

Christian Initiation in the Anglican Communion

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What is common about common prayer? The question is particularly poignant with respect to the rite of baptism, the source of the unity of the church. This article begins by reviewing baptism in the Book of Common Prayer, exploring how this rite was influenced by an ecclesiology rooted in Christendom. An impoverished understanding and practice of baptism is revealed, which serves to ensure social stability rather than initiation into a new way of life. The authors point out the necessity of re-thinking the rite of baptism and baptismal ecclesiology in a post-Christendom context. They propose that a renewed conception depends upon a common liturgical shape and principles of revision, and explore the 1991 report of the IALC which sets forth such principles. Finally, the article examines recent baptismal rites, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of these revisions. The authors conclude that a sense of community and purpose, defined by “our common baptism,” continues to elude the Anglican Communion.

What is common about common prayer? Within the Anglican Communion, the question arises because the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* no longer defines our unity. Over the last half-century, most provinces of the Communion have created their own prayer books—as a departure from the colonial expression of Anglicanism, but also in response to the liturgical movement, as an expression of the faith in contemporary language, and in order to address particular local needs and reflect local cultural realities.

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If we recognize that our response to scripture and gospel is always conditioned by our culture and worldview, we will not be surprised to find diversity of liturgical expression across a global family of churches. Nevertheless, diversity in rites of initiation must be a matter of special concern, for, as Article XXVII says, baptism is “a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church.” The bishops meeting in Lambeth in 1958, recognizing that prayer book revision was taking place in different parts of the Anglican Communion, called attention “to those features in the Books of Common Prayer which are essential to the safeguarding of our unity: ie. the use of the canonical Scriptures and the Creeds, Holy Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, and the Ordinal.”¹ Or as *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* states, “Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity.”²

What, then, are the criteria for “receiving baptism rightly”? What must be common in “our common baptism”? What degree of diversity in baptismal ritual and practice would impair Christian unity or foster incompatible ecclesiologies?

I. *Baptism in the Era of Christendom*

One of the most revealing features of the church of Christendom was its impoverished consciousness of baptism, due to the emergence of *quam primum* infant baptism (which was, in effect, emergency baptism³). This was not only a departure from the church’s earlier ordinary practice of celebrating the baptism of both adults and infants at the Easter Vigil or at Pentecost; it was also a practice of baptism that did not initiate into the sacramental body of Christ.⁴ That is to say, it effectively ended the practice of catechumenal formation; it

¹ Resolution 74 of Lambeth Conference 1958, “The Book of Common Prayer—Prayer Book Revision”; <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1958/1958-74.cfm>.

² *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), “Baptism,” § 6.

³ Mark Searle, “Infant Baptism Reconsidered,” in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 402.

⁴ Notwithstanding the claim made by Article XXVII! See Searle, “Infant Baptism Reconsidered,” 370–371.

separated the water rite from the episcopal anointing that followed it (“confirmation,” as it came to be called); and this eventually led to the exclusion of the newly baptized from eucharistic participation.⁵

However, it was more than that: the long-established practice of *quam primum* baptism virtually eradicated consciousness of the paschal and vocational meaning of baptism; it obliterated the link between baptism and conversion of life; and it undermined the dignity of adult initiation.

Nevertheless, *quam primum* baptism made sense in the world of Christendom. So long as it was politically desirable that the Christian religion constitute the foundation of the social order, it was obvious that everyone should be baptized; personal choice in the matter would be a threat to the peace. Or (from the perspective of any faithful citizen of Christendom) when the whole culture is Christian, why leave out the children, when God wills their salvation as much as anyone else’s?

This logic was not without challenges, however. The accidental emergence of episcopal confirmation as the completion of Christian initiation created for many an impossible demand: in large dioceses, the average Christian might never see the bishop,⁶ so confirmation was “more honour’d in the breach than the observance.”

It is important, then, to observe the way this complex heritage was treated in the *Book of Common Prayer*. In its earliest versions, the use of baptism for something other than initiation remained unchallenged: baptism was understood to be the remedy for the inheritance of *original sin*, for children cannot *commit sin* (and thus do not need the sacramental ministrations of either confirmation or communion) until they “come to that age, that partly by the frayltie of their owne fleshe, partly by the assaultes of the world and the devil, they begin to be in daungier to fall into sinne.”⁷ The protection against this

⁵ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 213–221.

⁶ J. D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, Alcuin Club 47 (London: SPCK, 1965), chap. 8.

⁷ “Confirmation,” *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, Everyman’s Library, no. 448 (London: Dent, 1910), 247. This implicit rule that infants can no longer be considered candidates for confirmation, combined with the final rubric of the rite (“And there shal none be admitted to the holye communion: until such time as he be confirmed”) makes clear that children were not understood to be initiated into the church through baptism.

danger was understood to be confirmation, through which the young are strengthened by the Spirit to resist temptation and the assaults of the world and the devil. Initiation into the church effectively took place at confirmation, once a young person could demonstrate adequate knowledge of doctrine.

The non-initiatory use of baptism was not the only problem left unchallenged. By the time the first *Book of Common Prayer* was conceived, the majority of baptisms took place immediately after birth and in private. Cranmer was aware of the early tradition of public baptism; the opening rubrics of the “Administracion of Publyke Baptisme”⁸ in the earliest prayer books sounds distinctly nostalgic: “It appeareth by aũncient wryters, that the Sacramente of Baptisme in the olde tyme was not commonly ministred, but at two tymes in the yeare, at Easter and whytsontyde, at whiche tymes it was openly mynistred in the presence of all the congregacion.” Nevertheless, the existing pattern was so deeply ingrained that a form of baptism “in Private Houses” was also provided in the new book, and the recollection of the ancient pattern served merely as grounds for urging that baptism take place before the congregation. “Neverthelesse (yf necessitie so requyre) children ought at all tymes to be baptised, eyther at the churche or els at home.”

Furthermore, there was no expectation of any preparation for baptism; parents were required to give the priest notice only the night before or the morning of the baptism. Certainly there was no sense that baptism would “set us free from the present evil age” (Galatians 1:4), for the calling of a Christian (according to the catechism) was “To honour and obey the kyng and his ministers. To submitte myselfe to all my governours, teachers, spirituall pastours, and maisters. To ordre myselfe lowlye and reverentelye to al my betters.”⁹ The conversion symbolized by the renunciations was apparently into greater *conformity* to this present age! In any case, no conversion at all was expected until the age of innocence was past. Nor was there any acknowledgment of even the possibility of adult baptism until the 1662 edition of the *BCP* included a rite of administering baptism “to Such as Are of Riper Years.”

However, with the beginning of prayer book revision in the twentieth century, the opening rubric of the rite of infant baptism, which

⁸ *The First and Second Prayer Books*, 236.

⁹ *The First and Second Prayer Books*, 249.

had emphasized the importance of baptism “when the most number of people come together,” was replaced by the rubric that insisted on *quam primum* baptism: “The Ministers of every parish shall often admonish the people that they bring their children to Baptism as soon as possible after birth.”¹⁰ Nostalgia for the ancient ways was displaced by obstinate reiteration of the church’s claims on a lukewarm populace. A dawning awareness of the changing relationship of church and society—a haunting intuition of the death throes of Christendom—appears to have triggered the reemphasis of this characteristic feature of the church of Christendom.

II. A Post-Christendom Quest for “Common Baptism”

What was then feared is now obvious in our secularized societies: Christendom has ended. We need a more satisfactory understanding of baptism and a very different ecclesiology; a renewed weight now falls on the rites of initiation in defining membership in the church. Restoring “common baptism” in a post-Christendom Anglican Communion will entail a recovery of the paschal and vocational meaning of initiation, a restored sense of the dignity of adult baptism, a recovery of catechumenal formation as a normal element of initiation, a restored sense of the conversion of life enacted in baptism, and a practice of confirmation that does not separate baptism from initiation.

Over the last three decades the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC) has attempted to address the question, “What is common about common prayer?” Instead of looking to traditional language as the common element, the Consultation seeks to identify a common shape in the liturgy and a common mind on principles of revision. One of the most far-reaching consensus documents of the IALC is its 1991 report, “Christian Initiation in the Anglican Communion: Walk in Newness of Life.” That report, adopted almost unanimously

¹⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer with the Additions and Deviations Proposed in 1928* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 269. (This had been the rubric introducing the rite of Private Baptism in Houses.) See also *The Book of Common Prayer according to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America* (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1928), 273; and *The Book of Common Prayer, The Church of England in the Dominion of Canada* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 292. The induction service of the latter also instructs clergy “frequently to admonish the people that they defer not the baptism of their children; and diligently to seek out and bring any unbaptized persons in the parish to the holy Sacrament of Baptism” (1915 BCP, 706).

by the sixty-four liturgical leaders representing most of the provinces of the Communion, began with a list of seven recommendations.¹¹

Those recommendations must be considered in any quest for “common baptism.” A careful reading of them will also help us to be more specific about the characteristics we must look for in our review of the initiation rites of post-Christendom churches.

- (a) *The renewal of baptismal practice is an integral part of mission and evangelism. Liturgical texts must point beyond the life of the church to God’s mission in the world.*

Underlying this summons is a different understanding of salvation from the one that prevailed during the era of Christendom. Salvation had come to mean obtaining the church’s assurance of getting to heaven when you die by accepting the church’s teaching and submitting to the church’s rites and disciplines, beginning with baptism. Such salvation was individual and otherworldly, and did not challenge the powers of “this present age.”

By contrast, the understanding of salvation implicit in this IALC recommendation consists in the redemption of the world through God’s grace revealed in the gospel, into which disciples are called as agents and inheritors.¹² This changes the meaning and purpose of baptism. Baptism must articulate the condition of the world that necessitates its redemption and the vocation of a disciple.

However, the articulation of such a vision in the liturgy cannot by itself instill that vision in those coming to baptism unless there is

¹¹ *Christian Initiation in the Anglican Communion: The Toronto Statement* “Walk in Newness of Life” (Nottingham, UK: Grove Books, 1991); also published as an appendix in *Growing in Newness of Life: Christian Initiation in Anglicanism Today*, ed. David R. Holeton (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1993). This report culminated years of debate about Christian initiation throughout the Communion, largely concerned with the opposing notions of confirmation (catholic and reformed), and with ways to bring children to communion at a younger age. See the summary account by Ruth Meyers, “Rites of Initiation,” in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, ed. Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 484–487.

¹² This understanding is well expressed in the five “Marks of Mission” of the Anglican Communion: “To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach, baptize and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to challenge violence, injustice and oppression, and work for peace and reconciliation; and to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth” (<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm> and as adapted, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2013/1/24/ACNS5292>).

a ministry of formation accompanying baptism. We need some contemporary form of a catechumenate that maps out for an inquirer a path of conversion to the way of Christ. Since a common experience of baptismal celebration for many congregations today is that of being reduced to voyeurs at the baptism of strangers, and then asked to promise to “support” them, such a catechumenal process must also facilitate the growth of mutual trust between the inquirer and the community that incarnates the gospel and models the way of Christ. The nature of this ritual path derives not from a didactic agenda, but from the developing character of this relationship.

- (b) *Baptism is for people of all ages, both adults and infants. Baptism is administered after preparation and instruction of the candidates, or where they are unable to answer for themselves, of their parent(s) or guardian(s).*

Because infant baptism *quam primum* is a defining reality of the church of Christendom, some question whether infant baptism is still a legitimate practice. This reveals a failure of imagination, however, for infant baptism need not be *quam primum*, especially in cultures that have largely overcome the threat of infant mortality.¹³ Nevertheless, this recommendation points to another criterion of legitimacy: namely, the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of “answering for those unable to answer for themselves.” Naming this issue implicitly restores normalcy and dignity to adult baptism while raising the question of how infants may “rightly receive baptism.”

The answer would seem to depend on whether parents and sponsors will provide a home and relationships within which the candidate will experience the new, redeemed creation in some consistent fashion (what used to be known as “the domestic church,” and might be thought of as a kind of “household Christendom”). The formation of infant candidates will be entirely post-baptismal, so a church that baptizes infants must provide resources for the celebrations of the domestic church.

¹³ Anglican prayer books commonly include a minimal form of the rite of baptism under the title *Emergency Baptism* for use in private with a candidate in immediate danger of death. From a historical perspective, it would be better to define “emergency baptism” as baptism celebrated without preparation or formation and in isolation from the church’s celebration of the paschal mystery, *whether the candidate is in danger of death or not*.

- (c) *Baptism is complete sacramental initiation and leads to participation in the eucharist. 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.*

This calls for a repudiation of the traditional Western catholic understanding of confirmation as a separate ritual act: confirmation, if it continues to exist separately from baptism, must no longer be used to validate baptism or legitimate the communion of the baptized. The ecclesial customs of Christendom, which mirror the rites of passage of archaic societies, with their initiation into adulthood at puberty, must yield to the celebration of a new kind of humanity in which only those who become like little children can belong.¹⁴

- (d) *The catechumenate is a model for preparation and formation for baptism. We recognize that its constituent liturgical rites may vary in different cultural contexts.*

The greatest obstacle to the implementation of catechumenal ministry is the deficit in our understanding and appreciation of baptismal identity and vocation. A culture of privatized religion combined with minimal formation in the practice of faith and a hollowed out baptismal identity renders most congregations ineffective in modeling the way of Christ for inquirers.

While the catechumenate was the early church's emerging response to the challenge of incorporating new disciples who had no prior formation in the faith of Israel, whose formation was in the ways of a world enslaved to the powers of "this present age," a similar pattern of pastoral ministry was also developed to restore to baptismal living those who had abandoned the way of Christ. The story of penitential discipline in the early church is complex and problematic, to say the least; but when a baptized person had openly renounced Christ—under threat of persecution, for example—restoration to communion had to be taken as seriously as initiation.

This is rarely the pastoral situation we face today; nevertheless, we do need a way to take seriously the collapse of baptismal meaning and authenticity. There is much to learn from the ancient order of

¹⁴ David R. Holeton, "Welcome Children, Welcome Me," *Anglican Theological Review*, 82, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 93–111.

penitents, if we wish to build communities of faith that are capable of “making disciples” and bring to faith those whose baptism was essentially a still-birth.

- (e) *Whatever language is used in the rest of the baptismal rite, both the profession of faith and the baptismal formula should continue to name God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

This is as close as the IALC recommendations come to addressing the possibility that the diversity of our rites of initiation could actually impair Christian unity. It reminds us that “common prayer” must be a concern not just within the Anglican Communion but one shared with our ecumenical partners.¹⁵ Mutual recognition of baptism between churches continues to be more of an ideal than a reality, inasmuch as we appear to mean different things by “baptism.” It is not very long ago that Anglicans contributed to the impairment of Christian unity by insisting on episcopal confirmation before one’s baptism in another denomination could be recognized.

Equally important is the implicit demand in this recommendation that rites of initiation be used to define Christian discipleship, not denominational distinctions. Whatever becomes of confirmation, its use as Anglican branding can only increase the confusion that it has already created.

- (f) *Baptism once received is unrepeatable and any other rites of renewal must avoid being misconstrued as rebaptism.*

This recommendation is revealing. How could rites of renewal come to be so misconstrued unless they were designed precisely to replicate or excel the experience of baptism? The fact that this needs to be said attests to the perceived impotence of our customary baptismal practice. On the one hand, many of those baptized in infancy seem unable to take that reality seriously, because it had no apparent consequences. On the other hand, given the absence of any discipline of faith formation, the only value one might expect from baptism would be the spiritual and emotional impact of the event itself (in which it apparently failed). We have inherited a practice of baptism which seems to be an end in itself, and is disconnected from practice

¹⁵ *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, “Baptism,” § 17.

of the faith. Neither weakness is addressed by rites of renewal that mimic baptismal washing. We need to find responsible ways of recovering from our indiscriminate practice of baptism, while assisting those who seek “rebaptism” to reclaim in a better way the truth of their once-for-all baptism.¹⁶

We should not be surprised, therefore, that in the recovery of the catechumenate currently underway in many Christian denominations, it is often co-opted for congregational renewal. This practice begins with the recognition that members of the community need to experience such formation themselves if they are going to be able to accompany others through such a process; that tempts us into a practice of catechumenal ministry with the community that makes baptism no more than an occasional element, and the process itself comes to be experienced as the “real” initiation, further diminishing baptism. What is needed is a process of formation similar to the catechumenate but focused on authenticating the baptism already received.

(g) *The pastoral rite of confirmation may be delegated by the bishop to a presbyter.*

The Anglican Communion is unique among Christian churches in insisting that only a bishop may confirm; this insistence seems to have more to do with preserving our present version of episcopacy than with forming disciples (yet another manifestation of using a rite of initiation to sustain a denominational distinction, thus impairing Christian unity).

The more critical question is whether this Reformation understanding of confirmation will be adequate to the task of “renewal of faith among the baptized” (see IALC recommendation [c], above). Filling the deficit in our understanding and appreciation of baptismal identity and vocation might be better accomplished by restoring the “penitential discipline” whose vestiges are still embedded in our Lenten practice. This would provide a pathway for those awakening to the gospel in a new way; it would guide and support those who have lapsed and have now decided to return; it would provide basic formation in the way of Christ for those who have never laid claim to the truth of their baptism. Such an annual pastoral/liturgical pattern of formation leading to the reaffirmation of the covenant of baptism

¹⁶ The continuing fervent defense of confirmation may be a sign of the paucity of the baptismal experience, compared to the high drama of confirmation.

at the Easter Vigil (a pattern that is nevertheless distinct from the catechumenate) may be more accessible and more effective in congregational renewal than the occasional visit of the bishop to confirm.

Therefore we turn now to review several recent revisions of initiation rites from various parts of the Communion which provide examples of our attempts rethink initiation in secularized and post-Christendom cultures.

III. *Post-Christendom Initiation Rites*

Massey Shepherd observed that “the sacraments are corporate actions, which are interpreted by the words that accompany them.”¹⁷ The following review of rites will consider primarily what is enacted, and with what consequences.

The Book of Common Prayer (The Episcopal Church)¹⁸

Published in 1979, the rite of Holy Baptism in this book clearly challenges the tradition of private, non-initiatory, *quam primum* baptism. There is a single rite of baptism, with provision for the baptism of “those unable to answer for themselves” (adult baptism now appears to be the norm). Baptismal celebrations are “especially appropriate” in the context of the church’s seasonal celebrations of the paschal mystery,¹⁹ and the initiatory character of Lent and Easter is restored, chiefly by a strengthened Holy Week.²⁰ Baptism is “full initiation,”²¹ and is normally celebrated within the eucharist. Although never stated, the immediate admission of the newly baptized to communion is implied.²² Baptismal anointing is restored (as an option). The rite of baptism includes the option of Confirmation, Reception, or Reaffirmation, but only for those “who have renewed their commitment to Christ,”²³ which presumably *excludes* those who have just

¹⁷ Massey Hamilton Shepherd, Jr., *The Reform of Liturgical Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 93.

¹⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979).

¹⁹ 1979 *BCP*, 312.

²⁰ 1979 *BCP*, 270–295.

²¹ 1979 *BCP*, 298.

²² The “Additional Directions” suggest that “the oblations of bread and wine at the baptismal Eucharist may be presented by the newly baptized or their godparents” (1979 *BCP*, 313).

²³ 1979 *BCP*, 309.

committed themselves for the *first* time in baptism. Another form for confirmation elsewhere in the book begins with a rubric stating that it is “expected” that those baptized as infants or young children will be confirmed at a later age,²⁴ but by itself, this does not give confirmation initiatory status. However, the administration of confirmation is still reserved to the bishop.

Sadly, another rubric was inserted immediately following this, “at the eleventh hour at the General Convention when the proposed Book of Common Prayer was presented for approval, suggest[ing] that baptism is not full Christian initiation unless an individual receives the imposition of hands by a bishop.”²⁵

This prayer book fails to acknowledge the need for any preparation or formation for the baptized life; but the subsequent *Book of Occasional Services* provides exemplary resources and rites for both the catechumenate and reaffirmation of baptism.²⁶ It also provides resources and rites for the preparation of parents and godparents for the baptism of infants, including foundations for the domestic church.

The Book of Alternative Services (Anglican Church of Canada)²⁷

Published in 1985, the *BAS* rites of baptism and confirmation are largely based on the Episcopal Church models, but there are a few notable differences. The only context provided for baptism is the eucharist.²⁸ The signing (with optional anointing) is more clearly joined to the water bath than it is in the Episcopal model.²⁹ There are no rubrics suggesting that confirmation is expected of the baptized (infant or adult), with the result that confirmation is clearly not initiatory.³⁰ There is also an introductory essay to the rite of baptism which describes the pastoral and communal nature of the preparation and formation that is necessary if baptism is to recover the meaning it had

²⁴ 1979 *BCP*, 412.

²⁵ Meyers, “Rites of Initiation,” in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, 489.

²⁶ *The Book of Occasional Services* (New York: Church Publishing, 2003), 114–145.

²⁷ *The Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985); hereafter abbreviated *BAS*.

²⁸ *BAS*, 162.

²⁹ *BAS*, 160; see also 1979 *BCP*, 308.

³⁰ Once it is clear that confirmation is not initiatory, however, it seems pointless to insist that it only be administered by a bishop.

before *quam primum* practice became the norm.³¹ However, the essay makes no mention of catechumenal rites, and none are provided.

Although the *Book of Alternative Services* is only an alternative to the Canadian *BCP* of 1962, baptism and confirmation are now celebrated using this book almost exclusively.

The *BAS* does provide a form of “Home Prayers,” a flexible resource for the development of the domestic church.³²

A New Zealand Prayer Book (The Church of the Province of New Zealand)³³ and

A Prayer Book for Australia (The Anglican Church of Australia)³⁴

Published in 1989 and 1995 respectively, neither of these books challenges the pattern of *quam primum* baptism, nor calls for any preparation or formation for baptism. In the Australian book, baptizing infants is so presumptive that even their presentation as candidates is optional in the rite.³⁵ Neither book attempts to integrate baptism into the seasonal celebrations of the paschal mystery. In both, episcopal confirmation is expected of all, even those baptized as adults. In the New Zealand book, children must first learn to pray, know the creed and commandments, and know how to read the Bible before they are confirmed; yet children are “encouraged to take their place in the eucharistic community.”³⁶ In the Australian book, adults are eligible for a “unified rite of Christian initiation” (baptism, confirmation, first communion),³⁷ but not children, and only the confirmed are invited to communion;³⁸ confirmation, rather than baptism, is understood as empowerment for ministry.³⁹ (There is one Lord, one faith, but two baptisms.)

The use of chrism in baptism is optional in both books.

³¹ *BAS*, 146.

³² *BAS*, 685–697.

³³ *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (Auckland: Collins, 1989).

³⁴ *A Prayer Book for Australia* (Alexandria: Broughton Books, 1995).

³⁵ *A Prayer Book for Australia*, 70, 82.

³⁶ *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, 382.

³⁷ *A Prayer Book for Australia*, 70.

³⁸ *A Prayer Book for Australia*, 69.

³⁹ *A Prayer Book for Australia*, 52.

The order of the rite in the New Zealand book is unique, apparently in the belief that confessing the faith should not be a condition of receiving the grace of baptism or confirmation,⁴⁰ for declaring our faith is “a response to the baptism which God gives us”⁴¹ (even though the Commitment to Christian Service is required before confirmation⁴²).

Neither book provides resources for the domestic church.

Common Worship: Christian Initiation (Church of England)⁴³

Published in 2005, this volume contains rites of baptism and confirmation as well as “Rites on the Way: Approaching Baptism,” “Rites of Affirmation: Appropriating Baptism,” and liturgies of reconciliation and healing. One of its strengths is the “Commentary by the Liturgical Commission,”⁴⁴ providing both the rationale for the rites and an account of the growing understanding of initiation, including the unresolved dilemmas. “Rites on the Way: Approaching Baptism”⁴⁵ offers a catechumenal process for supporting the conversion of those coming to baptism, confirmation, or affirmation of baptismal faith. Thus, the process fails to adequately distinguish between the journey to baptism and the journey of recovery of baptismal life;⁴⁶ the emphasis seems to fall more heavily on the cultivation of the journey of faith itself than on the defining character of baptism. It does, however, provide a separate form of “Welcome of Those Preparing for the Baptism of Children.”⁴⁷

As in the Australian book, baptism alone is not “initiation,” but only baptism-plus-confirmation⁴⁸—even though in England unconfirmed adults and older children may be admitted to communion once they are baptized.⁴⁹ What, then, does full initiation mean, according to *Common Worship*? The answer may be hinted at by the

⁴⁰ *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, 388, 394.

⁴¹ *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, 379.

⁴² *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, 390.

⁴³ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005).

⁴⁴ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 313–355.

⁴⁵ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 15–56.

⁴⁶ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 35, 37, 331.

⁴⁷ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 31–32.

⁴⁸ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 66, 111.

⁴⁹ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 331, 338.

contrasting declarations that precede the sharing of the Peace. After baptism alone, we are “heirs of the promise of the Spirit”;⁵⁰ after “initiation,” God “has set his seal upon us and . . . has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts.”⁵¹

No less significant is the failure to heal the pattern of “one Lord, one faith, two baptisms”: although the Commentary claims there is now “one baptism service for adults and infants,”⁵² two features of infant baptism belie this claim. First, though there may be no explicit prohibition of communion of baptized infants and younger children, this is clearly not expected,⁵³ and there is actually a rite of “Admission of the Baptized to Communion”⁵⁴ (curiously, the one rite at which the bishop must *not* preside!⁵⁵). Second, although the “Rites on the Way” are intended to reintegrate baptismal celebrations into the seasonal celebrations of the paschal mystery,⁵⁶ this only applies to those coming to “initiation,” which the baptism of infants is not! Infants, presumably, are still baptized *quam primum*.

The Commentary is transparent about the reasons for these limitations; confirmation is still canonically required for initiation,⁵⁷ can only be received once, and must be administered by a bishop. What does “initiation” initiate into? Confirmation is not necessary for admission to communion, as noted above, and the commentary lists five different understandings of confirmation.⁵⁸ It offers the only possible explanation: “The services have been drafted to take account of the fluid understanding of Confirmation in the Anglican Communion and the developing practices in the Church of England surrounding the admission of the baptized to communion.”⁵⁹

It is also noteworthy that *Common Worship* fails to provide (in any of its seven volumes) forms of celebration for the domestic church.

⁵⁰ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 75.

⁵¹ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 120.

⁵² *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 333.

⁵³ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 318.

⁵⁴ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 188–192.

⁵⁵ This is yet another attempt to preserve the unique dignity of confirmation.

⁵⁶ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 330–333.

⁵⁷ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 317.

⁵⁸ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 346–347.

⁵⁹ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, 324.

IV. Conclusion

The quest for “common baptism” (as envisioned in the first paragraph of section II, above) is still a work in progress. Churches of the Anglican Communion are held hostage by expectations formed through our initiation habits over many centuries. Those requesting baptism expect little more than the event itself, and may perceive the offer of formation as unwarranted discrimination, because they themselves were deprived of any baptismal formation and cannot recognize in baptism an initiation into discipleship in a sacramental community. Bishops still expect to be the exclusive ministers of confirmation, even though maintaining that role destroyed the unity of initiation and degraded baptism; that has been their only role in initiation and they refuse to give it up, even when confirmation no longer functions as part of initiation.

As a result, we have difficulty cultivating a “baptismal ecclesiology”—a sense of community and purpose defined by “our common baptism.” Instead of thinking of ourselves as a company of disciples, we tend to see ourselves as patrons of a clerical institution. Our unity is perceived to be grounded in “instruments of unity” and “bonds of affection,” rather than in the sacramental reality established in baptism (1 Cor. 12:12–13). This constitutes a problem not merely for the unity of the Anglican Communion but for any larger ecumenical prospects.