

PATTERNS OF INTIATION

Entry into the Body of Christ

There are at least four different patterns of entry into the Body of Christ, and at least one of those patterns has alternative orders of procedure:

1. *Baptism of candidates upon a personal profession of faith*
This is the Baptist pattern, but it is becoming more common as an alternative in other Churches. As an indication of the scale of this change, in 1970 there were 8,000 people who were not infants baptised in the Church of England; by 1987 the figure was 43,000..
2. *Baptism and Chrismation, usually of infants, followed immediately by communion, with an adult sponsor from the Church, the Eastern Orthodox pattern.* When the infant is grown up, he or she will join in the corporate profession of faith in the liturgy, but will not be expected to make an individual, public profession of faith.
3. *Baptism of candidates, usually infants, accompanied by a profession of faith made by godparents/parents; confirmation is then delayed until the candidate is prepared to make a personal profession of faith.* There are alternative orders of procedure here:
(a) some churches admit to communion before confirmation,
(b) while others normally give communion only after confirmation.
(These alternative orders of procedure sometimes exist within the same Church - e.g. Anglican and Roman Catholic.)
4. *The experience of transformation by the Spirit is not marked by an outward rite of water baptism in the Society of Friends or the Salvation Army, but the latter has a rite in which the candidate signs the "Articles of War".*

(These four patterns do not include some of those Pentecostal Churches which also require particular external evidence of baptism in the Spirit.)

The concept and practice of church *membership* is also different in different Churches. Most Free Churches have a recognised procedure for membership of the local church or congregation, and a membership roll. Roman Catholic and Orthodox have no such membership roll. Anglicans have an electoral roll, but this is technically a roll of members entitled to vote in certain church elections.

The words "baptism" and "membership" therefore do not mean the same thing in all our Churches. The different *elements* of the four patterns are not interchangeable between the patterns. If we are to recognise one another's membership, we have to look at one another's whole pattern of initiation, and understanding of it.

Without such understanding, a Baptist might well question why a person who was baptised as an infant in the Church of England, but who had not been brought up in the church, should not be baptised as an adult believer. Without such understanding, an Anglican might look askance at a Baptist who was a communicant member of an "open" Baptist church on the basis of a simple confession of faith without actually being baptised.