This is a work written about contemporary tensions in the Anglican Communion and in the Anglican Church of Australia. The author is herself a partisan participant in these Anglican divisions, as she makes clear in the book. Muriel Porter is a leading layperson in the government of the Anglican Church of Australia, a longtime advocate of the ordination of women and, as she explicitly states on p. 134, a supporter of homosexual clergy and of the blessing of same-sex unions. In other words, she is precisely the sort of Anglican whom the diocese of Sydney and other similar Conservative Evangelical Anglicans oppose in the name of biblical truth. The book is more focused on the history and current state of Australian Anglicanism than its title suggests, and the argument is not assisted by repetitious attention to just one issue, the ordination of women. But Porter nevertheless offers a number of significant critiques of the Sydney position with respect to global Anglicanism. She maintains that Sydney has a radical Protestant agenda to complete the sixteenth-century Edwardian Reformation in the Anglican Communion (something that Diarmaid MacCulloch has also suggested). This agenda can be seen in diocesan standpoints such as elevating the Scripture above sacraments, scrapping liturgical worship, and advocating lay presidency of the eucharist and other sacraments. The wealth of the diocese of Sydney has enabled it, under the leadership of Archbishop Peter Jensen, and his brother, the dean of Sydney, to spread this radical agenda to other sympathetic portions of the Anglican Communion. This international leadership culminated in Sydney’s leadership in the development of GAFCON (Global Anglican Futures) as a quasi-alternative conservative Anglican Communion. At the base of this Conservative Evangelical position, Porter maintains, is a particular theological viewpoint developed by Broughton Knox, the influential principal of Sydney diocese’s theological college. Knox’s theology upheld the congregation as the basic constituent of the Church; and the Bible as only source of revelation, understood as a series of propositions chiefly available to rational understanding. Porter also argues that Sydney’s advocacy of a biblical prohibition on homosexuality and the ordination of women, and of scriptural support for male headship, is selective exegesis, which ignores the validity of other exegetical positions, and is coy about applying this to wider society, preferring to confine the subordination of women only to ecclesiastical culture. Porter leaves unaddressed how the liberal positions that she upholds have also contributed to the current divisions within the Anglican Communion. Some attention to the problems of her own position would certainly have strengthened the book, giving it more intellectual credibility. However, the book is an acute and telling criticism, by an open and avowed opponent, of a diocese that evidently rejects most of the historical constituent aspects of Anglicanism. Insofar as the Anglican Communion wishes to retain these dimensions to its identity into the future then Porter clearly has grounds for her thesis that the ‘Sydney Experiment’ is a ‘threat to World Anglicanism’.

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