

**A response to “Darkness- The conversion of Anglican Armidale 1960-2019” (4<sup>th</sup> April 2024)**

“Darkness – the conversion of Anglican Armidale 1960-2019” is a book that seeks to bring to light hitherto unheard voices responding to the transition of the Anglican Diocese of Armidale from a middle church diocese to a lower church evangelical diocese. Relying heavily on Dean Wetherall’s diaries and interviews with people who were unhappy about the transition, Thomas Fudge has sought to present an untold story which is largely negative. While I’m thankful for the insights the book has given me into reactions from people both then and now, I do not agree with Fudge’s underlying presuppositions or conclusions.

The first presupposition I would challenge concerns the Anglican understanding of Scriptural authority. Fudge asserts that authority in the Anglican Church rests equally on the three-legged stool of human reason, church tradition and Scripture, (also adding human experience as a fourth equally valid authority along the way.) However, in the Anglican Church as conceived by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and preserved in the fundamental declarations and ruling principles of the Anglican Church of Australia, the Holy Scriptures were, and still are, the **primary** source of authority. The attack on this basic doctrine in the book is both relentless and I believe misleading. Fudge is however correct in identifying that the difference in the way the authority of the Bible is viewed is the key issue lying at the heart of both past and present tensions.

The second presupposition I would challenge concerns the central Anglican doctrine of Penal Substitutionary Atonement. The biblical doctrine affirming that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial death to pay the price for human sin so that those who put their faith in him might be forgiven and saved from God’s wrath is central to Christian faith and the Anglican understanding of it. Sadly, Fudge ignores the Scriptural evidence and implies that believing this doctrine and teaching it is somehow not mainstream Anglican but sectarian! The reality is that the doctrine of Penal Substitutionary Atonement is found all through the Bible and also in the current Australian Anglican formularies. Article 15 of the 39 articles states it plainly. Other Anglican doctrines that Fudge calls into question are: Article 17 on predestination, and Article 28 on the explicit rejection of transubstantiation. In short, the Anglicanism Thomas Fudge represents is not truly Anglican, nor even the middle church Anglican he claims the Diocese moved away from.

The result of Fudge’s rejection of these key Anglican doctrines is a strongly negative assessment of the transition that has taken place over the last 60 years. These presuppositions also lead him to stridently criticise present biblically faithful teaching which acknowledges the realities of human sin and the need for repentance and personal faith in Jesus.

All that said, I am grateful to Thomas Fudge for bringing to light the opinions of some, both past and present, concerning the transition that has taken place in the Armidale Diocese over the past 60 years. I have learnt a great deal and it has cast helpful light on the recent conflict experienced at St Mary’s West Armidale. This gives plenty of food for thought with regard to the way we might deal with theological difference into the future.

Bishop Rod Chiswell.

