

REVIEW: 'A HOUSE DIVIDED?'

Tom Frame, 'A House Divided? The Quest for Unity within Anglicanism.'
Brunswick East: Acorn Press, 2010

I loved this book, or should I say books. Tom Frame's interests range so widely. He guides us through discussions of ecclesiastical party politics, structural impediments to mission in Australia, contemporary forms of Christian mysticism, and the modernist atheist reaction to theologically anaemic expressions of faith. Each of the first three sections could have become a book in itself, and sometimes I was left hoping for more. Bringing these themes together sometimes felt a little contrived, especially the chapters on the Lucas-Tooth Scholars and the Moorhouse Lectures, with their appendices as lists of nominees, but two things made the book coherent: the thoughtful ecclesiology undergirding it, and the author's life-story which framed the telling.

The book begins with an outline of positions held by evangelicals, Anglo-Catholics and liberal Anglicans within the Australian church, and the resulting tensions which can be seen not only in our country but across the Anglican Communion as well. Frame works hard at affirming what he can in each of these traditions, while pointing out their weaknesses and the ways in which they are culturally coloured. The section on evangelicalism was for me most stimulating. Frame takes as his launching pad the published views of Dean Phillip Jensen and his defence of Reformed Anglicanism. In response, Frame argues that Anglicanism has never seen itself as a confessional church, that the evangelical movement itself is more diverse than Jensen acknowledges, and that the wider church needs the contributions that evangelicals can provide.

I am not persuaded that Frame is entirely successful in his critique. We may not name the 39 Articles as a Confession, but approved by Convocations and Parliaments, they are indeed in Frame's own words 'Anglican formularies' which prescribe 'convictions and customs' (p26), and were subscribed not just by clergy but anyone wanting to graduate from a university (cf p82). The idea that Evangelicals ought to remain within the Anglican church can also appear

patronising: our tradition is seen as something valuable not on its own terms, but when it is used to slow down the church's drift towards the 'Liberal Protestant churches whose demise is only a matter of time' (p30). Of course the Evangelical movement is impacted by the culture in which it is housed, as missiologically committed movements get close to the ideas and practices of their neighbours, becoming like them to win some for Christ. We have often had our fingers burned by getting too close to the fire. Frame's warning is timely, though naming evangelicals as a faction rather than a renewal movement, which its eighteenth century origins reflect and which is almost entirely neglected here, readies us for the model of 'consensus Anglicanism' which Frame himself espouses.

I agree with Frame that evangelicals need to work harder on ecclesiology. We resort with too much haste to pragmatic strategies and a revivalist mindset. We too quickly denigrate the nurturing value of sacraments, and conduct services without 'any sense of reverence and awe' (p28) for the sake of contemporary connections. We take our model of leadership from worldly examples, and are strangely hesitant to map out consistently a theological vision for leaders, though the chapter on the episcopate suggests that it is not only evangelicals who are wedded to models which have little theological underpinning (p156). We must reflect on the fact that our Gospel convictions are sometimes rejected because we have not lived lives worthy of the Gospel which we preach. However I am just not sure that the Lambeth Conference of 1930, for which Frame makes his 'fulsome apology,' adequately encapsulates my understanding of the heartbeat of Anglican life and witness: 'an open Bible, a pastoral priesthood, a common worship, a standard of conduct consistent with that worship and a fearless love of truth' (p104-105). Where is justification? Where are hearts strangely warmed? Where is anticipation of the joy of glory?

Frame's chapters on synods, episcopacy, and diocese should be compulsory reading for anyone responsible for the institutional features of our corporate life. They breathe an imaginative air and give concrete expression to new ways of organising our ministry. Abolishing electoral synods and replacing them with diocesan-national Episcopal selection panels may sound

crazy, but we need ideas like this to cast new visions of what could be (p123). Frame's own desire to relinquish his title as bishop, now that he works at St Mark's Theological Centre in Canberra and not in episcopal ministry, gives his reflections on episcopacy a sharpness which is bracing: he argues that 'the powers and discretion of the bishops must be devolved' (p 141). Frame also argues for a radical redrawing of diocesan boundaries, and an openness to 'cultural episcopacy,' or the development of targeted ministries in government, business, or ethnic groups (p156). In all this, he does not despise the institution, nor imagine that the church and the Kingdom are synonymous (p171). He does however want the church to be 'recklessly selfless when mission demands it' (p174) – a clarion call.

The section entitled 'Then and Now' is the least coherent. While there is much here to learn from, and the individual chapters give personal insights into Frame's own formation, I kept asking myself what this particular tree had to contribute to the forest of the book. I found myself nodding when Frame spoke of Anglican captivity to political correctness and its promotion of 'liberal democratic statism' (p192), and shouting 'Amen' when he described how pitifully we support and finance the theological training of our leaders, and so often in Australia mock intellectual leadership more generally (p232). The chapter on William Ralph Inge's contribution to Christian mysticism seemed to me to be out of place. Frame praised Inge's commitment to experiential faith, and appreciation of the immediacy of knowledge of God (p248), without giving due place to these very values amongst Anglican evangelicals, for whom they are nevertheless Christologically defined.

The final chapters of the book, functioning as one part mid-life crisis and two parts appeal for courage to learn again what it means to be the church in an aggressively secular culture, were reassuring. Frame's encouragement to get on with the work of evangelism and apologetics and disciple-making was heartening, for he is searingly honest about the critical state in which the Anglican church in Australia finds itself. Our enslavement to money and status is almost as alarming as the growing intolerance towards the Christian vision of human flourishing. Though I suspect Frame is a little naïve in assuming that Anglicans will be able to develop a 'coherent doctrine

of the Church that can attract the conviction and allegiance of all theological traditions' (p268), I agree with him that mid-life is a time for 'taking stock, reassessing and reviewing one's life' (p 256). We are as a church a middle aged institution, grown just a little too flabby and suddenly aware that we have to become more intentional in maintaining the vigour which once seemed so effortless. This book is a great health check, and a timely word.

And by the way, I wonder why the photo on the back cover has Frame wearing episcopal purple and a pectoral cross? After all his appeal to change our thinking about ministry structures and visions, this picture seemed an odd choice. We have so far to go.

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