

## *Cross†Way*

(C)opyright Church Society; material may be used for non-profit purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and the text is not altered.

As from Easter 1998 the first of the new contemporary language services, Initiation, has been available for use. Many churches up and down the land will probably already have used this service for Baptism, confirmation and so on. However, many others, when they study the service will feel some considerable disquiet about what they see. This article will examine the options open to parishes regarding the use of the new services, and in particular the new Baptism service.

Which services can and cannot be used are regulated by Canon Law. At present, in the case of Baptism there are now three options, *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Alternative Service Book 1980* and *Common Worship* (the overall title for the new services). Where churches have continued to use the BCP there will not be an issue since little in the new service will induce them to adopt it. However, where churches, for whatever reasons, adopted the ASB service, they will now be confronted with various choices. At some stage they will have to abandon the ASB service. It appears that provision will be made for churches to continue using the ASB for financial reasons, but this will only be for a few years at most. In any event, within 5-7 years parishes will have to change.

As always the PCC and Incumbent have to agree on which service to use, otherwise (under Canon B3.2) the parish will have to use the BCP. Therefore, if a church wishes to use contemporary language liturgy it must use the new service, or do something more radical.

The level of discontent with the new Initiation service can be seen from the fact that one fifth of the House of Laity of the General Synod voted against authorising it. Furthermore, it emerged in the debates that although some (not evangelicals) voted in favour, they said they would not use the services as authorised. Others accepted them as 'the best we can do' and of course there are always those who do not like to rock the boat by voting against things. Therefore parishes should not think that they are alone if they decide they cannot use the services as they are.

What should be done? Many parishes have been quite happy to ignore the letter of the law in the past. Those who have use *An English Prayer Book* do so in the conviction that it is within, or perhaps not far out of, what is allowed under Canon B5 - that is changes that are not of substantial importance. Others use the ASB, but may omit sections (such as the prayers) or modify them. It is therefore to be expected that many parishes, unhappy with the new service, will opt for one of the following:

- Adapt the new services by doctoring them to fit evangelical emphases
- Use other formal liturgy, such as *An English Prayer Book*
- Have a service which only loosely employs formal liturgy.

In a future article the new service will be examined to see why many believe that it falls short of the biblical standard as set out in the 39 Articles. In the light of this it will be possible to see ways in which the service might be adapted, mostly within what is allowed by the rubrics, to enable evangelicals to use it with integrity.

The best place to turn to understand the legalities of the Church of England services is a small booklet entitled, *Public Worship in the Church of England*, (50p from Church House Bookshop and some local Christian bookshops). A further booklet, *Liturgical Texts for Local Use*, (also 50p) covers copyright issues and rules governing production and copying of services for local use.

The Revd David Phillips is a member of General Synod and Director Designate of Church Society.