

25 March 2009

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Dear Kevin,

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of your experimental rite for Baptism. I read it with great interest, thinking of the various debates we had on several issues back in the '70s when I served on the sub-committee for the Standing Liturgical Commission charged with preparing the new rite for Baptism — which, of course, was eventually incorporated into the 1979 BCP. Some of the points which this rite raises echo in my mind with discussions at the time, but also reminded me that liturgical developments are always “progressive.” The Church is always dealing with its immediate situation, but even as we do so the horizon is expanding and new issues continue (and always will continue) to come along, new issues for which former responses are not adequate. I want to share with you a couple of perspectives from that earlier experience.

With regard to the question of liturgical language which is raised at points in this experimental rite: during my first term on the Standing Liturgical Commission (in the 1980s), we were charged with the development of rites based upon MP, EP, and the Rite II Eucharist of the 1979 BCP, rites which would address the need for inclusive language. Our primary task had to do with inclusive language of the worshiping community, but hiding in the shadows, of course, were the then-emerging questions regarding inclusive language in reference to God. One of my memories from our work on this task is the frustration shared by the members of the Commission when we realized that the substitution of plural (i.e. Inclusive) pronouns for singular (masculine) pronouns simply would not work. What we ended up with was simply poor English forms which still echoed the forms in the BCP. We realized that what was required to address this issue appropriately would be the development of new texts which would be conceived and generated out of a context in which inclusive language was a given factor from the start.

With regard to our tentative steps toward inclusive language about God, I remember well my discovery, particularly in texts by St. Ephrem the Syrian, the incredibly diverse images used in language about God or in address to God which characterize numerous texts from the early fathers. I realized that in the unfolding of the Church's life, that rich array of images had gradually been pruned down to a primary focus on male and monarchical images. A very useful book by Daniel Stevick which was published at about that time confirmed (as the fruit of his research) that in his wider survey of the evolution of liturgical language, an abundance of images about God had fallen into disuse. This insight became an important tool for us on the Commission for trying to open up the range of images about God which might find a legitimate place in the evolution of our liturgical rites.

I have looked at the experimental rite for Baptism from the Diocese of Northern Michigan with this past experience in mind. I am, of course, aware that for members of our Church, this question can raise a high level of anxiety. I really have a lot of sympathy for that, and that is why I would want to emphasize that what I think at this time, and what I pleaded for to the Commission shortly before I ended my second term, is that it is very important for the Episcopal Church NOT to move toward complete Prayer Book revision at this time, but rather to address the need for the development of a range of experimental rites which will enable us to address the larger issues of inclusion without being under the gun to produce a complete book. We need a process of local development, critical evaluation, and appropriate revision so that, in due course, the cream will rise to the top and the poor experiments, having been tested and found wanting, may drop off our plate.

I have read the baptismal rite carefully and it seems to me that as an experiment it models the type of process which we need, local testing, critical reflection, and, eventually, appropriate revision. In saying this, I am taking for granted that our situation (and really for the past twenty-five years) has been very different in this regard to the long adherence to prayer book conformity which preceded it. I tend to understand our current situation as ‘fluid’: this is not true only for Episcopalians, but in our Communion generally, and in the other liturgical churches. Both the liturgical and ecumenical movements have had enormous impact upon our current pastoral reality. My concern is not with experimentation guided by responsible oversight, but rather what I see here on the west coast (and which I am told of in other parts of the country) of a new kind of clericalism in which whatever liturgical whim the rector wants to impose on a congregation, often apparently with inadequate theological and liturgical knowledge, becomes the liturgy of the hour. I am frequently sent examples of these liturgies (--NOT by the rectors themselves!), and the problems both theological and liturgical are often very serious. Liturgical development requires appropriate leadership and a willingness to test and criticize; the first idea that pops into one’s head is not necessarily good liturgy.

One further comment. You mention that the question has been raised about the distinction between the ministries of bishops and those of priests, with bishops being understood as “guardians of the faith.” Speaking historically, certainly this has been an important dimension of the episcopal ministry. But for me, I must bring to this question the work of the late Raymond Brown on this question. Probably some thirty years ago he published a very important little book titled *Priest and Bishop*. In it, and on the basis of his substantial work on the books of the New Testament, Brown proposed a missionary model for the episcopate. He calls for the bishop to exercise the radical ministry implied in the ancient title *pontifex* — bridge builder. In this model, the bishop is the one who is reaching out into the expanding edges of the community, and who then interprets the various voices in the Church to each other in order to build up the unity of the Body which transcends such differences as progressive and conservative. The priests, on the other hand, Brown sees as the resident pastors, those charged with the building up and nourishment of the local communities, and in that sense the conservators of the tradition. For the episcopate, I would hope that, given the needs of the church in our own post-

Christian world, Brown's interpretation of the episcopate might be given fuller expression.

I know that this has gone on too long, but I hope that perhaps some of my comments may be useful to you. I do want personally to confirm my joy at your election to the episcopate for the Diocese of Northern Bishop. The past several bishops have been personal friends, and I would rejoice to see that continue. As a small diocese, it seems to me that the kind of corporate reflection on liturgical developments which I think we need might be embodied more immediately than in large dioceses in which inter-parochial communication is often so difficult, and I believe that you could foster that very effectively.

For now, my warm greetings to you and Rise. Yours ever in Christ, Louis