

23/93 Admission of Children to Holy Communion

(A report from the Standing Committee bringing together reports from the Anglican Education Commission Diocese of Sydney and the Diocesan Doctrine Commission.)

What the Synod Asked for

1. Synod resolution 23/93 reads -
 "Synod, noting the article 'The Lord's Supper for the Lord's Children' published in the *Reformed Theological Review*, (50/1, 1991) requests the Standing Committee -
 - (a) to refer the said article to the Diocesan Doctrine Commission and the Board of Education for consideration; and
 - (b) to seek the opinion of those bodies as to whether the theological arguments of the article and any perceived related matters warrant a recommittal of the General Synod Canon for the Admission of Children to Holy Communion (Canon 6/85) to a later session of this Synod."

Opinion of the Anglican Education Commission Diocese of Sydney

2. In response to Synod resolution 23/93, the Board of Education has considered the article "The Lord's Supper for the Lord's Children" published in the *Reformed Theological Review* and other related matters concerning the current practice of admission to the Holy Communion in the Diocese of Sydney. It concluded -
 - (a) that the theological arguments of the said article do raise exegetical as well as hermeneutical questions about the legitimacy of admitting children to the Holy Communion; and
 - (b) that developments in educational philosophy, psychology, sociology and methodology suggest that the approach by Alan Langdon's *Communion for Children? The Current Debate*, which addresses only the question of cognitive capacity of children, is too narrow to address all practical and pastoral considerations.
3. It is the opinion of the Education Commission, therefore, that there is sufficient warrant for a recommittal of the General Synod Canon for the Admission of Children to Holy Communion (Canon 6/85) to the next session of Synod.

Opinion of the Diocesan Doctrine Commission

4. Glenn Davies' article referred to in the resolution is a response to Alan Langdon's *Communion for Children? The Current Debate* (Oxford: Latimer Studies, 1988), which was commended in Synod resolution 7/87, wherein the Sydney Synod declined to adopt the General Synod Canon for the Admission of Children to Holy Communion. Davies argues that the exclusion of children from the Lord's Supper lacks biblical or theological warrant.
5. Davies' arguments, in summary, are -
 - (a) Inability to understand does not correspond to the "unworthy manner" of 1 Corinthians 11:27.
 - (b) In 1 Corinthians 10 Israel's wilderness experience of eating and drinking is presented as a type/analogy of the Lord's Supper, and *all* members of Israel shared in the wilderness "sacrament".
 - (c) On the basis of 1 Corinthians 10:17, the symbolism of the "one bread" is overthrown if some members of the "one body" are excluded from partaking.
 - (d) Just as participation in Christ is not dependent on an adult understanding of redemption, so participation in the Lord's Supper should not be dependent on an adult understanding of the sacrament.
 - (e) The *incomplete* understanding of a child is not necessarily an *inaccurate* understanding.
 - (f) The Lord's Supper is for the Lord's people. To exclude children is effectively to discipline them in the same way we would a covenant breaker.
6. Glenn Davies' arguments are substantial, and may even be more convincing overall than those of Alan Langdon, although some may consider his argument by analogy to the Old Testament experience of Israel (based on 1 Corinthians 10) to be somewhat forced. However it is not as though these or similar arguments were unavailable when Synod resolution 7/87 was passed. Similar arguments to those of Glenn Davies were advanced by Christian Keidel (with more emphasis on the Passover analogy) in "Is the Lord's Supper for Children?", *Westminster Theological Journal* 37/3(1975), pp 301-41. Alan Langdon was aware of this article, and of Roger Beckwith's response to it ("The Age of Admission to the Lord's Supper", *Westminster Theological Journal* 38/2 (1976), pp. 123-151). Therefore the publication of Glenn Davies' article does not itself warrant a recommittal of the General Synod Canon.
7. The question whether "any perceived related matters" warrant such a recommittal is difficult to answer. The Doctrine Commission does not believe that new information is available. However it may be that either circumstances have changed, or that Synod would no longer be convinced by the arguments of Alan Langdon's booklet. The onus is on anyone who wants to recommit the matter to demonstrate one or other of these changes to pertain.

20 September 1994