the sacred element and all kinds of unpleasant things happening once you understand the presence of Christ rather materialistically, people then got worried about giving communion even under the species of wine to infants. And so priests started to give them unconsecrated wine as a kind of substitute. By the thirteenth century the laity practically lost the chalice in any case and so people stopped communicating under the species of wine. With that combination of factors, the bread having already been abandoned for infants, then the wine disappearing in those ways -- either by use of unconsecrated wine or no wine at all -- you are left without infant communion.

The child then started to communicate when he could physically manage it (when he got a bit older), and then with confirmation having been postponed (the episcopal acts after baptism) and communion also having been postponed, people noticed the gap and thought it must be right and proper and theologically important.

They started to give an explanation as to why there was the waiting for confirmation and first communion, and they said, "It must be we have to wait until the children come to the years of discretion." That is the rationalization given, but the practice had grown up almost accidentally (or at least for other reasons that may have had some theological validity or not) -- not for that reason of waiting until the years of discretion.

We then start to build up a theology of confirmation on the basis of this new rite, as it practically was, which had grown out of

those episcopal ceremonies that had immediately followed on the water at an earlier date. You had to give an explanation for this rite of confirmation. It has been said that confirmation is a rite in search of a theology, and I think it has always been that. Whenever the church has wanted to say something important about being a Christian, and has not known which sacrament to attach it to, it has used confirmation as a peg on which to hang that important something. So it has happened that at various times it was said, for instance, "It is a strengthening for the fight. As you are growing up, you need to be able to fight against the temptations peculiar to adolescence and so on; to fight against the devil in the world." Or it is said, "You are now being commissioned to preach to others the gospel that you yourself have received," and so it becomes a kind of missionary sacrament-- commissioning to preach the gospel.

We are now coming to the situation that the Reformers inherited; we are not quite there yet, but let us summarize what we have so far: We have infant baptism within the first few days or weeks of the child's life as normal in the Western church; but then a gap of several or many years before first communion and confirmation or confirmation and first communion (the order seems to vary; it may have been more accidental than not). That is what the Reformers inherit; but they do not inherit it neat, because another association of ideas had grown up around the separate event of confirmation. This pattern was found on the heretical fringes of the medieval Western church among the Waldensians in Italy, among the Hussites in Bohemia, and even with Erasmus (who for other reasons must probably be reckoned on the heretical fringe of the later medieval church). The separate and later rite of confirmation could be a good occasion for making personal profession of the faith that as an infant one had not been able to

confess oneself at baptism. We find in those circles that I have mentioned that somehow associated with confirmation there is a period of instruction and of confessing the faith. Over much wider circles it had been the duty of godparents from baptism to teach their children the "Our Father", the "Hail Mary", and the Apostles' Creed. That was fairly common in the West in the Middle Ages. Put those together; have the notion also of some need to confess personally the faith that you had not been able to confess on being baptized as an infant; and you are coming towards, as you will recognize, something of what the Reformers made of confirmation.

The Reformation

What then happened at the time of the Reformation?⁷ The Reformers found themselves part of a church that seemed to be at variance with the Gospel as they read it (that is the simplest way, perhaps, of saying in one sentence what the Reformation was about). And so they sought to purify -- to reform -- the church; to bring it back closer to its original Gospel condition. One of the things that they noticed about the rites of initiation, indeed, was that all kinds of secondary ceremonies had gotten attached to them: salt and spittle, anointings and hand layings, candle and clout, and so on. Gradually the Reformers got rid of most or all of the secondary ceremonies and left only a water rite of baptism. They didn't do it immediately, and if you compare Luther's first and second *Taufbauchlein*, you will see that there's a further purification or whatever you like to call it, that has been made between the first and the second. The same can be found in Zwingli, the same can be found in Cranmer. They left standing out very clear and plain the water rite for infants.

The Reformers, nevertheless, did continue to baptize infants. Now this is an interesting phenomenon. On the face of it (and, I would still myself say, on closer inspection) there is considerable difficulty in reconciling infant baptism with justification through faith alone. I will talk a bit more about that in a moment. Zwingli at first thought he ought to give up baptizing infants, but he later said he had seen the error of his ways, and now continued to baptize them. But why? Zwingli had experienced the threat of the Anabaptists in Zurich, the Anabaptists being disruptive from a social-political point of view. And, probably impressed by the need to preserve the unity of the people of his city, he moved away from that position which had been initially sympathetic to baptism upon profession of faith, drowned the Anabaptists, and himself continued to baptize infants.

Luther saw the problem posed by the continuing baptism of infants and his doctrine of justification by faith, and he gave a whole load of answers as to how the two can be reconciled. But he shifts from one answer to another, at different times and places, as though he were not really satisfied with any of them as such. In one place, for instance, he emphasizes the promise that is contained in baptism and says: "God promises first." But then he goes on to say that the promise needs to be received. Then at another point he says, "The faith of others can avail for us," and there will be the notion of some kind of vicarious substitution of faith. Or at another point he says that we bring the children already as believers. At another point he says baptism makes the child a believer: gives the child faith. So Luther is undeniably hanging on to infant baptism, but with some inconsistency in the reasons he advances for doing so. Nevertheless, he did do so. One famous example that he gives is the Visitation, when Mary

arrived at Elizabeth's home and the babe in Elizabeth's womb (the embryonic John the Baptist) leapt as Mary, then bearing the Christ Child in her womb, entered. Luther says this is quite normal, as it were; anybody confronted with the Word of God can respond in faith: even the child in the womb. Opinions may vary on that, but Luther certainly maintained infant baptism, and ritually, in the *Taufbuchlein*, the answer that he gave seems to be that the child spoke through the godparents. The questions of renunciation and faith were addressed as though to the child, and the godparents "spoke for", in that sense, the child (the child is speaking through the godparents); and that was the position until very recently in the Lutheran rite.

This does raise questions, and I'll come out theologically on this one if you like, though I realize that I shall lose the sympathy of three quarters of the audience by doing so. I do find it difficult myself to reconcile infant baptism with justification through faith. The crucial question is, What do you understand by faith? A modern Lutheran defense of infant baptism on this score by Edmund Schlink, for example, in a very fine book on baptism, emphasizes Luther's words about baptism being *Gottes Wort*, *Gottes Wasser*, and so on. This is God's word, God's water; it is God who does all this.⁸ And, says Schlink, we are purely passive in baptism, and he says faith is purely passive: the nature of faith is to be purely passive, and that is exemplified above all in infant baptism. Now, my understanding of faith (and I'm a mere Methodist) is that faith is certainly receptivity; but it is *active* receptivity. God is prior, his grace is first, without the continuance of his grace nothing; but my reception must be *active* reception. Now with that I follow, for instance, Augustine whom Wesley loved to quote on this point. Augustine said, "He who

made us without ourselves will not save us without ourselves." That seems to express something of this notion of active receptivity.

Let me put it in terms of another religion altogether; it may shift the argument somewhat. There are apparently in Hindu theology two schools of thought concerning salvation, known as the "cat" school and the "monkey" school. The picture is: how does a mother in each of these two species, monkeys and cats, transport the offspring? The cat picks up the kittens by the scruff of the neck and lifts them to where they are going, and the kittens do nothing. But in the monkey school, the mother still picks up the children to move them but they cling on. Now that may illustrate something of the possible views of grace and faith. Is it that we're taken by the scruff of the neck, as it were, and lifted, or is it that we're certainly lifted but need to hang on?

What Luther did not do was to provide a rite of confirmation. But, within Lutheran churches, and in the Reformed churches of Switzerland and France, and so on, there grew up somewhat deliberately in many cases, as with Bucer at Strasburg, for instance, a rite of confirmation to conclude a period of instruction for young people in the main articles of the faith. Now, the form which that took varied considerably with times and places. Sometimes it included a public profession of faith; sometimes that was less explicit. But commonly among the churches of the Reformation there grew up this view of confirmation, where a medieval name was maintained, as an occasion for instruction and for profession of faith, in the main; with sometimes a kind of hangover from the view of a sacramental gift somehow strengthening by grace or whatever. It was usually the occasion of first admission to communion. And that

was the kind of confirmation we inherited, but with many different nuances and shades and varieties throughout the Protestant churches.

Now then, I have taken us to the point that I was supposed to take us to, but I would like to trespass beyond my historical brief and ask: What does this history mean for us today?

The Reintegration of Initiation

Ecumenically, we need to come to terms with the processes of development and dismemberment which have occurred from the early centuries on.⁹ The rise of infant initiation (unless this was already apostolic; we have no certain evidence before the second half of the second century), the crystallization of a particular focus for the Spirit after water baptism, the Western separation of "confirmation" and then communion from baptism, the loss or postponement of the catechumenate, the reassertion of a personal profession of faith as part of becoming a Christian: all these historical factors have allowed the requisite features of Christian initiation to be combined according to various patterns, the different patterns often coming to enshrine different understandings of man, sin and salvation. Some accommodation must be reached among the denominations. These are signs that the modern liturgical movement is helping to achieve this at the ritual level; and it may be that a certain harmony among the rites will be able to contain some measure of theological variety in matters of grace and faith.

Contemporary liturgists agree that the process of Christian initiation is properly a unity, and they further acknowledge that the making of Christians "takes time." There is indeed

a sense in which becoming a Christian is a lifetime's job: individual death and final resurrection seal what happened sacramentally in baptism and was developed existentially in the moral life. Yet there was a decisive beginning, even though the beginning itself may be spread out over a certain period: and it is this beginning, whether short or long, which is meant by Christian initiation.

There are several possibilities for bringing to ritual expression the unity of Christian initiation and for recognizing both the decisiveness and the duration of the process. Revised liturgies in the Western churches are tending to leave several possibilities open, though often showing an implicit or explicit preference for one particular pattern.

One way to reintegrate Christian initiation is to retain infant baptism and bring other elements of the initiation process into infancy to join it. Thus some revised rites introduce an anointing or an imposition of hands with prayer for the Holy Spirit immediately after the water baptism. This is the case in your new *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978), in the new *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal church (1977), and in the United Methodist alternate rite (1976). In all these churches there is some movement also (the strength of it is difficult to judge) towards giving the holy communion to infants. In so far as you are persuaded of the propriety of infant baptism, to that same extent you should also endorse infant communion; for the same arguments apply, it seems to me, in the one case as in the other. Those to whom you see fit to give the sacrament of rebirth should not be denied the sacrament of continued feeding.

The movement towards a reintegration of initiation in infancy would bring us closer to the Eastern tradition. The problem with it is the almost inevitable degradation of the personal profession of faith as an element in the making of Christians. Personal faith can, however, be professed later, at a more or less highlighted occasion in a whole series of opportunities for such profession. I am thinking of what the *Lutheran Book of Worship* calls "affirmation of baptism". There is something similar in the Episcopal *Prayer Book*, and the Methodists speak of "the first and other renewals of the baptismal covenant." It is noteworthy that both the Episcopalian and the Lutheran liturgists, at stages before the final production of their new books, sought to play down "confirmation" as an unrepeatable quasi-sacramental occasion for later confession of faith on the part of those baptized in infancy, but that such confirmation finally reasserted itself ecclesiastically, whether for reasons that were simply atavistic or soundly theological and pastoral.

A second way to reintegrate initiation is to "postpone" baptism until it can be given upon profession of faith, at which time the newly baptized can also receive (if a further sign is judged appropriate) an anointing or imposition of hands for the Holy Spirit and must certainly begin to share the eucharistic life. This pattern is being advocated by some Roman Catholic theologians such as Aidan Kavanagh in the U.S.A. (*The Shape of Baptism: The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 1978, and elsewhere) and Daniel Boureau in France (*L'avenir du baptême*, 1970). It is the pattern which I myself would prefer, and in my own British Methodist church I have argued that this choice should at least be open.¹⁰ The children of Christian parents may meanwhile be admitted to the catechumenate, as those "destined for baptism" and being reared

in a faith which they will one day make fully their own. It is important to observe that those of us who favor this position usually have a much more strongly "sacramental" view of baptism than is commonly held among Baptists, and that we do not advocate the "re-baptism" of people baptized in infancy. Most simply, the most clearly attested practice in the New Testament, namely the baptism of believers, is held to have become once again the best way of embodying the Gospel in a culture which is forgetting its Christianity.

A third possibility is to accept positively the interval which developed in the West between a baptism given in infancy and the later reception of confirmation and communion. But then steps must be taken to make clear that a single process of initiation is involved across the interval of time. This appears to be the way taken by the post-Vatican II rites of the Roman Catholic church. Infant baptism is certainly retained and expected, but an admonition at the end of the *Order for Baptizing Infants* (1969) looks forward to confirmation and communion. And the revised rite of confirmation (1971) includes the "renewal of baptismal promises and professions," though it cannot be said to make really clear what is "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" beyond baptism.

We may ourselves hold a theological preference for this, that or the other of these three main possibilities. If we hold even a minimal doctrine of God's guidance of the church in history, we shall probably be willing to see positive values in all three main patterns of initiation: what may roughly be called "ancient and eastern", "medieval and western", "primitive and baptist." They bear varied testimony to the rich resources of God in bring-

ing human beings to salvation and to diverse manners in which people enter on the way. I judge they should be embraced in mutual recognition.

NOTES

- 1 I have treated these issues in scholarly detail in my book *Christian Initiation* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), and in two articles in *Studia Liturgica*: "The Baptismal Eucharist Before Nicaea" (vol. 4, 1965, pp. 9-36), "The Rites and Ceremonies of Christian Initiation: Developments in the Past" (vol. 10, 1974, pp. 2-24).
- 2 Early and Medieval texts may be found in E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London: S.P.C.K., second edition, 1970). In the following description I have borrowed a few details from other sources than Hippolytus.
- 3 In the early centuries, Christian writers used "initiatory" language only in contrast with pagan initiation rites. The term "Christian Initiation" is modern, probably dating from L. Duchesne's *Origines du culte chretien* (1889).
- 4 A full survey of the earliest post-biblical evidence is provided by J. D. C. Fisher, *Confirmation Then and Now* (London: S.P.C.K., 1978).
- 5 For most of the texts see E. J. Yarnold, *The Awe-inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century* (Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1972). Note the study by Hugh M. Riley, *Christian Initiation: A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ambrose of Milan* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1974).
- 6 Note the significantly sub-titled study by J. D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West. A Study in the Disintegration of the Primitive Rite of Initiation* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965).
- 7 For texts, see J. D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period* (London: S.P.C.K., 1970).
- 8 E. Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972).
- 9 Note the Faith and Order work on *One Baptism, One Eucharist, and A Mutually Recognized Ministry* (Geneva: W.C.C., 1975). I am engaged in the revision of those three statements; see my article "Christian Initiation in the Ecumenical Movement" in *Studia Liturgica* 12 (1977), pp. 67-86.
- 10 See G. Wainwright, "The Need for a Methodist Service for the Admission of Infants to the Catechumenate" in *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, January 1968, pp. 51-60.