Jeffrey W. Driver


This book contains much learning and also much wisdom; perhaps that is not surprising given that its author is Archbishop of Adelaide and recently (2008) graduated with a PhD from Charles Sturt University, Canberra. Driver thus writes with academic rigour, but also deep experience both of the ‘Anglican Church’ in Australia and the wider Anglican Communion. It is really a ‘post Anglican Covenant’ book, reflecting on the process which led up to the *Windsor Report* and its successors and, to an extent, on the failure of that process.

The book has several strands. One is a careful re-telling of the history of the conflicts within the Communion over the last 150 years (Driver rightly takes us back to Bishop Colenso and the calling of the 1867 Lambeth Conference, with a glance back beyond that, so that we get a long perspective on the current travails). He then provides a measured account of the recent history – the controversies, structural responses, varied commissions – culminating in the Anglican Communion Covenant. This is a valuable piece of work in itself. Driver is able to describe the evolution of ideas and their practical outworking as well as to provide a judicious first reflection on the failure of the Covenant. He does this with both grace and rigour. The reader can detect Driver’s frustration with some of the exaggerated opposition to the Covenant. (He is sharp about Bruce Kaye’s opposition, but it is a sign of the grace of both men that Kaye has written a warm Foreword and that elsewhere Driver cites Kaye’s work frequently.) In brief, Driver suggests that the Covenant stalled, in part, because it both was and, more pressingly, was perceived to be ‘centralising’. So he suggests that in terms of an Anglican ecclesial ecology, the Covenant offered a process that was primatial and international (above the provinces in particular) without holding in balance the other elements of Anglican theological governance, subsidiarity (dispersed authority) and conciliarity; that it was too juridical at precisely the level where Anglicanism had been most cautious about ecclesiastical authority (Canterbury) and insufficiently consultative: ‘... the hesitation about the covenant proposal, despite a succession of drafts seeking to deal with concerns, might be seen as a genuine reluctance to abandon the model of dispersed authority that has marked the Anglican Communion during its relatively short history’ (p. 144).

This analysis sits on top of three further strands. One – the fuller – is an account of Anglican ecclesiology. This is both an account of formal Anglican ecclesiology (Articles 19 and 20 are examined several times) and also a theological interpretation of Anglican history. Driver suggests that Anglicans are
particularly committed to reflecting theologically on their history: ‘Anglican theology, and particularly its ecclesiology, has been characterized by what we might term historical contextuality. There has been an embrace of sound scholarly reason to reinterpret tradition in the light of historical and missional context’ (p. 3).

For those whose ears are attuned to the unspoken messages of Anglican theologians, this clearly identifies Driver as a Liberal Anglican. Other Anglicans might give greater prominence at this point to the roles of Scripture and/or Tradition, not least in the preservation of an episcopal church order during and after the sixteenth century, which has been profoundly determinative of Anglicanism. (We cannot re-read the Preface to the 1549 Ordinal too often.) But Driver is right to assert a degree of pragmatism (not his word) in how Anglicans have adapted their ecclesiology; a fact made evident in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral reference to the ‘historic episcopate as locally adapted’, which Driver both expounds but also criticises for its inadequacy without quite saying why. He does give an account of Anglican ‘vernacularism’ and quotes Douglas and Zahl warmly, in what is an intriguing phrase that bears much reflection: ‘Anglicanism is the embrace and celebration of apostolic catholicity within vernacular moments’ (p. 85).

The second strand of the book, which is both fully expounded in places but elsewhere just hinted at, is reflection on the nature of the Church as it really is in the early twenty-first century, and often has been. So Driver reminds us of the post-colonial context and of how sharply that has shaped the current controversies. He also hints at the nature of the modern church as a voluntary institution. Chapter 5 is an interesting account of the Anglican Church in Australia, whose internal conflicts and constitutional arrangements make the Church of England look positively well-oiled as a system of governance. Driver both derives wisdom from this Australian context to speak thoughtfully back into the Communion and also uses it to remind us of some simple realities:

In the Anglican Church of Australia, the General Synod Canons are permissive not coercive. They might influence the behaviour of bishops and clergy, they might have an influence as to how the courts rule on issues surrounding church property, but they have no coercive power in regard to the people who matter most – the ordinary worshippers whose allegiance and participation is entirely voluntary. So the challenge for the Australian Church is to tune its governance structures to this reality. (p. 104)