

“One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism”

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This summer, I received an email from Tom Ferguson, requesting the title of my presentation. I didn’t have one yet, but I came up with one that is biblically based, sufficiently generic to allow me to say almost anything, and sufficiently ecumenical for a bilateral dialogue. It is common in academic work to have a subtitle, and I considered whether to include one. But the one that came to mind – “*Two* Baptismal Covenants” – was, I thought, more likely to evoke confusion rather than clarity, or even curiosity, so I settled for “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.”

But what of these two baptismal covenants? As some of you know, the seminary where I teach, Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, is located across the street from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, a seminary in the United Methodist tradition (on occasion, they’re known as “East Jesus Tech” and “West Jesus Tech”). A few years ago, my colleague Ruth Duck and I discovered we were teaching essentially the same course during the same academic term on the same subject – baptism. That seemed like a poor use of our resources, so we agreed to co-teach the course the next time it was scheduled. Our first obstacle was agreeing upon a title for the course. Mine had been entitled “Christian Initiation,” a term that Episcopalians understand to include baptism, confirmation, and admission to communion. But Professor Duck thought that her Methodist students would not immediately understand that term, and she suggested that we use her title: “The Baptismal Covenant.” It was in that moment that I realized how easy it can be for common terminology to obscure difference.

For United Methodists, the term “Baptismal Covenant” refers to the entire baptismal liturgy. *By Water and the Spirit*, the document we read in preparation for this session, speaks of “the Services of the Baptismal Covenant” (p. 4), and in fact suggests that there are *four* Baptismal Covenants.” I wondered whether this was confusing for any of the Episcopalians. For us, there is only *one* Baptismal Covenant, by which we mean not the entire service, but one particular text. This covenant is a series of questions and answers, beginning with the Apostles’

Creed in interrogatory form (“Do you believe in God the Father?” to which the congregation responds with the first paragraph of the Creed, and so on). Immediately following the creedal questions are five questions inquiring about one’s willingness to live a Christian life by:

- continuing in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship;
- persevering in resisting evil;
- proclaiming the gospel in word and deed;
- seeking and serving Christ in all persons; and
- striving for justice and peace.

The Baptismal Covenant was introduced in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, and over the nearly three decades since its introduction, it has become widely used, not only at every celebration of baptism, but also at every celebration of the Easter Vigil and often on other baptismal feasts – the day of Pentecost, All Saints’ Day, and the feast of the Baptism of Jesus (the first Sunday after Epiphany). Moreover, Episcopalians are prone to citing the Baptismal Covenant when talking about Christian commitment.

So titling a course “The Baptismal Covenant” would not work for Episcopalians, who might think this was a course about ethics rather than liturgy. In the end, my colleague and I settled on the title “Baptism and Reaffirmation,” which at least has similar meanings on both sides of the street.

Background to the 1979 BCP

The Episcopalian “Baptismal Covenant” is one feature of a baptismal rite that is almost entirely rewritten from earlier services. The chair of the drafting committee pointed out to me (with a certain degree of pride) that the only text they kept from earlier prayer books was the baptismal formula, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Everything else was newly written or reworded substantially.

The development of the 1979 rite reflects major shifts in Episcopalians’ understanding and

practice of baptism. We are not alone in this, as the introductory section of *By Water and the Spirit* shows. During the past half-century, there has been a ecumenical recovery of the significance of baptism for Christian faith and life, leading to the new ecumenical convergence represented in the 1982 document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. *By Water and the Spirit* sketches the historical background to this from a United Methodist perspective. What follows is a bit of the Episcopalian story.

While the Methodist tradition seems to have devalued the sacramental nature of baptism, to the point that baptism came to be understood more as a matter of human choice rather than divine grace (*BWS*, pp. 2-3), Episcopalians have always maintained the significance of baptism as a sacrament. During the nineteenth century, this became a point of controversy. How could the baptismal rite speak of regeneration in the case of infant baptism, since infants are unable to manifest a personal conversion? So intractable was this debate within the Episcopal Church that it became a key factor in the formation of the Reformed Episcopal Church, which continues as a separate body today. In this separation, the Episcopal Church lost its most ardent evangelicals. We may have lost some of that evangelical fervor nearly a century earlier, when the Methodists emerged as a separate body. Perhaps Episcopalians might now be able to receive from United Methodists more of the evangelical emphasis on personal decision and commitment to Christ. At the same time, I wonder whether United Methodists might be encouraged to develop a stronger sacramental theology. I admit to being troubled by the statement in *By Water and the Spirit* (p. 12) that “new birth may not always coincide with the moment of the administration of water or the laying on of hands.” This may be merely a hedge against a purely mechanical or magical view of the sacrament. Nonetheless, for Anglicans baptism is a sure and certain sign of God’s grace, and we believe that baptism does effect new birth.

Even if Episcopalians were able to retain a sacramental understanding of baptism – and I think this is a fair assessment, particularly in light of the Anglo-Catholic revival during the nineteenth century, which gave new emphasis to the significance of sacraments – even so, baptism was

largely at the periphery of Episcopal Church life for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The sixteenth-century Anglican prayer books had called for baptism to be administered at Morning or Evening Prayer on a Sunday or holy day, “when the most number of people may come together,” so that the congregation might witness the incorporation of a new member of the Church and might remember their own baptisms. But the prayer books of the Episcopal Church eliminated the rationale for public baptism and relaxed the stipulation about Sunday baptism, omitting the phrase “when the most number of people come together” and allowing the minister to appoint a day other than a Sunday or holy day. It became common in the Episcopal Church for baptism to be administered on a Sunday afternoon with only family and perhaps a few friends gathered. (I recall such a setting at the baptism of one of my cousins in the early 1960s.) Baptism might be a sacrament, a sure and certain means of God’s grace, but it was not a high point of parish life.

Administered as an essentially private rite, baptism was primarily a rite of passage celebrating the birth of an infant. This is the Christendom model, with an underlying assumption that “everyone” is a Christian, and that all aspects of the child’s life – home, school, society, in addition to church – are Christian in their orientation. I think this is a heritage we share as Episcopalians and United Methodists, even if historically we understood baptism differently. Moreover, the twentieth-century recovery of the significance of baptism, which we also share, has been occasioned, at least in part, by the emergence of post-Christendom. In a post-Christendom world, we discover that we need a stronger identity, a stronger articulation of our commitments. Reclaiming the centrality of baptism is giving us that identity. It makes sense, too, that we should do so by turning to the first three or four centuries of Christian history, to the time before Christendom. *By Water and the Spirit* is largely silent about this surrounding context, and I wonder whether it would be profitable for us to reflect further on the impact of post-Christendom.

New Emphases in the 1979 BCP

A recovery of the significance of baptism was underway in some parishes and dioceses well before official development of the 1979 Prayer Book. In the late 1930s, William Palmer Ladd, Dean of Berkeley Divinity School, started writing a column that introduced Episcopalians to the ideas of the liturgical renewal movement. While the primary emphasis of this movement was restoration of a weekly Sunday eucharist with the people receiving, baptism received some attention as well. Drawing upon newly discovered and translated patristic sources, Ladd highlighted the ancient celebration of baptism at the Easter Vigil and encouraged a more public celebration of baptism. Over the next three decades, other church leaders also called for the celebration of baptism in the presence of the congregation, recommended a more abundant use of water, and urged substantive preparation of parents and godparents of infant candidates. This was not an official program of the Episcopal Church but rather a grassroots movement.

Alongside these changes, liturgical scholars continued to fill in the picture of patristic baptismal practice. In contrast to the mid twentieth-century use of baptism as a family occasion marking the birth of a child with the sprinkling of a few drops of water, baptism in the early church was a celebration rich with symbol and ritual drama. Adult candidates prepared for their baptism during a lengthy catechumenate that culminated at the Easter Vigil, a liturgy that included not only full immersion but also anointing and laying on of hands, and concluded with the newly baptized participating in the eucharist with the congregation. New understandings of the power of baptism in the early church encouraged twentieth-century liturgical leaders as they worked for the recovery of the significance of baptism.

The revisers who developed the 1979 baptismal rite relied heavily on the new scholarly understandings, not surprising in view of the value Anglicans have always placed upon liturgy that is based upon ancient church practice. Fundamental to the 1979 revision is the opening statement “Concerning the Service” that prefaces the baptismal rite: “Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church” (BCP p. 298). Like the

ancient baptismal rites, the 1979 rite culminates with the celebration of the eucharist. The newly baptized, including infants, may receive communion, a practice that has been increasingly accepted over the past three decades (although the rubrics are silent about whether the newly baptized receive). On this United Methodists and Episcopalians are clearly in agreement, as *By Water and the Spirit* states succinctly: “The Services of the Baptismal Covenant appropriately conclude with Holy Communion, through which the union of the new member with the Body of Christ is most fully expressed” (p. 20).

The baptismal eucharist is not just any celebration of the eucharist. The 1979 Prayer Book calls for baptism to be administered “within the Eucharist at the chief service on a Sunday or other feast” (p. 298) and further recommends that baptism be reserved for baptismal feasts (Easter Vigil, Pentecost, All Saints’ Day or the Sunday after All Saints’, and the Baptism of Jesus on the first Sunday after the Epiphany), as well as the visit of a bishop. As *By Water and the Spirit* puts it, “baptism is a rite of the whole Church, which ordinarily requires the participation of the gathered, worshiping congregation” (p. 10). As Episcopalians and United Methodists, we share this theological premise, and we have each adopted ritual texts that enact it. In our baptismal rites, the gathered community promises to support the newly baptized in their life in Christ and reaffirms its own faith, and after the baptism the congregation formally welcomes the newly baptized and exchanges the Peace with them. (Although all of the options are not present in each of the services provided in the *United Methodist Book of Worship*, at least some are included in each Service of the Baptismal Covenant.) In the Episcopal Church, these reforms are commonplace and unremarkable today. Moreover, some congregations and dioceses actively discourage what one of my students calls “drive-by baptisms,” wherein parents bring their new baby for baptism to the grandparents’ parish, a place they have long since left and to which they rarely return, or even to a local congregation where they have no ties and no intention of ever establishing any connection. This is the Christendom model of baptism and the continuation of such requests reminds me that we are still teetering between Christendom and post-Christendom.

The 1979 Prayer Book orients the church toward post-Christendom, calling for parents and godparents “to be instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christians grow in the knowledge and love of God, and in their responsibilities as members of [the] Church” (p. 298). The rite requires parents and godparents to state their willingness to raise the child in the Christian faith and life and to assist the child in growing into the full stature of Christ. Here, too, United Methodists and Episcopalians take similar stances, encouraging nurture in Christian faith and ongoing commitment to Christ.

Although the 1979 Prayer Book is silent about the preparation of adults, such preparation is assumed, and our *Book of Occasional Services* has since 1979 provided a catechumenal process for the Christian formation of unbaptized adults as they journey toward baptism. The process, though not the terminology, is similar to the material in *Come to the Waters: Baptism and Our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers and Making Disciples*, published by Discipleship Resources (United Methodist) in 1995. This is an area of significant ecumenical cooperation, evident in the work of the North American Association for the Catechumenate, which for over a decade has brought together Anglicans, United Methodists, Lutherans, and churches in the Reformed tradition in the United States and Canada to provide training and support for churches implementing such a process. *By Water and the Spirit* (p. 13) stresses the growing importance of evangelizing and nurturing adult converts in the contemporary context, one which is increasingly indifferent or hostile to Christian faith, and fewer and fewer children are raised in Christian families and communities of faith.

In addition to insistence on preparation and new attention to baptism as a rite that ordinarily requires a gathered community, Episcopalians and United Methodists share an understanding of baptism as a sacrament of conversion, in which we turn from our sinful human condition to the God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ, and God frees and restores us. Our baptismal rites use similar language for the renunciation of the spiritual forces of wickedness, the evil powers of this world, and the sinful desires that draw us from the love of God. Corresponding to this

renunciation of evil, candidates turn and accept Christ. Again, the language of our rites is similar, as the candidates promise to accept Jesus as Savior, to trust in his grace and love, and to follow and obey him.

Following this renunciation and affirmation by those about to be baptized, the Prayer Book invites the congregation to “join with those committing themselves to Christ and renew our own baptismal covenant.” As noted above, this covenant begins with the interrogatory Apostles’ Creed and continues with five questions about Christian life. It is a powerful statement of *our* belief and *our* willingness, with God’s help, to manifest this faith in our daily lives. This approach to covenant is rather different from the United Methodist “Services of the Baptismal Covenant.” *By Water and the Spirit* (pp. 8-9) explains that this title for the baptismal liturgies was chosen as an expression of the covenant God has entered with God’s people, the covenant first made with the people of Israel and then made anew through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus the entire baptismal liturgy is about initiating people into this covenant. The emphasis on God’s initiative is striking. Yes, covenant involves the community of faith and the person baptized into that covenant community. Nonetheless, *God* takes the initiative to make and renew the covenant, and *God* enables individuals and the community to respond with faithful commitment.

I wonder whether Episcopalians might receive from the United Methodist approach a deeper appreciation for God’s work in leading us to baptism and sustaining us in baptismal living. Certainly, God’s action is articulated as the congregation professes its faith in the Apostles’ Creed and in the commitments that are each made “with God’s help.” But when Episcopalians speak of the Baptismal Covenant, they usually mean the questions about Christian life; the creedal questions are rarely mentioned when we use the Baptismal Covenant rhetorically to urge more faithful Christian life or to express our missional commitments. Moreover, making these promises *before* the administration of the water can imply that God’s grace follows upon or even is contingent upon our action, that *our* covenant promises of faithful living precede *God’s* gift.

In contrast, *By Water and the Spirit* (p. 5) insists that all grace “precedes and enables any movement we can make toward God.”

Though we have different emphases in our use of the term “baptismal covenant,” Episcopalians and United Methodists share a renewed appreciation for baptism as the foundation for Christian life. All Christian believers, we insist, share in ministry, embodying Christ in our day-to-day lives, manifesting Christ’s reconciling love in the world. For Episcopalians, baptismal ministry is a relatively recent concept, and we are still learning what it means. It may be more fully articulated and more deeply rooted in the Wesleyan tradition of personal and social holiness, and I wonder whether Episcopalians might be enriched by an exploration of the Methodist understanding of sanctification.

Episcopalians have a somewhat longer history of understanding confirmation, rather than baptism, as the primary rite of Christian commitment. The ritual basis for this was in place in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, which introduced a question at confirmation asking the candidates whether they renewed the promises and vows made at their baptism, “ratifying and confirming” them. From this ritual inquiry came the informal shorthand teaching, “God confirms, and we confirm.” But significant emphasis on the commitment made at confirmation would have come only in the nineteenth century, after confirmation came to be more regularly practiced (which required both the presence of bishops, a reality on American soil only in the late eighteenth century, and a ready means of travel, vastly improved with the advent of the railroad in the nineteenth century).

Full Initiation by Water and the Holy Spirit

As confirmation became more customary, Anglicans began to debate the meaning of confirmation in relation to baptism, a debate that lasted until nearly the end of the twentieth century. Anglicans such as Arthur James Mason and Gregory Dix argued that baptism in water was a preliminary rite, effecting forgiveness of sin and requiring completion through the

bestowal of the Spirit in confirmation. Citing many of the same biblical and patristic texts, others such as Geoffrey Lampe insisted that initiation, including the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, was complete in baptism.

When the Episcopal Church began drafting the new initiatory rites, the question was still not settled. But there was growing scholarly consensus that initiation in the early church was accomplished in a single rite comprising administration of water, anointing, laying on of hands, and consignation, culminating in admission to communion. The revisers determined to restore this so-called primitive unity of the initiatory rite. To signify this, they included in baptism the prayer for the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit, a prayer that had been part of confirmation in the medieval Western rites and in every Anglican Prayer Book. This prayer follows the administration of the water, and after the prayer comes a consignation and hand-laying with an optional anointing. The rubrics permit the order of the actions to be reversed, that is, water, consignation, prayer, instead of water, prayer, consignation.

One way to understand this rite is to identify two steps: water-baptism and Spirit-baptism. The Prayer Book mitigates against such an interpretation by the formula accompanying the hand-laying (a formula that was agreed upon only after multiple revisions and prolonged discussion): “you are sealed by the Holy Spirit *in Baptism* and marked as Christ’s own for ever.” Certainly this *could* be seen as a distinct baptism of the Holy Spirit. Yet the inclusion of the phrase “in Baptism” makes this ambiguous. “In Baptism” could just as easily be a reference to the water of baptism, and the prayer of Thanksgiving over the Water (BCP pp. 306-307) supports such an interpretation. “In [water] your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah.” “Through the [water of baptism] we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.” In contrast to Prayer Book’s ambiguity about the precise location of the Holy Spirit in baptism, *By Water and the Spirit* (p. 9) makes a clear distinction: “Water is administered in the name of the triune God (specified in the ritual as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)... and the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands.” This is consistent with the language of “The Baptismal

Covenant I” in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*: immediately after the administration of the water, the pastor lays hands on the candidate’s head and says, “The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Holy Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Christ” (*UMBOW* p. 91).

As I consider the complicated history of confirmation, I find it problematic to distinguish so precisely between baptism in water and baptism of the Spirit. The two have been connected since the apostolic age, as *By Water and the Spirit* recognizes. But difficulties arise when the bestowal of the Spirit is connected only with a hand-laying or other action after the administration of the water. (I note that the United Methodist service includes as an option, in addition to the hand-laying, a consignation with or without anointing, using the formula from the 1979 Prayer Book, “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.”) One problem with separating water and Spirit baptism is evident in the development of confirmation as a separate rite and the subsequent struggle to articulate its meaning.

Confirmation has been called “a rite in search of a theology” for good reason, and the twentieth-century Anglican debate about the bestowal of the Spirit in baptism and/or confirmation makes me very cautious about separating baptism of the Spirit from water baptism.

A different question arises when there is a baptismal rite that does not include a separate, explicit bestowal of the Spirit. *The United Methodist Book of Worship* provides two services of The Baptismal Covenant from rituals of the former Methodist and former Evangelical United Brethren churches. The first (The Baptismal Covenant II-B), for children and others unable to answer for themselves, includes only water baptism in the triune name; the sole mention of the Spirit (apart from the triune name in the baptismal formula) comes in a prayer at the end of the rite, which includes a petition “that by the restraining and renewing influence of the Holy Spirit, they may ever be true children of thine, serving thee faithfully all their days” (*UMBOW* p. 105). The second (The Baptismal Covenant III) includes baptism for those able to answer for themselves along with confirmation, reaffirmation of faith, and reception into the United

Methodist Church. Confirmation comes immediately after the administration of water in the triune name, and each person who has been baptized is confirmed through the laying on of hands by the pastor, who says, “the Lord defend you with his heavenly grace and by his Spirit confirm you in the faith and fellowship of all true disciples of Jesus Christ” (*UMBOW* p. 108). This invocation of the Spirit appears similar in intent to the hand-laying in “The Baptismal Covenant I.” But what about the children who are baptized using “The Baptismal Covenant II-B”? There is no explicit bestowal of the Spirit in that service. By making such a neat distinction between the signs of water baptism and Spirit baptism, *By Water and the Spirit* calls into question whether – or when – these children receive the Spirit.

This is probably not a subject for substantial ecumenical dialogue, but rather an invitation to United Methodists to consider more fully the theological implications of the various baptismal rites provided in their worship books. The Lutheran liturgical scholar Maxwell Johnson points out that the revised Roman Catholic rite of confirmation, along with baptismal rites in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* and the 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, adopted the traditional *Eastern* (specifically, Byzantine) formula for the bestowal of the Spirit; he does not consider the United Methodist rite. Johnson laments the absence of the medieval Western prayer for the anointing after baptism: “God the Father Almighty, who has brought you to a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit and has forgiven your sins, himself anoints you into eternal life.” He argues further that this anointing should be secondary to the laying on of hands, which should be accompanied by the traditional Western prayer for the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit.

Episcopalians might look anew at the Prayer Book rite in light of Johnson’s recommendations. For our purposes, I note only that the traditional anointing prayer speaks of rebirth by water and the Spirit, and that in the early medieval baptismal rite, this prayer preceded hand-laying and the prayer for the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit. What I find absent in both the revised baptismal rite in *The United Methodist Book of Worship* and in the document *By Water and the Spirit* is a clear recognition baptism of the Spirit occurs *through* the water of baptism, even if also signified by a

subsequent ritual action and text.

Nurturing the Life of Faith

A consideration of the bestowal of the Spirit has introduced the subject of confirmation with its complicated history. I do not think any Western Church has untangled this knot in recent revisions and accompanying documents. *By Water and the Spirit* insists that confirmation, as the laying on of hands, has been restored to the current baptismal ritual. Yet it also states that persons baptized as infants participate in what is now called confirmation, which is “the first public affirmation of the grace of God in one’s baptism and the acknowledgment of one’s acceptance of that grace by faith” (BWS p. 18). *By Water and the Spirit* attempts to explain this by describing confirmation as “a dynamic action of the Holy Spirit that can be repeated” (BWS p. 18). Certainly I would concur that the Spirit can be bestowed more than once. But if the ritualization of the Spirit is “confirmation,” why does *The United Methodist Book of Worship* introduce the title “Reaffirmation” for ritualizing occasions of reaffirming faith after confirmation?

The effect of confirmation is also unclear. *By Water and the Spirit* stipulates that it is not an entrance into Church membership, which occurs at baptism. But it also states that a person who is confirmed “enters more fully into the responsibilities and privileges of membership in the Church” (BWS p. 19). The only example given is that statistics of church membership count professed/confirmed members rather than all baptized members. It is difficult to understand how one can enter church membership yet not be counted a member of the church.

I hasten to add the Episcopalians are also contradictory in our practice and theology. We define baptism as “full initiation by water and the Spirit,” but then expect that adults, “unless baptized with laying on of hands by a bishop” (BCP p. 412), make a public affirmation of faith in the presence of the bishop and receive the laying on of hands by the bishop. Is baptism full initiation or is it not? Knowing that this rubric was an eleventh-hour addition, inserted by the House of

Bishops (with the subsequent approval of the House of Deputies) as the Prayer Book was first being approved at the 1976 General Convention, only serves to remind Episcopalians of the significance attached by many to the ritual connection with a bishop.

For Episcopalians, confirmation, though not a sacrament of initiation, is a gateway to additional responsibilities and privileges of membership. The canons require a person to be a “confirmed adult communicant in good standing” to hold a number of elected or appointed offices and to be ordained. In adopting this language (six years after the Prayer Book was adopted), the Episcopal Church gave confirmation a quasi-initiatory status, introducing a different level of membership.

I do not want to argue against the value of a public affirmation of faith for those baptized as infants. But I suggest that we give it too much weight when we require it for some aspects of church membership. The primary ritual reaffirmation of our baptism occurs when we gather for Eucharist, wherein we are reconstituted as the Body of Christ, restored to the new life bestowed in baptism, united once again with Christ and with one another, renewed by the Holy Spirit. *By Water and the Spirit* states this clearly: “In celebrating the Eucharist, we remember the grace given to us in our baptism and partake of the spiritual food necessary for sustaining and fulfilling the promises of baptism” (*BWS* p. 20). Perhaps in both of our traditions we might benefit from recognizing more clearly the fundamental connection between baptism and eucharist. We might then make regular participation in eucharist and the life of the Christian community the criteria for the responsibilities and privileges of membership, rather than insisting upon the single ritual moment of confirmation.

Touching upon one other aspect of the relation of baptism and the eucharist, *By Water and the Spirit* comments, “Unbaptized persons who receive communion should be counseled and nurtured toward baptism as soon as possible” (p. 20). In the Episcopal Church, we are experiencing a growing practice of open communion, by which is meant an invitation for all present to receive communion, whether or not baptized. My hunch is that our post-Christendom context is presenting us with increasing numbers of unbaptized adults at worship, and that the

successful restoration of eucharist as the principal Sunday service in the Episcopal Church presents us with few or no alternative worship services in which seekers are fully welcome. Perhaps as we together reflect on our theology of baptism and eucharist we might have wisdom to offer one another.

Conclusion

Episcopalians and United Methodists have both benefitted from the ecumenical scholarship and liturgical renewal of the twentieth century. We have similar understandings of baptism, ritualized in similar ways in our most recent services of baptism, even though we use the term “baptismal covenant” quite differently. A survey of our history suggests that we bring different emphases to our contemporary approaches: United Methodists have emphasized the evangelical dimensions of baptismal practice, while Episcopalians have stressed the sacramental nature of baptism. Perhaps these are gifts we might bring to one another in our ecumenical cooperation. Today, both churches might profit from consideration of how we ritualize the bestowal of the Holy Spirit in baptism, in light of the most recent liturgical scholarship.

Together, in this post-Christendom age, we are learning anew about making disciples. Renewed baptismal theology and practice is enlivening our appreciation for baptism as the primary sacrament of ministry. Yet the understanding and practice of confirmation in each of our churches undermine to some extent the significance of God’s call and commissioning of each Christian that occur through baptism. Working ecumenically, we might encourage and assist one another as we wrestle with the complicated history of confirmation and consider how best to encourage faithful Christian living today.

I believe that a baptismal ecclesiology is emerging in the Episcopal Church, that is, an understanding that baptism forms us as Christians and as the Church, the people of God, who are called and sent to participate in the *missio Dei*. This, I believe is essential for us to be Christians as we leave Christendom behind. I hope that such an understanding of baptism can also be at the

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heart of our ecumenical endeavors.