

David McCready, *The Life and Theology of Alexander Knox: Anglicanism in the Age of Enlightenment and Romanticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. x + 320. ISBN 978-90-04-35522-4.

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In this comprehensive and masterly study, which began life as a Trinity College Dublin PhD, David McCready offers a definitive study of one of the most formative figures in the development of ‘Anglicanism’ as a distinctive form of church life – the Irish lay theologian, Alexander Knox (1757–1831). Knox’s range of writings was extremely varied and usually occasional, which has led the author into a thorough investigation of both published and unpublished sources that allow him to paint a three-dimensional portrait of a figure whose influences spread across Evangelicalism to Tractarianism. In so doing, he helps fill in some important gaps in the history of the development of the idea of ‘Anglicanism’ as a kind of bridge church between Rome and Protestantism rooted in the Fathers but also open to Knox’s own world, which embraced both the Enlightenment and the experiential religion that had guided evangelical piety. Perhaps because of the unsystematic nature of his work, Knox has often been relegated to the second division among the Anglican theologians, whereas it is clear that he was in the top league as he worked as a consummate networker and correspondent who challenged and shaped the life and thought of many of his contemporaries, most importantly his friend Bishop John Jebb.

McCready’s method is to explore the different themes and aspects of Knox’s theology in thirteen substantial interconnected chapters. After a brief biography, which emphasizes the importance of rapprochement with Roman Catholics in the context of moves towards emancipation, there follows a chapter on Knox and Anglicanism that is perhaps the most important in the volume: it is a full and detailed exposition of the theological emphases that developed in the seventy or so years when the Churches of England and Ireland were united in ‘the united Church of the whole Empire’ (p. 37). This is crucial in the development of a form of church life increasingly shorn of its Englishness and more aware of its antiquity. This was reflected in the Prayer Book as ‘the sublime piety of the primitive Church’ (p. 43). Coupled with this High Church emphasis was a sympathy for the renewed religion of the heart expressed in Evangelicalism, much of which was itself sympathetic to Knox’s High Church ideals: Knox’s spirituality is quite distinct from the ‘high and dry’ religion of the Hackney Phalanx and won him many Evangelical admirers, from William Wilberforce to Hannah More – to whom he was very close – even though they differed on some fundamental principles of doctrine.

Chapter 3 explores the relationship with John Wesley, who McCready sees as the key influence on Knox’s High Churchmanship. In his *Remarks on the Life and Character of John Wesley*, Knox regarded Wesley as ‘A Church-of-England man of the highest tone’, by which he meant a Platonist High Churchman, even though he deplored the tendency of Wesley’s followers towards separation. This discussion flows naturally into a chapter on Christian Platonism which is fully expounded in relation to Knox’s own readings in the Fathers. He was closest to the Alexandrian Fathers, especially Clement, as mediated through the Cambridge Platonists, whom he labelled as a ‘band of Chrysostomians’ (p. 84). Knox seems to have emphasized a mystical theology of deification. Moving from

the ancient world into Knox's own times, Chapter 5 explores the relationship to the Enlightenment and Romanticism which was manifest most strongly in Knox's spirit of tolerance as well as in the importance of experience.

The remainder of the book develops a synoptic overview of Knox's 'system' drawn from a very wide range of sources and adopting a thematic approach. This system is established on a method of practical eclectic eirenicism rather than any form of dogmatic rigidity against which he frequently takes issue. Knox, who described himself as a 'Christian of the six first centuries' (p. 141), established his theology on Scripture interpreted in the light of the tradition of the early church in which the so-called Vincentian Canon (*Quod Semper, Quod Ubique, Quod ab Omnibus*) became central. The next five chapters explore key doctrinal loci (God, Justification, Baptism and Eucharist, Ecclesiology, and Providence and Predestination). Knox disputed regularly with opponents in all these areas and in so doing developed his own emphases, which might be summarized as a kind of orthodox High Churchmanship that also stressed the centrality of lived religion. There was a sense of integration between living the holy life and incorporation in the divine nature. This leads to a higher view of human nature than that displayed by many of his more Calvinistically inclined opponents (many of whom remained friends). In all this, Wesley remained a key influence (p. 183). In turn, Knox held a high view of the sacraments, including maintaining what he regarded as the Scriptural doctrine of sacrifice. Most importantly, he was also a proto-ecumenist and remained open to dialogue with Roman Catholics and even with the Eastern Orthodox, a highly unusual move at the time (p. 219). While inevitably there is a degree of overlap between these more systematic chapters, they reveal Knox as an original and constructive theologian who remains of importance for ecumenical dialogue as well as for the understanding of Anglicanism.

After a brief chapter on Knox's influence on later writers including the Tractarians, much of which, despite what earlier commentators might have claimed, was indirect and ambiguous, there is an assessment of Knox as one who pre-eminently brought together the life of doctrine with the life of faith. His importance is seen by McCready as a means of revitalizing the centrality of the often under-estimated High Church tradition of the Irish Church. Perhaps most crucially he was one of the key modern influences on the classic Anglican method rooted in Scripture and the Fathers but always linked to piety and lived religion. His was a 'science of true piety' inspired by the Holy Spirit, the giver of life. This integrated and eirenic approach has much to contribute to the ahistorical mishmash of polemics of much of what passes for theology in contemporary Anglicanism. Sadly, such an approach is unlikely to feature in the theological curricula of the increasingly panicky churches of the Anglican Communion. McCready, it should be noted, is looking in from the outside: he is a priest of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America.

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