

# Lay and Diaconal Administration of the Lord's Supper

*A Report from the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission 1998*

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## Abbreviations used in this Report

Assessors	Appellate Tribunal: -Report of the Board of Assessors (August 1996)
Australian Bishops	Submission by the House of Bishops to the Appellate Tribunal (August 1996)
Bleby	Reasons of The Honourable Justice Bleby in <i>Appellate Tribunal Opinion: Reference concerning Diaconal and Lay Presidency</i> , 7 March, 1996 (1997), pp. 31-49.
Chiswell	Reasons of The Bishop of Armidale in <i>Appellate Tribunal Opinion: Reference concerning Diaconal and Lay Presidency</i> , 7 March, 1996 (1997), pp. 69-75.
English Bishops	<i>Eucharistic Presidency: A Theological Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod</i> (London: Church House Publishing, 1997)
George	Reasons of The Archbishop of Adelaide in <i>Appellate Tribunal Opinion: Reference concerning Diaconal and Lay Presidency</i> , 7 March, 1996 (1997), pp. 51-67.
Handley	Reasons of The Honourable Justice Handley in <i>Appellate Tribunal Opinion: Reference concerning Diaconal and Lay Presidency</i> , 7 March, 1996 (1997), pp. 21-23.
Tadgell	Reasons of The President in <i>Appellate Tribunal Opinion: Reference concerning Diaconal and Lay Presidency</i> , 7 March, 1996 (1997), pp. 3-19.
Wilson	Reasons of The Bishop of Bathurst in <i>Appellate Tribunal Opinion: Reference concerning Diaconal and Lay Presidency</i> , 7 March, 1996 (1997), pp. 77-94.
Young	Reasons of The Honourable Justice Young in <i>Appellate Tribunal Opinion: Reference concerning Diaconal and Lay Presidency</i> , 7 March, 1996 (1997), pp. 25-30.

## Membership

The members of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission are -

Bishop Paul Barnett (on leave)	Canon Peter Jensen
The Rev Dr Michael Bowie	The Rev Dr Peter O'Brien (on leave)
The Rev Dr Robert Doyle	Bishop Donald Robinson
Canon Robert Forsyth	The Rev Stephen Williams
The Rev Narelle Jarrett	The Rev Dr John Woodhouse

## Introduction

1. Lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper means certain lay persons and deacons being authorised to lead the Order for the Lord's Supper in its entirety.
2. The Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission has produced five reports about lay and/or diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper since this subject was introduced into the Synod in 1977 (1983, 1984, two in 1993, 1995). Other Synod Committees have produced five further reports exploring various aspects of the matter (1978, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1994).

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3. In 1995 the Synod passed the second reading of the Bill for the Preaching and Administration of Holy Communion by Lay Persons and Deacons Ordinance 1995. The third reading of this Bill has been deferred each year since 1995.

4. On 7th March, 1996 the Primate referred the following questions to the Appellate Tribunal for its opinion -

- “1. *Is it consistent with the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia to permit or authorise, or otherwise make provision for -*
  - (a) *deacons to preside at, administer or celebrate the Holy Communion; or*
  - (b) *lay persons to preside at, administer or celebrate the Holy Communion?*
2. *If the whole or any part of the answer to Question 1 is YES, is it 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 as mentioned in Question 1?”*

5. In the course of its deliberations the Appellate Tribunal received submissions from the House of Bishops and the Board of Assessors and other interested parties.

6. At its meeting on 24 March, 1997 the Standing Committee of the Sydney Synod requested its Legal Committee to provide a report for the Synod on the Appellate Tribunal's opinion and reasons when they became available.

7. During 1997 a theological statement, titled *Eucharistic Presidency*, by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England was published.

8. The Appellate Tribunal published its opinion on the Primate's questions (with reasons) on 11 January, 1998. The majority opinion was as follows -

1. (a) YES (a majority of 4 to 3)
- (b) YES (a majority of 4 to 3)
2. NO (a majority of 6 to 1)

9. The Doctrine Commission has been asked by the Synod and the Standing Committee to comment on -

- (a) The 1997 statement by the English House of Bishops;
- (b) The reasons given by the members of the Appellate Tribunal for their opinions; and
- (c) The submissions of the House of Bishops and the Board of Assessors to the Appellate Tribunal.

10. The documents referred to the Doctrine Commission reflect a variety of perspectives on the subject and raise a number of important theological issues. This report will concentrate on the debate occasioned by the Appellate Tribunal reference. It will outline a number of the major theological views that have been expressed, and provide comments on the debate. The report will not address purely legal matters, although in the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia law and doctrine cannot always be separated. Reference to the report of the English House of Bishops will be made at relevant points.

11. The discussion within and with the Appellate Tribunal has been wide ranging. The terms of the Constitution, however, have stimulated a major debate about the nature of the priesthood. Differing views have also been expressed about the nature of the Lord's Supper and the implications of lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper for the nature of the church. It is evident that different views about lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper often reflect and arise from different understandings of the priesthood, the Lord's Supper and the church.

### **The Nature of the Priesthood**

12. The Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia commits this Church to "to preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry" (Chapter 1: Section 3). For some the three orders of the ministry are in principle analogous to two other fundamental commitments expressed in Chapter 1 of the Constitution, namely the canon of Scripture (Section 2) and the historic creeds (Section 1) ("The same faith which acknowledged the canon was also led in the same period to acknowledge the ministry [in its three-fold order] as a divinely appointed means of serving the church and preserving its unity" [Australian Bishops 3; cf. Tadgell 7; George 61]). While others may not see the three orders of the ministry in the same category as the canon and the creeds, it appears to be generally agreed that the preservation of the three orders must mean more than the preservation of their titles [Tadgell 5, 6; Bleby 40]. Therefore extensive consideration has been given to the question whether the authorisation of lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper would threaten the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons.

13. Historical and theological arguments have been advanced in support of both sides of this question.

### Historical arguments

14. The historical argument, on one side, is that "there is no instance in the history of the undivided church of the consecration of the Eucharist by others than bishops or priests being authorised under any circumstances." [Australian Bishops 4, citing Dr Darwell Stone]. In a milder form this was part of the argument of the English House of Bishops: "It would be foolish to set aside lightly the long, sustained and many-sided tradition which has resisted lay presidency." [English Bishops 5]

15. On the other side the assertion of a consistent historic practice has been questioned as a matter of fact ("the documents between Arles of 314 and the Fourth Council of Toledo [sic] in 633 show a continuing struggle between the priests and the deacons, in which the former ended the winners." [Young 29]), and as a matter of relevance ("a long tradition of historic practice, does not by itself ... give adequate theological or constitutional justification for a practice" [Wilson 82]).

16. The English House of Bishops recognises some variety in the historic practice of the church: "there seems to have been considerable fluidity as to who could assume this presiding function. The *Didache* (first century AD) refers to prophets, apostles and teachers. Clement (c. 96) mentions presbyters and bishops (without distinguishing between them). Ignatius (c. 110) believes a valid Eucharist is only possible by restricting presidency to the bishop or those specifically delegated by him (without indicating whether or not they are presbyters). Tertullian (early third century) opposed lay presidency in his earlier works, not least from a desire to maintain good order. When he later allied himself to the Montanist schism, he accepted the view that since the baptised are already priests, not only might they exercise priestly functions, but they should also accept priestly discipline (e.g. monogamy). Cyprian (early third century) regards the bishop as the normal eucharistic president, but his priesthood is on occasion shared by the presbyters. The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (c. 215) envisages bishops but allows 'confessors', who had not received the laying on of hands, to preside. It also appears deacons were presiding in some places before the Council of Arles in 314 disallowed the practice." (English Bishops 43)

17. The Doctrine Commission is not fully persuaded that the early historic practice was demonstrably as fluid as the above comments suggest. The evidence cited is open to other interpretations.

18. The Doctrine Commission recognises that an argument from the historical practice of the church, if that practice is well established, can have considerable weight. However, even when the historical practice is certain, there are distinctions that must be made. Where a practice has been based on a consistent interpretation of explicit Biblical teaching throughout history, it would be serious indeed for that interpretation to be abandoned. Similarly where a practice reflected in sources closest to the New Testament appears to be based on an elaboration or extension of a New Testament teaching, such developments should be noted carefully. However where neither of these qualifications apply, and an historic practice is not clearly connected to explicit Biblical teaching, the historical argument will have less weight.

19. This is the case with lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper since there is no single New Testament text which prescribes who should lead that administration. Some members of the Commission believe that there is an implication that "the *Lord's Supper*", being a supper (for the whole body of the church) which had its origin in the supper at which the Lord himself administered the bread and cup to his disciples, was administered by someone recognised in the congregation as being "over them *in the Lord*", e.g. an apostle or presbyter/bishop. However the majority of the Commission considers that, while this presumption concerning practice in New Testament times may be reasonable, it is an inference which cannot itself be given decisive theological weight. Further, it ought not to be supposed that those numbered among "those over them in the Lord" constituted an ordained priesthood as we experience it.

### Theological arguments

20. The theological arguments over what is entailed in the preservation of the order of priests have involved three main issues. The discussion of these issues has brought to light different understandings of the priesthood.

#### *The office of the priesthood*

21. Firstly, what is the "order" or "office" of priesthood (and of deacon and of bishop) which Section 3 of the Constitution requires to be preserved? Does the office consist in the particular activities which are the responsibility of a priest? Or is the *office* distinguishable from the *activities* in some way?

22. The view that the three orders are defined by their respective activities is supported by reference to the Preface to the Ordinal of 1662 which appears to equate "office" and "function" [Tadgell 7]. The preservation of the orders, then, requires that they "continue to exercise the same functions as in the past and that the same differentiation of function between them should continue." [Australian Bishops 4; Assessors 6] The three orders, on this view, cannot be preserved "if an essential power committed to one order is conferred on another." [Tadgell 7] When this view is supplemented by the idea that "presidency at the Holy Communion ... is the focal point of a wide range of functions that together form the office of priest," [Assessors 9; cf. George

52, 54] diaconal (and therefore lay) administration of the Lord's Supper is excluded: it would involve the "enlargement of the office of deacon and the diminution of the office of priest" [Tadgell 10], and hence fail to "preserve" either.

23. However, substantial arguments have been advanced against defining the orders in terms of the activities that are legally denied to others [Wilson 83-4; English Bishops 55]. The assumption that the functions of priesthood have been "the same" in the past has been challenged. "Priests have moved from being Mass priests to ministers of the Word, from the English role of being officials of the State entitled to the profits of a parish to the Australian role of being paid leaders of the local branch of a voluntary association." [Young 27-8; cf. Wilson 80-1] Indeed this Church has substantially altered various important functions of the orders without destroying the orders themselves (in particular the authorisation of various lay ministries, and the authorisation, by ordination alone, of diaconal preaching, along with other changes in understanding of the diaconate) [Wilson 80-81].

24. An alternative view, then, is that the office of the priesthood is to be understood, not in terms of the particular activities of a priest, but by the responsibility of the office for congregational oversight or leadership. "The essential nature of a priest is to be the leader of a community of Christians in Word and Sacrament and ... it is inadequate to say that a priest is ordained to say Mass." [Young 28] This view has tended to see the possibility that particular activities through which the responsibility of the priesthood is carried out may be performed on occasions by others without damaging the office itself. Such activities include preaching God's Word and administering the Lord's Supper.

25. The Doctrine Commission comments: The 1662 Book of Common Prayer employs various terms with reference to the three-fold ordained ministry. "Order" appears to indicate the *status* of the bishop, priest or deacon within the church. "Office", then, indicates that the Order involves a *duty*, and "Function" is the *discharging* or *executing* of the duty. "Function" is very close to "Office", as appears from the expression "the said Functions" with reference to the "Offices" of Bishops, Priests and Deacons in the Preface to the Ordinal. The Doctrine Commission's view is that the three orders are best defined and distinguished, not simply by their particular activities, but by the relationships between them and between each of them and the church. The relationships that define the orders have not always been the same (any more than the activities of the orders have been the same). The orders, however, have survived. The order of priesthood in this Church has the potential duty of congregational oversight, a duty which is discharged chiefly through preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments. The order is not necessarily compromised if certain of these activities of the priest (preaching the Word of God or the administration of the Lord's Supper) are, on occasions, carried out by delegation to an authorised deacon or lay person [cf. Wilson 93].

##### *The distinction between priest and deacon*

26. A second area of discussion - a particular application of the first - has been the distinction between deacon and priest clearly recognised by the Ordinal of 1662. Does this distinction exclude the possibility of a deacon administering the Lord's Supper?

27. The two views of the nature of the offices already noted are expressed in the two sides of this discussion.

28. Some who advocate a "functional" definition of the priesthood appear to base this on an ontological understanding of the difference between, for example, priest and deacon (and by implication between priest and lay person). One submission suggests that the difference between priest and deacon is reflected in the fact that the 1662 Ordinal teaches that priests will be endowed for their ministry by the Holy Spirit, but there is no similar reference to the Spirit with regard to deacons [Australian Bishops 4; rejected by Wilson 86-7]. Another argues that "the nature of the offices are related to the qualities required of those who execute their functions." [Assessors 6] The conclusion appears to be that the deacon or lay person, by virtue of their lack of ordination as priests, are not endowed to execute the role of administering the Lord's Supper.

29. The view that the priest's office is that of congregational oversight understands the deacon's office in terms of assistance to the priest. This understanding has led to a different conclusion, namely that in certain circumstances "the deacon could 'assist' the priest ... by conducting communion services that the priest could not conduct personally", without compromising the office of either [Handley 22; likewise Wilson 85].

30. The Doctrine Commission agrees that the 1662 Ordinal makes a clear distinction between deacon and priest. The distinction, however, is in terms of the priest's oversight of "the people committed to your cure and charge", and the deacon's responsibility "to assist the priest". This distinction is not threatened if some activities normally done by a priest are, on occasion, done by a deacon. The proper distinction between priest and deacon need not, therefore, be dissolved by permitting appropriately authorised deacons (and lay persons), in appropriate circumstances, to administer the Lord's Supper.

##### *The role of the priest at the Lord's Supper*

31. A third theological question may be put like this: is there something about the priest - as a priest -, and in particular the priest's role in the Lord's Supper, that makes lay and diaconal administration impossible?
32. Some have argued that the priest, by virtue of episcopal ordination, is one or more of the following:
- (a) A representative of the whole church, sometimes on analogy to the Old Testament priesthood [Australian Bishops 3; Tadgell 11-14; Bleby 43; George 58, 61, 64, 66; English Bishops 32];
  - (b) A symbol, focus or representation of the unity in Christ of the congregation [Bleby 43; Wilson 88; George 53, 55, 56, 65; English Bishops 32];
  - (c) A sacrificing figure, in a "sacramental" sense [George 57, 60];
  - (d) An icon of Christ [George 60, cf. 59, 63];
33. Some see the administration of (or "presidency at") the Lord's Supper in one or more of the following ways:
- (a) A representative role in the great central act of Christian worship [Tadgell 11; cf. George 64; Wilson 88; English Bishops 49];
  - (b) "A delegation by the worshipping community itself of the priesthood of the people of God to the presbyter/priest overseer" [Bleby 43];
  - (c) The focal point of the priest's responsibility [Assessors 13]; "the highest method [of serving the flock], the culminating point of executive privilege and power" [George 62, citing R.C. Moberly];
  - (d) A witness to the whole story of the people of God from creation to eschaton represented in the Eucharist in symbol, word and action [Assessors 11; Tadgell 12].
34. On the basis of such views it has been argued that "presidency" at the Lord's Supper is an essential function of priests (because of what a priest is), and that only a priest can perform the role of "presidency" (because of what the role is).
35. One response to these arguments has been that the office of priest in this Church is that of a pastoral overseer [Wilson 85-6]. "The main purpose of ordination is not to provide eucharistic presidents but to provide publicly recognised oversight of a community." [English Bishops 55, cited with approval by Wilson 86] The order of priest will be properly preserved if it continues to be "a ministry of pastoral oversight of Word and Sacrament" [Wilson 87]. The delegation of particular activities, such as preaching the Word of God or administering the Lord's Supper, on occasions, does not necessarily diminish the office [Wilson 87].
36. The Doctrine Commission, while recognising the importance of the Lord's Supper in the life of the congregation, considers that its significance can be distorted if the focus of the "Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death" is lost by, for example, making it a representation of "the whole story of the people of God" [Assessors 11].
37. Furthermore, the Doctrine Commission considers that the significance of the role of the priest (as such) in the Lord's Supper has been overstated in much of this discussion. The language of "presidency" at the Lord's Supper has introduced a notion that is foreign to the Book of Common Prayer, and although the term is present in the New Testament (*proistemi*), it is not explicitly connected with the Lord's Supper. In the Book of Common Prayer the priest, as priest, does not play any symbolic or representative role in the Lord's Supper. Indeed the Ordinal makes no specific reference at all to the priest's role in the Lord's Supper (other than that contained in the expression "administer the sacraments"). In this Church "priest" means "presbyter, elder" (Greek *presbuteros*) whose role is oversight of the congregation. Attempts to interpret "priest" in some other sense, such as a representative, mediatorial, symbolic or sacerdotal figure, based on a different meaning of the word "priest" (Greek *hierous* or Latin *sacerdos*), and to apply this other sense to the role of the one leading the prayers at the Lord's Supper, are mistaken. (One member of the Commission would prefer to say that such interpretations have sometimes been overemphasised, rather than mistaken.) The English House of Bishops observed that: "The word-group 'priest' (*hierous*) is used of Christ and collectively of the Church, but never of an individual minister in the New Testament (apart from Romans 15:16)" [English Bishops 45] and "the English reformers chose to retain the word 'priest' ... on the understanding that 'priest' was an equivalent term to the Greek *presbuteros* ('presbyter')" [English Bishops 48]. There is nothing about the role of the priest at the Lord's Supper that can in principle only be performed by a person who is a priest [See George 57, 58, 59, 60, 65].

### The Nature of the Lord's Supper

38. As well as differences about the nature of the priesthood, the debate about lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper has involved differences about the nature of the Lord's Supper. It is not necessary here to enter into the details of this debate (some aspects of which have already been touched on), but to note two issues.

*The Lord's Supper and the role of the priest*

39. An important legal question turns on the significance of the priest's role in the Lord's Supper. Who is to administer the sacrament has been described as a "subsidiary measure", not a "principle of the Holy Communion" [Young 27]. Indeed it has been argued by one member of the Appellate Tribunal that the authorisation of lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper is (in terms of the Constitution) a matter of "discipline" rather than "ritual" or "ceremonial". It was then argued that, under the Constitution, "the diocese has power to act independently of General Synod, in matters of discipline as opposed to ritual and ceremonial." [Chiswell 75] On the other hand it has been asserted (and this would presumably be endorsed by the majority of the Tribunal) that "the matter in issue is a prime example of ritual or ceremonial." [Young 30]

40. The Doctrine Commission refrains from commenting on the legal aspects of this question. However, the theological point at issue appears to be whether episcopal ordination to the priesthood of a person administering the sacrament is significant to the sacrament itself. [Chiswell 75; contra Handley 23; Young 30 (but cf. 27); Bleby 46] The Commission's view is that the validity and effectiveness of the Lord's Supper is not affected by whether the person administering it is ordained or not. However, one member of the Commission believes that episcopal authorisation is always necessary to secure regularity in the administration of a sacrament.

*Administration of the Lord's Supper and preaching the Word of God*

41. The case for lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper has sometimes been argued with some analogy to lay and diaconal preaching of the Word of God. Is there a significant difference between administering the Lord's Supper and preaching God's Word which means that the former, but not necessarily the latter, must be restricted to ordained priests?

42. Some have drawn attention to the different historical precedents with regard to preaching the Word of God on the one hand and administration of the Lord's Supper on the other. The possibility of deacons being licensed to preach is clear in the 1662 Ordinal, while the deacon is only "to assist the Priest" in the Holy Communion [Australian Bishops 2]. Furthermore a significant history of authorising some lay people to preach has been noted [Assessors 8; Bleby 42-5]. The absence of any historical precedent for authorising the administration of the Lord's Supper by any means other than ordination to the priesthood is presented as evidence for the difference between the two functions [Assessors 9]. Those who see the role of the priest at the Lord's Supper in any of the ways noted in section 33 above, see the difference in strong theological terms: "Preaching may be said to be largely functional, whereas celebration of the Eucharist is not" [Tadgell 13], apparently because of its representational, symbolic role [cf. Bleby 43]. It has been argued that "eucharistic presidency" is more significantly related to pastoral oversight than is preaching [Wilson 88].

43. While no one has denied that there is a difference between preaching the Word of God and administering the Lord's Supper, the history, nature and implications of the difference have been disputed. It is claimed, for example, that there is no long or significant history of the Church permitting lay preaching [Wilson 90], and that BCP in fact has no concept of any ministry by individual lay persons within the congregation [Wilson 90, citing D.W.B. Robinson; English Bishops 4]. Historically, therefore, the situation with preaching may not be notably different from the administration of the Lord's Supper: "To rely on this interim measure [Section 15 of the 1662 Act of Uniformity, permitting a "lecturer" to be licensed to preach] to justify a theological view about authorised lay preaching can carry no more weight than to try to justify a theological view about lay presidency on the grounds that during the Commonwealth period non-episcopally ordained ministers celebrated the eucharist." [Wilson 90-91] Luther's view of the matter is summed up by the English Bishops: "If someone is recognised by the community as having the right to preach the gospel, that person also ought to have the right to preside at the Eucharist" [English Bishops 47]. Furthermore "The case which the mainstream reformers made for restricting the Ministry of the Sacrament to appointed ministers rests ultimately on their understanding of the indissolubility of word and sacrament, and the dependence of the latter on the former" [English Bishops 47]. Acknowledging that there are differences between the two functions under consideration, one writer concluded: "To insist that in no circumstances may eucharistic presidency be delegated to a lay person or a deacon is likely, in my view, to create a view of priesthood in which priesthood is equated with one of its functions and also to create a view of the eucharist that infers the eucharist belongs to the priests and not to the whole people of God." [Wilson 94]

44. The Doctrine Commission agrees that ordination to the priesthood leads to responsibility for the congregation, exercised especially through preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments. Both activities are important, but they are not identical. The sacrament depends upon the Word to give it significance and effect because the sacrament is the sign of a scriptural promise. Given the order of Word and sacrament, the Commission agrees that if it were possible to authorise a lay person and a deacon to preach God's Word, on occasions, without compromising the priest's responsibility, then it would also be possible to authorise the administration of the Lord's Supper in like manner.

### **The Nature of the Church**

45. The debate has shown that different attitudes to lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper can arise from different understandings of the nature of the church. This report will not examine this matter thoroughly since it was not a major theme in the Appellate Tribunal discussion. The statement by the English House of Bishops, however, developed a substantial exposition of the doctrine of the church. One point only will be noted.

46. Some see the episcopally ordained priesthood as expressive of the unity of the whole church, and the administration of the Lord's Supper by a priest as witness to the fact that the local church is but part of one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Lay administration may then be seen as fragmenting the church, since celebrants would be authorised to function only in one congregation [Australian Bishops 4; Assessors 8; cf. 13-4; English Bishops 32-33].

47. The majority of the Doctrine Commission does not accept that episcopal ordination to the priesthood should be regarded as a symbol of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church: the presbyter is given no such significance in the New Testament, nor does the Ordinal of 1662 contain this idea. The view of the majority of the Commission is that non episcopal churches can be fully authentic expressions of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. However, the Commission as a whole does accept that the episcopal authorisation of lay persons and deacons to administer the Lord's Supper in local congregations would not represent a fragmenting of the unity of the one church.

### **Conclusion**

48. The questions put to the Appellate Tribunal concerned legal and constitutional matters. The debate generated has been shaped to some extent by those questions. None of the submissions to the Tribunal, nor the reasons of its members, explored, for example, the theological or practical desirability (as distinct from possibility) of authorising lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper. The statement by the English House of Bishops represents one case against lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper, based on particular views of the church, the ministry and the sacraments. While different understandings of these important matters have been highlighted by the debate, the Doctrine Commission does not consider that sound theological arguments have come to light to overturn the main lines of the earlier reports of the Diocesan Doctrine Commission to the effect that a provision for lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper is theologically acceptable. See, for example, the reports in the 1984 (pp. 366-74), 1985 (pp. 452-9), 1994 (pp. 409-22, 459-69) and 1996 (pp. 422-30) Diocesan Year Books. The question of the desirability of this measure was not revisited by the Doctrine Commission. Two members of the Commission do not accept these main lines of the earlier reports.

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