

## **14/00 Administration of Confirmation by Presbyters**

(A report from a committee appointed by the Standing Committee)

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Minority Report: 14/00 Administration of Confirmation by Presbyters

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### **Introduction**

1. On 10 October 2000 the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney made the following resolution.

Synod requests that the Standing Committee appoint a committee, which shall include laypersons and need not be confined to members of Standing Committee –

- (a) to examine from a theological, historical, ecumenical, pastoral and legal point of view, the possibility of –
  - (i) confirmation no longer being required after baptism as an adult; and
  - (ii) confirmation in the Anglican Church being administered by presbyters or appropriate laypersons as well as bishops; and
- (b) to make a similar examination of the possibility of enabling presbyters or appropriate laypersons as well as bishops to receive into the fellowship of the Anglican Church, people who are communicant members of other Christian denominations; and

- (c) invite submissions from interested persons; and
- (d) report to the next session of Synod.

2. On 24 September 2001, the Standing Committee appointed a committee of six persons, subject to their acceptance, plus a nominee of the Archbishop (to act as chairman): the Rev Dr Robert Doyle, the Rev Neil Flower, the Rev Bruce Hall, Deaconess Margaret Rodgers, Mr Bill Nicholson and Dr Ann Young. The composition of the committee was not finalised until December 2001, with acceptances from all nominees, except Dr Young who declined the offer and whom the Standing Committee chose not to replace. The Archbishop appointed Bishop Glenn Davies as chairman. The first meeting was convened on 7 March 2002 and subsequent meetings were held over the following three years.

3. Advertisements were placed in the June 2002 edition of *Southern Cross* newspaper inviting submissions to the committee from interested persons. Fourteen submissions were received: twelve from individuals, both lay and ordained; one from a parish; and one from the Prayer Book Society in Australia.

4. The submissions indicated a range of opinions in the Diocese on the relative merits of confirmation and the value of the bishop presiding at such a ceremony. Broadly speaking, some endorsed the importance of retaining confirmation in its present form, given our Anglican heritage and our commitment to the principles of the Book of Common Prayer. Others, on the other hand, expressed a desire to change the way confirmation is practised, given the lack of authority for the rite in the New Testament and the appropriateness of changing customs to address the contemporary needs of the Church. In particular, there was strong support for dispensing with confirmation for those baptised as adults.

#### **The New Testament Evidence**

5. Since our Church is founded upon the teaching of the Bible and committed to the Fundamental Declarations of the 1961 Constitution, any discussion concerning a change in our current practice ought to be first tested by Scripture. Jesus' commission to make disciples of all nations includes a command to baptise them and a command to teach them to obey his commands. A Christian disciple, therefore, is a baptised follower of Jesus. No evidence of further initiation is present in Jesus' climactic words at the end of Matthew's Gospel with regard to his mission into all the world. Thus the invariable practice of the apostles was to preach the gospel and baptise those who believed (Acts 2:38; 8:35-38; 10:34-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8). Furthermore the teaching of the apostles identifies baptism as a distinguishing mark of those who belong to God's people under the new covenant (Romans 6:1-4; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27; Ephesus 4:5; 5:26; Hebrews 10:22-23; 1 Peter 3:21).

6. Yet despite the overwhelming evidence of a one-stage rite of initiation into Christian discipleship, there is a couple of instances of laying on of hands by the apostles, which may suggest a further stage of initiation.<sup>1</sup> In Acts 8:9-17 Luke records the preaching of Philip in Samaria, where believers were baptised. However, when the apostles heard that Samaritans had also believed, Peter and John were sent to Samaria. Upon their arrival they prayed for the disciples that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit had not yet come upon any of them. When the apostles, Peter and John, laid their hands upon them, they immediately received the Holy Spirit. The unusual character of this event has been generally recognised as reflecting the significance of the gospel penetrating beyond Judea into surrounding Samaria (cf Acts 1:8). Thus rather than depicting the normal manner of receiving the Spirit and being incorporated into Christ, the Samaritan incident reflects the apostolic imprimatur that the gospel of salvation had come to Samaria, just as it had done in Jerusalem. In other words, the mixed ethnic makeup of the Samaritans, considered second-class citizens in Israel, was no impediment to their receiving salvation in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

7. The other incident recorded by Luke reflects similar concerns. In Acts 19:1-8 upon arriving in Ephesus Paul encounters a group of disciples who know only the baptism of John. These disciples, living on the cusp of the new covenant, have only heard the news of the coming of the kingdom through the preaching of John, but have not been aware of its arrival in Jesus. Thus Paul baptises them into Christ and lays his hands upon them. It is in the laying on of hands that they receive the Spirit and speak in tongues. Again, the redemptive-historical character of the event is uppermost. These disciples are in Ephesus, beyond Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8), and the confirmation of their inclusion into the new covenant community is ratified by the apostle's laying on of hands and evidenced by the disciples' speaking in tongues. That this is the only recorded instance of imposition of hands in Paul's evangelistic practice suggests that the unique characteristic of this occasion warranted the laying on of hands, rather than any indication that the rite was a universally necessary one, beyond the initiatory rite of baptism.

8. In Hebrews 6:1-2 there is a curious reference to the laying on of hands as part of the foundational teaching of the Christian faith. It appears in reference to baptisms (note the plural). The distinctly

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<sup>1</sup> This view has a long history and was championed by the influential works of AJ Mason *The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism* (London, 1893) and G Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in relation to Baptism* (London, 1945). However, it was comprehensively answered by GWH Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit* (Longmans, 1951), who argued for baptism as a complete rite of initiation. For a summary of the history of this debate, see Colin Buchanan, *Anglican Confirmation* (Grove Books, Bramcote, 1986).

Jewish audience of Hebrews suggests that the author is speaking of rites of both baptisms and imposition of hands as part of the Jewish culture. Thus washings ('baptisms') were part and parcel of the Jewish religious practice. The term could also be a possible reference to John's baptism in association with Jesus' baptism (John 4:1-3; Acts 18:25; 19:3). Moreover, the laying on of hands had a variety of meanings in the Old Testament, including healing, blessing, consecration for service, identification or sign of fellowship with the community or an expression of fellowship. This range appears to be extended into the New Testament as well. Thus Paul and Barnabas had hands laid upon them for missionary service (Acts 13:1-3); Timothy had hands laid upon him for Christian ministry (2 Timothy 1:6); and Ananias laid hands on Paul as an expression of fellowship and commissioning.<sup>2</sup> As John Dunnill remarks on the Old and New Testament evidence:

Two motifs seem to be operating in these actions: a) the transmission or calling down of divine power (Genesis 48:13-16; Mark 6:5; Acts 8:19), and b) the identification of an individual person (or, in a sacrificial context, an animal) as a representative of the religious community (Leviticus 3:8; 16:21; Numbers 8:10, 12; 27:23; Acts 6:6; 13:13; 1 Timothy 4:14). Both blessing-with-power and the commissioning of representatives involve a change of status (and therefore, in some cases, of authority), but both presuppose membership of the community: on their own, they are not initiation rites in the sense in which the term applies to baptism. If used in connection with baptism, as argued above, this action should be understood as affirming the Spirit-empowering significance of baptism, not as adding a new element to it.<sup>3</sup>

9. The teaching of the New Testament evidences the unmistakable rite of baptism as the dominically authorised means of making disciples. While other tactile expressions of fellowship, blessing or commissioning also appear, they are not germane to the symbolic incorporation of a person into Christ. Rather, their existence in the New Testament reflects a well-established expression of fellowship and identification within the people of God.

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<sup>2</sup> "Ananias, the man who laid his hands on Paul, was not an apostle, nor even, it would seem, a presbyter, but an 'ordinary' Christian. And this was done before Paul was baptized (Acts 9:17f)." PE Hughes, "Confirmation: Recent theological trends", *The Churchman* 77/2 (1963), 113.

<sup>3</sup> J Dunnill, *Is Confirmation Necessary in Anglican Theology?* (General Synod Doctrine Commission Paper, 1997), 5.

**Post-apostolic Evidence**

10. Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century gives an account of baptism where the adult is baptised outside of the assembly, brought into the assembly, presided over by the bishop, greeted with a kiss of peace and then invited to receive communion. There is no mention of any laying on of hands. It is not until the end of the second century that the practice is first mentioned, where Hippolytus describes a laying on of hands by the bishop, prior to the kiss and the reception of communion. Similarly Tertullian describes a two-stage process of initiation, "a notable difference from the general use of the New Testament and the particular use of Justin."<sup>4</sup> From this point on, the two-stage initiation appears to lay hold of the Western Church. Yet in the East, the sufficiency of baptism as a complete rite of initiation continued for another 150 years. Thus in 388 John Chrysostom's instructions concerning baptism bear a good deal of similarity to that of Justin's account,<sup>5</sup> without any reference to an episcopal imposition of hands.

11. Nonetheless, the movement to a two-stage rite of initiation ultimately prevailed in both East and West, even though it was still administered during the one liturgical framework. Yet as the growth of the church in the third and fourth centuries increased, infant baptisms were more commonly administered by presbyters (rather than bishops), thus delaying confirmation by the bishop to a more convenient time.<sup>6</sup> Here the East and the West diverged: the East, preferring to keep the two stage initiation together, allowed the presbyter to perform both aspects of baptism and blessing (with the use of oils blessed by the bishop); the West, on the other hand, preferred the bishop to lay hands (also using oils) and thus the rite of confirmation was separated from baptism, which was still performed by the presbyter. By the twelfth century confirmation was considered a sacrament in its own right.<sup>7</sup>

12. The age of confirmation in the West varied significantly, though it was usually quite young and was in some parts associated with the child's first communion. Significantly, the Church of England retained early confirmation longer than the continental churches,<sup>8</sup> and as E W

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<sup>4</sup> Buchanan, *Confirmation*, 15. For a fuller discussion of the relevant patristic references see Lampe, *Seal of the Spirit*.

<sup>5</sup> J Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, cited by Buchanan, *Confirmation*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Buchanan (*Confirmation*, 17) lists six reasons for the "disintegration" of baptism and laying on of hands, following JDC Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West* (SPCK, 1956). See also Dunnill's summary (*Confirmation*, 8-9).

<sup>7</sup> SS Smalley, "Confirmation", *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Zondervan, 1974), 251.

<sup>8</sup> "[I]n 1553...at the tender age of three days, the future Queen Elizabeth was baptized (by Stokesley, Bishop of London) and at the same time confirmed (by Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury)." Hughes, "Confirmation", 100.

Winstanley notes: "several English synods in the 13<sup>th</sup> century required the bringing of infants under two, three or seven years, while the tendency of that time abroad to make seven the lowest age grew steadily, and this was the limit fixed by the Council of Trent."<sup>9</sup>

### The English Reformation

13. From Martin Luther onward, the sixteenth-century Reformers reduced the number of sacraments from seven to two, having rejected the sacramental status previously claimed for confirmation. They arrived at this conclusion by embracing the view of Thomas Aquinas that a true sacrament must be originated by Christ. The Reformers argued that confirmation did not originate with Christ, and for Luther and John Calvin at least, that it could not be found in Holy Scripture at all. There was wide agreement that there was no divine promise attached to it and that it did not work for salvation. It was thus merely an ecclesiastical rite and widely embraced as a positive activity.

14. While in 1537 Cranmer was still using the language of sacrament to describe confirmation,<sup>10</sup> he was of the opinion that it was not instituted by Christ. Thus in answer to a questionnaire circulated from Convocation, as to whether confirmation was instituted by Christ, Cranmer replied:

There is no place in scripture that declareth this sacrament to be instituted of Christ.

First, for the places alleged for the same be no institutions, but acts and deeds of the apostles.

Second, these acts were done by a special gift given to the apostles for the confirmation of God's word at the time.

Thirdly, the said special gift doth not now remain with the successors of the apostles.<sup>11</sup>

15. It is likely that Cranmer was influenced by the continental Reformers' treatment of confirmation, as an opportunity for profession of faith following significant catechetical instruction.<sup>12</sup> It was Calvin, drawing inference from the development of the rite from the early

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<sup>9</sup> EW Winstanley, "Confirmation", *The Prayer Book Dictionary* (London, 1912).

<sup>10</sup> This is a little surprising, as the Ten Articles of 1536 had excluded confirmation from the list of Sacraments.

<sup>11</sup> Cited by Buchanan, *Confirmation*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> By 1523 Luther came to associate the rite with an examination after a course of catechetical instruction. Both the Hussites and Huldreich Zwingli had begun the practice earlier. In general, especially with Bucer who was widely influential on the Book of Common Prayer, it was seen as a fitting completion of the catechetical process, required for admission to the Lord's Supper, and an appropriate submission to church discipline on the part of the recipient.

church, who most clearly expressed the view that confirmation was directly associated with infant baptism.<sup>13</sup> By the time Cranmer had written the first English Prayer Book in 1549, confirmation included a catechism as a prerequisite for children being presented to the bishop.<sup>14</sup> The rite omitted chrism but included the sign of the cross<sup>15</sup> and a prayer by the bishop that God would “send downe from heauen ...thy holy gost the comforter.” By 1552, the signing of the cross had been removed and the prayer changed to “strengthen them ...with the holy gost the comforter.” The act of confirmation was thereby ceremoniously reduced to a prayer: “Defend, O lord, this child with thy heauenly grace, that he may continue thine for ever, and dayly increase in thy holy spirite more and more, until he come unto thy euerlasting kyngdom. Amen.”

16. The 1662 Book of Common Prayer contained a more substantial order of service for confirmation than that prescribed by Cranmer, though the theology was much the same. The heading of the service was expanded to include the subtitle: “or laying on of hands upon those that are baptized and come to years of discretion.” The Catechism was also expanded and separated from the body of the printed order of service. However, perhaps the most significant aspect of the 1662 Prayer Book was the inclusion of a Ministration of Baptism to such as are of riper years and able to answer for themselves. Moreover, the service anticipated that those who were so baptised should be confirmed by the bishop “so soon after his Baptism as conveniently may be; so that he may be admitted to the holy

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<sup>13</sup> “How I wish that we might have kept the custom which, as I have said, existed among the ancient Christians before this misborn wraith of a sacrament came to birth! Not that it would be a confirmation such as they fancy, which cannot be named without doing injustice to baptism: but a catechizing, in which children or those near to adolescence would give an account of their faith before the church. But the best method of catechizing would be to have a manual drafted for this exercise, containing and summarizing in simple manner most of the articles of our religion, on which the whole of the believers’ church ought to agree without controversy. A child of ten would present himself to the church to declare his confession of faith, would be examined in each article, and answer to each.” J Calvin, *Institutes* IV.xix.12. Despite the fact that Calvin’s account of the practice of confirmation in the early church has been described as “wholly unfounded”, Buchanan concludes that it is Calvin’s authority that “lies behind Anglican Confirmation.” *Confirmation*, 19, n.1.

<sup>14</sup> “The publication of the Prayer Book marks a decisive change in contemporary practice in favour of the Reformed position.” J Atkinson, “Confirmation: the Teaching of the Anglican Divines”, *The Churchman* 77/2 (1963). 95. The involvement of the bishop was most likely kept as an expression of the orderliness that safeguards edification.

<sup>15</sup> Unlike the Sarum rite, which was the predominant Latin rite prior to 1549, Cranmer’s new English liturgy omitted the use of oil in the signing of the cross.

Communion.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The Logic of Confirmation for those baptised as Infants**

17. The reformation teaching of the Church of England recognised the importance of confirmation, even though it no longer considered it to be a sacrament. While it maintained the role of the bishop in the ceremony, following the custom of the second century, it remodelled confirmation to be a profession of faith for the one being confirmed. In fact the BCP recognises that it is both the confirmer who confirms or ratifies promises and the bishop who confirms. Indeed, the very language of “confirmation” excludes the notion of initiation, for it expresses a ratification of what already exists. That such a confirmation was necessary before a person could partake of the Lord’s Supper was in order that their repentance and faith might be confirmed by their own profession. In this regard, the presence of the bishop gave expression to the wider church as a witness to the promises of God being owned by the individual, now come of age and capable of public profession. While not a direct practice of the apostles, it is consistent with the apostolic imposition of hands as an expression of fellowship and prayer, if not a “confirmation”, that the ones upon whom hands are laid are members of God’s family (Acts 8:9-17; 19:1-8).

18. There are good theological, pastoral and ecumenical reasons for retaining the rite of confirmation. It provides an opportunity for those who have been baptised in infancy to affirm their faith in a public way. Since faith is not merely “personal faith” but a shared faith, with the apostles and all those who faithfully profess the Christian faith, it is appropriate that the bishop be involved as a representative of the wider church, not merely the immediate congregation. However, while appropriate, for pastoral and theological reasons, there is no necessity, apart from custom, that the bishop should conduct the rite. Since all liturgical ministries within a diocese are licensed by the bishop, there is no reason why the bishop could not license a presbyter to conduct the rite of confirmation.<sup>17</sup> In fact, in light of ecumenical relations, it is interesting to note that both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches currently provide delegation of confirmation to priests. Similarly, the Lutheran and Uniting Churches (among our current

<sup>16</sup> Unlike the service for infant baptism, the service for the baptism of those of riper years required that timely notice of any such persons be given to the bishop.

<sup>17</sup> “[Richard] Hooker gave the power of confirmation to bishops normally, though not necessarily invariably.” Atkinson, “Confirmation”, 96; see Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Policy* VII.vi.4. Note also the comments of Professor Lampe, “That the bishop should be its minister is obviously highly fitting and appropriate, although, as the history of confirmation compels us to believe, it is in no way essential.” *Seal of the Spirit*, 315. In 1950 the Church of South India introduced a confirmation service that was to be administered by the bishop or a presbyter (cited by Hughes, “Confirmation”, 109).

national Anglican dialogue partners) both allow for local presbyters to conduct confirmations. The only impediment to such a course of action for Anglicans is a legal one, which will be discussed below.

19. With respect to the possibility of senior laypersons conducting a confirmation service, in the opinion of a majority of the committee, there would be significant ecumenical (let alone legal) difficulties for advancing such a proposal.<sup>18</sup> While it may be argued that there would be no theological objection to such a proposal,<sup>19</sup> there seems to be no pastoral reason why the presbyter (if not the bishop) should be excluded from such a significant ceremony in the life of a candidate presenting for confirmation. The place of senior laypersons is better provided for in the preparation of candidates for confirmation and their presentation to the presbyter/bishop in the service, thus demonstrating the importance of the faith of the individual being a shared faith of the whole church.

### **The Logic of Confirmation for those baptised as Adults**

20. The history of post-apostolic confirmation sprang from the soil of a two-stage rite of initiation. While the laying on of hands is itself an uncontentious practice, as an act of fellowship or a prayer of blessing, there is no justification from Scripture for its being mandatory for all believers, let alone being a prerequisite for holy communion. Moreover, according to the teaching of Article xxv, the sixteenth century church had inherited some corrupt practices in the administration of certain ceremonies, including confirmation.

Those five, commonly<sup>20</sup> called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, [etc]...are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures; but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.

The Reformation view of confirmation was to see it as the complement to infant baptism, where children, coming to years of discretion, could profess for themselves the faith into which they had been baptized.

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<sup>18</sup> The great Puritan writer, Richard Baxter, defended confirmation in the light of theological, historical and practical considerations. "He differs from the Prayer Book only in one point, that is, episcopal confirmation, but the explanation of this lies in that he saw Anglican bishops and presbyters both as legitimate descendants of the same New Testament prototype." Atkinson, "Confirmation", 97.

<sup>19</sup> The oft-cited reference to Augustine's famous phrase comes to mind: "What other is the laying on of hands but prayer over a man?" *De Bapt. Contra Donat. iii. 16*, cited by J Calvin, *Institutes* IV.xix.12.

<sup>20</sup> Buchanan reminds his readers: "It will be recalled that, to the Reformers, 'commonly' usually meant 'wrongly'." *Confirmation* 21, n 4.

Thus Canon 60 (1604 Canons) declares:

Forasmuch as it hath been a solemn, ancient, and laudable custom in the church of God, continued from the Apostles' times, that all Bishops should lay their hands upon children baptized, and instructed in the Catechism of Christian Religion, praying over them and blessing them, which we commonly call *Confirmation*...<sup>21</sup>

However, with the laudable, though innovative, introduction of a service of baptism for those of riper years, a liturgical platform was erected for a service of adult baptism, for which the significance of confirmation of such candidates was clearly not properly thought through.<sup>22</sup>

21. Theologically, the baptism of an adult is complete in terms of their incorporation into Christ. There is no necessity for a delayed rite of confirmation, for they have already professed Christ. In current Anglican practice, if an adult baptisand (a candidate for baptism) is to be confirmed, either the baptism is delayed so as to coincide with the bishop's presence at the confirmation, or the confirmation is delayed because the bishop is not available at the time of baptism. Both situations are undesirable. Either confirmation should be dispensed with for adult baptisands or there should be no delay in the imposition of hands with prayer, as an expression of fellowship in the body of Christ.

22. While there are no theological objections to removing the requirement of confirmation for adult baptisands, there is good reason to continue with this ancient practice as a sign of fellowship and identification. In many ways it is akin to the handshake of fellowship or the applause from the congregation after an adult is baptized – not

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<sup>21</sup> The Prayer Book of 1604 expanded the title of the rite from Cranmer's "Confirmation wherein is conteyned a catchisme for Children" to "The Order of Confirmation, or laying on of hands upon children baptized and able to render account of their faith, according to the Catechism following".

<sup>22</sup> The Preface of 1662 declares in reference to the office for the Baptism of such as are of Riper Years, "which, although not so necessary when the former Book was compiled, yet by the growth of Anabaptism, through the licentiousness of the late times crept in amongst us, is now become necessary, and may be always useful for the baptizing of Natives in out Plantations, and others converted to the Faith." Buchanan makes the astute observation (*Confirmation*, 29): "It looks rather like the 'riper years' rite was devised at a late stage to catch up on those who had escaped infant baptism between 1643 and 1661, and that then the rubric [at end of the baptism service for those of riper years] was written without close reference to the confirmation rite. The 'riper years' rite (for all the vague talk in the Preface about the 'natives in our plantations') was intended to catch up once on a lost generation, and then be needed no more. And the closing rubric about getting confirmed was all of a piece with this, not a statement of biblical principles, but rather one of ecclesiastical/political expediency."

intrinsically necessary but appropriate. As the reformers retained the sign of the cross at baptism (equally unnecessary, but appropriate), there is no danger in retaining the laying on of hands for those who are received into the fellowship of Christ's church through baptism.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, there are ecumenical reasons for retaining confirmation, and the majority of the committee believes that there is no compelling argument to abolish "laying on of hands" for adult baptisands, as long as it is not viewed as an essential requirement for admission to holy communion.

23. When the post-apostolic church introduced the laying on of hands as part of the initiation ceremony, the growth of the church in the third and fourth centuries made it more expedient to dispense with the presence of bishops in the Eastern Church,<sup>24</sup> rather than wait for the bishop to baptise and confirm. In more recent days, for the sake of expediency, the Roman Catholic Church similarly authorises priests to conduct confirmation in the bishop's absence.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the delay of confirmation cannot be justified from Scripture as a ground for denying such baptised adults participation in the Lord's Supper.<sup>26</sup> The development within the Anglican Communion, and Australia in particular, of the admission of children to communion presents a striking contrast to the exclusion of baptised adults who have not been confirmed. Although it is true that one might claim the confirmation rubric,<sup>27</sup> so as to allow those "desirous of being confirmed" admittance to the Lord's table, what if they do not fulfil such desires? What if they consider that their baptism is sufficient for them to be counted among the many members of the one body who eat of the one bread (1 Corinthians 10:17)? What right has the church of God to refuse a baptised adult the Supper of the Lord, when it welcomes a baptised

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that Buchanan's preference is to abolish confirmation for adult baptisands rather than adopt an integrated rite (*Confirmation*, 46). No doubt his reasons for this are to avoid any suggestion that laying on of hands is integral to Christian initiation. However, it is not necessary to draw this inference from those instances where hands were laid either before (Acts 9:17) or after (Acts 19:6) baptism.

<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the authority of the bishop is still present in the episcopally blessed oils for confirmation.

<sup>25</sup> In Latin-rite Catholic churches only bishops (and priests with authorisation by the bishop) may lawfully administer the sacrament of confirmation, but if an ordinary priest administers that sacrament illegally, it is nonetheless considered valid, so that the person confirmed cannot be confirmed again, by a bishop or otherwise. In Eastern-rite Catholic churches, confirmation is done by parish priests via the rite of chrismation, and is usually administered to both neonates and adults immediately after their baptism.

<sup>26</sup> From 1829 till 1836, Archdeacon Broughton admitted unconfirmed Christians to the Lord's Supper, with permission of the Bishop of Calcutta, since no bishop was available until Broughton was consecrated bishop in 1836.

<sup>27</sup> "And there shall be none admitted to the holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed, or ready and desirous to be confirmed." Rubric at the end of the BCP Confirmation Service.

child to the Lord's table? While the value of church order is commendable in the sight of God (1 Corinthians 11:33), it cannot be used to justify a practice that is contrary to the teaching of Holy Scripture.

24. However, it is well to note that the Church of England has a long history of admitting to holy communion those who have not been confirmed. When the Test Act of the seventeenth century was passed, requiring all public servants and members of Parliament to be members of the Established Church, many "baptised but unconfirmed" citizens took communion three times a year, as prescribed by the canons of 1604, and thus fulfilled their civic and ecclesiastical duty.<sup>28</sup> Indeed the language of communicant member of the Church of England was more elastic in practice than might appear from a wooden interpretation of the confirmation rubric.<sup>29</sup>

25. Confirmation in its Western form is predicated upon the appropriateness for a candidate, baptised as an infant, to confirm by their own profession the promises made at their baptism. However, a delayed confirmation for adult baptisands appears bereft of any theological moorings. Yet if the rite of laying on of hands was delegated to the presbyter who, at the time of the adult's baptism, laid hands in accordance with the custom of the apostles (Acts 8:9-17, 19:1-8; Hebrews 6:1-2), there would be much to be gained pastorally, theologically and ecumenically. It would act as a sign of welcome and fellowship for the adult disciple. It would allow the adult to partake of the Lord's Supper immediately upon their baptism/laying on of hands. Furthermore it would be consistent with the practice of our ecumenical dialogue partners where provision already exists for confirmation to be delegated to the local minister.<sup>30</sup>

26. The question of confirmation of adult baptisands by senior laypersons, however, is more problematic. Unless the layperson was also administering the baptism, it would seem somewhat strange to delegate the rite to a layperson. In the view of the majority of the committee it would be better to involve the layperson in areas of catechetical preparation or sponsorship as their part in the welcome of the new disciple into the fellowship of the church.

### **The Legal Point of View**

27. Under section 74(1) of the 1961 Constitution a "Member of this Church" means a baptised person who attends the public worship of

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<sup>28</sup> The Test Act was not repealed until 1828, when the growth of Independents, Baptists and Presbyterians had become so great that it was impossible to restrict such conscientious objectors (requiring their triannual communion in the Church of England) from public service.

<sup>29</sup> See the essay by HM Gwatkin, "The Confirmation Rubric: whom does it bind?" (London, 1914).

<sup>30</sup> See note 25 above.

this Church and who declares that he is a member of this Church and of no church which is not in communion with this Church.” Clearly the lack of episcopal confirmation does not prevent a baptised person from being a member of this Church. Similarly in the Diocese of Sydney, under section 7(1) of the Church Administration Ordinance 1990, only members of the Anglican Church of Australia are eligible to participate in a Vestry meeting. Again there is no requirement that they be confirmed. The qualifications of churchwardens (§22) and parish councillors (§32) are that they be communicant members of the Anglican Church of Australia. However, a communicant member is one who partakes in the Lord’s Supper, not one who is necessarily confirmed.<sup>31</sup> This interpretation of “communicant membership” has a long history, notwithstanding the attempts of the Oxford Movement to redefine the boundaries of the confirmation rubric.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, every diocese in Australia has adopted the Canon for Admission of Children to Holy Communion (1985), which enables children to be admitted to the Lord’s Supper as communicant members, without their being confirmed.<sup>33</sup> In fact, it would appear that confirmation is only necessary for those who would be ordained deacon or admitted to the order of deaconesses.<sup>34</sup>

28. Notwithstanding the above arguments, it is also obvious that confirmation is the normal means whereby a person is considered a communicant member of the Anglican Church. Under the Admission to Holy Communion Canon 1973 the “ordinary requirements” of admittance to the holy communion declare that a person is eligible to be admitted to holy communion if they are a member of this Church and have been confirmed or are ready and desirous to be confirmed. Furthermore, the Book of Common Prayer makes no provision for a

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<sup>31</sup> The Sydney Diocesan Legal Committee addressed this question in July 1973. Although three members of the committee produced the “majority report” which identified a communicant member as person who had been confirmed, five members of the committee (the “minority report”) gave the opinion that a communicant member “is a person (a) who is a member, and (b) who partakes of the Holy Communion. He may do this as of right (if he has been confirmed or is ready and desirous of being confirmed) or as of grace (if he has not been confirmed and is not so ready and desirous).” Their distinction between a matter “of right” and “of grace” was based on the judgment of Stirling J re Perry Almshouses (1898 1 Ch. at 400), a judgment that was twice approved by the Court of Appeal in 1899 and 1951.

<sup>32</sup> “It seems historically clear that the rubric was never seriously understood as excluding nonconformists till long after the rise of Tractarianism.” Gwatkin, *The Confirmation Rubric*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> The canon makes no *requirement* for such children to be confirmed in later life. It would be difficult to justify the excommunication of a child so admitted who did not then proceed to confirmation.

<sup>34</sup> It is not without note that those admitted to the order of deaconess must be “baptized, confirmed and a communicant member” (Order of Deaconesses Canon 1969, §3), indicating that a communicant member is not coextensive with a person who is confirmed.

service where a presbyter might conduct a confirmation, nor is there any expectation that the Canon Concerning Confirmation 1992, in the light of the Reception Canon 1981,<sup>35</sup> allows for confirmation other than at the hands of a bishop. In the opinion of the committee, therefore, legislation would need to be passed by the synod or the General Synod for a person to be confirmed by a presbyter in accordance with the rites of the Anglican Church of Australia.

#### **Recommendations of the committee**

29. That the Synod endorse the proposal that confirmation should not be required of those baptised as adults before they are admitted to holy communion.

30. That the Synod endorse the proposal that presbyters, under licence from the Archbishop, be allowed to administer confirmation.

31. That the Synod encourage the involvement of senior laypersons in the catechetical preparation of candidates for confirmation.

32. That the Synod endorse the proposal that presbyters, under licence from the Archbishop, be allowed to receive into the fellowship of the Anglican Church people who are communicant members of other Christian denominations.

33. That the Standing Committee be asked to bring an ordinance to a forthcoming session of Synod or promote a General Synod Canon for the next General Synod that would make the above recommendations possible.

#### **Response of the Standing Committee to the recommendations**

34. In response to the committee's recommendations, the Standing Committee requested that the following motion be moved "by request of the Standing Committee" at the Synod –

"Synod –

- (a) endorses the proposal that confirmation should not be required of those baptised as adults, before their being admitted to holy communion,
- (b) endorses the proposal that clergy, under licence from the Archbishop, be allowed to administer confirmation,

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<sup>35</sup> The Reception Canon 1981 sets out the procedures whereby a person who is or was a communicant member of another church which holds the apostolic faith, but which is not in communion with the Anglican Church of Australia, which involves their being presented before the bishop for a rite of reception. Such received persons are then accorded the same status as a person who has been confirmed in accordance with Anglican rites.

- (c) encourages the involvement of senior laypersons in the catechetical preparation of candidates for confirmation,
- (d) endorses the proposal that clergy, under licence from the Archbishop, be allowed to receive into the fellowship of the Anglican Church people who are communicant members of other Christian denominations, and
- (e) requests that the Standing Committee bring an ordinance to a forthcoming session of Synod or promote a General Synod Canon for the next General Synod that would make the above proposals possible.”

35. This motion generally conforms to the committee's recommendations referred to in 29 to 33 above. However instead of presbyters being licensed to administer confirmation and receive communicant members of other Christian denominations into the fellowship of the Anglican Church, the motion proposes that clergy be licensed to perform these roles.

36. A minority report in relation to this matter appears below.

For and on behalf of the Committee

GLENN N DAVIES  
*Chairman of the Committee*  
18 July 2005

### **Minority Report: 14/00 Administration of Confirmation by Presbyters**

1. While in agreement with much of the content and tenor of the majority report, there are two areas in which we find unacceptable difficulties: the handling of the New Testament evidence, and the exclusion of senior lay people from administering confirmation.

2. In sections 5 and 6, the evidence adduced for water baptism being 'a distinguishing mark of those who belong to God's people' has not taken into account the fact that the majority of references to 'baptism' in the New Testament are not to a literal water baptism but are metaphorical. More importantly, the New Testament gives us a two-fold foundation against which we ought to understand 'baptism', including our practice of it. First, is the baptism of Jesus Christ, which is his death on the cross, where he was overwhelmed or 'drowned' by the judgement of God in his sin bearing on our behalf (Luke 12:50; Mark 10:38-9; Romans 8:3). It is this baptism which saves. Second,

the New Testament promises that the distinctive baptism which Jesus Christ brings is not water baptism but the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). The New Testament does not give a rite of baptism, i.e., water baptism, the emphasis or place the majority report does.

3. The conclusion in section 9 that water baptism 'is the dominically authorised means of making disciples', is unhelpful. The New Testament teaches that the 'authorised' human activities which make disciples are proclamation of the gospel and the response of repentance and faith (Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 1:14-25). In some references to baptism in the New Testament, water baptism is seen to operate as a suitable recognition or sign of the human response (Acts 2:41; 8:26-38).

4. Contrary to sections 18, 19 and 25, there are very important pastoral and ecumenical reasons for including senior lay people in any licensing of those qualified to administer confirmation. The prevailing understanding of spiritual reality both within Anglicanism and in Australian Christian practice more widely is catholicism. In that context, to exclude lay senior lay people is seriously misleading. Confirmation, like all significative or symbolic actions Christians engage in, ought to point clearly towards the truths of the apostolic gospel, not away from them. The arguments for this are akin to those concerning lay administration of holy communion.

5. Eastern and Western Catholicism are in a broad catholic tradition from Ignatius and Cyprian onward in which Christian ministry is understood in the context of a firm belief in an inescapably sacramental universe. On this view, God works downward through his creation to reveal himself and to redeem it through a hierarchy of sacraments. The world is seen as a place in which created things become vehicles of God's blessing, and humanity itself is defined as a sacramental being. The sacramental potential of all nature is realized through the consecration of some elements of it in explicitly sacramental rites. Within this theological and metaphysical understanding, by the performance of sacramental acts grace flows down from God, through Christ, to the earthly Church via duly ordained bishops, priests and deacons. Without this three-fold order, the Church is not truly constituted and sacramental ministry, with its saving power, is not truly valid. The absolute necessity for episcopal ministry of Confirmation, either directly or through priests authorised by bishops, falls within these foundational beliefs.

6. The Evangelical Reformers of the Continental and English churches affirmed that God does not work in the world as a first order by way of sacraments or signs, but that he works directly, by his word and Spirit. That is, it is affirmed that Christ himself and not any human person or persons rules his church, and he does it directly through his word of the gospel which the Holy Spirit himself speaks. The

Reformers grasped from the New Testament's teaching on Word and Spirit that word is personal mode of God's being. Thus, in the faithful reading and teaching of the Bible and in the faithful hearing of that teaching, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, is personally active, for as we read and teach, it is also a fact that 'the Spirit preaches the gospel' (1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2:13; 1 Peter 1:12, 23). For that fundamental reason, the Reformers understood the sacraments as 'visible words', or enacted promises, and decisions as to their ministry were dictated by concerns for an orderliness which would promote edification. As seen in both Luther's and Cranmer's writings on the Lord's Supper, lay people could in principle administer sacraments. Administration of holy communion and confirmation is consistent with the practice of lay people being able to baptise, for all three are spiritual ministries which in principle belong not just to clergy but to lay people as well.

7. In our present context, which has been heightened by the debates and discussions around Synod's resolve to licence lay people to administer holy communion, to exclude senior lay people from the administration of confirmation is to avoid offering a corrective to a wrong view of spiritual reality. Licensing senior lay people serves both our own constituency and the wider Christian community in Australia with a positive indication of the truth.

8. Our recommendations, therefore, agree with those of the majority report, except that "presbyter and senior laypersons" should replace all occurrences of "presbyter".

The Rev Dr Robert Doyle and the Rev Bruce Hall

18 July 2005