

Seminar at the Lambeth Conference 2022, by The Revd Dr Simon Jones

Formed by Worship: liturgical formation in the Anglican Communion

‘Christians are made not born’. Those words of the apologist Tertullian, who died about the year 220, are often cited to highlight the significance of the rites of initiation, of baptism and the Eucharist, as the means by which God makes Christians. That making of Christians does not take place as a one-off, stand-alone event, but as part of a process. By the time we get to the fourth century, the Church makes a distinction between the part of the process that happens before baptism, which it calls catechesis, and that which takes place afterwards, which it refers to as mystagogy. Whereas in this early period, mystagogy consisted mainly of a short series of lectures to help the newly-initiated live out the implications of what had happened to them at the font and the altar, I think it’s fair to say that, in every age, and whatever form it takes, post-baptismal mystagogy is a life-long, Spirit-led process of making and remaking, of forming and reforming. Its purpose is nothing less than to grow into the full stature of Christ or, put more simply and starkly, to become Christ.

As Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic letter, *Desiderio desideravi*, published last month: ‘The full extent of our formation is our conformation to Christ . . . with becoming Him’. Theosis is a central tenant of Christian theology, and yet the temptation is often great to water it down or shy away from it. This afternoon I’d like to suggest that it provides a useful starting point from which we can begin this brief exploration of liturgical formation.

Liturgical formation was chosen for the topic of this seminar because, within this life-long process of Christian formation, liturgical formation occupies an essential place. That’s also why IALC gathered in January 2019 in Hong Kong to consider this topic. With the widest representation of Provinces that IALC has ever achieved, our work focussed on three aspects of liturgical formation: the liturgical formation of all the baptised, of deacons and of presbyters. Subsequently, a small group of bishops considered the liturgical formation of bishops, and their work was discussed during an online meeting of IALC in May 2021. The result of all this is a report from IALC on liturgical formation that will go to the ACC next year. The section on bishops is yet to be finalised, and one of the purposes of this seminar is to invite you to contribute your thoughts and ideas to that.

But what do we mean when we talk about liturgical formation? It’s a somewhat slippery term, but it’s commonly used in two related ways: first, and most importantly, that Christians

are formed through their participation in worship; and then second, that the Church has a responsibility to form Christians for worship. There can be no formation for worship without formation through worship – the second is essential, and so I want to focus my comments on that aspect of it before we go on to look at the role of bishops within liturgical formation more widely, drawing on the work of IALC.

Christians are formed through worship because liturgy is a privileged place of encounter with Christ. It's not the only place, by any means, but it is the place where the possibility of that divine encounter is guaranteed, and can be as real to us as it was to those first disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Having given liturgy its primary place in the process of Christian formation, we need to remember that worship on its own, divorced from other aspects of the Christian life, is not enough to make a Christian. There is always the danger of worship becoming self-regarding and self-satisfying, worship for worship's sake, rather than worship for God's sake and for the sake of God's world.

That said, from the perspective of my small corner of the Anglican Communion, I observe another danger, which may or may not reflect your own experience – and that is a loss of confidence in liturgical worship: a loss of confidence that worship does what it says on the tin, with the result that worshippers and worship leaders have low expectations of what happens when we worship.

Are we mindful of the fact that when we preside at worship we are seeking to lead people into the mystery of God, to assist them on their Spirit-driven journey to grow into the full stature of Christ? Are we attentive to the fact that when scripture is proclaimed, the word of God himself is speaking to his people, calling them into relationship with him? When we preside at the Eucharist, are we aware that we are being 'plunged into the furnace of God's love' to quote Pope Francis? Do we rejoice that when we baptise, we are proclaiming the indelible identity of a child of God who, in the waters of the font, experiences an intense life-transforming encounter with Christ crucified and risen through the anointing of the Spirit?

A loss of confidence in worship and, consequently, low expectations of it, can be seen across all liturgical traditions and can manifest itself in a number of different ways. I hope that later you'll feel able to share some of your own experiences. From mine, here are four: for some people, concern about worship being ill at ease and out of synch with contemporary culture can lead to it inadvertently becoming entertainment, with the leader's primary focus shifting

from God to the congregation. For others, an embarrassment about the use of symbols, or a lack of confidence in their ability to speak for themselves, can lead to them being skated over, or explained before they're performed, or joked about, in ways that render them mute. For still others, an inward-looking rubricism can prioritise a concern for 'doing it by the book' over drawing people into the mystery of God. And then, finally, concern about boredom arising from the regular repetition of liturgical texts leads some to use different alternatives as frequently as possible, thereby failing to allow people to build a spiritual library of cherished texts that are known by heart and can nourish worshippers both outside and inside the liturgical assembly.

I offer this brief observation because, for me, in order to preside at worship in a way that enables people to be formed through liturgy, we need to be confident about what we're doing when we worship and why. To do so requires us who are privileged to preside at worship to have experienced formation through liturgy as well as having been formed appropriately for liturgy.

I'm reminded here of the words of Cyril of Jerusalem, in one of his lectures to the newly-baptized – those who had been formed through liturgy and were now being formed for it. He writes of their experience of baptism: 'What a strange and astonishing situation! We did not really die, we were not really buried, we did not really hang from a cross and rise again. Our imitation was symbolic, but our salvation a reality'. That's a wonderful example of confidence in liturgy and in its ability to form Christians.

I've quoted Pope Francis a couple of times already, and in recent weeks I've found it interesting to compare the crisis of confidence that I've observed within parts of Anglicanism with the current situation in the Roman Catholic Church. The contexts are obviously different, but there are a number of similarities, and I would suggest that a recovery of confidence in the liturgy expressed both through the way it is celebrated (in whatever style or tradition) and through a renewed understanding of liturgical formation is at the heart of the response to both.

In the Pope's letter which is subtitled, 'On the liturgical formation of the people of God', Pope Francis expresses his confident understanding of liturgical formation like this: 'The Liturgy . . . takes us by the hand, together, as an assembly, to lead us deep within the mystery that the Word and sacramental signs reveal to us . . . so that the Spirit, plunging us into the

paschal mystery, might transform every dimension of our life, conforming us more and more to Christ'. There we are again – back to theosis.

If we're prepared to accept such a positive and confident statement about worship and its essential and privileged role within Christian formation, what are the implications for bishops? In his *Theological Handbook of Episcopal Ministry*, Paul Avis states that 'It is in the Liturgy that the bishop is most truly the bishop'. He goes further, stating that, 'If the liturgy is the Church's proper work, it is also the bishop's proper work'. This places liturgy, and therefore by implication liturgical formation, at the heart of a bishop's ministry. This is very clearly reflected in many of the ordinals of the provinces of the Anglican Communion. In Kenya, for example, the Archbishop's exhortation says that bishops are to 'baptise and to confirm, to preside at the Holy Communion, and to lead the offering of praise and worship'; and in New Zealand, bishops 'are to ordain, send forth and care for the Church's pastors, and to preside over its worshipping life'.

So, then, back to the question I posed a few moments ago. What are the implications of this for bishops? The group that worked on the episcopal section of IALC's report suggested 12 key signposts for the liturgical formation of bishops. Before I read them, I think it's worth noting that some relate explicitly to formation through liturgy, others to formation for liturgy, and others to both. Whichever it is, the two are always linked, and without the first, the second it impossible.

As we look at them together, it might be helpful to consider which ones resonate with your experience as a bishop and which ones don't, and of those which don't, would you like them to and, if so, how might that be achieved.

1. Those called to the episcopate ought to exercise a proper liturgical discipline: they are role models, guardians of the tradition, upon whom other ministers will fashion their own liturgical practice.

As 'chief ministers of the sacraments', they ought normally to preside at baptism, confirmation and the eucharist wherever they are present.

They should be models of good presidency in the liturgy, holding together the entire rite and not inappropriately devolving certain elements or liturgical ministries within the rites they perform.

Bishops should be 'visible' within the local church by both presiding at the sacraments in parishes or by calling together the faithful in their cathedral/other great churches.

As the chief ministers and upholders of the deposit of faith, bishops should exercise a clear teaching office both within and beyond the liturgy.

The 'dignity' of the episcopal office should never obscure the fact that the sacraments are Christ's sacraments, with bishops exercising a proper humility, and by not allowing their performance of the liturgy to emphasize a monarchical/non-collegial model of ministry.

The bishop is an enabler of opportunities for interface between the local and the universal. Bishops should therefore indicate, by who they are and what they do, that they are there to 'promote peace and reconciliation' not only within the church, but in the wider world. This requires the liturgy also to embrace public theology.

Bishops, following their ordination/consecration, should allow proper time and focus for their own spiritual formation.

Bishops should always remain clear of the signals that a well-ordered liturgy should give. The planning of baptism, confirmation, ordination, and other services will achieve this not only through words but by movement and a good use of liturgical space within each rite.

Bishops should ensure and protect the breadth of Anglican worship by exercising broad generosity in applying liturgical discipline in the Diocese, so that liturgical practice does not just reflect episcopal preferences, but a genuine comprehensiveness.

Bishops should ensure the teaching of liturgical principles and practice to the clergy and to the laity of the diocese, and regularly calling all liturgical ministers in the diocese to liturgical self-reflection and providing challenging opportunities for deepening liturgical formation. They should have the courage to correct or challenge poor liturgical practice.

To help accomplish signpost 11, bishops should be in conversation with liturgical scholars and practitioners more widely within the Church. Consideration should be given to who assists bishops in their liturgical practice.

GROUP WORK - 20 minutes

What opportunities and challenges are presented by understanding liturgical formation as an essential part of Christian formation?

How confident do I feel about the role of the bishop in liturgical formation?

Feedback on the 12 Key Signposts for Liturgical Formation – including what needs to be added, removed, changed.

Feedback now and afterwards by email to Neil Vigers.