

Lay and Diaconal Administration of the Lord's Supper

Why is it wrong?

In 2008, the Synod of Sydney Diocese adopted the report from its doctrine committee entitled *The Lord's Supper in Human Hands*.

An argument was presented in this report, first pointing out that the Order for Baptism in the *Book of Common Prayer 1662* uses the term 'administration of the sacrament' to refer to the entire rite of Baptism. It was then argued that since certain canons (church laws), passed in 1985 and 1992 respectively, authorise deacons to "**assist in the administration of the sacraments**" and lay people to "**assist in the ministration and distribution of the Holy Communion**", both deacons and lay people may actually now lawfully 'celebrate' or 'preside at' the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

This is despite the continuous tradition of the Anglican Church that only those in priest's orders may lawfully celebrate or preside at the Lord's Supper. It was never the intention of General Synod to change this tradition when it passed the abovementioned canons.

The position taken by Sydney Diocese on this matter at the 2008 diocesan synod (effectively authorising diaconal and lay celebration of the Holy Communion) was subsequently challenged before the Appellate Tribunal.

In August 2010, the Appellate Tribunal reported to the Primate its judgement that it is *not consistent* with the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia for a diocesan synod, otherwise than under and in accordance with a canon of General Synod, to *permit, authorise or make provision* for deacons or lay persons to preside at, administer or celebrate the Holy Communion.

It is consistent with its role as an ecclesiastical tribunal of appeal that the Appellate Tribunal make determination on the consistency of actions taken by diocesan synods with the canons of General Synod and the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia. Yet the determination of the Appellate Tribunal was subsequently dismissed by the Sydney 2010 Diocesan Synod as "their opinion".

The initial and continuing actions by Sydney Diocese in allowing deacons to preside at the celebration of the Lord's Supper are wrong. They are wrong ethically, theologically, historically and pastorally.

A It is wrong ethically

- It is not our intention to criticise the honesty or integrity of any member of Sydney Diocese or its Synod. However, Sydney Diocese's actions rely on a contentious interpretation of the words 'administer' and 'administration' in certain existing General Synod Canons. The report actually acknowledges that it was never the intention of the *Lay Assistants at Holy Communion Canon 1973*, the *Authorised Lay Ministry Canon 1992* and the *Ordination Service for Deacons Canon 1982* to authorise lay or diaconal presidency of the Lord's Supper. The Appellate Tribunal's Opinion in 1996 assumed that this had *not* been authorised by General Synod. While it is convenient for the long-held position of Sydney Diocese to make the interpretation it does of the canons, it is disingenuous to claim *authority* from General Synod when it is clear General Synod never intended to authorise what is claimed.

It would be a scandal if matters affecting the order, ritual and ceremonial of the Church were determined by loopholes and disputed interpretation of words in legislation intended for quite different purposes. General Synod, not individual dioceses, needs to clarify what is authorised by its canons and what legislation is required to authorise changes in order, ritual and ceremonial.

- Anglican formularies set out what is the Church's order and practice for the provision of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. **It is the expectation and right of members of the Church, whether within the Diocese of Sydney or attending services in the diocese that the sacrament will be celebrated by a minister who has been ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament, which under our order is a priest.** It is a breach of faith with both the members of the diocese and the wider Church to allow deacons and potentially lay people to preside at the celebration of the Lord's Supper contrary to Anglican polity. Since the term 'minister' is often used indiscriminately of priests, deacons and a variety of lay people, a person attending a celebration will assume incorrectly that the normal order and discipline consistent throughout the Anglican Communion is being followed.

- Indeed, this very point has been raised by Sydney's GAFCON partners and others in the wider communion. The unilateral actions of the Episcopal Church in America (TEC) concerning gay and lesbian ordination and marriage have angered Sydney Diocese, yet it displays the same disregard for unity and discipline in the sacraments and the life of the Church.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has wrote in 2009:

“When a local church seeks to respond to a new question, to the challenge of possible change in its practice or discipline in the light of new facts, new pressures, or new contexts, as local churches have repeatedly sought to do, it needs some way of including in its discernment the judgement of the wider Church. Without this, it risks becoming *unrecognisable to other local churches*, pressing ahead with changes that render it strange to Christian sisters and brothers across the globe.

This is not some piece of modern bureaucratic absolutism, but the conviction of the Church from its very early days. The doctrine that 'what affects the communion of all should be decided by all' is a venerable principle. On some issues, there emerges a recognition that a particular new development is not of such significance that a high level of global agreement is desirable; in the language used by the Doctrinal Commission of the Communion, there is a recognition that in 'intensity, substance and extent' it is not of fundamental importance. But such a recognition cannot be wished into being by one local church alone. It takes time and a willingness to believe that what we determine together is more likely, in a New Testament framework, to be in tune with the Holy Spirit than what any one community decides locally.

In recent years, local pastoral needs have been cited as the grounds for changes in the sacramental practice of particular local churches within the Communion, and theological rationales have been locally developed to defend and promote such changes. Lay presidency at the Holy Communion is one well-known instance. Another is the regular admission of the unbaptised to Holy Communion as a matter of public policy. Neither of these practices has been given straightforward official sanction as yet by any Anglican authorities at diocesan or provincial level, but the innovative practices concerned have a high degree of public support in some localities.

Clearly there are significant arguments to be had about such matters on the shared and agreed basis of Scripture, Tradition and reason. But it should be clear that an acceptance of these sorts of innovation in sacramental practice would represent a manifest change in both the teaching and the discipline of the Anglican tradition, such that it would be a fair question as to whether the new practice was in any way continuous with the old. Hence the question of 'recognisability' once again arises.”

B It is wrong theologically

- **‘Administration’ rather than ‘presiding’**

Much stress has been put by the report adopted by the Synod of Sydney Diocese in 2008 *The Lord's Supper in Human Hands* on the term “Administration” and its application in the orders of service for the Ministration of Baptism and the Administration of the Lord's Supper.

The argument has been put that since the *Ordination Service for Deacons Canon 1985* (Canon 16, 1985) and the *Authorised Lay Ministry Canon 1992* (Canon 17, 1992) authorise deacons to “assist in the administration of the sacraments” and lay people to “assist in the ministration and distribution of the Holy Communion”, both deacons and lay people may lawfully ‘celebrate’ or ‘preside at’ the celebration of the Lord's Supper, since this is what the term ‘administer’ means in the Order for Baptism in the Book of Common Prayer 1662.

Since deacons in the absence of the priest (and even lay people in an emergency) may minister the sacrament of Baptism—it is argued—the authority in the respective canons to assist in the administration of holy communion is also an authority to celebrate the entire rite, since it could be argued that this would assist the priest! This is despite the continuous tradition of the Anglican Church that only those in priest's orders may lawfully celebrate or preside at the Lord's Supper.

Playing games with words in canons to offer an interpretation that is rejected by the very body that framed those canons is not a legitimate way to advance a theological position. As Christians “we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:2)

But perhaps the writers of the Sydney Diocese report truly believed their argument was a good one and that the prevailing Anglican consensus was wrong. If so, as we shall see, they are mistaken.

- **An Innovation**

The Sydney Diocese report challenges the assumption and previous consensus that the two canons cited were only intended to refer to the involvement of deacons and lay people in the distribution of the elements of bread and/or wine at the actual time of communion, arguing that regardless of what may have been intended by these canons, the consequence of the canons is to authorise diaconal and lay administration in the same sense as it is used in the order for Baptism.

However, while the report is at pains to stress the similarity and equivalence of the use of the terms “Administration” and “Ministration” in the *Ministration of Baptism* and the *Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion* in the Book of Common Prayer, the report has paid insufficient consideration to the differences between these two services as they appear in the Book of Common Prayer.

This paper will argue that because of this deficiency the conclusions of the Sydney Diocese report are erroneous. It may be that in failing to properly consider these differences the Appellate Tribunal also erred in its 1996 Opinion that Lay and Diaconal celebration of the Holy Communion *could* be authorised (but only) by a canon of General Synod.

- **The Crucial Difference**

In particular, there has been no consideration of the implications that in the case of the Lord’s Supper, but *not* in the case of Baptism, there is a Prayer of Consecration. The implications of this for an understanding of the meaning of “administration” in the respective cases are considered below.

If the terms “ministration” and “administration” are taken to mean the same thing in Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and the canons previously referred to, it must first be asked what in fact do they mean? And what in fact is being administered in each case?

In the Book of Common Prayer the terms are used to refer variously either to the whole celebration of the rite whether of Baptism or the Lord’s Supper (eg. “The Ministration of Publick Baptism of Infants to be used in the Church” and “The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion”), or merely to the delivery of the sacramental signs to the faithful (eg. “It pertaineth to the office of Deacon ... to assist the Priest in Divine Service, and specially when he ministereth the holy communion, and to help him in the distribution thereof ...”).

The context makes it clear which meaning is being used in each case. The similarity of these terms and their clear intention with the language of the Canons of 1985 and 1992 argue strongly for a continuity of intention and interpretation with the Book of Common Prayer, rather than offering a basis for innovation.

But what in fact is being ministered? Obviously, it is the sacraments that are being ministered, whether of Baptism or the Lord’s Supper. But what exactly is meant by ‘administering these sacraments’, and is the sense the same in each case?

- **The Prayer Book makes distinctions**

The Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer defines a Sacrament as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”.

But when it comes to defining the outward sign and spiritual grace of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, things are not straightforward.

In Baptism, the outward sign is identified as water. The inward grace of Baptism is described in terms of the sacrament’s *effects* on the one who receives it, namely “a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness ...”

But in the case of the Lord’s Supper, which identifies the outward sign as bread and wine, the inward grace is not the effects of the sacrament but “the Body and Blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord’s Supper”, in other words its *reality*. After defining the inward part of the sacrament (the Body and Blood of Christ), the *benefits* for the partakers are described, namely “the strengthening and refreshing of our souls ...”

Baptism's inward part is described in terms of its effects on the recipient. The inward part of the Lord's Supper is described in terms of what is signified by the bread and wine. The *effect* on the recipient is the *result of what is signified*. It [the effect] is not, according to the catechism, the inward part of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Furthermore, the sacrament of baptism consists of the pouring or washing with water, using the Biblical formula of the Trinitarian Names as commanded by Jesus. Although there is a prayer to "sanctify" the water, its significance is still and precisely that it is water. The order for the Ministration of Private Baptism of Children in the Book of Common Prayer for "when need shall compel them" does not require the prayer over the water for the sacrament at all to be "lawfully and sufficiently administered".

But in the case of the Lord's Supper, before the bread and wine can be administered, it is required that the priest say the Prayer of Consecration. This consecration is clearly of the utmost importance in the Communion Service. If the consecrated bread and wine is insufficient for all to communicate, it is necessary to "consecrate more according to the form prescribed". Consecrated and unconsecrated bread and wine are to be treated differently from each other. If any bread or wine remain unconsecrated, "the curate may have it to his own use". But if it has been consecrated it must not be put to profane use but must be reverently consumed.

It is evident from this that the Book of Common Prayer is also emphatic that the lawful consecration, not just the receiving or 'administration' of the bread and wine, are required for the 'inward sign' of the sacrament.

The consecration of the bread and wine therefore marks a significant difference between the administration of the sacrament of baptism and the administration of the Lord's Supper in Anglican formularies. The water of baptism is "sanctified for its use". The bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are necessarily consecrated as 'signs'.

- **Consecration is a Headship Role**

In the New Testament the word 'consecrate' is sometimes used to translate *ἀγιάσων*, for example in the prayer of Jesus at the last supper in John's Gospel. "For their sake I consecrate (*ἀγιάζω*) myself, that they may be consecrated (*ἡγιασμένοι*) in truth (John 17:19). This prayer to the Father is one of self-offering in anticipation of his atoning sacrificial death on the cross, and is rightly called his High Priestly Prayer. The synoptic gospels record the institution of the Lord's Supper on the same occasion, as the "perpetual memorial of his precious death until his coming again".

In contrast to his diaconal role when he took the towel and washed the disciples feet, setting them an example that they should love and serve one another, in these later passages Jesus acts in his unique role as the Saviour and atoning sacrifice, the One who will suffer death on the cross, and who will make there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a "full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world". Consecration is a solemn act by one who stands in a relationship of authority over those who are consecrated or who receive the fruits of what is consecrated. It is self-evidently an exercise of Headship over others.

This is the reason the consecration of the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper has always been the role of the priest, or even more fittingly, the bishop, in Anglican tradition. It is quintessentially the role of the Pastor-Teacher to feed the flock. To usurp this role, by asserting it is also the role of deacons and lay persons, is actually to devalue all ministry of humble service whose dignity and value are honoured and commended in the order of deacons and carried out faithfully by lay people. An apparently anti-clerical stance is actually an example of manifest clerical-*ism*, since it suggests that the role that really matters is the priestly one (or else that sacraments and the ordained ministry are completely unnecessary and unimportant—an equally repugnant and un-Anglican stance).

C It is wrong historically

- **Witness of Tradition**

In explaining and defending the validity of Anglican Orders after their condemnation by Pope Leo XIII in the bull *Apostolicae Curae* in 1896, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote in a letter in 1897 to the "Whole Body of Bishops of the Catholic Church" which they regarded as setting forth the position of the Anglican Church definitively and comprehensively, that

"We make provision with the greatest reverence for the consecration of the Holy Eucharist and commit it only to properly ordained Priests and to no other ministers of the Church." (*Saeptus Officio XI*)

Archbishop Donald Robinson affirmed this position in his essay "What Theology of Order and Ministry do the Anglican Formularies Teach?" in the General Synod Doctrine Commission Report *Lay Presidency at the Eucharist: A Theological Consultation, 1995*:

"With regard to the Holy Communion, the Act of Uniformity of 1662 is explicit: 'No person whatsoever ... shall presume to consecrate and administer the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper, before such time as he shall be ordained priest ...' Although this prohibition had particular reference to the situation in 1662, it really does no more than spell out what had been in the Preface to the Ordinal since 1550."

The Synod of Sydney Diocese has previously passed an ordinance repealing the Act of Uniformity in the diocese, which was seen as an obstacle to lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper. Despite this, the Act of Uniformity retains its authority as an explanation of Anglican practice and teaching as set forth in the Ordinal, as Archbishop Robinson states. It remains part of the documentation of the Book of Common Prayer 1662. "It really does no more than spell out what had been in the Preface to the Ordinal since 1550."

- **Anticlericalism masquerading as Reformation?**

Another argument in the report claims to be based on 'Reformation principles'. It argues in this way: deacons can be authorised to preach, and now also lay people if licensed. To allow them to preach but not officiate at the Administration of the Lord's Supper would elevate the sacraments above the word, and create a cultic priesthood with exclusive powers. This, it is argued, denies the supremacy of the scriptures and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

However, there is no nexus in Anglican ministry or formularies between preaching and administering the Lord's Supper. Deacons may indeed be licensed to preach, but have never been authorised to consecrate the Holy Communion. This was also the practice of the early Church.

The idea that word and sacrament are somehow in competition with each other is not to be found in Anglican formularies. On the contrary, the Ordinal declares that "it is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these orders in Christ's Church; Bishops, Priests, and Deacons ..." While it is certainly the case that presbyters are ordained (explicitly) for the ministry of word and sacrament, the idea that authority to preach the word absolutely necessitates authority to celebrate the sacraments is to make a connection which has not previously been made, even on Reformation principles. There is no Biblical, theological or historical basis for a single 'order' of ministry, whether formally or informally.

In fact, the threefold order of ministry enshrined in Anglican formularies and in the Fundamental Declarations of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia affirms that orders of ministry in the Church are not uniform and interchangeable, but diverse. The ministerial office in the Anglican Church, as in the New Testament, is not general and undifferentiated, but specialised, specific and interdependent with the ordained ministry and the laity (1 Corinthians 12: 4-31; Ephesians 4: 1-16).

D It is wrong pastorally

- **Unintended consequences?**

The consequence of insisting that the ministry of word and sacrament can be exercised by lay and ordained alike shows contempt for both the lay apostolate and the ministerial priesthood. On the one hand, it declares in effect that the only 'real' ministry is a 'priestly' one. The varied loving and humble service of the laity is made illegitimate and second-rate as only the 'up-front' roles are recognised as important. At the same time, the dignity of the ordained ministry as a gift from God to feed and care for his people is devalued, since "anyone can do it"; or else the ordained ministry is reduced to the role of 'manager' or sometimes corrupted into that of 'guru'. The sacraments are increasingly neglected in favour of gimmicks, personality cults and emotionalism.

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