

Taste and see
that the Lord
is good

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!
The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Ps 34:8-10

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Taste and see that the Lord is good



In Psalm 34, the Psalmist issues a beautiful invitation. He invites the listeners to taste and see that the Lord is good (v8). Such is his confidence that should a person seek to live and trust God's ways, they would indeed experience the Lord's goodness. Blessed is the one who takes refuge in the ways of God (v8b)!

It's no accident that Peter picks up the same word of invitation and promise when he exhorts his hearers to desire pure spiritual milk, so that they may grow by it for salvation, *since they have tasted that the Lord is good* (1 Pet 2:2-3). From the very beginning with Adam and Eve, God has invited mankind to taste and see that all He says is good and is *for* our good.

In this Easter issue of the ACR Journal, we want to exhort our readers to continue to trust in the *goodness* of God's word. Our Sydney Anglican diocese has been built on the solid foundation of the authority of Scripture as the *final* authority – praise God! However, do we trust that God's authoritative word is also *good*? When the ACR editorial panel met in late 2022, we wondered if we Sydney Anglicans have become somewhat apologetic about God and His ways. That is, as a contemporary example, we might boldly declare the truth of God's word on human sexuality (because we believe His Word to be the *final* authority), whilst in the same breath apologising for the way in which God's way is hard and difficult and not to our liking. To do as such is to show our commitment to Scripture's authority, but at the expense of its goodness. Indeed, given that it is the word of God, it's to turn God into an authoritarian ruler, void of goodness. But the good God who is, is also the same good God who has spoken. We need to have a solid foundation of the authority *and* the goodness of Scripture.

Thus, as an editorial panel wanting to be reminded ourselves of this truth, we have put together this Easter issue of the ACR Journal. The Journal begins by presenting a helpful principle on how we seek to see the goodness in *all* of God's word.

This is followed by two specific examples in Genesis and 1 Timothy respectively. In an interview with William Taylor, Rector of St Helen's Bishopsgate, London, we see the consequences of what is lost when church leaders begin to doubt the goodness of God's word.

Given many of the readers of this Journal have a preaching ministry (and all readers would sit *under* preaching), there are pieces raising questions on our preaching practices. In addition to this, we have invited the wisdom of those outside the coalface of the local church to share their reflections.

And finally, our hope going forward is to provide two regular segments in each of our Journals. The first is to provide some historical pieces to continually remind us of those who have gone before us in the ministry. We as Sydney Anglicans have a great and incredible history. Praise the Lord! I am very thankful to Stephen Tong for his excellent work on Richard Johnson. We have also provided some writings from brothers who are now with the Lord with the 'From the vault' segment.¹ The second is to bring to our readers regular book reviews.

Our prayer as an editorial panel is that you might be edified and encouraged through this Journal in living sacrificially with Jesus as your Lord and King. Many of the articles in the Journal are relatively short in length. They are by no means the last word on the issues they raise. Our great hope is to start conversations amongst those within Sydney Diocese so that we might continue to grow together in our usefulness to our Lord. You will also realise as you read that different contributors will emphasise different points. As an editorial panel we have not applied a heavy hand in the editing process. This is *not* because we want to appear 'balanced'. Balance, in my personal opinion, is not very biblical. Rather, different contexts and perspectives might provide different biblical insights. The Bible often presents us with two seemingly contradictory extremes, but they aren't contradictions – they are two truths that need to be held in right tension. This is all to say, that the editorial panel believes that you will be richly blessed in reading every piece in our ACR Easter Journal 2023. We invite you to taste and see that the Lord is good.

Mike Leite – Editorial director

(On behalf of the Editorial Panel – Meagan Bartlett, Matt Capel, Renee Capel, Ben George, Andrew Leslie, Stephen Tong, Bronwyn Windsor, Lionel Windsor) **ACR**

1 Our aim with 'From the vault' is to print them as they originally looked. We trust it will be easy enough to read in this format. Part of doing it this way is to promote to our readers the 'ACR Archive' dating back to 1880, which can be found on our website – www.australianchurchrecord.net. It is a great resource! Furthermore, you can enjoy the other original clips and ads from the page. Interestingly, and sadly, (if you read the side columns on the John Stott piece), the Swiss Reformed church of today in my quick reading has not fared well and continues to move further away from biblical truth.

The law of the LORD is perfect

A few reflections on the enduring wisdom of God's law

During the lead up to the same-sex marriage plebiscite in 2017, I remember being surprised at the number of Christian people in my own circles who could confidently say 'I know what the Bible teaches about homosexuality', whilst at the same time having no idea why that teaching is right and good, other than for the bare fact that God says it is.

I have even heard people make apologies on behalf of the Apostle Paul's teaching on marriage, as if to say, 'I'm sorry he says what he says, but because he does, I'm afraid that's the way it is.'

Thankfully, of course, our intuition tells us that all that really baffling and unpalatable stuff in Leviticus – such as regulations that seem disproportionately burdensome to women undergoing perfectly natural things like menstruation or childbirth – no longer applies to the church today. But such is the embarrassment this teaching continues to generate that Christians not uncommonly hesitate about the appropriateness of even reading these passages publicly in church. The desire to provide explanation and context to these injunctions in a way that a mere Bible reading doesn't is, as far as it goes, fair enough. But does not this hesitation at least unmask a truth we find deeply prickly and unsettling: at some point or another, God thought this was a good idea?

Then there are those bits and pieces of Levitical code that rather awkwardly appear to carry over into the new covenant, not least the prohibitions against all those practices that deviate from monogamous, 'heteronormal' sexual expression.



Andrew Leslie, Head of Theology, Philosophy, and Ethics, Moore Theological College



And even if we sense that the draconian impositions on the female sex have gone the way of the now-redundant food laws, we might well wonder whether their haunting presence lingers on nonetheless, in the asymmetry that distinguishes Paul's instructions to women and men in marriage or the life of the church. Even so, they are what they are, and however uncomfortable they make us feel, however shrill they

sound in the ears of our neighbours, our laudable instinct to obey the word of God kicks in, and so obey them we must.

Naturally enough, when it comes to matters of sexuality or other notoriously controversial issues like the roles and responsibilities of women and men within marriage and the life of the church, we rush full steam into all the practical questions that flow from these enduring biblical commands. What does Ephesians 5:24 ('wives should submit to their husbands in everything') mean for my marriage? Where do we draw the line between the headship Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and abusive coercion? What does 1 Timothy 2:11-12 mean for preaching or leadership in my local church? How does the prohibition against homosexuality square with proposals to bless same-sex unions? And so on.

We are deeply invested in these questions, driven as they are by what is – I repeat – an undeniably laudable desire to discern and honour the will of God. There is a risk here though. In our zealotry to get to the bottom of these practical concerns and to 'hold the line' as it were, we may not have adequately lingered on the divine logic, proportion, and *goodness* of these injunctions. But without a sufficient grasp of those dimensions, our 'complementarian' practice – to name just one distinctive – is much more at peril of buckling under the pressure of a culture that chides us for what sure sounds a lot like all we are really interested in doing is placing a whole lot of meaningless and oppressive restrictions on women. The same goes for our opposition to the numerous other mores of a culture so defiantly moving in a different direction: abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and the rest. I am not fearmongering here: the seemingly arbitrary, culture-bound, impractical nature of the Bible's injunctions has for many within the church proven to be just too brittle.

But God has not given us a set of arbitrary, culture-bound, and impractical injunctions. Here it is worth reminding ourselves of the striking refrains the Psalter makes concerning God's law, most notably in Psalms 19 and 119: the law of the LORD is 'good' (Ps 119:39); 'righteous' (119:62, 138); 'trustworthy' (119:86); 'eternal' (119:89); 'wonderful' (119:129) 'perfect'; giving 'understanding' and making 'wise' the simple (Pss 19:7; 119:98, 104, 130).

There is a venerable tradition – echoed in our own *Thirty-Nine Articles* – of categorising God’s law into three distinct varieties: the so-called ‘civil’ laws that regulated Israel’s social and political landscape, ‘ceremonial’ laws that ordered her religious practices and affairs, and ‘moral’ laws like the Ten Commandments that provide a normative standard for the behaviour of all people everywhere. And if, as Article 7 puts it, Christians are now free from the first two categories, ‘no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.’

It’s a guide that is informed by the contours of the New Testament’s application of the Old Testament law to the early church, and as a practical rule of thumb, there is clearly something to this way of approaching the law as Christians today. The difficulty with it is it can give the impression that while there might be something enduring and normative about the moral law, perhaps the civil and ceremonial proscriptions were entirely arbitrary after all. So, while we might infer that it’s always good to preserve life and refrain from murder on the grounds that God is the eternal life-giver, for instance, maybe there was no good reason for the Israelites to refrain from eating grasshoppers than the simple fact that God at the time said so. Likewise, and perhaps more unsettlingly, does this mean there was no good reason for imposing the burden of ritual impurity upon a new mother or a



Wesley Tingey on Unsplash



The Psalmist, however, speaks differently about the law. It is ‘good’ and ‘wise’.



woman undergoing menstruation than the simple fact that once upon a time, God said so (Lev 12; 15:19-30)? And if it turns out that various Old Testament laws are arbitrary, what’s to say that some of the demands the New Testament makes on the church today are any less arbitrary than those which preceded them?

The Psalmist, however, speaks differently about the law. It is ‘good’ and ‘wise’, speaking not just of individual bits of it, but of its totality. In other words, however much it is freely decreed by God, its quality has an even deeper foundation in his own very character and being. Even more emphatically, as if to underline the indelibility of this connection, it is ‘eternal’. When Jesus refers to the law in the context of his own ministry, he speaks of it enduring in a way

that is inseparable from the longevity of creation itself and the consummation of all things: 'Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished' (Matt 5:18). At the very least, then, we have to conclude that whatever Paul means by the 'law of Christ' (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21), it cannot be at odds with, or even a simple replacement of the law given to Moses.

The Old Testament law itself bears witness to its enduring normative character, alongside its harmony with the very order of all that God has made. A closer look at some of the so-called ceremonial laws – e.g., the food regulations that were imposed on the Israelites (Lev 11) – illustrate the way God's ordering of Israel's life and relationship with him mirrors patterns and distinctions he has stitched into creation itself. It's not that some animals were inherently morally suspect, and therefore unsuitable for food, and others were not. The Bible very often extols the symbolic virtue of creatures that were considered 'unclean': the lion (Num 23:24; Hos 5:14); the hawk (Job 39:26); the eagle (Exod 19:4); the ant (Prov 6:6-8); even the snake (Prov 30:19). After all, God made them. Yet so closely connected are the works of God that it shouldn't surprise us that even the very shape of the animal



Yet so closely connected are the works of God that it shouldn't surprise us that even the very shape of the animal world can effortlessly be purposed by him to illumine something true of his relationship to his people.



world can effortlessly be purposed by him to illumine something true of his relationship to his people. An older generation of biblical commentators readily perceived these connections. Could it be that animals which chew the cud fittingly represent the description of the righteous who relish the sweet 'taste' of God's word (Ps 119:103; Jer 15:16)? Could it be that the cloven hoof fittingly represents the 'feet' God gives his people to set them secure on the heights (Ps 18:33)? Could it be that the scales and fins of the fish fittingly represent a layer of protection

from, and a certain capacity to resist being swept along in the 'restless sea' of evil (Isa 57:20-21; Eph 4:14; Jude 13)?

Similar connections can be made between the regulations regarding childbirth and menstruation. Both ancient and modern commentators have recognised the way Adam's relationship to Eve in the Garden (Gen 2), and the instituted pattern of marriage and procreation that follows, sum up the very pattern of creation itself (Gen 1). In Genesis 1, that which is 'formless and empty' (Gen 1:2) is first 'formed' by God on days one to three of creation (Gen 1:3-13) only to be 'filled' on days four to six (Gen 1:14-25). In a parallel fashion, Genesis 2 speaks of Adam who is first 'formed' from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7), and then placed in a 'Garden' God has planted to fill it by 'working and taking care of it' (Gen 2:8, 15). But it turns out



he is incapable of fulfilling his vocation to fill the earth without a suitable helper taken from his side (Gen 2:20-21).

Within this context, motherhood and the generative character of the womb has a deep and irreducible significance, as together they symbolise the filling activity of God and the generative life of his creation itself. In that way, Eve is said to be the ‘mother of all the living’ (Gen 3:20). We shouldn’t be surprised, then, that Adam’s reprehensible failure in the Garden is something that strikes at the very womb of his bride and all that it signifies. Not only is childbirth now fraught in a way that it was never intended to be (Gen 3:16), the ground which was to generate life and nourishment now gives way to weeds and toil, and eventually consumes the very life it once gave to Adam himself (Gen 3:17-19). In other words, life has given way to the *barrenness* of death.

Seen in this light, the regulations regarding childbirth and menstruation, for all their lingering strangeness to us, might start to make a bit more sense. Through Adam’s fall, blood – at once a representation of ‘life’ itself (Lev 17:14) – is now also a representation of death and judgment, or the draining-away of life that has ensued with sin; the spilled blood of Abel crying out for vengeance (Gen 4:10). So here is another suggestion, then, and in a forum like this it can only be a suggestion. Perhaps God purposed the blood of the womb – at once a figure of its inherently life-generating character – to be a figure of the death and judgment that *he takes away*, especially through the atonement and purification of sacrifice (Lev 12:6-8; 15:28-30). To put it simply, could it serve to represent the way in which life, that has given way to death, now, through divine grace and sacrifice, gives way to life once more?

If this inference is correct, it is not that God once arbitrarily deemed there to be something inherently unclean about motherhood or menstruation (a prospect we find almost too horrific to contemplate!) so much a case of him putting something to purpose with deep, symbolic connections to the very order of things he has made, revealed in the rich, interleaving tapestry of Scripture.

All this is to say that however true it is that these impositions on women – or the food laws – do not apply in practice to Christians today, it is important to see how the divine ‘purposing’ of these things at one time was not arbitrary, but had a wisdom that reflects both the nature of God and the order of creation itself. In that sense, their ‘ceremonial’ character – quite apart from their *application* – is enduringly significant. It is no less ‘eternal’, ‘good’, and ‘wise’ than any other ‘moral’ aspect of his law. And with a bit of careful reflection and meditation on Scripture, we can say and must say the same about every other prescription of God’s law.

Why is it, then, that some things have now passed away in practice, only for other things – like the laws regarding our sexual conduct – to remain? And how do we decide between what no longer applies and what does? A short and sweet



Why is it, then, that some things have now passed away in practice, only for other things – like the laws regarding our sexual conduct – to remain?



answer to these questions would be to say that Christians are no longer practically bound by the ‘Old Covenant’ law – as exemplified in the Levitical code – because the Old Covenant itself has been rendered obsolete by the coming of Christ. Now we are only obligated by what is taught in the ‘New Covenant’ and anything carried over and upheld by what Paul calls the ‘law of Christ’ (Gal

6:2; 1 Cor 9:21). There is an undeniable truth here. A Christian’s freedom from the old jurisdiction that bound the Israelites is a theme that dominates New Testament letters like Galatians, Romans, and Hebrews.

This is only part of the answer though. In tracing out the enduring wisdom of God’s law, together with the discontinuities and continuities of its application from Old Covenant to New, we must discern how all its threads have been gathered up with the appearance of Christ, ‘who has become for us wisdom from God’ (1 Cor 1:30). For every prescription of Scripture, whether Old Covenant or New, only properly comes together in him.

Certainly, it is true that this discernment helps us make sense of why the practice of some things has passed away with the coming of Christ and why some things remain. The reality of new life from the barrenness of death, once symbolised by the cleansing rituals of childbirth, is now openly revealed in Christ, whose own spilled blood ‘speaks a better word than the blood of Abel’ (Heb 12:24). Likewise, the purity that was once symbolised by the food laws is now revealed in the internalised reality of new hearts and consciences ‘washed with pure water’ (Heb 10:22). It is not

that the reality was somehow inaccessible to those under the Old Covenant, but it was only then encountered through these symbolic, shadowy forms. Now that the veil has been removed, as it were, it is fitting that the old practice has passed away. But it is equally fitting that the practice of some things remain under the New Covenant. The ecclesial reality of Christ and his bride not only sheds light on the irreducible and enduring wisdom of laws regarding matrimony and sexual conduct, it also explains why any deviation from these norms continues to have no positive place in the plans and purposes of God.

But quite aside from questions of discontinuities and continuities of practice, we must not speak of the Old Covenant's obsolescence in a way that robs God's law of its enduring wisdom and significance, even for the Christian today. However strange, unfamiliar, and even confronting its ways, it has been preserved by God as a distinct witness to the eternal beauty and wisdom that is summed up in Christ. In that way it serves to enrich our knowledge of Christ, and – because we belong to Christ – ourselves as well. We would be poorer without it. More than that, it shouldn't surprise us if its wisdom continues to reverberate through the teaching of the New Covenant, even where certain practices have now made way for others. For instance, the distinctive witness of Old Covenant laws regarding matrimony and childbearing to the husbandry of Christ and the abundant fruitfulness of his ransomed bride, not only helps make sense of the vocations the New Covenant lays down for the Christian husband and wife (Eph 5:25-33), it also sheds light on the peculiar shape in which church life is to be ordered in this age (1 Tim 2:8-15). In fact, it is only as these symbolic connections are grasped – something Paul explicitly presses us to do (e.g., Eph 5:32; 1 Tim 2:13-15) – that these instructions will appear much less like arbitrary ends in themselves and no less fitting witnesses to Christ than their Old Covenant antecedents.

Much more can and must be said on the issues raised by these brief reflections, no doubt. By all means, let us continue to defend and nut out the practical implications of various biblical injunctions for the life of God's people in the world. But in doing so, let us not bypass the richly edifying labour of reflecting deeply upon the enduring wisdom of God's law, especially upon the way it all comes together and is given back to us in Christ. For the 'decrees of the LORD are firm, and *altogether* righteous' (Ps 19:9). **ACR**

Created male and female

Reflections on Genesis 1-3



Gav Perkins, Senior Minister, St Jude's Anglican Bowral

It has been quite striking over the last month as we have preached through Genesis 1-3 at St Jude's Bowral, that so many in the congregation have said that they have never heard, or rarely heard, preaching on these chapters. That is a great shame because what we read here is foundational in every possible sense.

It is foundational to what we know of God, as the one who speaks his powerful word to bring all things into being, and who then orders, arranges, and blesses. It is foundational also to what

we know of ourselves, as uniquely created in the image of God, and commissioned to rule and subdue. We learn here what it means to live and work in God's creation and relate to the rest of that creation, leading to a genuine Christian – rather than pagan – environmentalism. We also learn what it means to have a genuine Christian – rather than pagan – understanding of gender and sexuality. These chapters are simultaneously timeless and profoundly pertinent within our culture.

In Genesis 1 and 2 we see that our gender, male or female, is a central part of who we are, as created by God. We see this briefly in Genesis 1 where we read 'God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Gen 1:27). Genesis 2 then shifts from the wide angle shot to the close as we see in more detail what this means.

God remedies something that is not good

If we have been reading from the start of Genesis, the words in 2:18 could not be more striking. Everything so far is blessed by God as good, even very good, but now we are told something is

not good: 'It is not good for the man to be alone'.

Note that this is God's declaration rather than a feeling within the man. It is not that the man is feeling lonely, but rather that his aloneness is not good, according to God. It is not good because alone the man is unable to do and be what God commands humanity to do and be. The commission in Genesis 1:28 is for humanity to 'be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'. The man cannot do that alone, and it refers to more than simply procreation. In the whole task of ruling and subduing, he needs a suitable helper.

God the good provider no sooner has identified the problem than he enacts the solution. He will make a suitable helper for the man. There is no sense of subordination in the word 'helper'. How could that be when frequently in the Scriptures God himself is the helper of his people? This helper is one who brings vital aid from their strength to match a need.

The Hebrew word translated 'suitable' conveys the sense of opposite and complementary. Wenham paraphrases it as a 'helper matching him', while Hamilton puts it this way:

[The helper] will be neither a superior nor an inferior, but an equal. The creation of this helper will form one-half of a polarity and will be to the man as the south pole is to the north pole.¹

¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (NICOT; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 1995), comment on 2:18.

This theme of equality and complementarity is repeatedly emphasised in the rest of the chapter. For instance, the woman is taken out of the man's side and formed by God. She is out of him, like him, and yet different and distinct. When the man sings with joy in 2:23 he rejoices in the equal image-bearing identity of the woman: 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh', at the same time as she has now been taken out of him and is not him. Equal and yet beautifully corresponding and distinct. Even the vocabulary the man chooses stresses this identity and complementarity: 'she shall be called *Ishah* for she was taken out of *Ish*.'

Humanity doubts that God is good

God in his goodness remedies something that is not good. He does not leave man alone but provides an equal and complementary helper alongside him. This only makes the perversity of what happens next even more striking. Immediately, through the subtle temptations of the serpent, the woman and man are led to doubt the goodness of God.

The serpent's strategy is to first twist God's word to make him look restrictive and harsh (3:1). He then leads them to doubt the certainty of God's judgment on rebellion (3:4). Then finally he paints God as one who does not really have humanity's best at heart (3:5). Having succumbed to the strategy, doubting God's word and good intentions, the woman and the man (who only in verse 6 do we realise has been standing beside



Adam and Eve cast out of Paradise.

her mute all along!) assert their independence as their own wise determiners of good and evil (3:6). How quickly then the beautiful scene of Genesis 2:25 unravels as they turn to coverup, shame with each other, an almost comical attempt to hide from God, and plenty of blame-shifting in every direction. The man shifts blame horizontally (woman) and upward (God), while the woman shifts blame downwards (the serpent).

This pattern of human rebellion is paradigmatic, representing the very same spiritual dangers we face as we consider the issues of gender, marriage and sexuality today. The truth of God's word and his generous character is distorted in such a way as sin can seem sensible and appealing to our hearts and minds.

Seeing and trusting that God is good

At each of the various pressure points we face today, it is vital to continue to trust that God is good. This is the fundamental challenge.

This is true as we consider the nature of marriage. The present-tense application given in 2:24 asserts the binding contemporary relevance of this teaching. The reason for the 'cleaving' in marriage is the identity and complementarity of the man and woman as created. As the woman was created out of the man, so in marriage a man and a woman are united. This is strongly covenantal language, signifying a deep mutual commitment bound by solemn promises. This is why male-male or female-female couplings are simply not marriages, by definition. Whatever they might be under Australian law, they are not marriages according to God. As is said at every wedding conducted according to the Anglican prayer book, 'be assured that those who marry otherwise than God's word allows are not joined together by God, neither is their marriage lawful in his sight'. Whatever Australian law might say, this is what God says. This is the clear teaching of Scripture and is not arbitrary, but essential to who we are. At this point we have a simple choice to make between the world and the word of God.

This is true at the pressure point of understanding the nature of gender. God made us male or female. Those who have no place for God's word will doubt and distort this, but as those who have been brought into the light by the word of Christ, we must not lose courage as the world twists or simply ignores the word of our creator. We must keep on seeing and trusting the goodness of

God. Male and female is not arbitrary, flexible, or coincidental, but is essential to who we are. As Claire Smith puts it:

*God made us with sexual polarity, as either male or female. We cannot divorce who we are from our gender. We are not genderless 'persons'. We are male or female persons... It is a fixed part of our identity. It is not a role we put on and take off or only need for marriage or procreation. Our gender is inseparable from who we are.*²

Of course, as in all of life this can be tragically impacted by the fall, leading to physiological or psychological gender anomalies. But these gender anomalies are just that, an anomaly. God's intention in creation was never for a blurring of genders or a mixing of genders. Any attempt today to obliterate, disguise, or live at odds with one's God-given sex are contrary to God's word and against authentic human good. Each of us, as we have opportunity, must show compassion towards those who experience the brokenness of our world in this particular way, or who are victims of the confusion created by recent gender theory. However, compassion and truth must not be pitted against one another. We show the greatest compassion as we speak the truth in love to those who are struggling or misled in this area.

Finally, this equal but complementary nature of male and female is the basis for the teaching of the New Testament on men and women in church and in marriage (eg., 1 Cor 11-14; Eph 5; 1 Tim 2). This is an unchanging truth of human reality. No matter what changes in our human culture, male and female are equal but not interchangeable. They are together in the image of God with



However, compassion and truth must not be pitted against one another.



a wonderful complementarity, and with different roles and responsibilities. Male and female beautifully designed by God to mesh together as they serve him side by side in the world. According to God this is good – in fact it is very good.

The key question in all of these situations is this: do we believe him? Do we believe what God tells us about ourselves? Or do we find ourselves tempted to wonder, 'did God really say...?'. At that point we do very well to remember that God did say. He made us male and female, equal and beautifully complementary. And that is very good. Given to us for our good by our good and generous God. **ACR**

2 Claire Smith, *God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says about Men and Women*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2019), pp 168-9.

God's goodness in 1 Timothy



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Paul's first letter to Timothy is full of goodness. Terms for 'good' appear 25 times in the letter.

That should lead us to expect that 1 Timothy would bring us delight, joy, peace, and satisfaction in God's goodness. But when we come to read or teach this letter, there's often a measure of anxious apprehension. That's because to our modern ears, some of the things Paul writes in 1 Timothy, especially about human relationships, sound naïve, harsh, or just plain *bad*.

In this short article, I want to help us to grasp the fundamental *goodness* of 1 Timothy. I want to help us to better

know and share that delight, joy, peace, and satisfaction in God's word and his world that resounds throughout the letter. Seeing this goodness in 1 Timothy can be challenging, as we grapple with our own and our modern world's assumptions about what is truly good. But I'm convinced it's worth the challenge.

What's the problem in 1 Timothy?

Paul writes this letter to his ministry apprentice and colleague Timothy, who is in Ephesus. There are certain people among the Christians in Ephesus who are teaching in a way that is seriously out of line with Paul's true gospel-teaching (1:3; cf. 2:7; 6:3). Paul writes to equip Timothy – and through him the Christian community and its leaders – not only to deal with these false teachers, but also to live and teach rightly himself in line with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What was the nature of the 'different teaching' (*heterodidaskalein*, 1:3) that Timothy had to deal with?

Is it just about denying core doctrines?

To answer this question, we could start by looking to see whether we can identify any core *doctrines* that the false teachers were denying. For example, we could ask: were the false teachers preaching a different view of God? Were they taking a different view of Jesus? Of salvation? Of eschatology (i.e., teaching about the end times)?

Paul certainly says some essential things about God and Jesus and salvation and eschatology in 1 Timothy. Right from the start, Paul describes 'Christ Jesus our Lord' directly alongside 'God the Father' (1:2), whom he also describes as 'God our Saviour' (1:1). Paul emphasises the humanity of Christ and shows why it matters for our salvation (2:5; 3:16). He emphasises that God saves sinners by grace (1:12–17). He book-ends the letter with references to our future 'hope' (1:1) and Jesus' future 'appearing' (6:14–16). These doctrines are fundamental for what Paul says in 1 Timothy.

However, we can't work out exactly what the false teachers were teaching just by identifying these core doctrines in 1 Timothy. After all, just because Paul affirms certain doctrines doesn't necessarily mean the false teachers were denying them. Maybe Paul is mentioning these doctrines because the false teachers agreed with them, and Paul wants to show that they were hypocrites. How can we tell?

To truly understand what the false teachers' problem was, we need to look more closely at what Paul explicitly says about the false teachers themselves.¹

Denying the goodness of God's word, creation, and relationships

The first significant feature of Paul's description of the false teachers is that they have a strong focus on *discussion and arguments*, to the neglect of moral living in relationships with others. Paul says that the false teaching involved devotion to 'myths and endless genealogies' (1:4); produced 'speculations' (1:4) and 'vain discussion' (1:6); led the false teachers to think they were 'teachers of the law' (1:7); rejected 'faith[fulness] and a good conscience' (1:19) and thus ended up in blasphemy (1:20); involved 'irreverent, silly myths' (4:7); was taught by those who are 'puffed up with conceit', with an 'unhealthy craving for controversy and quarrels about words' (6:4); produced 'envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction' (6:4–5); and included 'irreverent babble and contradictions' while claiming to promote 'knowledge' (6:20).

By contrast, Paul describes true teaching arising from the gospel (1:11) as a teaching that emphasises the moral content of the law (1:9–10); undertaken by morally upright, approved, godly people (3:1–7); 'good' (4:6); and grounded in

1 For further detailed study of the relevant passages and issues see Dillon T. Thornton, *Hostility in the House of God: An Investigation of the Opponents in 1 and 2 Timothy* (Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 15; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016).

'righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, [and] gentleness' (6:11, cf. 6:3).

The second significant feature of Paul's description of the false teachers is that they deny or neglect God's good, creation-based order, especially in the areas of food and family life. Paul describes the false teaching as demonic and undertaken 'through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared' (4:1-2), because it involved rejecting or forbidding food and marriage (4:3). In reality, however, it promoted greed (6:5). By contrast, Paul describes true teaching that arises from the gospel as *promoting* features of God's created order. This true teaching is grounded in right behaviour in the 'household' of God (3:15); it promotes 'stewardship' (literally household management) (1:4); it is 'sound' (literally 'healthy') (1:10; 6:3); it affirms the goodness of creation, including marriage and food (4:4-5); and it is undertaken within an order between men and women undergirded by the order seen in the creation accounts (2:11-15).



Paul insists that we come to this salvation in Christ, not by escaping the created order or denying its goodness, but through living a 'healthy' or 'sound' life in God's good world.



So what can we say about the false teaching? It was interested primarily in discussion, words, and arguments. It promoted an interest in speculative spirituality and creation-denying asceticism. It either ignored the importance of moral Christian living that affirms creation, or perhaps actively opposed it. By contrast, the true teaching that counters this, and which rightly arises from the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, is interested deeply in *God's goodness*, in a deep, grounded, moral sense – as it applies

to God's word, God's created order, and relationships amongst God's people.²

It's important to clarify that even though Paul is very interested in moral living, he's not being *moralistic*. Everything that Paul says is consistently grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, whose mediatorial death and resurrection provides forgiveness, grace, and mercy for sin (see, e.g., 1:1-2; 2:3-6; 3:14-16). We have salvation in Christ alone – we don't achieve it through our works. Yet at the very same time, Paul insists that we *come* to this salvation in Christ, not by *escaping* the created order or denying its goodness, but *through* living a 'healthy' or 'sound' life in God's good

2 There is another view of the false teaching in 1 Timothy that is sometimes brought up in discussions of the controversial statements in 2:11-15 about women teaching. This view is that the false teaching was a specific heresy linked to the worship of the goddess Artemis, whose temple was in Ephesus (see Acts 19:23-34). An example can be found in Linda Belleville, 'Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15,' in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural & Practical Perspectives*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Cynthia Long Westfall, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 205-27. For more detail on how this view of the false teaching in 1 Timothy affects the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, as well as an engagement with the key exegetical issues, see the video of my paper, 'Key issues in scholarship on 1 Timothy 2:8-15', *Priscilla and Aquila Conference*, 6 February 2023, paa.moore.edu.au/resources.

world. This affirmation of the goodness of living in God's good world is a fundamental issue that Paul addresses in 1 Timothy.

God's good word in God's good world

This understanding of the problems that Paul is addressing in 1 Timothy helps us to see why he uses the word 'good' so often throughout the letter. Paul uses two Greek terms (with various forms and combinations) to express the concept of goodness. His most frequent term for goodness is *kalos*. This term has connotations of being fitting and beautiful. Another term Paul uses is *agathos*. This has strongly moral connotations. Even though the two words are a little different in their nuance, Paul uses them in very similar ways in 1 Timothy, and they're both rightly translated as 'good'. That makes sense. The idea of something being 'good' in the sense of *morally right* can't be separated from the idea of it being 'good' in the sense of *fitting* for God's creation and the gospel. A moral life is also fitting, beautiful, and delightful in God's good world.

There are various things Paul calls *good* in 1 Timothy.

God's good word

Firstly, God's **word** is good. Paul applies the word 'good' to both the law and the teaching arising from the gospel.

God's law is 'good' because it contains moral content that shows up our unrighteousness (1:8–10). God's law is not just for those who believe they are 'righteous,' like the Pharisees Jesus encountered (cf. Matt 9:13; Luke 5:32). It's for all of us, to show us our sin and lead us to repentance.

The gospel is also 'good'. It brings us 'good doctrine', so the one who teaches it is rightly called a 'good servant' (4:6).

God's good creation

Secondly, God's **creation** is good. By contrast with the false teachers' denial of marriage and food, Paul asserts:

*For everything created by God is **good**, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*
(1 Tim 4:4–5)

God's good word affirms God's good creation. This shows that such things as marriage and food are not merely to be seen as distractions from living a spiritual life. The things of God's creation are meant for delight, satisfaction, and enjoyment (6:17).

The good lives of believers

Good teaching must lead to and be grounded in good **conduct** by believers.

First and foremost, good conduct means leading a life of love. 'Love' in 1 Timothy is not simply a strong desire or a sentimental feeling or a random act of kindness; it is about being committed to others. Love springs from hearts that have been transformed by a 'good conscience' (1:5). When Paul describes Christian living in 1 Timothy, he's talking about committed living in rightly ordered relationships in God's creation. This includes relationships in the church as the 'household of God' (3:15) and in marriage and family life (e.g., 3:2-4).

Paul specifically applies the terminology of 'goodness' to Christian conduct within these ordered relationships. He describes ordered living under human authorities as 'good' and 'pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour' (2:3). He emphasises the importance of 'good works' for a range of people, including women (2:10; 5:10), elders (probably 5:25), and those who are rich (6:18-19).

A ministry grounded in goodness

Paul especially emphasises the importance of 'goodness' when it comes to **leaders** of God's people. This can be seen in the overarching statement Paul makes about overseers:

*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task [literally, a **good work**]. (1 Tim 3:1)*

The importance of goodness in 1 Timothy explains why the central characteristics of overseers and deacons include such things as the need for them to 'manage his own household well [literally, in a good way]' (3:4, 12); to 'be well thought of [literally, have a good testimony] by outsiders,' (3:7); to 'serve well [literally, in a good way]' (3:13) and so to gain a 'good standing' (3:13). Later, Paul says elders are expected to 'rule well [literally, in a good way]' (1 Tim 5:17).

The good fight

At both the beginning and the end of his letter, Paul charges Timothy to 'wage the good warfare' (1:18) and to 'fight the good fight' (6:12). If we don't read these words in their context, we might assume Paul is using these phrases to call Timothy to engage in war-like tactics against the false teachers. We might assume 'fight the good fight' means something like 'engage in controversies and quarrels with false teachers – for the good cause of the gospel'.

The problem with this interpretation of 'fight the good fight' is that it would contradict the rest of what Paul says in 1 Timothy. In this letter, 'controversy' and 'quarrels about words' aren't 'good' in any sense. They characterise the *false teachers* (6:3-4). So Paul isn't using the phrase 'fight the good fight' in this letter to inspire Timothy, for example, to give the false teachers a taste of their own medi-

cine or be just as argumentative as they were. Rather, he's encouraging Timothy to be completely *different* to the false teachers in the way he lives and teaches. Timothy's warfare and struggle isn't against people; it's a fight against his own natural inclination to get argumentative.

In other words, the 'good fight' (6:12) is the fight to pursue 'righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness' (6:11). The 'good warfare' (1:18) is a warfare whose primary weapons are 'faith and a good conscience' (1:19). This struggle arises from the 'good confession' (6:12), which in turn is grounded in Jesus' own 'good confession' before Pilate as he faced death on the cross (6:13). It's the fight to be good as we hold onto the truth and teach it.



1 Timothy challenges modern ideals of what 'goodness' means in the first place.



Challenges for us

In sum, Paul's first letter Timothy is full of goodness. It's all about God's good word in God's good and ordered creation. God's word in God's world leads his people to good lives. It means Timothy's ministry must fundamentally be grounded in goodness. Paul challenges him to struggle for the sake of goodness.

This letter provides many encouragements and challenges for us in our 21st century context. Here are a few.

Firstly, 1 Timothy challenges modern ideals of what 'goodness' means in the first place. Whether we realise it or not, our own thinking about goodness is deeply influenced by the Romantic movement. When we think about 'goodness,' we can easily think first and foremost in terms of inner feelings of beauty and authenticity. These are good things! But if we focus exclusively on these inner feelings, it can blind us to the broader sense of goodness that we see in 1 Timothy: the goodness of God's word, God's creation, and indeed, God's good order grounded in his good creation. We need to keep seeing what is beautiful and fitting, delightful and satisfying in *God's* eyes. This is especially true when it comes to elements of God's creation that our world denies are good – including the kinds of issues that arise in 1 Timothy 2:8–15 concerning men and women in their relationships with one another.³

Secondly, 1 Timothy challenges us to see religions and ideologies that deny the goodness of God's created world aren't just unhelpful – they're not *good*. Our own culture is deeply affected by movements that seek to deny the goodness of our physical, biological existence as men and women. Instead, these movements insist that our pursuit of authenticity and identity, and our inner feelings of gender and sexuality are what is truly 'true', despite biological facts. These movements insist

3 This is why the title of Claire Smith's book *Claire Smith, God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says about Men and Women*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2019), is so fitting.

that such feelings must not merely be tolerated, but actively and joyously celebrated. Anything less is unacceptable. But such celebration denies the goodness of God's good creation. As we love and care for people who struggle with these feelings, we cannot deny the created reality God has made us to live in.

Thirdly, 1 Timothy challenges us to find joy in our day-to-day lives in God's world, even when those lives do not feel especially inspiring. In the messiness and difficulties and boredom of day-to-day, on-the-ground, relational, sacrificial, love for and commitment to others, we can be tempted to flee to find meaning and satisfaction in more 'spiritual' things. Of course, it is right to yearn for spiritual things. But 1 Timothy shows us that spiritual truth isn't found simply by escaping from our physical lives in this world. God's goodness, and the beauty and satisfaction of living for him, are very often found by living obedient lives *in* the places God has put us in his good creation.

Finally, 1 Timothy challenges us to remember the importance of 'goodness' for true teaching. How can we avoid the kind of false teaching we find in 1 Timothy? We need to be committed to true teaching, that is, true doctrine (the terms mean the same thing). But being committed to true doctrine does not *just* mean being committed to getting the doctrines formulated correctly. In 1 Timothy, Paul reminds us that we must 'fight' to ensure true doctrine doesn't just stay theoretical in our lives. True doctrine must permeate the way we live and the way we teach. The false teaching Paul mentions is a danger for all of us. It's possible to be committed to fighting to formulate the truth correctly while not being committed to taking the same truth seriously in our lives and the lives of our hearers. If we do that, we're like the false teachers Paul identifies in 1 Timothy. If we keep on just *saying* we believe certain truths about God's goodness and *arguing* for these truths while consistently failing to prayerfully seek to change our lives and our relationships to match the truths, we're not much different from the false teachers Paul mentions in 1 Timothy.

To sum up: 1 Timothy is full of goodness. It's about God's good word in God's good world. It's a joy, a delight, a wonder, and a privilege. But it's also a challenge, a struggle, and a fight. Our constant challenge is to keep being committed to this truth, both by speaking it and by actively living it out, on the ground, in our lives in God's good creation. **ACR**



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Responding to the Church of England's blessing of same-sex marriage

A conversation
with William Taylor



Micky Mantle, Senior Minister, St Thomas' Anglican North Sydney

For many years the Church of England has been discussing differences within the denomination regarding same-sex sexual relationships and same-sex marriage.

A process was put in place by the Church of England bishops to try and resolve this. In November 2020 a suite of resources called 'Living in Love and Faith' were produced to enable churches across the country 'to learn together, listen to one another and to God'.

The outcome of that process was a series of prayers prepared and commended by the House of Bishops for the blessing of same-sex relationships. On the 9th of February, after three days of debate, these prayers were accepted by all three houses (bishops, clergy and laity) of the General Synod.

In a preamble attached to the prayers, the House of Bishops stated that what was being blessed in the prayers are the people and not the relationships themselves. They further argued that because of this the prayers are not a contravention of the Church of England's doctrine of marriage.

Our own Archbishop, Kanishka Raffel, the Archbishop of South Sudan and Chair of the Global South Fellowship of Anglicans, Justin Badi, and the Archbishop of Nigeria, Henry Ndukuba, are among global Anglican leaders who have rejected this claim and denounced the action as a grievous departure from the Bible's teaching on marriage as can be seen here:

Kanishka Raffel,

<https://anglican.ink/2023/02/10/english-synod-decision-rejects-clear-teaching-of-the-bible-states-sydney-diocese/>

Justin Badi,

<https://www.thepastorsheart.net/podcast/global-south-on-church-of-england>

Henry Ndukuba,

<https://anglican.ink/2023/02/12/church-of-england-quarreling-with-god-nigeria-says/>

St Helen's Bishopsgate is a leading conservative evangelical Anglican church in the City of London. Their response to the House of Bishops' and General Synod's actions can be found here: <https://www.st-helens.org.uk/about/announcements/cofe/> **along with statements of support by global Anglican leaders and other resources.**

What follows is an interview with William Taylor, the Rector of St Helen's. The interviewer is Micky Mantle, who was a Curate at St Helen's under William and is currently the Rector at St Thomas' North Sydney.

Micky: William, we know that unbiblical belief and behaviour from bishops in the Church of England is not a new phenomenon. Back in the 1980s the Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, denied the virgin birth of Jesus and his physical resurrection. More recently we've seen the consistent failure of bishops to exercise discipline on clergy who've been publicly and unapologetically living in same-sex sexual relationships, and so on. What makes *this* move from the House of Bishops different to these previous failures?

William: I think the primary issue is that the doctrine of the Church is being changed. And that is irrefutable. However much people want to argue it differently, the plain fact of the matter is that as Anglicans we have always known that what we pray reflects what we believe. That is why the Prayer Book is among the foundational documents defining the doctrine of the Church of England, alongside the Ordinal and the Thirty-Nine Articles. And so the idea that somehow these prayers aren't changing the doctrine of the Church of England in regard to marriage is a pure deception.

When clergy are ordained they are asked, 'Do you believe the doctrine of the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it?' And the way the doctrine of the Church of England is defined according to Canon A5 is by the Scriptures, the ancient creeds, and the [aforementioned] formularies of the Church. What the bishops are trying to do now is suggest that the doctrine of the Church of England is different to this, and thus make this change lawful.

Now that's never happened before. Somebody like Jenkins was a rogue bishop – self-evidently rogue – who deviated from the doctrine that was in place. So in the past one has been able to say, 'Well actually the doctrine of the Church of England is as follows and the canons reflect it'. But now the bishops are seeking to make canonical something which is doctrinally worse than erroneous – it's heretical.

Another question that those being ordained are asked with regard to bishops is, 'Will you recognise their authority and obey them in all things lawful and honest?' But now the bishops are making it lawful, canonically lawful, to deny the doctrine of the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it. The result is that you can no longer say, 'Well actually what that Bishop is doing is unlawful', because it is now lawful.

M: You've spoken about the impact of these actions on those in Church of England churches who experience same-sex attraction and yet are committed to living faithfully according to the Bible's clear teaching on sex and marriage. What impact do these actions have on these brothers and sisters?

W: Well I think it's in several different areas. Obviously I can't really speak to this personally because I'm personally not tempted to same-sex attraction. But I've talked to numerous who are tempted in the area of same-sex attraction. And we have a number actually in our staff team and across the church family in that situation. At one level they just find it profoundly wearying that this area where they find themselves tempted – and it's a very constant battle – just keeps being brought to the front of everybody's attention and therefore to the forefront of their own minds. So it's wearying, it's dispiriting, and you know, for some, the question becomes, 'Is it worth continuing the battle if there are so-called respected leaders in the establishment saying actually you don't need to battle in this area?' That is profoundly damaging to a person's spiritual welfare.

So you've raised the question with regards to those in a church like St Helen's



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who *are* seeking to battle and remain pure in spite of temptation in the area of same-sex attraction, and that's great. But then there'll be plenty of others in other churches where they haven't got the kinds of support and encouragements and constant teaching from the word of God to stand firm and they will simply be led astray – and 1 Corinthians 6 is very, very clear, that both the receptive and the active homosexual partner in homosexual sex – whatever the nature of the relationship – alongside

the idolater, the thief and so forth, is not going to inherit the kingdom of God. So it is a salvation issue.

M: How does all this impact the advance of the gospel in England?

W: Well I think you could answer that both theologically and pragmatically. Theologically, in one sense you have to ask, 'Well does it?' You know, interestingly, in Acts 8 when you see the persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem and they are driven out, the impact is phenomenal gospel advance from Jerusalem. You might argue that the advance of the gospel in the Americas came through the persecution of Christians in England. And people have commented on China and the way in which persecution and hostility resulted in really significant gospel advance. So in one sense God is in charge; it is his church; he knows what's going on and you might say, will this be detrimental or in fact will it be quite the contrary: highly advantageous to the advance of the gospel? The church of God will advance according to his purposes with or without the Church of England.

In another sense – still considering it theologically – it impacts the advance of the gospel profoundly. Romans 16:17 is such an interesting verse because it comes



Paul is writing to Rome, garnering support for the advance of the gospel in Spain ... he delivers this extraordinary command to watch out for those who cause divisions by promoting unsound doctrine – and then he commands us to 'Avoid them!'



right at the end of that missionary support letter. Paul is writing to Rome, garnering support for the advance of the gospel in Spain. But then right at the end, when you think he's finished, he delivers this extraordinary command to watch out for those who cause divisions by promoting unsound doctrine – and then he commands us to 'Avoid them!' And it seems to me that Paul is suggesting that erroneous, heretical teaching of this sort will have a pro-

found impact on the gospel if we fail to avoid the false teachers. When you look at it theologically, will it have an impact? Well, no and yes. And so our task then is to avoid those who teach falsely and trust God with the consequences.

Pragmatically, of course, because the Church of England is an established church, this gives it unique opportunities to penetrate into the very heart of multiple communities across England. It has a place at the heart of communities and it is still at the heart of significant sections of the population. It's nothing like it was in the 1970s and 80s but it is still profound. If you knock on somebody's door and say, 'I come from the local Church of England church', then you'll often get a hearing. People will often turn to the local Church of England church, so actually to have the Church of England then rent asunder, as it were, and those people significantly taken away from the gospel, has a very profound impact evangelistically.

M: What lies behind Archbishop Justin Welby's and the House of Bishops' decision to issue these prayers of blessing for same-sex marriage?

W: Well that's a good question. I mean it's not actually my place or yours to judge the motive of men and women – in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 Paul is very clear on that so I wouldn't want to go into motive, though I have plenty of thoughts on the matter! But I don't think it's right for us to go into motive.

I think if you were to ask what lies behind it, I would say 170 years of liberal theology. That is, a loss of confidence in the Bible as God's authoritative word and therefore a complete lack of ability to think theologically. Alan Stibbs wrote the most helpful essay that I've found on this in 1940. It's 'The Bible as Revelation' [which can be found in *Such a Great Salvation: the Collected Essays of Alan Stibbs*] and I just dragged it out.

He says, 'For to some, the Bible is absolutely unique and from above, God-given; while to others it is only outstanding and from beneath, man-wrought.'

And when he goes on to expound what he means by 'man-wrought' he says, 'The Bible is the product of spiritual discernment of men, a discernment which by the same spirit men today may not only equal but even supersede what was written. So the man enlightened by the divine Spirit may so discern fresh or fuller truths as to be able rightly to criticise and even to discard parts of Scripture.'

Now it's that approach to the Scriptures that has gained momentum since the radical German theologians of the mid-19th Century, rationalists who moved away from the spiritualists. That then produces theological incompetence in the church.

And the fact that the House of Bishops are promoting unity apart from the apostolic word, around what they discern God to be saying today, even though it's contrary to the apostolic word, demonstrates the most profound theological ignorance. And you only need to go to John 17:20 to see how a child in the youth group would be able to correct them. For in John 17:20 Jesus prays for those who will believe in him through the words of the apostles. So the unity for which Jesus prays for the church comes through the apostolic word, not through some later innovation of what 'spiritual men' might think God is saying today. And so it's 170 years of loss of confidence in Scripture as the word of God and therefore, effectively, councils of men today in synod, in communion, can decide what God is saying. So 170 years of that, followed therefore inevitably by a profound theological ignorance.

Really, I fear that there is a great level of theological ignorance in the House of Bishops of the Church of England. Many of the bishops are great managers, fine civil servants, very capable of organisational, structural change but when it comes to theological thinking, I get the sense that many members of our youth group would be able to think more theologically than they do.

M: How do you hope individuals and churches will respond to this action by the bishops?

W: So we at St Helen's are working with a short-term and then a longer-term goal.

The long-term goal is to secure Anglican evangelical ministry in London. And what is not said there is as important as what is said. So my goal is to secure long-term evangelical ministry in London.

In the short term, we're working towards July [2023] to secure a kind of provision that will enable evangelical churches in the Church of England to continue with evangelical ministry. And that sort of provision needs to be the provision of episcopal oversight which is differentiated from an apostate House of Bishops with bishops who have jurisdiction that is non-geographical, and bishops who have the authority to select, ordain, licence and install clergy, and where further bishops can be consecrated without tight association with Lambeth or York.

Now the question is, can that sort of episcopal structure be established by July? Almost certainly not by July. But our aim is to make it clear in the short-term that that is what's required. So our potential ordinands have withdrawn from going through any sort of discernment to be employed by the Church of England. The current ordinands have pressed pause on their ordination. The curates have pressed pause on their curate training, and the clergy have declared that they're in broken partnership with the bishop. The wardens I hope will press pause on their admissions to their office by the bishop. And then financially, we've pressed pause on any contributions to the diocese. There is a period between now and the end of May where wholesale and widespread protest of that sort is made, to show that if they fail to provide necessary provision of the kind of episcopal oversight that we're talking about then that will result in a much more significant turbulence for them.

And some people say, 'Well why are you bothered because surely you can just carry on?' And the answer is if you cannot ensure succession of ministry, then when I fall under the bus without the church being able to appoint my successor, the ministry of St Helen's is no longer secure. For the moment they pass the sort of measures they want to pass without clear differentiated episcopal oversight, then you will no longer be able to achieve an evangelical succession in evangelical churches because no one will go forward to be ordained; no one will be prepared to swear allegiance to a bishop; and no one will be ready therefore to be installed and so evangelical ministry is no longer possible in evangelical churches, long-term.

M: Can you elaborate on your longer-term plans by way of response at St Helen's?

W: I've talked about the short term. The long term is post-July. If there is no provision, then we enter into a much more difficult period.

I am legally allowed to continue serving until 2031. They may extend that by 5 years. Were they to do so, then retirement age for me would be 2036. Beyond that, without clear differentiated episcopal oversight, there is no way that you can secure long-term succession. There are churches who've been trying to do this for 20 or 30 years and have failed to come up with a solution, even us, so it's not a new

thing and nobody can [secure long-term succession] without a change in the law.

Having said that, given the level of ingenuity that the House of Bishops descended to, to be able to come up with prayers that 'do not redefine the doctrine of marriage', while self-evidently being prayers to bless relationships that are akin to marriage, you would think that they might be able to come up with some constructive and imaginative solutions to the legal problems that are being presented to them. I mean if you want to put it more bluntly, they have driven a coach and horses through any man or woman's plain reading of the law of the Church of England in order to achieve what they want to achieve when it comes to blessing same-sex relationships and one would hope that they would be similarly constructive when it comes to a form of legal provision.

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If you want to put it more bluntly, they have driven a coach and horses through any man or woman's plain reading of the law of the Church of England in order to achieve what they want

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M: How can we here in Sydney be helpful to you and other conservative evangelical churches in the Church of England?

W: You've been enormously helpful already in prayer and support. Kanishka Raffel has been remarkably helpful. His piece to video [that can be found here: <https://www.st-helens.org.uk/about/announcements/cofe/>] should be listened to by everybody, just to see how brilliant it was, and how widely appreciated it has been here in England. And in that video he offers to help in whatever way he can, and we're delighted. And I hope that you will be able to back him in helping us in many, many ways, some of them perhaps quite imaginative going forward. But he will need the backing of Sydney people and particularly Sydney lawyers and Sydney Synod and so forth and we would be so grateful, if it gets more choppy in the months ahead.

M: Let the reader understand! William, thank you so much. **ACR**

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How to preach truth yet teach falsely



Mike Leite, Incoming Senior Minister, Hope Anglican Church, Leppington

In Spurgeon's *Lectures to my Students*, in addressing the matter of 'The Sermon', Spurgeon exhorts his students 'to give a clear testimony to all the doctrines which constitute or lie around the gospel.' His point is simple. Some preachers are reticent to teach the whole counsel of God fearing the truth they teach may be irrelevant (or perhaps, even offensive!) to their hearers. Spurgeon was a great believer in *all* of God's word as good and profitable, and therefore, in his usual straight-speaking manner declared that 'No truth is to be kept back [...] Cautious reticence is, in nine cases out of ten, cowardly betrayal'.

However, it's the illustration he gives to make his point which provides some real food for thought. Spurgeon beautifully writes:

*Harmony requires that the voice of one doctrine shall not drown the rest, and it also demands that the gentler notes shall not be omitted because of the greater volume of other sounds. Every note appointed by the great minstrel must be sounded; each note having its own proportionate power and emphasis, the passage marked with **forte** must not be softened, and those with **piano** must not be rolled out like thunder, but each must have its due hearing. All revealed truth in harmonious proportion must be your theme.*¹

It's a beautiful illustration because Spurgeon is making two important points to his students. The first, which we've already seen, is 'to give a clear testimony to all the doctrines'. Yet, the second, is to be careful in so doing that right *proportion* and *harmony* is maintained. Thus, Spurgeon goes on to say:

Those doctrines which are not vital to the soul's salvation, nor even essential to practical Christianity, are not to be considered upon every occasion of worship. Bring in all the features of truth in due proportion [...] a doctrine

¹ Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students*, London: Passmore and Alabaster, Paternoster buildings. 1875, 77.

*may be very important, but an exaggerated estimate of it may be fatal to an harmonious and complete ministry. Do not paint the details of the background of the gospel picture with the same heavy brush as the great objects in the foreground of it.*²

What Spurgeon was critiquing in some of the preachers of his day was an obsession with particular doctrines. By all means, give a clear testimony to *all* doctrines as you are able, but do not emphasise and prioritise *all* doctrines in the same way. Spurgeon was making clear that biblical revelation has an emphasis. The Bible is the revelation from God about what He has done in Jesus Christ His Son to save a people to the praise of His glory. The gospel message about Jesus is to be the emphasis. The salvific preaching of the cross is to be the priority. Transformation into Christlikeness to the glory of God is to be the goal. The preachers' job is to reflect that emphasis and priority in their sermons. To do otherwise is to distort the harmony of revealed truth. Indeed, it is to teach something true and yet speak falsely because your teaching is at the expense of the emphasis and priority of God's revealed truth.

Now, Spurgeon's critique still has some relevance for us today. There are some, like in Spurgeon's day, who are more interested in preaching endlessly on their favourite doctrinal topic rather than sticking to all revealed truth in harmonious proportion. Each teaching occasion becomes a regurgitation of the latest scholarly debate on the topic. However, in my experience, that is not the norm in our Sydney Anglican circles. If anything, perhaps our interest in learning and teaching doctrine has waned over the last little while (but that is a topic for another day...)!

If Spurgeon were to address the preachers of today, I wonder if he would warn us about a disproportionate focus on the cultural issues of our day? To rephrase Spurgeon's words above, he might say to the modern-day preacher:

A cultural issue may be very important, but an exaggerated estimate of that cultural issue may be fatal to an harmonious and complete ministry.

For preachers in our part of the world, the pressure is growing to make the Sunday sermon about the latest cultural hot topic. The choices are endless. Environmental concerns. Family and domestic violence. Indigenous issues and the Voice to Parliament. Gender equality. Race. The economy. Local politics. World politics. The poor and marginalised. This is compounded by a growing desire for sermons to become more anthropocentric and felt-needs based instead of Christocentric. People want to be taught on how to become *a better you*. *A better parent*. *A successful worker*. *A greater friend*. *A more loving spouse*. These sorts of sermons, we are told, are what we need to preach if we are to be relevant to our people in our day. That's the growing pressure. Less Jesus (not that anyone would ever put it that way, but that's what they mean!). Less expository preaching. More relevancy please.

2 Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 78.

What if preachers were to give in to this pressure? The term-long sermon series would then develop along these lines: Term 1 on sexuality. Term 2 on work. Term 3 on hot-button issues. Term 4 on the Christian and politics, and so on. What's more, the preacher would then spend a disproportionate amount of time becoming au fait with the latest cultural issues, with their head buried in what the experts and self-help gurus have to say, all whilst spending less and less time in the Scriptures themselves (because let's be honest, the Scriptures do not speak in great detail about these cultural issues). The congregation too would spend less time *hearing* the Scriptures.

Now, I'm *not* saying that this is the current state of affairs amongst Sydney Anglican churches. But there is a growing trend. And the pressure is mounting. We need to remind ourselves that the local church is not a medical centre. It's not a political movement. Sundays aren't designed as self-help conferences. Furthermore, we need to ask ourselves why the Scriptures are not as concerned about these topics as much as our world is. Why didn't God say more on human sexuality, given all the intricate questions of our day? Why isn't there a section in the New Testament dedicated to Christians and the workplace, considering how central work is to the modern person? Could it be that God thought other things more relevant for Him to reveal to us? Could it be that God would rather us be consumed by other things, like Jesus His Son and His glory?

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If all the preacher does is preach and teach in light of modern-day issues, the harmony of God's revelation is being distorted.

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It's at this point where academic swear words begin to be hurled. 'That's reductionistic!'. 'False dichotomy!'. 'It's both/and!'. To which I say, please hear what I'm *not* saying. I'm *not* saying that God has *nothing* to say to us about all those things I mentioned above. We do need to become better in making space for topical sermons tackling the cultural issues of our day. The Scriptures *do* speak of parenting, work, friendship, and marriage. God does inform us on right (and wrong) human sexuality. We are to preach and teach on these things and understand what can be gleaned from the Scriptures about them. However! All revealed truth should be preached in harmonious proportion. If all the preacher does is preach and teach in light of modern-day issues, the harmony of God's revelation is being distorted. If all the preacher does is start with the questions of the world, seeking to glean the Scriptures for answers on *how to be a better you*, then the harmony of Scripture will be distorted.

Here is my bold assertion. Can we preach things that *are true* from the Scriptures, yet speak falsely, because our preaching disproportionately deals with the questions of our world at the expense of the emphasis of the revealed truth of Scripture? As I read the Scriptures, it seems to me that God's concerns and prior-

ities are to do with His glory and the proclaiming of the message of Jesus. Jesus himself is concerned primarily about preaching that message in his own ministry when you read the early chapters of Mark. In what is very familiar to all of us, instead of Jesus prioritising only what is good (the healing of many, Mark 1:32-34), he insists on what is best – going on to the next village so that he may preach there too (Mark 1:38). Indeed, that is why he has come. This is the same priority we see in the early church with the Apostles. While the issue concerning the widows in Acts 6:1-7 is very important, *THE* issue is *not* the distribution of daily needs but the neglect of the preaching about Jesus. It really is surprising what the Apostles say. Amidst the racism, inequality, and protection of vulnerable people (the preferencing of Hebraic widows over Hellenistic widows), the Apostles declare: *It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to handle financial matters* (Acts 6:2). To be sure, the Apostles deal with both issues – but one is clearly more central than the other. As one of our favorite theologians would say, ‘there’s the good and there’s the best’.³

In a piece of this length, we cannot explore and consider every nuance of what I’m asserting. There is often much misunderstanding when we begin to speak of priorities and things of most importance (1 Cor 15:3). People quickly jump to what is *not* being said rather than listening carefully to what *is* being said.

Let us be careful preaching what is true that we are not teaching falsely. Let us preach all revealed truth in harmonious proportion. Let us make sure that the priorities and emphasis of all our ministries are in harmony with what God himself has told us in His Word.

To give Spurgeon the last word:

Our great master theme is the good news from heaven; the tidings of mercy through the atoning death of Jesus, mercy to the chief of sinners upon their believing in Jesus.

We must throw all our strength of judgement, memory, imagination, and eloquence into the delivery of the gospel; and not give to the preaching of the cross our random thoughts while wayside topics engross our deeper meditations.

*Brethren, first and above all things, keep to plain evangelical doctrines; whatever else you do or do not preach, be sure incessantly to bring forth the soul-saving truth of Christ and him crucified.*⁴ **ACR**

3 Colin Buchanan, ‘Mary and Martha’ in Colin’s *New Testament Big Bible Story Songs*.

4 Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 78.

A God worth trembling before

Isaiah 66



Craig Schafer, Senior Minister,
St Mark's Anglican Pennant Hills

*The following is an edited transcript
from the Nexus 2023 Conference*

**We know a glorious God. A God
worth trembling before.**

Look at the opening words of Isaiah
66:

*Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is
my throne, and the earth is my
footstool...'*

A king who uses our planet, all 5.9 sex-
trillion tonnes of it, as a footstool.

This is an image of immense royal

power which gives us a glimpse of the
magnitude of God's glory.

The truth of God's glory has been
a theme throughout Isaiah. It is there
from the beginning, famously in chap-
ter 6, where the prophet was confronted
with that overwhelming vision of God's
glory:

*In the year that King Uzziah died
I saw the Lord sitting upon a
throne, high and lifted up; and the
train of his robe filled the temple.
Above him stood the seraphim.
Each had six wings: with two he
covered his face, and with two
he covered his feet, and with
two he flew. And one called to
another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy
is the LORD of hosts; the whole
earth is full of his glory!' And the
foundations of the thresholds
shook at the voice of him who
called, and the house was filled
with smoke.*

If we form this picture in our minds, we
can see that our God is glorious. He is
big. He is weighty. He is worthy. He is
in no way dependent or beholden to us.

*'what is the house that you would
build for me, and what is the
place of my rest?'*

God had commanded his Old Testament people to build the temple. However, God would use Haggai to chastise them for being slack in rebuilding it when they returned from exile. However, God did not need a temple. God was not dependent on the sacrifices that were offered in the temple.

‘All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD’.

God is the creator of all things and so he is above all things (Isa 66:2). All things are dependent on him. This is part of his glory (Rev 4:11).

The God of Isaiah is a glorious King and a glorious Creator who stands in awesome and complete authority over all that exists. In Isaiah, he is the one that makes mountains quake and turns the seabed into a road. He is the one who uses mighty king Cyrus as a tool to achieve his own purposes. He is the one who can somehow, impossibly, unfathomably, take a people soaked in sin and redeem them to himself, despite his utter and overwhelming holiness and purity.

As we busy ourselves each day in the pastoral trenches; as we work to build up the temple of God, it is useful to pause and remind ourselves *why*.

We know the glorious God; we really believe with Isaiah:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory’.

Why do you do what you do? Pride in achievement? Fear of failure? Peer pressure? Financial necessity?

The rightly ordered ministry, like

the rightly ordered life, begins with a true vision of the glory of God. Isaiah glimpsed it in a prophetic moment. However, we know where the ultimate vision of the glory of God is found.

2 Corinthians 4:6 says:

For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

For my life and ministry to be rightly ordered, I need a clear vision of the glory of God. This is why my own personal relationship with Christ matters so much, because he is the way God reveals his beautiful, terrifying, trembling-worthy glory to us.

Amid sorting out your M’s or your rosters, running the structures and programmes, and meeting with all the people, are you daily renewing your vision of the glory of God by contemplating Christ?

We know a glorious God. A God worth trembling before. And in Isaiah 66, that glorious God gives a word of promise to those who tremble at his word.

A word of promise for those who tremble at his word

God could direct his gaze of blessing anywhere in all of creation. But where does he particularly direct it?

But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isa 66:2)

He directs it to the person who is humble and contrite in spirit. The person who trembles at his word, who truly sees the glory of God.

If I truly see how big and weighty and worthy God is, what option do I have but humility and contrition? What option do I have but to see my smallness in the shadow of his greatness?

I was recently bushwalking in Tasmania and saw massive, old growth trees towering above me, with diameters greater than my height. They were glorious trees. I felt small and humble in their presence – and they were just trees!

How much more must I see myself as small and humble if I see how glorious God, the creator of those trees is?

If I see the glory of his holiness, how deeply will I see my unworthiness before him; how much cause do I have for broken-hearted contrition before him?

If I truly see the glory of God, as it is revealed to me ultimately in Christ, how could I not be who Christ calls me to be; poor in spirit, mourning and meek, hungry, and thirsty for righteousness?

Yet I very often fail.

Which is why I am so grateful that there is another who has always walked in dependent (John 5:18-19), reverent awe (Heb 5:7) before God; who walked in perfect humility and submission before God, even to death on a cross (Phil 2:5-11).

What he has done on the cross reveals new depths to God's glory and gives more reason to tremble before him; to tremble with joy and wonder and awe at his grace and love. How could I not tremble before that God?

How could I not tremble at his word? The word breathed from the lips of a glorious God is a glorious word. When the Lord of all the earth and the creator of all things speaks, his word is to be received with humility.

It is a humbling wonder that the God of glory chooses to speak to lowly and pitiful human beings at all. Certainly, each word from the lips of a God like that is a precious gem or a nugget of gold.

If the God of glory speaks, his words demand to be received with humble, awed faith.

His words of command demand humble and awed obedience. His words of warning demand humble and awed heeding. His words of promise demand humble and awed trust.

In Isaiah 66, we find beautiful words of promise for those who tremble at his word. We are united by faith to the one who ultimately and truly trembled at God's word and who at the same time was God's ultimate and true Word to us. And so, these words of promise are for us.

Firstly, we have the promise that God looks on us. Despite the darkness of our sin, we do not tremble before a hostile force in fear of our lives. We tremble before an Almighty Saviour who is for us.

Secondly, we have the promise of verse 5:

Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: 'Your brothers who hate you and have cast you out for my name's sake have said, "Let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy"; but it is they who will be put to shame. The sound of an uproar from the city! A sound

from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies'.

Isaiah experienced this hostility (Isa 5), however Jesus experienced the full humiliation as he hung on the cross. The leaders of Israel looked up and mocked him, even as he fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies and was pierced for our transgressions.

Jesus promised his disciples that they would share in that hostility, and we see it happen as the rest of the New Testament unfolds. Those who tremble at God's word, and therefore submit themselves to live in accord with God's word, have regularly been hurt and marginalised by others who claim to worship the same God.

This is currently happening to evangelicals in the Church of England. It is where the Diocese of the Southern Cross came from. I lived this for years fighting battles in the Uniting Church over sexuality, back in the day. But ultimately God promises to vindicate those who keep faithfully humbling themselves before his word. Eventually the burden of the hostility will be lifted. Because the God of glory will judge those that imposed it as enemies and give them what that deserves.

Thirdly, those who humbly tremble at God's word have the promise of *a glorious future that involves a new-born people and a new home.*

Throughout Isaiah, God has promised judgement against the corruption and sin of his chosen people and his chosen city. At the same time, he has promised them restoration and redemp-

tion. In Isaiah 66:6-14, God paints a beautiful picture of future blessing. He gives the image of Zion, giving birth to a new nation in a miraculous way, where the birth comes before the pain of labour. This new nation is mothered by a new Jerusalem.

At the beginning of the book, when Jerusalem's judgement is in view, she is pictured as a frail and derelict shelter in a veggie patch and as a wretched besieged city. She is compared to Sodom and Gomorrah and called a shameful whore.

But here at the end, the New Jerusalem is a mother able to satisfy and delight her children; to happily feed them and bounce them on her knee. She lives in a peace and prosperity that God

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Zion's motherly comfort is actually God's motherly comfort. What a beautiful image of the warmth of God's care and love for his people.

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will provide for her and so her children will rejoice and flourish. After so much tribulation, they will know the comfort of her motherly embrace. And, in verse 15, God deepens the image of comfort and blessing. *Zion's motherly comfort is actually God's motherly comfort.* What a beautiful image of the warmth of God's care and love for his people.

From verse 18 the promise of blessing grows and embraces God's ancient promises to Abraham about all nations being blessed through him. God declares that he will gather all nations and

tongues to see his glory. Messengers of his glory will go out in every direction, and people from all nations will be brought to him.

The great sign has been set in the resurrection of Christ. The apostles and evangelists who wrote the New Testament considered themselves to be living the outworking of this promise as they carried the gospel to the ends of the earth. Their message has been shared and reshared until eventually we have come to see the glory of God. We have been brought to the holy mountain of God, the new Jerusalem from above, who is *our* mother.



We have the hope of the day to come, when all trouble and tribulation will be gone



We have the privilege of worshipping the God of glory *now* as citizens of the new heaven and new earth, by faith. We have the hope of the day to come, when all trouble and tribulation will be gone, and all nations will gather around the glorious throne. We will sing:

*'Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne, and to the
Lamb'! (Rev 7:10)*

We will sing this with joy and comfort and triumph, and we will never tire, and the joy and comfort and triumph will never cease. This is the promise of God to those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at his word.

But we must not just tremble at his words of promise. We must also tremble at his words of warning.

A word of warning for those who do not tremble at his word

While it is always nice to finish with the positive, that is not what God does as he finishes the book of Isaiah. In verse 2 God talks about those he esteems, but in verse 3 he talks about a different group. People who go to his temple to offer the sacrifices proscribed by God's law. However, they might as well splash pigs' blood on his altar, or even commit a homicide; that is how much God despises their sacrifices.

While these people offer sacrifices, they do not tremble before God's glory, and they do not tremble at God's word. Their attitude and approach to him is something quite different.

They go to God's temple and offer their sacrifices, but this flows from self-interest, not awe at God's glory. They choose their own way. *They* set the terms of their relationship with God. Their souls delight in abominations, and they choose the opposite of what delights God (Isa 66:3-4).

They would go to the temple and offer sacrifices, they would fast in sack cloth and ashes, but then they would cheat and exploit one another. They would seek the blessing of pagan gods, alongside YHWH. They would do the opposite of trembling at his word. They ignored his word.

In Acts, many centuries later, Stephen confronted the descendants of those whom Isaiah confronted. They had just rejected God's ultimate and definitive word to them. And Stephen said to them:

*'You stiff-necked people,
uncircumcised in heart and ears,
you always resist the Holy Spirit,
like your fathers.'* (Acts 7:51)

Stiff necked, refusing to bow in humility before God. Their hearts did not truly belong to the God of glory, and so their ears do not truly listen to the God of glory. Since God really is glorious, the outcome of persisting in that path must be what God says it is.

*For behold, the LORD will come
in fire, and his chariots like the
whirlwind, to render his anger in
fury, and his rebuke with flames
of fire. For by fire will the LORD
enter into judgement, and by his
sword, with all flesh; and those
slain by the LORD shall be many.
(Isa 66:15)*

God warned his people through the prophet Isaiah. But they did not listen, so after the great slaughter, the temple was destroyed, and they went into exile.

God warned a later generation through Jesus, the true trembler at God's word and himself God's Word. They also offered sacrifices and kept fasts, but they were deaf to the ultimate and decisive arrival of God's Word among them. And the judgement he promised came once again. After the great slaughter, that temple is no more, but is replaced by a new one that needs no mountain to stand upon.

Those events in history stand as warning signs of the final fate of all who ignore God's word instead of trembling at it, including those who are visible and active in his temple.

What does it mean to tremble at *this* word from God?

Firstly, we should heed the word of warning. In our various forms of pastoral ministry, we are engaged in the life of God's temple, just like the enemies of God in Isaiah 66. Like them, it is possible for us to do it to fulfil our own agendas and desires, instead of an out-working of our wonder at the glory of God, seen in the face of Christ.

It is possible for us to *not* listen to God, even while we do all the things in his temple, the church. Perhaps to hear the things we want to hear and ignore the things we don't. To handle his word carefully in the pulpit, but then ignore it in the rest of your ministry; to ignore what God says about love or patience of holiness as you step out of the pulpit into lounge rooms or staff meetings or your home.

We must repent and seek God's forgiveness and strength to change. We must tremble at God's word of rebuke so that we can tremble at his word of grace, in Christ.

Secondly, we should trust the word of promise. Some have been through the wringer in the last little while. Some of you feel like you are still in it and the handle is still turning. In the face of that, God's promise to you is, 'I see you and I care for you'. Trust that word.

Our God is glorious.

Through God's ultimate word in Christ, we have come to know and love and worship a God who is big and weighty and worthy, as Isaiah did.

Tremble at his word because you tremble at his glory. **ACR**

Preaching a good and powerful word



Paul Grimmond, Dean of Students,
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*The following is an edited transcript
from the Nexus 2023 Conference*

An uneasy relationship with the Scriptures

As we start to explore what it means to tremble at God's word, I want to suggest that our relationship with the Scriptures as God's word is more complex than most of us are willing to admit. On the one hand, we know that Scripture is powerful, it is the Word of God. The preacher's job is to get out of

the way so that God's powerful word can work in the hearts of people. We quote Spurgeon's famous, 'Defend the Bible, I'd sooner defend a lion. Just let the truth free and it will defend itself.' We exhort each other to 'let the word do the work' and we share those wonderful stories of people who were converted just by reading Scripture.

On this view, we as preachers are in danger of muddying the power and beauty and wonder of Scripture by anything that we say and do. Applying the word of God can feel like an activity where we move beyond the Scriptures and are taking responsibility for people's godliness into our hands rather than leaving it in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

However, it is easy to parrot the 'let the word for the work' line and naively misunderstand the power and responsibility we have in ministry. After all, we choose the books of the Bible we teach and the chunks they are taught in. Additionally, years are invested in Bible college education developing exegetical skills. Why do we invest so much time and money if the preacher is doing nothing?

A moment's thoughtful reflection should reveal that there are complex-

ities in what we espouse and what we do. I think we have what I might call an ‘uneasy’ relationship with Scripture.

What does it mean to be faithful Bible teachers? How powerful is God’s word? And what part do we play in bringing that word to bear and ministering it in people’s lives?

God’s powerful word

What God’s word does

A quick survey of the Scriptures reveals many ways that the power of God’s word is articulated.

God’s word **creates**. God said let there be and there was. Ex Nihilo. Out of nothing. God did not fashion the world out of what already existed. He spoke, and things that were not, suddenly were. God is the creator, and we are the creatures. God is powerful enough, simply by a word, to create.

The same word that creates also **reveals**. The God who spoke creation into being spoke to that creation. He made himself known. He explained himself to us, his world to us and he explained us to us (1 Cor 2:11; Rom 7:7).

The word which creates and reveals must also be the word that **judges**. A holy and pure God cannot speak to fallen and sinful creatures without them experiencing the awfulness of sin and rebellion against God (Heb 4:12-13).

It is with relief that the same word that creates, reveals, and judges, is also the word which **raises the dead** (John 11:43-44; 1 Pet 1:23). The Word which made something out of nothing is the same Word that brings life from the dead. God’s people are declared right,

forgiven, cleansed, and made holy by the work of Christ brought to bear in our lives through the Word of God.

And so, the word of God is powerful enough to **relate** us rightly to God and to each other, and to **transform** us to be like the one who was raised from the dead as our Lord and friend.

We believe that the word of God is powerful, but how does it do all these things? How does it reveal, judge, relate us to God and transform us?

How God’s word does what it does

God’s relationship with his word

When we talk about God and his word, we speak of a relationship that is utterly unique in our experience. God’s word is not like our word in at least two very significant ways. Firstly, his words always represent him truly. There is no gap between what he says and who he is. Secondly, God is always present

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It is with relief that the same word that creates, reveals, and judges, is also the word which raises the dead.

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when his word is spoken. This is a very big difference from us. When we speak, our words can be reported by others. They can come in a letter, an email or a text that can be read and interpreted apart from our presence. But whenever and wherever God’s word is read, God is there. He is there working for salvation or for judgement.



Image: Imaisa-Blue | istockphoto.com

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We live in a world where goodness and authority are opposed.

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For both reasons, God's word is full of his power and goodness. God's word does what God does because it comes with all the power, authority and goodness of God who is at work in his world.

We live in a world where goodness and authority are opposed. In fact, goodness is what is necessary to stand up to authority because, by and large, authority is viewed as evil. Authority restricts my autonomy, and my humanness. And so, what is good is what thwarts authority and allows autonomy to thrive.

Of course, we know from the Scriptures, that God's world works in exactly the opposite way. The acceptance of God's authority is fundamental to goodness because God is fundamentally

good. There is no alternate truth, no container of righteousness, no abstract definition of good that stands over and against God in order that we might judge God; no, biblically, good is what God is. He is the origin and definition of all that is good.

We live in a world that wants to define goodness apart from God, and God will ultimately judge it. But this also means that when he speaks into our world, we ought to expect people to reject His goodness at every turn. This is always the way the world has been: Satan questioned God's goodness and Adam and Eve rejected God's authority.

The prophets spoke and were scorned. We live in the last days *when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths* (2 Tim 4:3-4).

God's goodness and authority are mutually entwined in his person. They are deeply related issues in all of Scripture, fundamental to our understanding of sin and the human condition. In our sin we have rejected God's authority and in so doing rejected God's goodness.

Nevertheless, God's word has the power to judge us, raise us, relate us to him and transform us because God is present with his word and his word never fails to reveal him perfectly – in all his goodness and power.

God speaks intelligible words

God speaks intelligible words. They are not words that mean nothing until the Spirit changes their meaning in our hearing. In fact, the key issue as we come to the Scriptures is not so much comprehension, but obedience or disobedience. It is not that the Bible cannot be understood but that we refuse to trust the words God speaks to us. This word is powerful enough, when God chooses, to overcome our wilful misunderstanding and correct our vision, indeed reshape our future.

The words of Scripture are the words by which God creates faith, and so rightly relates us to him. These words overcome hard hearts and bring spiritual reformation by relating us to Christ in such a way that God dwells in us by

His Spirit. And that happens through the meaning of the words that God has given to us.

So can I encourage you when you get up to preach or teach, in whatever situation, that you don't pray prayers that sound like God is going to take what is incomprehensible and make it comprehensible. Pray for God to lead us to trust and obedience. That is a much better prayer.

God's word situates us in his story

God's word relates us to himself, to Christ, to his people and to his world by situating us in a story. The Scriptures do not just paint a picture of who we are. They show you who you are by situating you in a story with a long and important past, and a glorious and vital future – it is an irrepressibly eschatological word.

Understanding where we are in history, knowing our past and being able to see our future helps us to make decisions about how to live to please our heavenly Father now.

God intends for his word to be ministered

This word that God gives us is intended to be a ministered word; it is intended to be preached. The truth about Jesus' work of death and resurrection had to be preached into all the world (Luke 24:44-47). And so, Paul is commissioned to take that gospel into all the world. Wherever God establishes churches, elders ought to be put in place because this truth is to be guarded, error is to be refuted, and God's people need to be led in hearing and responding to the word (Titus 1:5).

Furthermore, Paul encourages Timothy that he is responsible for the salvation of others.

1 Timothy 4:15–16 (ESV) —

¹⁵Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

It is easy to get caught up working out the details of God's sovereignty and human responsibility, but we shouldn't. Of course, everyone who is saved is chosen by God, granted his Spirit, and raised from death to life by the power that was at work in Christ when God raised him from the dead. However, that does not remove the responsibility of ministers for the salvation of those over whom they have been placed. We can see this in our favourite passage about Scripture:

2 Timothy 3:16–4:2 (ESV) —

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. ^{4:1}I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Scripture is God's word – breathed out by him and profitable, useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16–4:2). However, that is not a stand-alone statement. The point is that the word of God brings about the completion of the man of God and equips him for every good work. The man of God phrase here is not first and foremost about every Christian, but about the leaders of God's people.

Timothy will stand fast by being equipped by the word of God for every good work. While he means 'every good work', Paul then proceeds to speak of the particular good work that Timothy has been set aside to do. The charge is eschatological and weighty. The charge is to preach the very word by which he has been equipped. Notice the nature of his preaching – reprove, rebuke, exhort – and the overlap with the words used to describe Scripture. The preacher is to do what God is doing in Scripture.

The man of God needs to be equipped for every good work by the word that is preached before he can do anything. We need to be chastised by God's truth; have our error pointed out; be rebuked and corrected. Our lives are to be soaked and shaped by the truths we are called to speak to others. We are to act as God's servants, showing neither fear nor favour.

How long since you have been struck by the significance of what you are being called to preach? How long since you have been rebuked and repented? How long since your worldview has been challenged?

Humility under God means a will-

ingness to stand and do what God is doing in Scripture.

Standing in humble submission as preachers of the Word (reflections on Titus 2)

We stand in a place and time with particular pressures to turn away from the truth of God's word, even in the name of what we think God is calling us to do.

In Titus 2 the Apostle Paul instructs Titus on his role as a leader and servant of God's people. He begins the chapter by instructing him to 'teach what accords with sound doctrine'.

What follows is a section in which he is told how to instruct older and younger, men and women. For each group, the way they are to live is the very thing that will make the gospel attractive or keep the haters at bay.

However, the things that are supposed to adorn the truth are the very things that now cause people to revile the word of God. Train the young women to love their husbands and children? Outrageous! To think that encouraging them to submit to their own husband might keep the word of God being reviled is stupid. The fact that we believe and teach this leads to precisely the opposite of what Paul thought that it would.

So, should we re-appropriate the truths of Christian living for our age? Learn to live it in a way that makes it pleasing to the appetites and delicacies of our age?

No! A careful reading of Titus 2 suggests exactly the opposite:

Firstly, the context of the whole

passage is the sound doctrine that is in keeping with the gospel (Titus 2:1). Paul is adamant that the commands that he gives to each group are what accords with sound doctrine, and not just what will make that doctrine attractive. Additionally, this way of life is in accord with what Christ has done in giving himself up to train us to say 'yes' to godliness (Titus 2:11).

Secondly, people living this way will adorn the gospel because there is a way of life that comes with Christ Jesus as Lord that has an internal consistency. When we live in line with the life that we have been given by the risen Christ, we adorn his doctrine by living as he calls us to live. The various truths of the Christian life outlined in this passage accord with sound doctrine in all ages and in all places.



Paul is adamant that the commands that he gives to each group are what accords with sound doctrine, and not just what will make that doctrine attractive.



Thirdly, not everything Paul says here was attractive to the people in his day (Titus 1:12). Not everything that Paul espoused in chapter two was attractive to all members of Cretan society. We are quick to renounce things in this passage that make us feel uncomfortable, but Paul, who was very keen to commend the gospel, was aware that elements of the behaviour he was calling people to would be rejected. Those

who scorn will ultimately be silenced on the day of judgement by the faithful obedience of God's people to his word.

Preaching a good and powerful word

The power of God at work in his word is a power that God intended to be exercised by the faithful ministry of his word. Ministers are sinful people who need to be rebuked, corrected, and shaped by the word that they preach. But, in God's economy, his plan was always to have sinful people preach it and minister it to others.

We must never lose sight of the call to let the word do the work, but never assume that labouring in the word and with the word is a failure to let the word do the work. By God's incredible grace and mercy, and by his unfathomable power, he wills to work in and through his word as we minister it.

In the final verse of Titus 2, Paul called Titus to:

Titus 2:15 (ESV) —

¹⁵ *Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.*

The task for the faithful pastor is to cling to the truths of Christ revealed in God's word. In every age, that will involve some things that are currently 'acceptable' or 'attractive' to the world around us and some things that are not. But our job, fundamentally, is to humbly submit to God's word and to let it take us where it wants to rather than reading it through our cultural lens. The call of God in his word is to humble submission and obedience.

God is powerfully present in all his goodness and power in and through his word. This word which he speaks to us is an intelligible word that helps us to see ourselves in light of God's great eschatological story. This is the word that he charges his ministers to preach.

So, watch your life and doctrine closely. Because by so doing you will save both yourselves and your hearers. This word is the word that creates, reveals, judges, raises the dead, relates us to our Father and transforms us into the likeness of Christ. It is capable of equipping you for every good work, and particularly for the good work of proclamation. **ACR**

Will we be teachers who tremble at his word?



Phil Colgan, Senior Minister, St George North Anglican Church

This is an abbreviated version of a talk given at the recent Nexus conference interacting with the talks of Craig Schafer and Paul Grimmond (also included in this issue of the ACR Journal).

When I applied to Moore College, the application form asked you to list out the five most influential books that you had read. One of the books I put down was *The Everlasting God* by Broughton Knox.

As a young Christian I was blown away by one element of his argument in particular: the fact that what

is true about God, his character, is also true about God's word, as, unlike for us, there is no gap between God and his word. God's word is good and true – because God is good and faithful.

In many ways, this is what it means to be an evangelical. We believe that God has revealed himself in his word, and so that word is true and good. Therefore, we trust it no matter what. God's word is the authority over our tradition, our experience, and our reason.

Since we believe that about God and his word, we tremble at it. We tremble at it knowing that it is good. We believe it is good even when it judges us, confounds us, or subverts every concept we have of goodness.

My purpose today is to get us thinking on the implications of this. If this is what we believe, what impact will it have on our life and ministry? What does it look like for us to tremble at God's word?

Trembling at his word in our own lives

How can we teach and model what it is to tremble at God's word if we are not believing it and trembling at it ourselves?

Whenever I read the Psalms, I am

struck by the pictures of people who delight in the word.

Psalm 1:2-3 –

Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside streams of water that bears its fruit in season.

Psalm 119:97ff –

How I love Your instruction! It is my meditation all day long [...] How sweet Your word is to my taste – sweeter than honey in my mouth.

Before we ever dare think of ourselves as a teacher of others, we need to be people who love God's word ourselves, who meditate on God's word every day, who know that God's word is as sweet as honey. Yet also remember that it is the good word of the God who is to be feared. We need to remember that being people who soak in God's word is more important than any strategy we develop, any system we establish and



We need to remember that being people who soak in God's word is more important than any strategy we develop.



even more important than working on our preaching. In that light, the best habit I have tried to cultivate in ministry is to never do my quiet times on what I am teaching. I always try to be reading a part of God's word just for the sake of reading God's word myself.

More than that, we also need to make sure that we are letting God's word do its work in us (Hebrews 4). We need to be people who are being rebuked, changed, and working to bring ourselves into line with the radical challenges of God's word.

How will we preach the radical gospel if we do not live it ourselves?

Teaching the church to tremble at his word

Our job as preachers is to lead our people in trembling at the word of God. Just like Isaiah or Jeremiah called on Israel to do. Peter tells us that when we speak, we speak the very words of God (1 Pet 4:11). When we teach, we are not entertainers, not even just teachers; we are speaking the good and true word of God.

2 Timothy 4:1-2 –

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. [ESV]

There are three words from this passage that help me think about what I am trying to do when I preach:

Firstly, I need to be **faithful**. I want to proclaim *The Word*, regardless of whether it is convenient or fashionable. Secondly, I need to be **prophetic**. I need to call people to a response of faith and repentance. Preaching is not

simply information sharing; like the Old Testament prophets, I am calling for the response God wants. Thirdly, what I say needs to be **eschatological**. We need to speak to the times we are in and help people wait well for Jesus.

But what does it look like to do this task well? To teach people to tremble at the word of God?

At its heart I believe that we need to teach God's word **boldly** and **unapologetically**. Boldly and unapologetically in terms of our content firstly, but also, and just as importantly, in our tone and manner.

Do our sermons say to our people (both in their content and in how they are delivered): 'God's word is good, and our world is foolish for not understanding it, so turn away from the world and come and taste the goodness of God'?

Do our sermons say to people: 'This is God speaking to you this morning; sit up and take notice'?

I sometimes wonder if much of modern preaching is too apologetic to do that well – in every sense of that word apologetic. I speak judging myself here before I dare judge others, but I get the sense that we have fallen into the trap of believing that God's word will be unpalatable even to the people of God. I fear that when we preach on difficult topics, where we are increasingly out of step with the world – men and women in the church or family; or sexual ethics – we are too worried that our people will find God's word hard to stomach. So, we preach what I call apologetically – we start on the back foot, conceding that you will find this word unpalatable, rather than on the front foot and assum-

ing people believe God's word is good.

I also wonder if apologetics (in the more technical sense of the word), is too prominent in our preaching? Do we treat our people like God needs to justify himself to them and prove to them why they should accept his word – as if Christians are meant to have a choice in the matter?

I remember many years ago hearing a talk on 1 Timothy 2, on men and women and teaching in the church where I agreed with all the preacher's conclusions. However, I left uncomfortable because the preacher began by saying, 'This is a really hard word, and many of us will struggle with it. I must admit I don't like what it says, but it's God's word so we have to accept it.'

On the positive side, at least he modelled letting God's word be the final authority. Yet, I wonder if he should not have got up into that pulpit that day if that was where he was at. Surely he needed to teach that God's plan for men and women in the family and church is good for us – it is to be delighted in. Yes, it might be helpful to admit that it is counter-cultural, and that some people might struggle to accept it, but don't legitimise that. Perhaps even take people through our own journey of coming to see how this part of God's word is good. However, if we dare to teach God's word to others, our job is to show its goodness, to model and to teach an attitude of delighting in and trembling at the word of God.

Now, 20 years after hearing that sermon, I am fearful that many of our next generation will be lost to the gospel if we are too apologetic on the

question of sexual ethics. I wonder if we are so worried that we will lose them that we leave them confused rather than saying straight and clear that God says all sexual activity outside of marriage is a sin. Not only that, but that this is a good word from the Lord that expresses what is best for us.

If we believe God's word is good we should communicate it without caveat or apology. Our young people do need to be reminded that all people are made in the image of God, and that all people need to be loved. However, that is not the part of Scripture's teaching that people are struggling to fit with their worldview. It is actually the bit that fits very nicely with everything else they are hearing. If we love our people, we need to make clear exactly the parts of God's word that they will not hear anywhere else – including clarity on the nature of sin and God's judgement. We need to trust that God's word is good, and it is what God's people need to hear.

My purpose today is to raise ideas to stimulate our thinking. One thought I have is whether we are still impacted by the seeker service model and believe that we are preaching first and foremost to the outsider rather than the believer?

If we are always preaching to the outsider, we may not say with clarity what the insider needs to hear loud and clear. Our ecclesiology reminds us that church is for the equipping of believers – it should be intelligible to the outsider but not aimed at the outsider. We preach to the gathered assembly of God to equip them and encourage them to persevere in the gospel and not give up the fight, to remind them that what

they hear for the rest of the week is nonsense. We need to preach to strengthen the people of God, and that means being bold and unapologetic.

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul explains his work amongst the Corinthian church.

For though we live in the body, we do not wage war in an unspiritual way, since the weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments and every high-minded thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to obey Christ.

Preaching the word of God means wielding God's powerful weapon – the sword of the Spirit. Our job is to destroy the strongholds of the world in people's minds and to use God's word to demolish the arguments of this foolish world. In other words, we need to be worldview shapers in our preaching. It is our job to expose the foolishness of worldly wisdom and to help our people hate the lies of the world.

In Psalm 119, the person who loves the word, also hates the world.

Psalm 119:104 –
*I gain understanding from Your precepts;
therefore I hate every false way.*

It is our job to create a healthy cynicism towards the world's way of thinking and then to help people build up a Christian worldview.

In *When God's Voice is Heard*, Phillip Jensen speaks about how it is not the

preacher's job to change the Bible to make it more understandable to people; it is our job to change people's understanding: 'Preachers are not to change the words so that people will understand them, but to change people's understanding so that they will respond to the words'.¹

However, 30 years later we are in a time where it is not understanding God's word that is the issue for Christians, it is accepting that it is good and right and true. So, I think I'd take his quote now and adjust it: *'Preachers are not to apologise for God and make God's word palatable so that people will accept it, but to challenge people's attitudes so that they will respond to the words as good.'*

Phil Colgan (with thanks to Phillip Jensen)

Of course, as we are bold and unapologetic, we must also be compassionate and gracious – never one without the other. However, true compassion and grace requires crystal clear clarity and boldness.

A quick specific example or application to think about when it comes to sermon introductions: We often think that our introduction has to capture people's attention, which sounds good, and of course we want to make it easy for people to listen. But by doing this each week, are we in danger of creating an environment that says to Christians that they need to be cajoled into listening to the word of God?

Often, I like to start my sermon by just saying something like, 'How good is this, that we get to sit and listen

together to the word of God? Do you realise how good this is? God is speaking to us this morning by his word. Let's open our Bibles and get on the edge of our seats like we should. Come with me to verse 1.'

I am not preaching to a new audience every week. I am preaching to the people of God who know that God's



I am preaching to the people of God who know that God's word is good – they shouldn't need to always be entertained into listening.



word is good – they shouldn't need to always be entertained into listening.

The irony is that this can have a powerful impact on the outsider as they see the people around them open their Bibles and sit forward to listen even though they haven't been told a funny story to get their attention. It may well make them say, 'Wow, these people really think this book is the word of God!'

I wonder whether too often we look to evangelists as our model of preachers too often – that is, people who are always preaching to a new audience and probably do have to 'earn a hearing'. Perhaps this is a different task to how most of us are meant to preach week in and week out to help the people of God tremble at his word?

1 Phillip D Jensen, 'Preaching That Changes the Church', in *When God's Voice is Heard*.

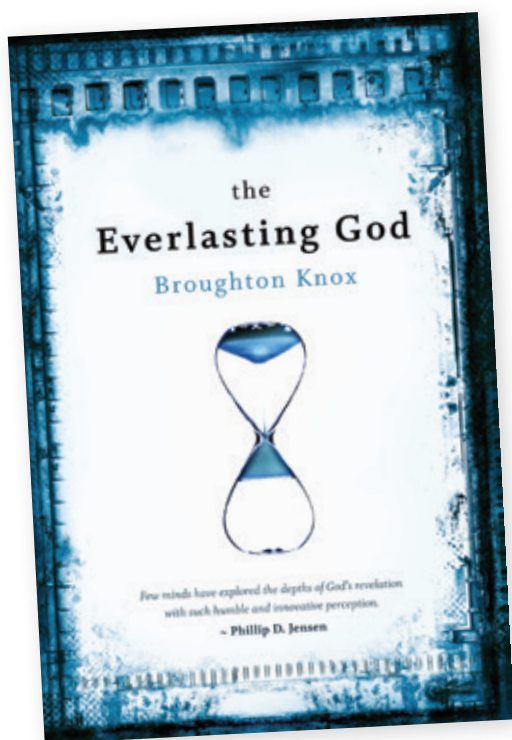
Trembling at his word as we speak to the world

Whatever way we communicate to the world, it has to show that we believe that God's word is true and good. This will mean we must have no expectation of being considered reasonable.

The apostolic ministry in the book of Acts gives a clear model for engaging with the world. The sermons in Acts are not interested in holding back in the interests of preaching another day. Every speech, whether to Jews or Gentiles, is about proclaiming that Jesus is Lord, God has set a day of judgement, and we must respond.

The apostolic preaching in Acts demonstrates that the preacher's job is clarity and boldness, more than relevance and accommodation.

The book I mentioned at the start, *The Everlasting God*, was written in 1982.



Yet, Broughton Knox made an incredible claim that few evangelicals were preaching the gospel because they did not preach with boldness about judgement:

A gospel which contains judgement as a prominent strand, as does the New Testament Gospel, is relevant to men and women everywhere and in every age and culture. It does not need indigenisation, so popular a catchword today, but requires only clarity of language and faithfulness in proclamation. [...] A theology that proclaims the God who saves from judgement by forgiveness through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ does not need to be adapted for Australian audiences [...] Asian Christians and Western Christians need the same Gospel and all are able to understand it, no matter how different the cultural backgrounds of the hearers and preachers may be, so long as the proclamation is true to the New Testament gospel of judgment and salvation from judgement.²

Of course we try to 'meet people where they are at', but our aim is to declare boldly and unapologetically the Lordship of Christ.

The other part of the New Testament that helps us understand how to speak to our world is the whole argument of 1 Peter. Peter grounds us in our hope in Christ and what that means for how we

2 D. Broughton Knox, *The Everlasting God*, Matthias Media, 2009, p36.

live in this world. Chapter 1 says that because we have an imperishable hope, we don't conform to our old ways of thinking and living. Therefore, we have a new identity built on Christ, as God's people, called to proclaim his praises (chapter 2). These truths lead to the reality about how we relate to our world.

The height of the argument comes at 1 Peter 2:11-12.

Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation.

Peter is saying that as we seek to express our new identity, we *will be* 'weirdoes' in this world. However, as we seek to live for Christ, we will also be a conundrum to our world. They will not respect us – how can the foolishness of the world respect people living by the wisdom of the cross? They won't respect us – they will even accuse us of evil. But we will be a conundrum.

They will say, 'He believes these abominable truths: that the gods are a figment of our imagination; that sex is just for a heterosexual marriage relationship... but he's the guy who helps me when I'm in trouble. But she's the person whose word I can rely on.' What a conundrum!

In the argument of 1 Peter, as the world is confronted by the conundrum of calling you evil but also observing your good works, you will then get an opportunity to explain that weird conundrum:

...but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. (1 Pet 3:15)

This is not talking about apologetics per se, but instead evangelism. In the context, 'your defence' and 'the reason for your hope' is the gospel – the fact that you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Why is the argument of 1 Peter so important? Simply because if we try to make our message palatable, to be seen as reasonable, we will never be the conundrum that will make people ask us the reason for our hope.

We need to be, and we need to teach our congregations to be, people who tremble at the word of God. Only then will we and they be ready to be a conundrum to our world. Only then will Christians be ready to sometimes be called evil yet confound people with their goodness. Only then will other people want to know why they are such a conundrum.

But of course, our people will not do that if their pastors are themselves not trembling at God's word. **ACR**

Reflections: An interview with Phillip Jensen



Ben George, Assistant Minister, Auburn & Newington Anglican Churches

The following is a reflection on an interview with Phillip Jensen at Nexus 2023 Conference

“I’d rather have Adolf Hitler teach the history of the Jews, than you [Phillip Jensen] teach New Testament Greek’ [...] you know you are on to a good thing when that is the case”.

These are the sorts of statements that meant this interview was dripping with wisdom and truth, worth thinking on, and for which we ought to

give thanks to God for the ways he has worked in the lives of evangelical ministers who have gone before us. Phillip was recounting a time during his university ministry days, when he was asked to teach New Testament Greek, and was taken to task by a panel of academics who were against him teaching. One of those academics screamed the above quoted line at him. I can only imagine what that felt like, in that situation, at roughly the same age as I am now, being grilled by an educational institution that up to that point I was committed to, and thought there was great value in, for the betterment of society.

To be clear, this statement wasn’t effective because of its shock value (as shocking as it sounded live), but it articulated the reality of what it truly means to be in the trenches as we preach the same Word that holds our consciences captive. It gave us a concrete example of what we see clearly when we scour the Scriptures, drink deeply from its unbelievably beautiful truths, and tremble at his Word: God’s Word is divisive. That seemed to be the thread throughout the interview: **if we tremble at his Word, there is an inevitability of conflict.**

Jesus said as much throughout the Gospel accounts (e.g., Luke 12:49-56), as does the Apostle Paul in his evocative image of the aroma of Christ being the fragrance of death to death, and life to life (2 Cor 2:15-16). It is noteworthy, verse 15, that it is we who are the aroma of Christ, for we can't actually separate the nature of the Word, and the ramifications of us trembling at that Word and therefore being divisive in the words we faithfully speak. As Phillip put it, "they [the world] will hate the message, and so they will hate the messenger".

The post-lunch session at the Nexus conference 2023 was an extended interview with Phillip Jensen, where he helped us grapple with what it looks like to tremble at the Word of God while in the heat of battle. It was an enthralling interview, with jokes, pleasing cricketing analogies, but more importantly a weightiness that caused all of us to ponder our service of the Lord Jesus, the challenge and privilege that it involves, and our motivations. I think the interview caused in most people a dose of healthy introspection that did us a lot of good as we were both refreshed and made to think. As I reflect on what I heard, I was personally challenged on a number of fronts.

Although it was at the very end of the interview, I was struck most significantly by Phillip's response to his personal battle while trembling at the Word. Although he spoke in general terms, the reality of battling sin not getting easier struck me more than I thought it would. I would have subscribed to all that he was saying about sin and its persistent threat until Jesus

returns, but the thought of being *more* conscious of my sin over time brought me to tears in my car on the drive home. Sin is bad already – and I have experienced my own stupid sinfulness and the consequences of the sinfulness of others on my life. To think that it doesn't get easier over fifty or more years of ministry is daunting. It reminded me that I am weak and sinful, and that I ought to turn to Jesus in every aspect of my ministry.



Standing firm in what the Bible says invites attack from the devil, the *Great Deceiver*.



Phillip made me think afresh about my constant need for repentance, and the reality of my dependence on God and his Word. His example of the spiritual attack that came when he pushed against proponents of the charismatic movement was a timely reminder to all that trembling at the Word means having faith in the Word. Standing firm in what the Bible says invites attack from the devil, the *Great Deceiver*. So when lies come rushing towards you, and you are attacked from all corners in experiences that may cause you to think you are wrong by sowing seeds of doubt, or circumstances that experientially may give ammunition for others to question your understanding of the Word all the more, remember that Christianity is a covenantal theology. God gives us his Word, and we ought to have faith in the word of his promise.

If nothing else, this was reinforced in Phillip's experiences with the Christian Union (CU) on campus at university. He spoke of the EU public lectures, which had essentially been 'washed by the rapid changes to society' at the time. These lectures were not about digging into the Bible to hear God speak, they were about social philosophy, where experts defended Christianity on particular topics of the day. On top of that, the CU did not study the Bible in smaller groups, rather (intentionally or unintentionally) propagating a Marxist agenda with 'cell groups'. It meant that when Phillip started a Bible study on campus, he was no longer welcome on the AFES platform until Andrew Reid was appointed the AFES General Secretary in the 1980s. Phillip also spoke of the influence of science in the 1960s during his time as a student. The inextricable link that society at the time had drawn between science and the truth, meant that the president of his Christian group didn't believe in answered prayer, because prayer could not stand up to scientific inquiry.

As unbelievable as all this might seem, the reality is that it stemmed from the great lies that were permeating society at the time. The lies of the *goodness* of science, Humanism and philosophical materialism were at odds with a Christian worldview. What had caused Phillip difficulty with university authorities was that he trembled at the Word. He saw the importance of studying the Bible, started teaching the Bible, and was attacked for it.

Another thing that particularly struck me during the interview was

Phillip's comment that 'we sit in a situation we have inherited'. In a rebuke to me and my lack of understanding of the movement and history of thinking in Australia, Phillip helpfully showed how our evangelical history in Sydney has fared in trembling at the Word. When asked by Tony Payne what teaching has been the hardest to tremble at, Phillip spoke about philosophical material. He spoke also about the rapid changes in technology, and the impact that had on the sexual revolution and how men and women were to relate to each other. It was very helpful to see the different strings being brought together as Phillip showed how the underpin-



Phillip was quite clear that this was our problem as evangelicals: that we did not tremble at the Word of God.



nings of feminism included money and wealth, and further how Marxist thinking on power imbalance also played a significant part in the shift in thinking. He explained the importance of the difficult battle for trembling at the Word that Sydney Diocese went through over the issue of the ordination of women.

Understanding these things were significant precisely because the evangelicals of the time had to guard against being washed by the views of the time, just as we are in danger of that today. Pitted against wealth and power imbalance for example, it was necessary to tremble at the Word of God. It was necessary because objective truth comes from the Word, and ought to flow forth and permeate every aspect of society. Phillip was quite clear that this was our problem as evangelicals: that we did not tremble at the Word of God. A particularly striking example alluded to in the interview was the giving in on changing speech. Phillip referred to the Orwellian principle of how changing language is how you change things. In other words, if you control vocabulary, you limit how much people can think. In 1984, Syme gives this explanation to Winston:

Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all

*its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten.*¹

Basically, with the change of words, eventually *big brother* will be able to control people into doing what they are told with no questions asked. Perhaps in a small (but by no means insignificant) example of this, Phillip referred to the old adage first spoken by Lord Acton to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887: 'power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. This line gets thrown around with gay abandon in our contemporary vernacular, but it is profoundly untrue, isn't it? God is all-powerful, and he is in no way corrupt! As Phillip points out, it is actually the problem of sin that uses power incorrectly. It made me ponder where else we have let things slip in language, and not bothered to stand firm as we trembled at the Word of God in the face of persecution. In this sense, we owe a great debt of gratitude to our evangelical Anglican forebears, who held to the Word of God on debates around feminism, and is the reason why the homosexuality debate looks very different in Sydney amongst evangelical Christians to many other parts of Australia and elsewhere.

Not only did we need to tremble at the Word in light of rapid changes to thinking in society in times past, but it is also just as necessary for us now. Otherwise, as evangelicals, we are always on the defensive and are required to stubbornly hold a position, rather than show that God's Word to us

1 George Orwell, 1984 (Memoria, 2022), p 56.

is good. We ought not to think about ‘giving in’ on our position, but rather think on what God says is good (which is good precisely because he says it is good) and then go about doing it. We ought to learn from what was at times a Pharisaical stance (as Phillip put it) of evangelicals on debates like women’s ordination, which ended up being about drawing lines rather than speaking the good Word of God.

In an interview that went for less than an hour, I was profoundly challenged to understand the extent to which trembling at God’s Word sits at the heart of gospel ministry, and as such

ought to shape every aspect of our lives as ministers of the gospel. It has also given me an appreciation of those ministers who have brought the evangelical Sydney Anglican Diocese to where it is today. Finally, an interview like this should cause all of us to pause and pray, as we ask ourselves: ‘... who is sufficient for these things?’ (2 Cor 2:16b). **ACR**

The interview, titled ‘Tremble at his word in the heat of battle’ is available at twoways.news

Displaying God's love daily

School chaplains and gospel ministry in Diocesan schools



Steve Tong has a PhD in the English Reformation, and is a lay member of Synod.

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Colossians 4:5-6)

Since the prevailing culture of our society has moved so far away from the Judeo-Christian roots of Western civilisation, it is an exciting – albeit challenging – time to be a Christian. Ministers and gospel workers in each parish are faced with big questions about how to edify the saints and engage non-believers. The same is true of school chaplains. In some respects, they are forced to square up to these realities in more direct ways, and more frequently, compared to parish workers. School chaplains

play a unique role in commending the gospel specifically to younger generations and have an opportunity to reach those who may not have any other connection to a church community. Many children and teenagers have never heard of Jesus, are suspicious of Christianity, and/or are highly influenced by the prevailing cultural norms of the day. Thus, school chaplains, as well as those who are part of their ministry team, work at the interchange of where the gospel meets the world in very real ways. It is a task that comes with its fair share of joys and challenges. But at its heart, school ministry is a daily opportunity to display the grace and truth of God's love to those who have not previously encountered it.

What follows is a summary of thoughts provided by several school chaplains from across Sydney Diocese. The ACR interviewed both men and women from the South Coast, Eastern Suburbs, Inner West, Northern Suburbs, and the Hills District who are directly involved in gospel ministry either as school chaplains or youth

workers.¹ The demographics of these schools varies widely from single-sex to co-educational schools, wealthy families to middle-class to lower socio-economic background, and multicultural, multiethnic, and multifaith backgrounds too. We asked each person the same set of questions and have arranged their responses accordingly below. We hope that these are a source of encouragement, and that they also act as a spur to rectors and layfolk to be more proactive in their partnership with those involved with school ministry.

Two key practical applications stand out. First, parish churches can be more intentional with their corporate prayer life for those in school ministry. This goes beyond praying for the SRE teachers in local public schools. Sydney Diocese has a golden opportunity to reach the world through the network of Anglican schools. Parents are increasingly choosing to educate their children in private schools, and many deliberately choose Anglican schools because the brand is trusted. It is therefore incumbent on parish churches to support this ministry, and an important part of that support is prayer.



A legitimate question raised from the coalface of children's and youth ministry, then, is 'how outwardly faced is your ordinary Sunday service?'



Second, is that school chaplains are asking parish churches to rethink the way they conduct public worship. Do not be alarmed – this is not a call to throw out the Prayer Book, or to reinvent the wheel. Public worship needs to be centred and grounded in God's word. However, there is cause for alarm. One school that we spoke to reported that, having taken their students on an edu-

cational excursion to a local parish church, the sermon for the evening congregation lasted a full 53 minutes. Not only were the students bored stiff, but many negative stereotypes were reinforced such that the returning students swore never to return to a church service. A legitimate question raised from the coalface of children's and youth ministry, then, is 'how outwardly faced is your ordinary Sunday service?'

There is no denying that the cultural moment we are currently in has and continues to undermine the gospel. But we must also ask hard questions of ourselves. To what extent is the cultural gap between the parish boundaries and the rest of society too wide to bridge? In what ways can we continue to show God's love to the world while loving God's word? Paul's words to the Colossians are a good reminder here. Let's encourage and support those in school ministry to continue to be wise in their actions, with conversations seasoned with salt and full of grace. And let the rest of us consider how we can be wise in the way we act toward outsiders.

1 Due to legal reasons, we are not publishing individuals' names, or the schools in which they work.

Questions:

1. Identify some of the joys of ministry in a school setting

Respondent 1: There are many joys in our school setting: the majority of students who come to our school have little to no knowledge of Jesus or the Bible, and so we have an incredible opportunity to introduce them through weekly chapel services, biblical studies classes and personal relationships over a matter of years, not simply as a once off. A particular joy is seeing our older Christian students grow as they lead our voluntary Christian group and care for our younger students.

Respondent 2: There are many joys of ministry in a school setting. Those include the opportunity (in a faith-based school such as this) to openly and consistently share the gospel of Jesus with a community who – without a connection to a school such as this – simply might not hear it. I regularly talk to students who before arriving at the college had never had a conversation about God in their lives or known someone who was a Christian. That is a huge opportunity! And it's a great joy to be able to direct young people – whether they are 8 or 18 – to the hope, peace and purpose that Jesus offers.

Respondent 3: School ministry brings us into contact with thousands of students who would not actively seek out Christian faith or church attendance. It is a privilege to be in their world and share the gospel with them. A joy of ministry in this context is seeing some become Christians, especially when they go on to share their faith with their family. Voluntary lunch time groups, discipleship, Christian Studies classes or even the more formal Chapel services all play their role. My observation is that the students themselves are the most effective evangelists to their peers so watching them invite or share the gospel with one another brings deep joy.

Another joy is seeing students live out their faith in front of their friends. Even in Anglican schools, Christians can feel like 'exiles scattered' (1 Pet 1:1) in the world. Observing students gain the courage to signal their faith or articulate an answer to a faith-question is marvellous to see. Schools are also a wonderful context for training in ministry skills as many students are looking for leadership opportunities. Channelling this desire towards ministry settings such as running a small group, giving a talk or sharing a testimony can be a good way to foster students' desire to lead, while at the same time shaping leadership around Christian service.

Respondent 4: Ministry in a school setting is daily exciting, fast-paced, and a little unpredictable, but practically it's a long road of persuasion. I have the privilege of talking to all K-6 students about God several times a week for 40 weeks a year, for 7 years (for some of them!). Schools are unique places where students and staff can consider and discuss God's word together in the context of long-term relationships built on trust and where open-minded inquiry is encouraged.



Photo: Monkey Business Images | shutterstock.com

Like all teachers, I love the ‘ah ha’ moments for students: when Kindy students discover Christmas is about a birthday; or when the idea that God has always been there starts to make sense; or seeing students captivated by the details of the Exodus week after week, and then to see them join the dots with the truth that Jesus’ blood protects all those ‘under it’ in God’s greatest rescue. And that’s just a few of the highlights before we even consider learning to pray, singing God’s praises together, and answering questions from the challenging to the quirky!

Respondent 5: Working with students and staff as they learn and grow over a number of years is a great joy. In the school environment you travel with students, experience many of the corporate and collective activities like sports carnivals and camps. Within their spiritual formation, it is a joy to see students grow in their knowledge of Jesus and the Bible and especially the encouragement of faith in our Student Christian groups.

2. Describe the challenges of ministry in this current cultural moment

Respondent 1: Some of our current challenges include breaking down misconceptions about Christianity, for example that it is oppressive, sexist and discriminatory. On a more positive note – there are also many ministry opportunities that are waiting to be taken, however, lack of time and full schedules mean that we can’t do all that we would like.

Respondent 2: Those opportunities also present their challenges, of course. More and more of our students are largely un-churched. At a practical level, this means that teaching the Bible to those with limited or no biblical literacy is more difficult than it would once have been. There is also the challenge that in a wider cultural discussion, faith is increasingly derided on the basis of what are considered

to be unnecessary or even unacceptable positions on matters of morality. This can become a 'bug on the windshield' of a young person's view on the world; obstructing students from even seeing the picture of God's character and grace laid out in Scripture because they cannot see past matters on which Christian teaching stands in great contrast to our accepted cultural positions on those matters.

Respondent 3: While the specifics of this cultural moment create a new look for challenges to the gospel, the underlying condition of human sin, spiritual blindness, pride and individualism remain the central challenges to receiving the gospel.

The inherited apologetic approaches of twenty or more years ago, which focus on the historicity of the Bible, appear to be waning in effectiveness. Students' notion of truth seems more aligned to 'does this work?' rather than 'did this happen?' And the absolute moral categories that are assumed in many gospel presentations are readily dismissed. For example, in a lesson on morality, I have posed this question many times in recent years: 'Was the Nazi treatment of Jewish people in World War II evil?'. I can only remember a small handful of students (out of hundreds) who have strongly affirmed that it was. The worldview of this generation presents a challenge only insofar as we need to continue to equip ourselves with fresh tools and lines of discussion that will engage and impact a thoroughly relativist mindset that places self-fulfilment at the centre of ethics. Rather than present the gospel within this framework as though Jesus is yet another option to make you feel better, the challenge is to articulate both the love and Lordship of Christ in realms that people want to determine for themselves.

Another challenge of ministry in this current cultural moment is the cultural gap between local churches and the world. I am not suggesting that churches become more worldly, but that they seriously heed the calls to be aware of the 'unbeliever or inquirer' (1 Cor 14:23) in their midst every week. We regularly have students visit churches (in Year 7 and Year 11), many for the first time in their life. Sometimes I'm disheartened by the lack of self-awareness that churches have in how they communicate Jesus to those outside the Christian sub-culture.

In ministry, challenges and opportunities are two sides to the one coin. Though some young people have imbibed the thinking of their parents, many do not carry the baggage of nominalism. Famous Bible stories are unfamiliar so there is an opportunity to open the Scriptures and allow God's living and active word to



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engage the students on its own terms. This generation tend to hold deep respect for other peoples' views, which often means even Christians are given an honest hearing. Justice, equality and fairness – all Christian principles – are deeply held and can be used to as powerful ways to introduce speaking about the character of God and the gospel of his Son.

In the end, underneath the complex worldview of our students remains a search for identity, belonging and meaning that is unfulfilled in the world.

Respondent 4: This cultural moment is challenging, but it's not new. Every so often, I'll be contacted by a parent regarding what has been taught in class or Chapel, but it's right that parents pay attention to their child's schooling and often I'm talking to their children about things that parents have had little or no positive exposure to. It's also true that children don't always accurately hear what was said, so I welcome the opportunities for conversation when parents follow up and ask for clarification. There are complex questions asked in the classroom and there is a time and place for them to be honestly and openly answered, as appropriate to students' age and stage. Yet, even when students wholeheartedly disagree with the biblical answers to their questions, they are treated with respect and kindness and intellectual integrity. They are free to disagree. Yet under God, over time, we see students engage with the message of Christ and we pray that God might grow these seeds into solid faith. The Lord knows those who are his in every cultural moment; today is no different.

Respondent 5: It is a challenge and an opportunity that many of the students have no Bible knowledge. It means that we have opportunities to explain things in a way that they can understand, but also a challenge in how to make sure we are clear in explanations.

3. What do you think are the key tools we need to provide the next generation with so that they can be an actively faithful witness in their own context?

Respondent 1: Helping them to deepen their love and understanding of who God is and what he has done for us in Jesus is crucial, along with providing tools to help students dismantle so much of the secular individualistic worldview that is prevalent and persuasive. Christian students who are prepared to stand out as different at school because they are Christian are well placed to face the challenges that may come in an increasingly hostile world.

Respondent 3: The word of God remains the key 'tool' for the next generation to witness faithfully in their context. Philosophical and moral arguments have their place, but the living and active word of God is powerful to save. We ought to equip this generation to interpret God's word faithfully, to handle God's word effectively and apply God's word joyfully to their lives. As they do, they will grow in confidence to trust God's word in our world that contests revealed truth. Two aspects of

learning are regularly emphasised in our education system. Students are encouraged to become 'life-long learners' who need to acquire skills and knowledge to prepare them for jobs that may not yet be invented. Following this model, young Christians need to set up to become life-long disciples who are preparing for challenges to their faith and evangelistic opportunities that have not yet materialised.

Respondent 4: They need to know the old, old story, from cover to cover. They need to understand the major threads and themes of God's story if they are to stand firm in their cultural moment and be able to faithfully contextualise the gospel for their time. Like any of us, the next generation need to be captivated by the One who is captivating!

Respondent 5: The next generation have been brought up in a very different world. For many of them, there is no absolute truth. Rather, anyone's perspective or reality is fine, as summed up in the motto 'You be You'.

Some of the tools that we can give the next generation are not new, but they remain necessary:

- How to discuss issues and topics with respect, but also acknowledging echo chambers and that conversations with others are coming from a different paradigm (or multiple paradigms).
- How to read the biblical texts in context. To understand Jesus more and more.
- Discipleship of students, so that they are followed up and supported in how to be Christian in the difficulty of the current culture of our society.

4. How can the full breadth of church communities help support your ministry?

Respondent 1: We are so thankful for local church youth ministries who can support and care for our Christian students, teaching them the Bible in extended and deeper ways. Regular prayer in church for school ministries is also incredibly valuable, as well as the simple recognition of school ministry as a significant ministry which is reaching people who would never walk into a church. Another way to support is by participating in school community life and activities as appropriate, and demonstrating God's love as you get involved.

Respondent 2: To ensure the continued effectiveness of Christian ministry in education, we need to continue to encourage young people to enter the teaching profession with a missional mindset. Then, to continue to train and equip those teachers with sound biblical theological understanding so that they will be effective in engaging their students across all subject areas with the gospel of Christ.

Respondent 3: Anglican Schools cannot replace the church but exist in partnership with local churches. We pursue the same mission and very often disciple the same people. Local churches can support school ministry through praying for

chaplains and their teams in the same way they would for link missionaries. At our school, former Christian students return to school for a week of mission each year and each term parents gather to pray for the ministry events of school life. Youth group leaders welcome our students when they attend church as part of two assignments they complete. Together with prayer, the best way church communities can support ministry is to prepare themselves to be the kind of place where non-churched, but spiritually curious young people can belong, learn, hear the gospel and grow in their faith.

Respondent 4: Please pray for all God's people working in schools; it's a team effort and we need wisdom to faithfully serve the thousands of students we get to know. Also, encourage faithful Christians to go into – and stay in – teaching. Humanly speaking, the gospel gets good airtime in Christian schools because of the culture established by mature, faithful Christian staff teaching across all departments. When Christians are excellent teachers of STEM, English literature, LOTE, the Creative Arts and Personal Development and live their faith with personal and intellectual integrity in front of their students, then faith in Christ and hope for the future becomes, at least, plausible, if not worth considering! This school-wide culture also promotes a richer conversation in the Christian studies classroom and complements the long-term work of chaplains in a myriad of ways. Who knows how God, who changes hearts, might choose to work in and through the conversations and relationships that students have at school?

Respondent 5: Pray. It would be great to hear the local church praying regularly for schools ministry (and not just SRE). Please work with us. Schools are really busy and we would love to work with churches and youth groups. Teachers are time-poor. Most chaplains and Christian Studies teachers are even more time-poor, with marking and reports as well as the demands of school life. Other para-church organisations like Anglicare and Cru are pretty good at linking with schools. Some churches are good, but not great and many schools would love to have links to a youth group and children's ministry. It would be helpful to see more Synod representation for our school chaplains. Similarly, greater support from missional groups, deaneries, and episcopal oversight would further our gospel partnership. Even small things, such as considering when events are held so that school workers can attend. Understanding the difference of the schools ministry is important. We have a big outreach to many families that aren't Christian, not even religious. We teach the Bible in Christian Studies and in chapel; we have a daily ministry of the word. And we also need to understand that not all of our community will hold biblical views on certain topics in our cultural context. **ACR**

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God



Mark Earngey, Head of Church History, Moore Theological College

With great joy in his heart, a friend of mine recently shared with me about how his son became a Christian.

The teenager had been reading through the story of Achan's sin (Josh. 7:1-26) at youth group and upon reflection on the nature of sin, had come to trust in Jesus for salvation. I was wonderfully surprised! Wonderfully, for the boy had made the most important decision of his life by believing in Christ. Surprised, because – somewhat

to my shame – my initial impulse was to be surprised that the account of Achan's sin could have been the instrument of his salvation. I think, upon reflection, that I had forgotten something significant about God's Word: that it is good, all of it. But perhaps it is possible to forget the other good aspects of the Holy Scriptures too?

For instance, **is it possible to forget the sweetness of God's Word?** There is a certain taste associated with the Scriptures, which the Psalmist declares is sweet, "sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103). Indeed, the Psalmist has in mind God's righteous laws which call for his obedience. And although the commands and precepts of the Lord often function as a mirror to show up our sin, these statutes and decrees from God are good to follow and their ingredients produce a sense of sweetness in the soul of God's people. Those who have "tasted the goodness of the word of God" (Heb. 6:3) go on in life and relish the banquet set before them in the Bible. Now, it is true that not every serving of the Scriptures will be consistently experienced like the perfectly marinated and flame-grilled steak. An extremely enjoyable experience is far less important than the

normal nourishment supplied by regular rations. What really matters is that the continual feeding on the meat of the Word is good for the soul. This process of digesting the Scriptures is behind the exhortation in Thomas Cranmer's *Homily on Scripture* to "chew the cud, that we may have the sweet juice, spiritual effect, marrow, honey, kernel, taste, comfort, and consolation" of the Bible.

But when we read the Scriptures, I wonder if sometimes we find certain mouthfuls of the Word less palatable than others. For there are plenty of passages within Holy Scripture which run up against the grain of what passes for socially acceptable sentiments today. Christian teaching on money, marriage, men's and women's roles in church and family, frugality, sexual ethics, gluttony, the judgement of God upon sin, the uniqueness of Christ – these may be the tip of the iceberg. It may be worth asking whether we find the Bible's teaching on these, and other things, sweet or sour? And it may be worth pondering why our spiritual tastebuds operate as they do. For some spiritual maturation may be required with some scriptural ingredients. This is why the Collect for the second Sunday of Advent assumes that reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting the Scriptures will be done through patience as we ever hold fast the joyful hope of eternal life. Our spiritual palate needs patience as it grows in piety.

Another question: **is it possible to forget the medicinal quality of God's Word** It is unfortunate that modern prayers of corporate confession have dropped the Cranmerian phrase "there

is no health in us". For even those justified by faith alone in Christ alone need serious spiritual healing. We speak of sanctification today, and the old terms "mortification" (putting things to death) and "vivification" (bringing back

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to life) are the two concepts which concern its progression. And the Word of God, in conjunction with the operation of the Holy Spirit, is the chief medicine which brings us this spiritual progress. In other words, the Bible brings healing. And those who want more healing, want more Bible. Archbishop Cranmer once wrote that "to the reading of Scripture none can be an enemy, but only those either so sick that they love not to hear of any medicine, or else those so ignorant that they know not Scripture to be the most healthful medicine."

I wonder why it is, then, that some contemporary evangelical church services seem like spiritual pharmacies running low on medicinal stock. There was a time, not long ago, when one could walk into almost any Anglican church in Sydney and receive a hearty dose of this Scriptural medicine. Bibles sat in pews, eagerly waiting to be opened. The service would start with a sentence from God's Word, and pep-

pered throughout the service would be a variety of verses and forms of words which resonated with biblical themes and ideas. Throughout the service, the Word was preached, the Word was prayed, the Word was sung, and the Word was tasted at the Lord's Table. A banquet of the written Word would be plated up during the service, with various courses which included responsorial readings of the Psalms, and lessons from Gospels and other places from both Testaments. Commonly, after the lessons, the reader concluded with the phrase "This is the Word of the Lord". And the congregation instinctively knew the reply: "Thanks be to God!"

Personally, I am grateful to attend a church which is Word-centric in this way. But what might it say about one's theological convictions when an entire church service revolves around a sermon which is based upon an often singular, and frequently short, biblical reading which briefly appears before a lengthy homily? Have we forgotten the medicinal qualities of God's Word? Have we slipped into largely passive and spectacle-oriented services requiring a mediatorial class of preachers to interpret the shrouded Scriptures and mediate God's grace to us? I suspect that we are not so unreformed in our deepest convictions, and I suppose that we simply love a good sermon and a good few songs. But it may be worth asking what our love is also like for the marvellous medicine of God's wonderful Word. Perhaps it could be good to ponder whether we have unwittingly wound down the dosage of the



Photo by Samantha Sophia on Unsplash

very medicine of the Word which we wish women and men would receive! Would there be a hearty helping of the Word of God if, for whatever reason, the preacher was unable to expound a sermon in church one week?

Is it thus, also possible to forget the usefulness of God's Word? "All Scripture", the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy, "is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The very fact that Paul had to remind Timothy (remember, of course, that he had known the Holy Scriptures from his infancy) about this fact, is instructive to us. We are forgetful people – which is the very reason why God so often commands his people throughout history to remember important things! But here is something else to note from this verse: Paul does not say that the sermons are

God-breathed and useful for all these, he says that the Scriptures are. Little wonder then, that he also told Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim. 4:13).

Christians have sometimes used the term “lessons” to describe the Bible readings in church services, and I think there is some value in reflecting on that. We believe in the clarity of the Bible and so a free-standing reading of Holy Scripture is to be considered a lesson from the Lord. It requires no interpreter except God himself. It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Thus, what might it say about our theological convictions if we could not countenance



I wonder what other opportunities we have to wield this mighty spiritual weapon of the Scriptures.



the possibility of having an additional Bible reading in our service which was not expounded by a preacher? There may be some (probably not very many) reasons why this may not be preferable in some service settings. And there may be some change management involved with the introduction of such an endeavour. But it is worth interrogating our theological convictions on this point. Why would we not want to explore the benefits of unleashing more of God’s useful word upon the life of our congregations? It is, as the great Anglican Reformer Bishop John Jewel says, “the bright sun of God which

brings light into our ways, and comfort to all parts of our life, and salvation to our souls; in which is made known to us our estate, and the mercy of God in Christ our Redeemer witnessed.”

Lastly, is it possible to forget the missional nature of God’s Word? “My word that goes out from my mouth”, declares the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, “will not return to me empty” (Is. 55:11). Just as the Son of God called his apostles to follow him, so too has he called us out of darkness and into his glorious light. And not only does the powerful proclamation of the gospel message have this wonderful effect but let us remember that the Holy Scriptures themselves were written so that we might believe and have life in the name of Christ (Jn. 20:30-31). This is why Article VI of the *39 Articles* says that “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation”. Or consider how Anglican theologian Richard Hooker put it: “The end of the word of God is *to save*, and therefore we term it *the word of life*.” And we could point to numerous other examples of this powerful and saving effect of the Scriptures: from St. Augustine, to Martin Luther, to Little Bilney, to John Wesley, to the teenage son of my friend, and probably to very many of our own spiritual stories too. The Scriptures summon men and women to salvation!

Thankfully, many of our great evangelistic courses have the missional nature of God’s Word embedded into them. And much of our interpersonal evangelism and one-on-one Bible reading ministries appreciate this vital point also. I wonder what other oppor-

tunities we have to wield this mighty spiritual weapon of the Scriptures. Could we invest some time to train and equip our church Bible readers to further realise the potency of the sword of the Scriptures (Heb. 4:12)? Could the post-COVID reintroduction of the pew Bible be a good move in a missional direction? I'm sure the good old Gideons are glad for this sort of thing. And isn't the salvation of a single soul worth it? Perhaps a simple and open-ended staff or parish council discussion about the missional nature of the Scriptures would be profitable in ways which might be surprising. Let those creative juices flow, remembering that at the end of the day, what matters more than specific ideas is the general ideology that grasps the missional nature of the Word of God.

Friends, what a gift we have in the Bible. This is the good word of the Lord. It is sweet, medicinal, useful, and missional. Heartily, we say, thanks be to God! Indeed, much more could – and probably should – be said in praise of the written Word of God. In our Bibles can be seen the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings; the Lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the world.

In our Bibles is a paradise overflowing with delight which no tongue can fully express nor heart entirely enjoy. In our Bibles is a strange world inhabited by wisdom, knowledge, power, judgements, mercy, and the magnificence of Almighty God. It is an orchestra with innumerable instruments and heavenly harmonies, a school with unfathomable limits of learning, and a treasure chest brimming with bright jewels and rich bounty. Wherever we look we appreciate anew his mighty acts of salvation through judgement, and whatever we hear whispers the Name that is above every name. Indeed, in Christ, all Scripture holds together such that when we hold Scripture, we behold Him. That great lover of Scripture, William Tyndale, put it well:

*The Scripture is that wherewith God draweth us unto him. The Scriptures sprang out of God, and flow unto Christ, and were given to lead us to Christ. Thou must therefore go along by the Scriptures as by a line, until thou come at Christ, which is the way's end and resting-place. **ACR***

You are enough, and other lies we like to swallow

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I don't know about you, but the recent months of school at home exposed some pretty ugly cracks in the façade I'd created for myself of being a good mother. It's much easier, it turns out, to parent your children when they aren't in the same physical space as you every minute of every hour of every day.



Jocelyn Loane is married to Ed and they are loving raising five children together. They serve in a residential university ministry in Sydney, and meet with the saints at Naremburn Cammeray Anglican Church.

Somewhere in my head I'd always thought I'd manage pretty well as a home-school parent. Turns out... not so much. There were times I was ridiculously impatient with mistakes my kids made, where I yelled unnecessarily, afternoons where I stomped about with a stormy disposition, and times I took my stress, boredom and frustration out on them.

Sometimes I took to social media to mentally 'check out' of the house and my parenting failures, and I realised I was not alone. There I found much 'wisdom of the age' that sought to soothe the ache many were feeling at their substandard parenting. Perhaps you've also come across some Facebook motivational memes or Instagram posts like this:

'Sweet mother be kind to yourself. If you catch yourself saying something mean or hurtful to yourself, forgive yourself. Choose a new thought that feels better. Accept yourself exactly how you are.'

'I see you mama, trying your best. We all get short tempered, tired, snappy. It's

okay, everybody has been there. This is an unprecedented situation. You are a good mom. Say it, believe it.’

‘Mama, in case no one told you today 1. You are doing great 2. It’s all going to be okay in the end and 3. You are amazing!’

‘To the mum who feels like she is failing... don’t doubt yourself, you *are* enough.’

Each time something like this was posted I’d see many women comment underneath about how much they needed to hear this today. Women who were feeling guilty and overwhelmed at their failures in parenting read these words and felt seen, felt understood, and were comforted. I’m sure these posts arise from good intentions – a desire to make mothers with a low view of themselves feel valued and rid them of shame. When they tell us ‘you are enough’ they are probably trying to correct a cultural pressure for mothers to be thin, beautiful, fit, make chef-level meals and have accomplished careers all while caring for children. But if we view these pronouncements with gospel eyes, we can see they are actually lies. And rather than helping women, they are potentially driving them further from God.

Here’s a thing we Christians know. We are sinners. We sin against our children. Our children are also sinners who sin against us, inciting us to sin even more. To minimise sin is to call God a liar (1 John 1:10). Reassurances like the ones above lower the bar on sin, they give you excuses... ‘what you did wasn’t so bad, I mean look at the times we are in.’ They encourage us to look sideways at other struggling parents and decide we aren’t doing so badly, rather than holding ourselves to God’s perfect standard. They offer forgiveness when they have no right to be the ones doing that. I most dislike those that say, ‘I see you’, when they literally can’t! Who are they to possibly know how I might have sinned against my kids? It troubles me that a child abuser could read that meme and feel vindicated. It is God alone who sees us, who knows our every thought, word and deed. It is before him that we are to examine our parenting and see where we have failed to measure up to his perfect holiness. We feel the shame because we know we have sinned. But rather than ignore it, and convince ourselves we ought not to feel bad for our failures, the gospel has a far, far greater solution.

We who know Jesus have no need to hide our sin. We know that even seeing it, and seeing our rotten core, he still came to seek and save the lost. Knowing the depth of our sin, he died for us. We don’t need to sweep our sin under the carpet or minimise it or find excuses for it. We can confess it to him, knowing he is not surprised by it and has already stepped in to deal with it. He forgives each and every sin of the one who would



Photo by Felicia Buitenwerf on Unsplash

call him Saviour and Lord. There is no parenting sin that you can commit that he will not forgive. You don't need to offer some insipid sort of kindness to yourself, because he has been so richly and abundantly kind to you! You are not enough, because only Christ is enough, and he is enough for you. We need to confess our sin to know the release from guilt and shame that only comes from forgiveness from God, and then go on depending on his strength.

We do our fellow Christians no favours by minimising their sin. And we actually end up 'de-glorifying' God if

we do. If I'm a mother who deserves acceptance and praise because she did the best she could, then why would I need God? These platitudes effectively push us away from depending on God and his grace. I would suggest they are in fact anti-gospel. The essence of the gospel is that we are *not* enough, that we need a saviour and that saviour is Jesus Christ. Of course, once we are forgiven, we don't then wallow in our sin, beating ourselves up over and over again for our failures. We are set free from guilt and shame and given the Holy Spirit to enable us to press on.

In our parenting sins, we also need to be quick to apologise to our children. We are not to hide our sin from them either. How powerful a witness is a mother who will ask forgiveness of her children for the outburst of yelling, rather than justify it to herself because of the difficult season she is in. By confessing our sins to our kids, we model for them a humble and contrite heart that knows it needs the Lord for everything.

So, as we come across these things on social media, let's hold them up to the light of the gospel. Do they minimise my sin and maximise my own importance? Do they tell me I'm enough as I am, or do they point me to my great need for my God? Do they encourage me to repent to my God and my kids, or will they entrench me in my own sense of self-righteousness? Praise God who forgives us all our sins and is making us into a people who will one day be freed to sin no more. **ACR**

“

You are not enough, because only Christ is enough, and he is enough for you.

”

Richard Johnson

Chaplain under fire



Steve Tong has a PhD in the English Reformation, and is a lay member of Synod.

One observation about the past is especially instructive for Christians of any age: faithful witness is often met with hostile opposition. It would be a mistake to conceive of some halcyon days in the past when the whole of society was motivated by the Christian faith and gospel proclamation went unopposed.

The Constantinian form of Christianity, which permeated the Western world over the past millennium, never truly embraced those who sought to be faithful witnesses. This is certainly true of Australia's first ordained minister, Richard Johnson, who arrived in Sydney as chaplain to the colony of New South Wales with the First Fleet in 1788. Despite having the official support of the British government, Johnson's

ministry was characterised by hardship and persecution. And for a twelve-month period in the mid-1790s, Johnson's greatest opposition came directly from the chief government official in the colony of New South Wales, Lieutenant Governor Francis Grose. This brief survey will highlight the impact of secular government policy on ministry at a time when the pervading culture was set against the gospel.

Until recently, the accepted view of chaplaincy within the fledgling colony of New South Wales has been a negative one. Johnson's tenure has traditionally been portrayed as a failure, while Samuel Marsden, the second chaplain, has been remembered as a harsh and retributive 'flogging parson'.¹ Yet, a recent effort to rehabilitate the earliest forms of ministry in this nation is providing a much-

¹ On Johnson, see for example Manning Clark, *A History of Australia: From the Earliest Times to the Age of Macquarie* (Melbourne University Press: Melbourne, 1962); Alison O'Brien, 'Religion', in Alison Bashford & Stuart Macintyre (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Australia* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2013), 414-437. Marsden's negative reputation was largely sealed by Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1987).

needed corrective to such interpretations.² This is not the place to unpack the relevant historiographical debates. Rather, our present task is to set Johnson in the wider context of his time, and to understand something of how his faith bore him through a period of acute opposition.

Taken as a whole, Johnson's time in Sydney was not filled with immediate joy – or huge success, judged by earthly standards. Although Governor Arthur Phillip was sympathetic to his task, Johnson never felt that his ministry was given the full support of the local government officials. Worried by the immorality he witnessed in those first years of settlement, Johnson wrote *An Address to the Inhabitants of the Colonies*, which was published in London in 1794.³ Yet the many exhortations to read and study the scriptures, and live holy lives fell on deaf ears. In a letter written in February 1792, Johnson lamented about 'the thinness of the congregation' each Sunday.⁴ This was partly due to the fact that after four years, no church building had been erected.⁵ It was also partly due to the limitations of having only one chaplain serving the entire colony. Johnson's time was certainly stretched. For example, by March 1788, one month into the new settlement, Johnson had presided over thirty marriages.⁶ As the burgeoning population increased, and settlement spread west, Johnson found himself splitting his time between Sydney and Parramatta. Long before cars, buses, trains, and ferries of the modern world existed, the distance covered by Johnson was significant. He made fortnightly trips on Saturdays to Parramatta by boat, woke early on Sundays to ride by horse to preach in Toongabbie, returned to Parramatta to preach at 10am and 4pm, spent time with convicts in their huts throughout the day, and came back to Sydney on Mondays.⁷ Johnson's dedication to his parish – understood in the widest possible sense – was evident through his industry. This was exhausting work, and Marsden did not arrive in Sydney until 1794.

Johnson also felt a personal responsibility for the convicts' welfare. When the Second Fleet arrived in 1790, carrying 300 convicts, Johnson commented that 'never did I see such a scene of misery in my days, in every sense truly wretched, naked, filthy, dirty, lousy, & many of them utterly unable to stand, to creep or even to stir hand or foot'. Yet despite the dreadful conditions that he faced, Johnson was determined to spend 'a great deal [of time] amongst them, till I have come

2 For example, see Stuart Piggin and Robert D. Linder, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity: Evangelical Christians in Australian History 1740-1914* (Monash University Publishing, Melbourne, 2018). See also, Marcus L. Loane, *Hewn From The Rock: Origins and Traditions of the Church in Sydney* (Anglican Information Office, 1976); Neil K. Macintosh, *Richard Johnson: Chaplain to the Colony of New South Wales, His Life and Times 1755-1827* (Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1978).

3 *An Address to the Inhabitants of the Colonies Established in New South Wales and Norfolk Island*, (London, 1794). This book was penned by Johnson in 1792.

4 Johnson to Phillip, 29 February 1792. *Historical Records of NSW*, 594.

5 Johnson to Phillip, 29 February 1792, *HRNSW* vol 1, 594.

6 Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, 52.

7 Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, 51.

home quite ill'.⁸ He went on to bury more than 100 of these convicts within the first few months of their arrival. Thus, Johnson's sensitivity to the earthly plight of his parishioners was matched by the spiritual care he sought to provide. Here was a model of ministry that cut across the social mores of the day. It was an effort to demonstrate God's love for those who were thought of as the most unlovable.

The difficulties faced by Johnson were made worse when Governor Phillip returned to England and was replaced by Lieutenant Francis Grose in December 1792. A military man, Grose had been wounded during the American War of Independence a couple of decades earlier, and was now in command of the New South Wales Corps. The impact Grose had on the colony was immediate. 'Civil government was virtually abolished and a quasi-military regime instituted in its place. The civil magistrates within two days of Phillip's departure were replaced by officers of the NSW Corps.'⁹ This included Johnson, who was stood down from the Bench of Magistrates, a position he had held since arriving.¹⁰ Grose also favoured his military colleagues by granting each officer one hundred acres of land. But he also promoted economic prosperity by encouraging trade, and increased the production and sale of liquor. However, the balance of power was firmly in favour of the elites where the 'concentration of wealth and power [was held securely] in the hands of the few'.¹¹



The difficulties faced by Johnson were made worse when Governor Phillip returned to England and was replaced by Lieutenant Francis Grose in December 1792.



One consequence of this new regime was that officers were now allowed to pay convicts in rum for their labour on private farms. This form of remuneration was certainly popular, but it also had a detrimental effect on the behaviour of its recipients since convict camps were flooded with alcohol each evening. As a result, Johnson's house was vandalised and robbed on more than one occasion. But he received no response to the complaints and pleas for extra security that were made directly to Grose.¹² When Marsden landed towards the end of Grose's term, he similarly was shocked at the state of 'riot and dissipation, and licentiousness and immorality, which pervaded every part of this settlement, amongst the lower ranks of its inhabitants ... gaming and drunkenness, and robberies and murders, were

8 Johnson to Fricker, 21 August 1790. Letters from the Rev. Richard Johnson to Henry Fricker, 30 May 1787-10 Aug. 1797, with associated items, ca. 1888, Mitchell Library.

9 Neil K. Macintosh, *Richard Johnson: Chaplain of the Colony of New South Wales* (Library of Australian History, 1978), 63.

10 Ibid, 67.

11 Manning Clark, *A History of Australia: I, From the Earliest Times to the Age of Macquarie* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1962), 132-42, at 135.

12 Johnson to Hunter 5 July 1798, *HRA*, vol 1, 2, 180.



common crimes'.¹³ Considering this state of affairs, it is not surprising that Marsden felt that 'all attempts to instruct [these people] in the duties of religion would be ineffectual, unless the policy of the colony was totally changed'.¹⁴ In other words, the policies of civil government limited the capacity of clergy to minister publicly, and this simultaneously discouraged layfolk from manifesting their faith openly. It was immediately clear to Marsden that Grose had used his power and privilege to actively stymie public ministry.

Johnson provided his own account of Grose's bullying tactics to Governor Hunter in 1798. One particularly egregious act was to refuse Johnson access to convicts on the night before their execution.¹⁵ Despite mul-

multiple attempts to see these men, Johnson and Marsden were barred from providing spiritual comfort in their final hour. Grose also used his political authority to restrict Johnson's ministry in Parramatta by stopping the provision of a government boat each fortnight.¹⁶ He continually obstructed plans to build a church by requisitioning raw materials such as wood and glass for government purposes and withheld funds. This forced Johnson to pay for the church out of his own pocket, and although the building was completed in August 1793, Johnson was only recompensated in 1797.¹⁷ More generally, public worship came under fire soon after Grose took control of the colony. Sunday services led by Johnson were to commence at six in the morning and could only last forty-five minutes. Still, these were routinely interrupted by regimental drummers who signalled the movement of soldiers out of the congregation mid-service, leaving Johnson with 'about half a dozen convicts standing behind me'.¹⁸ The widely acknowledged animosity Grose had for Johnson was expressed in a subsequent order that forbade convicts from attending his services. Johnson knew of at least one convict couple who were officially warned by a constable of the NSW Corps for worshipping at his service.¹⁹ Others did not get off so lightly. Some convict women had their heads shaved and were told that future

13 Marsden to Hunter 11 August 1798, *HRA* vol 1, 185.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Johnson to Hunter 5 July 1798, *HRA*, vol 1, 2, 180.

16 Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, 73-4.

17 Richard Johnson, *Memoirs of Richard Johnson* (16 April 1794), in Papers of Archbishop John Moore (as filmed by the AJCP)/File 1/Memoirs of Rev. Richard Johnson (29 pp).

18 Johnson to Hunter 5 July 1798, *HRA*, vol 1, 2, 179.

19 *Ibid.*, 181.

appearances at Johnson's church services would result in iron collars and being sent to Toongabbie as punishment.²⁰

It quickly became obvious to the inhabitants of Sydney that public support for Johnson's ministry was neither politically nor socially acceptable. The situation was so dire that on Christmas Day 1793, only thirty to forty people attended even though the service was held in the newly opened church building that had room for five hundred.²¹ While not exhaustive, these examples provide some insight into the way public policy had a direct impact on gospel ministry. In the words of Johnson, the measures taken by Grose were 'a most effectual step to throw aside all regard or reverence for the Sabbath Day, and to render all public solemn worship utterly contemptible'.²²

Grose's hostility to the gospel was concealed within the context of his time, in which society was glossed by a thin veneer of Christianity. On the one hand, the commander-in-chief, as he was colloquially known, supported the work of James Bain, the chaplain to the NSW Corps. Little is known about Bain outside his time as chaplain and magistrate on Norfolk Island from 1792.²³ But he had also been commissioned by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to help provide education in the colony alongside Johnson.²⁴ However, Grose recalled him to Sydney in February 1794, and Johnson interpreted this move as another calculated move by the Lieutenant Governor to further undermine his ministry.²⁵ For while convicts were barred from worshipping at Johnson's church, they were now instructed to attend Bain's services in the barracks. Given Bain's status and purpose, Grose was able to maintain a patina of Christianity. None of the ways Grose operated threatened the accepted cultural pillars of society. Yet for those few who understood the times, gospel ministry was being undermined within the very structures that purported to uphold it.

For Grose, raising the profile of Bain over and against Johnson was more than a redistribution of resources. It was motivated by a suspicion of and 'prejudice



Grose's hostility to the gospel was concealed within the context of his time, in which society was glossed by a thin veneer of Christianity.



20 Richard Johnson Papers, Lambeth Palace Library, 127-8, as cited in Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, 73.

21 D. Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, vol 1, (London, 1798), 327; Clark, *A History of Australia*, 138.

22 Johnson to Hunter 5 July 1798, *HRA*, vol 1, 2, 179.

23 See King to Grose, 19 March 1794, *HRNSW* vol 2, 184-6. <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bain-james-1732>

24 Extract from the Proceedings of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1794-95, *HRNSW* vol 2, 282.

25 Richard Johnson Papers, Lambeth Palace Library, 126, as cited in Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, 73.

against evangelical religion'.²⁶ Indeed, one of the greatest insults Johnson received during his time in Sydney was to be called a 'Methodist'. While Johnson was an Anglican thoroughbred who upheld the standards of public worship according to the Prayer Book, this was more than a denominational barb at the turn of the nineteenth century. The popular response to John Wesley's itinerant preaching was often conflated with the spirit of independence manifested in America, as well as the rebellious nature of the French Revolution. Thus, those who walked the corridors of power in late-eighteenth century Britain viewed non-conformists through the same lens as insurrectionists. To label someone a 'Methodist' was to question their fidelity to the Church of England as well as their loyalty to the British crown. This is exactly what Grose insinuated when he used the epithet to label Johnson.

In a letter to Colonial Under-secretary Dundas, Grose described Johnson as 'one of the people called Methodists, [who] is a very troublesome, discontented character'.²⁷ This criticism was the basis of the argument Grose used to dissuade Dundas from paying Johnson for building the church.²⁸ It was a pointed attempt to humiliate the chaplain by claiming that evangelical faith was synonymous with political and social insubordination. The implication was that the government should not offer public support for this kind of religion. Such personal attacks demonstrate how legitimate structures and public office were used to stifle gospel ministry



For Johnson, evangelical faith trumped churchmanship and denominational labels.



from the earliest days of white settlement in Australia.

Ironically though, Grose's insult was not that far off the mark. Johnson himself had previously described himself in similar terms to his Baptist friend, Henry Fricker. Comparing himself to fellow Anglican clergy who 'go aside ...

from the principles and fundamental doctrines held in our established Church, and so flatly contradict those very articles which they have subscribed to', Johnson claimed to 'see things in a different light, and however stigmatised by the name of Methodist, Enthusiast, etc., I am not ashamed of the precious gospel of Jesus'.²⁹ For Johnson, evangelical faith trumped churchmanship and denominational labels. And it was this, more than any socio-political association attached to the term 'Methodist', that Grose found so repugnant and offensive.

What we have seen in this brief overview, then, is that Johnson operated at a time when the denigration of gospel ministry was being woven into the structural framework of politics and culture. There was open opposition and private vilification. The capacity for faithful witness in the public square was stymied by deliber-

26 Piggin and Linder, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 83.

27 Grose to Dundas, 4 September 1793. *HRNSW* vol 2, 64.

28 Ibid.

29 Johnson to Fricker, 4 October 1791, as quoted by Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, 76.

ate government policy and changing cultural norms. Johnson never compromised his evangelical faith, and he suffered for it.

Considering these circumstances, it is unsurprising to note how much self-doubt Johnson felt about his ministry. This was expressed at length in various letters to his mentor, John Newton. The great abolitionist sympathised with Johnson and did not ‘blame [him] for being greatly concerned for the sins and enormities which you are daily witness to, and especially for the gross profanation of the Sabbath’.³⁰ But Newton had been offering fine words of encouragement from as early as 1791:

*I have not been disheartened by your apparent want of success. I have been told that skilful gardeners will sow and raise a salad for dinner in the short time while the meat is roasting. But no gardener can raise oaks with such expedition. You are sent to New Holland not to sow salad seeds, but to plant acorns, and your labour will not be lost, though the first appearance may be very small and the progress very slow. You are, I trust, planting for the next century. I have good hope that your oaks will spring up and flourish and spread among the islands and nations of the southern seas.*³¹

Two years later, Newton again encouraged the embattled pastor:

You are sent to lay the foundation upon which others will build; and it will be more clearly seen by posterity than at present that the lord directed you by His counsel, and upheld you by His arm of power – that He appointed you to the honour of opening a plan, which He, in His due time, will accomplish. This is a greater honour than if you had been made a Bishop, or Archbishop, or Cardinal, or Pope.

*You have been slighted or despised by those who ought to have assisted and encouraged you. But you have not fainted; you have kept His word, have not denied His name, nor been ashamed of Him.*³²

Given the time delay of postage of that era, this letter might well have arrived on Johnson’s desk in the midst of his prolonged confrontation with Grose. We can only speculate the relief and comfort it would have brought to the beleaguered chaplain. Two hundred and thirty years after that letter was penned, we can argue that Newton’s words were prophetic.

Viewed through the lens of his earthly life, Johnson’s story is not an uplifting tale of triumph against the odds. But taking an eternal perspective on his foundational ministry places our own struggles into sharper relief. Recognising and acknowledging how previous saints have contented for the faith once delivered helps to broaden and deepen our appreciation of God’s blessing, even amidst the

30 Newton to Johnson, 29 March 1794, *HRNSW* vol 2, 196.

31 Newton to Johnson, 10 March 1791, as quoted in Piggin and Linder, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 82.

32 Newton to Johnson, 24 May 1793, *HRNSW* vol 2, 27.

suffering of each generation. Johnson's story reminds us that it has never been popular or in vogue to teach the goodness of God's word, regardless of how nominally Christian or otherwise the cultural norms are. Yet, like Newton, we can thank and praise God for our spiritual forebears such as Johnson, who continued to preach and proclaim the good news of salvation in Christ through faith, whilst straining under significant pressure. **ACR**

From the vault

The evangelical
heritage

and

The cross and the
resurrection

Churches from Holland to Hungary. They are not of yesterday, they are true national Churches which have their roots in the nation's history, have shared the nation's vicissitudes, and at times have represented and revived the national soul. They have resisted, and continued to resist, every spiritual tyranny. "May I suggest," he said, "that while, as indeed is right, you give the right hand of fellowship to the ancient Churches of the East and the Lutheran Churches of the North, with the other hand you draw closer to your fellowship and your heart the historic Churches of the Reformation."

The Anglican Attitude.

The Bishop of Chichester, Dr. Bell, in a series of lectures given in Sweden, which was published just before the Lambeth Conference under the title "Church Unity," pointed out that intercommunion with the great Protestant Churches of the Continent was the normal custom of the Church of England until the Oxford Movement of 1833.

"We need," said the Bishop of Chichester, "to re-assert the position of the Church for the last 400 years rather than of the last 100 years."

In these days, therefore, when, in view of the world's need, the urgency

ground to be lost through forgetfulness of the points of agreement already reached. In the *Life of Archbishop Temple*, on page 460, the result of his oversight at the Lambeth 1930 in forgetting that non-Episcopal ministries in England had been recognised as real ministries of Christ's Word and Sacraments in the Universal Church is referred to as a blunder, so I draw your attention to five of the more important of our Evangelical beliefs and practice. They are—

1. Evangelicals decline to put any other authority on the same level as the Word of God.

In common with all Christians we believe that God has revealed His will toward man in the voice of prophet, Apostle, and evangelist, and pre-eminently in Jesus Christ, the Living Word of the Father. But we insist that this revelation of God contained in the book we call the Bible has no peer in the great realm of Authority. We interpret literally the words of Article VI "so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be received as an Article of the Faith or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."

To-day once again we are being told that the true guide of the Church is Scripture and Tradition; that you

believe. Those who believe we owe the fact of faith to the further condition that they have been called of God. This is the inner secret power which gives the Church its character. As in the Old Testament Ishmael and Isaac were included in the external covenant, so to-day we have those who "have a name to live and are dead." When the Son of Man shall come He will gather out of His Kingdom everything that offendeth, and "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Fathers."

Then Evangelicals feel bound to emphasise that the call of God is creative rather than stimulating. The sleeper is not only enjoined "to awake" but is bidden "to arise from the dead."

Evangelicals insist on the authority and truth of Article X—"The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us that we may have a good will and working with us when we have that good will." God works according to our nature but in so working He arrests the evil bias by which we will, contrary to His demands and leadings.

TO AUSTRALIAN CHURCHMEN.

THE EVANGELICAL HERITAGE.

AN ADDRESS by the ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY.

The opening day of the recent Lambeth Conference was given up to a Reception of foreign Delegations — the Orthodox Delegation, the Old Catholic Delegation, the Scandinavian Delegation, the Church of Scotland Delegation, and the Free Church Delegation.

Dr. Hagan, a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, made a deep impression upon us all by his remarks. He pointed out that while the Church of Scotland and its daughter Churches in Great Britain and the Dominions are in a minority in relation to the Anglican Communion ["There are always fewer Scots," he said, "than English in the world"] the type of Church and churchmanship which he represented was not a Scottish eccentricity. "We belong," he said, "to a world-wide Communion which in variety of race, nation and speech is as Catholic as any in Europe. There stretches across the Continent a chain of great reformed

of Churches working together in as close co-operation as possible is being emphasised, it is of great importance that we who rejoice in being members of a reformed Church, which is also Catholic and Apostolic, should grasp clearly our fundamental principles.

This is all the more important because Resolution 56 of the Lambeth Conference lays down that in further approaches to Reunion the theological issues, especially those concerning the Church and the ministry, should be faced at the outset, and the integral connection between the Church and the ministry should be safeguarded in all proposals for the achievement of inter-communion through the creation of a mutually recognised ministry, and the goal in any steps towards a United Church within a given area should always be a Church with which the Anglican Churches could eventually be in full communion. It is so easy for

cannot separate Holy Scripture from the complex of Christian life in which it had its origin. That would go far to rob the Divine Revelation of its unique character as a direct intervention of God.

The voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire is regarded as a unique event separating the Children of Israel from all other people. We cannot think less of the voice of the Incarnate Son of God, and those accredited and endowed by God the Holy Spirit to complete His message of goodwill to men.

The Divine Call.

2. Evangelicals affirm that the call of God is the indispensable Divine qualification both for Church and ministry.

The Church owes its Divine character and its authority among men to the fact that it has been called into being by the Word of God. Abraham obtained his place as the father of the faithful because he believed God. As the Article puts it, "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men." Those who comprise it owe their character to the fact that they

which we are justified is perfect but not inherent, the righteousness by which we are sanctified is inherent but not perfect."

The opinion of the Council of Trent that certain graces are infused into the soul and that through the possession of these we are not only reckoned but actually are righteous in God's sight must be resisted.

The righteousness which God demands is not a future righteousness consequent upon reformation. It is the full satisfaction of His unalterable holy law. We cannot render it. It is offered to us in the Person of Jesus Christ Our Lord. He died the just for the unjust. He bore our sins in His own Body on the tree. He of God is made unto us Righteousness. We can make no contribution, but we can appropriate the gift and commit ourselves to the Lord Who died for us. To attach any merit to our faith is to diminish the glory of Our Lord and to build up false hopes as to our own competence.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

4. Evangelicals regard the Church as the true Body of Christ. Every one who is led by the Holy Spirit to repose faith in Christ for salvation becomes thereby a true member of His Body.

work invisibly in us and doth not only quicken but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in Him." Nothing is of value to the rational fully developed human being that is not associated with an act of faith.

How urgent is the need for this teaching and this emphasis if spiritual life is to be re-awakened! The need to-day is for the nation to recover its spiritual sense. We have almost ceased as a people to live in the light of eternity. Our nation has fallen from its high estate by its increasing neglect of spiritual things and the pursuit of materialism. The Bible is no longer the people's book, family prayer is no longer the custom, Sunday is a day of pleasure-seeking, and young people are growing up in ignorance of the elements of the Christian faith. There is increasing moral looseness in literature, marital infidelity is condoned and sometimes lauded under mistaken applications of the idea of true love; commercial morality is low.

There are two urgent requirements. The Church must recover and declare the authentic Gospel Message, and must re-establish contact with the people. Let us seek God's forgiveness if our witness has not been clear and bold, and let us re-consecrate ourselves to our task.

Lord. The first event came to pass in 70 A.D., when the Roman general, Titus, destroyed the city. It is natural that we should count on the second coming to pass, especially considering the much greater detail our Lord gave to it in that discourse. The messenger from God to the Ascension was but stating within the words "this same Jesus shall so come as ye have seen Him go," a well established truth.

The Time of the Return.

"When shall these things be?" we echo. Back comes the reply, "it is not for you to know the times or the seasons for of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven but my Father only." However, we are assured that the Lord will tarry, will delay His return, and that, after a long time He will come. We are further told that when the Gospel shall be preached in all the world and after a time of wars and rumours of wars, of famines, pestilences and earthquakes and distress of nations and when people shall be selfish, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof, the great event will happen. Some believe this time to be fast approaching. Others remind themselves that "with the Lord a thousand years are as one day" and sink

Justification by Faith Only.

3. Evangelicals insist further that just because of the unique character of God's work in the soul, the justification of the sinner—that is, the ground on which he is accounted righteous before God cannot be due to anything in himself. Many to-day do not deny justification by faith, but they do deny justification by faith only.

Just as there has been an attempt to place human tradition in some effective connection with the authority of the Word of God, so there are efforts to place man's willing co-operation in effective connection with the justification of the sinner.

Article XI states distinctly: "Wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine." We are moved to rely upon God and His pardoning love in Jesus Christ by the operation of God the Holy Spirit, and when we are so moved we recognise our sinfulness, and depend only for salvation on what Our Lord has done for us and not at all on what we can do for Him and not even on what He can and does do within us in renewing us to righteousness. As Hooker sums it up — "The righteousness by

This inner bond of faith must manifest itself in the outward phenomena of holy lives and reverent worship. Evangelicals do not believe in a solitary Christian life. It is a contradiction in terms. If we are part of a body we must function as those who belong to a body. The early Disciples continued in the Apostles' fellowship and in the breaking of bread and the prayers. Public worship is as much a duty as private meditation. We are charged not only to join the visible Church of God, but also to secure as far as we can its soundness in the faith. Too often zeal for the truth of God has incited reproach, when it should have commanded commendation.

5. There has been much misconception about the place of Sacraments in Evangelical thought. If Grace comes to the soul only through the awakening of life induced by the living Spirit of God, then everything of a necessary connection of the grace of the Sacrament with the outward sign must be abandoned. If God's Word did not profit because it was not united with faith in them that heard, we must say the same of the Sacraments. As Article XXV states—"By the Sacraments God doth

OUR LORD'S RETURN.

(By the Rev. R. H. Pethybridge,
Melbourne.)

"What, the Second Coming! Do you belong to a freak sect? You never hear that preached in our Church. No! But you hear it stated as a fundamental part of our faith at every service of our Church. It is enshrined with in the Creeds of Christendom. "He shall come . . ."

The Truth of the Return.

Jesus foretold the event by direct statement, and parabolic teaching. During the most solemn days of His earthly life He said: "I will come again, as the lightning cometh . . . so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." About that time, through parables, He made clear that He would go away, and, after a long time, would return, adding "heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away, for all things concerning Me have fulfillment." It is interesting to note how Matthew records, in one chapter, two prophecies—the destruction of Jerusalem, and the return of the

only bury dead men; we know that He rose, because He was seen (and He could not have been seen if He had not risen).

How is our understanding of the death of Jesus affected by the fact that He rose from the dead? Or, more accurate, that He "was raised," for the common way of describing the resurrection in the New Testament is to ascribe it not to Jesus Himself ("He rose"), but to God the Father ("He was raised"). Why did God the Father raise Jesus from the dead?

In answer to this question, let me bring you three propositions and commend them to you from the Epistle to the Romans.

1. GOD RAISED JESUS TO DEMONSTRATE THE DELTY OF HIS PERSON.

Jesus Christ was "declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). Let us look at this historically.

As the three years of Jesus Christ's public ministry ran their course, the Apostles became increasingly convinced that He was the Messiah, indeed the Son of God. But when He warned them that He must suffer and die, they could not understand. They could not reconcile this dreadful prospect with their ripening faith in His divine Person. Then He was arrested, tried, condemned crucified, and all their hopes were shattered. How could Jesus be God's Messiah if, instead of reigning in His Kingdom, He suffered the appalling ignominy of crucifixion by the Gentiles? How could He be the Son of God, if men killed Him? These were the questions which tormented the disciples.

It is hard for us to conceive the greatness of their perplexity as the One in whom they had believed was shamefully done to death. The tears they wept were

rolled away, the tomb was empty, the grave clothes left, the body gone, and the Lord seen. Jesus had risen indeed.

2. GOD RAISED JESUS TO CONFIRM THE EFFICACY OF HIS DEATH.

He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Jesus was not content to foretell His death as a fact; He indicated its purpose as well. He said that He was going to give His life as a ransom for many, and that His blood would be shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Well, He died all right. That is an irrefutable fact. But how could His followers be sure that the purpose of His death had been accomplished? How could they know that His life had been accepted as a ransom, that His blood could cleanse from sin and that through His death sinners could be forgiven?

The answer is by the resurrection. God confirmed the satisfactoriness of His Son's death by raising Him from the dead. The resurrection was God's own proof that Jesus had not died in vain.

This is the meaning of Romans 4:25, which should be translated that Jesus was "put to death because of our trespasses and raised because of our justification."

In other words, it is because we were sinners that Christ died for us, and because we can now be justified on the ground of His death that He was raised from the dead. But if Jesus had not been raised, we could never have known if His sacrifice for sin had been accepted.

Rather we would have known that it had not been accepted. "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are

one day our bodies will rise too. We have already been raised with Christ spiritually from the death of sin; we shall be raised from physical death also and clothed with new, glorious bodies like His.

Thus each stage of our salvation is tied to the resurrection of Christ, our justification, sanctification and glorification, that is, our acceptance before God, our growth in holiness, and our acquisition of new bodies on the Last Day.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we have the proof of our justification, the power of our sanctification, and the pattern of our glorification. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a vital foundation of the Christian religion. The Christian faith is not only "the faith of Christ crucified," but "the faith of Christ risen."

Let me apply this to my readers with some direct questions: First, are you doubtful about the deity of Jesus? Then do examine the evidence for the resurrection. God raised Jesus from the dead in order to demonstrate the deity of His Person. He was powerfully designated God's Son by the resurrection.

Are you doubtful about your own salvation? Whether you are accepted before God and your sins forgiven? Then do look at the empty tomb! God raised Jesus from the dead to confirm the efficacy of His sacrifice.

Are you doubtful about the possibility of victory? Then do remember that God raised Jesus from the dead in order to complete your salvation! You need to be convinced that Jesus is alive. If you belong to Him, you have risen with Him, and in the power of the resurrection you and I can be "more than conquerors."

for learning which had characterized his father. He studied at Cambridge University where he took second class honours in both the History and the Theology Tripos. He gained his B.A. in 1929, his M.A. in 1934 and B.D. (Melbourne) in 1940.

In 1929 and 1930, he studied at Ridley Hall and was ordained deacon in 1930 by the Bishop of Warrington. He then returned to Australia and served a curacy at St. Augustine's, Moreland.

From early years, Laurence Nash was concerned actively in the work of C.M.S., and in 1933 went, under the society's auspices, as chaplain and assistant master of the Diocesan Boys' School, Hong Kong.

He worked in Hong Kong until 1936, when he returned to Australia to take up the post of general secretary of the Victorian branch of C.M.S., a position he held until 1942.

Following work as a Naval chaplain during World War II, Canon Nash went to Tasmania, as rector of St. George's, Hobart, in 1944. He stayed there until 1952, when he returned to Melbourne as vicar of St. Augustine's, Moreland. In 1961 he became vicar of St. Matthew's, Prahran.

Canon Nash actively participated in a number of Evangelical bodies such as the Church of England Evangelical Trust (Vic.), C.M.S., the Evangelical Fellow-

not only by his family (he leaves behind his wife, Gwen, and three children), but by many friends both in Melbourne and beyond.

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THE CROSS AND THE RESURRECTION

An Easter meditation by the

I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that He was seen. . . 1 Corinthians 15:3-5



Rev. John Stott

The Apostle is reminding his Corinthian readers of the gospel which he had preached and which he had received, in which they stood and by which they were being saved if they held it fast and had not believed in vain.

WHAT IS THIS GOSPEL?

It is composed of two parts, the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. First, Christ died for our sins; secondly, He was raised on the third day. True, the emphasis is on His death, since it is by His death that He dealt with our sins. Nevertheless, the Christ who died for our sins was raised, and His resurrection illumines His death.

These two doctrines of the death and resurrection of Jesus were both biblical, "according to the scriptures," that is, foretold in the Old Testament.

They were also both historical. They really happened. Their historicity is vouched for in each case. The fact of Christ's death was proved by His burial, and the fact of His resurrection by His appearances. "Christ died . . . and . . . was buried." "He rose again . . . and . . . was seen." We know that He died, because He was buried (and you

not just of bereavement, but of bewilderment. When Jesus died, their hopes died with Him. They sank into black and bitter despair.

Then God raised Him! He was "powerfully designated" God's Son by the resurrection. Jesus had never predicted His death without adding that He would rise. For He knew that His death would not be the end. Now they knew, too, and understood.

And the resurrection became the burden of their message in the early sermons recorded in the Acts. Again and again we read this kind of thing: "This Jesus you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men, but God raised Him up" (Acts 2:23, 24 cf. Acts 3:15, 4:10, 5:30).

Exactly! On the cross Jesus may have seemed defeated by the combined might of Jewry and Rome, but God reversed man's sentence and by the resurrection publicly vindicated Him. It was the resurrection which convinced Saul of Tarsus that Jesus, Whom he had been persecuting as an impostor, was true after all, and Romans 1:4 is an echo of Paul's own experience.

Still today many seekers have come to faith in Christ through conviction that on the first Easter Day the great stone was

still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Corinthians 15:17-18 RSV).

But Christ has been raised, to show that He did not die in vain. And since He did not die in vain, we have not believed in vain. We are no longer in our sins, but justified from them. And those who have died in Christ have not perished, but are with Christ in glory, which is far better.

3. GOD RAISED JESUS TO COMPLETE THE SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE.

We turn now to Romans 6, and I must ask you specially to read verses 4, 5 and 8 to 11. These verses make it plain that God is concerned not only with the justification of His people, but with their sanctification, that is, not only to bring them into His favour, forgiven and accepted sinners, but to transform them into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

If we belong to Christ, because we have become one with Him by faith, then we have died with Him to sin and risen with Him to newness of life.

The merit of His death and the power of His resurrection have both become ours. And

WORLD REPORT

WOMEN CLERGY — Swiss Protestants in two cantons have approved by large majorities legislation which will permit the ordination of women in the Swiss Reformed Church in those two cantons.

MOSCOW ATTACK — Moscow Radio recently introduced a series of English broadcasts to Southern Asia by describing Christian missionary activity as a "remnant of colonial domination." Moscow dubbed the Church and missionaries as a "mask used by colonialists in a 'strong, well-equipped, well-trained army,' used as an instrument of neo-colonialism."

PENTECOSTALISTS — There has been nearly a three-fold increase in the number of Pentecostals in Canada in 10 years. The denomination now has over 150,000 members in 685 churches and maintains five theological colleges.

4,690 persons were enrolled in Bulgarian study groups dealing with "atheistic subjects." The Bulgarians are running a mobile exhibition around the country and this is reported to have brought about rising interest.

NICENE TALKS — The Nicene Creed will be discussed by a joint U.S. meeting of Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians to begin in July. The talks mark the first formal conversations between the two Churches in the U.S.A. Later talks will examine "a wide range of theological questions of particular interest to Lutherans and Roman Catholics."

BURMA GROWTH — Christian Scriptures distributed in Burma during 1964 numbered over 150,000 copies—almost double the figure for 1963. Most of the Bibles and portions were printed locally. The Bible van salesman reported "an extraordinary response from the people and a hunger for the Word of God."

Canon Laurence Nash—an

outstanding Evangelical

THE unexpected home call of Canon Laurence Nash robs the Church of England of one of its leading Evangelicals.

The youngest son of the late Rev. C. H. Nash, Laurence Nash grew up with that same regard

ship, and Ridley College. He was often a spokesman for the Evangelical cause both within and without Synod.

He had a special interest in Ridley College and was secretary of the College Council. He wrote a history of the college under the title "Forward Flows the Time." Canon Nash will be missed

Book review

Eager to serve by Ray Galea

Eager to Serve by Ray Galea is one of the best 20 books I have read in my life. Ray takes us for a scuba dive ... deep into the divine waters of Philipians. The pages drip with decades of ministry experience and each chapter ends with profound prayers, wonderful reflection questions and inspiring personal testimonies.

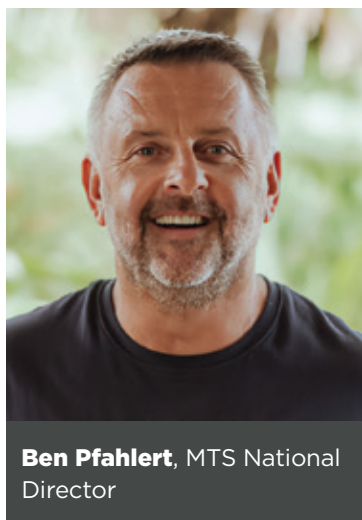
There are 5 chapters:

1. Single minded for the cause of Christ (Phil 1:1-2)
2. Consider others first for the sake of the gospel (Phil 1:4-6, 12-29)
3. Guarding the gospel (Phil 3)
4. Handling anxiety as a gospel worker (Phil 4:4-7)
5. Gospel generosity (Phil 4:8-23)

There are 6 personal testimonies of people from very different backgrounds; many of which made me cry:

1. Rob Abboud
2. Iszy (not real name, identity protected for safety reasons)
3. Sarah Anderson
4. Maggie Ha
5. Bruce Winters
6. Matt Anderson (by Perry and Kim Anderson)





Ben Pfahlert, MTS National Director

There are 5 deep, rich and wonderful prayers printed at the end of each chapter. I love that. Ray wants the fruit of *Eager to Serve* to be transformation, not just information. By calling upon God in prayer, we are so much more likely to be changed by the power of the Spirit of Christ.

There are also 5 sets of 3 'Reflection Questions' at the end of each chapter. They're open and easily understood questions. No jargon, no pretense ... you can imagine them inspiring a really open and honest discussion. The questions (and prayers) inspire me to read *Eager to Serve* with others.

Eager to Serve will inspire you to serve like Jesus whether you've come to faith last Wednesday or you're getting ordained next Friday.

Eager to Serve is also extremely helpful for wisely broaching the topic of raising up harvest workers. Ray wrestles with the complexity. He debunks the myth that those who don't go into vocational gospel work are second-class citizens ... but at the same time 'critiques any view that fails to prioritise gospel work.'

Ray examines the often-misunderstood distinction between 'ministry of the word and ministry of works'. Ever-practical Ray shares that MBM Rooty Hill, the church he pastored for 30 years, had a motto, 'We seek to relieve suffering in this age, and even more so, the age to come.' Ray cares deeply about the welfare of his fellow citizens but challenges us all with this statement: 'the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is good news because it is the only lifeline thrown out to humanity.' The reality of hell chastises all causes.

I'd be very surprised if you're the same person as you were before after reading *Eager to Serve*. It inspired me to deny myself daily, and to sacrifice everything for the sake of the lost. How did Ray do that? By exegeting the beautiful portrait painted of Jesus in Philippians. Wonderful stuff.

In *Eager to Serve* Ray Galea 'spills the tea'. He opens his heart and allows us to see how he (and his wife Sandy) applied Philippians to 30 years of Christian leadership. It gets pretty earthy. The book is worth buying for Chapter 4 alone, 'Handling Anxiety as a Gospel Worker'.

I want to give this book to every prospective ministry apprentice in Australia and abroad. Why? Because it paints a glorious picture of just how 'eager to serve' Jesus was.

I read it in two sittings. I commend *Eager to Serve* to you. **ACR**

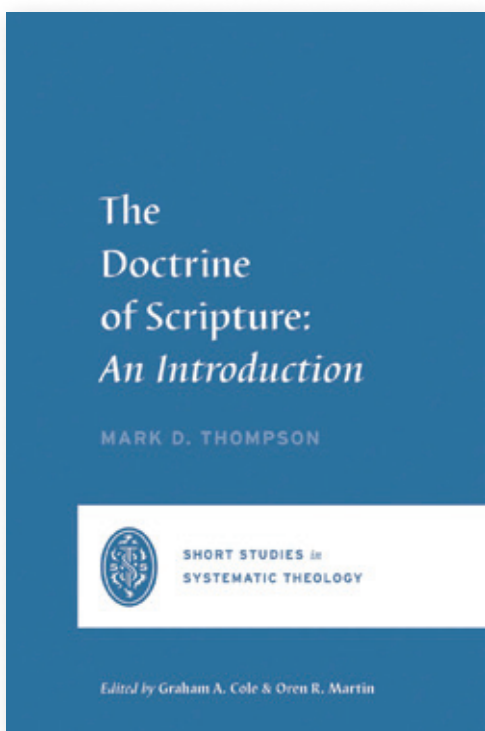
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***Eager to Serve* is also extremely helpful for wisely broaching the topic of raising up harvest workers.**

”

Book review

The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction by Mark Thompson



It can be a little awkward when asked to review a book written by a friend, especially if that friend also happens to be your boss.

One wonders if he or she will have to perjure themselves for the sake of preserving the

relationship! Fortunately, in the case of Mark Thompson's recently released book, *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction*, any anxiety has – as expected – proven to be entirely needless. This book, which is the latest contribution in Crossway's *Short Studies in Systematic Theology*, is in my opinion, the finest succinct study of this most wonderful and precious gift of divine revelation that I have come across. With his immediately accessible trademark clarity, Mark has managed to deliver a rich, well-documented study of this doctrine that is remarkably comprehensive for all its relative brevity. I expect it will be a stimulating, informative, and spiritually enriching resource for the full gamut of God's people: specialist, student, pastor, and layperson alike.

What I most appreciate about this book is its desire to unfold the theological reality of Scripture by fully recognising its distinctive place within all of God's acts. Textbook discussions of the doctrine of Scripture have typically



Andrew Leslie, Head of Theology, Philosophy, and Ethics, Moore Theological College

been arranged around a set of ‘properties’: its authority, truthfulness, inspiration, clarity, sufficiency, and so on. There’s nothing necessarily wrong with that, but it can sometimes feel like you are in a lab describing an inert lump of something staring back at you in a test tube.

In Mark’s book all these important matters are skilfully addressed, but the entire discussion is structured and animated by a conviction that flows out of our faith itself: that Scripture is the instrument God has graciously chosen to awaken us from our sinful rebellion and draw us into a personal relationship with himself. There is deliberately no chapter on the ‘authority’ of Scripture, for instance, as if it can merely sit as one isolated attribute among many. Rather, there is a sense in which the whole book is aiming to come to terms with the fact that Scripture is no less than

the mighty ‘arm’ of the sovereign Lord himself, or in the expression Hebrews gives us, ‘the *living and active* Word of God’ (Heb 4:12). That is why the book is punctuated by a repeated refrain that the ministry of the Holy Spirit always ‘attends’ Scripture in a unique and inseparable way, from its gradual inspiration through chosen human agents – Old Testament then New, to its recognition as a ‘closed’ Canon, its preservation, its exposition and proclamation by the church, and finally to its reception within the lives of his people. Even the rebellion of the sinner, Mark points out, is shot through with the folly and pretence that one can successfully manage to evade the spiritual sovereignty of his Word. No one can, and no one does.

If this central conviction is one that Mark deftly illustrates with the able assistance of great theologians from the past like John Calvin and Martin Luther, or more recent voices like John Webster and Kevin Vanhoozer, he is much more eager to take us straight to the testimony of the one who is at heart of our faith itself, Jesus Christ. And that’s where the book begins (chapter 1).

In beginning with Jesus’s own testimony about Scripture – a testimony which of course is contained within Scripture itself – Mark is not intending to say that these words are somehow more authoritative than any other statement within the Bible. The ‘verbal’ and ‘plenary’ inspiration of Scripture, where every word is equally affirmed to be the ‘Word of God’ – is a key claim Mark wishes to uphold. Instead, the point is simply this: if Jesus is uniquely the eternal Word of God made flesh –



Image: vchal | istockphoto.com

“

This book... is in my opinion, the finest succinct study of this most wonderful and precious gift of divine revelation that I have come across.

”

the one who fashioned the world out of nothing, the one who exclusively reveals his Father in his own very person, and the one, then, who exclusively gives us access to his Father – surely anything he has to say about his own relationship to the words of Scripture is going to be particularly instructive.

Mark shows how at every turn Jesus has chosen to define his identity and mission, as well as to communicate his authority, by means of Scripture which he unmistakably declares to be the very ‘Word of God’. It’s a point that’s eloquently underlined by his own willingness to submit to its authority in his incarnate life, so there can be no sense in which the authority of Jesus and the authority of Scripture may ever be prised apart. Indeed, every attribute

we associate with Scripture – its clarity, truthfulness, sufficiency, and efficacy – is readily attested to by Jesus himself.

After beginning here, the bulk of the book then unfolds these attributes of Scripture in much more detail.

Chapter 2 shows how the phenomenon of a God who speaks to his creatures through intelligible words is something that is ultimately grounded in his own triune life. It is no exaggeration to say that the intelligibility of God in Scripture, communicated by his inspired human mouthpieces, is a gracious overflow of what is eternally summed up in the Son’s own relationship to his Father as his eternal ‘Word’.

Chapter 3 gives attention to the phenomenon of the ‘book’ we call Scripture itself. Its central question is this: how did a Word, originally delivered through the ministry of prophets and Apostles, eventually come to be written down, settled or ‘closed’ as a Canon, and preserved for all posterity?

Chapters 4 and 5 then tackle the character of Scripture in two parts. First, there is a discussion of the clarity and truthfulness of Scripture (Chapter 4). Here the reader will relish in all the theological lucidity that distinguished Mark's earlier work on this subject. It is a profound, immensely useful, yet deceptively straightforward explanation of what is and isn't being claimed by these concepts, offering a cogent defence of the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture against many of the usual objections that are raised.

In chapter 5, there is a brilliant treatment of the sufficiency and efficiency of Scripture, bringing the book back full circle to the central place God has given Scripture in communicating his saving mercies to his people and in administering his authority over all things.

Last, but not least, chapter 6 concludes the book appropriately with an

exhortation to honour the significance of Scripture for our Christian discipleship. The nature of Scripture demands a certain posture in its readers, marked above all by a reverent, prayerful, and ultimately joyful submission to its teaching as in it we recognise the voice of our great Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Faithful though it is, this book is so far from being a dull and predictable repetition of the church's teaching on Scripture. It is in every respect a fresh, incisive, and spiritually uplifting read which I pray will instil among its readers an ever-greater confidence in the divine power of Scripture to raise the dead and bestow upon them the priceless gift of immortality in Christ. **ACR**

This article was originally published in *Moore Matters*, at moore.edu.au/resources/moore-matters-winter-2022/

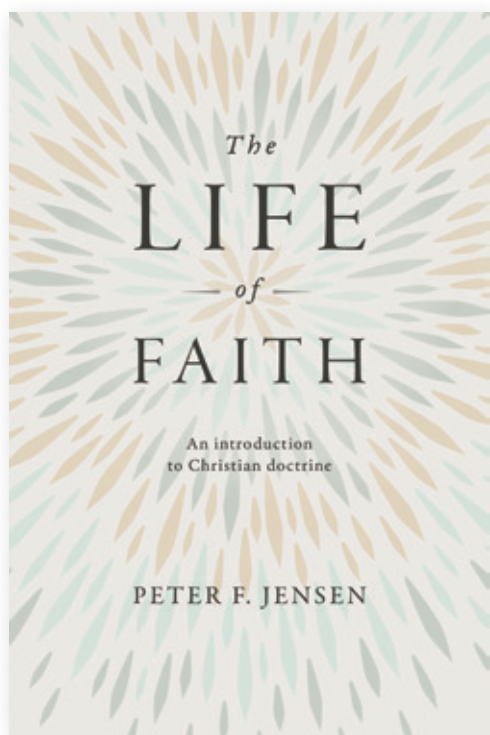
Book review

The Life of Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine by Peter Jensen

Thirty-four years ago I began as a naïve 21 year-old theological student at Moore College. Peter Jensen was the Principal and my lecturer in first year doctrine.

His class notes, which I recall he would hand out in full after each lecture, are the basis, albeit thoroughly revised, updated and otherwise improved, of *The Life of Faith*, his recently released *magnum opus*.

It's a mark of his clarity as a teacher that I soon felt able to invite my mother, who although a church-going Christian, had not been exposed to much systematic Bible study or doctrine, to attend the annual Moore College lectures which he delivered that year (published as *At the Heart of the Universe*). She found them challenging but digestible. Peter has also earned appreciation as a lecturer in doctrine to trainee youth and children's ministers, some of whom are without an undergraduate degree.



The Life of Faith proceeds through twenty-seven chapters, under three headings:

- Knowing the God who creates,
- Knowing the Creator who saves,
- Knowing the Saviour who is Lord.



Sandy Grant, Dean, St Andrew's Cathedral

Each of the three sections begins with a sentence to summarise each chapter within the section, which is repeated as the 'key concept' at the head of each chapter. Those chapters end with a key verse of Scripture, a pithy quotation from another earlier author, a listing of key terms discussed¹ within, stimulating questions for further reflection, and references for further reading, principally to three other excellent systematic theologies by Bray, Horton and Milne (Anglican, Presbyterian and Baptist respectively), but also to various Protestant confessions and to Jim Packer.

It might be too much to ask, but I would have benefitted from a brief

prayer at the end of each chapter as well, catching up the particular thoughts that had just informed us about God and our relationship to him.

The Life of Faith covers all the major areas of Christian theology: the nature and character of God; revelation and the place of Scripture, creation and humanity; the triune nature of God; the person and work of Christ, and of the Spirit; union with Christ, and repentance and faith; the Christian life and the church, and eschatology. However, one might wish for an index of key words at the end of the work, alongside the Scripture index.

Perhaps its most significant methodological feature is that Peter begins with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is how we know God. That is how he works to save us. That is how we live with him as Lord. So in addressing topics like revelation, or anthropology, he begins not with the idea of God or the creation accounts, but with what we learn from the accounts of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. This is an excellent feature of the biblical theological approach that characterises Moore College, and often allows for a fresher engagement on traditional theological topics. Along with this are connected emphases on history, covenant and God's relational nature, although not in an excessive way. Peter also remains in constant informed dialogue with classical theism and the historic creeds. And he connects with the thoughts not only of the ancients, but of the moderns as issues like science, human nature or social justice arise along the way.

Peter is more than capable at weav-

¹ Occasionally, and perhaps slightly confusing, a key term listed at end of a chapter has not been mentioned explicitly within the chapter, just implicitly, e.g. Pelagianism in chapter 11, Arminianism in chapter 20.

ing a series of biblical references together to illuminate the particular topic he is addressing. However just as often, he prefers the approach of what I recall my philosophy lecturer at Moore College, Grahame Cole, called ‘contextualised affirmation’, where rather than ‘proof-texting’, one took a deeper dive into a section of scripture through the angle of a particular topic. For example, in chapter 14 on the atonement, ‘The Crucified Lord’, there’s an extended section on ‘The mystery of the cross in Mark’s Gospel’ (pp 180-84). It may be a little unusual in a systematic theology, but was fruitful for me as I preach through Mark again, and I suspect for others, as they approach the precious doctrinal topic!

Peter is judicious in entering contested areas, and is careful to ‘not go beyond what’s written’; for example, on God’s relationship to time, or on the relationship of Israel to the church.

Peter is eminently quotable. I found myself photographing screen grabs of many little purple passages, which I plan to share on my social media feeds for thought. One brief example, which immediately produced stimulating interchange online, was this: ‘History, not philosophy, is the key to understanding God’ (p 104).

It’s worth knowing that Peter not only writes clearly and engagingly, but also with an expansive vocabulary. I am not just referring to the introduction and explanation of common theological technical terms, which must be done in such a work, but more generally in his writing (e.g. cosmogonies, fecundity, vouchsafed). So some of those whose

experience in reading is more limited may find this tougher going at times.

One could perhaps wish for a little more on prayer; others might say likewise on the sacraments or on church government. But what he says is perfectly adequate as far as it goes and there’s no problem with an introductory book leaving you wanting more.

Likewise, given the volume of ink spilt on current debates, Peter is entirely comfortable to address issues to do with ‘complementarianism’ in remarkably few lines. Describing us as social humanity, from the creation accounts, men and women are husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and also companions and friends, social not independent (pp 146-47). Then while considering the incarnation’s significance for us, he comments that:

ideology has driven a wedge between male and female, who share far, far more than what distinguishes us. We are first of all human beings before we are men or women. It is the grace, joy, peace, love and obedience of Jesus which we imitate, each in our own way, but without the slightest fear that our particularity is to be subsumed into some gigantic ‘super-Jesus’ transcending sexuality. (pp 170-71)

Lastly, in a section on ministry of the word, Peter simply reports, ‘Likewise, the local church is described in family or household terms, with implications for how we treat each other and for the qualifications for leadership – for example, that teaching elders should be men

(1 Tim 2:8-15, 3:1-16)' (p 340). Obviously, there is a place for deeper discussion and debate, but this strikes me as a good model for balance and weight in how we approach instructing newer believers in basic doctrine, when compared to the greater length afforded so many other key topics in this volume.

In a couple of months, God willing, I will be heading to GAFCON IV in Kigali, a conference of a global Anglican renewal movement for evangelism and biblical fidelity. It is a mark of my respect for the quality of *The Life of Faith*, and in the knowledge of how widely Peter is respected in the Anglican communion worldwide, that I will be urging every delegate from Australia to buy two volumes of this new systematic

theology so that they might share one (or more) with an Anglican pastor from a developing country that they meet at the conference. Whether experienced or emerging, such leaders will benefit deeply.

I could also imagine a Christian reading group working their way through the volume fortnightly over the course of a year to great spiritual profit. **ACR**

Disclosure: Sandy has served on the Council of Matthias Media for almost two decades. He receives no remuneration for his role, and chooses to forego the discount offered to board members when buying Matthias Media books and resources.

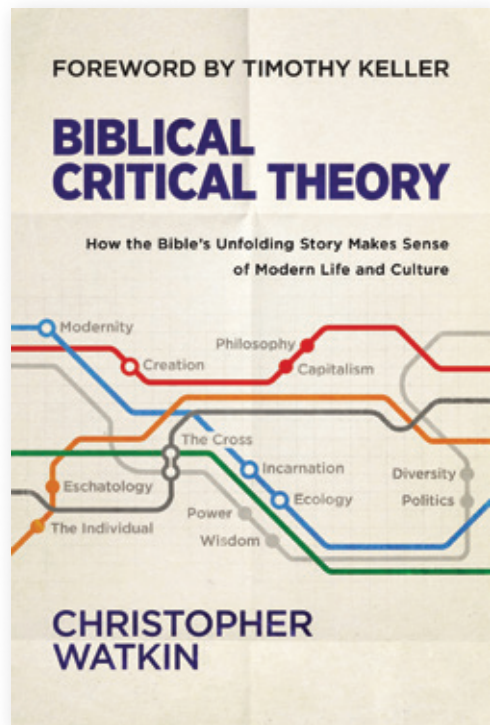
Book review

Biblical Critical Theory by Christopher Watkin

Christopher Watkin has just thrown us a lifeline. It's a book called *Biblical Critical Theory*. And it's good. Very good.

Biblical Critical Theory is a major work of what you could call Christian apologetics or cultural analysis. In it, Watkin sets out to explore and explain the major thinkers of modernity from a Christian perspective. Watkin knows that world intimately. The result is a rich, sympathetic, and critical engagement with Christianity's most powerful rivals.

I say you could call it 'apologetics' or 'cultural analysis.' But it's richer than either of those monikers would suggest. It fits into whatever genre Augustine's *City of God* fits into. *City of God* was Augustine's magisterial attempt to expose what was beneath the surface of Roman culture from the perspective of Christian faith. For Augustine, this involved understanding two things at



depth: the inner logic of Roman culture and the inner logic of scripture. In both cases, this meant reading beyond the surface. It means, on the one hand, understanding the culture of pagan Rome as something with a set of practices, cultural artefacts, prejudices, and



Rory Shiner, Senior pastor, Providence City Church in Perth

patterns of reasoning that together constituted a way of seeing the world and participating in it. And, on the other hand, it involved seeing scripture in the same way – not just a series of isolated commands and propositions, but a complex web of story and meaning that together forms the discipline and the Christian community to see and to be in the world in particular ways.

There is a word for this. It's called 'critical theory.' However, we associate critical theory with movements such as Critical Race Theory or Critical Gender Theory (often on the progressive side of the culture wars). But a critical theory is simply a way of seeing what is going on beneath the surface of a culture. St Augustine's *City of God* is, in this sense, a Christian critical theory.

Watkin has self-consciously written a biblical critical theory. By deploying a biblical-theological reading of scrip-

ture, he has brought its thought forms, figures, structures, and motifs of the Bible and used them to interrogate our culture and make critical sense of what's going on at the deepest level. If Graeme Goldsworthy's book *Gospel and Kingdom* and Francis Schaeffer's *How Shall We Then Live* had a child, it would look something like Christopher Watkin's *Biblical Critical Theory*.

Many books on Christianity and culture will use scriptural concepts, abstracted up to a 'Christian Worldview', but leave the actual Bible behind. But Watkin refused to enter the arena armed merely with the Bible's ideas, abstracted and packaged. He goes in with the Bible itself – the Bible in all its sprawling complexity, historical particularities, and narrative intrigue. How will we answer the sophisticated challenges of Deleuze, Butler, and Foucault? What will expose the deep structures of modernity? Watkin thinks the story of Adam and Eve, Israel, and Israel's kings and temple, and wisdom tradition, and, ulti-

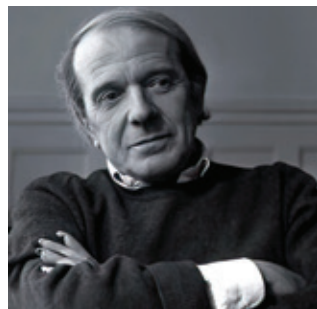


The particularity (and peculiarity) of the Bible is not a bug. It's a feature.



mately, the scandal of the cross, are exactly what we need. The particularity (and peculiarity) of the Bible is not a bug. It's a feature.

At the centre of Watkin's project is the concept of 'diagonalisation.' By this (slightly ungainly) neologism, Watkin proposes that scripture, when deployed to do the work of critical theory, tends



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to *diagonalize* between the limited options modernity offers. As he explains:

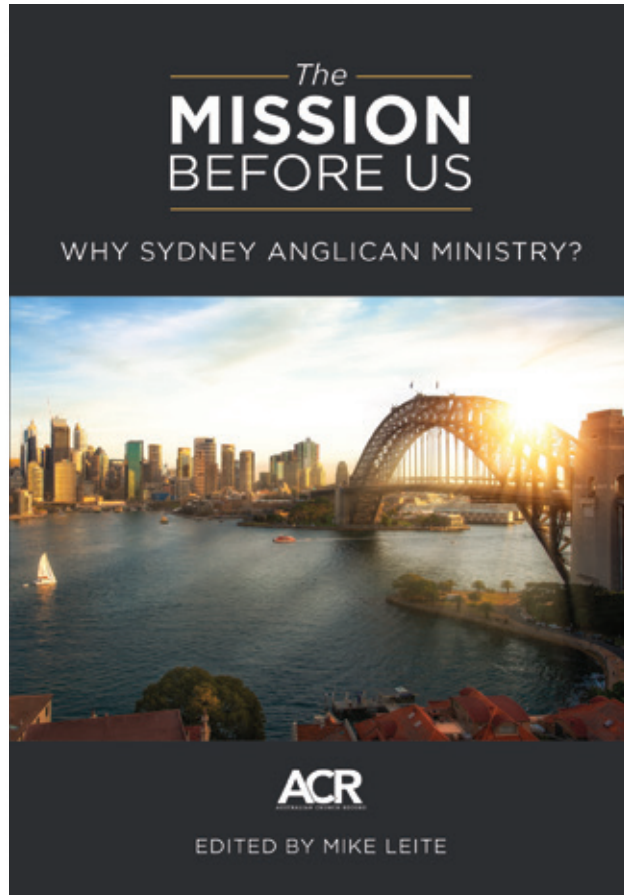
Given a choice between two camps or positions in our culture, the Bible frequently settles for neither and presents us with something richer than both, a subtler solution that neither position has the resources to imagine. Time and again we see that the Bible's figures cut across the range of options presented to us, only to find on further inspection that those options were themselves distorted and dismembered versions of biblical ideas. (xxxix)

'Diagonalization' in Watkin's hands should not be mistaken for a tepid 'third-wayism', an inherent centrism, or a strategy for intellectual respectability (ew!). It is, rather, a strategy for allowing the paradox found at the heart of the gospel itself, the paradox of Christ crucified, to do subversive work on culture. Martin Luther's *Destruktion*, Milbank's 'counter-fulfilment', or C. S. Lewis's idea of the 'the blessedly two-edged character' of Christianity, are cases of 'diagonalization' – points at which Christians have taken this paradoxical nature of Christianity and put it to work in the world of

ideas and culture (see Watkin xlii–xliii).

Watkin knows not only the Bible, but our culture. In his day job, Watkin can be found teaching French studies to tertiary students at a major Australian university. His working knowledge of philosophy and cultural studies is equal to any secular scholar operating in this field. In particular, his area of expertise is the French post-structuralist tradition (which includes Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze). It is a tradition that has had an influence out of all proportion on modern sensibilities – and not least in gender ideology and queer theory. Many Christians (rightly) concerned about this turn in our culture discover this tradition having seen some of its malevolent affects. Watkin is also concerned about this turn in our culture. But his grasp of this tradition is deep, first-hand, and appropriately sympathetic to at least some of their insights. The result is a deeper, richer critical appraisal. He critiques them at their strongest points. Not a strawman in sight.

This is an important and significant work. It's large and demanding but never obscure. Of the many things Watkin has learned from contemporary critical theorists, tortured prose is not one of them. It will repay careful reading and re-reading. **ACR**



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