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Introduction

Leading people in worship is leading people into mystery, into the unknown and yet the familiar; this spiritual activity is much more than getting the words or the sections in the right order. The primary object in the careful planning and leading of the service is the spiritual direction which enables the whole congregation to come into the presence of God to give him glory, and then to go out energized for mission.

(CI: p. 329)

In our introduction to *Celebrating the Eucharist*, Benjamin Gordon-Taylor and I noted that it was the latest among a ‘surprising number of manuals of Anglican origin and authorship which have sought to encourage sound practice in the celebration of the Eucharist in the Church of England and the Anglican Communion more generally’ (ALG 3: p. xi). At the time, the same could not be said about equivalent guides to the celebration of Christian initiation and, ten years later, with few exceptions (see pp. 118–20), the situation has changed very little.

Why is this? Is it that initiation rites are much simpler to celebrate than the Eucharist, and so require less guidance? (Dearmer, in *The Parson’s Handbook* (1932), devoted just 28 pages to baptism, catechism and confirmation out of a total of almost 500; more recently, in Michno’s *A Priest’s Handbook* (1998) they account for 11 out of 300.) Or is it that, compared with the Eucharist, there is much less diversity in belief and practice, removing the need for manuals which encourage a certain style of celebration to express a particular theological stance? Or even that, since deacons and, *in extremis*, lay people may baptize, it is perceived as being less central to priestly and episcopal ministry. While all of these may, to an extent, be true, perhaps the most likely explanation is that baptism is viewed as mattering less than the Eucharist, or being less significant, both to individual Christians and the wider Church, so that, consequently, the manner of its celebration has received less attention. Pointing a finger at myself, this is especially true of Anglican Catholics. Compare the amount of time typically devoted to preparing for a ‘first Mass’ compared to a ‘first baptism’!

My contention is that the celebration of Christian initiation is as much a 'leading people into mystery', the mystery of God, as is the celebration of the Eucharist, and therefore requires as much attention. Thus this volume endeavours to provide a detailed manual for the celebration of Christian initiation. Faithful to the ethos of the Alcuin Club, it does so within a broadly Catholic tradition, with the hope that its contents will also be of use to those who belong elsewhere. It focuses on *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, published in 2006, in a way that means many of the principles of performance may be applied to other initiation rites within Anglicanism and beyond. Following other Alcuin Liturgy Guides, its advice arises from an engagement with liturgical history and theology while, at the same time, being rooted in the pastoral reality of the variety of settings in which the Church finds herself ministering. In this connection, it draws on insights from, and makes reference to, the Church of England's adult discipleship course, 'Pilgrim', as well as the work of the Archbishops' Council Baptism Research and Resources group (hereafter 'the Baptism Project').

The changing face of Christian initiation: baptismal identity, catechumenate, confirmation

The fact that so little has been written about the performance of initiation rites is surprising given that twentieth-century liturgical scholarship and renewal have left their marks on the theology and rites of Christian initiation no less than the Eucharist. In the Church of England, scholarly contributions from a number of liturgists (among them, in the middle of the last century, Gregory Dix and Geoffrey Lampe) drew implications for contemporary practice from research into what could be known about the early history and development of initiation. As far back as 1968, the Lambeth Conference asked each province of the Anglican Communion to explore the relationship between baptism and confirmation. A similar request was made, ecumenically, by the World Council of Churches in its Lima Statement (*Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, 1982), challenging all churches to re-examine their theology and practice of initiation.

Within Anglicanism, provinces have revised their initiation services at different speeds and in slightly different directions. It is not the purpose of this guide to trace these developments. As far as the Church

of England is concerned, the debate has often centred on the relationship between baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. Indeed, it could be argued that the identity crisis surrounding confirmation has been one of the principal catalysts for the renewal of baptismal theology. That said, the confirmation conundrum is just one area to be considered in any exploration of the changing face of Christian initiation. As significant are what might be broadly termed 'baptismal identity' as well as the revival of the catechumenate. Given that these receive thorough treatment in the introduction to CI (CI: pp. 3–12) and the Liturgical Commission's commentary (CI: pp. 314–50), both of which are essential reading for those who preside at rites of Christian initiation, they will be touched on briefly here, allowing the more complex issue of the relationship between baptism, confirmation and Eucharist to have more thorough treatment.

Baptismal identity

Baptism is not only the centre point around which the other rites in CI are clustered. It also provides the theological underpinning for a number of other rites within the family of CW, with the result that it is presented as fundamental to the Church's identity and mission. Although the Church of England has not elevated 'baptismal ecclesiology' to the status it enjoys in The Episcopal Church (see Myers 1997), its presence can, nevertheless, be felt, not least in rites of reconciliation, healing and wholeness (CI: pp. 351–4) and ordination (OS: pp. 10, 32, 55, 124), as well as the initiation services themselves.

All of this draws attention away from seeing baptism as an isolated ritual moment, disconnected from Christian life and witness; rather, as described by the 1995 report, *On the Way*, it is viewed as a 'sacrament of significance in its own right that points Christians to their true identity, character and calling' (*On the Way*: p. 62). The work of members of the Liturgical Commission, Board of Education and Board of Mission, and many of the recommendations found in *On the Way*, as well as its overall theology, find expression in CI, and several of the key sections from the report have been included in the commentary (CI: p. 314). Its influence cannot be exaggerated, and leads CI to describe baptism as:

much more than a beginning to the Christian life. It expresses the identity which is ours in Jesus Christ and the shape of the life to which

we are called . . . Baptism is a reality whose meaning has to be discovered at each stage of a person's life . . . One test of the liturgical celebration of baptism is whether, over time, it enables the whole Church to see itself as a baptized community, called to partake in the life of God and to share in the mission of God to the world. (CI: p. 10)

The challenge for those who prepare candidates for, and celebrate, rites of Christian initiation is how to do this in such a way that expresses 'the identity and call of the Christian community today' (CI: p. 3). This is a point which will be returned to on a number of occasions in this and subsequent chapters, approaching it from various perspectives. For further discussion, in addition to the Liturgical Commission's commentary, see also Haselock (2000).

Catechumenate

The number of adults being baptized in the Church of England has increased substantially in recent years. From 2004 to 2013, whereas infant baptism declined by 17 per cent, the baptism of children (from 5 to 12 years of age) grew by 15 per cent, and adult baptism increased by 32 per cent from 8,000 to 11,000 per annum (Research and Statistics Department of the Archbishops' Council, *Statistics for Mission 2013*). This significant growth has coincided with baptism being seen as 'the culmination of an accompanied journey of exploration and enquiry (the catechumenate model)' (CI: p. 5) within a process of Christian initiation. That the catechumenate should be seen as 'a useful model against which to review and improve initiation practice in the Church of England' was one of the major recommendations of *On the Way* (1995: p. 48). In CW, the stages of this journey are marked by a number of liturgical rites which, like the Roman Catholic *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, are inspired by the catechumenate of the early centuries of the Christian Church. It is striking that, ten years after they were first published, very few communities seem to make use of the catechumenal material published in CI. Since this is a relatively new development for the Church of England, with no equivalent rites in ASB or BCP 1662, clergy and lay leaders may not be aware that the material exists, or be uncertain of how to make best use of it, or be overwhelmed by the amount of material provided.

It is to be hoped that this is now changing, and that the widespread use of the Church of England's adult discipleship course, Pilgrim (<www.pilgrimcourse.org>), will encourage fresh interest in

a catechumenal approach to initiation. Pilgrim is ‘a course for the Christian journey’ whose aim is ‘to help people become disciples of Jesus Christ’ (Croft 2013, *Pilgrim: Leader’s Guide*: p. 10). Its advent provides an opportunity for Christian communities to think afresh about how worship and catechesis can form new Christians, and renew and strengthen those already baptized. This is not to say that other discipleship courses may not be used with the Church of England’s catechumenal rites; far from it. What is important is that catechumenal rites are not used without catechesis and vice versa.

Confirmation

It is no exaggeration to say that, in the last 150 years, most discussion of Christian initiation, particularly among Anglicans, has either been hijacked by, or run aground because of, arguments over the history and purpose of confirmation. At its heart lies a dispute about what can be said to constitute ‘complete sacramental initiation’.

On the one side there are those who believe that baptism *and* confirmation are both rites of initiation which are necessary for participation in the Eucharist. Often referred to as the Mason–Dix line (after Arthur Mason and Gregory Dix who were two of its most influential proponents), in this view confirmation is an essential part of Christian initiation, conferring the seal of the Spirit and completing baptism.

The opposite view is most commonly referred to as BACSI: Baptism as Complete Sacramental Initiation, a theology which finds its most concise articulation in the 1991 report of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC), known as the Toronto Statement. Its third recommendation states ‘baptism is complete sacramental initiation and leads to participation in the Eucharist’ (Holeton 1993: p. 229).

Where does the Church of England stand with respect to these two positions? Three relatively recent developments seemed to ring the death knell for Mason–Dix: the admission of baptized children to communion before confirmation, the publication of *On the Way* (1995) and the authorization of the CW rites of baptism and confirmation (1998).

Communion before confirmation is now the normal pattern of initiation in a significant number of parishes. Permitted experimentally in three dioceses as far back as 1974, the decision to admit children rests with individual parishes which apply to the bishop for permission.

Relating to Canon B15A, the 2006 regulations are published with the *Canons of the Church of England* (<www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchlawlegis/canons/canons-7th-edition.aspx>). Since these regulations have opened up a direct route from infant baptism to first communion it is no longer possible for the Church of England to say that it regards confirmation as an *essential* part of the initiatory process. The Pastoral Introduction to the rite of admission states that 'A person is admitted to communion on the basis of their baptism' (CI: p. 189).

What then of confirmation? *On the Way* saw 'great merit' in the suggestion of David Standliffe and Kenneth Stevenson that there could be 'a renewed and extended view of Confirmation, akin to the Pastoral Offices, in which the bishop's role is the norm' (*On the Way*: p. 68). This echoed the second half of the BACSI recommendation of the Toronto Statement:

Confirmation and other rites of affirmation have a continuing pastoral role in the renewal of faith among the baptized but are in no way to be seen as a completion of baptism or as necessary for admission to communion. (Holeton 1993: p. 229)

So does the Church of England now view confirmation as a pastoral rather than initiatory rite? Yes and no! The 'extended view of confirmation' can certainly be found in CW, not least in the provision of an almost identical rite of Affirmation of Baptismal Faith for those already baptized and confirmed who wish to make a public commitment of faith. This includes the laying on of hands, optional anointing, and a version of the classic BCP 1662 confirmation prayer, 'Defend, O Lord'. Furthermore, when baptism and confirmation are combined, the separate identities of the two rites are hardly visible. Within one integrated celebration of Christian initiation it requires no stretch of the liturgical imagination to interpret the prayer, laying on of hands and optional anointing of confirmation as post-baptismal ceremonies, rather than a rite within a rite. This is particularly true if confirmation takes place at the font, and if there are no confirmands who have already been baptized at the same service.

However, just when it looked like the Church of England might be putting the first nails in the Mason–Dix coffin, an opposing view made an unexpected appearance. A report of the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, *The Journey of Christian*

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Initiation (Avis 2011), offered a rationale for confirmation which put clear water between itself and BACSI:

This report affirms the integrity of confirmation as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace and its vital place in the overall process of Christian initiation . . . Baptism stands at the heart of Christian initiation, but it is not all there is to initiation. Confirmation is an important further step, a subsequent gift, and initiation is not complete until we have made our first communion. (Avis 2011: p. 4)

The result of all this is a Church of England which is, to say the least, confused about the relationship between baptism and confirmation. Where does this guide position itself in this debate? For theological, liturgical and pastoral reasons, BACSI underpins the chapters of this volume, but not uncritically so. According to the Toronto Statement, ‘Full membership of the Church is conferred through baptism’ (Holeton 1993: p. 243). But what about the Eucharist? Whatever view one might take about a post-baptismal rite of confirmation, is it possible to talk about full membership of the Church without reference to being fed at the table of the Lord? Perhaps the minds of early proponents of BACSI were so focused on removing confirmation from the initiatory process that they underestimated the significance of the Eucharist as a sacrament of initiation in its own right, not simply in terms of it being the rite to which baptism leads, but also to it being the repeatable part of the initiatory process. Twenty years after Toronto, a 2011 study document of the World Council of Churches stated:

The one unrepeatable baptism leads a Christian to the regular, repeated participation in the Lord’s supper. The Eucharistic meal marks the culmination of Christian initiation . . . Theologically and liturgically, membership appears to be ‘incomplete’ prior to admission to the Eucharist. (One Baptism 2011: § 60, 64)

This may highlight a lacuna in the Toronto Statement, but it does not weaken the main thrust of what it has to say about the relationship between baptism and confirmation. With this in mind, the strong recommendation of this guide is that adults should be baptized, confirmed and make their first communion within a single episcopal rite. Although this will not always be possible, there is a serious danger of undermining the significance of baptism if it is separated from

the rites of confirmation and Eucharist. If there are strong reasons to separate baptism and confirmation, baptism should be celebrated at a principal service on a Sunday or festival within the context of the Eucharist, at which the newly baptized make their first communion. Although the commentary rightly points out that the discipline of the Church of England permits two liturgical sequences when adults are baptized, to be admitted to communion after baptism *or* after confirmation (CI: p. 338), to wait until the candidate has been confirmed implies a two-stage Mason–Dix theology: that, after baptism, their membership of the Body of Christ is incomplete and that confirmation bestows an additional grace, the reception of which is necessary before receiving communion. Since the Church of England permits baptized children to receive communion before confirmation, this makes no sense. For a detailed critique of *The Journey of Christian Initiation* and a robust defence of BACSI, see Buchanan (2014).

In summary, CW has not solved the confirmation conundrum; that was never its intention. If anything, the situation is more confused now than it has ever been (see Jones 1995: p. 288). A variety of practices, some of them conflicting, exist within the Church of England and CI seeks to accommodate them. It is therefore the responsibility of each Christian community to work out where it stands within this spectrum of belief and practice and, from this starting point, make appropriate use of the liturgical material provided.

The baptism of infants and the Baptism Project

The baptism of infants provides its own challenges and opportunities which are well known to clergy and ministry teams. After the success of the Weddings Project, the Church of England turned its attention to the baptism of infants in its Baptism Project. Its greatest strength is that it is informed by research ‘to help find out why families choose to have their children baptized, and why they might choose not to’ (<<https://churchsupporthub.org/baptisms/explore-thinking>>). This provides a helpful insight into people’s experience of the baptism rite as well as any preparation or follow-up. The available material includes:

- <<https://churchofenglandchristenings.org/>> – a website providing ‘all you need to know about choosing, planning and going to a Church of England christening’;

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- <https://churchsupporthub.org/baptisms/> – a website providing resources and ideas for clergy and others involved in baptism ministry;
- <https://www.churchprinthub.org/> – a website from which a range of attractively produced printed materials can be bought, including christening cards for parents and godparents, follow-up invitations and prayer postcards.

One of the most fundamental differences between CW and both BCP 1662 and ASB is that CW provides one baptismal rite for use with candidates of any age. This has significant implications for the celebration of Christian initiation. Advocated by the first International Anglican Liturgical Consultation in Boston in 1985 (Holeton 1993: p. 254), this guide strongly supports the theological principle of one baptism for all. It upholds the important theological principle that there is ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Ephesians 4.5) and that, as a result, great care should be taken to ensure that the baptism of infants is not performed in a way that suggests that it is somehow inferior to that of adults. That said, for pastoral and practical reasons, not least that adults and infants will often be baptized separately, and that the preparation of adult candidates is likely to differ considerably from that for parents and godparents, this guide will give separate consideration to the celebration of initiation rites for adults (Chapters 3 and 5) and infants (Chapters 2 and 4), with further notes detailing how to celebrate a rite in which both infants and adults are being baptized (pp. 96–7).

Whatever the age of the candidates, the canonical expectation is that baptism should be celebrated ‘when the most number of people come together’ (Canon B21). Moreover, in the case of infants, Baptism Project research suggests that there are significant missional advantages in doing so, with 29 per cent of parents being likely to become regular church members compared with 14 per cent when baptism is celebrated as a stand-alone rite.

Nevertheless, the same research reveals that around 60 per cent of infant baptisms still take place apart from public worship. The pastoral reasons given for justifying this practice are well known: among them, that Sunday morning is an inconvenient time for parents who need to get children ready and guests travelling some distance; that, in some parishes, the number of requests for infant baptism would

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mean that they would take over the Sunday morning service at least once a month; if the service is eucharistic, it can exclude a significant proportion of the congregation; and, not least, that visitors often outnumber regular members of the congregation on ‘baptism Sundays’, with the result that some of the regulars stay away, or go to another service. While not wanting to condone this practice, these problems are real, and there remains a need to give guidance on how best to use the CW provision for baptism when it has to be celebrated as a stand-alone service, often in the late morning or early afternoon on a Sunday, with very few, if any, members of the congregation present (pp. 46–66). Those wishing to move away from stand-alone rites to celebrate baptisms within the principal Sunday service will find some useful advice on how this might be achieved at <<https://churchsupporthub.org/baptisms/>>.

The ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach of CW relates not only to the age of candidates for baptism, but also to the variety of contexts in which the Church finds herself ministering. This variety requires a degree of flexibility within the rite to meet the needs of different groups of people in different contexts. It is therefore not surprising that, since it was first authorized in 1998, two pieces of synodical business have been introduced to revise, albeit in a limited way, the CW service of Holy Baptism which, notably, was the only principal CW rite not to have been road-tested through experimental use. Unsurprising, too, is that both relate primarily to its use with infants. Responding to early criticism about the length of the rite and the number of mandatory elements, the General Synod, through its *Miscellaneous Liturgical Proposals* (GS 1342, 1999), allowed for greater flexibility than was originally permitted. The rite published in CWMV and CI incorporates these. Subsequently, in 2011, in response to a motion from the Diocese of Liverpool, the House of Bishops asked the Liturgical Commission to prepare supplementary material aimed at those who are unused to attending church, and who found the existing CW provision complex and inaccessible. After the initiation services were first published, Jeremy Haselock rightly pointed out:

The new *Common Worship* baptism service draws upon the enormous variety of imagery used in the New Testament to illustrate the richness of all that God gives us through the sacrament.

(Haselock 2000: pp. 1–2)

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But at what cost? This was one of the new rite's great strengths, but also its principal weakness. Specifically, therefore, the Liturgical Commission was asked to provide alternative texts for the Decision, the Prayer over the Water, and the Commission, as well as any other elements of the rite which were thought to require revision. This led to the authorization of *Christian Initiation: Additional Baptism Texts in Accessible Language* (hereafter ATAL) from 1 September 2015.

The experience of using the rite over more than 15 years will have suggested to some that it might have been better to revisit some of the first principles upon which the initiation rites were devised, and start afresh, rather than attempting to manipulate the existing provision into an accessible form by substituting a few new words. That road not having been taken, greater flexibility than is often recognized and a selection of new texts nevertheless provide an opportune moment for clergy and parishes to think again about how they celebrate Christian initiation, not only in terms of texts used, but also in the manner in which they are performed. This is particularly true of celebrations of infant baptism. Interestingly, Baptism Project research revealed very little negative comment about the CW texts, perhaps suggesting that anxiety about their use was more an issue for clergy than congregations. While welcoming ATAL, it is important to remember that changing a few words, even important ones, will not enable people to engage with what is going on, and participate in a new way, without also considering how they are performed. Liturgical texts are always more than words on a page; they are prayed text-in-performance, and need to be approached as such (see pp. 1–2 and ALG 3: pp. xvii–xviii).

As yet, no reference has been made to the most important preparations for infant baptism: that of the child's parents and godparents and, indeed, of the congregation itself, so that they may be 'put in remembrance of their own profession made to God at their baptism' (Canon B21). This falls outside the remit of a liturgical guide, but there are many excellent resources available. See also Ron Dowling, 'Preparing Parents for Infant Baptism' (Holeton 1993: pp. 94–102). The message of this volume is that however meticulously planned and expertly performed the liturgy is, it will never make redundant the need for proper preparation and appropriate follow-up to assist in 'leading people into mystery'.