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Welcome (Back):

The Use of Initiatory Elements in the Reconciliation of Heretics to the Early Church

by

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A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology-Seminary of
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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY-SEMINARY
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Welcome (Back):

The Use of Initiatory Elements in the Reconciliation of Heretics to the Early Church

Description: The sacraments of Reconciliation and Confirmation would be used today for a lapsed Roman Catholic to return to the church and for a non-Catholic Christian to be received into full communion with the church. These rites took centuries to develop; before these sacraments assumed the role that they have today, ritual elements of these sacraments were used to reconcile heretics and schismatics to the Church. In this paper, I examine the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly before the year 700, discussing how water baptism, anointing with chrism, and receiving the Eucharist were prescribed at various times and places to admit or readmit heretics and schismatics to church membership. Of major concern is the topic of “rebaptizing” those who were baptized by schismatics or heretics, especially in the wake of Roman persecution before Constantine. While the church has never favored rebaptism, there were occasions when what was later regarded as “rebaptism” was considered to be a first baptism, and the only one validly conferred. I note how distinctions made at the ecumenical council of Constantinople in 381 become a model for the Church and contributed towards the development of a practice wherein anointing those validly baptized with chrism becomes normative. A few cases are also noted where the reception of the Eucharist is the only act marking the reconciliation of a Christian or group of Christians.

This paper may not be duplicated.

August 8, 2011

The rite of baptism has always included the theme of membership – membership in the family of God, and in the family of God’s church on earth. But what happens when one is seen to leave the family of God’s church? While lapsed Roman Catholics can now return to the Catholic Church after the sacraments of confession and Eucharist, the practice of confession took some time to develop. However, in the early church, before the rite of reconciliation took on the form of confession and penance known today, elements of the rites of initiation – baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist – were used to readmit heretics and schismatics to the church. This paper will explore the available evidence on uses of elements of initiatory rites – including a structure like the catechumenate, hand-laying, and the notion of “rebaptism” – as well as the occasions which required them. This paper will also examine the contexts in which these elements were used, as well as the theological questions which underlie them.

The church was confronted with heresy and schism from its earliest days, though the process of formally defining these terms extended over centuries. A look at the changing definitions of the terms is helpful. In modern usage, the use of the word “heretic” usually emphasizes the fact that one does not hold to the beliefs of a dominant group (in this case, Christianity), and the word “schismatic” emphasizes the membership of such a person in a rival group; that is, every heresy can potentially lead to schism. A schismatic group could be free of heresy, instead simply rejecting the authority of the church. The Greek words that are today translated as “heresy” and “schism” both appear in the New Testament. The original meaning of “heresy” in ancient Hellenism described a school or teaching. Within Judaism of that same time, “heresy” could denote a group within the religion, such as the Pharisees.¹ Paul’s use of the term in a Christian context was among the first to cast it in a pejorative light, using the term to refer to

¹ F.X. Lawlor and eds., “Heresy,” in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2003), 769.

the beliefs of splinter groups of Christianity. Some patristic writers tried to make a subtle distinction between heresy and schism; they defined heresy as related to a doctrinal error, whereas schism was dissent from official teaching.² However, this distinction is not consistent; other patristic writers seem to use the words interchangeably. A detailed examination of the extant writings of the third-century bishop Cyprian of Carthage has led scholar Geoffrey Dunn to conclude that while there is a distinction for Cyprian between heretics and schismatics, the nature of this distinction remains unclear. For Cyprian, the two terms were interconnected and related.³ For many of the situations examined in this paper, the terms may be considered virtually interchangeable.

In the earliest days of the Christian church, some thought it impossible for any baptized Christian to sin after baptism; they believed that baptism removed all sin and all inclination to sin. It is most likely that the church, like many other cultures and traditions, would simply have excluded the severest of the sinners from their group, and considered this person not to be part of the community. However, this was done with the hope that the sinner would repent and return to the group. A basis for this treatment is the 18th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus describes how to deal with someone who sins. A sinner who refuses to repent even after being confronted multiple times is to be regarded as “a Gentile or tax collector,”⁴ that is, as one who is to be shunned. This is corroborated by Paul’s comments to the community at Corinth,⁵ whom he urges not to associate with immoral people.⁶ These sorts of issues were already surfacing before the end of the first century, and appear to have been dealt with somewhat informally and on a

² Ibid., 770.

³ Geoffrey Dunn, “Heresy and schism according to Cyprian of Carthage,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 55, no. 2 (October 2004): 573.

⁴ Matt. 18: 17.

⁵ 1 Cor. 5: 9-11

⁶ James Dallen, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 8.

case-by-case basis.⁷ Even in this early time, there was a rigorist position within the church; some believed that a Christian who sinned after baptism should be excluded from the church forever. This tendency can be explained in part by the growing number of Christians and a desire to forge stronger communal bonds despite these increased numbers.⁸ The second-century document *The Shepherd of Hermas* argues against such a rigorist position, proposing that there was a possibility of penance after baptism, a last chance, but that it could only take place once.⁹ Hermas does not describe any ritual for welcoming back repentant sinners, but demands that there be such a welcome.¹⁰ The rigorist tendencies of the church led to the formation of Montanist sects in the mid-second century.¹¹ Montanism was predicated on a refusal to forgive those who had failed and who needed a “second” repentance after the first repentance of baptism.¹² It was also marked by rigid asceticism, severe discipline, and a disdain for marriage.¹³

By the late second century, there was a formal catechumenate as well as a penitential institution established in Carthage. These two institutions were similar in many respects. They apparently came into being at about the same time. The catechumens – those who were preparing to join the church – and the penitents – those who were preparing to rejoin the church – were kept in their own distinct groups, separate from the rest of the faithful. There was a special group of ministers who tended to each group. Each program could be completed only once in a person’s lifetime.¹⁴ However, those who were preparing for reentry to the church also had to

⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹¹ Ibid., 30.

¹² Antti Marjanen, “Montanism: Egalitarian Ecstatic ‘New Prophecy,’” in *A Companion to Second-Century ‘Heretics,’* edited by Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 76 (Leiden: Brill), 202.

¹³ Ibid., 200.

¹⁴ Dallen, *Reconciling Community*, 31.

confess their sins – some publicly, and some privately to the bishop.¹⁵ There was also the question of whether the church (and its representative, the bishop) was even able to forgive some sins.¹⁶ There had not yet been any official rulings, nor any official convocations of African bishops to decide the matter yet.¹⁷

This question of whether the church was able to forgive certain sins was still open at the time that the influential North African theologian Tertullian wrote his treatise *De Baptismo* (“On Baptism”), which has been traced to around the years 200-206. In this work, Tertullian lays out what became a dominant principle of African theology for centuries to come when he addresses the validity of baptism outside the church. Tertullian declared that no heretic could possibly confer a valid baptism; therefore, heretics who “converted from heresy” would have to be “rebaptized”, or rather, validly baptized for the first time.¹⁸ In translation, he wrote “Since [heretics] have not the proper baptism, assuredly they do not possess baptism at all...therefore they cannot receive baptism since they do not possess baptism.”¹⁹ At this early date, there was not yet a firm distinction between invalid sacraments and illicit sacraments.²⁰ Tertullian was a convert from paganism, and as a Christian he was filled with great zeal; increasingly, over the course of his life came to see sanctity as a necessary condition of church membership.²¹ His views led him eventually to leave the church and to become a Montanist; as his views developed, he eventually left the Montanists.

¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

¹⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹⁷ Cahal Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence: An Essay in Historical Theology* (Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd., 1993), 47.

¹⁸ Ibid., 46.

¹⁹ Ibid., 53.

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

²¹ Ibid., 1.

Unfortunately, neither Tertullian nor any other early church writers discuss much of the reconciliation rituals they may have witnessed.²² One of the earliest testimonies about reconciliation rituals comes from a non-Christian source. The Valentinians, named for their founder Valentinus, were one of the primary targets of Irenaeus of Lyons' seminal work *Adversus haereses* ("Against Heresies.") Valentinians held many of the same beliefs as Christians; many even claimed the same membership within the Christian church and resented the label of "heretics."²³ However, the institutional church considered their views Gnostic; according to Irenaeus, Valentinians considered themselves an elitist group with knowledge that made them superior to other Christians.²⁴ There is the testimony of one Hippolytus (who died in the year 235) who wrote about a Valentinian "second baptism" which consisted of a laying on of hands.²⁵ This account is one of the few descriptions of any ritual actions accompanying reconciliation in the early church.

In its first three centuries, the Christian church had rocky relationships with the Roman empire. Ever since Nero had blamed Christians for the Roman fire in the year 64, Christians had been regarded as a prohibited movement not licensed by Roman law.²⁶ Some emperors tolerated Christianity; others treated Christians as enemies of the state. One of the most severe persecutions, which would have far-reaching consequences for the church, was during the third century. In December 249, the Roman emperor Decius had just defeated a rival and wanted both to secure his position and to guarantee good fortune for his rule. He thus ordered that every

²² Dallen, *Reconciling Community*, 36.

²³ Ismo Dunderberg, "The School of Valentinus," in *A Companion to Second-Century 'Heretics,'* edited by Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 76 (Leiden: Brill), 64.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁵ Dallen, *Reconciling Community*, 37.

²⁶ Ivor J. Davidson, *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine, A.D. 30-312*, The Baker History of the Church 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 193.

Roman citizen had to join him in offering homage to the Roman gods, whom he saw as protecting him. Each citizen was to appear before a local commission, testify to having always worshiped the Roman gods, and to take part in a sacrifice in the presence of the commission to demonstrate their piety. Interestingly, Decius did not require citizens to renounce their other religious practices.²⁷ However, Christians saw Decian's decree as persecution, and Christian bishops were targeted when enforcement of the decree began the next year.²⁸

This enforcement split the church into factions – those who refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods, and thus faced exile or imprisonment; those who bribed an official to get a certificate saying that they had sacrificed when they had in fact not done so; and those who simply yielded to the pressure and offered a sacrifice. This last group became known as the *lapsi*, the “lapsed” (in faith). When persecution ended a few years later, the reincorporation of those *lapsi* into the church became a divisive issue. It led to the formation of rigorist sects, comprised of Christians who were reluctant (or unwilling) to welcome back the lapsed, as well as the formation of laxist sects, who were much quicker than the official Catholic church to welcome back the lapsed. Some of these sects became schismatic, leading to communities which might have the same ceremonies (such as baptism) but not be in communion with the Catholic church. For centuries, the church struggled to deal with contentious issues of reconciliation: whether or not it was possible to readmit those who had lapsed, whether to admit to the church those descendants baptized into rival sects, and how this reconciliation should be accomplished.

The Decian persecution was felt throughout the Roman empire. In Rome, it was decided not to consecrate a new bishop in the midst of this persecution, leading to confusion. When the

²⁷ J. Patout Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

persecution ended, Novatian, a Roman priest, was able to be consecrated a bishop under false pretenses. He led a faction, the Novatianists, whose members believed that Christians who renounced their faith during persecution could not be readmitted to the church.²⁹ The persecution reached all the way into Asia Minor. In Antioch, it was said that the persecution was so severe that even Montanists lapsed.³⁰ The martyr Pionios of Smyrna made several lengthy speeches addressed to Christian *lapsi*. Pionios seems to make a distinction among the different levels of *lapsi*.³¹ He addresses with particular tenderness those who were forced to make sacrifices.³² To these, Pionios strongly stresses the possibility of repentance for those who meet two conditions: first, that they could show that they were required to have offered sacrifices, and second, that they now have a spirit of repentance. He leaves open the hope of reconciliation (although without specifying what sort of penance would be required or how long would be necessary). Pionios does not demand torture or voluntary martyrdom for these *lapsi*, as some of his contemporaries do; there must have been considerable desire to ban *lapsi* from the community permanently.³³

At this time, Carthage was an important see city, and the church there soon became a flashpoint in the dispute regarding *lapsi*. A neophyte and wealthy aristocrat, Cyprian had been elected bishop of Carthage despite having been a Christian for less than two years.³⁴ Before the Decian persecution, Cyprian seemed to think that apostasy was a sin “against God” and thus

²⁹ Peter L’Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 57.

³⁰ Walter Ameling, “The Christian *lapsi* in Smyrna, 250 A.D.,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008): 135.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

³² *Ibid.*, 142.

³³ *Ibid.*, 146.

³⁴ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 1.

forgiveness of it was beyond the prerogatives of the church.³⁵ However, Cyprian himself was forced to go into exile during the course of the persecution. In the year 251, Cyprian was able to return to active governance as a bishop. He was faced with a complication in reconciling the lapsed – some confessors about to be martyred had begun granting letters “of peace” to those who had lapsed, in anticipation of their future glory and their future ability to intercede for the lapsed Christians.³⁶ A man named Lucianus was freely distributing these letters from a martyr named Paulus, claiming he was acting on Paulus’ orders to do so.³⁷ Some priests had begun accepting letters such as these and immediately readmitting the lapsed to communion.³⁸ At the same time, *lapsi* were writing to Cyprian to demand immediate reconciliation with the church, as they believed they had been promised by some of the martyrs.³⁹ Meanwhile, a group led by a deacon named Felicissimus revolted against Cyprian’s authority, gathering all who were aggrieved by Cyprian’s overly harsh reconciliation policy. Cyprian saw in this revolt a danger to the church as great as persecution.⁴⁰ Soon after the end of persecution, there were three bishops striving to rule and be recognized as the ecclesial ruler of Carthage: Cyprian, a rigorist bishop, and a laxist bishop. This sort of split took place in many communities throughout Africa, leading to the formation of three competing communions.

In this context, Cyprian authored his treatise *De Lapsi*, “On the Lapsed.” The text is an exhortation for all those who had yielded to persecution (in particular, those who were refusing to do penance) to submit to the discipline of penance so that they might be reconciled to the church. Cyprian carefully makes two arguments. First, he had to set limits on the power of the

³⁵ Maurice Bévenot, “The Sacrament of Penance and St. Cyprian’s *De lapsis*,” in *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality, and Discipline in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), 306.

³⁶ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 2.

³⁷ Bévenot, “The Sacrament of Penance,” 297.

³⁸ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 2.

³⁹ Bévenot, “The Sacrament of Penance,” 297.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 300.

martyrs.⁴¹ He claimed that God's intention was for the lapsed to do penance, and not simply rely on the intercession of the martyrs. To support his argument he alleged that there were those who had not done penance and attempted to rejoin the church who had suffered terribly. Secondly, Cyprian claimed that submitting to the church's authority was a form of confessing Christ.⁴² Notably, Cyprian did not promise reconciliation before death, but demanded penance anyway.⁴³ The reconciliation was accomplished through imposition of the bishop's hands; once this was done, the reconciled member was readmitted to Holy Communion.⁴⁴

A related problem, the validity of baptism performed by heretics, arose again shortly thereafter. The first reliably dated correspondence between Catholic bishops addressing the question of baptizing or "rebaptizing" converts from schism can be traced to no later than spring of 255.⁴⁵ It can be hypothesized that most of these converts would have been baptized by laxist bishops. The problem for the Catholic Church was whether to regard these converts as validly baptized penitents (and impose hands to restore them to communion), as baptized neophytes (and impose hands to bestow the gift of the Spirit), or as catechumens (and to then insist on the full preparation for baptism). Influenced by Tertullian, Cyprian stated that those who do not share the same God and Christ could not share the same baptism.⁴⁶ A council of seventy-one African bishops in Carthage sent a letter to Rome in the spring of 256, meant largely as a courtesy, to inform the church in Rome of the African practice of (re)baptizing these converts who had been baptized in heresy or schism.⁴⁷ Later that summer, Cyprian received correspondence from the new bishop of Rome, Stephen. Stephen insisted that converts from heresy and schism be

⁴¹ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 58.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴⁴ Bévenot, "The Sacrament of Penance," 293.

⁴⁵ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

received solely by imposition of hands – a policy of his own church, he claimed, that even heretics observed. Not only that, he threatened to break communion with any church that insisted on a practice he regarded as “rebaptizing.”⁴⁸ After consideration, eighty-five bishops from throughout Africa met and stated their agreement with Cyprian’s position.⁴⁹ This caused a conflict with the church in Rome, but did not lead to schism. African churches maintained this belief that “rebaptism” was necessary until the Council of Arles in 314.⁵⁰

A fresh wave of persecution began in the year 303, when the emperor Diocletian decided that Christians were again disrupting the stability of the state – some by refusing to serve in the armed forces, some by refusing to comply with the rites that symbolized one’s obedience.⁵¹ In Egypt, Meletius, bishop of Lycopolis in the Thebaid, amid confusion caused by this latest persecution, assumed the right to ordain bishops and priests for the whole region, much to the consternation of other (and imprisoned) bishops. Moving to Alexandria, he refused to ordain the men designated by that region’s bishop (who was in hiding), but substituted his own men.⁵² When this persecution eased, the rightful bishop of Alexandria was again able to govern. Meletius then became a rigorist and attracted many other ascetically-minded followers, whom he led to schism.⁵³

The ascension of Constantine as emperor and Christianity’s favored status as a state religion brought an end to Roman persecution. However, one of the issues that concerned those who met at the Council of Nicea in the year 325 was the reconciliation of various groups of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁰ C. E. Pocknee, “Confirmation and the Reconciliation of Heretics and Apostates,” *The Church Quarterly Review* 166 (1965): 357.

⁵¹ Davidson, *The Birth of the Church*, 335.

⁵² Ibid., 26.

⁵³ Ibid., 27.

heretics and schismatics with the church. The eighth canon of this council deals with Novatianist clerics who wished to return to the Catholic Church. This canon states (in L'Huillier's translation), "If they [Novatianist clerics] want to come into the catholic and apostolic church *en masse*, it seems right and proper to the holy and great council that they, after having received the imposition of hands, should then remain in the clergy."⁵⁴ This handlaying was a ritual gesture that accompanied a written promise to follow the rulings of the Catholic Church, specifically to keep communion with other formerly lapsed but readmitted Christians. L'Huillier notes that this canon offered very generous conditions to Novatianist clerics to encourage them to be reconciled with the Catholic Church.⁵⁵ Even bishops among the Novatianists could potentially retain the honor of their titles by being named a "chorepiscopus," a sort of auxiliary bishop.⁵⁶

There is a question of what, exactly, the handlaying rite would have meant for these presbyters. A commentary from the seventh ecumenical council centuries later referred to this canon and claimed that the imposition of hands was not reordination, but merely a blessing marking their reconciliation. L'Huillier finds this interpretation problematic based on his understanding of the grammar of the Greek text. Another possible translation for the text cited above as "after having received the imposition of hands" would be "after having been ordained."⁵⁷ An important argument for the second interpretation would be the situation of the Meletians; at the time of the council of Nicea, the Meletians had thirty-five bishops.⁵⁸ However, the council of Nicea had also stressed that those whom Meletius had ordained should be admitted to the clergy "after having been confirmed by a more holy ordination."⁵⁹ Because the church has

⁵⁴ L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 56-57.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

never allowed ordination to be repeated, this instruction indicates that the “more holy ordination” would actually be the first ordination, a true and valid one, and not just a simple rite of reconciliation. There is reason to believe that there would be a similar need for “reordination” for the Novatianist clerics; because of the fraudulent consecration of Novatian, his ordinations were thought to be invalid. Pope Cornelius described his ordinations as “an imposition of hands that was counterfeit and vain.”⁶⁰

Interestingly, the canons of Nicea do not deal with the reconciliation of lay Novatianists. Novatianists were quite popular in certain areas; some scholars believe that the places where there were a large number of Novatianists were places where there had also been a large number of *lapsi*.⁶¹ The eighth canon of Nicea refers specifically to “cities or villages [where] there are only clerics ordained by [Novatianists]”; that is, in certain regions, it would have been impossible to find a cleric who was not Novatianist.⁶² This may have motivated those who met at Nicea to deal with the more pressing issue of ecclesial leadership rather than the greater number of laity. In fact, the question of reconciling lay Novatianists was not addressed until the Council of Laodicea, which was convened in the years following Nicea. This latter council is not an ecumenical council and is thus of lesser importance; it is noted primarily for its sixtieth canon, which provides one list of the “canonical” books of Scripture. The seventh canon of this council states that lay Novatian dissidents were to be received back into the Church by being anointed with holy chrism. This ruling set a precedent on how to reconcile Novatianists to the church.⁶³

The nineteenth canon of the council of Nicea refers to the Paulianist sects and efforts to receive their members into the Catholic Church. This sect was named for a third-century

⁶⁰ Ibid., 60.

⁶¹ Ameling, “The Christian *lapsi* in Smyrna,” 135.

⁶² L’Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient councils*, 57.

⁶³ Ibid., 58.

Antiochene bishop named Paul who aligned himself very closely with the civil leadership in Palmyra, which had broken away from Roman rule.⁶⁴ The Paulianist theology was adoptionist (believing that Jesus Christ was born human and became God) and monarchianist (believing in only one divine person, the Father). While the sect was small in numbers and dying out by the time of the council of Nicea, its ideas lived on for centuries to come.⁶⁵ It is because of their lack of Trinitarian beliefs that the Paulianists must be baptized, according to this nineteenth canon. L'Huillier notes from the vocabulary of the canon that there seems to be a previous decree being cited by the Nicean council, most likely the decree of the original condemnation of Paul and his doctrine at the council of Antioch in 268.⁶⁶ So, in this case, there is only a minimal difference between baptizing a pagan for the first time and admitting Paulianists to the church, which would imply that Paulianists were little different from pagans.

The problem of heretics and schismatics continued to be a pressing matter for those who met at the next ecumenical council, which took place in Constantinople in the year 381. The seventh and final canon of this council explicitly defined the criteria for readmitting heretics to the church and became an influential precedent. There is confusion regarding the date of this document's composition. While the Council of Constantinople was concluded in 381, this text is also found in a letter addressed to the bishop of Antioch from Constantinople a century later, so scholars have had reason to debate when it was actually written. However, the absence of any mention of Nestorians or so-called Monophysites, as would be expected from a fifth-century document, indicates that it is most likely earlier.⁶⁷ The canon defines two groups of heretics. The first group includes people whose doctrine contains errors, but not to the extent that it nullifies

⁶⁴ Ibid., 70.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 131.

their baptism; these converts are reunited to the church by chrismation. This group includes Arians, Macedonians, Quartodecimans, and Apollinarians. By historical precedent, the Novatianists and Meletians can be included with this group because of how they were considered by the Council of Nicea.⁶⁸ According to this canon, such heretics will be received into the Catholic Church after they present a written document, denounce every heresy not in accord with the church, and then allow themselves to be marked by the seal – that is, “anointed with chrism on the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, and ears” with the words “the seal of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” The second group of heretics includes people whose baptism the church refuses to recognize. Members of this group, which includes Eunomians, Montanists, Sabellians, and “all other heresies,” are to be treated as pagans; that is to say, they would “become Christians” on the first day, catechumens on the second, be exorcised on the third day, and be taught for a long time thereafter. The baptismal practice for each named group explains why the church considered it heretical. Eunomians believed that the Son was completely separate from the Father; thus, the single immersion at baptism was really indicative of a heretical belief in a uniate God. Sabellians’ belief fell in the opposite direction; they believed that the Father, Son, and Spirit were so alike as to not be distinct persons, and thus their baptism was also not in a properly Trinitarian fashion.⁶⁹

This distinction, based on the validity of a heretic’s baptism, made at Constantinople set a precedent for centuries to come. Trinitarian baptism became an important marker for the validity of a baptism. However, in cases where someone was baptized validly outside the church, that baptism was to be followed by the chrismation or consignation from a bishop. The prescriptions of the council of Constantinople were followed by Popes Innocent and Leo the Great, who taught

⁶⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 134.

that those who received baptism from heretics “should be confirmed only by the laying on of hands.” This held true even where the Roman rite was not in use; the Council of Orange taught that in case of imminent death, priests could administer presbyteral consignation to heretics. According to the testimony of St. Isidore of Seville, the custom was similar in seventh-century Spain. Here a prayer was provided which used the term *confirmatio* and was essentially a prayer for the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰ The seventh-century Gelasian Sacramentary contains a blessing for those returning to the Catholic Church from Arianism; like the prayer cited by Isidore of Seville, it is essentially a prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, prefaced with a short introductory statement of context. A prayer very similar to this prayer appeared throughout many medieval sources.⁷¹ Despite the argument of some scholars that this rite is very different from the rite that has become what today is called Confirmation, there appears to be no difference whatsoever.⁷²

There is evidence that simply receiving the Eucharist was regarded, in some places and at some times, as an act of reconciliation. The historian Eusebius of Caesarea relates the story of a third-century Christian named Serapion who yielded to persecution and lapsed in his faith. As he lay dying, he sent his young grandson to summon a priest. The priest, unable to come, instead gave the boy a portion of Eucharist, with instructions to soak it and let the drops fall into Serapion’s mouth. The boy did so, and Serapion died shortly thereafter. According to Nathan Mitchell, this story suggests that Christians were accustomed to offering Eucharist to the dying; in this case, viaticum also served as a sign of reconciliation between a *lapsi* and the Church.⁷³

⁷⁰ Pocknee, “Confirmation and the Reconciliation of Heretics and Apostates,” 358.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 360.

⁷³ Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981), 256.

The fifth century reconciliation between the communities of Alexandria and Antioch provides an example of reconciliation of communities through the celebration of a common Eucharist. This discord followed the contentious council of Ephesus, in which the parties were supposed to come to agreement on the natures of Christ and whether or not “Theotokos” was a proper title for Mary. Instead, representatives of the two viewpoints bitterly fought among themselves and excommunicated each other. The emperor, Theodosius, was a vital part of continuing talks to reconcile the warring parties. After discussion, Cyril of Alexandria accepted the Antiochene position and sought to have Nestorius anathematized publicly. This led to agreement, and Cyril and his counterpart, Paul of Emesa, concelebrated Eucharist in the cathedral of Alexandria on Christmas Day, with the visitor, Paul, giving the homily.⁷⁴ In this Mass, representatives of both viewpoints, who had considered each other heretics less than two years before, worshipped together and shared the same Eucharist. In this case, the common Eucharist was a precursor of the official reconciliation to follow. When the Antiochene bishop John signed the official condemnation of Nestorius, the breach between churches was officially healed. Cyril subsequently wrote a letter titled “Let the Heavens Rejoice,” which became known as the Formula of Union.⁷⁵ The bishops of Rome and Constantinople and the emperor were then notified. Sadly, the peace achieved by this communion only lasted for a few years; extremists from both sides protested this accord, which eventually had to be addressed again at the council of Chalcedon.⁷⁶

As is the case with other liturgical practices, the reconciliation of heretics took a variety of forms for various times and communities in the early church. Evidence of rituals from early in

⁷⁴ Stefanos Alexopolous, “An example of ecclesial reconciliation in the early church: Three Homilies by Paul of Emesa and Cyril of Alexandria,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 45:4 (2001), 342.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 349.

the church's history is maddeningly elusive; scholars can today can only speculate on what form such rituals might have taken, if they existed at all. The participation in a Eucharist may have been the rite that accomplished this reconciliation in some cases, as it was for the fifth century Alexandrians and Antiochenes. From the third century onward, there is evidence of what became the two primary methods of reconciling heretics to the church: baptizing those who had not been validly baptized and handlaying for those who had. From the hindsight afforded by history, the seventh canon of the Council of Constantinople that explicitly defined this difference has proved to be of lasting influence, even to the present day. This distinction lives on in how the Roman Catholic Church receives new members. Many baptisms are recognized, provided they are of the valid form. Those who were not baptized validly are baptized; others can be received by the laying on of hands as part of the sacrament of Confirmation. Such rituals are part of the heritage of a church which has always had – and may always have – people to welcome and welcome back.

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