

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Anglican Confirmation: an Unfinished Reform

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(Received 21 July 2022; revised 28 June 2023; accepted 28 June 2023; first published online 14 July 2023)

## Abstract

Confirmation, one of the seven sacraments in Lombard's schedule, was retained by the English Reformers, but not as a sacrament and without any distinctive quasi-sacramental grace attributed to it. It became a ceremony to complete the catechizing process for children who, having been baptized as infants, were at the age of discretion now to come to holy communion. The reformers thought that a post-baptismal laying on of hands had been practised from apostolic times, and so commended the ceremony for their church practice. This requirement enabled later generations, such as Gregory Dix, to bid up its significance, teaching that confirmation completes baptism, and thus that water-baptism is of itself incomplete. The underlying premise has been that from the apostles onwards a requisite second initiatory ceremony invariably followed baptism. Both Bible and early church history contradict this thesis, not least the eight post-apostolic authors of the first two centuries who mention baptism. All eight testify to the use of water without any further ceremony. Thus, any insistence upon a two-stage sacramental initiation today lacks historical foundations; Anglicans ought to review residual texts and practices which reflect such a pattern.

**Keywords:** confirmation; reformers; Book of Common Prayer; sacramental initiation; apostolic practice; early church baptism; current practice

## Introduction

If we ask ourselves why Anglicans practise confirmation today, the simple answer must be that we do so because Thomas Cranmer thought fit to do so. His concern had begun back in Henry VIII's time, and in 1537 he issued a questionnaire about confirmation to other bishops and theologians. To this questionnaire both the conservatives and the reformers replied with an awareness of the texts in Acts 8 and Acts 19, which appeared to be precedents.<sup>1</sup> Both groups thought this post-baptismal

<sup>1</sup>The text of the questionnaire and the answers to it is in Thomas Cranmer, *Works: Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846), p. 80. The division of the replies into conservatives and reformers is made in S.L. Ollard's chapter, 'Confirmation in the Anglican Communion' in (various authors) *Confirmation or the Laying on of Hands: Volume 1 Historical and Doctrinal* (London: SPCK, 1926), pp. 64–65.

rite had been in outward continuous use since the days of the apostles; but they differed as to whether the inward special illapse of the Spirit, attested in the two passages as accompanying the laying of hands, had been permanently bestowed upon the church for all ages or whether it was a contingent occurrence, unique to the apostolic age, or even just to the two recorded instances.

The simple analysis is that Cranmer was inheriting a pre-Reformation practice which was a once-in-a-lifetime rite of passage – that is, in Lombard's terms it imparted a 'character', an irreversible ontological change in the recipient. But whereas the previous text and usage taught that it conferred, in Dix's words, *augmentum ad gratiam*, Cranmer linked it to catechizing youngsters in the basics of Christian living and giving it to them, according to his rubrics in 1549, at 'years of discretion'. And, although his rubrics in both 1549 and 1552 suggested a special gift of grace through the use of confirmation, he attributed this to the general value of prayer (here the prayer of the bishop) rather than to a special gift through the laying on of hands – the laying on of hands simply identified the one for whom the bishop was praying and reinforced his prayer for each.

A comparison of three confirmation texts through the rites of Sarum, 1549 and 1552 carries a clear message. Through the revisions the main confirmation prayer of the bishop ceased to ask God to 'send down' the sevenfold Holy Spirit upon the confirmands, but instead asked him to 'strengthen them' with the Holy Spirit; the 'matter' of confirmation changed from anointing to a laying on of a hand; the formula at administration changed from 'I sign thee with the sign of the cross and anoint thee with the oil of salvation' to an unspecific 'Defend, O Lord . . .' (that is, a prayer which could be said over any person at any time, without any of the specificity of a sacramental gift); and the post-confirmation prayer changed, from referring to the Holy Spirit as being conferred through the successors to the apostles to make the recipients' hearts a temple to God's glory, into asking that God's fatherly hand should ever be over them and his Spirit ever be with them. There remained nothing so specifically 'sacramental' or spiritually distinctive as to enable it to be classified as other than a pastoral ceremony to round off the period of catechizing, and to admit the recipients to communion (an admission indicated by rubric, rather than by any indication in the spoken text).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless a rite of 'confirmation' was retained, one thought then to have been used in the apostles' time and to have continued in some shape ever since, and to be unrepeatable.<sup>3</sup>

For present-day purposes we may also note later refinements made to Cranmer's rite. In 1604 the *Book of Common Prayer* amplified the title 'Confirmation' into 'Confirmation or laying on of hands on those that are baptized and come to years of discretion'. It also added a section on the sacraments to the catechism. This recognized simply two sacraments; and although, in the very fact of being a

<sup>2</sup>The Elizabethans bolstered their reformed use of confirmation by appeal to John Calvin (see Ollard, 'Confirmation in the Anglican Communion', p. 96). Calvin taught in *Inst.* IV.19.4 that in the early church those baptized as infants appeared at adolescence to give account of their faith to the bishop, by whom 'the ceremony of laying on of hands was also used'. The instances Calvin provides are in fact cases where heretics or schismatics were being reconciled, and, as general early church history, his account must rank as imaginative.

<sup>3</sup>The authority given it by its supposed continuity from the apostles is well conveyed by Hooker (see *Ecl Pol.*, V.26.9).

catechism, it was preparing candidates for confirmation, it did not touch on the nature of confirmation or explain it. The Church of England had – and has – no defined doctrine of confirmation. At the same time Canon 60 of 1604 named confirmation as: ‘a . . . laudable custom . . . from the Apostles’ times, that all bishops should lay their hands upon children baptized and instructed . . . praying over them and blessing them, that we commonly call *Confirmation*’. This made explicit the common belief that the ‘laudable custom’ had been continued unbroken and in good standing from the days of the apostles.

Later the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* separated the catechizing from the confirmation rite and began the rite with an affirmation by the candidates that they were bound by the baptismal undertakings which their godparents had made on their behalf. It also allowed by rubric that candidates for confirmation could be admitted to communion before the confirmation actually occurred, provided they were ‘*ready and desirous*’ to be confirmed – that is, it was the preparation by catechizing which at root qualified them to receive communion; and the rite itself, being neither commanded by Christ nor the *sine qua non* for receiving some special grace, was not absolutely essential.

But 1662 also saw the first provision of a service for baptizing those of ‘riper years’, that is, people who, during the Commonwealth, had not been baptized as infants and now needed to be baptized as adolescents or adults. These people would answer the catechism and profess their faith at this ‘riper years’ baptism, so what need would they have of a subsequent confirmation?

The text of the ‘riper years’ baptism service was overtly adapted in 1661 from the 1604 infant rite, and the closing rubrics of the two rites may be helpfully compared (see Table 1):<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1.** The closing rubrics of the 1604 Infant and 1662 Riper Years Rites

1604 Infant rite	1662 Riper Years rite
<i>The Minister shall command that the children be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him, so soon as they can say in their vulgar tongue the articles of the faith, the Lord’s Prayer . . . [etc.]</i>	<i>It is expedient that every person, thus baptized, should be confirmed by the Bishop so soon after his Baptism as conveniently may be; that so he may be admitted to the holy Communion.</i>

The contrast in the closing rubric between ‘*The Minister shall command*’ in 1604 and the ‘*It is expedient*’ in 1662 is instructive. One can imagine the committee that was producing the draft having an interchange about that rubric, which went something like this:

A: Do we order those who have answered for themselves at baptism still to go on to confirmation?

B: Surely not? They have been catechized before baptism, and have answered for themselves in baptism, and must therefore be as eligible to receive

<sup>4</sup>The discussion of the 1661 provision here is largely taken from my chapter ‘Anglican Confirmation to 1920’ in Mark Chapman (ed.), *Costly Communion* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 11–41 (17).

communion as those who have been baptized as infants and then been catechized when they were confirmed at years of discretion?

A: Yes, but by definition these are the young men and women from Anabaptist and Independent families, and, irrespective of questions about the catechism, ought we not to get them, of all people, to kneel before a bishop and accept our restored discipline?

B: Well, perhaps, but we must not allow ourselves to be represented as thinking baptism to be 'unperfect' without confirmation or as believing confirmation to be a sacrament commanded of the Lord.

A: Would there perhaps be a compromise in which we called for confirmation after riper years baptism, not on the grounds that it is requisite, but rather on the grounds that it is 'expedient'?

This (imaginary) dilemma illustrates the ambiguity of confirmation. It would have been entirely consistent with the closing rubric of the infant baptism rite for the committee to have made post-baptismal confirmation a requirement; however, they instead declared it to be merely 'expedient'. The final clause closing the rubric is consistent with this, for the confirmation that is being urged is *not*, if we look closely, 'so that he may be admitted to the holy Communion' but 'that so he may . . .'. The choice of words indicates that, while the committee thought it 'expedient' that the newly baptized should be admitted to communion this way, they were not precluding other ways. An almost contemporaneous understanding is to be found in the Latin version of Dean Durel (1670), where the words are rendered '*ut sic ad sacram Communionem admittatur*'. Here, if 'so that' had been understood, then a straight '*ut*' would have translated it, imposing an exclusive route for admission to communion. In fact, '*ut sic*' provides uncoercively simply a preferred route, and that coheres well with both the '*It is expedient*' which introduces it, and the '*or be ready and desirous*' in the confirmation rubric.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, if the 'riper years' baptism of catechized candidates had been treated as of itself sufficient to admit to communion, then Anglican history might well have taken a course different from that which it actually followed in the succeeding centuries.

### The 'Mason-Dix' Line

While this summary tells us the basic pattern of confirmation under 1662, the retention through the Reformation of an episcopal rite, one which now admitted to communion, has enabled various theologians to make more of the rite sacramentally than the official text warranted. Being administered by the bishop made it rather

<sup>5</sup>The translation of this sentence was preserved in the later Latin version of W. Bright and P.G. Medd in 1865, although other wording was changed within this very rubric, let alone elsewhere in the rite. Indeed, in the first rubric at the beginning of the rite where the same 'that so' occurs, Durel has '*ut eo pacto*' and Bright and Medd have '*ut eo consilio*', which strongly suggests that, where they did *not* change the wording, they firmly endorsed its significance.

scarce, and, valued as such, it could be readily expounded as being richer in the work of the Spirit than the bare text properly warranted. Nevertheless, it does not look as though even the Tractarians taught more than a special gift of grace.<sup>6</sup> The doctrinal shift came when Fuller and Mason from 1880 onwards taught that confirmation is a replication of the Samaritan episode in Acts 8, that baptism has provided a preliminary cleansing, but now initiation is completed by the illapse of the Spirit in confirmation. Initiation was thus a two-staging sacramental action, both halves of which were needed. This was coincidentally matched with the insertion of the Acts 8.14-17 passage into confirmation rites, first in the USA in 1892, then in the Canadian Book of 1921, and notably in the 1928 'proposed' Book in the Church of England. In this 1928 Book the reading was followed by the assertion 'The Scripture here teacheth us that a special gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed through the laying on of hands with prayer', and this seemed to indicate from the Acts 8 passage that the 'special gift' was the initial bestowal of the Spirit upon the candidate. Confirmation was being classified as 'initiatory' rather than as a pastoral office.

This Acts 8 passage, however, still portrayed baptism and the laying on of apostolic hands as coming at separate times, and therefore quite happily reflected in inherited Anglican practice. The final stage lay with Gregory Dix, who, writing in the 1940s, with an eye rather to the Acts 19 passage, made much of the supposed *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus as well as the Eastern practice of anointing known as the seal (σφραγις) to confer the Spirit after baptism. Dix emphasized that the primitive use had, throughout the early centuries, been a complex single rite with these two main stages:<sup>7</sup> and later the Christian history in the West told the story of how this 'integrated' rite had 'disintegrated' and ended up with infant baptism and with confirmation separated from it and coming long after.<sup>8</sup> In the early 1950s this found official expression among Anglican liturgists, as for instance:

On the basis of the *Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus (early third century) and of scattered notice in the Fathers, it is now possible to reconstruct in considerable detail the initiatory ceremonies of the pre-Nicene Church. The evidence serves to illuminate the fragmentary and often elusive and debatable references in the New Testament, not only in the narratives of the Book of Acts, but also in the epistles of both the apostolic and sub-apostolic age, such as Rom. 6.4-6; 2 Cor. 1.21-22; Eph. 1.13-14, 4.30, 5.26-27; Heb. 6.2-5 and Tit. 3.5. The initiation consisted of two distinct but inseparable stages: (1) the washing with water wherein the candidate received remission of sin, regeneration and

<sup>6</sup>I have done some research leading to this conclusion in my chapter 'Anglican Confirmation to 1920' in Mark Chapman (ed.), *Costly Communion* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 11-41 (22-24).

<sup>7</sup>The so-called *Apostolic Tradition* is not now ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome (see Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell Johnson and Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002]) and thus not to the early third century; but the issue is not the date or veracity of the document, but the legitimacy of asserting as a principle that third- or fourth-century practices, not attested in the first two centuries, are nevertheless apostolic uses and therefore part of the givenness of the Christian faith.

<sup>8</sup>I have not found the words 'integrated' and 'disintegrated' in Dix, and suspect the terminology owes much to J.D.C. Fisher. The title of his major work, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West – A Study in the Disintegration of the Primitive Rite of Initiation* (London: Alcuin/SPCK, 1965) highlights the concept.

adoption by God; and (2) the 'sealing' with the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands and anointing with chrism as an earnest of eternal redemption and inheritance. So far as the evidence goes, there was never any restriction regarding the minister of baptism in water. But only an Apostle – and later, after the establishment of moniscopacy, only a Bishop – could confer the gift of the Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

That came from 1950. But the next two decades would see a major shift in scholarship to strip away the 'confirmation' element from this two-stage concept and move Anglicans towards seeing water-baptism as complete sacramental initiation. Geoffrey Lampe's book, *The Seal of the Spirit* (1951), provided the first challenge, and in America the liturgists, writing again in 1970, had somewhat modified their assertion about 'the gift of the Spirit' coming through the laying on of hands. However, they could still write:

The basic principle of this proposal is the reunion of Baptism, Confirmation, and Communion into a single continuous service, as it was in the primitive Church.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly in the Church of England, where, on the Liturgical Commission in the 1950s, Edward Ratcliff and Arthur Couratin carried the torch of Dix after his decease, the first proposals for new baptismal rites were introduced as follows:

From every point of view, pastoral, theological, and liturgical, Baptism and Confirmation must be viewed as two parts of one whole . . .<sup>11</sup>

Although the Liturgical Commission was not using either of the two Acts passages as set lessons or warrant texts, their actual textual proposals in this report, almost certainly attributable to Ratcliff and Couratin, located the coming of the Holy Spirit in the confirmation part of their two-stage rite. Although the further rites in later years have reduced the weight placed upon the integral role of confirmation as being the second half of 'one whole', yet the actual rites in authorized use today in the Church of England stem from these doctrinal points of origin and have the marks of their origin upon them. Nor are there lacking at intervals later authors to give further vent to this reading of baptismal origins, J.D.C. Fisher being the chief proponent in the 1970s. Much more recently in England we

<sup>9</sup>PECUSA *Prayer Book Studies I* (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1950) (committee of SLC of Massey Shepherd, Henry Ogilby, Charles Hill) – under 'Baptism and Confirmation' ch. II ('History of the Rites of Christian Initiation'), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>The Episcopal Church *Prayer Book Studies 18* (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1970), p. 19. Massey Shepherd remained from the 1950 Commission, and it seems likely that 'the primitive church' being cited was Dix's supposed pattern of Rome in the early third century as exemplified in so-called Hippolytus.

<sup>11</sup>From the Introduction to *Baptism and Confirmation: A Report submitted by the Church of England Liturgical Commission to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in November 1958* (London: SPCK, 1959), p. ix.

have experienced an extraordinary collection, edited by Paul Avis and called *The Journey of Christian Initiation*,<sup>12</sup> and issued in the name of the then newly formed Faith and Order Commission of the General Synod. In it, Martin Davie wrote:

It may be the case that Acts 8 and Acts 19 reflect the fact that from the earliest days of the Church the laying of hands with prayer for the gift of the Spirit was an integral part of baptism and this may also be what is referred to in Hebrews 6.2 when it refers to both ‘ablutions’ and the ‘laying on of hands’. If this was the case it would explain why the laying on of hands in baptism seems to have been a very widespread practice in the Church during the Patristic period.<sup>13</sup>

The last sentence is qualified by a footnote which says ‘Although it [the laying on of hands] was very widespread it was not universal. In some places the laying on of hands gave way to chrismation.’ Nevertheless, Davie seems to be asserting as ‘fact’ that there always was ‘from the earliest days’ an integrated rite in which water-baptism was followed by the laying of hands, or, in some places and times, by chrismation. The ‘fact’ seems to be a given – the Acts verses ‘may’ reflect the fact.

However sweeping as history this may be, it hardly compares with the wonderfully detailed and highly imaginative exposition by Sharon Ely Pearson in the USA, introducing the volume she compiled, entitled *Signed, Sealed, Delivered*, in 2014:

Christian baptism in the New Testament is a complete and adequate entrance into a new relationship [with the Trinity] . . . The newly baptized emerged from the water and (in many parts of the Church) were anointed, usually over the entire body. Being marked with the sign of the cross with oil, a part of the rite called consignation, the newly baptized were then re-clothed (later in the era they received white garments). Being brought into the Eucharistic assembly for the first time, they shared in the kiss of peace and the people’s prayers, made their own offering of bread and wine, and received the Body and Blood of Christ. Baptism was seen as a water moment of washing from sin and a cleansing act of forgiveness. The anointing, a representation of the rich, flowing life of the Spirit, was a sealing of the gift of the Spirit, being marked as Christ’s own forever.<sup>14</sup>

However much this reads as though reporting rites of the fourth century, it unambiguously claims to describe New Testament practice. So, whatever recovery recent decades have seen in identifying water-baptism as full sacramental initiation, echoes of Mason-Dix linger on. We remain in need of the investigation envisaged by

<sup>12</sup>Paul Avis, *The Journey of Christian Initiation* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012).

<sup>13</sup>Martin Davie in Paul Avis (ed.), *The Journey of Christian Initiation* (London: Church House Publishing, 2011), p. 37.

<sup>14</sup>From the Introduction, presumably by the ‘compiler’, in Sharon Ely Pearson (compiler), *Signed, Sealed, Delivered: Theologies of Confirmation for the 21st Century* (New York: Morehouse, 2014), p. 3.

the blunt challenge of the Boston Statement of the first International Anglican Liturgical Consultation:

The foundation upon which the 'Mason-Dix' approach was ostensibly based, historical enquiry, proved to be its weakest dimension.<sup>15</sup>

It is to that historical enquiry we now turn.

### The Very Early Church

I suspect that our Anglican retention of confirmation owes a certain amount to the limited range of patristic authors known to Cranmer. His main early authors in the West seem to have been Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian and, somewhat later, Augustine; and, apart perhaps from Irenaeus, these attested a post-baptismal rite. It is just possible that he knew Justin Martyr, who would certainly have raised questions for him.<sup>16</sup> But his reply in 1537 that 'the said special gift doth not now remain with the successors of the Apostles'<sup>17</sup> reads rather as though he thought the outward act had continued, though the 'said special gift' had not. His post-confirmation phrase 'upon whom (after the example of thy holy apostles) we have now laid our hands'<sup>18</sup> appears to be making the same distinction – the post-baptismal ceremony continued, but the special gift did not. Had he thought the laying of hands had itself been unique to the apostles and had not been continued, he would surely have said as much in his own reply to his questionnaire? But the call for closer enquiry is there. So what did the early church do?

This is where Dix needs close inspection. He has given his name to the further promulgation in the mid-twentieth century of the Puller-Mason theory but has in fact done so through the fascination he has exercised upon liturgists, rather than upon any weight of argument. And there is nothing within his treatment of initiation to bear any comparison with his massive history of the Eucharist. We have but three short essays to consider.

His first essay, 'Confirmation, or Laying On of Hands', while strongly two-staging, nevertheless presents (in his words) 'a novel theory of the historical origin, primitive matter and theological significance of the sacrament of Confirmation'.<sup>19</sup> Dix at this stage does not see firm precedent for confirmation in the Acts 8 and Acts

<sup>15</sup>The Boston Statement 'Children and Communion' IAIC.i (published in Colin Buchanan [ed.], *Nurturing Children in Communion* [Grove Liturgical Study 44; Bramcote: Grove Books, 1985] and in Ruth Meyers [ed.], *Children at the Table* [New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1995]).

<sup>16</sup>He certainly did know something of Justin when he wrote on the Eucharist against Gardiner in 1551, and it is possible his source had been a manuscript extract from Justin's works known as the Codex Bobonianus. This codex, however, only covered *1 Apol.* 65-67, and thus did not carry the information about how baptisms were conducted, which came in *1 Apol.* 61, and Cranmer may well have been ignorant of it (see Colin Buchanan, *Justin Martyr on Baptism and Eucharist* [Alcuin/GROW Joint Liturgical Study 64; Norwich: Hymns A & M, 2007], p. 6).

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Cranmer, *Works: Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846), p. 80.

<sup>18</sup>As in 1549, 1552 and 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* in the post-communion prayer.

<sup>19</sup>Gregory Dix, 'Confirmation, or Laying on of Hands', *Theology*, Occasional Paper No. 5 (1936).



19 events – no, confirmation for him is the anointing, which is reported in the Pauline texts from 2 Corinthians and Ephesians. He contends, on the basis of Eastern developments, that chrismation preceded baptism, until in the fourth century it was superseded by a post-baptismal ‘seal’; and in the West he argues from precedents in Jewish baptism and then jumps straight to Hippolytus, whom he confidently dates to 215 AD. He acknowledges that in the second century Hermas and Irenaeus ‘clearly identify “the seal” with the water of baptism’, but he judges that this was perhaps a brief lapse on the part of the church then. He never mentions Justin, who is the major witness from that century against two-staging theories.

His second essay, ‘The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism’,<sup>20</sup> was occasioned by a Convocations Committee’s report from 1944, *Confirmation Today*. Here he describes (so-called) Hippolytus in detail, states that it ‘represents the practice of Rome in the later second century’, and tops it up with the assertion ‘I believe . . . that it can be shown that it is a rite like this in its main essentials which the New Testament everywhere presupposes.’<sup>21</sup> He says little else from the New Testament except a few lines discussing whether a bishop was always present at New Testament baptisms, which, he tells us, there always was. Once again Justin escapes attention.

Dix’s third essay is “‘The Seal’ in the Second Century”,<sup>22</sup> and here he does finally address Justin. His answer, similar to that of Mason, is that references to ‘baptism’ denote the *two-stage rite as a comprehensive term*, but may yet sometimes refer solely to the administration of water. This splendid adaptability of the term means that each reference to ‘baptism’ in the New Testament or the second century will mean exactly what Dix wants it to mean on each occurrence. To a clearer eye it appears as a last retreat of a school of thought that has its conclusion written prior to the argument being mounted.

So the history question presses: was sacramental initiation in the first two centuries an essentially ‘two-stage’ procedure?

## The New Testament

The New Testament evidence, on any fair reading, singles out water-baptism, and water-baptism alone, as the ceremony for incorporating the new convert into the people of God, the church. The ground has been well covered by many authors, and the references to baptism may be summarized as follows:

- (i) In the Gospels, the baptisms done by John, and the baptism of Jesus by John.
- (ii) In John’s Gospel, Jesus himself giving baptism, done by his disciples (Jn 3.22 and 4.2)
- (iii) Two metaphorical uses of ‘baptize’ by Jesus (Mk 10.38, Lk. 12.50)

<sup>20</sup>A public lecture delivered in Oxford in 1944 and published as Gregory Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in relation to Baptism* (London: Dacre Press, 1946), pp. 13–14.

<sup>21</sup>Gregory Dix, *Confirmation Today* (London: CIO, 1944).

<sup>22</sup>Gregory Dix, “‘The Seal’ in the Second Century”, *Theology*, LI, No. 331 (January 1948), p. 12.

- (iv) Mention of baptizing in the 'Great Commission' as part of the means of making people disciples (Mt. 28.19)
- (v) Nine mentions of separate occurrences in Acts.
- (vi) Passing explicit references to baptism in Rom. 6.3-4; 1 Cor. 1.3-17, 12.13. 15.29; Gal. 3.27; Eph. 4.4; Col. 2.12; Heb. 6.2 (doubtful); 1 Pet. 3.21
- (vii) Some further allusive references as in 1 Cor. 6.11, Eph. 3.26, Tit. 3.5

Out of this plethora of passing references, only in two of the nine occurrences in Acts, that is, in Acts 9.14-17 and 19.6, comes any mention of a post-baptismal ceremony. Among the other seven occurrences in Acts there is mention both of water and of washing; but not only is there no mention of a laying on of apostolic hands, but in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8.33-35 this was obviously impossible; in Acts 2 (in conformity with Mt. 28.20) it looks highly unlikely; in the case of Paul (Acts 9, 22 and 26) it was impossible; and, in the case of the first Gentile converts in Acts 10, when Peter directs that others should take them to be baptized, it is almost impossible to read into his directive that they were to be brought back for him to lay a hand upon them. Almost every reference to baptism in both Acts and the Epistles portrays converts being baptized, that is, using the verb in the passive, and thus there is no emphasis upon who administers baptism; the only two exceptions to the passive use being, first, in Acts 8.33-35 (where Philip inevitably did the baptism) and then in 1 Cor. 1.14-17 (where Paul uses the active transitive only to *deny* that he performed the baptisms). Dix's references to 'baptize' and its cognates as connoting a ceremony including both the pouring of water and the laying on of apostolic hands or anointing, prompt two strong refutations:

- (i) This asserted need for an apostle lays emphasis upon ensuring the right person officiated and duly imposed his hand; but the New Testament attests to John the Baptist giving baptism and has thereafter no indication of who administered the rite.
- (ii) In the very foundation of the two-stage concept, the two passages where a laying of hands *is* recorded (Acts 8.14-17 and 19.6), the references to baptism *have* to refer to water-baptism only; for the laying on of hands is mentioned separately and was yet to come when baptism was administered. It is a counsel of despair to say that in all other passages the 'baptize' stem implies a two-stage-rite, but in these two cases it means a single stage of water alone.

We are driven to view these two passages in Acts as exceptional, and as not a necessary or usual part of apostolic practice. Clearly with the Samaritans in Acts 8 there was a kind of emergency, to address which Peter and John made their special visit to Samaria.<sup>23</sup> Acts 19.6 looks more as though Paul were doing something unexceptional, but contingent and not necessarily integral to baptism.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>It is often interpreted as being an apostolic action needed to convince the Samaritans that, Samaritans as they were, had a true part in the new Israel of God.

<sup>24</sup>It is possible that the unique feature of these baptisms, that is, that the recipients had 'known only the baptism of John' in the 50s AD, was what made the event a special case. But it could be, or might also be, that

The last retreat of the two-stagers is to expound words of ‘sealing’ (as in 2 Cor. 1.22 and Eph. 1.13 and 4.30) or ‘anointing’ (1 Jn 2.21 and 27) as referring to the supposed second ceremony which had been conferred within the converts’ initiation into Christ. We have no other indication of such an outward ceremony nor any reason to ascribe the inward spiritual benefit described as belonging to such a second ceremony.<sup>25</sup> This is another counsel of despair, a reading back of later practice (as, e.g., anointing) into the New Testament text. If these texts refer to an outward ceremony at all (which is impossible to demonstrate), and not more profoundly to the inward gift of the Holy Spirit, then that ceremony must be water-baptism, the sole universal initiatory rite of the apostles and of the infant churches. And, as water-baptism would fit each instance perfectly well, it is improper to multiply hypotheses to come to a different conclusion.

Dix so navigates a path through the above as to conclude:

But the N.T., rightly understood, does not teach that the sacrament of Holy Baptism is by itself the rite of Christian initiation. This consists of Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion (to use our modern terms), and without the two latter is incomplete.<sup>26</sup>

Leaving aside ‘first communion’ issues (surely not visible in the New Testament?), the Mason-Dix school is asserting that in the New Testament there was a universal practice of administering a second outward ceremony, the laying on of apostolic hands (or alternatively anointing), to follow water-baptism. But, if it was not universal, it cannot have been a ‘given’, a standard practice.<sup>27</sup> A second ceremony was an occasional practice, perhaps used for ad hoc purpose, but cannot have been an invariable response to Jesus’ command to baptize. The refutation of Mason-Dix, addressed strongly in Lampe’s *The Seal of the Spirit*,<sup>28</sup> was, in relation to the supposed biblical roots, dealt the *coup de grâce* by the non-Anglican, James Dunn, in his *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*.<sup>29</sup>

## The Church of the First Two Centuries

If Cranmer had little or no knowledge of practice in the early church until the time of Irenaeus, and especially of Tertullian, then his belief that a post-baptismal laying on of

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Paul looked for more visible renewing of them in their baptism, and, not seeing that, took a back-up or emergency step just as Peter and John had taken with the Samaritans.

<sup>25</sup>Thus Westcott, in commenting on 1 Jn 2.21, says ‘The context shows that the word *χρῖσμα* is not to be understood of the material sign, but of the corresponding spiritual reality.’ See B.F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St John* (London: Macmillan, 1883), p. 72.

<sup>26</sup>Dix, ‘“The Seal” in the Second Century’, p. 12..

<sup>27</sup>In Heb. 6.2 the writer mentions *βαπτισμοί*, a word different from *βαπτισμα*, which is used elsewhere in the New Testament, and *βαπτισμοί* recurs in Heb. 9.10, where it cannot mean ‘baptisms’. So the mention of laying on of hands does not necessarily connect there with baptisms.

<sup>28</sup>G.W.H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1951).

<sup>29</sup>James Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

hands had been sustained through two centuries until their time was hardly surprising. Dix was well answered by Lampe, but subsequent Anglican scholars, particularly Edward Ratcliff, Arthur Couratin and J.D.C. Fisher clung to the Mason-Dix line and would say that the established practice of the third century, as they believed they were seeing it in Hippolytus, is near to proof that the rite of initiation from apostolic times had this two-part character. But the first two Christian centuries are not in fact silent; they provide us today with eight separate authors who make mention of baptism in water, and not one of the eight gives any hint of a further initiatory ceremony conferred within baptism or subsequent to it. The eight witnesses, arranged in a broadly chronological order are well known and are listed here with little further investigation:

1. The *Didache* (or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*) (variously dated between 50 and 100 AD) has in §7 a straightforward set of directions about baptizing (and no mention of a bishop or subsequent ceremony).
2. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 112 AD) twice refers to the baptism of Jesus by John, but also makes explicit reference to baptism in *Smyrnaeans* 8 and in his *Letter to Polycarp* 6.<sup>30</sup> It does appear contrary to the heavy bishop-consciousness of Ignatius that, if he, or other bishops, had been laying hands on everyone baptized, he somehow never found a chance to mention it, or exhort everyone to receive it.
3. *The Epistle of Barnabas* (thought to be from Alexandria c. 100–150 AD) treats of baptism in §11.1–11, multiplying references to water in an almost exclusive way, which strongly suggests that water alone was the ‘matter’ of the sacrament.<sup>31</sup>
4. *2 Clement* (c. 100–140 AD) is a document so labelled as ‘2 Clement’ (but without connection with Clement of Rome). It is viewed as an authentic Christian exhortation of the early second century. Its relevant passages are as follows:

6.9 ‘... if we do not keep our baptism pure and undefiled.’

7.6 ‘For he says, of those who do not keep the seal ...’

8.6 ‘So therefore he says this “Keep the flesh pure and seal spotless” in order that we may have life.’

It looks as though that which is to be ‘kept’ pure is identifiable as either baptism or ‘the seal’, so there is no hint of some other secondary ceremony to constitute the seal.

5. The *Shepherd* of Hermas (from Rome c. 100–150 AD) has several passing allusions to baptism, each identifying water alone as the outward sign in

<sup>30</sup>Everett Ferguson wonders whether the reference (in Eph. 17) to Jesus being anointed on the head (i.e., by the woman at Bethany, Mk 14.3) prior to a reference to Jesus being baptized implies a ‘liturgical sequence’, but this looks extraordinarily far-fetched, and is overtly an instance of attempting to read later practice back into earlier. See Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 209.

<sup>31</sup>Everett Ferguson discusses two other passages (in chs. 6 and 16) which, without mentioning baptism, may imply it (see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, pp. 213–15), but they have no bearing upon the matter at issue here.

initiation, notably: (i) *Visions*.3.7; (ii) *Mandates* 4.3; (iii) *Similitudes* 9.16.1, 3-4 (where 'the seal is the water').<sup>32</sup>

6. The *First Apology* of Justin Martyr (Rome c. 160 AD) is a major work of the great orthodox writer of the West in the mid-second century. And his account of baptism in *1 Apol.* 61 gives a full detailed description of how the candidates were baptized outside the assembly, and were then brought into the company of worshippers, who were being led by a presider. They were welcomed there by inclusion in the prayers, and were then greeted with the kiss of peace, and next shared in the reception of communion. And there is no mention at all of any post-baptismal ceremony, apart from the kiss and communion. And so all commentators who wish to treat the third and fourth century uses as definitive, on the supposed grounds that they are in unbroken continuity from the apostolic times, have then to demonstrate that Justin was concealing some vital practice beneath a highly descriptive text in which he gives no hint of it.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps Paul Bradshaw should have the last word on Justin:

Two of these [earliest sources] in particular – the *Didache* and the description by Justin Martyr – seem to exclude the possibility that anointing was actually practised but simply not mentioned, even though desperate attempts have been made by some to find hidden allusions to the practice in the respective texts.<sup>34</sup>

7. Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 190 AD) wrote of baptism in his *The Demonstration of Apostolic Teaching*, §3 and §7. In his *Adversus Haereses* he mentions baptism in passing, or by allusion, in the following: 1.12.1; 11.22.4; 111.12.7; 111.17.1; 111.17.3.<sup>35</sup> Insofar as these references touch on the sacramental sign used, they do refer quite specifically to water, without hint of any other ceremonies.<sup>36</sup> Ferguson relates the totality of Irenaeus' evidence to the two-stage question:

<sup>32</sup>Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>33</sup>See E.C. Ratcliff, 'Justin Martyr and Confirmation', *Theology* 51.334 (1948), reprinted in A.H. Couratin and D.H. Tripp (eds.), *E. C. Ratcliff: Liturgical Studies* (London: SPCK, 1976), pp. 110-17. He has an earlier essay ('The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism in the Early Roman and Byzantine Liturgies', *Theology* 49.315 and 316 [1946]), reprinted on pp. 118-33. However, 'early' in this title does not mean Justin's *First Apology* in the second century: it means the Gelasian Sacramentary in the sixth or seventh century. In respect of both Ratcliff and Couratin see my edition, *Justin Martyr on Baptism and Eucharist: Texts in Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Alcuin/GROW Joint Liturgical Study 64; London: SCM-Canterbury, 2007), pp. 18-19, 36.

<sup>34</sup>Paul Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (London: SPCK, 2010), p. 85.

<sup>35</sup>Everett Ferguson adds a quotation from a ('probably genuine') fragment saying that Naaman's being baptized in the Jordan was a sign for us that we, lepers in our sins, 'are cleansed from our old transgressions through the holy water and the invocation of the Lord'. See Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 305, quoting Fragment 34.

<sup>36</sup>David Power, in citing *Demonstration* 3, comments in a footnote: 'In the time of Irenaeus, in some churches along with baptism there was an anointing with oil, but he himself does not appear to have known

There is nothing in what survives from Irenaeus about an anointing, a laying on of hands, or a signing in connection with baptism . . . when the language of anointing is employed, it is used figuratively for the gift of the Spirit and not for any literal application of oil.<sup>37</sup>

8. Melito of Sardis wrote *On Baptism* around 170–180 AD, and there is but a fragment thought to be from this work which survives. In it Melito uses comparisons to baptism from manufacturing and from the natural world. The common factor throughout is that water is not only central to all baptisms, but that it and it alone is mentioned – the terminology is of baths, dipping and baptism, all overlapping or even interchangeable with each other.

The sum of the above is that, apart from two exceptional incidents in Acts (and an uncertain reference in Hebrews), there is no evidence in the New Testament of any ancillary or ‘completing’ ceremony to follow baptism. Similarly, the eight Christian authors who in the first two centuries refer, sometimes quite fully, to a baptism which is evidently conducted with water alone, comprise the total post-apostolic evidence available to us from before 200 AD. To insist that some such ceremony was used universally without exception to accompany the baptism in water as an integral feature of sacramental initiation is to stretch credibility beyond breaking-point. The first clear evidence of a second, post-baptismal, ceremony comes with Tertullian in the West and more than a century later in the East.<sup>38</sup> Thus an impossible onus of proof rests upon the two-stagers: we should be done with talk about the ‘disintegration’ of an originally ‘integrated’ rite. If the choice of wording is to convey an evaluation, then we should rather describe the later ‘complicating’ of an originally ‘straightforward’ rite.

### Latterday Anglican Practice

Despite all the above, before 1970 confirmation was administered and valued throughout the Anglican world as though it had been commanded by Christ to accompany baptism. No child could receive communion until confirmed; no unconfirmed visitor from another Christian denomination could receive communion at an Anglican Eucharist. The whole Communion was ring-fenced by confirmation. But bold spirits were testing the fencing – and, as will have been seen above, the theological case for understanding baptism as complete sacramental initiation was emboldening the call for reform. In the USA, Prayer Book Studies 18

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of this rite.’ (David N. Power, *Irenaeus of Lyons on Baptism and Eucharist* (Alcuin/GROW Joint Liturgical Study 18; Bramcote: Grove Books, 1991), p. 8, n. 3.

<sup>37</sup>Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 305.

<sup>38</sup>Theophilus of Antioch, towards the end of the second century, does refer to being ‘anointed with the oil of God’, and if this implies a separate post-baptismal use of physical oil (which is very uncertain), then such use of oil in the East came a fraction earlier than Tertullian’s witness to a laying on of hands in the West. If, however, he is using it (in line with St Paul’s references to being ‘anointed’) about the inward spiritual gift of baptism, then he increases the number of relevant earliest authors to nine. And if he is referring to the pre-baptismal anointing in the East, then that does not sit well with any two-stage theory.

in 1970 strongly recommended that children should be admitted to communion on the basis of their baptism. However, they also recommended that at baptism there should also be a 'sealing' by the laying on of hands, so they were arguably still featuring a Mason-Dix understanding of the rite. This was canonically implemented, and of course gave entry to communion to children who had already been baptized without the 'sealing' ceremony with the then-current 1928 Book. In New Zealand in 1970 Brian Davis, Dean of Waiapu, had persuaded his diocese to permit the admission of his own children to communion in that same year. In England, the 1971 'Ely' report, *Christian Initiation: Birth and Growth in the Christian Society*,<sup>39</sup> had also recommended this, and had even recommended an end of requiring confirmation for those baptized as adults. The General Synod, hampered by traditionalist bishops, took 26 years to accept that unconfirmed children could receive communion, and has not addressed the further recommendation concerning those baptized as adults since 1974. At the same time, all round the world ecumenical relationships were bringing pressures to bear upon the exclusiveness of confirmation, and in England in 1971 a change in the Canons explicitly provided for eucharistic hospitality to be offered to those baptized but unconfirmed from other denominations. Confirmation was, canonically, both absolutely requisite, and yet now, in specified cases, dispensable. The International Anglican Liturgical Consultations in 1985 and 1991, calling for the admission of children to communion on the basis of their baptism, stated that sacramental initiation was complete in water-baptism.<sup>40</sup> Then the 1988 Lambeth Conference reinforced the point: 'Baptism by water is the scriptural sacrament of once-for-all initiation into Christ and into his Body.'<sup>41</sup> So these statements excluded confirmation from any initiatory role, and precluded any suggestion that an indispensable gift of the Spirit was ministered through the laying on of hands.

How then stood the liturgical rites? Within the baptismal rite in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* of The Episcopal Church the rubrics of baptism require a sequence whereby the use of the water is followed, either after a thanksgiving prayer or immediately, by the laying on of an episcopal or presbyteral hand with the making of the sign of the cross (with chrism 'if desired'), and the spoken formula:

N. you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen.<sup>42</sup>

So we seem to be back with an 'integrated' rite with two distinct halves, the second of which appears to be the 'seal' of the Holy Spirit, but the whole process is called 'baptism'. This imposes a two-stage process for initiation, while calling it by a one-stage name, simply 'baptism'. So there remains an ambiguity about affirming that sacramental initiation is complete in baptism. And in the 1979 Book the

<sup>39</sup>Ely Report, *Christian Initiation: Birth and Growth in the Christian Society* (London: CIO, 1971).

<sup>40</sup>These are to be found in David Holetton (ed.), *Growing in Newness of Life* (Toronto: ABC, 1993), or in Ruth Meyers, *Continuing the Reformation* (New York: Church Publishing Inc, 1997), pp. 269-70.

<sup>41</sup>*The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988* (ACC, 1988), p. 70.

<sup>42</sup>The Episcopal Church of the United States of America, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), p. 308.

separate rite for confirmation, printed among the 'Pastoral Services', does not only provide for the ratification of the baptismal covenant for those baptized as infants, but also increases the ambiguity of interpretation. An opening rubric directs:

Those baptized as adults, unless baptized with the laying on of hands by a bishop, are also expected to make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism in the presence of a bishop and to receive the laying on of hands.<sup>43</sup>

So here we are back with the 1662 dilemma – that professing the faith at the point of being baptized as an adult does not suffice for initiatory purposes: one way or another there still has to be a laying on of a bishop's hands. As with the infant rite, we are to have a requisite ceremony, one strongly suggestive of a Mason-Dix understanding, and lacking any other particular rationale.<sup>44</sup>

Thus it is even possible that the American bishops at Lambeth in 1988 accepted the bald statement that 'Baptism in water is the scriptural sacrament of once-for-all initiation' as in fact connoting the complex baptism which their 1979 Book prescribed. The more general Toronto statement of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation in 1991, 'Baptism is complete sacramental initiation',<sup>45</sup> does not quite so visibly limit the 'matter' of the sacrament to the use of water, but there the signatories were nevertheless excluding confirmation from being part of sacramental initiation.

But in general, round the Anglican world confirmation has run on as a distinctive rite, and rubrics have deemed it necessary even for those baptized as adults. Away from England it has been listed with 'pastoral rites' or 'episcopal services', but the Church of England, in line with the origin of its modern rites in 1958, has continued to list it under 'initiation'. Yet alongside this sits uncomfortably the theological finding that confirmation is no part of sacramental initiation, and has no standing in either the Bible or the first two Christian centuries as some given complement or completion to water-baptism.

Here is a dilemma not only for the liturgical theologians and the canonists, but also for any Christian attending Anglican services. The believer, perhaps coming from elsewhere finds an Anglican church, joins in communion, shares in the fellowship, and then there comes a question of confirmation. And to some at least the question presses 'Why should I at this stage of Christian life be confirmed?' or 'What good will confirmation do?' In the days of Mason-Dix or during the use in England of the 1928 Prayer Book, the answer might well have been that the 'special gift' is only granted by this means and that those merely baptized are only half-

<sup>43</sup>The Episcopal Church of the United States of America, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 412.

<sup>44</sup>Ruth Meyers points out that the rubric was inserted by the General Convention in 1976 (in other words it was not in the 'Blue Book' from the Commission which was being proposed). Its insertion leads her to say: 'If baptism is full Christian initiation, it is difficult to see what such a rite adds for adults who make a profession of faith at their baptism' (Meyers, *Continuing the Reformation*, p. 187). Marion Hatchett describes it more neutrally as a rubrical 'expectation' but without much rationale. See Marion Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1980), p. 272.

<sup>45</sup>David R. Holeton (ed.), *Growing in Newness of Life: Christian Initiation in Anglicanism Today* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1993), p. 229.



initiated. But the collapse of that rationale has left us with a nearly compulsory ceremony with no clear rationale apart from the renewal of baptismal vows at the age of discretion for those baptized as infants. An apologia for it nowadays cannot say ‘well, you cannot receive communion without being confirmed’, for that has become incredible. So the apologia is more likely to be ‘Well this is the Anglican way’, which is no apologia at all to the enquiring mind. Thus, while all provinces still require confirmation prior to ordination, it is much less certain that confirmation is a universal *sine qua non* for holding lay office, or being licensed as a lay ‘pastoral minister’ or lay ‘reader’, or being elected to a church council or synod. Requirements for these vary from province to province. And where confirmation is required, notably for ordination, it is fully possible and certainly logical for the candidate to see no spiritual purpose in it, but to regard it as simply fulfilling a bureaucratic regulation.

Yet there remains some undefined difference of ranking between those who are ‘baptized’ and those who are ‘baptized and confirmed’. The difference is undefined, of course, as from 1549 to today the Anglican Communion has, as a Communion, had no doctrine of confirmation, even while generally treating it as obligatory. That said, the 1888 Lambeth Quadrilateral included no mention of it as vital in ecumenical negotiations; the 1920 Lambeth ‘Appeal’, while reaffirming the Quadrilateral added to it not a requirement but a footnote which looked forward to when all can ‘share in that grace which is pledged . . . in the apostolic rite of the laying on of hands’<sup>46</sup>; union schemes have given different messages about confirmation; and a survey of modern catechisms reveals some not touching on confirmation, others mentioning commitment or stating that it provides ‘strength’ through prayer and the laying on of hands.<sup>47</sup> The New Zealand catechism calls it ‘Confirmation, or commissioning for Christian witness and service’, though witness and service are commissioned in baptism. There is little anywhere nowadays to suggest it is indispensable before God, or that any grace attributed to it is unique to it.

### Further Changes Needed

This survey has drawn attention to two points of contrast between Anglican practice and the ever-more confident assertion that sacramental initiation is complete in baptism.

Firstly, there are the liturgical rites.

Clearly, a rite to enable those baptized as infants later to accept and ratify publicly the baptismal commitment made in their names is pastorally useful; and a case for a bishop to preside at such a rite is easily made. But that exposes as redundant the addition of confirmation to the baptism of adults who have in the same rite already made their baptismal commitment. They are not even asked to renew that commitment – it is accepted as once affirmed. So what does the confirmation offer

<sup>46</sup>‘An Appeal to All Christian People’, in *Lambeth Conferences 1865–1937* (London: SPCK, 1948), p. 39.

<sup>47</sup>In the Church of England, the ‘Christ eucharist’ text commended by the House of Bishops for use on Maundy Thursday has, in its prayer over the ‘oil of confirmation’, all too strong an echo of a ‘special gift’ of the Spirit being thus conveyed.

or convey over above the baptism? Surely anything then attributed to confirmation has first to be detached from baptism? Is a Christian in any way more a Christian or a member of Christ or more committed because a bishop has laid a hand on her or his head? If a symbolic bonding with the bishop is valued, then receiving the greeting of peace and sharing in communion with the bishop presiding would surely make the point? And, we should insist, that 'symbolic bonding' is itself a cosmetic benefit rather than a revealed means of grace: those baptized at a service with no bishop present belong fully to the body of Christ, and share in communion on that basis. Lampe thought it an open question whether Cranmer, had he been providing a service of adult baptism, would not have expected confirmation to follow it,<sup>48</sup> and the Church of England 'Ely' report in 1971 proposed abolishing any such requirement. In years following I served on Revision Committees of General Synod revising initiation services both in 1978–79 for the Alternative Services Book and in 1996–99 for Common Worship; and on both Committees we expressed doubt about the propriety of confirmation following adult baptism, but on both decided on a split vote that it was beyond our competence. It was referred back to the House of Bishops, and they have remained silent on the issue.

The other major liturgical issue is the form of The Episcopal Church's baptism, printed above. It is a form imitated in rites derived from the USA – Brazil, Korea, the Philippines – but also in the Scottish Episcopal Church. The mandatory laying on of hands (whether for adults or infants) with the phrase accompanying it that 'N. you are sealed with the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever' is highly ambiguous. Of course, Anglicans are used to secondary ceremonies accompanying baptism – the sign of the cross ever since 1549, and the giving of a candle and, less frequently, the provision of a white robe, in more recent times. But these accompaniments are clearly explicative of the central act of baptism, not a missing element not conveyed to complete it, nor an add-on to top it up. That was clearly expressed in Canon 30 of 1604, to which the 1662 infant baptism rite refers.<sup>49</sup> Its non-sacramental identity has been reinforced in the Church of England by the provision that it can come before baptism (fulfilling an apotropaic role) instead of after. The candle and the robe, even if required in one or another province are each acknowledged to be optional extras, and any meaning assigned to them is explicative of baptism itself. These additions are in a different category of post-baptismal ceremonies from either the laying on of hands or anointing, as these latter both in other Churches and at times in Anglicanism have been taught as God-given necessary complements to water-baptism, without which anyone simply baptized remains only half-initiated. There is need to distance our rites from such a misapprehension, wholly contrary to the dawning insistence that sacramental initiation is complete in baptism. It calls in question the laying on of a hand (as a 'seal') in the TEC rite, and the general insistence that adults baptized should also be confirmed, whether at the baptism rite or some time after.

<sup>48</sup>Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, p. 316.

<sup>49</sup>The explanation was of course defensive against the puritan attempts to remove the sign of the cross – as the sign was itself under attack as superstitious, wherever it came, but this was the only point in the Reformation settlement where the sign was mentioned as retained, and so it attracted opposition.

The other continuing problem, bound up with the liturgical programme but extending into the canonical sphere, is the issue of status. In all sorts of ways, confirmation confers a status which in some way elevates the confirmed to a status with a value and currency outstripping that of baptism. The key to this lies in its unrepeatability – while the ‘character’ language of Lombard’s ontology is lacking, the treatment of the confirmed fixes the same concept upon them – they are marked for life. By contrast, a sick person who is anointed does not thereafter get ranked as in a class of the ‘anointed’ – because the sick person can be anointed again, so no distinctive lasting status is conferred in such anointing. But the confirmed rank with the baptized and with the ordained as having now a lasting Christian identity as such, and that is without scriptural warrant, and tends to distort the norms of Anglican structures and patterns of discipleship.

So what is the redress?

The great signal would be the dispensing with confirmation for those baptized as adults. Baptism would then be seen as fully initiatory and itself the rite of commissioning for service. The status of being confirmed would cease to signify. And the requirement of confirmation prior to ordination or the holding of lay office would have to cease with it. A further needed accompanying change would be for Anglicans to receive baptized communicants from other denominations without the laying on of a bishop’s hands – some kind of question and answer and certification and welcome would meet the case. And the accustomed use of confirmation for those baptized as infants and professing faith at years of discretion could continue, but the change would be better signalled by a change of name, and the recasting of the rite so that it became repeatable and adaptable for the restoration of the lapsed, even when they needed to be restored for a second time. The growth in the practice of submersion with the renewal of baptismal vows perhaps provides a pointer to the future.

So what qualification would be needed for lay office or for ordination? Properly, the answer ought to be that all that is necessary for a lay person to be in good standing is that he or she should be a communicant. Nor is this a revolutionary concept – the 1604 Canons of the Church of England specified that godparents should be communicants; and, in a different context, when first steps were taken in the late nineteenth century to form Houses of Laity for both York and Canterbury, the qualification for electors was that they should be communicants. Later, when electoral rolls, parochial church councils and so on, were being formed by the Representative Church Council in 1918–19, there was a concern for precision which ‘communicant’ was deemed not to provide, and (after some battling) baptism alone was required for inclusion on the electoral roll as a voter, whereas confirmation was required for holding office.

There is also precedent elsewhere. In the Church of Ireland, a lay person, to be a parochial nominator or a member of General Synod, has for many years (possibly since the formation of the disestablished Church in 1871) had to sign up that he or she is a communicant member of the Church of Ireland. Again, there may have been a presumption of confirmation, but the affirmation has been that of being communicant. ‘Communicant’ also appears in the rules of the Anglican Church of Canada, where the constitution of General Synod requires lay members of Synod to be communicants who are members of, or eligible to be members of, their diocesan

synod. The diocesan synods vary from each other in their own rules of membership, but 'communicant' status is sufficient in at least some of them. Confirmation still seems to be required in all provinces as a qualification for ordination, but in the light of the slow trend charted above, such a requirement begins to look paradoxical.

There remains the loose end of 'membership'. Membership of the body of Christ is agreed to be sacramentally conveyed in baptism. Beyond that, 'being an Anglican' may be identified solely by having had an Anglican upbringing or attending an Anglican church. It is not easy to relate it to Anglican confirmation, except for believers overtly changing denominations. It is more precisely demarcated by belonging to a particular parish or congregation, and this may be recorded on an electoral roll or similar listing, and may perhaps be certified in a document given to the member. In the Church of England those joining the electoral roll affirm that they are baptized and 'members of the Church of England' – that is, their membership preceded their enrolment. It is a wholly imprecise area and probably not amenable to attempts to regularize it on an international basis; but it is clear that it is not inextricably related to confirmation; and the cessation of once-for-life confirmation would clarify that distinctiveness rather than complicate it. However, being a communicant could well figure in a qualification.

So do Anglicans believe that sacramental initiation is complete in baptism? If not, then yet further scrutiny of the biblical and early patristic texts is indicated. But if so, then our corporate and constitutional practice needs some rigorous rethinking.