Review of ‘The Push for Lay Administration at the Lord’s Supper’

John Milbank recently commented that ‘the practice of “apologetics” has fallen into disrepute ... in part due to the associations that cling to the word itself, which suggests, at worse, that one must apologise for something, and, at best, that one must defend a doubtful or compromised position.’ Milbank observes that apologetics has come to mean ‘a theologically secondary exercise’ which involves ‘not the exposition of the faith, but the defence of the faith on grounds other than faith’ where the aim might be to demonstrate that another person has missed the authentic wider ground. This, as Milbank sees it, would ‘appear to be beyond the apologetic remit’.

Michael Jensen’s book *Sydney Anglicanism: An Apology* avoids most of these problems of apologetics to which Milbank refers and agrees with Milbank that it is time to reconsider the role of apologetics. Jensen helps the reader to see that the exposition of faith always includes a dimension

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of apology but, at the same time, an apology must contain a strong confessional element. He does however at times lapse into discussion of how Anglican traditions other than the evangelical Anglican and specifically the Sydney Anglican have missed the authentic wider ground. This is beyond the remit of apology.

Apology convinces precisely because it persuades through an imaginative presentation of belief and at the same time includes reasoned claims within a particular tradition. Jensen's apology does these things and discusses the strong confessional elements behind what is known as Sydney Anglicanism in a clear, persuasive and imaginative manner, allowing the reader to understand what drives the tradition of Sydney Anglicanism. His narrative provides a testament to faith in one part of the Anglican Communion by affirming the supremacy of Scripture, by the use of reason and by an appeal to the evangelical and Reformed tradition predominant in Sydney Anglicanism. There is a clear sense that Jensen's apology is a narrative, an argument, a confession and an imaginative witness in the name of the divine, or as Socrates interpreted by Plato would say, before the city: the wider expanse of the Anglican Communion and Anglican theology. The differences between Sydney Anglicanism and other parts of the Anglican Communion are clearly marked and, indeed in relation to Anglican Eucharistic theology, a multiformity of views is admitted. There is an individuality, nonetheless, in Jensen's apology for Sydney Anglicanism which he does not try to hide, nor should he, since it is one voice amongst many in the Anglican tradition. Jensen develops this voice in many places with pride and enthusiasm as a particular expression of Anglicanism. His apology is instructive for those who want to understand Sydney Anglicanism.

Jensen's apology is not some weak thing but rather bold and imaginative where the reader is left is no doubt about a Reformed and evangelical commitment to, among other things, a particular method of interpreting Scripture called 'Biblical Theology' (chapter 3) and propositional revelation (chapter 4) or, as he would call it, 'verbal revelation' where 'divine self-disclosure is basically verbal.' Jensen also reaches beyond the Sydney agenda and gives an accurate and balanced assessment of Richard Hooker's approach to revelation arguing, as Hooker did, that Scripture is supreme but that reason and tradition have an important and necessary part to play in Anglican theology. Throughout the book Jensen's argument sees reason as
an important God-given gift, assisting people to hear the words of Scripture and to interpret the tradition.

Jensen is firmly committed to the evangelical and Reformed tradition of Sydney Anglicanism arguing in a reasoned way, in harmony with other makers of the tradition including his own father, Peter Jensen the Archbishop of Sydney, that 'revelation is not the proper nouns "Jesus Christ", but the proposition, "Jesus is Christ, the Lord".10 This tradition of propositional revelation rests on God-given reason. When Jensen says 'the divine Word became flesh, as the New Testament claims, then surely that divine Word can inhabit words too', it would be hard for any Anglican to disagree. Some Anglicans, especially in any discussion of sacramentality, may however want to expand the argument and say that the divine Word can also inhabit experience and nature. To be fair Jensen admits that God is revealed in human experience and nature but insists that it is through the word that we 'truly apprehend his revelation'.12 The words 'truly apprehend' imply the application of reason as the word is apprehended, through the traditions of Biblical Theology and propositional revelation, and also that the other means of revelation, such as human experience and nature, are not as truly the means whereby a person apprehends as through the word. Other Anglicans may disagree but it is not Jensen's purpose or need in such an apology for Sydney Anglicanism to explain the positions of others.

In chapter 10 of his apology Jensen considers what he calls 'The Great Cause', that is lay presidency or, as Sydney Anglicanism prefers, lay administration. He assumes that the need for lay presidency is apparent, since 'most Sydney Anglicans' see it 'as an appropriate reform of church order in the light of Scripture' and that such a move is 'entirely consistent with the Reformation convictions of the Sydney diocese'.14 The reader is left to wonder how Jensen knows the mind of 'most Sydney Anglicans'. Does he merely know the mind of a small part of the tradition – perhaps some of those who have voted for it in synod or argued for it in various publications? The claim that it is 'entirely consistent' with Reformation convictions is also interesting since the Reformers such as Archbishop Thomas Cranmer never make any mention of or suggestion about lay presidency of the Eucharist.

For Jensen it seems that the reason for advocating lay presidency lies in the fact that Scripture makes no mention of a priest presiding at the Eucharist and so such questions are seen to be second order questions of church order alone and therefore open for Sydney Anglicanism to introduce
lay administration, despite the scriptural direction that 'all things should be done decently and in order'\textsuperscript{15} and despite the probable leadership of the elders in the community of faith\textsuperscript{16} which may have included worship. It must be recognised however that 'as far as eucharistic presidency is concerned there is no indication anywhere in the New Testament of an explicit link between the Church's office and presiding at the Eucharist.'\textsuperscript{17}

Article XX of the \textit{Thirty-Nine Articles} says however that the church has power to decree rites and ceremonies and to be the authority in controversies of faith. It also says that it is not lawful for the church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's word as written in the Bible. The Anglican Reformers, who acknowledged the supremacy of Scripture, envisaged nonetheless that the president of the Eucharist would be a priest and it is clear in the rubrics of the 1662 \textit{Book of Common Prayer (BCP)} that the priest will say the Prayer of Consecration – not a deacon and not a lay person. Such a direction by the 1662 \textit{BCP} is not contrary to Scripture but falls within the confines of church order, which the Anglican Church has always used to regulate its corporate life as Hooker, and indeed Jensen himself, claim is the case.

When Jensen addresses the matter of church order he quotes from Article XXXIV of the \textit{Thirty-Nine Articles}, referring to a section of this Article that says:

\begin{quote}
it is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly like; for all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's word. ... Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying.
\end{quote}

It is interesting to note that he leaves out the middle section of this article, as indicated by the three dots in his quotation. Article XXXIV makes a fairly strong statement, saying in the omitted section:

\begin{quote}
Whosoever through his private judgement, willingly and purposefully, doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority,
\end{quote}
ought to be rebuked openly, (that others may fear to do the like,) as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the Magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren.

If church order has decided that it is the priest who presides and says the Prayer of Consecration in the Eucharist then, on the basis of Article XXXIV, it seems that breaking that order is a serious matter. Breaking of such church order is not done as a matter of private judgment or because most Sydney Anglicans see it as appropriate, even if Scripture says nothing about it, or on the basis of reasoned argument in a particular evangelical and Reformed tradition of Anglicanism, but only where the national church has decided that this should be done. In our Australian context this means the national church's making such a decision and so an individual diocese's making a decision on a particular issue which goes against the national church or indeed the consensus of the worldwide Anglican Communion is creating a break in church order before the mind of that national church or the wider Anglican Communion has been properly decided. This applies as much to lay presidency as it does to any other matter of order. The ordination of women to the priesthood was at one time not generally accepted church order in the national church but now it is, apart from a few dioceses including the diocese of Sydney, and so by extrapolation Article XXXIV now affirms the ordination of women to the priesthood since the mind of the national church is now substantially agreed on this matter of church order. The important matter here is not that ceremonies and rites can be changed in national churches, since the Article says they can be changed. The important matter, omitted by Jensen in his consideration of Article XXXIV, is the matter of church order and not changing it unless by decision of a national church. Unless the changes are made by the legitimate decision of a substantial majority of a national church in, say, the synod of that national church, then those who make unapproved changes ought to be rebuked since they are offending rightful authority and wounding tender consciences. The logic follows with issues other than lay presidency of the Eucharist, especially when there are implications for the church as whole. These are matters which our Anglican Communion in the Windsor Report\textsuperscript{18} has considered, as some provinces move ahead of the mind of the Anglican Communion to ordain gay people as bishops, to conduct same-sex-marriages or, as bishops in certain parts
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of the Anglican Communion, to cross boundaries of authority to offer episcopal oversight in a province other their own. These matters of ordination, marriage and episcopal oversight have offended church order, just as lay presidency of the Eucharist offends, since there is no clear mind of the Anglican Communion at this time. It does not help the Anglican Communion as a whole if one province or diocese changes church order simply because most people in that diocese see it as an appropriate change or because this change accords with the beliefs of a particular diocesan tradition, ahead of the mind of a substantial part of the whole Communion.

Curiously Jensen argues that the 'celebration of the Holy Communion by the ordained clergyman must surely convey that the ministry involved is sacerdotal'. Leaving aside the question that some celebrants of the Eucharist may indeed be women, and not just a 'clergyman,' the use of the word 'sacerdotal' to describe the function of the ordained priest in the Anglican tradition is mistaken. Sacerdotal implies much more than priestly, not just the celebration of the Holy Communion but rather the priest's taking upon him or herself the offering of a sacrifice for the sins of others, both the living and the dead, where the priest offers up gifts as a sacrifice for sin such that the priest's actions perform this as a good work. This is not Anglican Eucharistic theology since of course only Christ can do this. A correct understanding of Eucharistic sacrifice does not involve sacerdotal priestly action but this is another matter not to be pursued here. To describe the role of the priest in celebrating the Holy Communion as sacerdotal is also distinctly different from what the prayer books say about the function of a priest. The 1662 BCP describes the priestly function as being to 'take thou authority to preach the Word of God, and to minister the holy Sacraments in the Congregation, where thou shall lawfully be appointed thereunto.' A Prayer Book for Australia (APBA) has similar words which include the faithful ministry of the word of God and God's holy sacraments. The priest's function then is to preach the Word and minister the Sacraments as well as to provide pastoral ministry. This is a function of presiding as the elder and providing unity in the congregation, representing not only a particular church but the universal church by virtue of ordination in the church of God, as well as providing leadership in the whole community of faith. Both prayer books reserve the function of presiding at the Eucharist, which is much more than just saying the Prayer of Consecration but also includes presiding over the Word, to the priest.
Jensen also argues that if lay people can read the Scriptures, preach, pray and assist at the Eucharist, then why is this one action of presiding at the Eucharist restricted to the ordained priest. The answer lies in church order governing the life of the Anglican Church in a reasoned and appropriate way that is not opposed to Scripture. If the church delegates authority by virtue of ordination to the priest to preside over Word and Sacrament and to say the Thanksgiving Prayer and if the church believes that this is not opposed to Scripture, then it is a matter of church order based on the authority of the church (Article XX) and a matter which supports the common order of the church (Article XXXIV). Such a delegation of authority does not imply that 'there is a special power in the ordination to pray the prayer of consecration'\textsuperscript{22} or 'a quasi-mystical view of the effects of ordination'\textsuperscript{23} as Jensen argues, but that there is a specific function delegated to the ordained priest which is not delegated as a function to lay people. There is indeed a 'special power' given to the priest in ordination which includes much more than praying the Prayer of Consecration and this is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit for a specific function. In the 1662 \textit{BCP} the bishop's words make this clear when he or she says, 'Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands.'\textsuperscript{24} It is the Holy Ghost who conveys the special power that results in an 'ordering of priests.' In \textit{APBA} the bishop prays that God will 'send down the Holy Spirit upon your servant N, whom we set apart by the laying on of our hands, for the office and work of a priest in the Church'\textsuperscript{25} and it is by this special power that the priest is 'set apart', allowing the priest to 'take authority to preach the word of God, and to minister the holy sacraments.'\textsuperscript{26} This delegating of a specific function to the priest by the church, in the power of the Spirit, is not a distortion of the gospel as some have claimed\textsuperscript{27} and with which Jensen seemingly agrees\textsuperscript{28} but is a matter of church order with scriptural warrant for the sending out of people to specific functions by the laying on of hands. Delegating the function of presiding at the Eucharist to the priest is not to say 'that there is a higher priority in this activity than in preaching the word of God'\textsuperscript{29} but merely to say that the priest has a different function which the church has affirmed by ordination and which is delegated to the ordained priest but not to the lay person. Lay people and the ordained priest are equal before God in the sense that all are members of the priesthood of all believers but at the same time they have different functions in the congregation and at the Eucharist, as is affirmed.
in the Ordinal. They are the same but different. To argue as Jensen does that ‘if the lay preacher can preach under the delegated authority of the ordained minister, why can she not administer the Lord’s Supper under that same delegated authority?’ really misses several points. First it misses the point that church order directs that the ordained priest presides at the Eucharist. Second the ordained priest presides over both word and sacrament but the lay person does not preside over either the word or the sacrament, even if the lay person preaches, reads the word or assists at the Eucharist. Third the ordained minister does not have the authority according to the church order we see in the 1662 BCP or APBA or according to the Anglican Church of Australia to delegate authority to a lay person to preside at the Eucharist, even though the ordained minister does have the authority to delegate the authority to preach, read and assist. The whole question revolves around church order and delegated authority that does not offend the supremacy of the word of Scripture or indeed the Anglican formularies.

Jensen also argues that by restricting the celebration of the Eucharist to the priest ‘the validity of the Lord’s Supper is constituted by the one who administers it and that ordination has more to do with the sacrament than the ministry of the word’. To argue in this way is to mistake the matter of church for some sort of special power which is exactly what Jensen has previously argued against. Priests are ordained as the prayer books direct to the faithful ministry of the word of God and God’s holy sacraments. They are not ordained to an ‘activity’ as Jensen suggests, but to a function which is affirmed by the church in ordination. This function is both to word and sacrament and it is the priest who presides over both word and sacrament in the Eucharist. The church in its lawful order has decided that others can share in the ministry of the word and sacrament but not in the specific function of consecration and this is clear in almost every national prayer book of the provinces of the Anglican Communion.

Jensen also makes some comments concerning certain evangelical and Reformation interpretations of what happens in the Eucharist. While this is interesting and indeed part of the multiformity of theological and philosophical assumptions underlying Anglican Eucharistic theology right from the beginning of the Reformation, it has very little to do with any suggestion to introduce lay presidency of the Eucharist. Jensen suggests however that ‘advocating lay administration is a way of asserting the credibility of the evangelical view of the ministry of the sacraments.’ This is
hardly a gospel imperative to give credibility to one tradition and to argue in this way may well be a distortion of the gospel, as some within Sydney Anglicanism have claimed, for those who support exclusive presidency in the Eucharist by an ordained priest. If however lay presidency of the Eucharist is an outworking of the tradition of Sydney Anglicanism, reasoned on the grounds that it is not a gospel issue, then it in fact becomes a matter of church order requiring substantial agreement in the mind of the church and not a matter of providing credibility for one tradition in opposition to others and not a matter of one diocese proceeding without substantial agreement in the mind of the church. There are of course other traditions within Anglicanism in regard to what happens in the Eucharist and this is part of the multiformity of the Anglican tradition. Using church order in order to validate particular traditions and affirm their credibility hardly seems appropriate. It is more appropriate, however, that all recognise our different traditions, respect them and live with them, knowing that not all Anglicans will agree on what happens in the Eucharist, but that all agree to live according to church order unless the mind of the church decides on another form of church order. This is exactly what Article XXXIV is speaking about when it says that traditions and ceremonies need not be in all places one and that these may be changed in different places. Jensen’s argument is difficult to understand in view of his later critical comments on Nicholas Taylor’s book *Lay Presidency at the Eucharist?: An Anglican Approach*. Jensen says that Taylor romanticises ‘the Anglican compromise as a wonderful synthesis, instead of acknowledging that the ambiguity in the formularies made possible, within the same ecclesiastical structure, the presence of two mutually exclusive views of the Eucharist’. This recognition of the multiformity of the Anglican Eucharistic tradition and denial of an imagined synthesis is accurate and Jensen is commended for embracing it but it stands in stark contrast to his rather exclusive and distorting view that the evangelical tradition can gather credibility by implementing lay presidency of the Eucharist without proper church order substantially agreed by the mind of the church.

The Articles certainly teach that customs may change to reflect new contexts in the light of Scripture. The Articles also teach that such changes should only be done according to the recognised authority of church order. It is not a matter of church order becoming more important than the gospel itself as Jensen suggests but rather that church order is there to make
sense of and to regularise the life of the church, as long as that church order does not offend Scripture or the tender consciences of believers. Ordained priestly presidency of the Eucharist is a matter of church order which does not offend Scripture. Moving ahead of church order before the church has come to a mind on a particular issue can lead to problems, as the Anglican Communion has experienced in recent years, and it is for this reason that lay presidency of the Eucharist has the potential to offend against the common order of the church, especially if one section of the church moves in this direction before the church has come to substantial agreement.

Michael Jensen has written a truly useful book restoring apologetics in the Christian tradition. Jensen's apology allows the reader to know something more of the tradition that guides Sydney Anglicanism and the approach to reason that is behind that tradition. His book is well written and researched and sets out in some depth what is important to the theological thinking of Sydney Anglicanism. His apology successfully debunks some of the unfair criticisms that have been directed at Sydney Anglicanism and its particular theological method and expression. His book firmly sets out the theological commitment of Sydney Anglicanism, and indeed his own, in a reasoned apologetic. Jensen's explanation of these methods is logically presented within the legitimate assumptions of the evangelical tradition of Sydney Anglicanism and as such contributes much to the overall understanding of the complexity of Anglicanism. There are however a few occasions where he assumes that others have not grasped the authentic wider ground and in so doing he betrays his own commitment to multiformity within the Anglican Eucharistic tradition. He also argues that the evangelical and Reformed tradition can use the implementation of lay presidency in the Eucharist to gain credibility for that tradition. This seems to move beyond the remit of apologetics.

Endnotes

2. Milbank, 'The heart of Christianity'.
3. Milbank, 'The heart of Christianity'.
15. 1 Corinthians 14: 40.
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