

Foreword

FOR SOME TIME JEFFREY Driver has been thinking and reading about the nature of the Anglican tradition of faith and how to interpret the current condition of the Anglican Communion. Now we have his considered treatment of some of the most important issues facing Anglicans. This is a book to be read and pondered. In an increasingly well-populated field, it offers some realistic and helpful ways of understanding what is going on in Anglicanism worldwide that are creative and practical. The book is based on wide research and practical wisdom.

In a dispersed communion, what kind of authority is appropriate to the history of Anglican faith and practice and what are the consequences of a notion of dispersed authority in such a community? Driver locates this diversity, not only in terms of contemporary church life, but also in terms of diversity over time. The Anglican way is a way of expressing faith in historical contextuality. This is especially true of Anglican ecclesiology. This very helpful approach enables him to confront current issues with both a confidence about faithfulness to the gospel over time and with a robust candor about the present. He names the postcolonial currents and the hegemonic power of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the USA. He draws attention to the family resemblances between the Grindrod, Eames, Virginia, and Windsor reports and the various Anglican covenant drafts. He offers a historical-contextual interpretation of these reports.

This book is not just analysis; it also offers ways of thinking about the future. He rightly nails the Windsor approach as centralizing in its tendency and entailing a somewhat mountaintop notion of reception. But he takes this point and offers a way of thinking about reception that incorporates a contribution from what might be called the “top down” with a

conciliarist-inspired notion of a “bottom-up” approach to reception in the life of the church. At work here is a sense of the whole church being responsible for the whole church. The last chapter comes to grips with the role of various doctrines of the Trinity in these ecclesiological debates and the “Trinitarian idealizing” that is found in some recent arguments. He seeks to reframe this aspect of the argument in a way that takes better account of human frailty and brokenness, the critical issue of imitation as a way of speaking about the function of the doctrine of the Trinity for Christian behavior and the challenge of endemic conflict in the church.

Driver is archbishop of Adelaide and metropolitan of the province of South Australia and was previously bishop of Gippsland in Victoria. He has plenty of involvement in the Australian church and this enables him to write with considerable experience and knowledge about the particular kind of federalism that is built into the constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia. He shows that that constitution and the church community that inhabits this constitution contain many of the institutional and political issues that on a wider canvas are present in the Anglican Communion. He gives a succinct analysis of the Australian situation and illustrates the usefulness of the Australian example for the wider communion with a discussion of the arguments over the ordination of women. His point is not that the Australian church has the answers but rather that the Australian example has sufficient parallels with the Communion issues that it is worth seeing how the Australians have struggled with the questions.

In a very valuable chapter he sets out a case for what he calls a “polity of persuasion.” Just as with the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission’s (IATDC) Kuala Lumpur Report, he recognizes that conflict is endemic in the church and that much of church life is to be taken up with creatively dealing with that conflict. Indeed one might reasonably say that the vitality of a church is directly proportional to its capacity to provide for conflict and diversity in creative ways. In this book Driver joins conflict resolution principles with aspects of conciliarity to argue that good conciliarity arrangements provide a “bounded space” for the creative expression of conflict within relational engagement. This kind of conciliarity, he says, is critical to the ongoing life of the Communion, especially as it must confront issues of diversity, change, and conflict.

This is a timely book full of good ideas and presenting an important argument of great relevance and value to any who are interested in the

character of Anglican Christianity or more generally in the nature of ecclesial life in a pluralist world.

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