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Review of Thomas A. Fudge, *Darkness: The Conversion of Anglican Armidale, 1960-2019* (Vancouver: St John University Press, 2024). 837pp. ISBN: 979-8-9859892-2-9.

Introduction

Professor Fudge has produced a weighty tome on some of the recent history of the Anglican diocese of Armidale. It is a deliberately revisionist historical account of the period and presents a non-evangelical perspective of the conversion of Anglican Armidale (p. 14) with special attention to the diaries and opinions of Evan Wetherell who served as Dean at the Cathedral of St. Peter Apostle and Martyr between 1960-70. The title of the book hints strongly at his displeasure in the events across the period under examination. While conversion is normally associated with light (e.g. 1 Peter 2:9: “that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”), Fudge interprets the growth of evangelical Anglicanism in the Armidale diocese in terms of darkness.

The book is the product of a large body of research, the most notable sources being a vast array of personal interviews and the private diaries of Evan Wetherell. This material enables a presentation of frank opinions and colourful personalities, which, while giving a good sense of some of the controversies during the period examined, is often repetitious and occasionally superfluous (e.g. Wetherell’s dog is discussed across nine pages). It is also not a straightforward historical account. It is an attempt at “understanding theological history” (p. 12), and this is where the book unravels. The author injects a strong and peculiar theological bias into his historical interpretations such that his overall account is unreliable, and thus his conclusions ought to be mostly rejected. No church historian is wholly impartial, but this sort of subjectivity both muddies the scholarly waters and entrenches ecclesiastical tribalism. It is a shame that a more dispassionate approach was not taken, for the sources and what they reveal of the history of the Armidale diocese are important.

It is difficult to avoid the impression that Thomas Fudge does not like evangelicalism. There are proportionally very few warm words about evangelical churchmanship, the Anglican diocese of Sydney, Moore Theological College, John Chapman, Peter Chiswell, Rick Lewers, and Chris Brennan. In contrast, High Church traditions and the theological and liturgical ethos represented by St. Mary’s West Armidale (a branch church of St. Peter’s Cathedral) are lauded. There is a telling instance of this bias in the mishandling of a citation of American historian

Mark Noll. Fudge cites Noll as follows: “Much of what is *distinctive* about ... evangelicalism is not *essential* to Christianity.” (p. 85). However, the whole original sentence and the single word replaced by Fudge with an ellipsis tell a different story: “In the first instance, historical study or travel throughout North America and the rest of the world should help evangelicals realize that much of what is *distinctive* about American evangelicalism is not *essential* to Christianity.” Why would Fudge replace the single word “American” with “...” in this sentence? It appears that what was originally a comment directed at North American evangelicalism has been altered by Fudge to critique evangelicals everywhere, and especially evangelical Anglicans in Sydney and Armidale. One would hope that such source mishandling would not be more widespread in this book which is dependent on careful source work.

It is also difficult to avoid the impression that Thomas Fudge does not understand evangelicalism. Indeed, the most problematic features of his account revolve around both theology and history, especially concerning the doctrine of Holy Scripture and the doctrine of the atonement.

The Doctrine of Holy Scripture

Firstly, Professor Fudge would have us believe that Holy Scripture cannot be equated with the Word of God. We are told that High Church traditions consider it dangerous to draw a connection between the Word of God as the Bible (p. 52). We are provided with stories of detractors from evangelicalism who argue, in various ways, that this connection (and attendant doctrines such as inspiration and inerrancy) is a departure from the Anglican formularies such as the *39 Articles of Religion*, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and the *Ordinal* (pp. 57, 411, 598). We are warned of the danger of turning the Bible into a substitute for God’s revelation. (p. 58). In fact, Fudge tells us that in contrast to Islam which teaches the word of God is the Quran, Christianity teaches that Christ is the word of God (p. 590) and the Christian Bible is authoritative because it witnesses to Christ (p. 591). The implication of all this seems to be that the direct identification of the Bible with the Word of God is dangerous at best, and non-Christian at worst.

That the great Wittenberg reformer Martin Luther is marshalled in support of this position should raise our eyebrows. “In short,” Fudge says, “Luther’s notion of the ‘Word’ does not equal the Bible.” (p. 55). Unfortunately, just as Karl Barth “critically misunderstood Luther at this point”, so does Professor Fudge.¹ In his *Sayings [or Proverbs] from the Old Testament* (1541), Luther could not be clearer: “Holy Scripture is God’s word written and (so to speak) lettered and formed in letters, just as Christ is the eternal Word of God clothed in human flesh.”² Twice in his first sermon on John (1537) Luther speaks of “Holy Scripture, which is

¹ Mark. D Thompson, “Witness to the Word: On Barth’s Doctrine of Scripture” in David Gibson and Daniel Strange (eds.), *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 182; *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther’s Approach to Scripture* (Carlisle: Cumbria, 2004), 88-90;

² WA 48:31.4-8.

God's word".³ Further evidence could be easily adduced from the vast body of Luther scholarship, but even this sample makes it clear that Luther believed Scripture to be the word of God which testifies to Christ, not a written form which testifies to the word of God. Of course, the Word is a larger theological category than the Bible, but stating that the Bible is the Word of God is not tantamount to bibliolatry. One can only imagine how Luther might respond to the judgement of Professor Fudge's reticence to call the Bible the Word of God.

Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformers would have been shocked by Fudge's position. So important were the Scriptures to the great Archbishop, that he wrote in the Preface to the publication of the Great Bible (1539) that, "this book ... is the Word of God, the most precious jewel, the most holy relic that remain on earth."⁴ Also, in his first homily in the *Book of Homilies* (1549), Cranmer attributes "the most infallible certainty, truth, and perpetual assurance" of the Scriptures which are given By God who is "the only author of these heavenly meditations." It is little wonder that the Preface to the *Book of Homilies* speaks of the "very Word of God ... according to the mind of the Holy Ghost, expressed in the scriptures."⁵ Furthermore, Archbishop Cranmer's famous collect for the second Sunday of Advent captures the close connection between the words of Scripture and the Word of God: "Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning ... that by patience, and comfort of your holy Word..." And this God-breathed nature of the Scriptures is implicit in the Ordinal's form of service for the ordering of priests, wherein immediately after the ordinand is charged to be a "faithful dispenser of the word of God" he is given a Bible by the bishop. But the most succinct account of the God-breathed nature of the Scriptures is found in Article XX of the *Thirty-nine Articles*, which simply speaks of "God's Word written". Even from this cursory glance at English Reformation sources we can see that an Anglicanism which cannot directly identify the Holy Scriptures with the Word of God is at theological odds with the chief architect and primary formularies of Anglicanism. On the other hand, confessional Anglicans affirm that the text of the Bible is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21), and we – like Cranmer – rejoice to hear it read and preached. When presented with the Word of the Lord, we unashamedly respond, "Thanks be to God!"⁶

The authoritative status of the Holy Scriptures seems to lie at the heart of Professor Fudge's concerns. He rightly commends a "proper and balanced understanding of authority." (p. 44). However, he wrongly articulates this balance as "Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience rather than mere loyalty to texts and traditions." (p. 69). Fudge's "Four-Legged

³ WA 46:542.6; 548.32-33.

⁴ Thomas Cranmer, "The Prologue to the reader" in *The Byble in Engylshe that is to saye the content of al the holy scripture ...* (London: Grafton, 1540), RSTC 2071, *.ii^v. This, and subsequent early modern quotations have been modernised.

⁵ Thomas Cranmer (ed.), "A Fruitefull exhortation, to the readyng of holye scriptrure" in *Certayne sermons, or homelies appoynted by the kynges Maiestie, to be declared and redde, by all persones, vicars, or curates, euery Sondaie in their churches, where they haue cure* (London: Grafton, 1547), RSTC 13640, A.ii^r (Preface), B.iv^v.

⁶ For more, see Mark Earney, "God's Word Written: An Anglican Understanding of the Bible." *Australian Church Record* 1922 (Summer 2019), 14-20 which is available online at www.australianchurchrecord.net

Stool” is a slightly modified form of the more infamous “Three-Legged Stool” which has plagued Anglicanism for decades, perhaps since their articulation in the work of American theologian Urban Holmes III in 1982.⁷ Over time, the three legs came to represent three traditions: Reformed (Bible), Catholic (tradition), and Liberal (reason). Thus, it was thought that Anglicanism could comprehend the Reformed, the Catholic, and the Liberal streams just as it could see the Bible, tradition, and reason as equal sources of authority. Proponents of this view claimed the important Elizabethan reformer Richard Hooker as their own:

Hooker articulates for Anglicanism its answer to the question of what is our authority. Our authority is the association of Scripture, tradition and reason. Subsequent commentators have spoken of this as a "three-legged-stool." If one removes a leg, any leg, the stool topples.⁸

However, this Hookerian “Three-Legged Stool” is nothing more than a myth. That is, the idea of Scripture, reason, tradition (and we could add experience too) as equal sources of authority is completely foreign to the thought of ‘The Judicious Mr. Hooker.’ Scholarship over the last 50 years has debunked this way of thinking, and reformation historians in particular have led the charge. What Torrance Kirby, Nigel Atkinson, Bradford Littlejohn, and others have rediscovered, is that Richard Hooker has remarkably reformed theological credentials.⁹ This should not surprise us, given the reformed nature of the Elizabethan Settlement and that Hooker’s patrons were the reformed theologians, John Jewel and Edwin Sandys. Indeed, the scholarly consensus largely agrees that Richard Hooker wholeheartedly believed in the supreme authority of the Bible, and that all reasoning and traditions were subordinate to God’s written Word. These are the words of the great Elizabethan divine:

What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must incongruity of reason over-rule all other inferior judgments whatsoever.¹⁰

Professor Fudge is aware of some of these historiographical issues (p. 53 n47) but his repeated pleas for a balance of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience (pp. 53, 69, 71, 83, 87, 98, and 661) suggest that theological (rather than historical) reasons commit him to this view. Indeed, Fudge claims that “Scripture can only be authoritative when understand [sic] through

⁷ Urban Holmes III, *What is Anglicanism?* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1982), 11.

⁸ Holmes, *What is Anglicanism?*, 11.

⁹ W.J. Torrance Kirby, *Richard Hooker’s Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); Nigel Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason: Reformed Theologian of the Church of England?* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997); W. Bradford Littlejohn, *Richard Hooker: A Companion to His Life and Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015); W. Bradford Littlejohn and Scott N. Kindred-Barnes (eds.), *Richard Hooker and Reformed Orthodoxy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).

¹⁰ Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, 8:2; Folger Edition 2:39,8-14.

the prism of tradition, reason, and experience.” (p. 589). This is an extraordinary statement about the ability of Holy Scripture to be authoritative. It is unclear to this reviewer what precisely is the intended meaning of “can” in the sentence. However, if the implication is that the authority of Scripture is subordinated to or equal with tradition, reason, or experience, then we have serious problems. For this approach to the authority of Scripture runs completely contrary to the doctrine of Scripture embedded into the *39 Articles of Religion*.

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. (*Article VI*)

The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God’s Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation. (*Article XX*)

The Doctrine of the Atonement

The second major misunderstanding in Professor Fudge’s work concerns the doctrine of the atonement, and in particular its penal and substitutionary aspects. We are told that the substitutionary doctrine of the atonement was “championed by John Calvin”, that it could be traced to Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109), and that “it cannot be detected in the millennium prior to his time either in the Greek or the Latin.” (p. 412). Apparently penal substitutionary atonement is a “core matter for the evangelical tribe” such that “other theories cannot be considered save to disparage and dismiss.” (p. 586). In a rather confusing paragraph, Fudge seems to suggest that Article XXXI and the triumvirate of Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer limited the redemptive work of Christ to the cross (p. 168-69). He laments the fact that Article XXXI (“Of the one Oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross”) did not acknowledge “the significance of the resurrection, ascension, and glorification.” (p. 169). This is a particularly odd comment given that Article XXXI is a succinct statement focused upon the cross. But it is the sort of theological bluster and clumsiness which sits behind Fudge’s disdain for penal substitutionary atonement. He may well be overreacting to some evangelical misconstruals of the doctrine which reduce the whole work of Christ to this strand of the Bible’s teaching or which neglect the many other redemptive aspects of Christ’s work. But these mistakes do not warrant the caricature of Christ’s “full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction” which we find in Fudge’s book.

The Bible clearly teaches that our Lord Jesus Christ was punished (penal) in the place of sinners (substitution) to propitiate the wrath of God and expiate sin so that sinners could

be at one with God (atonement). The Old Testament prophet Isaiah speaks about the “Suffering Servant” in these terms. “The Lord has laid on him”, we are told, “the iniquities of us all.” (Isa. 53:6). And for what purpose would the Messiah be the substitute for sinners? “The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isa. 53:5). The New Testament authors put the same reality in different ways. For instance, the Apostle Paul writes, “God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). Elsewhere, he puts it succinctly: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement.” (Rom. 3:25). This, of course, is the mind of the other New Testament writers, such as Peter, who says “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” (1 Pet. 3:18). These verses illumine what it means for Christ to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Whereas under the Old Covenant the high priest would bring the sacrificial blood into the Most Holy Place for the forgiveness of sins, the New Covenant depends upon the blood of Christ who was sacrificed once to take away the sins of his people (Heb. 9:24-28). It is little wonder that John Baptist joyfully declared, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29).

Early Church apologists and theologians shared this theology and doxology also. In his *Demonstratio evangelica* (c. 311), Eusebius of Caesarea comments on the “Suffering Servant” in Isaiah: “In this he shows that Christ, being apart from all sin, will receive the sins of men on Himself. And therefore He will suffer the penalty of sinners, and will be pained on their behalf; and not his own.” (Book 3.2). In *Against the Arians*, the great Trinitarian theologian Athanasius (c. 300-373) likewise articulated the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. “Formerly the world, as guilty, was under judgement from law [penal]; but now the Word has taken on Himself the judgement [substitutionary], and having suffered in the body, has bestowed salvation to all [atonement].” (Sect. 60). In his *Theological Orations*, the great defender of Trinitarian orthodoxy, Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 330-390), also understood the atonement in penal and substitutionary terms. “But look at it in this manner”, writes Gregory, “that as for my sake [substitutionary] He was called a curse, who destroyed my curse [penal]; and sin, who takes away the sin of the world [atonement].” (Sect. 5). The long list of other Early Church articulations of the penal and substitutionary aspects of the atonement have been admirably compiled by recent scholars.¹¹ These early theological accounts undermine Professor Fudge’s claim about the early modern invention of the doctrine, but none moreso than the marvellous description of the atonement in the *Letter to Diognetus* (c. 130):

He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy one for transgressors, the blameless one for the wicked, the righteous one for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal one for those who are mortal.
For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than his righteousness? By

¹¹ For example, Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2007): 161-83; see also Garry J. Williams, ‘Penal Substitutionary Atonement in the Church Fathers’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 83.3 (2011): 195–216.

what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! That the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous one, and that the righteousness of one should justify many transgressors! (Chap. 9)

The Reformers of the sixteenth century adhered to this teaching of the Bible and the Church Fathers. When they emphasised the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary they did so mostly because the cross stood at the very heart of Christianity, but also because of the widespread and dangerous belief in the sacrifice of the Mass. “The greatest blasphemy and injury that can be against Christ”, was for Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, “that the priests make their mass a sacrifice propitiatory.”¹² Indeed, it was theologically axiomatic that the atonement be both penal and substitutionary. In the opening paragraph of his *Homily on Salvation*, Cranmer wrote, “God sent his only son, our saviour Christ into this world, to fulfil the law for us, and by shedding his most precious blood, to make a sacrifice and satisfaction or (as it may be called) amends, to his father for our sins, to assuage his wrath and indignation against us.”¹³ None of this implies that Cranmer neglected other vital aspects of Christ’s redemptive work, and this may be gleaned from his carefully crafted collects for Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost, etc. But it was Good Friday when Christ declared “it is finished” (Jn. 19:30) and this lies at the heart of everything else. All aspects of Christ’s redemption require liturgical and homiletical attention, and while it may be a stumbling block and foolishness to some hearers, Christ crucified is central to our Christian proclamation (1 Cor. 1:23).

Conclusion

One of the absurd consequences of Professor Fudge’s two major issues is that his position effectively unchurches Archbishop Cranmer and the English Reformers (not to mention most Anglicans throughout the history of Anglicanism) from a proper place within the Anglican Church which they established. Those whose positions on Holy Scripture and the atonement contradict Fudge’s position (e.g. Thomas Cranmer, John Jewel, and Richard Hooker) are characterised as evangelicals rather than traditional Anglicans (p. 588) and Puritans rather than Protestants (p. 524). The ridiculousness of such a thing should give us pause for thought. There are other absurdities in Fudge’s book also: that *sola scriptura* can only be traced to the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 (p. 59), that T.C. Hammond was a “Federal Theologian” (following Peter Carnley’s errors, pp. 162-171), that omitting the eucharist potentially invalidates an ordination (p. 174), that there was a sharp dichotomy between Calvin and the Calvinists (Fudge seems unaware of the last 40 years of Calvin scholarship debunking the “Calvin vs. the Calvinists” thesis, p. 375), and bizarrely arguing that

¹² Thomas Cranmer, *A Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Bloud of our Saviour Christ ...* (London: Reginald Wolfe, 1550), RSTC 6000, sig. 104^v.

¹³ *Certayne sermons, or homelies appoynted by the kynges Maiestie ...* (London: Richard Grafton, 1547), RSTC 13640, sig. D.ii^v.

solafidianism implies a salvation which is conditional on works (“... if faith is the condition for grace then efficacious grace is contingent upon performance. This distorts the gospel by producing a doctrine of justification that occurs as a result of faith and works. In other words, salvation is conditional.” p. 376). These may have been small mistakes which a better editor could have picked up and corrected. But they present a cumulative case of theological misunderstanding which does not reflect well on the author.

This book needed to be written. But it needed to be written differently, and perhaps by someone else. The painstaking research and invaluable sources utilised within its pages supply part of an important historical record of the past, and for that Professor Fudge ought to be commended. However, what lets this book down is the author’s relentless injection of personal and peculiar theological bias. We are left with an unreliable historical interpretation of the recent decades of change in the Anglican diocese of Armidale. *Darkness: The Conversion of Anglican Armidale, 1960-2019* will need to be consulted in the future writing of Australian Anglican history. But it will not age well because *Darkness* has not understood it.