

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH DOES THE RITE WANT?

By JAMES B. DUNNING

A poet says it this way:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells;
Crying What I do is me; for that I came.

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace; that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places;
Lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.
(Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'As kingfishers catch fire').

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* says it this way:

The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously (#4).

THE POETIC LANGUAGE of Hopkins and official language of a Roman document speak the same revolutionary message: 'Christ plays in ten thousand places, lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not his'. All the baptized, the people of God are the place of Christ's presence.

The rites of adult initiation offer many theologies: of God; Christ, humanity, creation, sacraments, conversion, etc. Other articles in this issue address those theologies. However, the key vision and the underlying theology of the catechumenate with its

rites is its vision of Church, its ecclesiology. With Hopkins that vision proclaims that when the community of all the baptized cries out self, it cries out Christ. That is the 'real presence' which we offer catechumens. When the rite speaks of ministries, the first mentioned is the entire community (cf #9).

That is the same dramatic shift made at Vatican II. The first draft of the constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, had a first chapter on the mystery of God, a second chapter on the hierarchy and a third chapter on the people of God. The bishops reversed the order of the second two chapters. God is present in the people of God, all the baptized, and then in some of the baptized who are ordained. Perhaps more than any other sacrament, adult initiation takes that vision of Church with utmost seriousness. That is 'the Church which the rite wants'.

That often is not the Church which the rite has. In oft-quoted words liturgist Ralph Keifer complains,

This is a revolution quite without precedent because the Catholic Church has never before in its history done such violence to its liturgical practice as to make its rites so thoroughly incongruous with its concrete reality . . . Such an approach is either suicide or prophecy of the highest order.¹

Much ecclesiology formerly began with institutional structures and hierarchies. Catechisms based on Trent had little on Church as people of God or body of Christ. In 1948 the encyclical *Mystici corporis* began to break that silence, but even there Pius XII discussed membership in largely canonical terms. Talk of the lay apostolate in the 50s and 60s saw the laity delegated by the hierarchy for witness. Theology reflects practice, and practice at its worst meant authoritarian power in clerics and bored apathy in the rest of the baptized. We still live with that practice. In too many places that is the 'concrete reality' mentioned by Keifer. As sacramental practice, adult initiation confronts that reality. It brings the vision of *Lumen gentium* into practice. It will cause all the tensions about shared ministry and responsibility and baptismal vocation launched by that document. Although it calls for practice, it also is a document which people read through their own blinders or binoculars. Often adult initiation minimally involves the community. It is still priest-centred with lectures and classes and a few mechanical liturgies thrown in. It is grounded in Church as

institution guided by professionals not Church as community on a common journey with catechumens.

What kind of Church does the rite want? Certainly it wants all the models of Church ably described by Avery Dulles.² It is an official rite of the *institutional* Church and involves ministries of that institution. In honesty we must say, however, that the predominant model is *community*. But it also vigorously proclaims God's word by evangelization and catechesis (*herald*). It is a *sacrament*, and surrounds catechumens with the community as sacrament. The goal is Pentecost with new members blown by winds of the Spirit into witness and mission (*servant*). At the very first liturgy; the Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate, the rite calls catechumens to follow Christ as a *community of disciples*.

Rather than rehash those models, I shall offer three visions of Church less complete than Dulles's but key to the initiation of adults: Church as Body of Christ, as community of faith and a missionary people of God. I do not suggest that the rite explicitly presents these ecclesiologies. I do suggest that the rite implicitly lends itself to these images of Church and that these three images are critical to effective implementation.

Church as body of Christ

Not only Hopkins but St Paul proclaims that we live 'in Christ'. He says it 164 times. We forgot that very soon. 'I hear that when you gather there are divisions among you . . . Those who eat and drink without recognizing the body eat and drink a judgment on themselves' (cf I Cor 11, 17-34). John Haughey insists, 'For Paul, Christ was inextricably the person of Christ-and-his-own-members'.³ We often reduced 'recognizing the body' to real presence in bread, but Paul confronts the Corinthians for not recognizing the body in the community. They did not forget who Jesus used to be. They forgot who he is and who they are. Therefore, as Haughey notes, 'Corinth was notorious for its ethnic antipathies, its exploitation of women, its rapaciousness and catastrophic economic inequalities'.⁴

Today's Church also forgets not only Jesus but Paul's reminder. Liberation theologian Juan Segundo has written: 'The Eucharist brings people next to each other; it juxtaposes them. It does not make a community out of participants'.⁵ That happens if we limit eucharist to things, objects, just bread and wine on a table rather than the action of sharing a meal which makes *us* the Body of

Christ. *The Body of Christ* is not bread. It was first the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, the primordial sacrament of God's presence. Jesus gave us his Spirit to enliven and empower us as his new body, so theologians call the Church the basic sacrament. The seven derivative sacraments and seventy times seven sacramentals are not things but actions of that basic sacrament—the Church initiating into community, eating and drinking in communion, reconciling, healing, leading, marrying. Transubstantiation theology so concentrated on real presence in bread and wine that we forgot that both the source and goal of all sacraments is the basic sacrament, the Church as Body of Christ. In its most explosive paragraph, the *Constitution on the liturgy* expands that presence to: word, ministries, the ritual action and, most important, the community (cf #7). Kenan Osborne states that the key to understanding all sacraments is to recover Jesus and Church as sacraments. Theology formerly claimed that Christ was present in his person in the eucharist but only by his power in the other sacraments. Osborne insists,

Jesus is present, really present in all the sacraments, not only in the eucharist, and it is the real presence of the Lord in the Church and in each of the sacraments which is the constitutive relationship between the primordial sacramentality of the humanness of Jesus and all other derivative sacraments. From this viewpoint, then, there is no difference between the real presence of Jesus in the Church and each and all of the sacraments.⁶

Catholics and other sacramental churches take the incarnation with radical seriousness. John Shea has written:

Many argue the code word 'incarnation' is the central affirmation of Christian faith. It says that God's commitment to the human adventure is not a word of promise from a distant reality but a personal union with a human life.⁷

That human life through Christ's Spirit is enfleshed in all the baptized who are now Christ's Body. Christ 'speaks and spells' his Self into ten thousand places. We are the basic sacrament of Christ's presence. We as Church do seven actions to share that presence. This is who Christ is and what Christ is doing today. If we forget that, the Church as Body of Christ becomes a kind of 'appendage trailing the Risen Lord from a distance'.⁸

This ecclesiology powerfully grounds the sacramental actions in the rites of initiation. When theology focused on objects, only the priest acted; and he did so at 'magic moments' which changed those objects. In adult initiation magic moments give way to a journey filled with a myriad of celebrations in which Christ is really present from the very beginning. 'The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults' (*RCIA* #5). Not just the priest but the entire community acts. 'The entire community must help the candidates and the catechumens throughout the process of initiation' (*RCIA* #9).

To catechumens seeking to become part of Christ's Body, we offer Christ's Body. To catechumens journeying to become sacraments of Christ, we give that Body as *the* sacrament of Christ. In the sacrament of adult initiation, as in all derivative sacraments, the basic sacrament we give is the Church as Christ's Body. 'Selves goes Christ' into our selves. We give catechumens those selves. We give them: the liturgical assembly, evangelizers, ministers of hospitality, sponsors, godparents, catechists, presbyters, spiritual directors, social concerns ministers, catechumenate directors, musicians, liturgists, fellow candidates, deacons, mystagogues, presiders, parish council and leaders, prayer companions, bishops, parishioners—the Body of Christ. We also help them learn of Christ by meeting him especially where he said he would be, in the hungry, thirsty, naked prisoner and stranger (cf Matt 25), since they are involved in mission *during* the catechumenate period (cf #75, 4). We hope that catechumens will come to say, 'We have found Christ's presence and love in all these people. Perhaps we can be that presence and love. Perhaps we can be that Body of Christ'.

Church as community of faith

We look first at faith and then at community. The rite calls catechumens to personal faith in God's love. 'From evangelization, completed with the help of God, come the faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God's love' (*RCIA* #37). The Church which the rite wants also has heard the Good News of God's love and has come to personal faith. That is not to be assumed.

We distinguish between faith, theology and doctrine. The Roman centurion tells Jesus only to say the word and his servant will be healed. Jesus exclaims he has not found such *faith* in Israel. He

was telling Israelites who knew doctrine and law that faith is more than doctrine and law. Faith is more than 'the faith', accepting truths about God. It is the response of our whole self to the God who in grace gives Self to us in Christ Jesus. 'Credo' comes from the Latin 'cor' and 'dare'—to give our heart. 'Believe' has roots in the German, 'be-love'. Without that relationship in love, John Westerhoff insists 'doctrines become ossified, witness and proclamation wooden, doxologies and litanies empty, consolation hollow, and ethics legalistic'.⁹

In a broad sense, whenever we express faith we do *theology*, in stone, glass, painting, music, especially in words. Out of their relationship with Jesus, writers in communities gave us words in biblical stories, theologies and doctrines. Theology, in St Anselm's classic phrase, is 'faith seeking understanding' which teases out the meaning of our relationship with God. Good theology assumes we have had that experience. There can be no faith without some expression, some theology, just as there is no real marriage without expressions of love. There can be theology without faith. Later generations can mouth the expressions of those who know God's love without tasting that Love. In the words of Leonardo Boff: 'A theology—any theology—not based on spiritual experience is mere panting—religious breathlessness',¹⁰ and of Herwig Arts: 'Without experience the mind is a mill grinding without grain'.¹¹

Doctrines (dogma) are official theology. In the strict sense doctrines are one-liners or brief paragraphs approved by the Church as official theological expressions of faith for the whole Church. Doctrines are few. Some who complain about lack of doctrine in catechesis really mean popularized theological commentaries of catechisms on doctrine.

If the rite calls catechumens to faith, it wants a Church which is a community of faith not just of theologies or doctrines. Studies in the United States indicate that this is not entirely the Church which the rite has. Evangelicals scored highest (92%) and Catholics lowest (65%) in agreeing that 'God loves you a great deal'. Evangelicals were also highest (97%) and Catholics lowest (82%) in believing that they have a personal relationship with God.¹² 38% of all priests in the United States and 55% of those aged 55–65 say that 'faith means essentially belief in the doctrines of the Catholic Church'.¹³

Karl Rahner claims that such belief is not strong enough in a post-Christian world:

Our present situation is one of *transition* from a church sustained by a homogeneously Christian society and almost identical with it . . . to a church made up of those who have struggled against their environment to reach *personally* a *clearly* and *explicitly responsible* decision of faith. This will be the church of the future or there will be no church at all.¹⁴

Elsewhere he says the same thing with another striking phrase: 'Christians of the future will be mystics or they will not be Christians at all'.¹⁵

Many of the baptized need the evangelization and catechesis described by the rites of adult initiation (cf *RCIA* #36-37, #75). They are 'uncatechized adults' mentioned in Part II of the document, *if* uncatechized means not just uninstructed in doctrine but uninitiated into personal relationship with God. They need a journey like that of catechumens if we are to offer catechumens the Church which the rite wants. D. S. Amalorpavadass reminds us:

In catechesis, we do proclaim the Word, but the form of proclamation that most of our people need . . . is not catechesis but evangelization: a creative, dynamic, global, and interpellating Word, for the first result we expect is faith and conversion.¹⁶

Having looked at faith, we now turn to community. If faith is not just theology or doctrine but a personal relationship with God, we offer catechumens people in that relationship, a community. Archbishop Thomas Murphy of Seattle writes:

Renewal and conversion come not primarily through the understanding of theological insights, or the commitment to the doctrines and dogmas of our faith, or the aesthetic appreciation of liturgical celebrations. These are all critical and important. Renewal and conversion come from our contact with, our knowledge of, our friendship for others who are experiencing ongoing renewal and conversion.¹⁷

I mentioned that the model of Church as community described by Dulles is predominant in the rite. Some complain that this approach is too public, too difficult for shy people, too much community. Indeed, we are gentle with the shy. Usually it is not shyness, however, but hurt and lack of trust left over from

oppressive past relationships or a privatistic religion centred on Jesus and me. We give them good relationships. Catholics proclaim: take away the community and you take away Christ's real presence.

Church as community centres on the inner life of *koinonia* which supports the outer life of *diakonia* and mission. It is the group's life of shared faith usually made possible by the intimacy and trust generated by a small group. This often is not the Church which the rite has. Churches south of the equator abound with small groups and base communities, but for the most part western Europe and North America have not found our way. The catechumenate offers small groups. In that sense the catechumens may be joining a different Church. We may create false hopes in catechumens who experience an intense and intimate community of shared faith and life and then are dropped for a crash landing in the larger, anonymous geographical parish where even a small parish of 100 households does not meet a sociologist's requirements for community.

Sociologists define religious community as having two levels of concern. First, they are about the quality of life and the shared experience of their own members. Second, they are also deeply concerned about the quality of life of the larger world. Also, they are *intentional*, i.e., people freely join them; and they are small enough to allow members to know each other.¹⁸

The lack of intentional communities to which a catechumen can be apprenticed is no small drawback . . . We are noticing now a significant seepage out of the Church of men and women who entered through the RCIA. Part of the reason seems to be that the promise of a community to which one can belong . . . does not materialize once the catechumen has been baptized.¹⁹

The canonical statutes for initiation in the United States ask neophytes to meet periodically for one year after initiation. We need to invite small groups of Catholics to meet with them. We ask them to adopt a fragile neophyte for a year to support them in their faith and mission. Ultimately this vision sees the entire parish not as community but as a network of communities and calls us to offer such groups to others. The Grubb Institute in London claims that people 'oscillate' by periodically moving more deeply into the world of faith and worship and out of the world of work, because they need to get some perspective on life. A small

community, where people experience Christ's presence through people in a relationship with God, which builds personal faith, leading to ritual and worship, available not just for neophytes but for all members, might meet those needs. In any event, that is the Church which the rite wants for new members during and after the journey of initiation.

Church as missionary people of God

We explore this image of Church more briefly because in one sense we should not have to mention it. Community should say it. For Christians, community means not just warmth, intimacy, friendship. Mission makes church community. We may not know each other; but our mission and vocation to build the reign of God unites Church as community.

Bishop Untener of Saginaw will not use the word community because Americans identify that only with warmth and intimacy. Parker Palmer insists that the Church should be a 'company of strangers' and not just friends.²⁰ He contends that Church often takes on qualities of community denied to people in society. If society is impersonal, cold, fractured, competitive and even violent, we hunger for a Church community which is intimate, warm, close-knit, loving. We can escape from Matthew 25 and the beatitudes, build our cocoons and retreat to the womb.

Indeed, catechumenal communities of friends which allow intimacy and trust are places where we dare to share faith and our times of dying and rising. But the goal is not intimate sharing but witness and mission, not Easter but Pentecost. With the vision of *Lumen gentium* of Church as people of God, every member is gifted by the Spirit and called to share that Spirit, especially in family, work and world. The catechumenate is formation of the newly baptized for their mission. This is how Church forms new members to renew the face of the earth and empowers them with the fire and wind of the Spirit of Pentecost.

These, then, are three visions of Church which underlie adult initiation: Body of Christ, community of faith, missionary people of God. Fidelity to that vision will bring not only a new way of initiating members but a new way of being Church. It calls old and new members to 'act in God's eye what in God's eye we are—Christ'.

NOTES

- ¹ Keifer, Ralph: 'Christian initiation: the state of the question', *Worship*, 48:7, p 402.
- ² Dulles, Avery: *Models of the Church*, (Garden City, NY, 1974). Dulles identified five models: institution, community, herald, sacrament, servant; and later he offered an umbrella model: community of disciples.
- ³ Haughey, John C.: 'The Eucharist and intentional communities', in Lee, Bernard, ed.: *Alternative futures for worship, vol. 3: the Eucharist* (Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, 1987), p 54.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p 56; and cf Bornkamm, Günther: *Early Christian experience*, (London, SCM Press, 1969), pp 151-152.
- ⁵ Segundo, Juan: *The sacraments today*, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis, 1974), p 10.
- ⁶ Osborne, Kenan: *The Christian sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1987), p 207.
- ⁷ Shea, John: *The Spirit Master*, (Chicago, The Thomas More Press, 1987), p 63.
- ⁸ Haughey, *op. cit.*, p 59.
- ⁹ Westerhoff, John: 'Celebrating and living the Eucharist', in Lee, Bernard, ed.: *Alternative futures for worship, vol. 3: the Eucharist*, (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1987), p 33.
- ¹⁰ Boff, Leonardo: *Salvation and liberation*, (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1984), p 2.
- ¹¹ Arts, Herwig: *With your whole soul*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1978), p 15.
- ¹² Gallup, George, and Castelli, Jim: *The American Catholic people: their beliefs, practices and values*, (Garden City, Doubleday, 1987), p 193.
- ¹³ Hoge, Dean R.; Shields, Joseph J.; Verdieck, Mary Jeanne: 'Changing age distribution and theological attitudes of Catholic priests, 1970-1985' (Washington, DC, Catholic University of America, 1987).
- ¹⁴ Rahner, Karl: *The shape of the Church to come* (New York, Seabury, 1972).
- ¹⁵ Rahner, Karl: 'Theology and spirituality of pastoral work in the parish', in *Theological investigations, vol. 19*, (New York, Crossroads, 1983), p 96.
- ¹⁶ Amalorpavadass, D. S.: 'Catechesis', in Warren, Michael, ed.: *Sourcebook for modern catechetics*, (Winona, St Mary's Press, 1983), p 358.
- ¹⁷ Murphy, Thomas: 'Renewing the Church: RCIA in parish life', *Emmanuel*, March, 1987, p 78.
- ¹⁸ Cf Lee, Bernard: 'The Eucharist and intentional Christian communities', in *Alternative futures for worship, vol. 3: the Eucharist*, (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1987), p 12.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 13.
- ²⁰ Cf Palmer, Parker: *A company of strangers*, (New York, Crossroads, 1981).