Anglican Diversity And Conflict: A Case Study On God, Gender And Authority

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The recent publications of three polemical works by Australian Anglicans, Kevin Giles, Peter Jensen, and Peter Carnley, have highlighted what every casual newspaper reader in Australia knows well: that the Anglican church in this country is fragmented. For example, this report was to be found in the Melbourne Age of 29 June 2003:

The Anglican Church is an institution that Australians, of all faiths and none, have grown used to regarding as part of the cultural background. It arrived in this country with the first white settlers and has been a substantial presence in national life ever since. In the past few weeks, however, many people have been surprised to learn that this institution whose existence they have always taken for granted is in danger of disintegrating.

The fragmentedness of Australian Anglicanism comes as a shock not only to Australian Anglicans and those members of the wider public who may seldom attend church but who feel the need for a

stable church to 'make up for the instabilities of modern life'.
It is also out of keeping with Anglicanism's historical character. Did not Anglicanism in its early modern form start as an attempt to hold together in one church the religiously varied sensibilities of the whole English nation? And have not Anglicans been at the forefront of the ecumenical movement, with its aim of bringing together separated Christians?

There are at least two markers of identity that have functioned in the past for Australian Anglicans. The first is a sort of religious tribalism linked with ethnicity and social class. Anglicans in Australia were ethnically people from English (rather than Irish, Scottish or Welsh) backgrounds, or else middle class or with middle-class aspirations. England—not the United Kingdom, note—continued to be, if no longer 'home', then certainly the 'mother country'. It was possible to be working-class and Anglican if you were of English background. A great many post-war English migrants fit this category; these people even now continuing to form the backbone of many suburban Anglican parishes. It was also possible to be middle or upper class and non-Anglican. And of course, it was relatively easy for individuals to change denominational allegiance—especially among non-Roman Catholics—through marriage, or simply because of the availability or non-availability of somewhere to worship or send children to school. And though—with the possible exception of the earliest convict settlements—Anglicanism was never the established religious denomination in Australia, it long remained (and in some minds still has pretensions to remain) quasi-established. Local parish churches in the 1950s still displayed the national flag and, often as not, the Union Jack; and the iconography of Anglican churches still includes an imposing presence of brass plaques celebrating the donations and benefactions of past public worthies. All these functioned as signifiers of substance, stability, and identification with nation and Empire. They gave Anglican worshippers a powerful sense of belonging, of identity, that somehow transcended the immediate context of the alien Australian landscape and the ethnically and religiously mixed Australian populace.

There is a second form of past Anglican identity that we could call a common outlook, or even a common aesthetic. This is the worldview, and the aesthetic sensibility, formed by the Book of Common Prayer. Until the early 1970s, all Anglicans—not only in Australia, but worldwide—had this formation in common. Anglican theology certainly, and arguably Anglican aesthetic taste as well, were formed by a particular text, a text that made clear and frequent reference to the Bible in its 1611 English translation and the Coverdale Psalms, and which in turn inspired a whole range of literary offshoots. Anglican clergy read the offices of morning and evening prayer daily, and Anglican lay people frequently knew large sections of the prayer book by heart. This was not necessarily the result of a conscious decision, but simply through the familiarity that comes from frequent, intensive hearing of the text read. If Anglican 'tribal' identity was at least in part an external, publicly recognisable marker of identity, this second marker of identity was largely internal, assuring Anglicans of an inner bond of understanding and outlook that they had in common with other Anglicans, and also, it has to be said, with a great many other English-speaking Protestants. Neither the Authorised Version of the Bible nor the Book of Common Prayer were ever the sole possessions, or intended to be the sole possessions, of Anglicans, and so in one sense this 'Anglican' identity was always open-ended.

The current situation is that both these markers of Anglican identity, external and internal, have become things of the past. Few Australians, even Anglican Australians, nowadays want to be associated with England or Englishness, and legal ties with the United Kingdom—where, at least in England, Anglicanism continues to be established—are slowly melting away. The Book of Common Prayer has gradually disappeared from public worship in Australia since 1978, when An Australian Prayer Book was introduced throughout the country. The process, which started earlier in some places, now means that familiarity with the Book of Common Prayer is a rarity except among older generation Anglicans, and even they in most cases have not heard the old prayer book in regular use for almost a quarter of a century. Neither of these changes is to be regretted. They both have come about slowly and in an orderly 'Anglican' way for all sorts of


5. A recent Australian High Court ruling, for example, establishes that British subjects who are not Australian citizens may now be deported as aliens (The Age, 10 December 2003: 1). Britain is now, and arguably has been for some decades, a foreign country.
good reasons. But they do pose the question: how are contemporary Australian Anglicans (and non-Anglicans, for that matter) to understand Anglican identity?

Kathryn Tanner suggests that identity resides in a sense of ‘style’, an intangible feel for which practices may be appropriate and which not. Different styles will themselves be proper in different contexts. Every community has its own sense of style, and it is this, according to Tanner, that gives communities their identities. Beliefs and practices are embodied in style, and come to expression in it, but the community cannot be reduced to matters of belief and practice. If I were to try to describe the Anglican style, and the qualities I find in Anglicanism that continue to keep me within this community, the list would be something like this: an understated conviction that does not shy away from naming evil for what it is and engaging it vigorously when necessary; a dignity that can smile at its own attempts at seriousness; a circumspection that refrains from probing too deeply into the minds of others; a modesty that does not advertise its own good works; an urbancity that can live with disagreement; a generosity that delights in otherness when it encounters it and also, out of gratitude for what it has itself received, shares the good. These qualities, furthermore, are nurtured in a church whose polity balances the democratic impulse with the personalism of episcopal care and oversight, and the personalism of episcopacy with the democratic safeguard of synodical governance. These are not the qualities of all Anglicans or all Anglican communities, nor are they the sole possession of Anglicans. They are not dramatic or eye-catching characteristics, and they are not necessarily successful according to the expectations of the world at large, but they endure through time and across space, and they characterise Anglicanism at its best.

6. Kathryn Tanner, Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 144.


The Anglican Church of Australia is divided on at least three practical questions. There are different views with regard to the leadership of women in the church, to lay presidency at (or administration of) the eucharist, and to homosexuality. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s the internal Anglican debate focussed on the ordination of women, especially to the priesthood. This was resolved in most Australian Anglican dioceses during the 1980s with the ordinations of women to the diaconate, and in 1992 with the first ordinations of women priests. In 2006 there remain some dioceses that continue to oppose the ordination of women and even seek to reverse the decisions of the previous decades. The consecration of women to the episcopate continues to be a matter of debate in Australia. With regard to the second issue, the Sydney Diocese for some time argued that ordination to the priesthood should not be a condition for celebrants at the eucharist. For most Anglicans, this argument called in question the meaning of ordination, and its connection with eucharistic worship. However, in general the focus of the ordination debate has shifted from the issues of gender and lay presidency to that of sexuality, and specifically to the ordination of practicing homosexuals. Media attention has been brought to bear on this issue in other parts of the Anglican communion, the United Kingdom and the United States, with strong reactions from some third world members of the communion. During 2003 the Archbishop of Sydney recommendend a withdrawal of recognition of a particular overseas diocese on this issue, pointing, not without some justification, to the cross-cultural problems occasioned by the proposal, especially in parts of the third world where some of the most vigorous Anglican churches have their homes. While culture should not determine theology, it is worth noting that the stance of the Sydney Diocese on all these matters of practice is in opposition to the majority opinion among the Australian public, and a great many Australian Anglicans find no particular conflict between majority public opinion in this area and their own faith.

There may be a cultural factor to this divergence. If we can take Anglicanism as a style of intellectual life and then apply John Docker’s analysis of the differing styles of intellectual life in Sydney and Melbourne, for example, an interesting regional contrast suggests

8. The Age, 3 October 2003.
itself. Dockr argues that intellectuals in Melbourne have historically felt themselves more in harmony with the surrounding popular culture, and so have taken their place more comfortably and confidently within it. Sydney intellectuals, by contrast, have felt themselves to be outside of the surrounding culture, and this has led to a split between a reclusive or bohemian intellectual life either escapist from the surrounding popular culture or assertively contemptuous of it. In terms of Moltmann’s dialectic of relevance and identity, Sydney intellectuals have had identity— as intellectuals—but have stood outside of and been ignored by their social context, where Melbourne intellectuals as a group have enjoyed relevance but have felt no great impulse to develop or provide for themselves a radical alternative to the larger society in which they live. Applied to the Anglican Church, if such an application be permissible, this might explain the greater integration of Melbourne Anglicanism with the society in which it finds itself and the stronger identity of Sydney Anglicanism as a cohesive group that stands over against, and in opposition to, many aspects of the wider culture. These differing styles are not necessarily self-chosen: there may be differences in the histories of these two cities, to say nothing of the other Australian state capitals, and the contexts in which Anglicanism has found itself, which have compelled these differing developments in self-understanding. These different views have come to expression also in differing understandings of trinitarian doctrine, especially on the question of hierarchy and subordinationism within the Trinity. Closely related are the issues of theological method and the question of authority.

The books by Giles and Carrley, authors of the very different theological perspectives, attest, among other things, to the theological dimensions of the fragmentedness of Australian Anglican identity. Jensen’s book, when set beside them, highlights the methodological aspects of this fragmentedness, and the role of authority. For this reason the three books will serve as the focus for this discussion. Giles and Carrley focus on what they see as theological aberrations of the official theology of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. It is hard to

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trinitarian argument in much conservative evangelical theology for subordinating women to the ‘headship’ of men. He notes that in this literature, the term ‘difference’ functions as a code word for inequality, and the term ‘equality’ is assumed to mean sameness. The very point of the trinitarian doctrine of God, as Giles points out, is that real difference and real equality can go together, and to confuse equality with sameness, or difference with inequality, are category mistakes.

In the second half of the book Giles evaluates the other arguments used by contemporary conservative evangelicals to subordi- nate women, and finds them both novel and unconvincing. Advocates of gender subordination (including those who propose the innocent-sounding ‘difference of roles’ theory) are demonstrated to be just as selective in their readings of the biblical texts and the tradition, and on the basis of considerably less evidence, as were the nineteenth century evangelical and reformed advocates of racial subordination that justified slavery. Giles’ historical work on slavery is alarming: it shows how good Christians, with the best of intentions, can misinterpret the Bible to serve their own ends. Giles concludes by offering three methodological rules for formulating a theology of gender equality: one based in the differentiated equality expressed in Genesis 1: 26–8; a second in the priority of an eschatological perspective over any ‘orders of creation’ theology; and a third rule, based on the relationships seen in the co-equal Trinity, for interpreting the texts that tend to be cited in the gender debate.11

A common theme in the recent upsurge in scholarly and popu- lar discussions of the Trinity is the level of agreement about the practicality of the trinitarian approach to God. If even twenty years ago one might have heard the Trinity dismissed as having no implications for everyday life, this opinion itself now sounds quaintly old-fashioned. The Trinity has returned to being—in reality, not just in theory—one of the central non-negotiables for Christians. So it is hardly surprising that, given the wide diversity of opinions among Christians as to how real, practical Christian life is to be lived, it has now, again, become a matter of some consequence what sort of trinitarian God one professes. In Kevin Giles’ book a particular version of the Trinity is forcefully advocated and another version just as forcefully refuted, and both in relation to an immensely practical ethical question, that of hegemony and subordination. More specifically, this relates to the official Sydney Anglican position on the hegemony of one gender and the subordination of the other. Giles’ passionate advocacy of the historic orthodox position thus finds concrete expression in opposing the tendency to subordinate women on the basis of a supposedly hierarchical ordering of persons within the Trinity. Peter Carnley has more recently tackled the Sydney Anglican phenomenon. Significantly subtitled ‘trends and tensions in the contemporary Anglican church’, his book sets out to ‘clarify some of the issues that surfaced among Australian Anglicans in April 2000’.12 The reference is to the author’s feeling of having been misinterpreted and attacked, especially in the media of the Sydney Diocese, for an Easter reflection he published that year, shortly before he was installed as primate of the Anglican Church of Australia. It is written in the belief, he continues, ‘that the resolution of the conflict of ideas can only be achieved by the grace of God in generosity of spirit through reasoned conversation and debate’. This methodological presupposition continues through to the book’s concluding call to engagement in dialogue rather than the modern secularist reduction of all matters of faith to the private sphere, and for believers to ‘retreat into a cool and liberal-minded tolerance bordering on indifference’.13

The Christian imperative to ‘speak the truth in love’ (Ephesians 4:15), cited in justification of the attack on the author’s Easter reflection, is in reality a call to ‘us all to careful listening in a spirit of attentiveness to the views of the other’.14 Carnley thus turns the weapon of attack back on those who had wielded them.

Carnley’s twin opponents are post-Enlightenment liberalism and what he sees as its product and mirror-image, the rationalistic and largely propositional official theology of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.15 It was the representatives of this theology that in Carnley’s estimation so seriously failed to understand his Easter reflection, a failure that has provoked his book-length response and attempt at clarification. Chapter one is an extended critique of liberalism (a theme to which Carnley later returns) from the viewpoint of his own arguably more post-modern ‘progressive orthodox’ position, allowing

13. Carnley, 312.
15. Carnley, 6.
scope for communal—rather than merely individual—experience. Liberalism, which belongs to classical modernity, emphasises the rights and freedoms of the individual. It is this individualistic ideology, according to Carney, that lies at the root of Sydney’s departure from the shared, common wisdom of the Anglican (and wider Christian) tradition.

It appears at the outset that Carney lays the blame for the aberration of ‘Sydney Anglicans’—he puts the term in quote marks to indicate it is the official theology of Sydney Diocese he has in mind, not the faith of all Anglicans who happen to live in Sydney—on a particular theory of atonement, the Anselmian or ‘penal substitutionary theory’. Certainly it is a major problem—not confined to Anglicans—if salvation is understood purely or even largely in penal substitutionary terms. This theory is, as Carney correctly points out, extra-biblical and belongs to the history of doctrine. Sydney’s advocacy of it seems out of keeping with the insistence that the Bible should be the sole source of doctrine.

But the problem is more complex than just one atonement theory. There is also the understanding of ‘revelation’ as a body of information of a propositional kind and both the propositional-cognitivist understanding of doctrine that flows from such an approach to revelation and the naïve ‘plain meaning of scripture’ approach to the hermeneutics that informs it. These are connected of course. Only if there is a plain unambiguous meaning of scripture is it possible hold a coherent understanding of doctrine as unambiguous propositions.

Peter Jensen champions such a view of revelation. Jensen’s focus is on theological method: on how we do theology, and before that, on how we know God. There are two basic themes: revelation is fundamentally propositional, and the proper attitude of the Christian believer is one of obedience to revelation. But neither of these themes is developed in an unsophisticated way as such a bald summary might suggest. Jensen at the outset nuances this propositionalist view of revelation. Biblical revelation is the revelation of a person, Jesus Christ, and is a matter of trust or faith. But this revelation is encompassed in words, and the words of the Bible are to be identified with God’s revelation. The revelation is not the proper nouns “Jesus Christ”, but the proposition “Jesus is the Christ, the Lord”. The words of scripture are thus the words of God in a ‘direct and revelatory sense’. And yet this revelation is not mere information; it is information that provokes an existential response. No distinction is to be made between propositional knowledge and personal knowing. It is the words that give rise to personal intimacy, not—as in most human experience—the existential and initially unarticulated sense of trust that may or may not then lead to words, words that in turn show a person to be either trustworthy or untrustworthy. The existential response of the believer is what endorses revelation—in this propositional sense—to be revelation, and this existential response must be one of obedience, or subservience.

There is, at first glance, much to commend in Jensen’s viewpoint. There is an emphasis on eschatology; the quest for a relational knowledge of God, the living God. He rejects a natural theology in favour of a theology of nature. He rejects individualism, and its concomitant privatisation of religious belief, as a legacy of the Enlightenment.

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18. Carney, 155.
The problems arise at closer examination. What is the real meaning of Jensen's 'theology of nature'? Creation is effected by a divine word of command—not, as other contemporary theologians of creation have argued, the divine permission that invites creation to come into being. 'The covenantal Scripture is the instrument by which the Lord Jesus rules over his covenant people', and we in turn are made in the image of God to rule over the world he has made. The scriptures 'rule'; the gospel is to be 'obeyed'. If the gospel is good news, might we not say it is to be received? The teachings of the Bible are to be obeyed. Again, my question is: are teachings 'obeyed' or are they assimilated, followed, heeded; even critiqued? Christian freedom for Jensen is not to be found in autonomy. Well yes, but are autonomy or subservience the only alternatives? 'We are not only the Lord's servants,' states Jensen, 'but also his slaves, bound to please him in all things'. Authentic faith involves the capacity to trust and obey words, sentences and paragraphs. Words like obedience, submission, and subservience occur several times on almost every page of Jensen's book.

Here we see the methodological underpinnings of the 1999 Report with its reintroduction of trinitarian subordination. Like Carney, but drawing very different theological conclusions, Peter Jensen has set his face against the Enlightenment as the source of the ills of contemporary society and church. For Jensen, the problem is that the liberation theme of the Enlightenment has 'entered the Christian soul'. But what if the Enlightenment theme of liberation is a message latent in the gospel itself, waiting for the right social conditions to allow it to emerge? What if it is something Enlightenment Europe may have learnt from Christianity? Where Carney seeks to go beyond the Enlightenment, Jensen seems to want to return to the pre-Enlightenment hierarchical world. Methodologically Jensen posits a 'biblical theology' that minimises the diversity of scripture. There is no post-modern or post-colonial hearkening here to the dissonances, the spaces between the words, or the minority voices in the text. The naming of God as 'Father' or 'Lord' is apparendy quite unproblematic for Jensen. This is not mere innocence of recent contributions to biblical criticism and theology. Jensen's book has its quite intentional polemical edge: 'the word of God does not help me to decide whether to choose fish or pork for dinner. Instead it tells me that I am free from any religion interested in such worldly concerns ...' Jensen is by no means so naïve as to be unaware of the implications of such a line with regard to fasting as a religious practice, and many Christians, to say nothing of Jews or Muslims, might feel some cause to take offence.

The books by Giles and Carney both seek to answer this style of theology. Carney identifies a gnostic element in the Sydney reliance on revelation as entirely propositional information, and it is this that leads him to identify another insight about the difference between Moore College theology and the wider Anglican tradition. He contrasts this gnosticism with a sort of theological agnosticism, an unknowing of God. Christianity is agnostic in its historic opposition to ways of secret knowledge that supposedly function as passwords through the heavens. Carney overstates his case at this point. His proper objection to gnosticism leads him, for example, to endorse the position of HL Mansel in his great nineteenth century debate with FD Maurice. I think it would be arguable that it was Maurice who held a proper dialectical tension between God's economic revelation of God, and the hiddenness of God in Godself. To oppose gnosticism we do not have to follow Mansel's particular theology of divine unknowability over against Maurice's, to my mind more helpful, dialectic of known and yet unknown, unknown and yet known. Carney is justified in his concern that a propositional understanding of revelation as information once given tends to gnosticism, and that in turn leads to the arrogant assumption that one's own knowledge is right and everyone else must therefore be wrong. Such a stance closes dialogue. Conversation can only be replaced by conversion—or its

34. Jensen, 72-73.
36. Jensen, 174; see also, 243.
38. Jensen, 90. Reception comes only later, 91.
40. Jensen, 151.
41. Jensen, 72.
42. Jensen, 83.
43. Jensen, 92; see also: 145-6, 147, 149, 176.
44. Jensen, 147-8.
45. Jensen, 225.
46. Jensen, 265.
opposite, isolation. Even so, Carnley also slips into generalisation at times, as when he speaks of the ‘gnostic and defensive tendencies of much evangelical theory’. Although he does not say it outright, this statement seems provocatively close to suggesting that all evangelical theology is tarred with the same brush. But it is only fair to distinguish between the authentic evangelical theology that arose out of the spiritual revivals of the eighteenth century and the retreat into Protestant scholasticism that Carnley discerns in the official line of Sydney Diocese. The evangelical revivals were precisely reactions against the scholastic staidness of the previous century. However, given the understanding of revelation we have noted in Jensen’s book, in which words are certainly the starting point but personal discipleship the intended outcome, we have to ask if the Sydney approach to the knowledge of God is quite as unambiguously propositional as Carnley suggests.

Carnley notices another evidently long-standing feature of official Sydney Anglican theology: its dissociation of the spiritual from the material. As long ago as 1956, in a revealing anecdote related in his book, Broughton Knox advised the then archbishop of Sydney that a cross placed in the sanctuary of a church might lead to superstition. Idolatry was defined to include the worship of the true God ‘by the aid of unauthorised sensuous media’. Carnley quite rightly discerns in this statement not only ‘a paradigm statement of the propositional-descriptivist approach to faith and doctrine’, in which ‘faith is an intellectual assent to abstract doctrinal truths’, but also—more importantly in my opinion—an alarming dualism in Dr Knox’s statements insofar as he draws an unfortunate gnostic dichotomy between the spiritual and the material. For if we accept this dichotomy, we deny the possibility of the spiritual revealing itself through matter. Christian discourse about the Word’s becoming flesh, God’s bodily participation in the world, would then be transformed from a radical claim into a pious myth, a mere manner of speech with no real content. This of course has connections with the trinitarian subordination of the Son to the Father that Carnley discerns. If the eternal Word were somehow on a lower ontological level than God the Father, eternally subordinate, then his being in the world would be something less than God incarnate. And if Jesus were something less than God incarnate, then his eternal subordination to the Father would be a matter of no real consequence. The social and indeed political consequences about the legitimacy of subordinating one group of human beings to another (whether it be women, or black people to white people—the two examples Giles gives) could then go safely unchallenged.

So I suspect this dualism that Carnley discerns in Sydney Anglicanism may be the crux of the matter. Such a dualism will see no fundamental problem in subordinating some people to others, nor in a cavalier approach to the sacraments, but will fear the power of sense experience, whether this be in the form of charismatic spiritual experience or the aesthetic experience of the creative arts. Such an outlook betrays an attitude that can only be described as fundamentally anti-incarnational, and therefore anti-trinitarian. This methodological tendency strikes me as closer to the heart of things than a particular stance on sexuality, or the ecclesiastical-political matter of ordination of women, or a particular understanding of salvation exclusively in terms of penal substitution. These other things, on the other hand, will surely follow from a questionable theology of incarnation and Trinity. The truly alarming thing to my mind is that so much time has passed since the quoted statement of Broughton Knox. It seems to me the real question that Australian Anglicans need to explore as a matter of urgency, the question on which other, penultimate questions will be decided, is this: who is the one trine God, whose eternal Word became flesh, and what is the relationship between this God and the created universe into which God has entered in the flesh, as a human child? If we can find agreement on these questions—real, searching agreement, not simply reiteration of traditional doctrinal formulas—then I am confident other agreements will follow, even though these may be agreements about where to disagree. But without agreement on these questions, the only possible way forward for Anglicans would be to slouch quietly off in separate

47. Carnley, 153.
49. Carnley, 69–70.

50. See Jensen, 269, for his dismissal of the Eucharistic revival as ‘a sign of weakness’ in the contemporary church: ‘A growth in interest in expounding and obeying the Scriptures would indicate a recovery of strength’.
directions, preferably with as little mutual recrimination and ill feeling as possible.

Kevin Giles argues that a theological divergence appears to have arisen out of the perceived need to justify a divergence in pastoral practice and church order. At the time of writing, however, there is reason to hope that Giles' call to his fellow evangelicals in Sydney may have been heeded. The Sydney bishops themselves placed the question on the agenda for the Australian Anglican bishops' meeting in March 2004, and have also directed the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission to review the 1999 Report. Carney writes from a very different theological background from Giles—the two have conducted a public debate in print, and Carney takes issue with Giles' approach to hermeneutics in this book. Yet both find the official Sydney line theologically inadequate and indeed objectionable. Giles' book is largely a single-issue response to Sydney, arguing that a particular political issue, Sydney's rejection of the leadership of women, has led Sydney Diocese to conform its theology to this political agenda, and that this in turn has in effect led Sydney Anglican theology beyond the limits of Christian orthodoxy. Carney's book is a multi-issue response to Sydney, covering a range of questions on which the author feels Sydney Diocese is mistaken. Carney's chapters cover the theological themes of revelation, doctrine, hermeneutics, atonement, ministry, leadership, gender, ethics and dialogue across and between religious communities. But both Giles and Carney, from their differing viewpoints are agreed that Sydney Anglicanism has taken trinitarian theology 'beyond the parameters of Christian orthodoxy'. But both are also wary of name-calling, because both know that it is above all that cuts off the possibility of ongoing dialogue. Both books contain a hard, prophetic message for Sydney Anglicanism to hear. Kevin Giles claims it was a good eighteen months after publication of his book before he received a considered reply from the representatives of the theology he calls in question, with Peter Carnley's critique addressed in the same article. Both authors name the sense of hostility they claim to have experienced, not only for their theological opinions, but towards themselves personally. In doing so, they give voice to something that many Anglicans—to say nothing of non-Anglican Christians—have often experienced when confronted by the official theological positions of the Diocese of Sydney.

What are the theological issues at stake here? According to Kevin Giles, a theological agenda is being driven by a political agenda, to continue the subordination of women in the home and the church. The Trinity, he argues, is redefined to support the exclusion of women from priestly and episcopal ministries. But this leads him to ask the question: are the formulators of the official theology of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney really being faithful to scripture as it has been understood by the best of theologians from the past and to the creeds and Reformation confessions of faith that they so strongly claim to uphold? According to Carney, the basic theological problem is the elevation of a matter of theological opinion, the Anselmian atonement theory, to the status of unquestionable dogma. This leads them into a range of other, more complex theological problems. I have suggested that perhaps the fundamental question is whether God's presence can be mediated by material realities. The anecdote about Broughton Knox's advice is most revealing in this regard. If the presence of God cannot be so mediated, then any presence of God in this material world is called in question. Sacraments would no longer be conveyers of God's presence, and all artistic creativity would become immediately suspect. But more importantly, God's presence in the incarnation would become fundamentally unreal, fundamentally

51. On the question of subordination and hierarchy see Common Theology: A Quarterly Journal for Australians, 1.1.2.3 (2002). Carney is more guarded in his statements in this book than in the earlier articles, which did indeed leave him open to Giles' criticisms. The point of orthodox trinitarianism is precisely that origin does not necessarily convey pre-eminence—herein lies the fundamental radicalism of trinitarian Christianity's historical challenge to the patriarchy inherent in ancient Roman law.

52. Carney, 236. Giles' statement that scripture can be trusted to 'accurately reveal the full truth about the whole triune God' offends Carney's sense of God's unknowability. But it does serve to establish Giles' bonafides as an evangelical Anglican, and, in any case, Carney may be less troubled by this claim if his paradigmatic 'Deneau' theologian were Maurice instead of Mansel. Giles in any case sets out clearly his own interpretative rules (Giles, 202–3).

docetic. And the Son would also be understood as fundamentally subordinate, in eternity, to the one God the Father.

The practical question that arises in each of these interrelated debates is: which practices, and which beliefs underlying them, are matters of doctrine (first order), and which are theologoumena, or to be considered matters of opinion (second order)? In other words, where are the boundaries of the church to be drawn? May one diocese withdraw recognition from another, or suspend communion with another, and if so, on what grounds? And if recognition were to be withdrawn, or communion to be suspended, would there be a basis for retaliation against the more scrupulous party on the grounds that its own position may be contestable on another point of practice or doctrine? The current tendency to fragmentation in Australian Anglicanism reflects a problem of identity, of two diverging ways of describing Anglican identity in the Australia at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Christian identity is, according to Kathryn Tanner, ‘essentially relational’. This means that ‘Christian identity cannot be secured by sharp cultural boundaries’, and that ‘the practices that mark a boundary need not be good indicators of what is required to maintain Christian identity’. Markers of identity are contextually determined, and what is a decisive marker of identity in one era or context may disappear entirely, or almost entirely, in another context. As an example we could mention the early Christian custom, so universal that it was itself a Christian badge of identity, of facing east for prayer. Christians do not differ culturally from their non-Christian neighbours, but reshape the existing cultural material. Hierarchy may be adopted, for example, but with its significance reversed (the first last, and the last first). ‘Christian practices’, writes Tanner, ‘are always the practices of others made odd’—not only phenomenologically, but for good theological reasons. Thus, ‘one should not try, for example, to purify Christian practices from outside influences out of fear of their possibly corrupting influences’, because God’s grace meets us—as the saying goes—where we are.

Tanner’s argument is of direct relevance to some of the divisive debates within Australian Anglicanism at present. Her statement, ‘the propriety of a new use . . . is not apparent before it actually emerges and there has been some public effort to establish whether it works’, means that there can be no pre-emptory rejection of a proposal to change Christian practice. Each proposal must be considered anew. This applies equally to the introduction of lay presidency at the eucharist as to ordination of practicing homosexuals. There needs to be argument and testing of these proposed changes in practice. Any premature condemnation is theologically problematic. For Tanner, this situation becomes a demand for the maintaining of communication, and communion. ‘Because one’s point of view is invariably inadequate, it makes sense to keep in touch with those who have formed other conclusions: one might conceivably be corrected by them.’ The latter wry remark is a reference, of course, to the possibility of a radical change in one’s perspective; to the possibility of conversion. But this is not to say there has to be a winner to the argument: quite the contrary. ‘The purpose of engaging in argument with others cannot be . . . to bring about conformity with the account of the object one brings to the debate’. Rather, the object is to maintain a ‘fellowship of mutual concern and adoration’, in which debate with other Christians is to be expected as the norm, and ‘Christian agreements’ when they do occur, ‘are agreements about how to have an argument’. This may appear a bleak prospect, except that it is this reality that maintains openness to God’s future, to the new thing God is always doing in our midst. It is a warning against any attempt at

55. Tanner, 108.
56. Tanner (109) gives the example of the freedom to eat beef as a boundary marker that identifies Christians in largely Hindu India, but nowhere else in the world.
57. Tanner, 113.
58. Tanner, 113.
59. Tanner, 79.
60. Tanner, 127.
61. Elsewhere Tanner remarks: ‘For this reason theological arguments are often bad arguments, if understood in purely logical terms’, because they work not by persuasion but by demanding a change in perspective—they ‘transpose the grounds of argument as they proceed’ (Tanner, 117).
62. Tanner, 128.
63. Tanner, 178.
64. Tanner, 174.
Anglican expression of the Christian common life in Australia, as it does to the church of God as a whole.

To say this is not to underestimate the seriousness of the current situation. The books surveyed here are warnings about Australian Anglicanism's fragmenting identity. I do not want in any way to minimise this danger. There are grounds for genuine doubt about the extent to which Australian Anglicans hold common beliefs and values. The issue becomes one of how we are to manage our diversity. In practice this means: what are the limits of acceptable diversity? Various guidelines have been suggested for this, but tend to generalities that are hard to implement in practice. There will always be different understandings as to what constitutes those things we agree are unacceptable. It is a principle of ecumenical theology that truth must be sought in community, and this is as true of intr-Anglican differences as it is in the broader ecumenical context. It is in keeping with the Anglican liturgical principle that prayer—and therefore our relationship with God—is something done in common, communally.

It could be that the Anglican Church in Australia is only beginning to find its own true identity, as a church of the southern hemisphere. The old identity has had to fragment to allow this new, more authentic identity to begin to emerge. This new identity will be unlike the old in more ways than one: it cannot be a monocultural identity, but pluralist. It must be porous to surrounding cultures—including the predominantly secular Australian culture—while making these cultures odd, shaping them to convey the good news of Jesus Christ. It is this blending that will give Australian Anglicanism its own sense of style, its own relevance and its own identity.

65. Tanner, 174. This is my main reason for objecting to the Archibishop of Sydney's advocacy of 'withdrawal of fellowship'; it closes the conversation.
66. Tanner, 172.