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Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion: Christian Initiation in the Contemporary Church

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Made, Not Born, is the title of a remarkable book produced by the remarkable program of liturgical studies conducted at the University of Notre Dame[1] and also the title of Frank Quinn's keynote address yesterday. The correspondence of the two titles is surely no accident. The notion that Christians are made and not born may well come as a shock not only to Lutherans but to all those Christians that prize the Reformation emphasis on the priority of grace. We have for so long insisted on the gift character of baptism that such a title jars. A Christian is made? Never! is our first response, for faith is the gift of God, the necessary undergirding for the new life bestowed in baptism.

However, today we are faced with the urgent and pressing question: What new life? What is the evidence for it in the Church's present state? Do we even expect it? If we expect to see new life, then it should be obvious from the very way we handle Christian initiation. I do not know how it is with other Christian churches, but I suspect that all too many Lutheran congregations limit their own preparations of candidates for Christian initiation to a course of instruction, either an hour or so for parents and godparents in the case of infants or to a six to twelve week instruction course for adult candidates. In some cases competing congregations have ad-

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vertised their course to be shorter than those of another congregation. Such courses of instruction for adults have sometimes been made more inviting with the use of the phrase "No obligation." Come, if you wish. We shall see to it that our faith puts no demands on you. It is as if we were inviting them to sample a new acne medicine. If it doesn't get rid of your pimples you can have your money back. But if it is good for you, we'll expect you to come back and buy some more from us. We invite people to encounter the God of the Exodus and the Father who lifted up his Son, and we say "No obligation." Is there anything that you don't like about us? If not, how about joining the church?

One of the Lutheran arguments for infant baptism has been that since it is so obvious that a child can bring nothing to its own baptism the baptism of an infant gives a clearer witness to the grace of God than that of an adult. Well, baptism is clearly an act of grace, but baptism is not just a bit of liturgical action. And grace is not like a shot of penicillin. Baptism is a name for the encounter between sinful humans and a forgiving God who meets us in the body of his Son. That is a life or death situation. Bonhoeffer's phrase, "cheap grace," ought to begin to haunt us if it has not already done so. A reflection on the state of Christian initiation in the churches must lead us to confront the accusation in those words.

Aidan Kavanagh has written: "The clearest symptom of the present state of the church is the quality of discussion on the matter of Christian initiation."[2] Writing from the perspective of the Roman Catholic church he mentions questions about the right age for confirmation, about how to catechize parents of infants brought for baptism, about whether infant baptism itself is a good thing, and so on. But it is clear that in his mind these questions are not

the crucial ones. They are only the surface symptoms of a much more profound disquietude in the church.

I am sure that I am not the only person who was active in the liturgical work leading to the *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)* who somewhat dreamily listened to the controversy that settled around the proposals of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW) concerning the eucharistic rite. We knew that the real excitement was in the baptismal rite and the working out of its implications in other rites. The Lutherans in America already had the resources they needed to come to terms with the liturgy for Holy Communion. They only needed to make the effort. It is not yet at all certain that they have come that far in regard to Christian initiation. It may well be that this is also true of Christians in other denominations.

The *Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Edition* states: "The Service of Holy Baptism has several parts which together constitute the fullness of the sacrament of initiation into the community of faith: presentation, thanksgiving, renunciation and profession of faith, baptism with water, laying on of hands and signation, welcome into the congregation."[3] Now that is not quite what the ILCW said earlier in *Contemporary Worship 7: Holy Baptism.*[4] There the emphasis on the unity of the rite was somewhat more broadly stated. The fullness of Christian initiation was described as a baptism with water, the laying on of hands, and the eucharist. This is not to suggest that the liturgical drafters of the *LBW* had a change of heart; rather it suggests that the churches for which the *LBW* was prepared were not yet ready to accept the classic understanding of the rites of Christian initiation without reservation. Something of the same backing and filling, it appears, also took place in the Episcopal church between the time of *Prayer Book Studies 18: Holy*

Baptism With the Laying-On-Of Hands (PBS)[5] and the authorization of the new *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*.[6]

The unity of the rites of Christian initiation is axiomatic among students of the liturgy. The point is emphasized not only by the lifting out of the Vigil of Easter as the clearest sign of the full meaning of Christian initiation. The liturgy for that night provides that unity within its proper context: the celebration of the new Passover of God in his Son's suffering, death, resurrection and glorification. The point is also emphasized by the discussion within the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches about the role of the bishop in these rites. Those churches have consistently stressed the old Roman notion that the bishop alone could, as was said, "complete" the sacramental rites by Confirmation. *PBS 18*, in the interests of the unity of the rites, stated, "When because of unavoidable circumstances, the bishop cannot be present, the unified rite provides that the priest be empowered to act as his deputy and to perform the Laying-on-of-Hands."[7] You may want to note that the term "confirmation" is avoided by the expression, "laying-on-of-hands." The *Book of Common Prayer* no longer mentions the laying-on-of-hands. It simply states: "The bishop, when present, is the celebrant; and is expected to preach the Word and preside at Baptism and the Eucharist. In the absence of a bishop, a priest is the celebrant."[8] For its own reasons, the Episcopal church also is not quite ready for a totally integrated rite. The Roman Catholic *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, it is quite evident, sees Christian initiation in its fullest terms. The rites are unified. That is considered so important that the rite states, "When the bishop is absent, the presbyter who baptizes an adult or a child of catechetical age should also confer confirmation, unless the sacrament is given at another time."[9] Perhaps that is of signifi-

cance more in what we used to call missionary situations than in countries as our own. Nevertheless, this marks a very significant shift in values.

Perhaps those who have shown particular interest in the worship of the church have at times communicated to others the naive notion that if we ever get the rites of the church in order, all will end well. Reunify the rites of Christian initiation and all's well. But Christian initiation is more than a series of rites, unified or not. It has to do with the Holy Spirit and with the search for the Spirit: to find the signs of his presence, to center the life of the church on that presence. When we deal with Christian initiation we are talking about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our participation in that dying and rising. And that is to be caught up in the fire and wind of God.

The rites of Christian initiation therefore have a context. In time, that context is the celebration of the passover of Christ in the Three Great and Holy Days of his death, burial, and resurrection, and the season of Lent which prepares us for those days, and the Paschal season which is our cry of alleluia before God. Thanks to the new Roman lectionary which has been incorporated in substance in both *BCP* and *LBW* Lutherans are relearning the meaning of Lent. We are being turned away from the notion that Lent is an extended Passiontide in which we are continually to be occupied with meditation on the passion of Christ. We are once again seeing the classic purposes of Lent: a recall of our baptism, reconciliation, and renewal of the disciplines of fasting, prayer and alms-giving. Lent is our annual revisiting of the process of Christian initiation. It is to give us a vision of what the church is to be and to reveal the communal context of Christian initiation.

The *BCP* and *LBW* both provide rites for Ash Wednesday that should remind us of the ecclesial context of baptism. The *BCP* rite follows the sermon. The *LBW* rite precedes the liturgy of the word. They both contain, although in varying order, Psalm 51, a litany of penitence, and the imposition of ashes. They also contain an exhortation to a congregational observance of Lent. Penitence, forgiveness, prayer, and reconciliation are the business of Lent. They are the same stuff of which initiation is made. Lent reminds us that conversion takes place within the church.

We must ask if that communal context really exists in our practice of Christian initiation. *LBW* stresses that baptism is to be celebrated in the chief service of the church on the Lord's day. Pastors are more conscious of the need for pre-baptismal counseling for parents and sponsors. I suspect that adult catechumens are in all churches rather isolated from the community in special instructional classes. In which way does the church actually serve as the matrix from which conversion springs? We have reformed the rites, but not only are we often using the new rites as though they were still the same old rites but the renewed church that the new rites seek to evoke has yet to appear.

Aidan Kavanagh notes that the crisis in Christian initiation today relates to the disintegration of church discipline and Christian witness. In a footnote he refers to a poll of American leaders on the eighteen most powerful institutions in the nation. They rated "organized religion" last, can you imagine, after the Republican party.[10] How we have fallen! Because of its failure to understand and live by and for the meaning of Christian initiation, the church cannot help but present a weak and uncertain image.

The anabaptist brethren of the 16th century raised the question of the inconsistency between the significance of Christian initiation and the reality of the church's way of life. They objected to the notion that if you are born in a Christian land, you must surely be a Christian, and therefore you just as surely are qualified for baptism. The brethren pointed to the baptized multitudes that showed none of the fruits of the Spirit. Their arguments were refuted by references to the errors of the Donatists and the objective character and power of Word and Sacrament.

Nevertheless serious questions are being raised about infant baptism within the very churches that have baptized infants and vigorously defended the practice. In my judgment, this is not so much a discussion about infant baptism but one about the character of the church of our day. The question seems to be, "Can one in good faith baptize when there can be little or no assurance of that conversion signified by baptism?"

When the ILCW issued its provisional rite on baptism some angry mutterings were heard. It was suggested that the ILCW did not quite approve of infant baptism because it identified adult baptism as a norm for baptism. From that some concluded that because the baptism of an infant is not the same as the baptism of an adult, infant baptism was somehow abnormal, not quite good enough. That is one way of looking at a norm, of course, but not the only one, and not the correct one in this case. There is a sense in which the new rites of Christian initiation set forth the initiation of adults as the norm. But that must be understood correctly.

Collecting rocks is no longer as popular these days as collecting antiques and nostalgia items. But hobbyists learn that one aid

in classifying rocks is their hardness. Scales of hardness have been established. One point on the scale is the diamond. Talc is not as hard as diamond. It does not cease being a stone however. It does not mean that diamond can be used in all the ways of talc or vice versa. To say that adult baptism is a norm means to say that we can see something about the nature of initiation in the initiation of an adult that is helpful for a definition of that process. What one should see in adult baptism is the crisis for both the individual and the community in passing from under the control of Satan to the realm of God. Just because a person is initiated as an adult does not mean the conversion is more certain than in the case of an infant. But rather it should show us more clearly the way in which the church is involved as the vehicle of the Spirit and the radical change that initiation symbolicly presents and makes possible.

PBS 18 states: "The difference between infant baptism and believers' baptism is easily exaggerated. Although in the latter the candidate can declare his faith, it may or may not reflect a true commitment. Far more important is the response of faith of the church into which one is sacramentally incorporated by Baptism. This is true both for an adult and for an infant. Faith and commitment remain voluntary throughout a Christian's life. The capacity for them, as well as the willingness to exercise them, varies considerably. They do not always increase with age."[11]

Those who have ministered in areas of the country where anti-pedo-baptist churches prevail may be excused for smiling a bit about the debate over infant baptism. One rapidly learns that "believer's baptisms" are just as likely to be the result of social and cultural forces as are infant baptisms.

I can still remember my shock when I overheard two girls in their early teens decide that they had put off their baptisms as long as they dared. They calmly discussed the best season of the year in which to profess that religious experience that would lead them to the baptismal tank. The discussion encompassed the weather and the local high school's social program. Arguments about the proper age for baptism leave me as unexcited as questions about the proper age for admission to the other evangelical sacrament. The real question is what sort of church is it that presumes to baptize and commune at all.

The anabaptists were swept aside by the magisterial reformers, but the great issue today is nevertheless, "What is a Christian?" Can we still call an individual or a community Christian because of lingering Christian overtones? The neo-evangelical movement and the charismatic movement are asking us "What use is a light hid under a bushel, what use salt that has lost its savor?"

The new rites of the *BCP*, *LBW* and the Roman Catholic *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* all call for a new church. Rites alone do not a right church make.

The new service books all offer not only rites for baptism but also for confirmation. They do not call it confirmation. This reminds us that the old question of the relation between baptism and confirmation in the process of initiation is not settled. Lutherans have to deal not only with the old liturgical and theological questions but also with the report of the Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation issued in 1970 and subsequently accepted by the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in Amer-

ica. It is not quite clear what The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod's attitude toward it is.

That commission prepared a definition of confirmation. "Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church which helps the baptized child through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission."[12] In a certain perverse way that cuts the gordian knot. If we ask, "Is confirmation a part of a Christian initiation rite?" and if so, "Does it take place in infancy at the baptism or in adolescence?" the Joint Commission cuts right through the argument by declaring that confirmation is not a liturgical act at all. It is an educational and pastoral ministry. Yet the report assumes that some sort of rite will be celebrated to mark fulfilment of the catechetical process.

Here the point of tension can be seen clearly. Historically confirmation is a rite. However, the post-reformation practice was to tie it to a program of religious instruction. The Joint Commission clearly limited its understanding of confirmation to the instruction. The ILCW was given the task of reconciling these two views in some manner. The rite proposed in *Contemporary Worship 8: Affirmation of the Baptismal Covenant* was a carefully contrived effort to do this.[13] The rite was given another title. It was no longer to be called confirmation. It was designed to have multiple use: for what Lutherans used to call confirmation, for reception of members from other churches, for the restoration of those who had broken their ties with the church, and for those who wished to affirm their baptism at some special moment in life. Confirmation was to be repeatable, sort of a progressive baptismal dinner. Because of the reference to

use at special moments in an individual's life, the rite was put to some interesting uses --in some parishes to induct young people into office as acolytes, for example. The churches simply were not ready for this sort of thing. Whatever its merits, it fell before criticisms from a Lutheran church that evidently had not been entirely conscious of the significance of accepting the Joint Commission's report. They wanted confirmation back. The provisional rite was modified and now appears in the *LBW*. Even though it may still be used for reception of members and restoration, it clearly presents a one-time only confirmation of young people. In fact, the rite is so good at this, that I have had many parents say to me that they wish they had been confirmed by the *LBW* rite instead of the older rite. They feel that their children had been more movingly confirmed in the new rite. Lutherans are left with the old problem.

It seems to me that the Episcopal church has been somewhat more successful with the problem. That church has the added consideration of the function of the bishop in the rite of confirmation, a problem that the Lutherans do not have. *PBS 18* allowed for the priest of the parish to confirm in the absence of the bishop. But the *Supplement to PBS 26* notes that baptism confers full Christian standing and should, in principle, reach its completion in the baptized person's first communion and entry on full life in the Christian community. That aspect of confirmation which has been catechetical, voluntary, and responsive is made a separate service, to be used at the bishop's visitation, and to be used when occasion warrants.[14] Confirmation is not a completion of baptism but a solemn renewal of the baptismal covenant. In the new *BCP* baptism includes a laying-on-of-hands and signation as in the *LBW* baptismal rite. Baptism is presented as complete in itself. This position is undercut, however, by the inclusion of the same form for the

laying-on-of-hands, as appears in the *BCP* rite for confirmation. One must conclude that like *LBW* the *BCP* either has no confirmation or two confirmations. It all depends on the meaning given the term. The problem is left as unfinished business, to be settled perhaps when the mind of the church is clearer. Both churches seem to have decided to have confirmation as a liturgical action with baptism, satisfying the liturgists on that point, and a confirmation in adolescence, satisfying those who feel the need for the post-reformation practice.

Complicating the problem has been the practice of postponing first communion until after confirmation, that is, after instruction. Because confirmation was perceived by many young people as a form of graduation from religious instruction, the teacher felt obliged to try to get the whole Christian religion into a single course. That only reinforced the idea of graduation.

Children baptized as infants, of course, do not remember their baptism. Rubrics and the good intentions of liturgical reformers to the contrary, confirmation inevitably becomes the rite that appears to them as the great moment of Christian initiation. The result is to give greater importance to confirmation (or affirmation, if you wish) than is intended.

Some discussion continues in all the churches about the age at which adolescents should be confirmed. A better question is why confirmation at all? That question is raised by Theodore Jungkuntz, author of *A Lutheran Charismatic Catechism*.[15] He distinguishes between the confirming that we do --that is, our own affirmation of our baptism --and the confirming that God does: his bestowal of the gifts of the Spirit. He argues that if indeed there should be a

rite of confirmation, it should focus on expectant prayer for a fuller release of the Spirit's variety of gifts.

Many Christians might have a different notion than the charismatics as to what gifts of the Spirit are really significant, but there is something intriguing in Dr. Jungkuntz's proposal. The charismatic movement raises questions about the practice of Christian initiation by insisting that the paschal mystery is to be first of all an event and an experience in the life of the church before it is to be a doctrine. The ritual temptation is to assume that where the ritual is the experience will follow. We can be grateful to the charismatic movement for raising the question of the quality of life in the church in its own way.

Those who argue for confirmation in the adolescent years note that puberty rites are deeply rooted in world culture and world religions Such rites make possible the passage from childhood to adult status. It usually requires learning the lore of the society or religion. So, they argue, Christianity should have such a rite.

Daniel Stevick raises a question about this in the *Supplement to PBS 26*. He notes that in our society "the passage from childhood begins earlier and earlier, while entry on adulthood is later and later. Children take on sophistication and physical maturity and they begin separating themselves from their parents at measurably earlier ages. Yet the society is not prepared to consider persons as adults until their middle twenties."[16] At what point, he asks, in that process should the church mark admission to adulthood. He concludes that not only is it difficult to determine an age but that nothing in Christianity requires a puberty rite.

Are we perhaps forced to take yet another look at confirmation? Liturgists would undoubtedly be happy to see the adolescent rite disappear. It is doubtful, however, that this is likely to happen soon. The evidence in the Lutheran, Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches is that these churches are not yet ready to return completely to the primitive practice.

Perhaps Jungkuntz offers the one suggestion that can point a way out for the present at least. There will always be a need for catechesis in the church. Can we accept the notion that post-baptismal catechesis is necessary but that post-catechetical adolescent confirmation is not? That does not preclude some sort of post-catechetical rite. A period of catechesis might be preceded with a liturgical presentation of the Scriptures and the Service Book of the church. Catechesis itself could be broken into as many units as desired and cover as many years as wished and at whatever age chosen. At some point pastor and young person determine a significant amount of growth has taken place. The young person determines a desire to assume a more mature participation in the ministry and mission of the church. That determination finds liturgical expression. In those churches where the role of the bishop is seen as essential, the bishop could well preside as a sign of the involvement of the larger church. Bishops can just as clearly be fulfilling their office by liturgizing the call of young adults to prayer, witness, and ministry as by doing what they do now.

Perhaps this is a return to the notion of confirmation as a form of lay ordination. But it needn't be called confirmation, reserving that name for the laying on of hands and anointing at baptism. The term could be abandoned completely. It has never been that helpful anyway. The liturgical form should not duplicate the

baptismal rite in the way the present forms do with their echoes of the renunciation, profession of faith, and laying on of hands. In short, completely set aside the liturgical trappings of the baptismal rite. Let it clearly be a service of prayer on behalf of the church and the persons requesting that prayer for themselves as they accept with their brothers and sisters the servant's task. Let the preparation be for that servant's task. It might be argued that servanthood is precisely what adolescent confirmation is all about. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that that is what adolescent confirmation should be about. I do not think the confirmation problem is just a problem of nomenclature. The confirmation problem has to do with the widely divergent expectations and understandings of pastors, youth, educators, bishops, parents, and congregations and our failure to thread our way through them. Our history is too much for us. Our present practice satisfies hardly anyone. The first step to a solution may have to be the cutting of the knot so that things can be re-sorted. To do that we must change the basis of discussion and remove it from consideration with the rites of Christian initiation.

We have seen that the unity of the rites of initiation is axiomatic for the reformers of those rites. We have seen how that principle has had to be bent to the reality that the churches are not yet ready, if they ever will be, to surrender a rite for adolescents. Yet another problem area remains for us to examine: the age at which children are admitted to the Holy Communion. As is well known the Eastern churches still follow the ancient pattern of following baptism and confirmation with the communion of the baptized, young and old. We also know that this was the pattern in the Western church into the first half of the second millenium. We also know that until very recently the refusal of the communion to small

children was taken for granted in our churches. The *Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition* notes "Customs vary on the age and circumstances for admission to the Lord's Supper. Older children and adults should commune for the first time during the service in which they were baptized. Infants may be brought to the altar and receive a blessing."[17] For Lutherans at least, that accurately defined how far the churches were willing to go.

At the Fourth Lateran Council the decision was made that confession must precede communion. This assumed that a person must be able to reflect on the difference between good and evil prior to partaking of the Lord's Supper. Children were believed to reach such a stage in their development at about age 7. Then they could make their first confession and first communion. This issue was not debated at the Reformation. Although the practice of mandatory confession, and eventually even voluntary confession, fell away, the practice of withholding the sacrament continued. Echoes of the practice of confession before communion can be heard in the Lutheran practice of self-examination. Other churches encourage similar practices. For Lutherans, admission to the sacrament has become based on the ability to examine one's life on the basis of the Ten Commandments and the proper understanding of the real presence grounded on a dubious interpretation of I Corinthians 11:28-32. This in the face of Luther's teaching in the *Small Catechism* that while outward forms of preparation for the sacrament are good, true worthiness consists in simple faith in the promise of Christ that his body and blood are offered by his grace for our forgiveness and salvation. Nevertheless, in the mind of the average Lutheran worthiness is dependent upon participation in and acceptance of catechetical instruction. This is seen as providing the intellectual content needed to be worthy to commune.

In spite of some grumblings on the part of liturgical scholars, the Roman Catholic church continues to hinge first communion on participation in what is now frequently called the sacrament of reconciliation. That continues to separate the communion from baptism. That continues to link it to the ability to rationalize about the faith.

The Episcopal church may not have been ready to abandon adolescent confirmation, but it has separated the question of first communion from confirmation. The Prayer Book now permits infants to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood at the time of their baptism. Bishop Frederick B. Wolf writes in *Prayer Book Renewal* that the matter of continued participation in the communion afterward must be determined by the priest and parents. However, he writes, "Implicit in the new rites is the hope that no Christian will be able to remember the time when he or she did not receive the Holy Communion."[18] This suggests that although children might not regularly commune after baptism by the time when they might normally ask about participating in the sacrament their communion would have become an established habit.

The *Lutheran Book of Worship* accepts the status quo in the Lutheran churches: infants are not communed at baptism. Since a large number of congregations had already separated first communion from confirmation, the *LBW's* rites use language that allows for the difering practices. The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship of necessity followed this path. Whatever the commissioners' own thoughts on the matter might have been, it was not in their jurisdiction to authorize rites that assumed infant communion. The rites, however, certainly do not preclude it. The *LBW* makes attempts to discourage establishment of rites for admission to first communion that would assume the same importance for them that confirmation

has had. As far as the *LBW* is concerned, the matter of the age of first communion is in the hands of bishops, councils, and those others who devise and execute church policy.

The issue of the correct age for admittance to Holy Communion has not been ignored however. Enough interest has been shown that when the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America drafted a communion practices statement, infant communion was mentioned.[19]

Almost everyone will approve some things in the statement and disapprove others. The statement begins with a theological introduction and goes on to recommendations for practice. In the section entitled "Participants in Holy Communion" the ALC and LCA agree that "Holy Communion is the sacramental meal for the new people of God who are called and incorporated into the Body of Christ through baptism. Whenever the sacrament is celebrated it should be open to all such people who are present and ready for admission."

The next section states: "Admission to the Sacrament is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the church to those who are baptized. It is the practice of the church to admit to Holy Communion those who, in its judgment are ready to participate." Four guidelines follow. What is needed is a simple trust that Christ is present in the sacrament, that there be a basic understanding and appreciation of the gifts God gives through the sacrament, that there be an acceptance of one's place as a communicant in the fellowship of believers, and that there be self-examination in a manner appropriate to the level of maturity and recognition of the need of forgiveness. It goes on the cite the conclusion of the Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation that

readiness to participate in the sacrament normally occurs at age ten or the level of the fifth grade, but it may occur earlier or later. And then: "Responsibility for decision when to admit is shared by pastor, child, the family or sponsoring persons, and the congregation. Thus infant communion is precluded."

Now it should be obvious that no instruction is given by Scripture on the age of those who ought to be admitted to the sacrament. It should also be obvious that the Joint Commission's conclusion is based on theories of psychological development more than on Scripture and theology. Once the Joint Commission opened the discussion on age, it was no longer possible to invest any age with greater authority than any other. In fact, a representative of the Joint Commission commented to members of the ILCW's drafting committee that the age of ten was simply the lowest age the Joint Commission thought it could sell to the churches. That may have been only the opinion of an individual, but it is hard not to suspect the Joint Commission also knew that the discussion once opened could not be shut down.

The ALC/LCA communion practices statement with its "Thus" attempts a grand Pauline "Therefore" to preclude consideration of infant communion. The statement does not quite achieve the irresistable force of the Letter to the Romans. If the guidelines offered are to provide the argument for the statement's "Thus", we must note that the argument to exclude smaller children from the Sacrament of the Altar is strikingly parallel to those anti-paedobaptists use against the baptism of very young children. If the Lutheran churches are to rule out infant communion, then we do so without the support of logical argument and in the face of the tradition of the Eastern church and the practice of the Western church for

more than a millenium. When the Western church did decide against the communion of very young children, it was on the basis of a notion of episcopal responsibility and authority that Lutherans have rejected, an insistence on the necessity of sacramental confession Lutherans do not adhere to, and an ultra-realistic understanding of the sacramental presence of Christ that we have set aside. The only argument we still cling to is that children need to reach an age of reason after which they can rationalize about sin and grace.

There may indeed be pastoral and ecclesiastical reasons within Lutheran churches for precluding the communion of very young children. I personally believe there are such reasons. One does not overthrow seven hundred years of practice lightly. On the other hand, the Episcopal church gives the impression of making the adjustment, however slowly, without the collapse of church discipline. Parochial practice that suggests indifference to churchly discipline is hard to support. By the same token, the churches need to acknowledge that a simple "Thus" will not let them escape the question.

Since appeal has been made by the Joint Commission to a study of human development, which is then used to explain the precluding of the communion of the very young, we must note that the same discipline can also present an argument in support of infant communion. *PBS 18* suggests: "Psychologists have helped us to see that there is a level of human understanding--vital for growth into maturity--that is non-verbal and non-rational. We now know that this unconscious level responds to reality as it is conveyed by means of symbolic forms and actions. We know that such an unconscious response begins at birth, if not earlier. The truth about God and his relation to man is received by our unconscious

mental processes through many channels. Long before a child can be reached in verbal and rational ways, his life-style is already being permanently shaped."[20]

Before I conclude, reference must be made to the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* to which Father Quinn has referred. Not all of you may have had a chance to study it. A brief description is in order.

It is assumed that the rite is preceded by evangelization, that is, the future candidate will have heard the Gospel or has inquired about the church. When the individual determines to become a Christian, he or she is accepted as a catechumen by the church. The ritual begins with the candidates, their sponsors, and the members of the congregation gathered outside the church. The candidates are instructed, prayed over, given the sign of the cross, and brought into the church. The liturgy of the word follows. The candidates may be given copies of the Gospel. They are dismissed before the Eucharist. They undergo instruction in a variety of ways, the chief activity being participation in the liturgy.

When the faith of the candidate has grown sufficiently, the candidate is enrolled for the final, more intensive stage of the catechumenate during Lent. A series of services called the scrutinies that are part of the celebration of the eucharist accompany the regular instruction. These services are intended to purify their intentions, and make firm their decision. These services take place on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. They include instruction, prayer, and exorcism. During the week of the fifth Sunday in Lent at special services, they receive from the church the creed, and the Lord's prayer.

Finally they are ready for the celebration of the third stage of their initiation at the Easter Vigil: baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist. During the Easter season post-baptismal catechesis takes place at the mass.

It is obvious that this rite unites the various rites of Christian initiation. It expresses the passionate love the church should have for the candidate and seeks to evoke in the candidate a passionate love for Christ and the church. In addressing the North American Academy of Liturgy in 1979, Aidan Kavanagh reflected on the fact that new rites a new church do not make. He reported that less than half of the Roman Catholic dioceses responded to a questionaire on the implementation of this rite. Of these who responded less than half reported that any work had been done on implementing the rite.[21]

Nevertheless, the rite signals for us the missing factor in many of our attempts at liturgical reform. The process of conversion is properly the concern of the local church. "The initiation of catechumens takes place step by step in the midst of the community of the faithful. Together with the catechumens, the faithful reflect upon the value of the paschal mystery, renew their own conversion, and by their example lead the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously."[22]

The new rites of initiation all presuppose the presence of the church. They also assume that the local congregation is a loving fellowship in the Body of Christ with a personal concern on the part of all its members for the nurture and growth for those who are entering that community, be they young or old. Ralph Kiefer, in commenting on the present problems associated with Christian initiation, suggests that the church is unable to say no to any that

present themselves for sacramental incorporation into the church because it does not even know the questions it should put to them. "It does not dare to ask whether they can pray, whether they live as disciples and servants of other members of the local church, whether they know how to make their occupations and professions a ministry for justice in the world, or whether they can give an account of the hope that is in them."[23] Perhaps it cannot ask those questions of candidates because it dares not ask the same questions of itself.

We are asking so many questions about the rites. How old should a person be for baptism? How old should a person be for first communion? How old should a person be for confirmation? In what order should the rites of initiation be performed? Who may serve as minister for the rites? Aren't they the wrong questions? Should not the questions instead be "What is the church? Who may be a Christian? What does it mean to be incorporated into the death and resurrection of Christ? What is the ministry of the church to its many parts?

I personally rejoice in the great interest that has developed in the work of the Institute of Liturgical Studies under the diligent direction of Dan Brockopp and his associates. It was not always so. I can recall a time ago when after several years of modest growth, the Institute program concentrated on the diaconal ministry of the church. The signal for financial disaster came with the letters of formerly faithful supporters that indignantly argued that the diaconal ministry of the church had nothing to do with its liturgy.

On the contrary, it has everything to do with the liturgy. Christian liturgy, all of it, intends for us to pass from death to life

with Jesus Christ and to participate in the life of the church as that Body of Christ grows ever more fully into the maturity of its head. The rites of Christian initiation ritualize the radical change from death to life, darkness to light, and slavery to freedom in Christ that they celebrate. They are not the change itself. The redeemed people of God do not spring full grown from the head of Zeus but must be lovingly, patiently formed and molded by the creating Spirit of God.

The rites of Christian initiation remind us that they are not the end of the story but only the foreword. Perhaps they are not even that. Perhaps they are only the table of contents. The story has to be written again and again on us by the finger of God.

NOTES

1 Kavanagh, Aidan, et al, *Made, Not Born*, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976)

2 *Ibid.*, "Introduction" by Aidan Kavanagh, page 1.

3 *Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), page 30.

4 Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Holy Baptism: Contemporary Worship 7* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, and St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974)

5 Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church, *Prayer Book Studies 18 on Baptism and Confirmation* (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1970);

6 *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation and the Seabury Press, 1977)

7 *PBS 18*, page 32.

8 *BCP*, page 298.

9 *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Draft Translation), (Washington: Secretariat, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 1974), see "introduction," II. Ministries and Offices, #46.

10 *Made, Not Born*, page 6, footnote 46.

11 *PBS 18*, page 14.

12 *The Report of the Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1970), page 21.

13 Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Affirmation of the Baptismal Covenant: Contemporary Worship 8* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, and Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975)

14 Stevick, Daniel B., *Supplement to Prayer Book Studies 26: Holy Baptism together with A Form for the Affirmation of Baptismal Vows with the Laying-on-of-Hands by the Bishop also called Confirmation* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1973), page 87.

15 Jungkuntz, Theodore, *A Lutheran Charismatic Catechism* (Flushing, N.Y.: Bread of Life Ministries, 1979), pages 6-7, and "Pray the Lord of the Harvest," in *Lutheran Charismatic* (5, August, 1979, 8), page 1.

16 *Supplement to PBS 26*, page 67.

17 *LBW: ME*, page 30.

18 Wolf, Frederick B., "Christian Initiation," in *Prayer Book Renewal* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), page 43.

19 "A Statement on Communion Practices: Report of the ALC/LCA Communion Practices Review Committee," in *God's People in Mission: Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America, July 12-19, 1978, Chicago, Ill.*

20 *PBS 18*, page 15,

21 Kavanagh, Aidan, "Unfinished and Unbegun Revisited: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults," in *Worship* (53, July, 1979, 4, page 372.

22 *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, "Introduction," #4.

23 Keifer, Ralph, "Christian Initiation: The State of the Question," in *Made, Not Born*, page 147.