

General Synod

GS 225

Alternative Services Series 3

# Infant Baptism

A Report by the  
Liturgical Commission of the  
General Synod of the  
Church of England

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## Introduction

Until some conclusions emerge from the debate on the Ely report, it is necessary to postpone further work on most of the rites of initiation. The Liturgical Commission has, however, been asked to prepare a Series 3 service for infant baptism. We have taken this instruction literally, and now present an order which is limited in its scope to those who are correctly described as infants, that is to say those who cannot speak. We are aware that there is a need for some special provision for children who are old enough to be conscious of what is happening and to be treated as individual people but who are not old enough to make their own decisions. Provision of this kind must wait for the outcome of the debate. Similarly, we are aware that when the debate is over, the order of service which we now present may need to be amended in certain ways: for example, to include the laying on of hands and possibly anointing. We shall have no difficulty in amending the service if that is what the General Synod desires; but in that case we believe the Synod should state clearly the meaning it attaches to such a service.

In presenting this report we are happily conscious that the Series 2 orders of Baptism were well received in the Church of England. We have therefore not attempted to make any changes except by way of addition, unless we were satisfied that there was good reason for it. In the following paragraphs we set out the reasons for such changes as we have made.

**No. 1.** We have set out the duties of parents and godparents in the form of an address and not in the form of a rubric as it appeared in Series 2. Some people, we know, are anxious that such an address should appear in the course of the service. But there are others who believe that such an address carries more weight and is more effective when it is delivered by the priest in his own words, and others again who prefer that such matters are dealt with in the course of pastoral ministration rather than in the liturgy. We do not propose, therefore, that this address should be mandatory in the course of the service, either in its use or in its terms.

**No. 2.** The Series 2 introduction to this service has been found in practice to be difficult, and the alternation of homilies and prayers to be inconvenient. We have therefore rewritten this passage in the form of one homily and one prayer, and it will be found that all the elements of the Series 2 introduction have been preserved with the exception of the story of our Lord blessing the children. Apart from the difficulties felt by some scholars in accepting that this story has any connection with baptism, we believe that it will be very appropriate in a service for the Blessing of Infants, if such a service is required by the Church.

**No. 4.** From very ancient times it has been the practice of the Church in the baptism of infants to address questions to children who do not understand them and to credit the children with the answers given by their sponsors. This is the practice of the Book of Common Prayer, and it is based on the assumption

that responsible adults may act for their children. Since the time of the Reformation, however, critics of this practice have urged that the questions ought to be addressed to the parents and godparents on their own account, to make inquiry into their own faith and repentance. We believe that both of these approaches contain elements of value, and that our proper course is not to exclude either of them. We have therefore provided that the parents and godparents answer the questions both for themselves and for their children.

An assumption which underlies these questions, both in Series 2 and in this revision, is that infants are presented by parents and godparents who are believers and can answer in good faith the questions which are put to them. We do not accept the view that these questions ought to be modified in such a way that they can be answered by people with no Christian convictions. If it is found that this raises difficulties on some occasions, when parents or godparents either will not answer the questions, or ought not to be encouraged to answer them, then the proper solution of the difficulty lies in the field of pastoral ministration and not of liturgical reform. We are aware, however, that there are cases where responsible Christian parents cannot well find suitable godparents, and other cases where parents who cannot conscientiously answer the questions themselves desire baptism for their children, and are prepared to provide them with responsible godparents. While these cases raise the whole issue of the number of sponsors to be provided for each child, and the question whether the provision of sponsors should be mandatory, we are at present bound by the clear requirements of Canon B 23.

We find that the three questions in the Decision have won so much approval that it would be wrong to alter them. The question, 'Do you turn to Christ?' has, however, occasioned questioning in some quarters, and it may be helpful if we explain that we have borrowed this manner of expression from familiar passages in the Prayer Book order of Holy Communion, where it appears in the absolution and in the preamble to the Comfortable Words. The picture which these passages give is of the Christian who turns from a sinful past and redirects his life towards Christ. We believe that such a picture is as appropriate for the candidate for baptism, and for the parents and godparents of children, as it is for the communicant.

**No. 5.** Experience has shown that in Series 2 the Decision comes to rather an abrupt end and needs to be completed with an appropriate prayer. This we have provided in no. 5.

**No. 7.** It will be noted that the cross-heading 'The Blessing of the Water' has been omitted and that the prayer has been included under the heading 'The Baptism.' It seems desirable to keep cross-headings to a minimum, and by this arrangement we group together everything which necessarily takes place at the font.

The basic theme of the new prayer is water. The prayer sets out the variety of contexts in which water is significant both in nature and in Scripture, and then draws the variety into unity in baptism. It includes the neglected truth that water is a sign not only of cleansing but also of new life and resurrection; and it restores the traditional Exodus typology. No matter of substance in the

prayer of Series 2 is omitted, and we believe that the new insights which this prayer incorporates justify a departure from Series 2 at this point.

**Nos. 8, 9, 10.** The profession of faith is not merely an assent to certain intellectual propositions about God: it is an act of personal commitment and an expression of faith and trust in God. The three questions and their answers in the Series 2 service were framed so as to make this clear, and we have accordingly preserved them in this revision without alteration. We have also been careful to preserve the position of the confession of faith in the closest possible association with the baptism itself. We think it important at this central point in the service to follow the almost universal order of Western Christendom. Baptism was well described by St Augustine as the 'sacrament of faith', and this profession of faith, at this point of the service, deliberately isolated from any other interrogation, helps to make it clear that the true and essential character of the baptized Christian is that he is one who puts his faith and trust in the Holy Trinity.

It ought to be recognized that our primary concern in baptism is with the faith of the candidate, whether adult or infant, and that these questions ought therefore to be addressed only to the candidate and his sponsors, and ought to be answered only by them. However, since it is desirable that the congregation should associate itself with the candidate in his profession, and since it is often anxious to do so, we have added a further brief passage (no. 9) to achieve this association: and we have employed the same passage to make it clear that the threefold profession relates to one God, and so avoid the suspicion of tritheism.

The desire has been expressed in some quarters that the Apostles' Creed should find a place in the rite, and we have accordingly restored it. But the Creed makes a substantial addition to the length of this passage in the rite and of the service as a whole. We have therefore provided that its use in the baptism service is optional.

**No. 17.** Not the least effect on those who attend a baptism, whether they are few or many, is that each of them is reminded of his own baptism and may be led to pray that he may be faithful to it. We have accordingly introduced a final prayer which includes the petition that 'each one of us may grow into the pattern of our baptism'. The pattern of baptism is primarily the pattern of death and resurrection to new life. The whole meaning of the sacrament is not exhausted when the service is completed and the family goes home from the church, for baptism provides a pattern or mould into which we must grow. We believe that this is a valuable image, for it gives simple expression to the profound truth that the business of the baptized person is to become what his baptism makes him. Thus in baptism he is made 'the child of God'; but this has to be realized in life and experience. He dies and rises with Christ in baptism: but this has to be made good and practised in daily life.

The prayer looks forward to the perfection of the whole creation in Christ, and this fittingly ends a service which began with a reference to creation as the context of the new creation which is accomplished in the sacrament of baptism.

## Notes

- 1 Where rubrics indicate that a passage is to be said by 'the priest', this must be understood to include any other minister authorized to administer Holy Baptism.
- 2 **Hymns.** If occasion requires, hymns may be sung at points other than that which is indicated in this order.
- 3 **Permitted Omissions.** Sections with numbers in brackets may be omitted.
- 4 The priest explains their duties to parents and godparents either in the words set out in this order (1) or in his own words. If he does not do this privately in their own homes, he may do so in church at the beginning of the service or in a sermon.
- 5 At the signing with the cross and the giving of a candle, the priest or other minister may address the candidate by name.
- 6 **The People's Responses.** At the signing with the cross and the giving of a candle, it is sufficient if the people join and say their part (13, 15) once only, when all have been signed or when all have received a candle.
- 7 **The Giving of the Candle.** A lighted candle, which may be the Paschal candle, can be made ready so that other candles may be lighted from it. It may also be useful to provide a stand on which the lighted candles may be placed by the godparents.
- 8 **Other Material.** At nos. 10 and 18 the 1662 or Series 2 versions may be used in place of those printed.
- 9 When this order is used apart from the services of Morning or Evening Prayer or of Holy Communion, it is desirable that representatives of the regular congregation should attend the service, so that they may welcome the newly-baptized and be put in mind of their own baptism.
- 10 **Conditional Baptism.** If it is not certain that a child was baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, then the usual service of baptism is used, but the form of words at the baptism (11) shall be:  
*N., if you have not already been baptized, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*
- 11 **Emergency Baptism.** The minister, having asked the name of the one to be baptized, pours water on *his* forehead saying, *N., I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.* He then says at least the Lord's Prayer and ends with this blessing:

*God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,  
bless, preserve, and keep you, this day and evermore.*

If he lives, a child so baptized shall afterwards be brought to church and the baptism service is said, except that no. 7 and no. 11 are omitted and at no. 8 the priest says: *You must now profess before God and his church the Christian faith into which this child has been baptized and in which you will bring him up. You must answer for yourselves and for this child.*

## Infant Baptism

### The Duties of Parents and Godparents

- 1 *The priest explains their duties to parents and godparents in these or similar words:* Children who are too young to profess the Christian faith are baptized on the understanding that they are brought up as Christians within the family of the Church.

As they grow up they need help and encouragement so that they learn to worship God, to pray to him, and to put their faith and trust in him. Parents and godparents, *these children* depend chiefly on you for the help and encouragement *they* need. Are you willing to give it to *them* by your teaching, your example, and your prayers?

*Parents and  
Godparents*    **I am willing.**

### The Ministry of the Word

- 2 *The priest says,*  
*All*            **The Lord is loving unto every man:  
and his mercy is over all his works.**  
*Priest*

God is the creator of all things, and in the birth of their children he gives to parents a share in the work and joy of creation. But in the gospel Jesus tells us that we who are born of earthly parents need to be born again, for he said: 'Flesh can give birth only to flesh; it is spirit that gives birth to spirit.' He said also: 'Unless a man has been born over again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.' And so God gives us the way to a second birth, a new creation, and life in union with him.

Baptism is the sign and seal of this new birth. Jesus commanded his disciples to preach the gospel to all nations and to baptize men everywhere. They obeyed this command, and we read of St Peter preaching in these words: 'Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord calls to him.'

In obedience to this same command we ourselves were baptized and now bring *these children* to baptism. We thank God therefore for our own baptism to life in Christ, and we pray for *these children* | *this boy, A.B.* | *this girl, C.D.*, and say together,

3 **Heavenly Father, in your love  
you have called us to know you,  
led us to trust you,  
and bound our life with yours.  
Surround *these children* with your love;  
protect *them* from evil;  
fill *them* with your Holy Spirit;  
and receive *them* into the family of your Church;  
that *they* may walk with us in the way of holiness  
and grow in the knowledge of your love. Amen.**

### The Decision

4 *The parents and godparents stand, and the priest says to them,*  
Those who bring children to be baptized must affirm their  
allegiance to Christ and their rejection of all that is evil.

It is your duty to bring up *these children* to fight against evil  
and to follow Christ.

Therefore I ask these questions, which you must answer  
for yourselves and for *these children*.

Do you turn to Christ?

*Answer* **I turn to Christ.**

Do you repent of your sins?

*Answer* **I repent of my sins.**

Do you renounce evil?

*Answer* **I renounce evil.**

5 *Then the priest says,*  
May Almighty God deliver you from the powers of darkness,  
and lead you in the light and obedience of Christ.

*All* **Amen.**

### The Baptism

(6) *A hymn or psalm may be sung.*

7 *The priest goes to the font with the parents and godparents and the children  
to be baptized, and says,*

*All* Praise God who made heaven and earth,  
**who keeps his promise for ever.**

*Priest* Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ was baptized in the  
river Jordan,  
We thank you for the gift of water to cleanse us and revive us;

We thank you that you delivered your people from bondage  
and led them through the waters of the Red Sea to freedom  
in the promised land;

We thank you that through the deep waters of death you  
brought your Son, and raised him to life in triumph.

Bless this water, that your servants who are washed in it  
may be made one with Christ, in his death and in his  
resurrection, to be cleansed and delivered from all sin.  
Send your Holy Spirit upon them to bring them to new  
birth in the family of your Church, and raise them with  
Christ to full and eternal life.

For all might, majesty, authority, and power are yours, now  
and for ever.

*All* **Amen.**

8 *The priest says to the parents and godparents,*  
You have brought *these children* to baptism. You must now  
profess before God and his Church the Christian faith into  
which *they are* to be baptized and in which you will bring  
*them up*. You must answer for yourselves and for *these  
children*.

Do you believe and trust in God the Father who made the  
world?  
*Parents and Godparents* **I believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in his Son, Jesus Christ, who  
redeemed mankind?  
*Parents and Godparents* **I believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in his Holy Spirit, who sanctifies the  
people of God?  
*Parents and Godparents* **I believe and trust in him.**

9 *The priest says,*  
This is the faith of the Church.  
*All* **This is our faith;  
We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

(10) *All may say,*  
**I believe in God the Father Almighty  
creator of heaven and earth.**  
**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.**  
**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.**  
**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.**  
**He descended to the dead.**  
**On the third day he rose again.**

He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

- 11 *The priest takes each child, and having asked his name, he dips him in the water or pours water on him, saying,*

N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.

*All* Amen.

### The Signing with the Cross and the Welcome

- 12 *The priest makes a cross on the forehead of each child, saying to each,*  
I sign you with the cross, the sign of Christ.

- 13 *When all have been signed, he says,*  
Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified.

*All* Fight manfully under his banner  
against sin, the world, and the devil,  
and continue his faithful soldier and servant  
to your life's end.

- (14) *A minister may give to a parent or godparent for each child a lighted candle,*  
saying to each,  
Receive this light.

- (15) *And when a candle has been given to each one, he says,*  
This is to show that you have passed from darkness to light.

*All* Shine as a light in the world  
to the glory of God the Father.

- 16 *The priest says,*  
God has received you by baptism into his Church.

*All* We therefore welcome you into the Lord's family,  
as fellow members of the body of Christ,  
as children of the same heavenly Father,  
as inheritors with us of the kingdom of God.

### The Prayers

- 17 *Priest* Lord God our Father, maker of heaven and earth, we thank  
you that by your Holy Spirit *these children* have been born  
again into new life, adopted for your own, and received into  
the fellowship of your Church:

Grant that *they* may grow in the faith into which *they have*  
been baptized;  
that *they* may profess it for *themselves* when *they come* to be  
confirmed;  
and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow  
in *them*.

*All*

Amen.

*Priest*

Heavenly Father, we pray for the parents of *these children*;  
give *them* the spirit of wisdom and love, that *their homes* may  
reflect the joy of your eternal kingdom.

*All*

Amen.

*Priest*

Almighty God, we thank you for our fellowship in the  
household of faith with all those who have been baptized in  
your name. Help each one of us to grow into the pattern of  
our baptism, and so hasten that day when the whole creation  
shall be made perfect in your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

*All*

Amen.

18 *All*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Do not bring us to the time of trial  
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

19 *Priest*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and  
the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.  
Amen.

20 *Infant Baptism in the context of Holy Communion*

Holy Communion Series 3, nos 1–13 (the Creed (13) may be  
omitted).

The Baptism service (no. 1 may be omitted; nos. 18, 19 are  
omitted).

The notices (Holy Communion Series 3, no. 14).

The Prayers of Intercession (Holy Communion Series 3,  
no. 15, or Baptism, no. 17).

The Prayers of Penitence (Holy Communion Series 3,  
nos. 16–20) may be omitted.

Holy Communion Series 3, nos. 21–45.

21 *Infant Baptism in the Context of Morning or Evening Prayer*

Morning or Evening Prayer, to the end of the second lesson.

The Baptism service (no. 1 may be omitted; nos. 18, 19 are omitted).

Morning or Evening Prayer, to the end of the service.

*or*

The same, except that Infant Baptism, no. 17, may be used at the end of Morning or Evening Prayer.

22 *Lessons which may be used at Holy Communion or at Morning and Evening Prayer*

Exod. 14.19-31      Rom. 6.3-11      Matt. 28.16-20

Deut. 11.8-21      Rom. 8.11-17      Mark 1.1-11

1 Kings 5.1-14      Gal. 5.16-25      Mark 10.13-16

Isa. 44.1-5      1 Pet. 2.4-10      John 3.1-8

*except that on Christmas Day, Ash Wednesday, Passion Sunday, Palm Sunday and the fourteen days following, Ascension Day, Whitsunday and the seven days following, the lessons of the day are read.*