

# **The baptismal liturgy as a tool for mission and engagement – a discussion with the British *Methodist Worship Book 1999*.**

## **Introduction**

During sixteen years of presbyteral ministry, I have taken a steady stream of baptisms of babies and young children. In Milton Keynes (Buckinghamshire), Hackney (east London) and more recently, in Golders Green and Hendon (north London), families have ranged from those who are regular worshippers to those with little or no church background. Unlike most funerals I conduct, baptisms take place in a local church.

The British Methodist Church's Statistics for Mission for 1 November 2011 to 31 October 2012 show there were 10,189 baptisms taking place in Methodist Churches (including LEPs). 6,177 were babies under 1 year old and 3,329 children between 1 and 12 years of age. These together represent 93% of the total. (There were 515 thanksgivings after the birth or adoption of a child. This is less than the total teenage and adult baptisms which numbered 683.)<sup>1</sup> Our baptismal service is the key liturgy for mission with those of little church culture.

The British *Methodist Worship Book (MWB)* of 1999 was the result of almost ten years of preparation, debate and feedback from draft services which were tested in local congregations. The study of British Methodism's baptism liturgy helps us to see how the Church's own identity and mission relates to that of the wider Church and society.

## **Scripture**

Scripture provides various images and emphases for baptism.

Jesus himself was baptised by John the Baptist who appeared 'proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Mark 1:4).<sup>2</sup> Referring to his own suffering and death, Jesus asks his disciples whether they are able to 'be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' (Mark 10:38). Using the imagery of washing and cleansing, baptism is an ablution so 'our hearts [are] sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water' (Hebrews 10:22).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/stats-National-100pceestimates-1213-0513.pdf> [accessed 12 July 2013] p38

<sup>2</sup> All biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

On the Day of Pentecost, 'Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"' (Acts 2:38).

Paul in Romans Chapter 6 uses the imagery of death and resurrection. 'Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life' (Romans 6:4).

Imagery associated with baptism can also be found in Hebrew Scripture. God says to Moses, 'Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall wash them with water' (Exodus 40:12). There are several references to ritual cleansing following contact with unclean objects including Leviticus 11:24-40 and Numbers 9:1-24. Cleansing becomes associated with morality. 'Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts' (Psalm 24.3-4a).

Maxwell Johnson highlights the baptism of Jesus and the coronation of kings in the Old Testament. He connects the 'identity and coronation of kings in ancient Israel... to the identity and vocation of that one known as the "Suffering Servant"' in Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>3</sup>

Oil is used in some traditions for anointing at baptism. Such anointing is also found in Hebrew Scripture. In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel anoints David with oil in preparation for kingship. The root of the Hebrew word for 'anointing' is the same as for the word 'messiah' and indeed 'Christ'.

### **Methodist Worship Book**

The British *Methodist Worship Book (MWB)* of 1999 has five permutations of baptism and confirmation under the heading 'Entry into the church'. The general introduction to this section states, 'Baptism shows the love of God for all people' and that 'Water, the central symbol of Baptism, speaks to us – among other things – of being washed clean and of making a new beginning'. It 'normally takes place in a service of public worship'.<sup>4</sup>

The five services have a common structure and common prayers reflecting a universal understanding of baptism (although there is less of a universal view of confirmation) and providing Methodist emphases.

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<sup>3</sup> Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) p14

<sup>4</sup> *Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999) p60

As the majority of baptisms in Methodist churches are of children, the baptism of young children will be the core service discussed in this paper. However, the words and patterns are similar in all of the five services.

The services of baptism begin with the following prayer:

‘Sisters and brothers,  
Baptism is a gift of God.  
It declares to each of us the love and grace of God.

In this sacrament we celebrate  
the life of Christ laid down for us,  
the Holy Spirit poured out on us,  
and the living water offered to us.  
God claims and cleanses us,  
rescues us from sin,  
and raises us to new life.  
He plants us into the Church of Christ  
and sustains and strengthens us with the power of the Spirit.

Although we do not deserve these gifts of grace,  
or fully understand them,  
God offers them to all,  
and, through Christ, invites us to respond.’<sup>5</sup>

Traditional baptismal images and themes emerge here of water, moving from sin to new life, becoming part of the Church and the strengthening of the Holy Spirit. There is also a Methodist emphasis upon the unconditional offer of God’s love and grace.

The prayer continues with words from the risen Christ, including the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:18-20 and from Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38f. All five services of baptism and confirmation therefore have these texts in common which are Scriptural warrants for baptism

These are followed by the request for baptism from the parents, the visible pouring of the water, a prayer at the font and over the water and an affirmation of faith. The prayer at the font and over the water has six mentions of the Spirit or Holy Spirit bringing out that particular emphasis.

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<sup>5</sup> *MWB* pp88f

The affirmation is in the form of a two-part question. The minister asks:

‘Do you turn away from evil and all that denies God?’

Answer: By the grace of God, I do.

Do you turn to God,  
trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour,  
and in the Holy Spirit as helper and Guide?

Answer: By the grace of God, I do.<sup>6</sup>

Neil Dixon of the Liturgical Sub-Committee which produced *MWB*, notes this is the first time these words, which ‘are a truncated version of an ancient text, first used in the Eastern Church’, have been used by Methodists in an official service book.<sup>7</sup> *MWB* has made better use of earlier sources of liturgy than previous books.

The affirmation of faith continues with the Apostles’ Creed, which is rooted historically in baptism, in a question and answer format for the whole congregation to respond to.

There is also a shorter credal statement which is offered as an alternative to the Apostles’ Creed. In this, the whole congregation say:

We believe in God the Father,  
who made the world.  
We believe in Jesus Christ, his Son,  
who redeemed humankind.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
who gives life to the people of God.<sup>8</sup>

More will be made of this modalist statement later.

Following a request for the name of the child, the minister says the following ‘all this for you’ prayer:

‘*N and N (N)*,  
for you Jesus Christ came into the world;

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<sup>6</sup> *MWB* p91

<sup>7</sup> Neil Dixon, *Wonder, Love and Praise: A Companion to the Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003) p.65

<sup>8</sup> *MWB* p92

for you he lived and showed God's love;  
for you he suffered death on the Cross;  
for you he triumphed over death,  
rising to newness of life;  
for you he prays at God's right hand:  
    all this for you,  
    before you could know anything of it.  
In your Baptism the word of Scripture is fulfilled:  
"We love, because God first love us."<sup>9</sup>

The words from this prayer, *All This For You*, are also the title for a booklet which considers the meaning of Baptism in the Methodist Church and is useful for engaging with parents and families in pastoral visits.<sup>10</sup>

The child is then baptised with water three times and the minister says:

'N, I baptize you  
in the Name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

By Baptism, God has received you into the Church.'

The sign of the cross is made on the forehead with the words:

'N, I sign you with the cross, the sign of Christ.'<sup>11</sup>

There is no mention of oil being used to make the sign of the cross. More will be said on this later.

A lighted candle is presented and the Aaronic blessing is said by all.

The promises are then made. The parents are asked to love and commit to their children in body, mind and spirit, to ensure they are nurtured in the faith and life of the Christian community, and to set a Christian example before them. The Godparents are asked to support the parents and the congregation are asked to ensure a life of worship and service for the children. With all questions, the response is, 'With God's help we will'.

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<sup>9</sup> *MWB* p92f

<sup>10</sup> *All This For You – the meaning of Baptism in the Methodist Church* (Peterborough: mph, 2007)

<sup>11</sup> *MWB* p93

*MWB* places the baptismal promises after the baptism itself. This was new to the 1999 Book whereas earlier liturgies placed them in the traditional manner before the baptism.

A Bible or other book and baptismal certificate may also then be given and the baptismal liturgy ends with a final prayer and Lord's Prayer. The service then continues in its usual way.

'An Act of Thanksgiving after the Birth or Adoption of a Child' comes much later in the *Methodist Worship Book* and is placed alongside a service for 'A Celebration of Christian Renewal'. Both are under the general heading of 'Pastoral Services' and are clearly separated from the sacrament of Baptism. This clarifies that such thanksgivings are of a different nature to baptism.

(Interestingly, British Methodism's recent hymn book *Singing the Faith* does the opposite, linking 'Baptism and Thanksgiving Services' in one section, and 'Holy Communion' in another, separated by 'Covenant, Commitment and Dedication'.<sup>12</sup>)

The *MWB* baptismal liturgy will now be considered in its use of symbol, its use of tradition and its Methodist emphases.

### **Use of Symbol**

The use of symbol is crucial for mission and engagement. Symbolism and imagery should not need much, if any, explanation. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, a key international ecumenical document from 1982 says that baptism should 'vividly express the reality that in baptism the Christian participates in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ' (*BEM*: 6).<sup>13</sup> The word 'vividly' is important here.

Stephen Happel says that Christian symbols reach the core of our very being. 'Cleansed by water, rubbed by oil, caught up in darkness, blinded by light, shaped by sound, and touched and pressured by imposing hands', we are caught up in the Christian tradition and community. Although written liturgy is by definition text, sacraments by definition are real material things. There is a symbiotic relationship between texts on the one hand and symbols, signs and gestures on the other.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Singing the Faith* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2011)

<sup>13</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982) p6

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Heppel, 'Speaking from Experience: Worship and the Social Sciences Perspective' 1997 in *Alternative Futures for Worship* ed. by Mark Searle (Collegeville: Liturgical Press) p182

Johnson highlights different biblical interpretations of Christian initiation which are reflected in various baptismal practices and symbolism. For example, anointing with oil reflects anointing with the Holy Spirit. Being clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27) is re-enacted with the stripping of candidates and being re-clothed in new garments. Enlightenment is expressed through the lighting of candles. Water and the font can symbolise the womb and the tomb. Johnson concludes, 'a rich biblical theology such as this would seem to call for an equally rich liturgical expression and practice'.<sup>15</sup>

Aidan Kavanagh notes the role of anointing in Jewish ritual which might even be regarded more important than the use of water. He questions therefore 'why the earliest churches should have driven to ritual literalism concerning water but not concerning unction?' 1 John 2:20 and 2 Corinthians 1:21 both use the term 'anoint'. Indeed, in the Corinthians text, Paul places the words *Christon* (Christ) and *Chrisas* (anointed) in such a way that they are only separated by the word *kai* (and). The meaning of 'Christ' as the anointed one and the similarity of the words here used by Paul suggests that the popular use of the term 'Christening' to denote baptism has merit.<sup>16</sup>

Johnson remarks, 'Theologically and ritually, it is *this* liturgical act, interpreted *messianically* in relationship to the anointing of priests and kings in ancient Israel and accompanied by the citation of Psalm 2:7 ["You are my son; today I have begotten you"]... which receives the primary emphasis within the overall initiation rite'. In the synoptic Gospels, it is the appearance of the dove symbolising the Holy Spirit and the voice of God which is the key moment in the baptism of Jesus. Only John's Gospel puts greater emphasis on the water and its imagery of new birth.<sup>17</sup>

Baptism and the Church's wider use of symbolism should never downplay the breadth and depth of the Christian faith. Louis Weil warns against trivialising baptism. He pleads 'for an abundance in the signification, an abundance of the signs, because I believe that through abundance, the signs speak with particular power to our physical humanity'. If baptism is to point to the generosity of God, then the use of symbolism needs to reflect that generosity.<sup>18</sup>

Use of powerful symbolism is very appropriate for mission and engagement. It speaks to us at a deeper level than words can do. From flowers left at roadsides following traffic

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<sup>15</sup> Johnson p31

<sup>16</sup> Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1978) p27

<sup>17</sup> Johnson p43

<sup>18</sup> Louis Weil, 'Baptism as the Model for a Sacramental Aesthetic' in *Anglican Theological Review*, 92 no 2 Spr 2010, p269

accidents to small candles lit quietly in sacred places, symbols express the deepest emotions.

The signing of the cross on the forehead and giving of a lighted candle are important symbols. However, without the use of oil, the first of these is deficient and can be compared to presenting an unlit candle.

The greater use of poetic and evocative language is also an important aspect of *MWB*. Language which opens up imagination is symbolic. In addition, its language is more gender-inclusive than its predecessor. However, it uses more words than its predecessor and there is a tension here for mission as people prefer brevity.

The *United Methodist Book of Worship (UMBW)* from the United Methodist Church gives the option of anointing when the sign of the cross is made on the forehead. The rubrics say, 'Olive oil may be used in this action, following the biblical custom anointing prophets (1 Kings 19:16), priests (Exodus 29:7), and kings (1 Kings 1:39). Jesus' titles Christ and Messiah both mean "Anointed One," and the New Testament repeatedly calls Christ our High Priest and King... Anointing at baptism is a reminder that all Christians are anointed into [a] royal priesthood'.<sup>19</sup>

After the administration of water, the laying on of hands and a prayer invoking the Holy Spirit, the rubrics say, 'If desired, one or more of the following acts may be added: anointing, presentation of new clothing, presentation of a baptismal candle, or presentation of a certificate of baptism'.<sup>20</sup>

The Roman Catholic *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)* uses anointing with baptism (unless confirmation takes place immediately afterwards). Before the anointing, the celebrant prays:

'[God] now anoints you with the chrism of salvation,  
so that, united with his people,  
you may remain for ever a member of Christ  
who is Priest, Prophet and King.'<sup>21</sup>

This is followed by the possibility of a baptismal garment being placed by the godparents on the newly-baptised to reflect that they have been clothed in Christ. The godparents then give a candle lighted from the Easter candle with an accompanying prayer. The Roman Catholic use of symbol is strong.

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<sup>19</sup> *United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992) p91

<sup>20</sup> *UMBW* p98

<sup>21</sup> *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Study Edition* (London: Burns and Oates, 1987) p140



Communities have their own cultural symbols and rituals. Despite the liturgical preference for the term 'baptism', families will hold 'christening' parties inadvertently re-claiming a word which has 'anointing' as its root. As minister, I am often invited to these. Church families may ask me to 'bless the table' but otherwise, they are largely secular-style celebrations.

Methodism in London has in recent decades become home to significant numbers of people from all parts of the world, especially from the Caribbean, parts of Africa (Ghana in particular) and the Indian subcontinent. These communities sometimes have pre-baptismal naming ceremonies in family homes. The context is Christian and as minister I am asked to lead prayers. Symbols such as salt, honey, oil and pepper are also used. There may be the libation of alcoholic spirits. These other practices and symbols are a good opportunity to engage with others.

Although *MWB* makes good use of symbolism, there is room for improvement, especially using oil for anointing. The presentation of new clothing is another possibility to consider.

### **Use of Tradition**

All liturgy should stand within the tradition of the Church. However tradition is living and evolving. Liturgy should be theologically rigorous. The baptised person becomes part of the historic community of faith so therefore should stand in theological continuity with it.

The use of Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 2:38f as texts in the liturgy emphasise the Scriptural warrant for baptism and are common to the five services of baptism and confirmation. However, this means the words of Jesus inviting children to him from Mark 10:13-16 which were in the 1975 *Methodist Service Book* are lost.<sup>22</sup> Mark 10:13-16 had a role in baptismal preparation with parents and families.

The creedal statement which is offered as an alternative to the Apostles' Creed reflects a modalist view of the Trinity. In modalism, each person of the Trinity is defined by a function or mode, rather than all three persons sharing together relationship and community. Modalism is not part of Orthodox Christianity. Indeed, it is heresy. Yet modalist forms of the Trinity appear in liturgies and *MWB* gives an example of it. It is debatable whether such expressions (which go back to the early Church are therefore not fresh) of doctrine might be easier to understand by non-church people. Modalism not only fails to express the breadth and depth of Christianity but is also misleading.

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<sup>22</sup> *Methodist Service Book* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1975) pA7

A modalist view of the Trinity such as ‘creator, redeemer, sustainer’ puts the baptism outside the mainstream tradition of the Church.

In attempts to adapt to, and be engaged with wider society, baptism should not be reduced to a cultural naming ceremony. Anscar J. Chupungco, who has been an important champion of local cultural expressions of liturgy, argues that ‘expedience is not the sole nor the principal reason for adaptation. The main reason must be sought in the nature of the Church as the prolongation in time and space of the Word of God.’<sup>23</sup>

There is a tension between being faithful to the traditional practices and understanding of the Church and making this accessible to a changing world in which culture and language are continually changing.

Liturgies are by their nature conservative. They need to preserve the traditions and observances of faith through many fashions and challenges. Kavanagh notes ‘they resist change. Their evolution is normally slow’.<sup>24</sup> He also says that ‘Baptism has always been a compound act absorbing cultural patterns into itself: it has taken on definite shape in various cultures, shaping those cultures in turn’.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, when changes occur, they make significant statements about new practices and texts. Sometimes these are not new, but a re-discovery of an older tradition. Yet, nevertheless, they can bring a fresh perspective to worship. This was an important element of the Liturgical Movement and expressed in *MWB*.

### **Methodist Emphases**

From my pastoral experience of the baptismal liturgy, there are two emphases in *MWB* which particularly express Methodist theology and to which parents respond positively.

The first emphasis is the ‘all this for you’ prayer. A version of it appears in the Uniting Church of Australia’s *Uniting in Worship 2* published in 2005. Here the image of the Cross is made starker. ‘For you he endured the agony of Gethsemane and the darkness of the Calvary; for you he uttered the cry, “It is accomplished!”’. In addition, the rubrics note, ‘The original form of this prayer is from the French Reformed church; it emphasises God’s initiative in the call to baptism’.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Anscar J. Chupungco, ‘The Theological Principle of Adaptation’, 1982, in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader* ed. by Dwight W. Vogel (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000) p247

<sup>24</sup> Kavanagh p35

<sup>25</sup> Kavanagh pxiv

<sup>26</sup> *Uniting in Worship 2* (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2005) p79

It is notable that *MWB* tones down the imagery of this prayer. Nevertheless, as Dixon asserts, this prayer 'is a powerful proclamation of prevenient grace'<sup>27</sup> which is a central element of Methodist Arminian theology in which God's grace is given to all before we can respond. It contrasts with Calvinist theology and its emphasis on predestination. However, despite that contrast, it is interesting to note the prayer's roots are in the Reformed tradition which is associated with Calvinism.

The second emphasis is the placing of the promises after the baptism. This is especially helpful in explaining Methodist theology to parents. Dixon puts it strongly. He remarks that the placing of the promises after the baptism is 'an eloquent testimony to our belief in prevenient grace. Baptism is administered, a sign of God's love and acceptance; only then, and in response to the divine act, are promises made'.<sup>28</sup> Baptismal liturgy has caught up with Methodist theology.

David Chapman argues against this. All Christian rites are signs of God's love and acceptance. 'However, the Church attaches a specific meaning to the sacrament of baptism in terms of incorporation into the Church and entry into the new covenant'. He says that if Methodist baptismal practice is to reflect Methodist theology in this way, then it should consider omitting parental promises completely.<sup>29</sup>

*MWB* is not the only worship book which places the parental promises after the baptism. The Church of Scotland's *Common Order* does so as well.<sup>30</sup> For *MWB* it represents Methodist Arminian theology. However the Church of Scotland stands in the Reformed tradition with Calvinist roots. Whereas prevenient grace is key for Arminians, for Calvinists it is the sovereignty of God. Both the British Methodist and the Scottish Reformed traditions place the promises in the same order yet have different theological emphases. Could this be important liturgically for any union between the two traditions?

As well as these two main emphases, there are other points to note.

The congregational promise is sometimes considered as particular to Methodism. Irénée Henri Dalmais maintains that the function of liturgy is 'to constitute the Church and to express the Church'. The Church is constituted through worship. (Some Methodists regard it as constituted through membership lists.) By baptism, people become 'active members of a community in which the reign of God is proclaimed and begun'. Therefore 'Christian liturgy

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<sup>27</sup> Dixon p66

<sup>28</sup> Dixon p60

<sup>29</sup> David M. Chapman, *Born in Song: Methodist Worship in Britain* (Warrington: Church in the Market Place Publications, 2006) p111

<sup>30</sup> *Common Order* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1994) pp90f

has no place for passive spectators'. Dalmais' remarks emphasise the important responsibility placed upon the wider Church which is expressed in this promise.<sup>31</sup> However, it is interesting to note that *Common Order* also has congregational promises.<sup>32</sup>

*BEM* maintains that baptism 'is appropriate to great festival occasions such as Easter, Pentecost and Epiphany, as was the practice in the early Church'.<sup>33</sup> Given that presbyters cannot be at every British Methodist church, or even most Methodist churches on Easter Sunday (or indeed any Sunday), other appropriate occasions should be explored. The lectionary readings with John the Baptist in Advent and Epiphany, and for Mothering Sunday offer other possibilities. Given the roots in the anointing of kings, baptism at the time of a monarch's jubilee celebrations, or anniversary of a coronation, might also be appropriate. Methodism's own Sundays such as Junior Church Anniversary and 'Action for Children' Sunday can also be considered.

*MWB* calls for baptism in to be in public worship. There is a wider question on what constitutes this. For most of my ministry, I have always considered this should be the main Sunday morning worship. Yet having attended special services for baptism on Sunday afternoons, I now believe there is an argument in favour of these. They can be more accessible to those without a church background. Worshippers from the main congregation can be present so it does not become a private service. It is a model which is practised in some places and might considered more widely if it meets the needs of mission.

## **Conclusion**

Given the elderly age profile of the Methodist Church, the fact that 61% of baptisms are of babies under 1 year old and 32% are of children between 1 and 12 years of age suggests that Methodism is still appealing to young families for baptism. We must be doing something right.

The traditional formula with water and the name of the Trinity roots the Methodist baptismal liturgy within the Western tradition of the Church. Since *MWB* provides norms and standards in Methodism rather than an authorised fixed form there is always a danger that its clergy will stray into unorthodox forms such as 'creator, redeemer and sustainer'. Given the widespread use of the worship book, we can hope such practices are rare. However, even *MWB* its modalist creedal statement is not free from heresy. Therefore, the question and answer form of the Apostles' Creed should be used.

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<sup>31</sup> Irénée Henri Dalmais, 'The Liturgy as Celebration', 1987, in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader*, ed. by Dwight W. Vogel (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000) p26

<sup>32</sup> *Common Order* pp91f

<sup>33</sup> *BEM* p7

Much is made of the placing of the parental promises after the baptism itself. Being able to explain to parents the significance of the position of the promises is important in conveying Methodist theology even though it is not unique to *MWB*.

We have seen that although the practice of anointing varies between traditions, it has an important role in Christian initiation. The Methodist baptism liturgy underplays this important practice by only signing the cross and not using oil for anointing. Therefore the symbolism of the liturgy would be made more vivid by using oil. If the minister could explain the link with the anointing of kings and priests in Hebrew Scripture, it would highlight more strongly the deep biblical roots of baptism and be a more vivid symbolic expression. It also connects baptism with the Jewish roots of Christianity which is particularly valuable in Golders Green and Hendon where there are significant Jewish communities.

*MWB* makes a number of improvements on the *Methodist Service Book*. These include the two-part affirmation and the pouring of the water in the sight and hearing of the congregation. The first is an example of an ancient source being recovered for contemporary use. The second is an example of the use of greater symbolism which appeals to more of the senses and imagination. These two examples together with other elements reflect the debt which *MWB* owes to the Liturgical Movement.

Despite all the symbolism and words which surround baptismal liturgies, the Roman Catholic *RCIA* summarises all that is necessary for baptism. If the person is at the point of death, 'and time is short, the minister, omitting everything else, pours natural water (even if not blessed) on the head of the sick person, while saying the usual sacramental form'.<sup>34</sup> The simple act of pouring water in the name of the Trinity is all that ultimately matters in baptism.

'Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, in his death and resurrection.'<sup>35</sup> There is a rich heritage of symbols, texts and gestures in many baptismal liturgies to convey the reality of this. Overall *MWB* combines traditional practice, contemporary insights and Methodist theology in a positive way but there are improvements that could be made. However on balance, the *MWB* baptismal liturgy has much to offer in term of mission and engagement.

Rev Shaun Sanders  
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<sup>34</sup> *RCIA* p207

<sup>35</sup> *BEM* p2