Carnley launches straight into his apologia in the prologue, exploring the sustained criticism to which he was subject from key Sydney figures at the time of his election as Primate. Newly elected as the national Anglican leader, Carnley had jumped at an invitation from the Bulletin to write for their Easter edition, seizing the chance to ‘communicate religious truth to a wider audience through the columns of an essentially secular publication’. The article, ‘The Rising of the Son’, discussed the resurrection of Jesus from the perspective that he rose from the dead not to confront those who had betrayed and persecuted him but rather to embrace them in forgiveness.

However, an avalanche of criticism, most of it emanating from Sydney, was quickly directed at Carnley for apparently not stressing sufficiently the uniqueness of Jesus (by contrast with the founders of other world religions) as the ‘only way to salvation’. A heated media debate followed, with some 300 separate news items, opinion pieces and letters to the editor in the ensuing weeks around the country. The climate was thus ripe for some Sydney clergy to try to organise a boycott of Carnley’s ceremonial inauguration as Primate, held in Sydney at the end of April 2000, an attempt that caused even more public controversy. In the event, the media furore ensured that St Andrew’s Cathedral was packed with Carnley supporters as a few placard-waving protestors, who presumably imagined they were the ‘champions of Christian orthodoxy’, waited outside. Reflections in Glass, Carnley explains, is an attempt to explore the underlying issues of his clash with ‘Sydney Anglicanism’ because ‘many people in the pews of our churches and in the Australian community generally’ were left in the dark.

Carnley then explores in some depth the vastly different interpretations of key doctrinal issues and their outworkings that have caused such powerful and public division between people who are, after all, members of the same church. Several chapters deal with central Christian theological truths such as ‘God: Manifestation or Mystery?’, ‘The Nature of Doctrine’, ‘Scripture’ and ‘Cross and Resurrection’. The author offers not only his own position on these important topics but also demonstrates how that position — which he identifies as mainstream Anglicanism — differs from that of his Sydney critics. Those same critics have not hesitated to respond in kind since the publication of this book, accusing Dr Carnley of misunderstanding their views, and describing his theological stance as ‘idiosyncratic’ rather than mainstream.

The rest of the book deals with the way the fundamental differences between conservatives and liberals impact on more pragmatic matters for the Anglican Church, in particular its leadership. An important chapter supports women as bishops, an issue yet to be decided by the Australian Anglican Church. Other chapters look at ongoing debates about lay and priestly ministry, particularly in the context of who should preside at the central Christian rite of Holy Communion.

Reflections in Glass is an important book for anyone seeking to understand the background to the current world Anglican crisis, as well as the more localised disputes that erupt from time to time between Australian Anglicans.