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 Position Paper of Willis Elliott, Dean of Exploratory Programs,
 N.Y. Theol. Sem., 5 W 29th, NYC 10001

EARLY AND FUTURE CHRISTIAN INITIATION, or
 Extrapolations Into and From the Wonderful Wanderings of Willis
 in the Bayous of Baptism

(This is an abridgment of a forty-page manuscript, with most of the illustrative material eliminated so that all the concerns can be included in an article of decent length.)

The full meaning of baptism reveals it as the most revolutionary ritual act the world has ever known, but the broken and embattled fragments of baptism have made for some of the most boring and slippery and sleazy argumentation the world has ever known. This position paper tries to free the former fact from the latter mess and morass. It can be done. It must be done if the United Church of Christ is to be what it professes, a uniting church....and if we are to model for, or at least participate in, the Ecumene, all God's people in each place and every place.

A story-allegory will show my confidence that it can be done and will be done. A friend and I had occasion many years ago to talk with Schweitzer as he played, on an organ he'd never seen before, Bach's "Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor." Now, "passacaglia" is pseudo-Italian for a Spanish picture-word meaning playing on your guitar a dance-tune while passing through the streets. It was a favorite of this great organist and great human being, for it tests an organ to its last stop and breath! Now, Schweitzer had agreed to converse with us during the playing as long as we did not expect him to speak English, though we ourselves could; we were to indicate whether we preferred him to respond in German or French. So we two chattered away on a rather technical double interview while he concentrated on the organ response and replied to me in German and my friend in French. Moral: It may take a bit of genius to resolve and transeend the baptismal controversies of the past, but it is possible. Baptism is the melody, the continuity, the what as content and action--in short, the organ being played. In the allegory, English is the common language, the New Testament terms, images, ideas about and touching baptism--how baptism as act and meaning is impressed upon us Christians. And German and French are at a third level of significance: how the truth of baptism is expressed in the two candidacies, confessors (believers) and infants-children.

This paper's subtitle is autobiographical. In my own life and ministry I have been involved with virtually all the practices and meanings of baptism throughout Christian history and around the world (thus, "extrapolations into" my present vision), and on this basis, including special studies and participation in the UCC committees on baptism-confirmation-membership from the earliest days of our denomination, I have some concrete proposals to make (thus, "extrapolations from" my present vision).

Just one more introductory note: What is my viewpoint and commitment? That's detailed in a rash of position papers I wrote during our church's first dozen years as a member of UCC national study-groups on Christian initiation. A story will show my general orientation. As national-office liaison, I said to an early such committee, "Our task is to bless what is and to move toward what should be." At this, the E&R scholars Elmer Arndt and Allen Miller, and the UCC scholars Amos Wilder and Paul Minear, reacted four ways, one each! So complex is the relating of the Holy to the sacred in such wise as that neither does the Holy become implausible and unavailable nor does the sacred degenerate into the sacrosanct, "having the form of godliness but denying the power thereof." I still hold to my flat and wry posing of the polarity: "Our task [still] is to bless what is and to move toward what should be."

My proposal I'm making for "Disciples United" (the prospective union of the Disciples of Christ and our church), since (1) we are immediately up against the most difficult baptismal question as we face this prospective union, viz. candidacy (of believers only, or also of infants-children?), and (2) this wider-than-our-church address moves us toward the possibility of making a fresh ecumenical witness while facing baptismal questions in the UCC.

CHRISTIAN INITIATION: A Proposal for "DISCIPLES UNITED"

Congregational Freedom-Responsibility....(Elliott #1179)

1. That as both of the merging traditions emphasize individual freedom-responsibility, the same be in future more radically extended within congregations--so that what a person may find in ritual somewhere (among the denominations) can be found anywhere (in any UCC/Disciples congregation). This ideal of the congregation as ecumene, a slice of the global ecumene in Christ with all the nutrients thereof (Gk. *cosmico en cosmo*, Lat. *ecclesiola in ecclesia*)....For this, during the past thirty years I've been using the phrase the local ecumene, for it was 30 years ago that I left seminary teaching and wended my way into a congregational exploration toward a NT church that, instead of moving "back to the Bible," tried to move forward to the Kingdom of God by comprehending, including, as much as could be with integrity, the liturgical-ritual-doctrinal heritages of all churches. During the ensuing decade of my pastoring Morton Community Church, I represented this vision, with the feeling of (as Visser 't Hooft put it about such a congregation) "a scout who in the old days went ahead of the wagon train" (qtd. in my exposition of this vision in 8 May 57 CHRISTIAN CENTURY, "Unity Through Community"). [NB: "Local" can be either a congregational or a geographical reference; as the latter, the local ecumene means all God's people in one area--a block or ward or town. "A local-ecumenical church-congregation" will, by conviction, be committed to cooperation, which means preferring to do together with other churches whatever they are willing to do. E.g., we promoted prayer-study-action groups on a town basis rather than on a congregational basis, and had some score of them pointed toward heaven and earth, the latter including human need, including the need for Christian critique, in the town.] [UCC NOTE: This perspective comports well with the phrase we were using in UCC's early days: "a uniting church."] I represented this point of view at all four conciliar levels, and was treated respectfully and even wistfully as an impossible dreamer. But what now, in 1978, is possible except the dream? Besides, it wasn't impossible: we were doing it, mixing Catholics and Protestants with new converts to Christ but to neither. We were practicing the great liturgies on an eight-point churchyear by rotation; we were offering baptism all eight ways. (The Sunday our third son was "presented," some believers were immersed--but the latter in a nearby Disciples church, for we had not yet built our own building with its ecumenical appointments.)

2. That responsibility for children's participation in the sacraments lie not with the congregation but with the bio-family. In Morton, this meant (as did the whole conceptual leap into "the local ecumene") that we had to stress adult education with emphasis on re-education away from the sectarian notion of denominational-congregational paternalism, viz. the person-and-family's unfreedom to make the decisions as to children's participation (active unfreedom, in education for narrowness, and/or passive unfreedom, in failing to offer some of the ecumenical options). Humanizing the question of "first communion" involves first the locating of the question in the proper socio-context, the mini-society in which the child and so the child's holistic development, is best known, which is in almost all cases the bio-family. So also with "Christian initiation," the inducting of the child into the congregation/Church/Kingdom of God. The bio-church (i.e., the church equally concerned to honor God's work in nature by priesting and in grace by propheting) will honor the bio-family's decisions both as to when and as to how the child is to be inducted and initiated. Helping the parents sort the options is a prime opportunity in Christian education, and frequently led to conversions to Christ and to the local as well as the larger ecumene.

3. That the new theological commission make it its first business to provide the following study-documents for use in Disciples and UCC congregations, and to recommend feedback processes looking toward publication by the new communion: (1) "The Local Ecumene: History and Possibility"; (2) "The Congregation as God's Minister of Nature and Grace"; (3) "The Child in the Christian Family and Church"; (4) "Liturgies of Christian Initiation." In Morton, I found this fourth level of literature the most exciting to evolve and produce, for it tests all else.

The rest of this paper may seem like a bidding prayer or a succession of calls to meditation and study. It is a succession of reflections behind and implicitly within my proposal. It is evidence both of the fact that I keep on being baptismal, and how I do so in my own heart and mind and life.

waited for the person who was to meet me and take me to a certain city to lead a three-hour seminar for eight groups of divorced Catholics on the subject, "Unchristian Feelings about One's Ex-Spouse." Now, there were more difficulties, as I stood there waiting, than you might think. You know I'm not a Catholic. Some of you know I've never been divorced. None of you know that I didn't know the exact time of the meeting; or the building; or even the city. It got so late I decided to guess at the city, which had to be one of seven to which that gate led --figuring, when I got somewhere, I'd hit a stack of phonebooks (as I had a few names). I got to the wrong city, and located in the phonebooks all the names I had. Nobody answered: by that time, they were all at the meeting! So I said to myself, "Whatthehell, I'm too tired for a long meeting, anyway," and went home and sleep soundly with the peace of one who has done all he could. Meanwhile, the program chair and associates were frantically trying to locate me, and the folks waiting in the meeting shifted their unchristian feelings about their ex-spouses to unchristian feelings about me and the person who had been waiting for me at another gate. MORAL: If you're to meet, you better both damn well be at the same gate. It just won't do to wait for God at Godot's gate: not even Godot will come. It won't do to expect the new world at some other gate than the gate marked "Baptism." "O Jesus, thou art waiting...."

Again, in the liturgics of Israelitism and the pre-AD70 Judaism, the place of meeting was the lid on the ark of the covenant (Hb.9.5, *hilaste.rion*), and the cost of meeting was its being sprinkled with blood (Ex.25.16ff+). For the community and unity of the people of God, it did not do that, handier to home for most everybody, were other sacred meetingplaces: God's mobile home the tabernacle, then his settled dwelling on Zion, were the one Meeting-Place! Call it tribalism gone nationalism, if you will; or call it revelation; I call it both. This *hilaste.rion* of baptism in blood, this gate of new life and new world marked "Baptism," is--and on this, and on almost nothing else, all Christians agree--the primordial place of meeting, of the gift of forgiveness, of the double action of reconciliation by grace (Luther's *Gnadenstuhl*). Anything that lessens the soul-shaking and world-revolutionizing dimensionality of baptism trivializes the Christian faith and the Church, the Community of faith and the mission.

2. Second, baptism is the entrance-place into the kingdom of God, i.e. the door. Time for another story: While at NYTS I have taught many rabbis, and of all three flavors, an evengreater privilege has been to teach with some, and one of them is now my closest Jewish friend--Chaim Stern, editor of the four Reform prayerbooks: Sha'areh Tephilah for children and for adults, Sha'areh L'Bayith, and Sha'areh Teshuvah. In process, we had many conversations about the image of "gate" and "door" in our biblical heritage, and the Hebrew word therefor is the continuity in his titles. Early on in the process, I asked Chaim how come he chose this everyday analogy, and he said this: "When I was growing up in Brooklyn, each day

1. Baptism is the place where we must be if we are to meet and greet the One we are seeking, the only One who can answer our yearning to become more than we are without lusting to claim more than we need. Baptism is the place where that one gives the Gift of the Kingdom, which in its most inward part is the assurance that all along we have been more sought than seeking, more loved than loving, more yearned for than yearning.

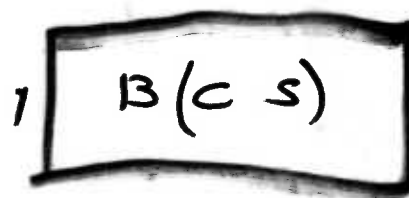
Baptism, I say, is this place of gift exchange where I give the kingdoms of this world to the extent that they are mine, and God gives the kingdom of his Son my Lord. A story to say this negatively: A few weeks ago, on a rainy day after teaching three classes, I walked into Grand Central and, at a certain gate,

I saw a certain rebbe who was so holy and so loving that it was as if, in his presence, all walls became open doors on heaven. I have honored him with the first word in the prayerbooks' titles." When I got to know him better, it became clear to me that the rebbe was his own hasid father, who had come to America to make just enough money to keep his hasid community in Jerusalem from starving....The Lord of baptism says (Jn.6), "I am the door" of entrance; and this was the central image for baptism-as-initiation in Morton (IL) Community Church, of which I was minister through the whole of the 1950s and a bit beyond. As I got to design both the structure and the symbolism of the church building, the door-baptism theme appears in several ways--in the symbols of the first door in then nave, in the descending dove at the bottom of the Trinity-cross window over the main altar, and in the cover-door which both serves as the lid on the tomb-baptistery for immersion and as the space in front and on the level of the high altar (combining the themes of "meeting-place" and "gate of heaven").

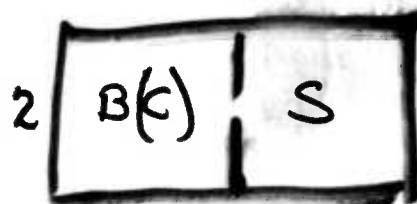
Understandably, the door image also dominated cachechetical (Christian-initiation/induction) instruction. We drew a dutch door, divided horizontally in the middle. The lower half represented basic, believer or confessor, baptism; and the upper half, infant or child baptism ("pedobaptism"). The door had four panels. The first was all blue, representing the full water of baptism ("immersion") and extending at both levels, i.e. the immersion of both "adults" and infants, picturing baptism as identification with our Lord's dying and rising. The second was blue half the way from the bottom of each half of the door, representing pouring ("affusion"), picturing baptism as the outpouring of the Spirit. The third panel was blue one-fourth of the way from the bottom of each half of the door, representing sprinkling ("aspersion"), picturing baptism as a rite of purification. And the fourth had no blue, representing baptism as spiritual-inner, picturing "a circumcision of the heart, not of the flesh." One Sunday, I baptized seven of the eight ways: I never made it to all eight at once! Note that the option as to which of the four modes lies, as implicit in the first statement of my "Proposal," with family and, at the age of discretion, person.

3. Third, while original Christian initiation was--and on this a scholarly consensus has been forming for thirty years--a single door of rich design (inclusive of confession of sin and faith, immersion, confirmation, the laying on of hands, and the Supper), various pressures through the centuries extended it into a multi-door corridor. A design-science, humanization-of-space parallel is the sequence of development from barrier through single door through to the "lock" as "a realm and activity zone," as I have detailed on thinksheet #1174 (an extensive review of the brilliant COMMUNITY AND PRIVACY, Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander [Anchor/65]). Here is a rough tracing, the Christian-initiation development reading downward:

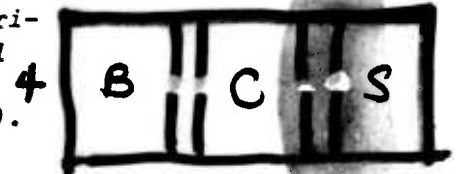
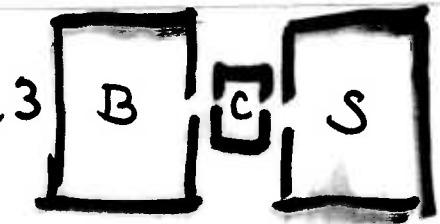
In diagram 1, "B(CS)" means that the term "baptism" is inclusive of confirmation and the Lord's Supper. It is "baptism-os" the act + "baptism-a" all the ecclesial and world-behavioral consequences. It is, indeed, a holophrase for being a Christian in church and world.



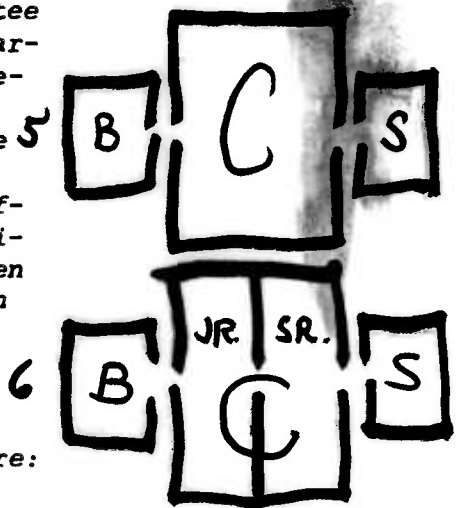
In diagram 2, eucharistic discipline has begun under a number of pressures and desires--educational, purificational, preservational, and competitive (the mystery religions offering an inner-sanctum secret "Mystery," which indeed the Supper came to be called in the Eastern churches). Full Christian initiation is now two-stage--though of course the development was not as neat as one, for clarity, must make it on a flowchart.



In diagram 3 a second fission (to use another figure) has occurred. Confirmation has gained a small but independent status. Looking at this and the later stages, one may think of a "growth," i.e. a tumor; but our architect-authors want us to see this development as healthy, with no privacy in diagram 1 and, in 3 through 5, both an increase of privacy and an enlargement of social space ("community"). Transposing to our theme, the growth of confirmation did indeed incline toward the privatization of both baptism and the "Mass" (a liturgical collection of individuals related only to the "Sacrament of the Altar," with uncomfortable Prot. parallels).



Now, for our purpose I've repeated the authors' diagram 5, in order to show my 1961 proposal to the UCC Committee on Confirmation. [Throughout the 1960s I was on the various UCC committees on baptism and confirmation, and developed a series of fairly widely circulated papers--1961, 1963, 1965, 1966, 1967--on various aspects of the problems we were dealing with.] The vertical line dividing confirmation represents adolescent rebellion/differentiation/individuation, a phenomenon both more visible, and more present, since children stopped being seen and not heard. My proposal of a two-stage confirmation to honor all the values (psychological, developmental, anthropological, sociohistorical, and cultural as well as religious and theological) was widely praised, bureaucratically filed, and forgotten. I can't resist the temptation to take it out and dust it off, here:



UCC Committee on Confirmation...
12.61 statement of Willis E. Elliott [Exhibit G]

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL INTEGRITY OF
THE CHURCHES' SACRAMENTAL LIFE

Summary

The churches' sacramental life must have a triple integrity:

RITUAL

WHOLENESS -- the rites integrated with the one Sacrament (as in perception the eye collects details into a single visual image, an organic-semantic unity) and articulated with each other;

GOSPEL

WHOLENESS -- the motives being a single devotion ("one Lord"), a common witness ("one Faith"), a common remembrance and anticipation sanctifying the life together ("one Baptism"), and the celebration of the community's understanding of the meaning and goal of human existence ("one God and Father of us all");

COMMUNAL

WHOLENESS -- and the effects being compaction (the believer self-consciously delineated from the unbeliever, and the community of faith self-consciously marked off from all other communities), expansion (conscious witness toward commitment and incorporation), resistance to whatever hinder the compaction and the expansion ("the world"), and positive response to all human need (the obedience of love, truth, and joy).

Concern

That in "the Spirit of unity" our denomination shall seek a sacramental integrity honoring the Lord, strengthening for witness and service, and countering the fragmenting forces in the believer, the local church, the relations between local churches

within (unstructured, conciliar, and denominational), the denomination, and between the larger fellowships (denominations, councils).

Fears

1. That our new denomination will be non-directive on the churches' sacramental life, each local church pursuing an independent course, the two liturgical traditions preserving themselves intact, and General Synod at most pointing to our version of local autonomy (do-nothing drift dressed up as laissez-faire but actually a secular substitute for freedom of the Spirit).
2. That the united denominations will accept the adjustment of differences (in commission on worship, theological commission, confirmation committee, etc.) as a substitute for asking the harder question of a comprehensively Christian sacramental integrity; that the book of worship will seek to satisfy merely the congregations rather than the ecumenical spirit of openness toward "all always everywhere"; that in this and other realms our UCC will eventuate into a mere merger and not a true unity through which new light may come to Christ's Church. Even after uniting, the two denominations represent only a single band in the Christian sacramental spectrum, the pedobaptist Protestant. Though practice varied both between and with the two denominations, our sacramental theory diverged but little --too little to compel thoroughgoing reexamination of the basic questions and of the total Christian sacramental heritage. If

these larger quests are undertaken it will be for reasons supervening over our internal dialogue.

3. That agencies publishing for the denomination (Christian Education, Evangelism, Commission on Worship, etc.) will present each other with fait accompli, narrowing or closing further and broader considerations not vocally represented.
4. That Christians everywhere, and our new denomination in particular, shall fail to hear God's call from outside the sanctuary--God's call to disciplined sacramental life vis-a-vis environing competitive and corrupt versions of the holy; that misunderstanding the holy life in Christ we shall embrace indigestible elements of "the world" or indiscriminately reject whatever opposes our religio-institutional life. What it means to be a Christian vis-a-vis Neo-Hinduism and Communism (for examples) must be worked out with fear and trembling, prayer and worship, study and encounter.

The remainder of this paper consists of comments on the first of the three sections of the "summary."

Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is, as God's self-giving act of taking his creation back up into himself redemptively, the single Christian Sacrament. The quality of this Sacrament

is neither active (centering on the act) nor contemplative (centering on the meaning) but interpersonal (centering on the Person in axis with his devotee-disciples). In this Person are both the richness and the simplicity which characterize Christian sacramental life. And because this Person saw himself and his movement in terms of an unfulfilled messianism, this sacramental life contains a second element--incompleteness. Whatever rites express this sacramental life must accordingly express both this Person-to-person and Person-to-community relationship and this incompleteness, this longing.

Once the Person is truly met, all that the relationship can ever involve is already present. For this reason, baptism of either candidacy and of every form is the symbolic sacrament: the continuum of its meaning (in any Christian psycho-socio-metaphysics) is that it is a meeting of, indeed a being introduced to, ^{Confessor or infant,} this Person, and into the community of,

On any other view we would lack warmth, depth, breadth, and unity in our sacramental understanding and life. The Sacrament would fragment into "sacraments"--things in themselves that tend more and more to be viewed as crass magic or mere symbols. The Church would be disrupted (and indeed it is) with irrelevant debates on validity (e.g., of administering some rites as over against others) and adequacy (e.g., of pedobaptism) and efficacy (though there is no stopping-point for judgment short of the full-presencing of this Person in the Parousia, the sacramental

center which is at the same time the center of the believer's living and the center of history and hope).

The living integrity of the Church's sacramental life is interpersonal and intentional. In it there is only so much of the past (remembrance) as the renewal of the promise requires, and only so much of the present (covenant life) as affirmation of the promise demands. The actions of baptism-confirmation and supper (and any other acceptable rites) are dominical and psychosocial. They are bound together as actions of the one Lord, as commitments of persons to the one promise, and as celebrative responses of that community which accepts only this promise with ultimate seriousness.

As the celebration of the supreme theophany unto community, the Sacrament is one and celebrates in various rites and forms the appearance of God incarnate in the "one Lord." The earliest Christians, former devotees of "lords many," rejoiced in this new Center for their personal and corporate lives, understood their new existence (one "Faith") as functional within this new unity ("one Body"), and celebrated their oneness with God and each other sacramentally ("one Baptism," the initiation personally and intentionally inclusive of the whole sacramental life, later disintegrated into "sacraments"). As the being and rationale of unity, the Lord himself was God's Sacrament.

But as the fires of dominical devotion burned low, sacramental

rites came to be less looked through and more looked at. Justin is the last father to try to hold the Sacrament together. Blind faith stepped in to invest the fragments with magical powers, and modernly the tendency is to shore them up with psychosocial "insights" and "values" (at great loss to the devotional, the mystical, the sense of the holy, and with the extraneous addition of a strong voluntaristic caste emphasizing the sacramental fulfillment of the known needs of man in himself and in community--reducing sacramental acts to didactic dramas and sacramental theology into intellectual illumination (a strong current in Christian Education literature)).

Of the members of our committee Robert Paul has voiced a concern for the restoration of the one Sacrament, which he conjectures as possibly taking the form of immersional confirmation with the laying on of hands of the supper; and the author of this paper has experimented in the pastorate in the direction of restoration. The most recent relevant publication from the World Council of Churches ("One Lord One Baptism," Augsburg/60, especially pp. 70f) gives hope that the matter is a rising concern among the Christians of the world.

A Suggestion

In the light of the above, and of the two new relevant factors of modern times--our understanding of adolescent rebellion, and the postponement of adult responsibility to a half dozen years after puberty--I suggest two-stage confirmation, as follows:

Christian Initiation Practices		
A	B	C
baptism	baptism	baptism
	confirmation	junior confirmation <i>REBELLION</i> senior confirmation
supper	(Many possibilities)	

Practice A -- undivided Baptism, for confessors only--obtains in more than 200 of our UCC churches. The pending union with the Disciples would increase this. *1961*

Practice B is common to most of our UCC churches. Our committee has found divided baptism an ecumenical necessity but undivided confirmation an unnecessary and unduly restrictive procedure.

Practice C would satisfy the positive arguments for early (ca. age 12) confirmation and the positive arguments for in-rebellion and post-rebellion confirmation. Its three rites correspond with the three stages of membership--baptismal, confessional, and adult (with full responsibilities, including the vote). Each local church would determine the degree of rigor for the third stage.

4. Fourth, then, we come to what I consider the appropriate governing design principle in ritual, viz. the maximization of values within the limits of clarity, continuity, and community. The first limit is logical, viz. the community's capacity of dealing with complexity/richness. The third is down-to-earth: what will the traffic bear, enjoy, and be guided and energized by? And the second...well, I'll tell a story on that. The first time I as UCC-office representative met with the study commission on baptism and confirmation, I was asked my conception of the commission's task and answered, "To bless what is and move toward what should be"--i.e., to adjudicate the concerns of priest and prophet. All laughed except two. One of those, Amos Wilder, smiled; and the other, Paul Minear, frowned. Now, it happens that the three of us who did not laugh represent a succession of PhD theses on sanctions religious leaders were responsive to in designing and delivering their message. Paul (1930) took it to Jesus, Amos (1932) did Jesus, and I (1954) took it from Jesus to Augustine. Now, sanctions are to motives as romantic marriage is to love: the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible condition. In answering the implicit/explicit lay questions, Why and how be pious? and Why and how be good? the Christian leaders who shaped "baptism" in the early generations and through the centuries have had to pray and think through the differentia (contents), dynamics, and consequences of various designs and ratifications (explanations, rationalizations, sanctions) thereof. We are doing this at this colloquy: I am doing this in this paper. The materials we have to work with are plastic--more like colors on a palette than like stones to be fitted into a wall in progress. I believe my two-stage-confirmation proposal best meets the criteria of clarity, continuity, and community with maximization of values, and here would add only a few more points: (1) The bifurcation of confirmation is continuous with the ancient splitting of confirmation from baptism, and is in this light not a radical suggestion. (2) Thomas (SUMMA 3a.62.1) uses the analogy of bio-developmentalism to ratify the earlier split, and I am using the same to ratify splitting confirmation into junior and senior levels (indeed, given the fact that adolescence is a recent invention or discovery, my argument is identical to that of Aquinas). (3) The baptism/confirmation split became inevitable when the early Christians extended baptism to incorporate the earliest rite de passage: when baptism increasingly became merely a birth rite, confirmation was needed as a new-birth rite, an individual yes-saying "confirming" one's parents' proxy yes-saying in the birth-and-naming ("christening") celebration. (4) Well, a second set of yes-sayings seems to me necessary. My own two experiences of baptism prepared me for later, far later, developing the two-stage-confirmation model; for at age 12, in what was virtually my junior confirmation, I said yes to Jesus with all I had and was; but at age 17, after the hormones had been squirting around in me for another five years, I had more and was more, and said yes with (literally and spiritually) a deeper voice--yes both to Jesus and to my earlier yes--it was my senior confirmation. Let me chart the differences:¹

JUNIOR Confirmation
roughly, end of gradeschool
discipleship
nature (Baal!)²
called "Owning the Covenant"
priest
adolescent (early)
anointing for participation
socialization
entering into the church
yes-saying to culture-religion

SENIOR Confirmation
roughly, end of highschool
apostleship
grace (Yahweh!)
called "Confirmation"
prophet
adult (early)
anointing for mission
intellectual maturation
full entry into Kingdom of God
no-saying to culture-religion

(5) Ross Snyder's comment on my model: "More, more, Willis! There should be a number of developmental stages at which the churches recognize that God is doing a new thing in the growing life." Three-stage confirmation might be, roughly, ages 7, 13, and 17...and perhaps public school should have three graduations

as we have after public school (BA, MA, PhD). This leads into my next design-principle:

5. Fifth, what I may call peak-fitting. In addition to being messy, human development is, from person to person, staggered. To start children in public school on the basis of bio-age is insane and cruel, and it's compounded if we bunch them the same way through the ecclesial hoops. The ideal is the integration, for each person, of physical-social-intellectual-spiritual stages with what is going on for that person in family-school-community-church. Here I argue for my multi-stage model of confirmation that where the church has more recognition stages there will be less pressure to herd children through confirmation-as-crisis and more opportunity to match the individual child to a rite appropriate to where the child actually, personally, is....a rite representing realistically *this* child's decisional maturity, devotional-dedicational level, and ability-desire to enact a troth that sums up the personal past and points to the personal future.

6. Sixth, this multi-stage confirmation can be more easily, and with more integrity, correlated with the church's programming in Christian education, which is the life-long process of preparing people for praise, community, and ministry according to their stage, state, and status (position-in-life). The tradition's plethora of metaphors to describe Christian initiation-participation can easily be distributed over a spectrum of stages, a dominant metaphor for each stage.

7. Instead of targeting in on one grade-level, as our UCC confirmation materials have, confirmation literature ought to be aimed so as to bracket 9th grade (some earlier, some later). This was the practical action I pressured for--and lost to those who wanted the one-grade target. A tragic mistake, I believe: the materials were both too old and too young. I hope the Disciples of Christ provide us in UCC with a fresh infusion of blood on this and many other aspects of the realities this colloquy is wrestling with.

8. A further principle is the nonconcomitance of "sacraments" and "rites." The so-called sacraments or ordinances "of the gospel," viz. Baptism (= Christian initiation) and Eucharist (= participation in community and ministry) may take various liturgical forms, called "rites." In order to demonstrate our freedom to shape rites--freedom from traditional ritual notions signaled by the words "baptism" and "confirmation"--my 1965 paper projected five rites none of which used either of the sacred terms that signal the two sacraments. Here they are:

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- (1) *Pedobaptism*: belonging to the church as physical community.
 - (2) *Owning the Covenant*: belonging to the confessing church.
 - (3) *Membership*: belonging to the institutional church. {Believer's baptism.}
 - (4) *Office-Holding (Bearing)*: belonging to the officary of the institutional church.

OF (5) *Commissioning*: belonging to the mission of God in the world.

I'll not load you with the commentary in that paper except to say that all five rights could be bracketed with the sacramental word "baptism," and rites #2-#5 with the word "confirmation." All are titled "Rites Celebrating Belonging," and a 6th, celebrating one's about to belong to the church triumphant ["last rites"] should be added. The right to share power in the church could be given ritual recognition within #3, and ordination is within #4-#5. Present proliferating rituals unassimilated to the sacraments--e.g., the giving of Bibles at the passing into 4th or 5th grade, student-recognition services, and vocational commissioning--could be easily placed within this schema, which is patient of the polar values of continuity/contemporaneity, integrity of ritual action/reflection, and clarity of meaning/function....Two other dimensions of belonging: (1) To belong to the One who graciously incorporates us into his Body involves all five of the rites in my schema; and (2) A church belongs to the Kingdom of God only to the extent that it turns itself out toward the world and there participates in the mission of God....A paragraph near the paper's end reveals my point of view in all this: "In facing its functions of describing and prescribing, this committee [UCC Continuing Comm. on Confirmation and Church Membership] asks itself *What are the present practices? What are the present realities? What practices*

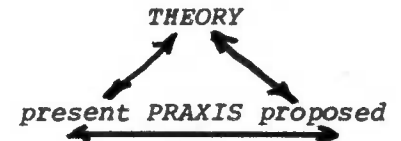
(rites) would best represent the realities? What practices (rites) should we suggest to the churches? If we fail to give serious attention to the third question, we shall muffle the voice of the realities in the interest of current practices, and we shall wind up doing little more than blessing what is. If we fail to be practical about the fourth question, we are in danger of being rejected as dreamers."

9. Ninth, a further principle I'll call dimensionality. My 1963 paper treated of the dimensions of baptism, dimensions that should serve as criteria for (1) theologizing about baptism, (2) planning baptismal education, and (3) designing literary and audiovisual materials on baptism. These dimensions are: "Baptism is sacramental, dominical, ecclesial, universal, familial, prophetic, and eschatological." All easy to correlate with great NT texts on Christian initiation.

10. Tenth, the ^{criteria} order for designing/evaluating/redesignment rites is validity, adequacy, clarity, efficacy. These nouns are static representations of dynamic critical questions which administrators and liturgical theologians should continuously ask--in UCC especially at this moment of prospective union with a communion of significantly different ritual history and practices. All four values pervade our colloquy and this paper. Footnotes 4 and 5 diagram the second and third criteria. By "efficacy" I mean something less than magic (*ex opera operato*) and something more than the modern sense of efficiency; I mean the question *Is this rite, this sacramental form, both faithful to Christian sacrament and effective in communicating both the grace-strength and the meaning of the particular sacrament to the communicant(s)?* As for "clarity," I wish to abstract a few particular from my 1966 UCC paper on "Ritual Clarity": In religion, RITUAL CHANGE occurs through the dominance of dilettante or scientific-experimental interest or from outward (political) coercion or from inward pressures of spiritual vitality. Of the four, currently only the last influence has a chance of effecting ritual change in UCC congregations....By 'spiritual vitality' I mean a lively sense of Presence in Word, church, and world; the controlling conviction that history was made for man and not man for history, so that history may be for God's glory and unto his kingdom; and a steady dedication to participate in the subjecting of 'all things' to Jesus Christ the Lord, the New Man....In my judgment, our denomination has at present insufficient spiritual vitality to produce relevant ritual. Deepening this pessimism is the widening gulf between the prophetic and the priestly in UCC: as some, responsive to these revolutionary times, get more 'far out,' others become more 'dug in'--and the most dug-in dimension of a religion is its rituals. The whole priestly aspect of a religion stands for what ought not to change.... I conclude that this committee (Continuing Comm. on Confirmation and Church Membership) is doomed, as was its predecessor, to triviality or at best, academicism. ...Being an optimist, I hope we make the best of both. Our seven books [on confirmation] seem to me to make the most of the triviality: given the mindless pastiche of our confused and self-standing traditions, the authors have wrought mightily and not entirely unsuccessfully to justify the chaos. Of course justifying the chaos is not the most creative treatment: bringing order out of it is. But our two committees have assumed the continuance of the disorder: 'Given the continuance of our present rituals, how shall we make the most of the mess?' I thank God that we have been making the most of the mess, but I pray that this committee will go beyond this achievement and press toward ritual clarity....As it seems baseless to hope that any significant (?) number of our congregations would adopt any radical (?) suggestions for ritual change, is it not academic for this committee, in the interest of sacramental integrity [and clarity], to make any such suggestions? It is precisely academic. It is the second task of this committee. Not to undertake it would be to stop at triviality. But would it not confuse if this committee's fruit were to be bifurcal--realistic-'practical' in one direction and idealistic-radical in a quite different direction? Perhaps, but the very existence of the committee suggests that its fruit should exhibit the tension and call others into the dialog, thus helping keep open the door to a greater honesty of religious praxis. We should try to speak to tomorrow as well as to today, to long-range as well as to short-range, to depth as well as to

surface. (The committee probably does not have the spiritual vitality for this second task. Like people, like priest. But God can give us the vitality and take away our cynicism.)....But if, in addition to helping our churches make the most of their current rituals, we undertake to invite them beyond the minor adjustments toward major reconstruction, it will be necessary to re-theorize the church's sacramental life and to project reform schema(ta). How we might proceed along these two lines--that is what I undertake in the remainder of this paper.

This 1966 paper then proceeds to re-theorize, the material including the diagrams in notes 4 and 5 of this present paper (my thinksheet #815) and a paper titled "THE BIO-CHURCH: How Are Creation and Redemption Related in [Baptism and] Confirmation?"--reproduced, in the present paper, as note 3 [thinksheet #1177]. Now, this re-theorizing is a triangular business: not a reworking of theory within itself, or even a dialog between theoretical possibilities and past and present practice, but a trialog between, on the one hand, theory, and on the other both past-present and future-potential practices. Thus:



Theory is irresponsible, antiquarian-or-dilettante, if it does not model-build and encourage the testing thereof. This heuresis (exploratory search) is an essential form of Christian prayer on the part of all Christians, each with his/her particular part in the process.

"Re-theorizing the church's sacramental life involves judging what is and also what might serve more adequately than what is. In other words, the re-thinking can proceed only on the basis of a dialectic between theory and (present and proposed) praxis. For objectivity and adequacy, the emergent theory must be liable to criteria which are not bound to any current rites. [This paragraph is quotes from the 1966 paper.] Maintaining, in the constructing and testing of rites, the tension between "tradition" and "communication," and with the caveat that sacramentality tends to impede as well as to advance sanctification, a few of many questions: How much of the past (liturgy as remembrance) does the renewal of the Promise through this rite require? How much of the present (covenant life) does the affirmation of the Promise demand? In the world, what is so relevant to the rite that the latter would fail of secular quality without the incorporation of the former? Does this rite exhibit that this faith-community takes this and only this Promise with ultimate seriousness? How does this rite enable an appropriate response to the Promise? What aspect of the Promise does this rite celebrate, and how clearly does it do so? How does this rite relate the worshippers (1) to global man and (2) to the New Man? How is this rite related to the actions of the one Lord? To the extent that the medium is the message, what is the message of this rite-medium? Does the ritual mix amount to an authentic third language (beyond "religious" [boundary 3 on #815] and "secular" [boundary 4])?"

11. Eleventh, an essential element in ritual clarity is the unstranding/restranding of nature/grace as two dynamisms within each actual or proposed ritual. To honor both as divine gifts, and to remind myself and others that nature and grace are ever in dialectical relationship, I use the hyphenate holophrase, "the bio-church" (title of thinksheet #815, mentioned above). In a conversation once, now-atheist Rich. Rubenstein (then rabbi) said that YHWH should have been left in Jordan: Joshua and the people should have adopted Baal, and let YHWH fall into Moses' grave himself after putting Moses in. Now, we know that Israelitism did not so much destroy baalism as incorporate it; in my figure, YHWH cuckolded Baal by taking his consort, as in America the white man cuckolded the black man. But as deep guilt remains in the latter case, so in the former: Judaism and Christianity are more comfortable with history (YHWH) than with nature (Baal; Solomon introduced the worship of Ashtoreth into his kingdom, but not of her husband Baal).

12. Twelfth, my library's stack of books on Christian initiation offers no hope that "the NY doctrine of baptism" is possible: the materials are too sketchy and inchoate to yield definitive results unless you are ignorant or unscrupulous. This, since I believe the Bible is (in some senses) the Word of God: the indefin-

does not disturb me.

itenesses, confusions, and errors of the Bible are divinely inspired in the sense that they convey (1) the unimportance of their subject-matter, relative to the great issues of revelation, and (2) the freedom we have to shape appropriate materials, processes, and doctrines without scribistic restriction. Since my paper was to be more or less on NT vis-a-vis baptism, I'm obliged, however, to say a bit more:

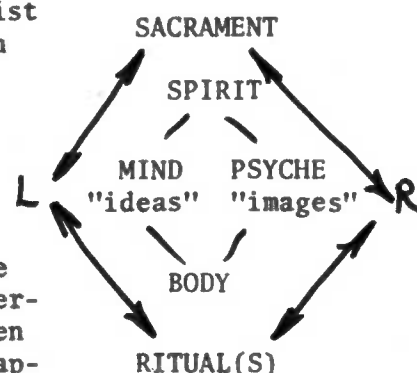
(1) In photocopy, I've brought with me some excellent articles on this inter-face: (a) Not Kittel, for it was too much to zerox, but it's basic; (b) "Water-Baptise-Wash," one of the 317 topic-articles in Michael Darton's MODERN CONCORDANCE TO THE NT (Doubleday/76; based on Jerusalem Bible, but with reff. to many other mod. trs.); (c) Alan Richardson's excellent A THEOLOGICAL WORD BOOK OF THE BIBLE (Mac/62; which I try to see that all my students have in their libraries); (d) Millar Burrows' AN OUTLINE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY (Westm.46), pp.238-243 and 270f); and (e) Van A. Harvey's A HANDBOOK OF THEOLOGICAL TERMS (Mac/64), pp.37f). It's a temptation to fall into the bibliographical well, but I must mention chapters 15 in Alan Richardson's AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEOLOGY OF BAPTISM (Harper & Row/58), and ¹⁰10, but really the whole book of W.F. Flemington, THE NT DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM (SPCK/48). Oh, and I cannot resist the temptation to mention Donald M. Baillie's competent and saintly THE THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENTS (Faber and Faber/57)!

13. Thirteenth, since teaching the world's great religions in the state university that is most polyglot in religion, viz. Hawaii, I've been more raised-consciousness about "pagan" (i.e., nonbiblical) evidences. I could wish that this whole paper of mine today were on pagan baptism before and during early Christianity, for there's hardly a breath about this in baptismal literature--which, if it mentions any antecedents and contemporary parallels at all, mentions only Jewish proselyte baptism (not even also the daily baptisms at Qumran!). In this area, my great teacher was a man who did his PhD more than a half-century ago at U. of Chicago precisely on pagan, non-Jewish precedents and parallels to Christian initiation, and published it as a too-little-known classic, PAGAN REGENERATION: A STUDY OF MYSTERY INITIATION IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD (U. of Chic. Press/29). Here's your living context for the earliest Christian initiation alongside Jewish initiation but also Eleusinian, Hermetic, Isiac, Marcionite, and Mithraic, + the philosophico-religious cults. Early Christian initiation was both continuous with and discontinuous from all this--which is to say that it was shaped by my double principle, "to bless what [has been and] is and to move toward what should be." [*Harold R. Willoughby.] In recent years, it has become increasingly clear to me that early Christianity, in doctrine and worship (including initiation) and ethics both consciously and unconsciously shaped itself between the counter-forces of Jewish legalistic-tribalistic tendencies and pagan gnostic-metaphysical (with either libertine or ascetic) tendencies. In simplest terms, Christianity's two perpetual temptations have been "institution" and "spirit," both of which are both necessary and tend to become religions in themselves. When the church yields to the aperatura on the right (institutionalism), baptism becomes priestly magic; when to the aperatura on the left (spiritism, pentecostalism, charismatism), baptism virtually disappears. The fate of this sacrament-ordinance which our Lord himself "permitted" in his own case signals, in my conviction, faithfulness to or betrayal of the Christian faith. [In the 6 1/2 hours I spent at Sun Moon's seminary three months ago, lecturing on "Unificationism Is Not Christian," no faculty member or student mentioned anything about Christian sacraments: Sun Moon as the "Lord of the Second Advent" is the Sacrament with hair and skin. More than anything else that has ever happened to me, this experience convinced me (1) that I am Christocentric in my faith and praxis and (2) that I am basically Jewish in my "feel" (my language, and way of seeing and living in the world--not Korean!).]6

14. Fourteenth, I've never been more frustrated in presenting a position paper! I've hardly touched my notes, yet I've been caught u, in this issue our colloquy is dealing with, in what Wm. James called "the thick jungle of reality." God help me and us to be faithful to all this green life around us, and sun breaking through!

16. A phenomenology reflection: When the Holy "hits"--i.e., when one experiences the Presence--both brain hemispheres go into action, the right brain agitating images holistically in search of holophrases and the left brain computing remembered and new-generated ideas. Both coils--the upper (= the neocortex) and the lower (= the viscera)--are in action, and so feelings engine the images and ideas. "Sacrament" is here potential, and becomes actual in "ritual," a distillate of the experience for memory, celebration, and hope. If the ritual deteriorates into magic, it is because the experience is no longer remembered and repeated, and this fading or amnesia is due to unfaithfulness, to the expulsive power of some new affection and commitment. While I've said it elsewhere elsewhere, I want to repeat it here on a model of human energies:

17. Avoid double narrowing! After teaching in three Baptist seminaries (up to 1948), I found I could not narrow myself down to pastoring a Baptist church. Opportunities were there, but I could not bring myself to say that I would refuse all parents bringing their newborn for baptism, though my wife and I preferred in the case of our own children to defer the water of baptism till "the age of consent." Then, having become pastor of an ecumenical church beginning with some twenty souls, I found I could not refuse water baptism to those who, having had pedobaptism, requested, after a conversion experience, some mode of water baptism. In scriptural language: when the convert said, "Here is water! What doth hinder me to be baptized?" I could not reply, "The church doth hinder thee! For those hast already had water applied to thee!" Refusing rebaptism ("anabaptism") appeared to me as great a violation of love and freedom as the antipedobaptist narrowing among Baptists, Disciples, and many "Christian" and Pentecostal churches. The ground for refusing a second use of water was flimsy, viz. the woodenheaded notion that it would somehow violate the once-for-allness of our Lord's dying and rising for us (whereas the deeper, gut-level reason was, I am convinced, superstitious-magical: once a person is "done," grace as a quasi-physical energy has become "effectual," and re-using water is somehow a numinous violation, perhaps an insult to God).⁷ The double freedom I thus came to lies behind and within my UCC papers on baptism.



18. Too seldom is a huge human-development fact given its due weight in baptism discussions, viz. the hypertrophied adolescence of modern youth. As I write this, I have just had dinner in our home with a visitor from another culture, who remarked the absence of adolescence in her culture: "We went right from childhood to adulthood, without your American mountain of adolescence in between." I often use for this more complex process the verb "to own": the stages of American development are being owned, owning, disowning, and reowning-through-sifting-through-what-had-been-disowned. At age 17, Robert Paul (who is to read a paper at this colloquy) and I were immersed--he atop pedobaptism, I atop confessor baptism (by aspersion) at age 12. Now, when the Holy hits, everything previous seems unholy, to be rejected rather than "confirmed": the psychology of "confirmation" assumes a smooth transition from childhood to adulthood, without our American adolescent upheaval. To put it baldly, just about the time our churches are trying to "confirm" our youth, they are in the "denial" stage! Needed: A radical updating, for our culture, of the psychology of Christian initiation. Suggestion: Except where the conscience and conviction of parents point otherwise, water should be deferred till the convergence of grace and faith, i.e. till the person is ready to confess sin and faith. Beginning with Karl Barth in 1943 and running right up to Jürgen Moltmann in 1978, the movement of theologians is for saving the water till confession, i.e. till "believer's baptism." Many ritual options remain for the recognition, in public worship, that this infant-child, born in a Christian family (or to at least one Christian parent, or sponsor in the case of an orphan) has come under the economy and covenant of grace: H₂O is nonessential to this function....

....but I feel I should put some autobiographical flesh on this conclusion. Growing up in a largely secular home (the family being erratic attenders of vari-

ous antipedobaptist and pedobaptist churches), and being given exploring and judging genes, I wandered on my own, then settled down for a nine-month confirmation instruction in a pedobaptist church, terminating--or I should rather say culminating--in a single rite at age 12: while kneeling, I received baptism by aspersion (Jordan River water!), confirmation, and church membership [while all other members of the confirmation class did not receive any water]. My explorations continued, including an hour of Gospels reading each night and the attending of four or five religious services per week in various places, including camp meetings and revivals. On 9 Mar 35, just as I'd turned 17, after an evening worship in a little new antipedobaptist church by the trolley terminal, I said to the preacher, "I never was sure before," and soon thereafter it seemed to me proper "to fulfil all righteousness" to body forth my fresh assurance of faith--an *axis mundi* of cosmic-integral Love--in the most energetic and dramatic way I could, viz. by immersional baptism: I became, literally, an ana- or re-baptist [for short, by ellipsis, "Baptist"]. Note that while your usual ana-baptist, such as my Puerto Rican students at N.Y. Theological Seminary, has believer baptism after and atop infant baptism, I had two forms of believer baptism, one at each end of early adolescence. Note further than the confirmation instruction preceded both water-baptisms! The more dramatic baptism was so both because it was immediately preceded by an experience of such depth, breadth, and height that its assurance has been a conscious daily experience all these 43 intervening years, and because the more ample dimensions of the act itself--the robing, descending, ascending, disrobing--were "an outward and visible form" of a size comporting better than aspersion or affusion could to the size of "the inward and visible state."

19. In a Presbyterian church this morning, a late-middle-age couple came up to me and with deep joy told me of their rebaptism in a swimming pool four days previous. It was on a retreat, and the event occurred "naturally, in a moment of ecstasy, as a way of celebrating our deeper entry into discipleship." This Presbyterian parson is paying, it seems, as little attention to the historic stricture against anabaptism as today many a Roman Catholic priest pays to his church's stricture against contraception. I intend the analogy closely: The clergyperson who says "The church doth hinder thee to be rebaptized with water" is pushing a form of contraception, cooling the orgasmic moment which is the womb from which to be born again again again again again. Mind you, I'm against "pushing" rebaptism. My advice is pastoral: to deal with human beings flexibly in the here and now, rather than dogmatically. And note again how flimsy the biblical support for the stricture against rebaptism: (1) The death/rebirth experience, which our son Bill explored in his ANTS thesis, is only one of the baptismal images; and those who claim it to be central vis-a-vis this stricture are seldom willing to insist with equal vigor on the mode best expressive thereof, viz. immersion; and (2) Those who use Hebrews 6:4-6 to ratify the stricture do so hypocritically if they do not refuse the penitent lapsed back into communion (a refusal which itself was nailed as heresy in the main body of the Early Church!).

But what about ecumenicity? Fat chance that most churches will give up the stricture! Here I compare the stricture with the evangelic stricture against divorce: the marriage ideal is one sexual partner for life (my wife and I were virgins when we married, and after a third of a century still are so except to each other), and the baptismal ideal is one event full of the Christian riches of meaning and ritual. But to insist on the ideal is to misunderstand the very nature of an ideal by turning it into a rigid law which time and again misfits the human situation. Let's preach the baptismal, as we do the marriage, ideal; and argue and pray that this will satisfy ecumenical fellowship in the future.

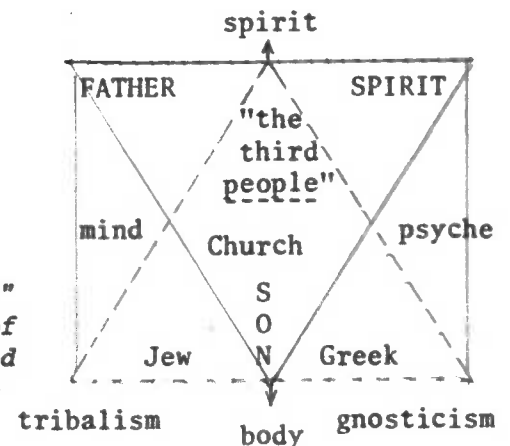
20. A good group-exercise on baptism is to draw a chart listing on the x-axis all the modes and both candidacies and on the y-axis all the criteria (validity, adequacy, individuation, collectivity, clarity, efficacy, humanity). I would not hesitate to check everything in the first column: for me, all modes and both candidacies are "valid," and that is the most important consideration for "a uniting church" and for ecumenical dialog. By "adequacy" I mean comprehensivity of word/deed/meaning. "Individuation" means *What is its potential for helping the candidate come to Chris-*

tian maturity as a single self, a miles Christi (soldier of Christ)? "Collectivity": How well does it express and impress the prevenient grace of God at work in and through the community of faith? "Clarity": Does it have "gospel simplicity," communicating with minimal chance of confusion the truth and power of baptism as Christian initiation-induction? "Efficacy": Does it accomplish the ends baptism intends? "Humanity": Does it "fit" actual human beings in their personal histories and individual developments vis-a-vis nature, bio-community, secular community, sacred community, God? [At several points in this paper, e.g. the whole of reflection #19, I have dealt with the "humanity" criterion.]

21. By "contextual translation" I mean finding in today's life the dynamic situation closest to that of the biblical world at the point of the biblical text being dealt with. Our increasingly minority status as Christians-and-Church-and-churches is, at it were, bending us backward toward, or bringing us closer to, the original Christian situation in the Hellenistic world. As they had to fight off tribalism (aggressive Judaism), etatism (the totalistic claims of the Roman Imperium), and both hot and cold winds from the East (various gnosticisms, libertine and ascetic), so we have to resist various levels of chauvinism from the town-dominance of the basketball team and the public school system all the way up or out to the Washington bureaucracy....and denominational sectarianism....and virtually the same gnosticisms (darkness from the East, as well as light--with the Sinic now added, for the Yangtse as well as the Ganges is now flooding westward). Along with trinity and christology, under these pressures a doctrine and praxis of Christian initiation emerged: under the pressures we face, how adequate is that doctrine-and-praxis and its historical and contemporary alternatives? "Interpretation" being first the recreation of the life from which the literature came, then the interpretation of the literature in the context of that life, and then the touch of that life on our life by the literature, what significance and shape should baptism have today in our celebrative and missionary situation? This paper offers some hints and probes toward the best answering of that question. Here, I limit myself to presenting a diagram to display the living dynamic under which baptism was originally shaped and interpreted.

EXPLANATION:

1. The down-arrow is the divine initiative (so solid lines), with the incarnation touching the human base.
2. The up-arrow is the human upreach, aspiration, yearning for transcendence, all that we mean by "spirit."
3. The diamond formed by the overlap represents two realities: (1) the four human energies (as in reflection #17, above), and (2) the Church as what I call, following some early Greek fathers, "the third people."
4. The solid vertical lines represent the polarities of Father/tribe (the Jewish revelation and temptation) and Spirit/inspiration (the pagan, chiefly gnostic, revelation and temptation).



22. None would deny that there's an awkward gap between infant baptism and essential baptismal doctrine, which is grace-oriented.... whereas anything a religion does ritually with infants is nature-oriented no matter how much is said about grace. One may argue that the infant is, under original sin, its own, so that pedobaptism is the infant's becoming not its own: an argument countering the question *How can the infant become not its own before it becomes its own, i.e. before it emerges into a self-claiming person?* But this answer is esoteric, abstruse, involuted to the point of ludicrousness. In theology, plausibility is nothing everything; but it is something, and I fear this argument will remain, and become even more, implausible as the years roll. We shall be working with a decreasing number of folk pious and patient enough to keep a straight face while priests and theologians expound with such doubletalk the single reality of Christian initiation. Here, water twice is some help: buried proleptically as infant, confessionally as believer

(though this image leans toward immersion in both instances).

23. *Veritas in medio stat*: for me, this old Roman proverb seems true in the case of baptismal doctrine and praxis: "truth [usually] stands in the middle." Anthropologically, ecclesiologically, theologically it is not right to do nothing ritually with babies....or to do something on the arrogant claim that it somehow improves the infant's standing before the divine love. The former fails to honor the God of Nature; and the latter is an insult both to this same God, who causes sun and rain impartially, and a blasphemy against this same God's intention to act toward all children through the human individual-communal benevolence bodied forth representatively in pedobaptism, the God of Grace. This, then, is a second polarity (the first being Jewish/Greek) within which we struggle to shape appropriate baptismal doctrine and rites.

24. A fruitful way of ecumenical dialog on baptism is to view it three ways: Baptism is a life-change of meaning [Zwingli et al], of being [RCC], of relating [Protestant other than Zwinglian-type]. Most of the differences here have been transcended by advances in metaphysics and semantics, so a lot of confusing clutter can be jettisoned in the early stages of this dialog. Phenomenology and linguistic philosophy free us to see more than we could before in such a phrase as Paul Minear's "re-birth of images." [His 1930 PhD in this area, the relation of images-ideas to sanctions of religious leaders up to Jesus; and Amos Wilder's continuing the study through Jesus (1932 PhD); led to my 1954 PhD, which carried this line of investigation up to Augustine. The questions sanctional analysis asks are from within the heart of the leader who seeks to motivate followers to faithfulness, growth, and risk-taking. It has obvious implications for baptismal doctrine and praxis....and thus the presence of the three of us on the early UCC baptism-confirmation-membership study committee.]

25. The earliest, richest mode of Christian baptism was immersion in running water [the Hebrew for "running" and "living" being the same, so the running water representing the living-and-abiding Spirit]. Honesty and richness both, I think, should incline us--when a candidate is neutral as to mode--to nudge folk toward immersion (and even in running water! why not?). No big deal, no pressure. Just a gentle preference, with no implication of superior validity. If UCC could come out for this position, it would advance our conversation with the Disciples: an incidental, but real, advantage over the preference at present, both E&R and CandC, for aspersion.

26. A personal witness: For many years it was my practice, when immersing adults, to dip them backwards under the water, as if "laying out" a corpse. One day I got to studying the intimate relationship, in the Early Church, between baptism and the laying on of hands. Since then, my placing my hands on the candidate's head has been the signal for the candidate to squat or kneel under the water (sort of "se-baptist," self-baptizing, fashion). Anything to enrich baptism, "getting it together" in history and the here and now.

27. If we shift the subject of the baptizing sentence from ourselves to God, the question becomes *Where, now, is God baptizing? where is baptism now going on, and what shape(s) is it taking, and how are we to recognize it as both process and event? Jesus Christ being God's "YES," how, here and now, are we to help this "YES" say itself?* From this question, and the answers we find/give, we shall have to move beyond merely descriptive and diagnostic models to constructive models we both practice and recommend to the Ecumene.

28. The Early-Church, Protestant, and Vatican II insistence on the solidarity of Word and Sacrament needs re-exploration in dialog within UCC, between UCC and the Disciples, and within the Whole Church. The solidarity can now be freshly conceived for a whole new productivity theologically and liturgically (ritually). A catholicity of meaning already exists: we need now a convergence of terminology, such as the 1549 Anglican Book of Common Prayer achieved on the Supper.

29. The question is not *What is baptism?* The *what* of baptism in and since the NT is far more clear than most Christians have been led to believe. Rather, the

question is *What, in relation to the Christian-initiation process, shall we give the name "baptism" to?* No question that Christian initiation is processive, from the hearing through the obeying of the Word in Sacrament: Word-to-Sacrament is inherently processive. Again, in the case of pedobaptism infant-to-confessor development is inherently processive. If (as I have above) we use the analogy of a corridor with a number of doors, passing through the corridor into the Church-Kingdom may be called "the baptismal walk or process." The NT certainly does not restrict itself to the beginning of this process, and "baptism" is more aptly applied to the process than to its inception. Indeed, if we limit the word "baptism" to the inception of the process, it would be--is!--as awkward as if we were to use the word "corridor" for only the first door one passes through into the corridor...which would leave us hard up as to what to call the corridor and its other doors (precisely the hardship we face when we spend the whole word "baptism" on the beginning of the baptismal process, and must invent a term like "confirmation" for a later stage of baptism-as-process). *How resolve this awkwardness? Several possibilities:* (1) Use "baptism" for each stage, and qualify the word in the naming of the processive rites of entrance (e.g., pedobaptism becomes "The Beginning of Baptism"); (2) Dump the word "baptism," as it's too embattled and confused to be useful; (3) Use "baptism" only for the whole process of Christian initiation (the journey, not any of the steps); (4) Use "baptism" only for the final stage, as in anabaptist and baptist (including "Christian" and "Disciples of Christ") churches. [As to suggestion #3, Allen Miller and I did a MINISTER'S QUARTERLY article presenting "baptism" as three-stage, avoiding the word for any stage. This gave "member" the continuity: "christened members," "communicant members," "covenant members" (the 1st for community, the 2nd for identity, and the 3rd for commission). The christening was to be with or without water, and might also be called (as the French Protestants) presentation or (as the Christian Churches of the old CandC denomination) consecration or (as most Baptists and Disciples) dedication. "Owning the Covenant" was the old CandC term for the 2nd stage, for which "Confirmation" was the old E&R term. In the order of nature, the three stages incorporate, respectively, the birth rite, the puberty rite, and the rite of trial (costly responsibility through conflict). Though the proposal ultimately lost, it was favored by many knowledgeable persons--e.g., Ruth Sprague (3-5Dec61 Confirmation Committee paper): "I favor a three-act approach to church membership."]

30. Colloquy on baptism should take a new look at the way "objectivity" is used, was used, and should be used. Nineteenth-c. philosophy gave, of this polarity, an account quite transcended in the late 20th century. The cheap polemic of "nothing-but"-fallacy argumentation is now either ignorant or dirty. The polarity is useful for clarification and rectification (restoring balance), but usually obfuscatory in argument. The old definition of sacrament shows the living balance: "an outward sign of an inward grace." When at age 17 the inward grace of assurance was given me, the outward immersion with water in the presence of the worshipping congregation was the sign: thank God no one was on hand to wet-blanket me away from the sign! I was in no mood for a lecture on "confirmation." "Confirmation" is what I had five years earlier, and now found insufficient to celebrate and objectivize this fresh experience of grace. Not to have gone down into the waters of baptism would have been a kind of subjectivization, a failure to objectivize in the midst of the people of God the objective-subjective working of Grace within and around me....But this witness is only a start toward a more authentic use of "objectivity" in baptismal colloquy.

31. "Culture Christianity" buttressed by the indiscriminate baptism of infants seems to be fading, thank God. Formerly, nature swallowed up grace: pedobaptism became a general-community birthrite centering in the bio-family, and confirmation only a puberty rite centering in the person-in-the-family. Since this converted the church from an intentional to a "natural" community, no wonder the folks resist when we ask them to be prophetic-courageous in their witness and decision-making! This captivity of grace by nature must be broken, is being broken; and one necessity is a conceptual and ritual leap such as I'm presenting in this position paper.

32. A note on human existence: The individual/collective polarity is "natural"

to us, an endemic dimension of human "nature." COCU's 1977 theological consensus states that the act of baptism is the event through which God "incorporates" us into Jesus' dying and rising, the incorporation obviously being a process-corridor with, for pedobaptists, "confirmation" at the other end. That's half the truth. The other half is that in the baptismal process, God continues to individuate us. Roughly, here are two religions: Judaism and Hellenism. And here are two politics: Collectivism and individualism, assimilation-conformity and isolation-individuality, communism and democracy (i.e., individual franchise). And here are two economics: State capitalism and laissez faire. And two religious styles: catholic-sacramentalist and evangelical-pietist. And two baptisms: pedo- and martyrial ("confessional," "believer's").

33. The polarity of continuity/change needs to be re-assessed for baptismal discussion. For the early Christians there was both (1) contextual-environmental continuity of Jewish and pagan roots, and (2) communal discontinuity, change of associates and life-style, under the evangelical commission. 9 Mar 35 found me both the same creature and a new creature.

I am hopeful that this colloquy will (1) reveal the variety and riches of our UCC traditions on baptism, (2) move us in the UCC toward unity within our diversity, and (3) prepare us for merger dialog (e.g., with the Disciples) and ecumenical conversations toward the unity and fulness of Christ in the world.

NOTES

- 1 and 2. These concerns appear at a number of points in this position paper.
3. (Napt p.)

THE BIO-CHURCH: How Are Creation (NATURE) and Redemption (GRACE) Related in Christian Initiation?--a paper assigned Willis Elliott for the 13f May 66 meeting of the United Church of Christ Continuing Committee on Confirmation and Church Membership (and appearing as Appendix II in that meeting's Minutes)....#1177

Life is events and processes, and so is entrance into Life. Life (small "l") is punctuated with celebrations and transitions, and so is Life. The nexus of problems I point to with my word "the bio-church" exists in the tension between life and Life, between nature and grace; and the focus of the nexus is the question, Can we sort grace's events, processes, and celebrations out from those of nature? On page 4 of the September 8, 1963 United Church of Christ Sunday bulletin I tried to: "Confirmation is not a puberty rite sanctifying this natural coming of age. It is rather an event in grace--a strengthening...., a full welcoming...., and a personal public dedication to the life of Christian service and witness." This negative was of course an attack on those who "let nature take its course" in grade-school graduation, church-joining, etc. But I am uneasy with this rhetorical simplism. Nature never was outside of grace, and (theologically speaking) all cognition is recognition. Natural love is in gracious continuity with primal and final love. Church rites, while they consecrate soldiers of Christ for battle against sin, aim to continue and "perfect" (i.e., complete) the creative-redemptive influences from which the person is never free--as in Aquinas' inclusive and majestic statement, "Grace does not destroy /tollit/ nature, but perfects /perficit/ it." At the moment, the best ecclesial representation of this I can manage is the following:

Confusingly but truly representing this nexus of problems, the churches represent themselves as DECISIONAL communities ("A"), as DECISIONAL-NATURAL communities ("B"), and as NATURAL communities ("C"). These three ecclesiologies may exist in a single church, in a single theologian /if sufficiently confused/. The overlapping circles visualize the separability/inseparability of grace ("A") and nature ("C"). Excepting humanistic ("C") and primitivistic ("A") churches, the vast bulk of the world's churches are of the intermediate type, combining the rites of grace and the rites of passage in a confusing but rich mix: "the bio-church." I suggest that far from being embarrassing and creating uneasiness, this mixed situation should be received with thanksgiving as a divine assignment to represent in a single community the interests of nature and grace and to celebrate the mighty works of the Creator-Redeemer. Our performance, however, is usually that of my Sunday bulletin: we rob nature to pay grace; we disclaim nature in order to lodge special claims for grace; we miss opportunities for service and witness (and "relevance") because we fail to unite what God has joined together.



OVER

(Page 23-- but,
of this thinksheet,
p.2)

Focusing this perspective, now, on the rites of the church, I propose as an organic principle in the constructing and testing of rites: HOW DOES THIS RITE CELEBRATE NATURE AND GRACE? EARTH'S STORY AND OUR STORY? Let's begin to see how this question might affect our five "Rites Celebrating Belonging" /in my paper, "Ritual Clarity"/:

1. The rite of INFANT BAPTISM. This is an event-in-nature celebration, and its rite is a "C" action in violation of "A". The anabaptist-baptist tradition correctly understands this babies-and-water business as a betrayal of the pure, voluntary, confessional ideal of Christian community. Laity tend to have a better understanding of this rite, for clergy feel constrained to pull and haul on it to drag it from "C" at least to "B." (But remember: "nature" is never without "grace"!)... This rite has another standing, however, beyond its standing as a "rite celebrating belonging." It is, along with puberty /recognition of grade-school graduation/, matrimony, and memorial, "a rite of passage." The interweaving of these two sets of rites should enrich both.

2. The rite of AFFIRMATION. Bible-presentation rite at end of fourth grade; confirmation in sixth or seventh grade (Arndt); age fifteen /too late and too early!/?; confirmation; junior or senior high confirmation (Snyder)? "Nature" would direct that preparation for this rite ("junior confirmation"?) include understanding and celebrating the developing power of decision-making; grace, deciding what.

3...4...5....

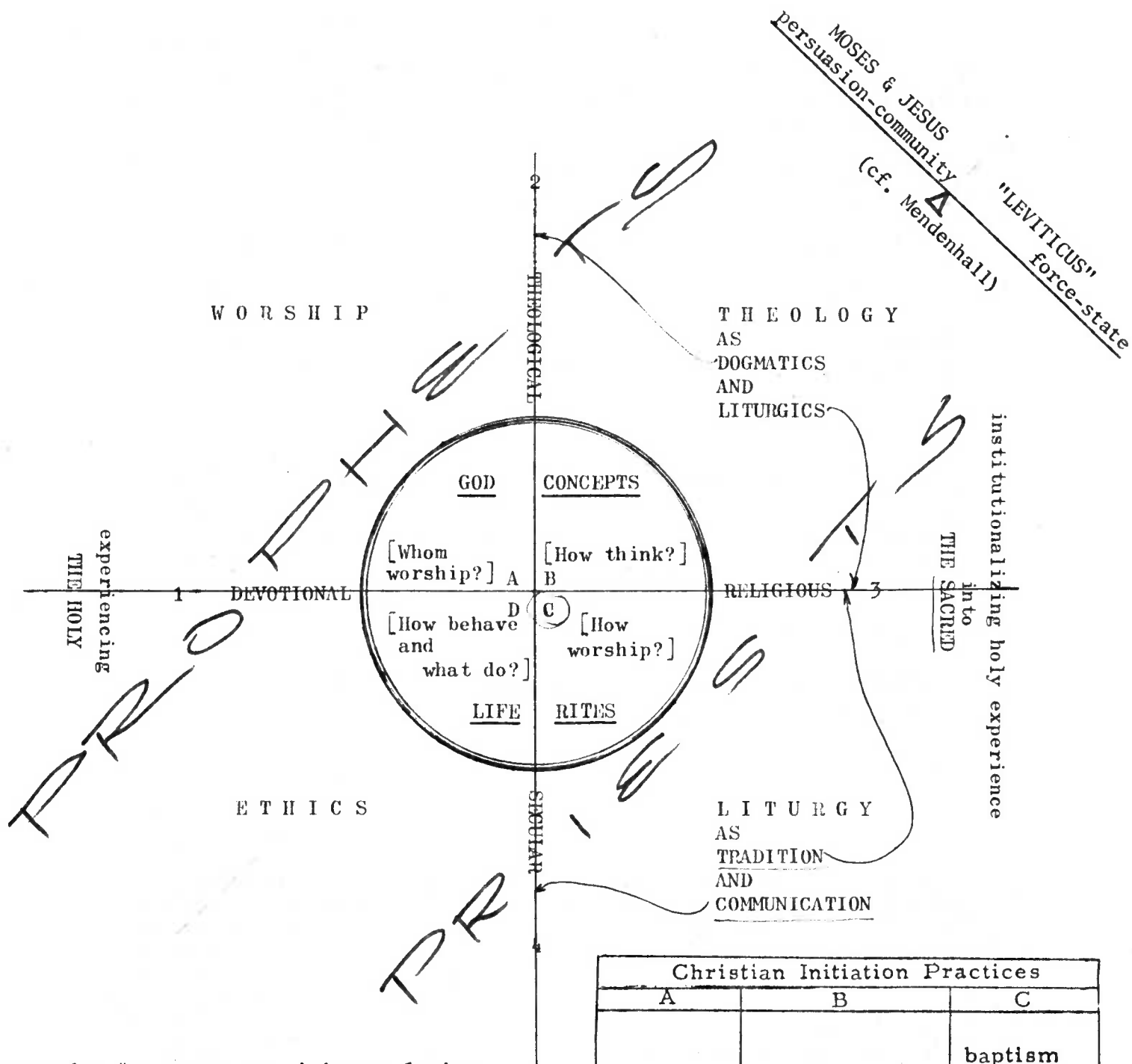
MORAL: If clergy become less embarrassed by nature, the laity.....
.....by grace.

---o0o---

24 Aug 78 NOTE: Long after the above on nature/grace, I read the beautiful parallel chapter in Donald Baillie's *THE THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENTS* [Faber & Faber/57, pp.39-54], "Sacrament, Nature and Grace." P.44: "When Christianity took the common elements of water and bread and wine and made sacraments of them, it was because this universe is the sacramental kind of place in which that can fitly happen; because these elements, these creatures of God, do lend themselves to such a use; and because we men and women, who are another sort of God's creatures, do require in our religion such a use of material things and symbolic actions."....See also my #1178, "'Spirituality,' biblical and other."

APPENDIX I to Willis E. Elliott 13f May 66 paper on "Ritual Clarity":

C R I T E R I A FOR THE ADEQUACY AND CLARITY OF CHRISTIAN RITES.....



See also #814, for my writings relative to the baptism/confirmation questions in the first stage of the United Church of Christ.

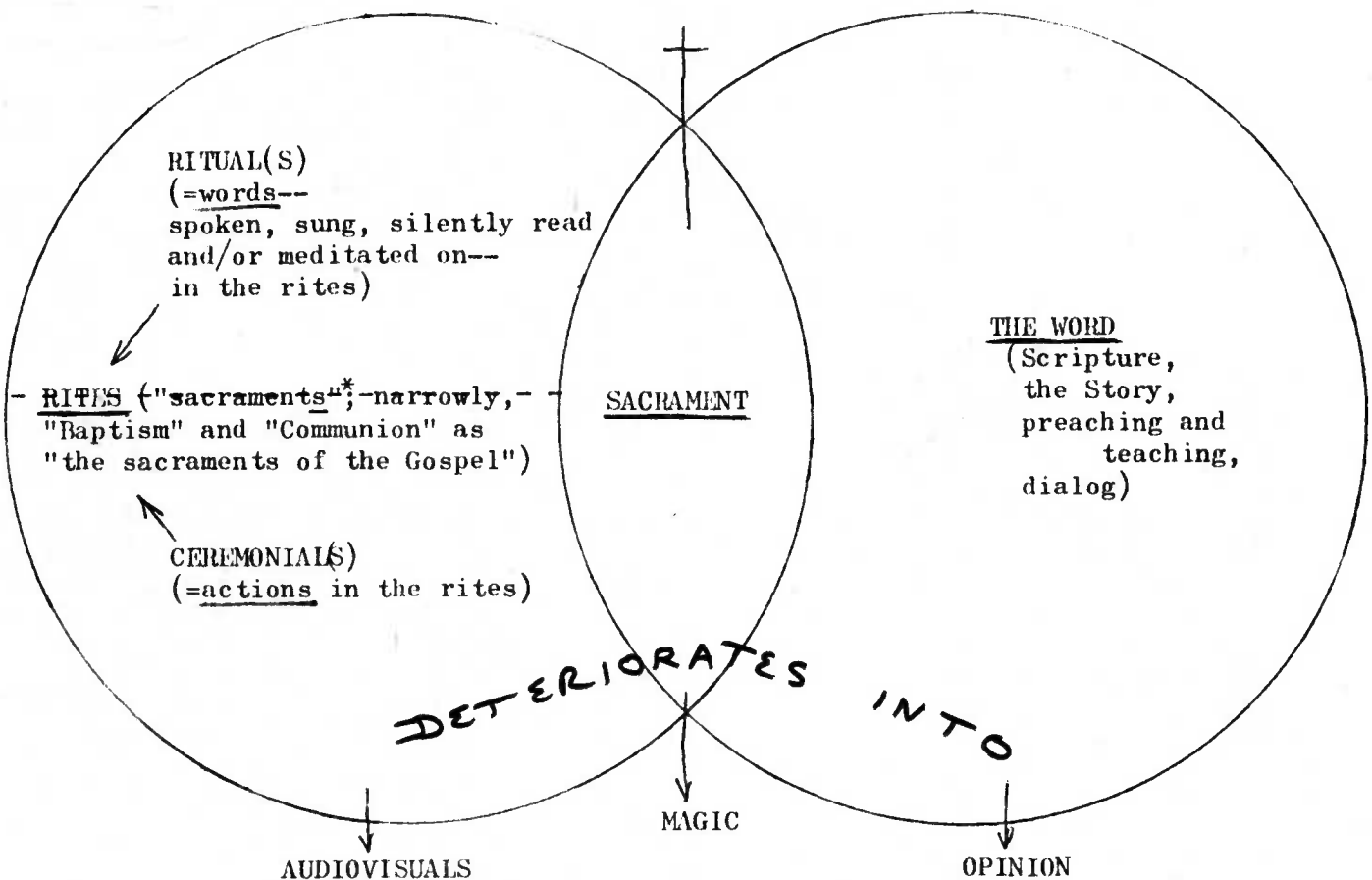
Christian Initiation Practices		
A	B	C
baptism	baptism	baptism
	confirmation	junior confirmation <i>REBELLION</i> senior confirmation
supper	(Many possibilities)	

OVER

APPENDIX II to Willis E. Elliott 13f May 66 paper on "Ritual Clarity":

LITURGICAL TERMS

Verbal precision has a limited functionality in liturgies and liturgy, but within the limits precision through consensus can (1) improve communication in liturgies discussion and (2) move discussants and church toward ritual clarity....In the diagram below (and in one strand of current ecumenical theology) the term "Sacrament" is limited to the Christ-event, God's action in incarnation-death-resurrection-Parousia. Since the term "sacrament" is sacrosanct, i.e. under taboo against change, this limitation frees up all the church's "sacramental" actions as subject to change. Ritual reformation becomes possible: today, it is urgent.



1. As the being, rationale, and promise of unity, Jesus Christ is the One Sacrament, in whom all Christian worship and life coheres: a single devotion ("one Lord"), a common witness ("one Faith"), a common remembrance and anticipation sanctifying the life together ("one Baptism"), and the celebration of the community's understanding of the meaning and goal of human existence ("one God and Father of us all").

2. As participant in and pointing to the one Sacrament, the church's RITES are "sacraments"---just as THE WORD is sacramental. Without this participation in Jesus Christ, the Word degenerates into mere opinion and rites into mere audiovisuals.**

3. Some of us have experimented toward a comprehensive rite. E.g., Robert Paul's immersional confirmation with the laying on of hands in the Supper.

4. Relationship to the Person is primary (questions of validity, adequacy, and efficacy are secondary). But when the fires of dominical devotion burn low, rites become more looked at than through: Results: (1) fragmentation [for the Lord is no longer seen as the living unity] and (2) deterioration [indicated in 2, above].

*From this plural use of "sacrament" comes "sacramentals" (=equipment used in rites).

**No insult to AVers in education. Liturgy, however, is more than education. (Compare also the lower uses of "symbol" and "sign.")

OVER

NOTE 6. For almost a half century I have tried to be a biblical person. This fact became painfully-joyfully clear to me at Sun Moon's seminary, for his is a Sinic-gnostic prostitution of Scripture to an individual-subjective experience which the Korean church of his nurture, far from ratifying and supporting, rejected as heretical, divisive, inauthentic to the spirit of Jesus Christ. Wm. O'Byrne, to whose NYU PhD thesis I was the biblical mentor, showed in his 1978 thesis that there's only a 5.6% correlation between Sun Moon's biblical exegesis and that of a typical evangelical scholar of substance and note. Dramatically, I experienced the centrality of Jesus [versus Moon as "Lord of the Second Advent"] and the fundamentality of Hebrew [versus Korean!]. When at the Beautiful Gate I'm asked "In whose name do you come?" I shall say "In Jesus' name!" and say it in Hebrew or Aramaic just to be on the safe side.

~~NOTE 7.~~

For the United Church of Christ I was asked to do research toward a fresh structure of confirmation appropriate to (1) the times and (2) the fact that four traditions had come together to form the new denomination. By 1961, I'd come to the conclusion that traditional confirmation should be divided into Junior Confirmation [before adolescent rebellion] and Senior Confirmation [during/after adolescent rebellion]. This thesis was worked through in the UCC Confirmation Committee [Continuing Committee on Confirmation and Church Membership], and adopted by many influential leaders in the church--e.g., David Colwell and Allen Miller; but the committee will to compromise resulted in plopping confirmation right in the middle of the time-span--too late for a rite of passage, too early for mature decision; and this baleful compromise, subsequently written into the UCC literature, prevails to this day....but I've been asked to re-present my thesis, in the light of the rather general discontent with the present system throughout the denomination.

This thinksheet provides a look at the thesis, but chiefly lists my major papers, which can be borrowed by requesting by letter of the alphabet, as follows:

- A. "The Psychosocial Integrity of the Churches' Sacramental Life," Dec/61
- B. Minutes of said committee, 3-5 Dec 61--including my chart showing how the single sacrament under "Ritual Freedom" split into Baptism/Eucharist in the "Primitive" period, then into three-stage [single confirmation] in the "Early Modern" period, and--my proposal for the "Present Time"--into four-stage, with Junior Confirmation at about age 12 and Senior at about age 18.
- C. "Rites Celebrating Belonging," 1 Oct 65. This builds on David Colwell's expansion of my thesis.
- D. Minutes of said committee, 8f Oct 65. Colwell uses my "owning the covenant" as the first [instead of my second] stage of confirmation, and associates it with first communion--saving the word "confirmation" for the second stage. Thus first stage is not rite-of-passage [puberty] celebration, but readiness for the Lord's Supper. [The Eucharist/Holy Communion/Lord's Supper floats, in the various communions, all the way from pedobaptism onward, and is a question relatively independent, for UCC, of the confirmation question.]*
- E. Minutes of said committee, 18 June 65. Extensive treatment of my question, "How can we prepare out of the actual historical activity of the church a rite that takes into account modern developmental aspects?" + extensive dealing with Ross Snyder's paper for the meeting ["hero's journey," etc.].
- F. "The Bio-Church: 'How Are Creation and Redemption Related in Confirmation?'" --a paper assigned by the committee for its 13f May 66 meeting; contrasts "natural communities" and "decisional [voluntary-association] communities; "I propose as an organic principle in the constructing and testing of rites: HOW DOES THIS RITE CELEBRATE NATURE AND GRACE? EARTH'S STORY AND OUR STORY?MORAL: If clergy become less embarrassed by nature, the laity...by grace."
- G. "Ritual Clarity"--a paper prepared for the 13f May 66 meeting of the committee, in fulfillment of assignment. "In religion, ritual change occurs through the dominance of dilettante or scientific-experimental interest or from the inward pressures of spiritual vitality or from outward [political] coercion....Given the continuance of our present [four-denominational] rituals, how shall we make the most [ritual clarity] of the mess?" We must "re-theorize the church's sacramental life"--thus Appendix I [which reappears as thinksheet #815]: "Criteria for the Adequacy and Clarity of Christian Rites"--also, Appendix II [the reverse of #815]: "Liturgical Terms."....In this paper, one way clarity is sought is through surrendering the term "confirmation" entirely: my "Junior Confirmation" becomes "The Rite of Affirmation" [including baptism if the pubertous was not given pedobaptism], and my "Senior Confirmation" becomes "The Rite of Membership"--the former, "belonging to the confessing church"; the latter, "belonging to the institutional church."
- H. Theologian Allen Miller and I, in this paper, use my two-stage confirmation for three-stage membership: "christened member," "communicant member," and "covenant member." I still [1976] hold with "junior confirmation" and "senior confirmation."