

5-1-1994

Initiation into Christ: Ecumenical Reflections and Common Teachings on Preparation for Baptism

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Recommended Citation

Nevile, Donald C. (1994) "Initiation into Christ: Ecumenical Reflections and Common Teachings on Preparation for Baptism," *Consensus*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 1 , Article 18.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol20/iss1/18>

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The authors are sensitive to the problems of the modern university and are aware that faculty in the field of religion have been as much part of the problem as of the solution. That applies to questions of equity, greed, sexual harassment, and pomposity and especially infighting (see 318-321). On all of these they have some very important things to say. Nor do they hesitate to prognosticate the future and obviously before Social Contract days still assume there is one.

Gone are the days when members of churches went off to university to avoid religion. It is now possible to study religion as an academic discipline in university and show no particular interest in "practising" the religion of one's ancestors. Indeed one can be extremely keen on doing so without showing a shred of interest in going to church.

They suggest that "clergy who, while in seminary, had no time for religious studies may want the kind of instruction offered in religious studies and turn there for help in understanding and living in our pluralistic, secular society" (321). Words well worth heeding!

It is a pleasure to read a book which has a joyous undertone (318), is very carefully edited and proof-read; in short, one that performs a genuine service for the discipline. The writers and the press, above all the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, are to be congratulated for this fine piece of work. It deserves wide reading certainly by everyone interested in the impact of religion on life.

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Initiation Into Christ: Ecumenical Reflections and Common Teachings on Preparation for Baptism

Canadian Council of Churches

Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, and Ottawa: Novalis Press, 1992

50 pp. \$7.50

For those who have taken the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada's *Statement on Sacramental Practices* seriously, especially the parts which speak about the ecumenical nature of the church's beliefs on Holy Baptism and the Eucharist, and who are looking for a teaching tool which focuses on this ecumenicity, this may be the book for you. Sponsored by the Commission on Faith and Order of the Canadian Council of Churches and in preparation for over fifteen years, it comes as a breath of fresh air in this time of "ecumenical winter".

The book intends to provide a common teaching tool for churches which agree on the recognition of one another's processes of initiation. The format is clear and the approach is inductive, each of the five chapters beginning with "reflections on human experience" and going on to "the biblical

witness", with each section followed by a set of "questions for reflection". Themes of the five chapters are: (1) Beginning with the world: its goodness and brokenness; (2) God's initiative in the world: reconciliation and wholeness; (3) From death to life: turning towards God; (4) Becoming God's people: initiation into the body of Christ; (5) Baptized by water and the Spirit: called to new life.

Although the text avoids the issue of baptismal regeneration (but alludes to the historic differences between the churches over infant baptism), the emphasis on God's grace and acceptance appears throughout. The importance of conversion as a time of choice (dramatic or otherwise) is stressed as well, and the central role of the community as the cradle of initiation is given strong emphasis. Images of water in the Bible are explored and integrated, as in fact they also are in the various churches' initiation rites. The new life in Christ is described, and here the emphasis is both personal and communal, secular and religious, comforting and challenging.

The language used is still traditional and "religious", and so use of the book with those of no Christian background will have to be supplemented with clarification and interpretation by the instructor. The book concludes with a set of brief sketches by representatives of the participating churches, giving their denominational view of baptism/initiation. These include: Anglican, Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Orthodox, Lutheran, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Reformed, Quaker, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, and United Church of Canada. If for no other reason, read the book to see how these 12 churches (13, if you recognize that "reformed" means both Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church of America) put it all together.

Except for the odd Anglican/Lutheran eucharistic celebration, and the few joint "campus"-style parishes (Mississauga, Winnipeg, Calgary), ecumenical activity is hard to come by today. This book is strong evidence that the "ecumenical winter" will not last forever and will someday give way to spring.

Too bad the price is so high (for the book, that is). But why not have the parish buy a dozen copies or so and, rather than giving them away, keep them in the library for use in confirmation classes, with new members as a unit on baptism, in pre-baptismal seminars, as a Lenten study series, and perhaps as a cooperative study between two or more local churches?

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