

BOOK REVIEW

Bruce N. Kaye, *Frozen Institutions: Questions for the Church after Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock - Pickwick Publications, 2022), pp. xx + 207. ISBN 978-1666713480 doi:[10.1017/S1740355323000554](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355323000554)

For forty years Bruce Kaye has been one of the wisest voices in the Anglican Church of Australia. Trained for the ministry at Moore College in Sydney, he undertook postgraduate work at the universities of Durham and Basel, then taught New Testament for some years at St John's College in Durham. In 1983 he returned to Australia to become Master of New College, an Anglican residential college at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, where he engaged with many areas of university life. From there in 1994 he was appointed General Secretary, with a tiny staff, of the General Synod of the Australian Church. The Church was just emerging from a tempestuous period, dominated by a 15-year debate over the ordination of women to the priesthood. Bruce was a creative general secretary. He instigated major changes to the structures and procedures of General Synod, wrote several substantial books exploring Anglican history and identity, initiated forums to promote the interchange of ideas within the Church, brought together a team of historians to produce the first one-volume history of the Australian Church (published in 2002) and founded the *Journal of Anglican Studies*. He retired in 2004 but has continued to produce significant scholarly work.

Frozen Institutions comprises a collection of Kaye's lectures and occasional papers exploring a variety of subjects relating to international and Australian Anglicanism. They are divided into two parts. The first set of essays deal with Anglicans worldwide and the second set is concerned with Anglicans in Australia. A common theme is the need for the institutional arrangements of the church to relate effectively to their primary purpose: to sustain and transmit the faith of the Christian community. They should foster cooperation and interdependence; the local church – whether parish, diocese or province – needs to interact with the wider body of the church; and, particular patterns of church government are not absolute.

Behind these essays are a cluster of social and religious changes that have changed the context in which the Anglican Church in Australia has operated. One is the ending of the Christendom model of the church, in which the church had an assured relationship with the civil powers. This has largely disappeared but not the assumptions and habits of thought that lay behind it, and these are obstructing the church's mission. Another is the changing place of the Anglican Church in contemporary Australia. Until the 1970s it was the nation's largest religious denomination, embedded in the community, and its bishops were public figures.

Social and religious changes since then have diminished the Church's numerical base and its influence. Whereas 70 years ago the label 'C of E' or Anglican had a distinctive religious and cultural identity – people knew what it signified – the majority of Australian Anglicans (who now comprise only 10 per cent of the nation's population) have only a weak sense of identity. Another is the fragmentation of Australian Anglicanism. The Australian Church, with its strong sense of diocesan independence and wide differences in theology, has become more tribal, with its different groupings and parties reluctant to talk to or listen to each other. The ties that used to bind have grown weaker or dissolved, while the issues that divide have grown deeper. Institutions that have served the Church effectively in earlier years are 'frozen', no longer fulfilling their purpose. As General Secretary of General Synod, Kaye sought to create new structures that would promote connections and also boost the Church's engagement with contemporary Australia.

Bruce Kaye's essays provide wise and historically informed discussions of many aspects of contemporary Anglicanism and the issues it faces. He regrets, as inconsistent with Anglican ecclesiology ('a fellowship of churches'), the sidelining of the Anglican Consultative Council by the Archbishops of Canterbury and the Primates. In current debates he deplores what he calls 'theological ping pong' (a term coined by the Oxford philosopher Basil Mitchell) in which complex issues are reduced to binary positions and point-scoring, with one side claiming the label 'Catholic' or 'orthodox'. Those who hold other views are seen as wrong-headed (if not heretical) so that serious conversation with them is impossible. This way of thinking, Kaye reminds us, ignores the theological and institutional diversity of the early church; there never was 'one great church' with a universally accepted set of beliefs. But how does the present-day church deal with diversity and differences? One of the essays is Kaye's opening address to the second National Anglican Conference held in Sydney in 2002. This is an astute assessment of the state of the Australian Church, and its weakness, and his hopes for its renewal. Kaye urged the church community to find ways of engaging with its differences in a creative way, with spiritual openness and love.

During the last 20 years Kaye's hopes have not been realized and his theology of unity is needed more than ever before. As in other provinces of the Anglican Communion, the Australian Church has been mired in controversy over acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The diocese of Sydney, which was a vigorous opponent of the gay movement from the time it emerged in the early 1970s, was prominent in the founding of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON). In 2020 the Church's Appellate Tribunal gave its opinion that the blessing of same-sex civil marriages was 'not contrary to or a departure from the doctrine of this Church'. This judgment stoked the anger of conservative Anglicans who claimed that it was wrong in both law and theology, as did the failure (by one vote in the house of bishops) of a motion in the 2022 General Synod opposing same-sex marriage. These tensions led to the formation soon afterwards of the diocese of the Southern Cross, a parallel jurisdiction linked with GAFCON, to provide a home for Australian Anglicans who felt they could no longer accept the oversight of 'liberal' bishops; it has also attracted some dissident members of other denominations. The final and most recent essay in *Frozen Institutions* is a careful analysis of the Appellate Tribunal's judgment. Kaye, while believing the decision to

be well grounded in law, recognizes the opposition that it has provoked and urges the Australian Church to hold patient and respectful conversations on the issues it raised. Sadly, I suspect that those in the Australian Church who could learn most from Bruce Kaye's analysis and insights are the least likely to do so.

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