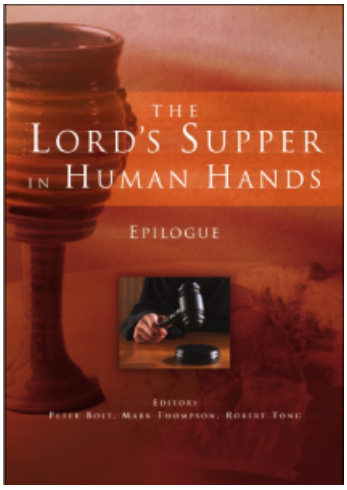
Review: The Lord's Supper in Human Hands – Epilogue

An epilogue to *The Lord's Supper in Human Hands*, a treatise on lay and diaconal administration of Holy Communion which I reviewed some time ago, has been made available as a free pdf.



I was off-deck when the Appellate Tribunal brought its 2010 response to the Synod of Sydney's resolution accepting legal argument for non-presbyteral administration. I wondered at the time what Sydney's response would be. The synodical outcome is old news now. But now we have easy access to the booklet that outlines the basis for it.

No great commentary from me. Just a few points.

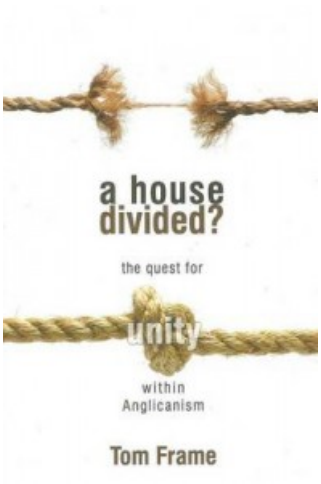
1. Bp. Peter Brain's minority report in the Appellate Tribunal's decision is I think thoughtful, balanced and well-spirited.
2. Bp. Glenn Davies' response to the decision says nothing new but brings new clarity to his argument. He does make a clear emphasis on the disparity in the logic used by the AT to recognise provision for women bishops in the current legislative corpus, but not diaconal administration. I agree with him at least to say that the disparity should never have existed: the AT interpretation that led to female episcopacy was an insipid way of recognising that practice – its proponents should have argued it into joyous acclamation and reception, not slipped it through a judicial

backdoor.

3. Bp. Davies assumes the AT decision is "advisory" not a "determination" and Robert Tong explicates this in his chapter on constitutional arrangements. I assume that this issue will be the next legal question raised. Which in turn raises an interesting question about whether the AT will need to determine something about itself – and whether any response that it is determinative could then itself be taken as advisory!

Unsurprisingly the "judicial" aspects of the Anglican Church of Australia have failed to resolve this question. I concur with Bp. Brain's emphasis on fellowship rather than legalism here.

Review: Two books by Tom Frame #1 – A House Divided?



I've just read the two most recent books by Australian Anglican author, Bp. Tom Frame of St. Mark's National Theological Centre in Canberra. One book is an examination of unbelief in Australia, and conversely the other is an examination of a denomination in Australia. Frame brings analysis, rhetoric and a touch of polemic to both topics

I read the most recent first. *A House Divided*? is subtitled "the quest for unity within Anglicanism." It is both an apology and a critique. Although the critique is sometimes more prevalent there is no questioning Frame's motivation

which is unashamedly reformational. At both the beginning and the end of the book:

> *"In the face of growing anti-Christian sentiment, the time has come for the Anglican Church to declare what it believes and to determine the limits of diversity; to divest itself of the institutional baggage that drains its members of so much energy and enthusiasm; and, to shed much of its antiquated Victorian accoutrement and stifling English mindset… In this set of essays I want to identify what is ailing the Anglican Church of Australia; to explain why parts of the Church have become diseased; to advise against persisting with policies and practices deleterious to its well-being; to prescribe changes to its common life in order that it might regain health; to suggest actions and attitudes what will promote vibrant mission and ministry, so that the Church will be able to face some of the challenges rising before it over the next 30 years." (Page 3)*

> *"While those who are obsessed with preserving structures and processes will disappear and those who are transfixed by the need to dispense with difficult beliefs and unpopular doctrines will fade from view, the remaining Anglicans will constitute a remnant and their task will be to rebuild the Anglican edifice from the ruins of secularised faith and the rubble of compromised theology… The rebuilding will take decades but whatever arises from the ground will have better foundations, more solid walls and look more authentically Australian… I hope to live long enough to see this new Church and to rejoice in the grace of God that built it." (Pages 289-290)*

I confess that such motivation moves me and resonates with my own commitment to Anglicanism.

Frame's analysis takes him through a consideration of Evangelicalism, Anglo-Catholicism, and Liberalism in the

Anglican Church. He gives the strengths and weaknesses of both yet he is not academically dispassionate about it. In fact Frame looks determine to deliberately inhabit the unhappy centre, understanding everyone, but not closely aligned with anyone. It's a lonely place to be. I can admire that. The only thing lacking from his analysis is to consider the Charismatic renewal in the Anglican Church – a renewal that transcends the other three categories in a way that he doesn't engage with substantially.

The axe is taken to the root of some Anglican holy cows – the characteristics of our episcopacy, the operation of our synods. I can respect his view that episcopal orders should inhere to diocesan oversight – and he uses himself as an example of someone who has such a discordant title. I would counter by arguing that he himself is actually an example of how episcopal leadership is greater than diocesan administration. (And gently point out that he is wearing an episocopal shirt on the back cover).

The global Anglican situation is not overlooked. My (mostly online) observations from afar have lead me to a similar conclusion that I might call "redemptive cynicism" a sense of knowing that it's finished, amicably handling what remains, and not being nervous about the unknown future. I have previously extended hope to the possibility of the Covenant bringing remedy, reduced that hope to the chance of bringing amicable divorce, and, since last year, reduced it even further. I can agree with Frame that "in all likelihood, it will not even go close to achieving its stated goals." I agree with this position:

> *"I am naturally disappointed that the high level of organisational unity achieved within the Communion has subsided but I see no reason to be despondent The time and energy devoted to preserving the fractured remains of the Communion over the past five years has not paid any dividends. An attempt was needed because something valuable*

> *was at stake. But this attempt failed because the dissenting parties felt they would gain more by going it alone than continuing in the company of those with whom they disagreed… Anglicans will hereafter be described by their 'network' affiliation or some other label disclosing the theological tradition to which they belong. This reflects the reality that the Church has a 'natural' community of its own, a community that is intrinsic to the kind of decisions it needs to make about its life and witness." (Page 87, emphasis added).*

The third part of the book breaks out of a stream of argument and delivers a series of stand-alone essays. While useful in and of themselves I think they are something of a distraction and actually weaken the thrust of the reformational polemic. A shorter harder-hitting book would be more powerful I think.

I have heard this book criticised for being ranty. I'm not sure if it is but part of me doesn't care if it is. Reformation needs personal charisma as long as it is constructive and spins a vision to aim for. There were times when I felt Frame was not tilting at the windmill that I would personally prefer him to. And some of the final chapter on "Moving Forward" (the main place where negative criticism turns into positive vision) seems a bit abstract and disconnected from a real plan or substantial agenda. But so what? It fired me up. It made me think about the world and the church and renewed the fire in my belly to see these old ecclesiastical bones bearing real flesh once more.