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**'Only in Christ can any of
us find our true identity
and know lasting peace and
contentment.'**

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A MUSING ON LEADERSHIP

Steve Carlisle



WITH THE MUCH PUBLICISED US primaries still in process, as well as our own Federal election approaching, it should come as no surprise that our political leaders strain so hard to find the perfect 'tagline'. But whether our leaders are trying to 'Make {Insert Nation Here} Great Again',

or think that 'It's Time' to 'Keep Australia in Great Hands' 'For All of Us', or even when they just like to rhyme (remember 'Kevin-07?'), it ought to be obvious that what they promise can never be lived up to. After all, these are idealistic leadership statements from fallen and fallible human beings just like us. They cannot ever fully deliver what they promise. The answer never was, and never is, a person, party, or ideological platform.

You see, by definition, leadership and slogans cannot belong together. The slogans always over-promise. The leaders always under-deliver. This is why you'll never see a political slogan such as 'We will try our hardest but we cant make any guarantees.' (It's catchy, though, don't you think?!) In the Lord Jesus, however, we have a leader who leads his people perfectly. He leads with great authority, as displayed in his teaching and miracles. Yet he also leads with profound gentleness, fulfilling the role of the Servant who neither quarrels nor cries out, and in whose hands even the bruised reed and the smouldering wick are safe. So often in worldly leadership, those with authority lack

any gentleness, while those who are gentle command little authority. Jesus holds both together in unity.

It is at the cross, of course, that we see Jesus' leadership most supremely displayed. It is here he brings perfect justice. It is here he brings perfect love. It is here he shows supreme compassion. It is here he opens the way for restored relationship with his Father. And this he does willingly in his own death. At the cross there is no sloganeering or fist pumping, but rather the simple words, 'It is finished.' At the cross the war between God and man is ended, reconciliation is available. The tyranny of sin and death is brought to an end and a new age is ushered in for all who trust in him. Jesus' words speak of a hope which cannot be extinguished, because they are spoken by the one who would be raised to life again, to remain the ultimate, perfect and trustworthy Lord and Leader.

As Paul instructs, we must pray for our leaders, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. We pray for them in the knowledge that our leaders will always under-deliver. Only Jesus can perfectly deliver what he promised. After all, he came 'not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' 🙏

**The slogans always
over-promise.
The leaders always
under-deliver.**

THE ART OF GODLY LISTENING

Susan An



I ATTENDED A CONFERENCE recently on a Christian response to a social issue. The speakers had conducted extensive research, reflected biblically, and helpfully gave personal testimony as to how they were dealing with the issue in their own lives.

However, during question time, I noticed that emotions were running high. Emotions are perfectly normal and God-given, of course. But in this case, they were so strong that they seemed to have overcome people's ability to listen. Questioners were at times hostile towards the speakers, accusing them of not having addressed aspects of theology, when, in fact, they had, as well as of condoning sin.

This somewhat perplexing interaction got me thinking about how we can easily fail to hear each other if there is discussion on a difficult issue. There are numerous 'hot topic' issues with significant complexities that are discussed endlessly but rarely resolved. Further, we sometimes do not exercise grace towards those whom we disagree with, or even those with whom we agree, in the example above! Some of the more memorable examples of issues within both Christian and non-Christian circles that elicit strong responses include: the role of men and women in the church, the nature of the Lord's Supper, accuracy of the creation account, the refugee crisis, terrorism, politics, and same sex unions. Depending on the context and situation, other topics could easily be added to this list!

Yet in discussing these and other issues, James 1:19 calls on us to be 'quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry'—in order to lead the kind of righteous life that God desires. Philippians 2:3-5 teaches us to be humble with each other and to look to the interest of others, in the same way that Jesus did. Part of being a loving and respectful community of brothers and sisters in Christ, then, is to listen to each other with humility.

Having said all this, as sad as it is when we do not hear *each other*, the bigger tragedy would be if we were to ignore *God's voice*. The importance of listening to God, and warnings against the failure to do so, are prominent themes in the Bible. God repeatedly calls on his people to listen to him throughout the Old Testament (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 4:1; 7:12; Joshua 3:9; Isaiah 46:3). Failure

to listen is deemed sinful and an act of rebellion against God (Judges, 2 Kings 17:14; 21:9; Isaiah 66:4; Jeremiah 6:10; 7:26). God describes Adam's failure in the Garden as being 'listen[ing] to the voice of your wife' over his (Genesis 3:17). Failure to listen to God spelt disaster for numerous others in the Bible, including Abraham, Pharaoh, Saul, Jonah, and at times even the whole nation of Israel.

In the New Testament, God continues to command people listen to him, but he also directs people to listen to his Son (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Jesus, in return, teaches that the mark of a person that belongs to him is someone who knows and listens to his voice (John 10:14-16).


Just as failure to hear God's voice has led to catastrophic results in the past, so it continues to lead to disaster in the present. It is, therefore, not only a right and appropriate

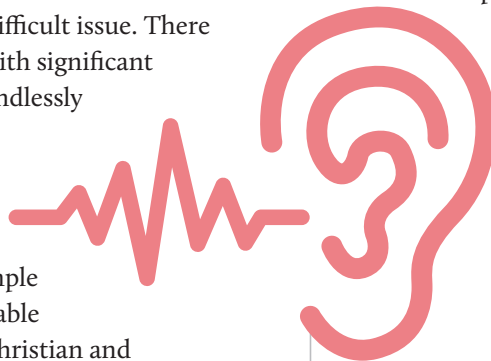
response, but a necessary one, for Christians to

turn to God first when we are discussing issues. It is especially important with issues that stir strong emotions. Not only should our responses come from our reading and understanding of the Bible, but when a fellow brother or a sister in Christ speaks faithfully from the Scriptures, we need to acknowledge that it is God that is speaking through them. 1 John 4:6 says 'we are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us.' God may be

using their voice and their thinking process, but it does not make it any less true that it is God who is doing the speaking. The verse goes on to claim that our attitude to

listening helps to 'recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.' Therefore, respectful listening is a godly and helpful mark of the Holy Spirit.

As creator of the universe, God has many things to say to us on anything and everything. His Son, Christ, is *the truth* (John 14:6). We cannot start thoughtful discussions on any topic, unless we first stop to listen to God. Good listening, godly listening, starts with us listening to God with humble attitudes and loving submission. Once we have understood the wisdom from God, only then, can we start speaking to each other on any topic with any semblance of measured consideration. 



The mark of a person that belongs to him is someone who knows and listens to his voice.

EDITORIAL

THREE PRECIOUS WORDS

AS CHRISTIANS, WE PLACE great value on words. Words matter a great deal to us. Sometimes even just one or two, two or three, words can be enormously significant.

The gospels record for us seven 'words' that Jesus cried out from the cross. They testify to different aspects of what was happening in his suffering and death. Three of them, for example, testify to his abundant grace and mercy. '*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*' (Luke 23:34) reveals his deep and gracious concern even for those who, in ignorance, have just crucified him. '*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise*' is his word of blessed assurance given to one that has just cried out to him for acceptance, knowing full well that he does not deserve it and can offer Jesus nothing in return. '*Woman, this is your son ... This is your mother*' (John 19:26-27) reveals his concern to provide for his mother and one of his disciples in their own darkest hour, even in the midst of his own suffering. Truly, he is a wonderful Savior who abounds in mercy and grace!

Two of Christ's words from the cross tell of the depths of his agony. '*I thirst*' (John 19:28) indicates the enormous physical stress he endured in crucifixion. '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*' (Matthew 27:46) speaks of the momentous relational disruption that he endured. Rightly, he is the beloved Son with whom the Father is well pleased (Matthew 3:17). Yet now, as he hangs on the cross, the Father turns his face away, and he endures God's condemnation, even though he himself is innocent. Moreover, both of these cries testify also to the theme of Scriptural fulfillment. Jesus' thirst echoes David's thirst, whether from Psalm 22:15 or from Psalm 69:21. Likewise, his forsakenness fulfills David's experience recorded in Psalm 22:1. And so we can say with confidence that

everything Jesus endured in his suffering and death too place because it was part of God's sure plan of salvation.

One word that Christ speaks from the cross tells of his own trust in his heavenly Father. The verdict of sinful men has been passed. But when Christ calls out, '*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*' (Luke 23:46), he is entrusting himself to him who judges justly, as the apostle Peter later describes it (1 Peter 2:23). And, of course, Christ's resurrection is God's great vindication of his Son, for he did not let his Holy One see decay.

One cry, then, remains: the words recorded in John 19:30 – '*It is finished*'.

Just three little words (in our English translations). But of all the words that Christ speaks from the cross, these ones should be especially treasured. For they testify to the finality, the completeness, of what Christ has achieved by his suffering and death. It is a cry of victory, not defeat.

At the start of John's gospel, John the Baptist described Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 2:29). Now, in his sin-bearing death, that mighty work of redemption has reached its end. Yes, the resurrection still lies ahead, as well as his ascension and heavenly rule and final return. But in a truly wonderful manner, Jesus proclaims that his work of salvation is done. It is complete. It is finished.

Herein lies the *goodness* of the good news that we proclaim, both to one another and to the lost. Herein lies our confidence that we have truly been reconciled to God, having been justified by faith alone in Christ alone. The finished work of Christ is the great wonder of the gospel. ☪

Herein lies the goodness of the good news that we proclaim.



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MAKING SENSE OF GENDER CONFUSION¹

Rob & Claire Smith

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in *Essentials* (issuu.com/efacaustralia/docs)

The transgender tipping point



In May 2014, a year before Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner became headline news around the world, the cover story of *TIME* magazine declared that we've now reached

a 'transgender tipping point'. Sociologically speaking, a tipping point refers to a moment in time when a minority is able to bring about a significant change in the minds of the majority, such that long-held attitudes are reversed and the momentum on a particular issue begins to move in a completely new direction.

That new attitude and direction is, in essence, a new way of thinking about gender. And it really is new. Much of the discourse on homosexuality over the last 40 years has been about the fluidity or variability of *sexual orientation*, but not about the fluidity or variability of *gender itself*. In fact, both sides in the same-sex 'debate' have tended to view gender as something that is not only *binary* (i.e., either male or female) but also as something that is *fixed* (i.e., determined by one's biological sex).

What is transgenderism?

The new way of thinking, however, makes a sharp distinction between sex and gender. Sex is still seen as *biologically determined*, but gender is now seen as an arbitrary *social construct* and/or *personally chosen*. This means that there is no necessary correlation between your gender identity and your biological sex. The two may be the same or they may be different. 'Transgender' is the popular umbrella term that describes the experience of difference or dissonance between one's biological sex and one's gender identity. 'Gender dysphoria' is the latest diagnostic label for the psychological distress arising from this experience of dissonance.²

¹ An earlier version of this article appeared in *Essentials* (Spring 2015), pp. 4-6.

² According to the most recent *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), 'Gender Dysphoria' is regarded as a more appropriate diagnostic name, given the symptoms and behaviours it seeks to describe. It is, however, a significant shift away from the earlier term, 'Gender Identity Disorder', which identified the dissonance itself as a 'disorder.' Now it is only the distress caused by the dissonance that is seen to be a problem. In other words, DSM-5 has normalised gender nonconformity.



However, not all who identify as 'transgender' would meet the diagnostic criteria of gender dysphoria.

Transgenderism, however, is not to be confused with the handful of rare physical conditions that fall under the 'intersex' label, where there are varying degrees of genital, hormonal, gonadal or (even more rarely) chromosomal ambiguity

with a person's biological sex.

These are *physical* variations, and on their own do not involve questions of either sexual

orientation or gender identity. In other words, with intersex we are talking about a physiological condition with a clear biological basis, not a psychological condition with no identifiable biological basis, as is the case with gender dysphoria.³

That new attitude and direction is, in essence, a new way of thinking about gender. And it really is new.

Are we ready for the revolution?

For the last few decades the question of homosexuality has exercised western societies and Christian denominations around the world. But what the enthusiastic media (and social media) response to Jenner's gender transition reveals is that behind the homosexual revolution (about which much has been written), the transgender revolution (about which much less has been written) has always been present and has been steadily gaining momentum. It is, therefore, now apparent that the move toward same-sex marriage belongs to a broader complex of questions about gender,

³ This is why many in the intersex community do not want to be included in the LGBTQ(I)A acronym, and why there has been some criticism of DSM-5's subsuming of 'Intersex' under the category of 'Gender Dysphoria'. That said, people with intersex conditions can experience significant psychological distress, particularly if they come to reject the medical decisions made for them at birth.

MAKING SENSE OF GENDER CONFUSION (CONTINUED)

identity and the nature of human sexuality – captured by the acronym LGBTQIA – and a much broader ‘gender agenda’ aimed at a radical and thoroughgoing moral, social, psychological and sexual revolution.

The consequence of all this, as societal, political and legislative developments both here and around the world indicate, is that transgenderism is the next major issue that Christians are going to have to come to grips with – theologically, morally, medically, legally and pastorally. And yet, because of the way it has been largely obscured by the homosexual debate, most churches are far from ready for it. But get ready we must!

Understanding transgender ideology

In large measure, the rise of transgenderism has come about because of medical and surgical advances. However, at an ideological level, it has grown out of the feminist and homosexual revolutions. For if there is no necessary correlation between biological sex and ‘destiny’ or gendered life roles (feminism), and if there is no necessary correlation between biological sex and your sexual orientation (homosexuality), then why should there be any necessary correlation between biological sex and gender identity?

Nor is there any necessary correlation between one’s sexual orientation and one’s gender identity. They are both separate (and potentially fluid) categories. As it has often been put, ‘sexual orientation’ determines *who* you want to go to bed *with*, whereas ‘gender identity’ determines *what* you want to go to bed *as*. The bottom line is that *biology* determines neither! Moreover, just as you can *choose who* you go to bed with, so you can *choose what* you go to bed as. Everything is, ultimately, self-selected.

What’s more, once we decouple gender identity and (binary) biological sex, we are free to believe that there are many genders, or perhaps none at all, and that gender identity is (potentially, if not actually) perpetually fluid. The end point of such an understanding is that there is, in fact, no need for any person to align their biological sex with their gender identity.

The tensions of transgender experience

However, interestingly and paradoxically, not all transgender people are comfortable with such voluntarism, nor with a radical separation of sex and gender. Indeed,

as is the case in the homosexual community, many transgender people argue for a kind of ‘born this way’ determinism.⁴ They believe that the disparity they experience between their biological sex and gender identity is not something they have chosen, but has been determined by forces beyond their control and, rather than live with this tension, they long for alignment. They feel they’ve been given the wrong body and so want it changed.

It is worth noting, however, that over 80% of children who experience gender identity issues resolve those issues prior to adulthood. Nonetheless, those whose gender dysphoria persists into adulthood would certainly not say they have chosen what, for them, is a deeply distressing experience. Even so, some measure of choice is necessarily involved – firstly, at the level of self-belief (e.g., I believe I am an actual woman trapped in a man’s body) and, secondly, in terms of the chosen way of addressing the perceived problem (e.g., I have decided to change my appearance or body to align with my self-belief).

The current approach to treatment

Whilst both medical and psychological research continues into gender dysphoria, its cause or causes are a long way from being fully understood. As with same-sex attraction, it appears to be both *multifactorial* and *case specific*, with the mix of causal factors varying from person to person. What is common, and contrary to the notion of ‘gender plasticity’, is the desire of those who experience it to achieve some measure of alignment between mind and body. In other words, most of those who experience gender dysphoria want to look on the outside the way they feel on the inside.

Since the 1980s, there has been a shift in medical practice and public opinion no longer to regard the experience of dissonance between biological sex and gender identity as a psychiatric illness or thought disorder (hence the nomenclature change noted in footnote 2). Now it is only *the distress* caused by the dissonance that is the problem, which is simply seen as a ‘condition’. Even more significantly, the preferred way of treating this condition is not by focusing treatment on the person’s mental health and psychology, but by seeking to change their appearance, hormones and anatomy. In other words, instead of trying

⁴ To date, and despite claims to the contrary, there doesn’t appear to be any biological basis for transgenderism. This, of course, doesn’t mean that no biological component will ever be identified, nor does it rule out other ‘softer’ forms of determinism (e.g. psychological, familial, social or environmental).

MAKING SENSE OF GENDER CONFUSION (CONTINUED)

to change the mind to fit with the body, the body is changed to fit with the mind.

The tragedy of this approach

The tragedy of this shift in diagnosis and treatment is that ‘sex change’ is a biological impossibility, whereas psychological change is not. Chromosomes cannot be redesigned and fully functioning sex organs cannot be surgically constructed. A person’s self-perception, however, can be altered (albeit often with difficulty and not always completely). In short, whatever the best way to classify gender incongruence, it should be treated with psychotherapy, not surgery. However, according to Paul McHugh (Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Medical School), the ‘meme’ that “whether you are a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, is more of a disposition or feeling about yourself than a fact of nature” has so permeated our culture that, like the emperor’s new clothes, few are willing to question it.⁵

Nonetheless, despite its ubiquity and popularity, McHugh believes that the ‘meme’ is a ‘pathogenic’ one, based on a disastrous diagnostic misapprehension that is doing great damage. And he says this as the previous head of a department that was among the first to offer sex-change treatment – a practice it has now abandoned. Rather than treating the condition, those who promote sex-change through hormone treatment and surgery, McHugh argues, are collaborating with and promoting a mental disorder, and encouraging genital mutilation. Not surprisingly, the instance of ‘sex-change regret’ is disturbingly high (and little publicised) and, tragically, the experience of undergoing ‘gender transition’ seems to do little to address the high attempted-suicide rate of transgender people (over 40%). Indeed, one longitudinal Swedish study (published in 2011) found the attempted-suicide rate following transition was some twenty times that of comparable peers.⁶

What must not be lost sight of in all this is that those who experience gender dysphoria need our heartfelt compassion and clear-headed help, as do their families, friends and wider support networks. What they do not

need is to be encouraged in their disordered thinking and empowered to engage in serious and irreversible self-harm. But if the verdict of *TIME* magazine, the response to the Jenner story and the ‘bathroom battles’ taking place in the US are any barometer of societal change, then the cultural momentum is with those who have accepted the transgender meme. If so, then we have indeed reached a genuine tipping point and are now engaged in a major social, sexual and surgical experiment the likes of which has not been seen before.

How, then, should we respond?

So how should Christians respond? This is neither a time for silence nor for inaction – not if we truly love our neighbours! We must pray fervently and, where possible, agitate publicly and lobby politically for a more responsible and coherent therapeutic approach to the treatment of gender dysphoria. This may not always make us popular. But here is yet another point where, if we are to be faithful to Christ, we will not shirk our prophetic calling. Our task, as Francis Schaeffer liked to say, is to present the truth with compassion but without compromise.

To this end, we need to deepen our appreciation of the Bible’s teaching about the basic, binary nature of human sexuality, the way biological sex determines gender identity and gender roles, and the goodness of being either male-men or female-women (Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-25). This is not to suggest that things never go wrong. They clearly do, as Jesus acknowledges (Matt 19:12). We therefore need to grapple deeply with the impact of sin upon all aspects of our humanity – including our biology, psychology, sexuality, self-esteem and self-perception – and the need, therefore, for all people to be redeemed and remade into the image of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. For only in Christ can any of us find our true identity and know lasting peace and contentment (2 Cor 5:17; John 16:33), even though our afflictions in this life may be ongoing.

What’s more, as part of our renewal, we also need to learn to live according to God’s will. Here’s where the Scriptural prohibitions against ‘gender bending’ (e.g., Deut.

Not surprisingly, the instance of ‘sex-change regret’ is disturbingly high (and little publicised).

5 See Paul McHugh, “Transgenderism: A Pathogenic Meme”, June 10th, 2015. Found at: www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/06/15145. Accessed 5 May, 2016.

6 Cecilia Dhejne, Paul Lichtenstein, Marcus Boman, Anna L. V. Johansson, Niklas Långström, and Mikael Landén, “Long-Term Follow-Up of Transsexual Persons Undergoing Sex Reassignment Surgery: Cohort Study in Sweden.” Found at: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3043071. Accessed 6 May, 2016.

MAKING SENSE OF GENDER CONFUSION (CONTINUED)

22:5; 1 Cor. 6:9; 11:3-15) reveal that, despite our fallenness and brokenness, each human being remains a psychosomatic unity and each redeemed man or woman, boy or girl is to see their body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20). For it is God's glorious purpose to raise our gendered bodies, removing all imperfections and banishing

It is God's glorious purpose to raise our gendered bodies

all disease, dysphoria and disappointment forever. Therefore, whatever our 'body image issues' now (which, for some, are a cause of extreme

distress), Scripture calls us to be "joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Rom. 12:12) and to "encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (1 Thess 5:14).

Finally, in our evangelism we need to ensure that the temporary does not overshadow the eternal. For, as with all people, the greatest need of those who experience gender dysphoria or identify as transgender is not for

their gender identity issues to be resolved (as wonderful as that would be), or to have their attempts at transition reversed (which may not be possible), but to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and adopted as his beloved children. Therefore, like the rest of us, transgender people need the gospel above all else. It is still the saving and sanctifying power of God, and still the only hope for sinners of every kind. Moreover, through it God offers real, existential peace; a better peace than anything this world can ever provide; a peace not just for this life but for eternity (John 14:27). ☪

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Dr Claire Smith is women's Bible teacher and the author of God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says About Men and Women (Matthias Media, 2012).

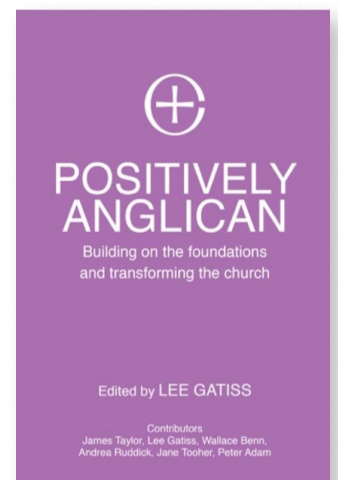
WHERE TO FOR ANGLICAN EVANGELICALS?

WHEN DIFFICULTIES ARISE in ministry that are caused by the denominational structures that are supposed to support ministry, it is not uncommon for evangelical clergy and parishioners to question why they should continue in the fellowship of Anglican churches. Certainly in some dioceses around the world it is much easier to be an Anglican evangelical than others, but there are frustrations everywhere. It is for this reason that this little book, *Positively Anglican*, is helpful.

Seven brief chapters have been gathered and edited by Lee Gatiss as a constructive contribution to encourage Anglicans to work for reform of the denomination rather than just abandon it. The chapters cover a range of topics from history to ministry to strategy. A study of George Whitefield is a great example of someone whose *Anglican* ministry reawakened the moribund national church with the gospel. Wallace Benn's chapter on evangelical episcopacy demonstrates the tremendous influence good bishops can exercise. There are a couple of chapters exploring the practicalities and opportunities

of complementarian ministry. These chapters demonstrate that this position, far from being negative towards ministry by women, is tremendously affirming of biblically shaped women's ministry. The chapters by James Taylor, Lee Gatiss and Peter Adam all demonstrate profitable approaches to continuing within the structures of Anglicanism and working towards its spiritual renewal. It should be noted that this book is written with the particular context of the Church of England in mind, nevertheless there is much here that is helpful for Anglicans elsewhere. ☪

You can get a copy of this book at churchsociety.org/product/positively-anglican



Positively Anglican: Building on the Foundations and Transforming the Church, Lee Gatiss (ed.), Lost Coin Books, 2016. 119 pp

'WHEN I KEPT SILENT'

THE VITAL ART OF CONFESSION

PSALM 32

James Macbeth

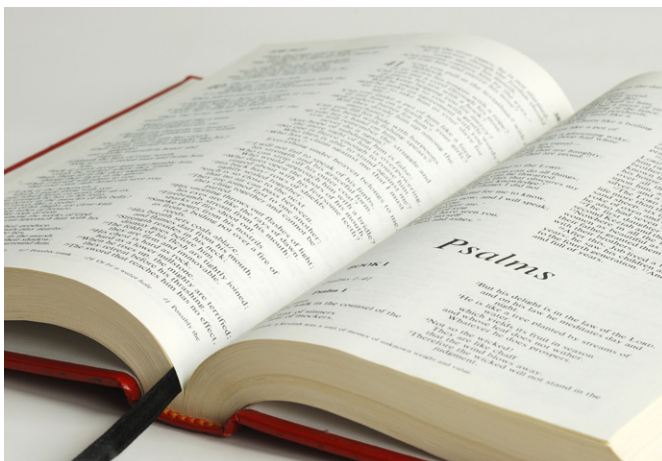


WHEN WE KNOW WE have sinned – and we know God knows – why do we still balk at acknowledging it openly? Why do we, at times, hold back from confession?

It is this hesitation, the ensuing tension and the forgiveness that follows that makes Psalm 32 a vital call to healthy confession in our relationship with God. It is an intensely personal song by a psalmist driven to warn others and spur 'the faithful' into the gospel blessings of being forgiven by God.

The psalm opens in vs 1,2 with a celebration of those blessings and the wonder of a wronged God who is able to cover sin and not count them against the sinner. A crucial element of this blessed state is that this is a man or woman 'in whose spirit is no deceit'. There is a direct correlation between God's readiness to forgive and the honesty of the one needing forgiveness.

It is the obverse of such honesty in vv3-44 that produces the crisis in this Psalm. David admits that he remained silent and he experienced the peculiar agony of a bad conscience before God. Even if we allow for some degree of metaphor in his reference to 'wasted bones', 'groaning' and 'sapped strength', these speak of the insidious strength of unconfessed sin. It eats at the heart of the man like cancer. He cannot rest. David knows that God knows, but as long as he refuses to confess, God's holy presence is not a blessing. It is oppressive, a 'heavy hand', both day and night.



Why do we, like David, remain silent about our sin – often for days, months, even years? Such behaviour can be traced all the way back to Genesis 3 and the fear of God's omniscience and justice. The sinner's first instinct is to hide from God and others out of shame, to cover up the raw fact of one's wickedness. Having believed a lie, we can shy away from the truth for a long time. We hold to our pride even in pain, baulking at the humility needed to admit we are weak, wrong, worthy of punishment and in dire need of mercy.

V5 shows the absurdity of remaining silent. After days and nights of agony, David finally confesses, 'And you forgave the guilt of my sin.' The contrast in timing is acute. The Lord's mercy is applied with lightning speed and his covering

with absolute efficiency. His blessing is immediate. David has thrown off his deceptive ways and he now sings openly to

all who will hear. As one who needlessly delayed, he calls on the faithful to pray while there is still time (v6). The reference to rising waters is a potent call to find God and enjoy being high and dry in his forgiveness before the final judgement. As one who once hid *from* God and found his presence oppressive, David now calls us to hide *in* God and sit gladly under his protection (v7).

There is some debate over whether it is God speaking in v8 or David taking on the mantle of kingly guide and counsellor. Either way, the particular counsel given in v9 is intriguing. In the context of the psalm, David's foolish delay and eventual confession is likened to an ignorant horse or mule needing constant handling in its stubbornness. It is as if God as rider had to wrench David around to the liberating truth of his mercy. The instruction to be otherwise is a command to be wise and pro-active in our relationship with God, particularly when we have sinned.

Psalm 32 is a great spur to personal confession as a core part of our devotional life – and a warning against warning against its absence. The

David's foolish delay and eventual confession is likened to an ignorant horse or mule needing constant handling in its stubbornness.

CONTINUED PAGE 12

BOOK REVIEW

THE GOSPEL, FREEDOM, AND THE SACRAMENTS: DID THE REFORMERS GO FAR ENOUGH?

Reviewer **Nathan Walter**

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT BOOK on the important topic of what has traditionally been referred to as the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The subtitle of the book casts the issue in light of the teaching of the 16th century Protestant reformers. However, this is a relatively minor theme of the book. Whilst it does, at times, reflect an awareness of Reformation teaching concerning baptism and the Lord's Supper, it is essentially an examination of *what the Scriptures teach* on these matters.

Herein lies the book's great value, for as the Reformers insisted the written Word of God is our supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. It is not simply that the Scriptures come first historically, and therefore we start with them. It is that they are the basis by which all other views are weighed. In other words, to stand on the supreme authority of the Scriptures gives us a theological method. Whatever one makes of its conclusions, this book models just such a pursuit.

The format of the book is uncommon. It follows a long-running dialogue between two believers. One, referred to as GB, is relatively young, both in life and in Christian faith. The other, referred to as TS, is older in both senses. GB has come to trust in Christ from a background in a religious cult, and is full of questions, as well as a degree of anxiety, about the place of ceremonies in the Christian life, particularly baptism and the Lord's Supper. TS has thought about these issues for some time, and over the course of many conversations, seeks to calm GB's anxieties by working through all the relevant biblical texts, and considering them in the light of the gospel.

Although some readers may find this format a struggle, whether by virtue of its unfamiliarity or because it can

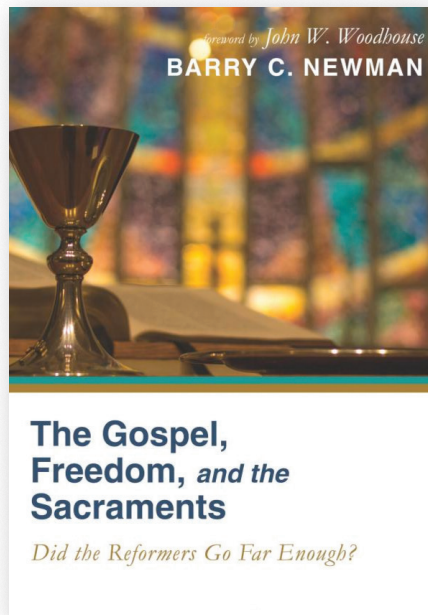
sometimes be difficult to extract the particular propositions that are being contended as the conversation develops, it also brings considerable advantages. For example, it enables a coherent picture of the Bible's teaching on these matters to emerge over time, with ground being covered and then gone back over again, in the way that real conversations tend to do. It also allows the reader to enter into the same process of discovery and questioning that GB himself embarks on. These things are important, because for many readers, the possibility that Christians have long misunderstood the Bible's teaching on these matters is almost too much to contemplate. Entering into GB's

journey allows the reader to try and consider things with fresh eyes.

The conversation moves through three major stages. The first, around 30 pages long, explores the nature of gospel freedom, and therefore a Christian's relationship to rules, regulations and ceremonies. The second, a little over 100 pages, explores the meaning and significance of baptism. The final stage, comprising around 170 pages, deals with the Lord's Supper. The book concludes with two brief conversations concerning the gospel and the preaching of the gospel.

At points, the conversation between TS and GB is very technical, considering word counts and verb forms and translation options, not just within the Bible text itself,

but also against the background of contemporary non-biblical usage. This has an important bearing on the reasonableness of the book's argument – it is not a casual work, but is based on careful and thorough consideration of the matters at hand. Some may find these passages difficult to follow, but they are there because the book is written for both layperson and scholar, novice and expert. For those who are interested, the Explanatory Notes that



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accompany each chapter will often explore these technical matters in more detail. Yet for all that, the book remains highly readable from start to finish.

Not everyone will agree with the understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper that TS and GB settle with by the end of the book. Some may object that GB's background in a cult unnecessarily frames the issues and thereby misconstrues the notion of gospel freedom. However, this is precisely the issue the book seeks to examine. It affirms that, with careful explanation, baptism and the Lord's Supper can be genuinely *helpful* in the life of the believer, and a rich source of God's blessing. But are they *necessary*? Are they *mandatory*? Should a person who trusts in Jesus without ever having been baptized, for example, be anxious about their salvation on account of the fact that they have not been baptized? The book argues that they should not.

Others may object to the novelty of the book's arguments. Is it likely that a new understanding could

correct what Christians have understood and held dear since virtually the beginning? Here again, however, is where a commitment to Scripture's supreme authority comes into play. For as just one example, it is true that we owe an enormous debt to the Protestant Reformers for the way they contended for gospel truth, and in this particular case, for an understanding and practice of the sacraments that accords with our justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Yet how should we decide the matter? By appealing to the Reformers? Or to the early church? Or to a particular denominational understanding? Or shall we bring all views to be tested and measured by the Scriptures – whether those of the Reformers, or of the early church, or of a particular denomination, or even TS and GB?

Thanks be to God, our Diocese has a wonderful heritage of fearlessly examining the Scriptures and reforming our traditions by them. *The Gospel, Freedom and the Sacraments* makes a valuable contribution to that ongoing task. ☺

IT'S UNANIMOUS: ARV AND ANGLICARE TO MERGE

Gav Poole, 5/5/16



VERY RARELY DOES EVERY member of the Sydney Diocesan Synod agree. If they do, it is usually on minor matters. Given the size and significance of the decision to merge the Anglican Retirement Villages (ARV) and Anglicare, it is amazing that the entire Synod agreed. When Synod met on Wednesday, 27 April, it had one decision to make – 'Should ARV and Anglicare merge?' When crunch time arrived there was not a 'neigh' in the house.

There were however amendments to the motion but most of those were easily decided. The exception was one amendment which entailed whether or not to retain the phrase, 'at least'. Retention of the phrase was won by one vote. A small phrase took up a lot of time and was carried by a small margin.

Most debating time was taken up on two left field

amendments concerning branding. Five speeches were against them, with one of the opposing speeches labelling them as 'ridiculous' and that they needed to be 'booted out'. They were 'booted out' on the overwhelming voices. If nothing else, they offered comical relief.

The decision could have been made by Standing Committee but it would only take three people to insist that the ordinance be promoted to Synod. Standing Committee would have been unwise to try it. Imagine the objectors, 'Standing Committee did what? How could they?' But now ... we're all in this together. This had to be decided by Synod.

This was a significant decision. Consider the sheer size of the merged organisation – \$1.5b in gross assets. If the company was publicly listed it would imaginably be in the ASX300. Consider the people – over 10,000 will be serviced by the new organisation in one form or another. Consider the history – the Church Society (Anglicare's genesis) was

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established in 1856. And consider the partnerships with the many parishes across the diocese.

It's not every day you get to make a decision of this calibre. Very few Synod members would have experience with any company merge let alone one of this size. So how can so many people, with so little experience make such a large decision and be united in it? The answer – information and after that, more information.

For this reason, the decision to postpone the Synod was a good one. It would have been near impossible to be well informed if Synod had been held in March. Questions had to be asked, alternatives had to be properly entertained, numbers had to be crunched and advice sought. Although, it was slightly embarrassing and inconvenient, a month's deferral meant that Synod members were informed.

Synod members should be commended on their preparation. Most of the questions were asked at the three pre-Synod briefing meetings, where approximately

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170 members were in attendance. Comprehensive reports were completed by the CEOs and Standing Committee. Seven good questions were asked at Synod, all of them demonstrating

that they had read the subject matter. This was proof positive that given the chance Synod will educate itself and come prepared.

It is now over to Standing Committee to pass an ordinance that closely reflects the motion of Synod. Synod has noted the reports, including draft ordinances. Things like objects and the board make up must closely resemble that of the draft ordinances. Standing Committee's work is all but done.

Synod's work however continues. The decision to merge is only the beginning. It will be important for Synod to receive the promised reports and keep the merged organisation accountable. The legal make up of the organisation will only go part of the way to ensuring the conditions of Synod are met. The board must be committed to these conditions and work in partnership with other parts of the diocese. This will take careful attention during elections. Synod's motion will be fulfilled legally, politically and prayerfully.

Pray that such a key diocesan organisation will be used for kingdom growth and the proclamation of the gospel.




Pray that the board, executive, employees and partners will act wisely and efficiently to protect the gospel character of the organisation. Pray for those who will be the object of the new organisation's compassion. Most importantly pray that Christ be honoured as Lord and Saviour in every community.

Realistically this is unlikely to be a part of your regular quiet time. That would be great but you are most likely to pray when you receive prayer bulletins or booklets (every organisation seems to be doing this), or when your congregation is visited by a representative. Pray when prompted.

Such organisations can quickly go off track and after a while resemble their secular counterparts. Hopefully, this one will not. It is the motivation of such an organisation that will inevitably distinguish it. Truly righteous acts are seen by God, an audience of one. In Jesus Christ, we have freely received and gifts from God are to be freely given. A life impacted by the gospel will delight in expressions of generosity and compassion. We resemble our Father in heaven and such an organisation gives us access to the vulnerable and needy. Synod was unanimous in its decision, let the diocese be unanimous in its ongoing support.

The main motion agreed to at the Special Synod, 27 April 2016

2/16 Approval of the merger of Anglicare and Anglican Retirement Villages

Synod, noting the report of the Standing Committee in relation to the proposed merger of Anglican Retirement Villages Diocese of Sydney ("ARV") and Sydney Anglican Home Mission Society ("Anglicare") together with accompanying draft ordinances and other documents in relation to the proposed merger received at this session, approves in principle the merger of these two organisations on the basis that:

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(a) the indemnity provided by ARV to Anglicare is intended to ensure that survivors of child abuse have at least an equivalent level of recourse as if Anglicare had continued to operate in its own right,

(b) the merged organisation will actively aim to continue to deliver services provided by Anglicare and ARV to socially disadvantaged people at an enhanced level,

(c) the merged organisation will actively aim to continue the work undertaken by Anglicare with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at an enhanced level,

(d) the merged organisation will actively aim to

continue to alleviate necessitous circumstances through the provision of education at an enhanced level,

(e) the legal name of the merged organisation is “Anglican Community Services”,

(f) consideration is given to making provision in both the Anglicare and ARV constituting ordinances for a gift fund for both entities,

and requests the Standing Committee to pass such ordinances and take such other action it considers necessary or desirable to give effect to the merger on this basis. ©

'WHEN I KEPT SILENT' (CONTINUED)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8 mature man or woman in Christ will not delay in dealing decisively with sin. When we know that the mercy celebrated by David is fulfilled by Jesus, then ‘in him and through faith in him, we will approach God with freedom and confidence’ (Eph 5:12). We will step to him with our sins, not away, being certain that God is faithful and just, able to forgive and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9).

The spatial concept of ‘approaching’ God is helpful when we consider the lessons of Psalm 32 applied beyond the individual to a congregation. The Prayer Book authors deliberately built the Confession into the earliest parts of the services. As a congregation gathers to meet with God, one of the first steps is a joint acknowledgement of sin and an affirmation of forgiveness in Christ. In this, the services follow the ancient ‘architecture of approach’ seen in the tabernacle and temple, whereby anyone approaching God had to step across blood-soaked (or sprinkled) ground. Sin was the point of division between humanity and God and his mercy through sacrifice was the door to renewed intimacy. In view of the ‘new and living way opened for us’ by Christ and his shed blood (Hebrews 10), the place of the

Confession in the Prayer Book services takes us across that threshold in common assurance and thanks.

In an age when much of our liturgy is being dropped either in part or in whole, it’s worth considering the enduring value of a public Confession when we meet. It is a potent statement of our common standing in Christ and our shared experience of his blessed forgiveness. It is the act of those ‘hidden with Christ in God’ (Col 3:3), dealing honestly and openly with that which is grievous and glorious: our sin and his salvation. For those slipping into silence before God, a public Confession is a rebuke and encouragement to speak up and not fall into senseless, stubborn ways. For those uncertain of how to speak, our Prayer Book confessions are beautifully weighted and comprehensive prayers drawn from Scripture that lead us into the heart of the gospel and the Christ who delights to show mercy.

Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them

And in whose spirit is no deceit.

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