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Given by

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From Birdbath to Plunge-pool:

Some shifts in the theology and practice of Baptism in the Church of England over the last fifty years

Let me plunge you straight into the paschal Vigil in Greece:

Easter, in the Orthodox Church, far surpasses in importance all other feasts, and in Greece it is celebrated by the whole nation, including even those who for the rest of the year are notoriously indifferent in such matters, with a fervour and intensity considerably greater than that which we are accustomed to display at Christmas. The fast of Lent has been observed in progressive stages, culminating, in Holy Week, for the devout in almost total abstinence and in an absence of meat even on the mondaine dinner-tables of Kolonaki. All Good Friday the bells have tolled ceaselessly from every belfry in Athens, and after dark the Bier has been carried in procession round the confines of every parish. Holy Saturday is a *dies non*; for the only time in the whole year the cafés are empty and even the terrace at Yennaki's is deserted except for a handful of foreigners, while in the church all is dark save for one solitary candle on the altar.

Towards midnight the space opposite the Metropolis, and of every church throughout the land, is gradually filled by an immense crowd in whom the fasting of the previous week and the unaccustomed gloom of the day, so foreign to the nature of a people not markedly austere, have induced a nervous condition bordering on hysteria. The wooden platform erected on a line with the high altar is now occupied by members of the government and representatives of the diplomatic corps, the latter holding their candles in the slightly embarrassed manner of grown-ups participating in a game of oranges and lemons, while from the open doors the sound of the chanting which has been going on within the darkened cathedral for many hours takes on a more urgent note. A few minutes before midnight the Archbishop emerges attended

by two deacons, one carrying a lighted candle from the altar, and mounting the platform begins the reading of the Gospel.

By now a deathly hush, or what passes in Greece for a deathly hush, that is to say an absence of sound that compares not unfavourably with the noise of the small mammal-house on a quiet afternoon, has fallen on the vast crowd, which is maintained unbroken until, on the stroke of midnight, the Bishop pronounces the words *Xristos anesthi, Christ is risen*. At this the night is rent by a wave of sound in comparison with which all the noises to which one has grown accustomed on other days of the year are as tinkling cymbals. A massed choir and two brass bands burst into powerful, though different, songs of praise; the guard of honour presents arms with a crash unrivalled even in Wellington Barracks; every bell in the city, ably assisted by air-raid sirens and factory whistles, clangs out the good news, while cheering crowds greet their Risen Lord with a barrage of rockets, squibs, Roman candles, Chinese crackers, and volley after volley of small-arms fire discharged by such of the devout, a not inconsiderable proportion, as have come to the ceremony armed.ⁱ

The public liturgy portrayed here by Osbert Lancaster is essentially a performance – it describes what is done or enacted to enable a whole mass of people – not just the intellectually verbalizing Christians – to experience resurrection. I begin with this prologue, because it is my contention that what most people experience about church is what is done, and – importantly – how it is done, rather than what is said, which we professional liturgists – if I make so bold as to include myself for a moment in this august company – tend to make the focus of our attention.

My own liturgical formation owes as much to my experience of Holy Saturday night in Rome in 1970 as anything: my experience of sitting in the balmy Roman dusk in the atrium before the basilica at San Clemente keeping the vigil round a large bonfire next to the springing fountain in the middle of the atrium is why Portsmouth Cathedral was completed as it was – with a fire set in the centre of the square nave round which we sat to re-tell the stories of salvation from the Armenian Lectionary rather than the improving snippets from the modern Roman Rite, before we lit the

Paschal candle, and followed it past the dark waters of the font into the eastern half of the building – and why users of the *Common Worship* initiation rites are encouraged to plan the acts of worship to draw the participants into a sense of movement and journey.

It was in Greece too that I once witnessed a baptism in the cathedral at Kalambaka, at the foot of the Meteora, where the priest greeted the people, and then first harangued the father, and cajoled him into saying the creed. ‘*Pisteuo*’ he haltingly began... and then was prompted word by word through the Symbolum. The priest then distributed jobs, like uncorking the litre of olive oil they’d brought and undressing the infant. The grannies got the christening gown ready and the father and his mates were shooed off to get some fresh water into the font – a kind of enlarged milk-churn – while the priest (combining the roles of lector, thurifer, MC, deacon and priest in one) got on with the prayers. That was his proper job, they knew, and would make the whole thing valid even if they listened to (or understood) hardly a word. When all was ready, the priest must have used nearly the whole litre of oil to anoint the wriggling infant before he immersed him in the font. He was making him as slippery as possible so that the devil should not be able to get his talons into him; but I observed that the practised old priest had very long fingernails as well as a plastic apron over his robes!

Down and up went Herakles, the priest wrinkling up his nose at the fashion for heroic names but judging nicely how long to leave the surprised and naked infant, purple with rage, raised above his head before the shrieks burst forth; then swiftly plunging him below the water (which shuts mouths very effectively) twice again and finally handing him over to his mother and the grannies to be dried, dressed and comforted while he read the next chunk of liturgy. Then it was Chrismation – his coronation – turning him into a viceroy of God’s creation, before walking him through the Royal Doors for the first time, and finally giving him the light – a beribboned beeswax candle, which gave off a wonderfully sweet smell – to remind us that we’d reached to promised land.

The Revision of the Holy Week liturgy

All that I have recounted so far draws its conviction from the fact that the heart of the baptismal experience is Easter, and the liturgy is about making the experience of resurrection real and vivid.

It is hard for most of us to remember that until the reforms of 1951, the Easter Liturgy was celebrated in the Roman Church in broad daylight at 11am on Holy Saturday morning: indeed when I had that Holy Week in Rome in 1970, the first of the several Vigils that I attended was with the canons of the Lateran Basilica at 6pm, the sunlight streaming in through the dusty windows. An American Cardinal was presiding, and presumably – from the rather bored expressions of all those canons in their furry mozettas – the aim was to get it all over and done by dinner-time!

It was the restoration of the Easter Vigil in 1951, and the later revision of the whole Holy Week liturgyⁱⁱ that changed the way much of our liturgical celebrations have been shaped. Those revisions brought the celebrations of Holy Week back to its supposed origin in the celebrations of the formation and initiation of new disciples – back to how the church had become shaped in the fourth century by the rites of enrolment, mystagogia, baptism, and eucharist as the liturgy made the church, before the historicising elements of the celebration gave us the Holy Week we know today.

But not all the revisions made in the 1950s or in the years following Pope Paul VI's *Missa Normativa* of 1969 and the revisions consequent upon that had the scrutiny later brought to bear on them by a new generation of liturgical scholars. The revisers in the 1950s and again in the 1970s had assumed that in the process of pruning the rites of later accretions they were justified in removing from texts like the Blessing of the Water what was obviously secondary material, to give prominence to the essential Paschal material. In an article that appeared in *Worship* 64 of 1990ⁱⁱⁱ, Dominic Serra revealed the conclusions of his doctoral study on the revised form of the Gelasian blessing prayer of the 1970s which had omitted the theme of baptismal rebirth in favor of the theme of paschal dying and rising with Christ. But 'In fact,' says Serra in a recent email to me; 'when you separate the ancient Roman from the later Gallican elements in the Gelasian prayer, the original Roman text is based solely on regeneration with no paschal references at all. This is quite different from what one usually hears these days about the Roman preference for Romans 6 over John 3, etc.

Fortunately, the rebirth imagery of early Roman texts is beginning now to get some recognition.’

I remind you of Serra’s conclusions in as compressed a form as I can, as it introduces the main point that I want to set before you today: that the theology and practice of initiation, the way we celebrate it and the way it is experienced, have a profound effect on our ecclesiology. That is, how we celebrate baptism is the principal means by which we form and express what we believe about the church – who can belong, how they might come to be part of it and so how the church is comprised and what it is for. And it is of interest to us because the history of the development of the rites of Initiation in the Church of England mirror those assumptions made in Rome about the obvious centrality of the paschal material, and the ecclesiological consequences of those assumptions.

Liturgical Revision in the Church of England – the ASB

Let me spell this out in more detail. This is not the place to rehearse in detail the challenges to the Mason-Dix line by Geoffrey Lampe and others in the 1950s and 60s, but by the time that the Initiation rites were crafted for the ASB 1980, what was presented as the typical rite was a unified service of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion of adult believers, from which various sub-sets could be derived: Thanksgiving for Childbirth, The Baptism of Children, Confirmation as a stand-alone rite, for example.^{iv} The central theology of the rite was derived from the *anamnetic* pattern of Romans 6; and the rite as crafted work splendidly for the Easter Vigil, its theology profoundly influencing those who were working to reinstate that liturgy as the central celebration of the Paschal Mystery. In that context, the move from darkness to light, (with the giving of a lighted candle as one of the subsidiary rites – thought very daring for the Church of England in the 1980s), the emphasis on committed adult believing and response and the strong assertion of eucharistic belonging as the goal of the rite had two - perhaps unintended – consequences. The first was that those who were less keen on the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and thought that personal faith and conscious conversion were the prerequisite of a believer’s baptism, found a sanctioned way of declining to baptise those who were brought by their parents to be ‘done’, and turned the Thanksgiving after Childbirth

from what it said it was into an friendly non-believer's alternative to the real thing. The second consequence was that the Church of England reinforced the idea, so central to the Parish Communion movement, that it was keen on becoming a sect for true believers, gathered at the Lord's Table each Sunday, to reinforce the distinction between those who were truly part of the club, and knew the 'in' language and Masonic-type signals, and those who were God-fearing Englishmen, who thought that belonging to the C of E was their birthright, of which 'christening' was the socially acceptable liminal rite.

Whether this move to disestablish the Church of England surreptitiously was consciously in the mind of the authors of the ASB, only Colin Buchanan can tell us; but it certainly played a part in bringing us to where we are now. As the Marriage Project's research has shown, a large proportion of those seeking to marry in church don't even get as far as asking their parish priest if they might be married, because they know that the answer will be 'no'. Did we spot that this semi-conscious exclusivism might be consequence of these brave new rites when they were launched? I certainly didn't: I used them and taught them, and did my best to instruct and explain, and played my part in turning the church even more into a middle-class, intellectually respectable liberal institution, from which it has suffered in the popular vote every bit as much as the Lib Dems or the Labour party. In the church too, people like things as they were, are suspicious of outsiders and long to get what they want.

I began to be more consciously involved in these questions after finding myself succeeding Bishop Colin James in the Commission's chair. We had a mandate to prepare and deliver a thoroughgoing revision to the ASB, whose 10 year extension of authorisation was due to expire in 2000, and I began to look not only at how to bridge the acrimonious gap between the BCP and the consciously 'alternative' ASB, but also to take a look at the theology and ecclesiology that lay behind the processes of revision from the 1960s onwards. There was not a large shift in the consensus around Eucharistic theology, but a good deal around the theology and practice of Christian Initiation, not least since the publication of the Canadian Book of Alternative Services in 1985, and the Toronto Statement of 1991^v that followed it in declaring baptism to be full and complete sacramental initiation into the church. So initiation was at the forefront of my interest when we began to map out what we were needing to do in a

way that made sense of the Church of England's evolving liturgical history in the context of the wider ecumenical exploration; of where common ground could and should be found in translating into local currency the essential gospel of the universal church's sacramental life; and what we needed to do to serve the needs of parishes, cathedrals and chaplaincies throughout the land.

Patterns of Initiation: stages on the pilgrim journey into life

So how did our thinking about baptism begin to take shape? While different views on the way in which the Eucharist is related to communion remain between the churches, a more immediately fruitful area for common understanding is the central agreement we have about baptism. Threefold immersion in water in the name of the Trinity is acknowledged by all the churches as a valid act of baptism. Around this central act a number of subsidiary rites, which have varied over the centuries, have grown. What is significant about baptism is that the rite can be administered in an emergency by someone other than an ordained priest; indeed, perhaps this is what has rescued the sacrament of baptism from the kind of questions that still hang around the celebration of the Eucharist. In baptism the question of validity of orders has never been held to raise questions about the validity of the sacrament.

But if the heart of the rite of baptism remains a simple and universally acceptable act, the main theological questions about the nature of what happens in baptism have been the subject of continual exploration and development. How was baptism, and the liturgical expression of what God might be doing in it and through it, related to the whole mission of the church in making disciples? In the journey of discipleship, were intellectual formation and the ability to articulate your faith coherently a necessary prerequisite of candidates for baptism? How could we celebrate with those who, though baptised in infancy and maybe confirmed as children, had come to a renewed and vibrant faith later in life? There had been debates in the General Synod in the late 80s on the catechumenate, and in one of them I remember following Gavin Reid, at that time running the London Mission, and finding myself surprised that I agreed with almost every word he had said about their experience of how people were coming to faith: it was a gradual process, marked by stages, he said, and for most people that process took an average of four years to become embedded. Did the mantra that belonging leads to believing have wider currency than I had imagined?

Part of our education in the Commission had been watching the film called: ‘This is the Night’. It had been made in a parish in Pasadena in the USA, where lavish use of water and oil as well as an informal though very liturgical style of celebration was vividly portrayed in the culminating rite of a parish that had adopted the RCIA – the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults^{vi}. The process of taking the formation of new disciples seriously had clearly touched the life of the whole parish at every level. It was revitalizing the sense of mission, engaging established parishioners in processes of rethinking and renewal, enabling new vocations to all sorts of ministry to emerge, and watching it left Bishop Colin James in tears.

Towards a joined-up theology of initiation

To make some progress, a small working group established with two from the Board of Education, two from the Board of Mission and two (Michael Vaisey and myself) from the Liturgical Commission; we met for what was booked to be a week’s hard arguing out of the different emphases we were expected to bring. But we found in our first post-prandial review of the territory that in fact we had an entirely common mind, so Michael drafted our report overnight and in the morning we agreed it and departed. It was published in 1995 as *On the Way: Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation*.^{vii}

The ecumenical agreement that baptism in water with the Trinitarian formula is valid and unrepeatable is foundational. But immersion in water in the name of the Trinity is only one part of what we were discovering was a process. There is the calling of candidates, the proclamation of the divine initiative of grace. There is the journey from welcome, through a sense of belonging to believing. There is the formal renunciation of evil and the turning to Christ, the light of the world, with the sign of the cross inscribed on the forehead of each candidate to give them the badge of faith, a defence against the powers of darkness, as candidates are claimed for the journey in Christ to the Father. There is the movement to the place of baptism, the prayer over the waters in the font (which is where much of the theology of the rite is rehearsed), the corporate recitation of the Apostles’ (or baptismal) Creed, and the scrutiny of each candidate before they are plunged below the waters or have water poured over them.

When they emerge from the waters, they may be clothed in white and are then anointed with Chrism to show that they are God's viceroys – members of his royal, priestly people who have been given responsibility for the care of the world and its peoples. If the bishop is presiding, they may have hands laid on them before being given the kiss of peace and led to the altar for the liturgy of the Eucharist at which they receive the consecrated elements, the bread of life and the cup of salvation. Finally, they are blessed and sent out with a candle lit from the Paschal Candle as a sign of their being sent out as part of the church's apostolic *missio*. Like the first apostles on the day of Pentecost, they are to go out to cherish, challenge and change and the world.^{viii}

How do rites of initiation relate to the formation and conscious development of Christian witness?

Where do we now stand with regard to the development of the initiation rites? First, there is the re-discovery of baptism as a process. Second, there has been a re-evaluation of the subsidiary rites that accompany the different stages of the process and their theological significance. Third, baptism has been discovered to be fundamental to our Christian identity as those made in the image and likeness of God, and so to our calling to live out the faith we profess.

These stages are laid out in clearly in the RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, a programme developed to help Roman Catholic churches to recover the corporate celebration of baptism in communities which acknowledges the transforming effect that accompanying adults on their journey into faith has for the whole church that is involved in accompanying them^{ix}. Perhaps particularly important is the recovery of the church's responsibility for the post-baptismal catechesis – sitting down after the liturgical celebration with those newly baptised and confirmed to work out with them what difference this makes and what they should do about it, ranging from the adoption of a rule of life to the proper evaluation of gifts and skills, and the testing of vocation in its widest sense.

There is a growing awareness of how the wholehearted celebration of each stage in the process and its attendant rites can change not only the lives of individual

candidates but of church communities that take the whole process of discipling seriously. Most importantly, such celebrations re-focus a church on two important aims: the making of new disciples, and the church's mission – a mission which is less about 'taking the gospel' to people, as if we were the sole custodians of God's grace, and more about discovering what it is that God is actually doing in his creation, and helping people to recognise it, celebrate it and take part in making it actually happen.

In this context, one of the questions still wide open around how the liturgical year evolved is how the baptismal seasons in the differing local traditions affected the shape of the liturgical year; how, for example, the forty days of Easter related to the forty days of Jesus' fasting after his baptism. In particular, this raises questions about the relation of pre-baptismal to post-baptismal formation. In their study *The Origin of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*^x, Paul Bradshaw and Max Johnson warn us against the idealised single-track picture of a unified simplistic golden Fourth Century haze of the kind that I was brought up with.

The implicit ecclesiologies in different theological emphases in baptism

So what kind of ecclesiology do patterns like these imply? In the theology of baptism, two different basic strands are present. There is the *anamnetic* pattern, where Christ's dying and rising is recalled by submerging the candidate in the watery tomb. Here the sense of being called out of darkness into the light of Christ rising fits well with a Pauline theology of dying to sin and rising to new life, and the implication is that baptism marks a sharp transition from the old life to the new. The imagery here is decisively Paschal, and the key Biblical text is Romans 6.3-11, the passage read as the Epistle at the Paschal Vigil. Fonts are large pools, if not flowing rivers, and a literal submersion – a real drowning – gives the candidates that sense of totality they often long for, rather than the waist-high immersion that seems to be the early practice, to judge both by the surviving fonts and the iconography. This pattern was often assumed to be the early church's norm, along with its accompanying expectation of instant conversion and immediate and total belonging aboard the ark of salvation. It provides a model of church with firm boundaries which is essentially *contra mundum*, sharply differentiated from the surrounding tumult, and offers

security. The only chorus I remember from the one occasion when I attended Sunday School had the refrain ‘Fling out the lifebelt!’

The other or *epicletic* pattern is founded on a more Johannine theology of the new creation, and the experience of new disciples is less one of sudden conversion than of growing conviction. The new creation harks back to the events of Genesis and their reversal in the way that John presents his Passion narrative, and to the narratives of Jesus’ own baptism, where the Spirit descends on him as he emerges from the waters of the Jordan, declaring him to be both the anointed Son and the one who will suffer for the people. Emerging from the waters to be anointed with Chrism is central to this tradition, and the key Biblical text is John 3.1-17 – Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus about being born again by water and the Spirit. The Spirit-led growth into full maturity is a model that has analogies with natural development.

This model of baptism stresses continuing growth rather than instantaneous change, and plays into a theology of the church which is an emerging new Israel, a pilgrim people on the way rather than a fully fledged and radically different entity. The pattern is one of organic development rather than of radical change, and the church is seen less as the ark of faith and more as the leaven in the lump. Here the central goal of believing is union with the divine, being drawn into the life of the Trinity and is perhaps less Christocentric. In this model, the church has softer boundaries and only gradually places more disciplined demands on the new Christian as they grow into faith. It consciously welcomes those who don’t want to risk putting more than a toe in the water to test the temperature.

What was important for the Commission’s rethink was that the two theologies of baptism each imply a different ecclesiology. A more paschal, decision-based theology, implying a clear division between darkness and light, the old order and the new, is accompanied by an ecclesiology that emphasises sharp boundaries between the church and the world, between the saved and the rest of humanity. Such an ecclesiology leads to a citadel model of the church, and a clear distinction between those who belong and those who don’t. An ecclesiology based on a baptismal theology that emphasises rebirth and subsequent growth, where the womb rather than the tomb is the dominant image, will foster an ecclesiology that emphasises low

thresholds and a strong centre, an image of a people moving towards a goal rather than securely settled. Some ecclesial traditions are more comfortable with the black and white picture, just as some church-people are temperamentally inclined that way. For others, a church that seems narrow or exclusive – a church with sharp boundaries and clear discipline contradicts their image of a Christ who eats with tax-collectors and sinners; for some, a greater emphasis on the incarnational element of the faith, at any rate as a first stage, seems truer to the gospel. There are dangers in an either/or approach, which is what is avoided by Cyril of Jerusalem, as he reflects in his post-baptismal catechesis:

When you went down into the water, it was like night, and you could see nothing. But when you came up again it was like finding yourself in the day. That one moment was your death and your birth; that saving water was both your grave and your mother.^{xi}

While these different emphases are best understood as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive, it was a desire to move to a more inclusive model of the church that prompted the Commission to provide a wider theological basis to the Initiation rites in the period leading up to 2000. So ‘Faith is the gift of God to his people’ was a hard-won opening to the initiation rites, to make it clear that faith was not a personal achievement that would entitle you to baptism, but was part of what God did.

A second thread was the exploration of the commonest imperative in the New Testament: *metanoiete* – traditionally translated as ‘Repent’, with its connotations of wayside pulpits and wagging fingers at sexual peccadillos; whereas in the initiation context it rather bears the meaning of ‘change your mind’ or ‘get a life’, in the way that teenagers might say to their father – ‘Oh get a life, Dad!’

This led us again to the process of growth and continuous turning – what St Paul describes as dying daily to sin – constantly tuning your compass to God’s bearings. How should you celebrate the rites around baptism in such a way as to mark the different stages from enquiry to apostolic commitment to mission?

Providing a rite that makes sense of these varying stages

This progress through the different stages may be compressed into a brief period of preparation and a single liturgical celebration, as is still most frequently the case, I suspect, judging by the clamour for something short and intelligible from those who want a one-moment rite. But to emphasise the stages in growth, the celebration might well be spread out over a number of months, or even years. For example, potential candidates might be welcomed and made at home in the assembly at All Saints tide or at Advent. Those taking the next step might make the renunciations and receive the sign of the Cross on the first Sunday in Lent, enrolling like other members of the congregation did on Ash Wednesday in a period of particular testing and self-discipline; these candidates would then come to the waters of baptism and be chrismated at the Easter liturgy, receiving the sacrament of the eucharist. Then they might enter a period of post-baptismal formation – exploring their gifts and what their new-made resolution might mean in practice – during the days of Easter, then [be confirmed and] sent out with an apostolic charge and a lighted candle at Pentecost.

I have placed the words '*be confirmed and*' in square brackets because I cannot be persuaded that the one part of the initiation rite that in the Church of England has continued to be reserved to bishops should go on being treated as an independent sacrament with a quasi-mystical status on its own. Let us have bishops preside at joined up services of Initiation, even if they choose to delegate many of the bits – anointing, water baptism, chrismating and even hand-laying perhaps – to their assisting clergy (who do much of it anyway, as they preside at the eucharist in the parish churches of the diocese when the bishop can't be there Sunday by Sunday) and rely on the perfectly good post-baptismal super-populum prayer in the rite to do its intended job.

May God, who has received you by baptism into his church,
pour upon you the riches of his grace,
that within the company of Christ's pilgrim people
you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit
and come to the inheritance of the saints in glory.

When I introduced this prayer to the House of Bishops – it was the only prayer that I ever drafted which went through every stage of the revision process from House of Bishops to final approval without being altered at all – I transparently (as it would now be called) pointed out to them that it was essentially a Confirmation prayer, and that by agreeing to it we were conceding to future generations that theologically there was no objection to presbyters using chrism and ‘confirming’, as the final stage of the rite of baptism, while leaving open the question of whether a laying on of hands with prayer might not be a repeatable gesture for those who were making an affirmation of faith, even if the libretto were to be different; and that both these things would not rule out a rite of association with the bishop as a gesture of ecclesial belonging^{xii}. They, in spite of their reluctance to concede any idea of non-episcopal confirmation, so strong was the folk memory of the supposedly necessary multiplication of suffragan sees in the late nineteenth and twentieth century to cope with the surge in population and the consequent numbers for confirmation emerging in the more populous parts of the country, declared themselves perfectly happy to see such a post-baptismal prayer as part of the rite of baptism.

It surprises me therefore to see the old canard of episcopal confirmation as a necessary sacramental rite to ‘complete baptism’ being trotted out as a defensible position in the Church of England by Paul Avis and others in *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*^{xiii} and even being claimed as the Anglican position, when many other Provinces of the Communion have abandoned it. Traditional it may be, but theologically defensible it certainly is not. The Mason-Dix dualism of ‘water and the Spirit’ is no longer credible, and was the only theological justification for such a line. What more can be done to adults who have just been baptised by a bishop, and as they are chrismated have the prayer *May God, who has received you by baptism into his church, pour upon you the riches of his grace* prayed over them?

The Missio

Let us rather have Pentecost – or the final act of a long and full initiation rite – gaining its power from an imaginative Missio – a rite of sending out to put into practice what we have become in the sacramental incorporation into the body of

Christ – which needs to be an area for serious exploration not just at the end of initiation rites, but at the end of every celebration of the Eucharist. Think of it like this on the sixth Sunday of Easter – ten days ago.

The Post-communion prayer is prayed, and perhaps a hymn sung. Then the people sit down for the notices; there's just one this Sunday: 'Its Christian Aid Week, and our task as church this week is to deliver to every household an envelope and collect it. Three streets still have no-one: who can do it?' Dead silence, until of course the person who's already doing more than anyone volunteers. A clamour of 'you can't possibly – you're doing far too much already' When, finally that get's sorted, the deacon says: 'Are we agreed, then? We'll go and deliver them now; bring them back on Thursday evening by 9 o'clock, and there'll be an informal celebration of the Eucharist. Now bow your heads for God's blessing.' So after the dismissal, people move out together to deliver the envelopes; arriving back in church with their bags and comparing notes from about 8pm on Thursday.

This leads me to my final comment: we can script all the most carefully scrutinised and theologically all-embracing texts that we like, and take them through what can be the 22 stages of Synodical and Episcopal scrutiny and approval; we can suffer the synodical passion for letting members add back in all their favourite bits from every previous recension that have been omitted as duplicating what is there or having been replaced by a shorter prayer, so that unless you use your common sense, the liturgy lasts for totally ever; we can teach out parish priests how to sit in front of their screens and make near-perfect one-off specially crafted liturgy pamphlets week by week that will glue peoples noses in their scripts; BUT unless we convince the clergy – bishops as well as priests and deacons – that the church's worship is essentially something we do together that makes us change our behaviour, and so live differently as a result, then church will continue to bore the pants off most people, fail to change communities lives and make no difference. Its what we do and *HOW WE DO IT* that counts, not the words.

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- i Osbert Lancaster, *Figures in a Classical Landscape*, John Murray, 1947, pp 28-29
- ii established in *Maxima Redemptionis* (November 19, 1955)
- iii Dominic E Serra, *The Blessing of Baptismal Water at the Paschal Vigil: Ancient Texts and Modern Revisions* in *Worship*, Vol 64.2, March 1990, pp142-156, itself an abbreviation of a more substantial treatment published in two segments in *Ecclesia Orans* 6 (1989) pp 323-344 and 7 (1990) pp 343-368
- iv The Alternative Service Book 1980, pp 223-281
- v *Christian Initiation in the Anglican Communion: The Toronto Statement "Walk in Newness of Life"*: the Findings of the Fourth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, ed David Holeton, Toronto 1991
- vi The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, © 1985 ICEL
- vii For the emergence of these patterns in the Church of England see *On the Way: Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation* (GS Misc 444), Church House Publishing, 1995, 1998
- viii This description of a contemporary baptism and confirmation rite is based on *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, Church House Publishing, 2006. Common Worship is the collective title given to the volumes that make up the new liturgies and prayers of the Church of England from 2000 onwards
- ix *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, study edition, LTP Chicago, 1988
- x Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origin of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Alcuin Club Collections 86, SPCK, 2011)
- xi Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* II.4; these words are inscribed round the rim of the substantial cruciform baptismal font in Portsmouth Cathedral.
- xii A pattern I had argued for in *Confirmation and its Future*, Chapter 8 in *Liturgy for a New Century: Further Essays in Preparation for the revision of the Alternative Service Book* ed Michael Perham, SPCK 1991
- xiii *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives* ed Paul Avis, published by FAOC 2011 for the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity