



Do not be conformed, but be transformed

**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the
renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is
the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

Rom 12:2



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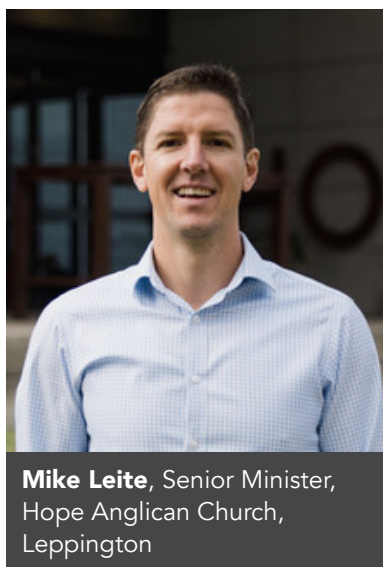
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Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed



Mike Leite, Senior Minister,
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Paul's warning in Romans 12 verse 2 is clear – ***Do not be conformed to this world.*** If we're honest however, it is hard *not* to be! Our age is so domineering. Our current world has many tools at its disposal to cause us to conform – social media, television, radio, our phones. Even if we were disciplined enough to minimise our use of these things, there are still the billboards that we can't help but stumble across and the rest of humanity itself, who are on the whole, conformed to this world. I'm usually very hesitant to say that our age is any harder or more sin-filled than any other age. The world, the flesh, and the devil have always been powerfully at work in every age. However, I can't help but think that the world, in our age, is particularly strong in causing us to conform with the tools at its disposal.

Now of course, none of this should be a surprise to the Christian. We know we are in a spiritual battle. And we know that we have been given the spiritual tools for this battle. What I love about Romans 12 verse 2 is that God's command isn't simply ***Do not be conformed.*** If that was all that was said, I'd feel as though I'd need to become a hermit to have any chance whatsoever! What chance have we when the world is so domineering? However, verse 2 goes on to say, ***but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*** The Christian, therefore, is not one who ***conforms*** but one who is ***transformed*** by the renewing of their mind. This renewing is of course the work of God's Holy Spirit in the believer by the Word of God. What an extraordinary grace of our God that he would transform us in this way to enable us to discern His will, and therefore not be conformed to this world.

It is in light of such a truth that the Australian Church Record exists. The articles that follow in this journal are written to help stimulate our thinking. They are written so that we might not be conformed to our world but have good discussion from the Word of God to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Of course, what follows is by no means the final word on the matters that are raised. Some may disagree with what's being said. Others may agree wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, these are matters worthy of our conversation and thinking. If we are not to be conformed to our world, we must and need converse together on a whole range of topics.

In this Sydney synod edition of the ACR Journal, we begin with a piece by Lionel Windsor on remembering *God's* truthfulness in all things. This is followed by three articles raising three distinct ways in which we can be conformed to the ways of our world: our safety obsession; cautions over materialism; and a warning about our guts! Mark Thompson then helpfully writes about our need to be biblical and theological during the upcoming Sydney synod debates. As those who desire to discern the will of God in all things, the debates and speeches during the synod should never follow the practices and techniques of our world. In what will no doubt be a more contentious topic at the synod this year, Jason Veitch shares his thoughts and principles when it comes to the question of mandating Pastoral Consultation.

In the middle section of the journal, we hear from some of the lay representatives of the synod. Sydney synod has a rich history of involving lay people in decision making and discussions. How can we keep encouraging this legacy? This is followed by some encouraging pieces and testimonies from our sisters involved in the Equip ministries, for which we are particularly thankful to God. And finally, Mark Earngey gives us much to think about when it comes to the question of catechising. Given the domineering nature of our world upon our young, the question of catechising and the need to teach our children is of great importance. Of course, we also have our regular segments. The 'From the vault' article was written by an anonymous author (most likely the editor) from July 1961. And there are two book reviews for you to consider.

As always, our prayer as the ACR Editorial panel is that you might be edified, encouraged, and challenged in your reading of this Journal. May we *not* be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of our minds.

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**

'Your truth' and the true story:

How the gospel of Christ transforms our decision-making



Lionel Windsor, teaches New Testament and Greek, Moore Theological College

"Whatever the cause, my memory is my memory, it does what it does, gathers and curates as it sees fit, and there's just as much truth in what I remember and how I remember it as there is in so-called objective facts. Things like chronology and cause-and-effect are often just fables we tell ourselves about the past."

So writes Prince Harry, near the start of his autobiography *Spare*. Since its release in January 2023, *Spare* has been incredibly popular, breaking multiple sales records.² Harry's tale is a lifetime of emotional confusion and anguish from traumatic experiences and oppressive systems.

His story of suffering is clearly designed to evoke sympathy from his readers. It also seems aimed at rewriting his history with the Royal family.

This is not the place to analyse whether Prince Harry is right or wrong about the details of his family history. The reason I am quoting the book here is to highlight Harry's candid admission that he does not ultimately *care* about history. In his words, the 'truth' that matters most to him is not found in 'so-called objective facts' about what actually happened. The true story is about his current feelings based on his fragmented memories of suffering and oppression. *This* is the truth the world (and his family) needs to know – *his* truth.

Why has this book been so popular? It cannot simply be a matter of Harry's celebrity

1 Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex, *Spare* (London: Bantam, 2023), 13.

2 E.g., Sarah Shaffi, 'Prince Harry's *Spare* Is Fastest-Selling Nonfiction Book since UK Records Began', *The Guardian*, 18 January 2023, www.theguardian.com/books/2023/jan/17/prince-harry-spare-is-fastest-selling-non-fiction-book.

status. The answer can be found in *how* Harry (or, more accurately, his ghost-writer J R Moehringer) tells the story. His narrative of emotional suffering and oppression taps into something deeply ingrained in our modern psyche. For many people in our world, what matters most is not some 'objective' truth that can be found in history and facts. Instead, what matters most is our own internal emotional experience. This is what the world calls 'your truth'. That is why emotional distress is now considered one of the greatest evils in our world, to be avoided at all costs. This is a crucial reason why personal stories of suffering are so powerful (and saleable). Indeed, personal stories of suffering are increasingly becoming one of the most effective ways to sway public opinion and to effect policy change.

This can be seen in several recent public policy and legislative decisions in Australia. An increasingly influential factor in policy decisions has been the need to reduce individual distress, including psychological distress.

For example, in debates about euthanasia in Australian state parliaments, personal stories of distress have often been front and centre. Such accounts have been decisive in swaying legislators. The stories easily override broader ethical concerns, including the sanctity of life, that would have been given far more weight in previous decades.³



Indeed, personal stories of suffering are increasingly becoming one of the most effective ways to sway public opinion and to effect policy change.



Another example is legislation passed in Victoria in 2021 designed to criminalise certain conversations concerning gender identity and sexual orientation. The types of conversation the legislation targets include (but are not limited to) psychiatric consultations and 'prayer-based activities'. Conversations that affirm a person's biological sex over against their perceived gender – even when spoken consensually and in private – are viewed by Victorian legislators as having such severe potential to cause psychological

'injury' that they must be explicitly prohibited. Potential perpetrators of such speech must be threatened with prison sentences and harsh fines. A primary object of the legislation is to 'ensure' that individuals 'feel welcome' and 'are able to live authentically and with pride'.⁴

As Christians, we are not immune to the world's way of making decisions. We are often profoundly influenced by it, even if we don't realise it. Unless we are thoughtful and deliberate, we can make decisions as our world does. That's why we need to remember that as Christians, we have a far more secure foundation on which to make decisions. That foundation is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel is a greater truth that transcends and encompasses 'your truth' and 'my truth'.

3 E.g., Kate McKenna, 'Queensland MPs Give Emotional Speeches amid Debate over Controversial Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill', *ABC News*, 14 September 2021, www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-14/qld-euthanasia-voluntary-assisted-dying-laws-parliament-debate/100460264.

4 *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021* (Vic), legislation.vic.gov.au/asmade/acts/change-or-suppression-conversion-practices-prohibition-act-2021.

In this article, focusing primarily on Romans 5–8, I will explore how this gospel foundation grounds our decision-making when we face stories of suffering. I am writing primarily for those who have roles in making decisions in difficult situations, especially those in leadership or governance positions in churches, Christian schools and other Christian communities.

Why stories of suffering resonate with us

Before we turn to Romans, it's worth exploring briefly *why* stories of personal suffering resonate with our world and influence our decision-making so easily. One reason is simple: we are human. Suffering is awful. It tugs at our heartstrings – and so it should. If we cannot empathise with others, something is seriously wrong. Yet this is only a small part of the answer. There are more specific realities relating to the time and place we live in – i.e., the modern twenty-first-century Western world – that we need to consider.

Carl Trueman's book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* is beneficial here.⁵ Trueman has given us a compelling philosophical history of the Western world. He has charted a series of 'revolutions' in our Western communal understanding of the 'self' – i.e., what it means to be a human being – over the last 300 years. Together, these revolutions have led to a situation where our deeply ingrained view of what it means to be truly human now has at its core three factors: psychology, sexuality, and politics. This means that for so many in modern Western society, our 'identity' – how we understand who we are at a fundamental level – has become a matter of what we feel inside, especially about gender and sexuality. Furthermore, this is all seen as inextricably political. It is assumed that our society's attitudes, speech and structures must be bent and moulded to ensure that these individual identities are protected as a top priority.

Most people in the Western world cannot clearly articulate these modern assumptions about identity, sexuality and politics. Yet they still run very deep. They are basic beliefs and gut-level reactions that we've picked up by osmosis, throughout generations, through countless stories, songs, movies, TV shows, videos, etc. Because they operate at a gut level, they are even more potent than they would be if we reasoned about them and questioned them. This helps to explain why psychological well-being, sexual orientation and gender identity are now so fundamental to how we talk about our very existence – and why they induce such strong emotional reactions.⁶

Trueman's analysis also helps to explain why stories of psychological distress have had such a powerful influence on decision-makers. Since many assume that our inner emotional

5 Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020). For a shorter, more accessible version, see Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022).

6 For a detailed summary and comment about the book, see Lionel Windsor, 'Review: The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self by Carl Trueman', *Forget the Channel*, 14 December 2020, www.lionel-windsor.net/2020/12/14/review-trueman-rise-triumph-modern-self/.

experience is absolutely fundamental to what it means to be human, they also believe (at a gut level) that *any* decision that removes or reduces emotional suffering must, by definition, be right, good and true. Other concerns are always seen as secondary. Increasingly, then, decisions in governments and other organisations are being made with the overriding goal of reducing psychological distress in individuals.

Yet the tragic irony is that attempts to achieve this overriding goal have demonstrably failed. We do not live in a society that is increasingly happy and free from psychological distress. Instead, the opposite is true. By all accounts, anxiety is sharply rising in the Western world right now.⁷ In fact, the overriding concern of our society to reduce psychological suffering too often leads to *more* suffering. It creates an environment that fosters vicious competition between sufferers. Potential victims must now vie with one another for the right to be granted victimhood status and thus seen as worthy of protection. So, for example, world-renowned *Harry Potter* author J K Rowling, who is also a vocal advocate for safe spaces for biological women, is routinely and ferociously attacked online (including through threats of sexualised violence) by those seeking to fight for the rights of those who identify as transsexual.⁸ This is a consequence of the worldview that privileges victims' rights above all else. It creates a gladiatorial arena of victimhood, where power and legal protection can only be granted to the victim group deemed most worthy. As a result, victims must fight to the death to prove who suffers the most.

The true story is far better

Perhaps you are in a place of leadership or governance in a Christian institution, such as a church organisation or school. How do you react when you hear stories of suffering? How do you make decisions in light of these stories? What is a Christian way of going about this?

We need to avoid simplistic answers. For example, we cannot merely reject all stories. Stories are exceedingly important. Indeed, true stories are a compelling way to bring across the truth. After all, a large part of the Bible is in narrative form, including, most significantly, the Gospels. We come to know the true God through these stories – through seeing him in action through his people Israel and his Son Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, we cannot merely refuse to listen to stories about individual suffering. We cannot close our hearts and insist only on an abstract 'truth' without any compassion. Jesus was often filled with compassion (e.g., Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2) and he calls us to do the same (e.g., Luke 10:33, 37). 'Love your neighbour' is repeated and prominent in the Bible (e.g., Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8).

7 E.g., in the UK, 'Generalised anxiety recording rates increased in both genders aged 18–24 between 2014 and 2018', according to Irwin Nazareth et al., 'Trends in Generalised Anxiety Disorders and Symptoms in Primary Care: UK Population-Based Cohort Study', *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 218.3 (2021): 158–64, [www.doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2020.159](https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2020.159).

8 See Megan Phelps-Roper, 'The Witch Trials of J.K. Rowling' (podcast), *The Free Press*, chs. 4 and 5, www.thefp.com/witchtrials.

However, as Christians, we can and must do far better than following the world's knee-jerk reaction to stories of suffering. That is because we have a far better story – a true story. This is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel does not ignore suffering. Indeed, the gospel has at its heart the suffering of the Lord Jesus for our sins. Yet the gospel's answer to our suffering is not simplistic. It does not force us into a situation where we must remove suffering at all costs. Instead, the gospel interacts with suffering at many different levels. It gives us a richer, more satisfying answer than the world does as we seek to make decisions in the face of suffering. We see this particularly clearly in Romans 5–8. In these chapters, the Apostle Paul frequently addresses questions of suffering and love in light of the gospel of Christ.

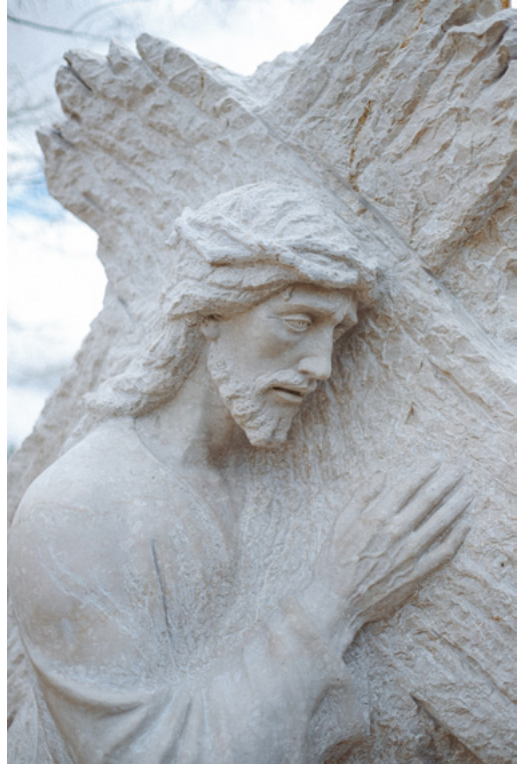


Photo by Wesley Tingey

A deeper perspective on suffering (*Romans 5:1–5*)

The first thing we see as we approach Romans 5–8 is that the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection gives us a deeper perspective on suffering.

At the beginning of Romans 5, Paul reminds his readers of the great truths about justification through faith in Christ, which he has just described in the previous chapters (chs 1–4). Although we are sinners, deserving only God's wrath, God sent Jesus to suffer and die on the cross for our sins in our place. We are 'justified' – declared right with God – not by anything we can do, but only by trusting in Christ, who died and rose from the dead. After Paul reminds his readers about this truth ('Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, ...') (Rom 5:1), he focuses on its implications for our lives.

Paul first describes the way justification by faith in Christ brings us 'peace' with God and 'hope' in a certain future (vv 1–2). Then he speaks about the way this peace and hope gives us an entirely new perspective on suffering (vv 3–5). Knowing this peace with God and this certain hope does not necessarily remove suffering from our lives. Yet it radically transforms how we view this suffering:

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)

Our peace and hope give us the ability to endure suffering. Even though suffering – including emotional distress – can be deeply painful, it need not dominate all of our emotional space and leave room for nothing else. We have a firmer, deeper foundation: God's peace and love for us through Jesus. We can also be confident in our future: the hope of God's glory through Jesus. No amount of suffering, however painful, can ever undo that peace, love and hope.

Paul also says that suffering can have a *positive* role in our lives: it can generate further character and hope in us. Paul says that 'we rejoice in our sufferings' (Rom 5:3). The Greek word translated as 'rejoice' here is *kauchōmetha*, which can also be translated as 'boast'. Rather than simply being ashamed of our sufferings or wanting to avoid suffering at all costs, we can view our sufferings as opportunities to grow in endurance, confidence and hope.

This is not to glorify suffering itself. But it does help us to see that suffering is not so fundamentally bad and overwhelming that it must be avoided at all costs.



Photo by Chelsea Bock

A greater kind of love (Romans 5:6-11)

The gospel of Christ's death and resurrection also shows us a far greater kind of love than the idea of love the world gives us.

The idea of 'love' in our world is often reduced to relieving a person's emotional distress by affirming everything about them. On this understanding, the 'loving' thing to do in any

given situation is to make a person feel better about themselves. However, God's love shown in Christ Jesus is far greater than this:

*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
(Rom 5:8)*

This is very different to our world's understanding of love. In our world's understanding, it would make more sense for this verse to read, 'God shows his love for us in that while we were feeling like worthless sinners, God affirmed that really we are wonderful in every way and accepted us for who we are inside.' But God's love for us differs greatly from this kind of worldly 'love'. God didn't deny that we were sinners at all. In fact, he was deeply opposed to our sin (see Rom 1:18–32). So he did not merely affirm us. He did something far better. He *loved* us. He *acted* for us. Christ *died* for us, not so that we would stay in sin, but so that we would be reconciled to God.

A greater kind of identity (*Romans 5:12–21*)

The gospel of Christ's death and resurrection, therefore, gives us a far greater understanding of identity than the world offers us.

As we have seen, our world's view of 'identity' is intimately bound up with how we feel inside – especially when it comes to our internal feelings about gender and sexuality. In the world's view, we are bound to accept and affirm our feelings. Only in this way will we discover who we truly are. Or, as Lady Gaga puts it, we are 'born this way'.⁹

At first glance, the idea of affirming who we feel we are may sound liberating. But if we scratch beneath the surface, we find that it is, in fact, profoundly disempowering. If we are just 'born this way', then there is nothing whatsoever we can do to change. If we try to change, it will only damage us, because we cannot deny our predestined feelings. This bleak view of identity is not confined to pop stars like Lady Gaga; it is rapidly becoming a legally enforceable ideology in parts of the Western world. For example, the Victorian legislation mentioned above is explicitly designed to prohibit change. It encodes in law the idea that any practice 'inducing' a person to 'change' (even with that person's 'consent') is potentially a criminal offence attracting a prison sentence.¹⁰ The law is designed to protect identity, but it removes the freedom and power to change.

Yet the gospel tells us a far greater story about who we are and can be. Paul describes this reality in Romans 5:12–21. In Christ, we are given an entirely new and far better identity. Rather than being forced to live according to the old humanity into which we were born

9 Lady Gaga, 'Born This Way', 11 February 2011, <https://youtu.be/wV1FrqwZyKw>.

10 'In this Act, a *change or suppression practice* means a practice or conduct directed towards a person, whether with or without the person's consent... inducing the person to change or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity'. See *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021* (Vic) s 5(1), legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/change-or-suppression-conversion-practices-prohibition-act-2021.

('Adam'), we receive a new life – a new humanity – in Christ. This means we no longer need to be defined by how we feel, sexually or otherwise. We *can* change. We have the freedom to be new people and to live life for the Lord Jesus – now and forever:

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:17)

A story of transformation, not merely affirmation (Romans 6)

This means that the gospel of the Lord Jesus is a story of transformation, not merely affirmation. In Romans 6, Paul describes Jesus' death and resurrection as the foundation and model for our lives. As we are united with him by faith, his story becomes our story. So rather than being required to affirm and live forever in our old lives, we can become new people in Christ. Rather than remaining trapped in our old desires, we have a new life to live – a life of freedom rather than slavery:



Photo by Håkon Grimstad

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Rom 6:6–7)

This means that our internal desires no longer define us. We are not trapped. We do not have to let our feelings rule our lives. We can live in God's grace:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Rom 6:12–14)

A story of struggle and victory (*Romans 7–8*)

This does not mean that life on this side of glory will be easy and free from struggle. The struggle against sin and wrong desires is an ongoing reality. That is because we still live in mortal bodies. We are still subject to desires that conflict with who we are in Christ and what God wants us to be and do. Paul describes this struggle in Romans 7. As Will Timmins writes (focusing on v 14):

We now have freedom through union with Christ in his death and resurrection (6:1–10), but our bodies don't yet share Christ's risen life (6:11). So there's still a slavery in our bodily members (7:23) as we await the redemption of our bodies (8:23). That's what it means to be fleshly. ... This is the painful reality – our bodily condition hasn't yet caught up with who we now are in Christ.¹¹

So we should not be surprised when we find ourselves struggling against sinful desires. According to Romans, we should *expect* to struggle in this life. This struggle is not pleasant. Struggling is painful. It will create emotional distress in all of us. If we accept our world's view that emotional distress is one of the greatest evils to be avoided at all costs, then we will never be able to bear the kind of struggle that Paul talks about in Romans 7. If we hear of others struggling emotionally, our reaction will be to change everything we can possibly change to stop this struggle from happening. However, the gospel teaches us that the struggle is always present with us in one form or another. The struggle is real. And that is okay.

Thankfully, however, this struggle is not the final word. In the next chapter (Romans 8), Paul gives us a deeper and broader perspective: he speaks about our hope in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us. We know the security and freedom from condemnation that we have through Christ's death for our sins (vv 1–3). We have the power to live for God by his Spirit, who is at work in us (v 4). The Spirit brings us both hope and the ability to change and grow (vv 5–11). And he enables us to live our new lives in Christ – lives of hope and dignity (vv 12–17).

At this point, Paul returns directly to the theme of suffering (vv 18–39). The realities Paul has previously laid out – the reality of our new identity in Christ leading to transformation (chs 5–6), the reality of our struggle in our mortal bodies (ch 7) and the reality of our life in the Spirit (8:1–17) – enable him to deepen our perspective on suffering even further.

Firstly, our certain hope of glory in the Lord Jesus gives us a broader horizon in which to live with our suffering. Suffering is real, but it is not the end. We may groan, but we groan in hope:

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the

11 Will N Timmins, 'What's Really Going On in Romans 7', *The Gospel Coalition: U.S. Edition*, July 2, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/romans-7-apostle-paul-confession/>.

firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom 8:22-25)

Secondly, the indwelling Spirit means that God is with us in our suffering. We are not suffering alone, but in the presence of God himself:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (Rom 8:26)

Thirdly, God's love shown in Jesus' death for our sins is a deep basis for security in everything. While God's love shown in Jesus' death for our sins does not remove all suffering immediately, it is an anchor that gives us great strength to live and endure:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:35-39)

The true story and decision-making (*Romans 12*)

The gospel of the Lord Jesus is the new story we live by as Christians. It is a true story. It is a story that encompasses both suffering and joy. Yet it is greater than both.

How might this work out for those of us tasked with making decisions in Christian communities? What do we do when we hear stories of suffering, particularly of emotional distress?

In Romans 12, Paul draws out some practical implications of the gospel for our Christian lives. We are not to be 'conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind' (Rom 12:2). This implies we must not unthinkingly follow the world's views and knee-jerk reactions when we hear stories of suffering. We need to let the gospel's story of Jesus Christ encompass these stories of suffering and transform our hearts and actions.

Paul develops this in several ways in



We need to let the gospel's story of Jesus Christ encompass these stories of suffering and transform our hearts and actions.



Romans 12. Here are three that are especially relevant to those tasked with making decisions in Christian communities.

True love

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. (Rom 12:9)

As we saw above, love for our neighbours is fundamental to our Christian lives. We must make decisions out of Christian love.

However, we must keep returning to the gospel of the Lord Jesus to define what love really means. We must not be taken in by the thin and pale definition of 'love' the world offers us. Genuine 'love', according to the world, is all about affirmation and reducing distress. It has little room for true discernment about good and evil. In our world's view, if you genuinely 'love' someone, you'll do everything in your power, at all times, to reduce their distress, rather than address the issues in terms of right and wrong.

However, according to Romans 12:9, genuine love goes hand in hand with *hating* what is wrong. In our world's understanding of 'love', this would be nonsense. But it makes a great deal of sense when we understand love according to God's love for us in Jesus. Loving people and hating evil are not opposites. They go together. Genuine love involves doing what is genuinely good and hating what is genuinely wrong.



We must not be taken in by the thin and pale definition of 'love' the world offers us.



Therefore, when it comes to decision-making in Christian communities, a genuinely loving decision may result in increasing emotional distress in some people. Doing what is good according to God's word is ultimately the right and loving thing to do. It will not always be *felt* as love. Yet this does not stop it from being genuine love.

True hope, patience and prayer

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. (Rom 12:12)

The world's knee-jerk reaction to suffering – including emotional distress – is to seek to *fix it right now at all costs*. If we accept the world's view that suffering is the greatest evil, this makes sense. However, the Christian's first reaction to suffering must be different. Paul summarises it in using three key ideas: hope, patience and prayer.

Hope means setting our hearts on our secure future in the Lord Jesus when God will raise our mortal bodies from the dead and make all things new. *Patience* means waiting and living with the discomfort right now: not always seeking to fix it immediately, but being confident

that the Lord will bring about his good purposes. *Prayer* means coming before God and asking him for help before trying to fix it all ourselves. This does not always remove suffering immediately, but it does put it into perspective.

Of course, this does not mean we should never do anything about stories of suffering. Sometimes, we can and should make a real difference in these situations by making positive decisions. In some cases, it is both possible and right to seek to reduce suffering while holding on to what is good. In that case, we should indeed act decisively out of love. Nevertheless, we must always do this in the context of hope, patience and prayer.



When we cry with others, we cry in the context of the greater story. We cry with hope.



True empathy

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (Rom 12:15)

None of this means that we should neglect empathy for others. Stories of suffering are painful. They should make us cry. And we must cry with others.

In fact, when it is understood rightly, the gospel's perspective on suffering increases our ability to show empathy. When we cry with others, we cry in the context of the greater story. We cry with hope. This means we can bear the crying – which means that it's OK to keep crying. We do not need to anxiously insist that we must always do something right now to stop the crying. We can continue to show empathy, with patience and prayer, even when we cannot fix the problem ourselves.

Remembering God's truthfulness

Behind everything Paul writes in Romans is God's concern to see salvation in Christ go out to all the world (Rom 1:1–6). This is vital for us to remember. In all of our decisions, we are not simply acting for the sake of our individual Christian communities. We are acting for the sake of God and his world.

We want the world to know this better way. We want the world to know this true gospel story that is far greater than the world's increasingly anxious and dysfunctional pursuit of salvation through psychological safety. We want the world to know this salvation: this faith, hope and love in the Lord Jesus.

The world will not always understand and might even oppose us. We ourselves might suffer deeply for decisions we make. But this does not mean we should give up. Living lives of faith, hope and love in response to God's truthfulness is part of his plan to bring the gospel message of faith in Christ to the world (Rom 15:8–9). **ACR**

Safety obsession

'Caution: slippery when wet'

Our society is risk-averse. With our endless road signs, laws and regulations, we've cultivated a society that champions safety and prioritises the elimination of risk. Our Western world is safety obsessed.

How have we got here? Surely, our love of money is a part of the picture. We don't want to pay out for an 'oversight', and so we love the fine print. Our faith is in the fine print.

Human hubris and the unrealistic belief that there is a world in which we can truly control every outcome and risk also forms a part of the picture. It has led to urbanisation and infrastructure. Increasingly, the average human experience is 'life in the city' – where our buildings, streets and city lights allow us the illusion of safety. *'If you live within our city walls, and follow our laws, you will flourish and thrive'* is the catch cry.

Most of all, however, our safety obsession must stem from our fear of our own mortality. Death is our common enemy and so let's give ourselves a fighting chance to keep it at bay as long as possible. We do this partly by denying death's power and keeping it at the peripheries of the human experience: in our hospitals and out of our conversations. *'Fifty is the new thirty'* is the lie that *'death has no power'*, wrapped up in billions of dollars of cosmetic branding. We fear death and its portents: sickness and age. So we adopt a 'safety mindset' to protect ourselves.

Perhaps there are other reasons for how we got here. Nevertheless, safety has become a virtue and aspiration. We use the 'safe' adjective endlessly: *safe schools, safe house, safe spaces, safe ministry*. We cannot conceive of a world in which there is ever an argument *against* safety. My question is whether this is a good and biblical thing?

Please be assured, this isn't an argument for recklessness! A society with no laws and regulations for the general good is a place of chaos. However, this *is* an argument against taking 'safety' as an absolute 'good' without some biblical discernment. What is lost with our



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world's safety obsession?

The book in the Bible that has most challenged my 'safety mindset' in regards to gospel ministry is 2 Corinthians. In this passionate letter from the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church, he urges us to peer away from the *blinding lights* of the impressive Corinthian city, and to fix our eyes on heaven, to preach a gospel of a crucified One and to forgo the securities of this world – even our lives on this earth – for the salvation of others.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Cor 4:11-12)

To engage in gospel ministry is to be given over to death for Christ's sake, so that others would know the life Christ offers. Paul's love for the Corinthians is so great he will even live a life that looks like dying. He'll be afflicted, persecuted, and hurt for them. By every measure, his life looked in danger. He was bleeding out life for them – giving his minutes, hours and years for them. He was giving up comfort and home and security for them. He was giving himself up for them ... much like Jesus did.

In a world that teaches us to love ourselves – where the self is sacred and must be protected as priority – the Apostle Paul gives up that 'safety mindset' for his love of Jesus and others.

And not only does he forgo his own security – but he speaks a gospel that destroys strongholds, arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God ... it's the gospel that creates a new person and removes the old. It's the gospel that pierces and cuts and shows up human hubris for the foolishness it is. To live and preach the gospel is about as dangerous as it gets! Our Lord Jesus Christ showed us that. If we conform to our world's obsession with safety, are we at risk of foregoing a Christ-like and Paul-like gospel ministry?



Photo by Justus Menke

Our society's instinct for safety is a yearning for a permanence in this life that is essentially elusive. It cannot be achieved in a world of sin and death. As a Christian, I pray I resist the urge to build up a life of safety now, for the sake of the lost and the only life that can assure their souls the safety they crave.

2 Corinthians puts uncomfortable questions before me: Am I willing to die? Perhaps not tomorrow, or the next day – but am I willing to die over the next 5-6 decades that God gives me life? Will I slowly, at times quite painfully, give up my minutes and hours and years – my remaining youthful energy – my coming wisdom of age? Will I give that all up to serve the Lord Jesus, for the only lasting salvation of our souls? **ACR**

The challenge and opportunity of wealth



Ben George, Assistant
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Even a cursory look through Scripture shows that the generosity of a Christian in this world should look different to the rest of society. Undergirding generosity is everything that we learn about Jesus, in the example of his life, and even more profoundly in the example of his death and resurrection. As we strive to adorn the gospel of the Lord Jesus, that treasure delivered to us in clay jars (2 Cor 4:7-18), we strive to not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but rather transformed as we are renewed in aligning our affections to those of the King we serve wholeheartedly (Rom 12:2). This profound challenge is true for every aspect of our lives – our relationships, sexual conduct, work, and so much more. Perhaps there is no more challenging a topic for many in Sydney and Australia than submitting to the will of

our Lord Jesus when it comes to how we use the finances he has so graciously given to us. It is a topic that everyone in Sydney is forced to take seriously, and consider carefully, for it permeates every aspect of society. I take it, the challenging words throughout Scripture on the dangers of wealth and the careful manner with which we ought to think about how we use our money (Matt 6:19-21, 24; 1 Tim 6:10, 17-19; Heb 13:5; etc) are there precisely because they too easily fall to the side as we are pushed along by the tide of materialism and hedonism that is commonplace in our culture and contemporary vernacular.

For this reason, I hope to encourage us to keep being challenged by Scripture in letting generosity abound. I hope that we, as we make up our individual churches and parishes, and more broadly as a Diocese, would not take our foot off the accelerator in being so different from the world around us in our attitudes, that people can't help but ask us about our conduct. For it is my firm belief that our Biblio-centric counterintuitive actions around materialism and hedonism are an evangelistic opportunity in a financially blessed city that is devoid of stability, safety, and hope for the future.

A great challenge in Sydney

The rise in interest rates, cost of living, pressure to purchase property as one of the only sure means of secure investment – Sydney is a financial pressure cooker, with cracks starting to show. This impacts the way in which we think about church, fellowship with others, generosity in hospitality and with our time, and so much more. In fact, when these real and stress-inducing pressures continue to build, we are naturally drawn to focus inward as our *modus operandi* becomes self-preservation. This is not entirely wrong, as it is our duty to take care of ourselves (1 Thess 4:9-12) and provide for our families (1 Tim 5:8). However, it is important that we seek wisdom from God in both inoculating ourselves from becoming a product of materialism, and in how we ought to strike a balance between being sent into this world while not being of this world (John 17:14-19)¹². Given our context in Sydney, a factor that needs to be taken into account in our fulfilling our mission mandate to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20) is where the devil might attack us. Where are we as Sydneysiders most vulnerable to temptation? In seeking to understand the times in which we live, we ought to ponder our greatest challenge: not (yet) so much persecution, but rather wealth and agency.

Let me explain a little further. Our relative wealth in Sydney will by and large mean creaturely comforts for us. These comforts, again, are good and right things to be thankful to God for and utilise appropriately, but they are temptations that can also so easily distract us from our evangelistic pursuits. The truth is that



Sydney is a financial pressure cooker, with cracks starting to show.



our finances are tied in with so much of what is important in day-to-day life – our sense of comfort and a safe space juxtaposed against the mental stresses of work and the hard grind; the education of our children in spaces that are safe for them to thrive and flourish as little disciples of Jesus; our inheritance and setting up secure futures for our retirement and the next generation; and even opportunity to travel and enjoy the goodness of God's creation across the globe. We must be careful, we who are clergy pastoring our congregations; and we who are Christians adorning the gospel in workplaces, on university campuses, in retirement villages, and amongst our neighbours.

Our Sydney Anglican Diocese Remuneration Guidelines, and the work that goes into them by Sydney Diocesan Services and others, is something for which I am very thankful to God. The care offered to clergy in stipendiary rates is so helpful to allow us to put our heads down and focus on the precious gospel work we have been given time to do. We ought not to take this for granted, as there are many places around the world where the pressures

12 David Mathis has a helpful little article where he revises the popular phrase 'in the world but not of the world'. He shows from Jesus' prayer in John 17 that the disciples are emulating Jesus' movements. The disciples are not of this world, as Jesus is not of this world. The disciples are also sent into this world, as the Father sent the Son into this world. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lets-revise-the-popular-phrase-in-but-not-of>

of meeting basic needs can significantly complicate how clergy go about their work.¹³ Nonetheless, the socio-economic diversity within parishes in Sydney calls for wisdom on how clergy are to use their stipends and model Christian generosity in financial stewardship. Even on a surface level, it is clear that clergy stipendiary rates are much lower than the average income of congregants in some suburbs, while being much higher in others.

This should surely impact difficult decisions we make on where to go on holidays (or how much to post on social media about such holidays), whether we purchase a property that is significantly better than what is normal within our parish, or even on decisions about a four-bedroom rectory when most residences in the area are one- or two-bedroom apartments. In other cases, thought ought surely be given to challenging ourselves and our people to go against the grain of the hedonistic

culture of our context – more modest accommodation, buying property in gospel-strategic places where income earned may not be as lucrative, holidays which cost less in order to budget more for significant gospel causes, sending kids to public school or private school where there aren't exorbitant fees, which extra-curricular activities to participate in.

The same is true in the case of lay people in our churches. For them to be salt and light (Matt 5:13-16) in the world necessitates decisions being made that go against the grain of society. Yet, making tough decisions on whether to buy property, where to buy property, sending children to school in the suburb in which they live, asking employers for flexible time at work in order to teach SRE or volunteer with monthly food distribution or ESL classes, and even decisions on whether to take a promotion at the cost of less time for building relationships and less time with family – all of these decisions, for a Christian, are *gospel decisions*. They impact our witness to those around us, and even the pipelines of our churches' engagement and evangelistic efforts. You only need to think of invites to church or youth groups that have come because of relationships built between parents and their children at the local high school. However it would be remiss of me not to say that all of these things are fraught with pastoral complexity, as they cut to the very heart of our agency and autonomy.

Nonetheless, these things are surely significant in how we shepherd our people under Jesus, and how we show the goodness of Christian living as we follow the wisdom of Scripture. For clergy, if we do not challenge ourselves to foster a culture of healthy introspection around materialism and hedonism, it would be perilous to try and lead our people in the same. For laity, if we do not live in a way that shows our submission to King



For clergy, if we do not challenge ourselves to foster a culture of healthy introspection around materialism and hedonism, it would be perilous to try and lead our people in the same.



13 I was speaking recently to a pastor in India who was flabbergasted by the fact that our Diocese would think hard on stipendiary rates and how to give wholistic care to their clergy.

Jesus in all aspects of life, including finances, we run the risk of being poor disciples who do not model for the world the uniqueness and beauty of walking with Jesus. For everyone, the nature of the challenge is sensitive, and Scripture is often strong in its language on the finite nature of earthly things when juxtaposed against the sure and certain hope to come. I am often profoundly challenged by the second half of Hebrews 10, reminding readers of the full assurance of faith that we have because of the complete work of Jesus. After a warning to not go on sinning deliberately, the writer reminds the recipients of this letter of how the gospel oozed out of their actions, including the giving up of wealth and other freedoms for the sake of the gospel and in light of the imminent return of Jesus:

*You suffered along with those in prison **and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property**, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded (Heb 10:34-35).*

Even just the challenge of this example, in a willingness to accept imprisonment and the confiscation of property¹⁴ because of the focus on the sufficiency of Christ in all things, likely gives us shivers. Yet concurrently, my cursory conversations with other clergy tell me that money and education are sometimes (if not often) preached in our pulpits and mentioned in Growth Groups, yet our people sometimes do not see it. This is a danger that we are more and more blinded by because of our context. I take it that the reason Jesus teaches on some topics numerous times, in words that are profoundly challenging, is because they are of Kingdom-level importance, and so, easily vehicles for temptation. This is certainly true for money.

You need only think back to the last time there was a pushback in Bible study or question time after a sermon on the Rich Young Ruler (Luke 18:18-30) with words like ‘... but Jesus doesn’t say that money is bad here, it’s more about idolatry’. Irrespective of the numerous implications drawn from this powerful interaction in the synoptic Gospels, we are often guilty of too quickly dismissing the specific words and examples that Jesus uses. This is surely due to our context, and the wealth that so easily informs our decision making and future planning. It’s not an accident that throughout Scripture, money is brought up in examples, and given to us as warnings. Listen, for example, to the apostle Paul as he articulates the danger of wealth:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Tim 6:10).

This certainly is a great challenge, and one we as Christians can’t afford to be lackadaisical about.

14 The ‘confiscation of property’ seems especially challenging in the Sydney context!

Generosity, and the opportunity for more!

It is worth saying that there is much to be thankful to God for when it comes to the generosity being shown in smaller and larger ways across the Diocese. It is a profoundly heartwarming experience to see the partnerships that occur between churches in socio-economically diverse parishes as a more financially established church partners with a church in a more financially challenging area, or helps financially stabilise a new church plant or re-pot. It is wonderful to hear of donors giving generously to gospel-centred organisations focused on theological education, caring for the vulnerable, raising up the next generation of gospel workers, and overseas aid – all for the ultimate goal of the gospel of Jesus being known among the nations, and care after his own heart being provided. It is encouraging to hear of Diocese-wide initiatives like the Greenfields and Brownfields projects, stewarding the resources we have been given to ensure churches have spaces in new and emerging suburbs to stand as the beating heart of evangelism and discipleship in those areas.

Yet, there are so many opportunities to show generosity for the sake of more people hearing about Jesus. To quote Archbishop Raffel's powerful Presidential Address at synod last year, 'do you see the crowds?'¹⁵ While Greenfields and Brownfields projects are there, many other areas within the Diocese also need significant financial assistance in order to foster evangelistic and discipleship opportunities. Areas already too full for church building



The counterintuitive thinking of a gospel-minded person captured by the love of Christ will mean generosity and the willingness to bless others, as that continues to display the grace of God in the lives of those people.



spaces are in desperate need of spaces where the gospel can be preached and God's people can gather. There are vulnerable and displaced peoples across Sydney who need urgent care and are yearning for sacrificial love that helps them to see the deep and profound love they can have in Jesus. There are also people coming from a plethora of tribes and nations to our shores, who are in desperate need of financial and physical care, through which opportunities arise to break cross-cultural and inter-cultural

barriers, build trust, and preach the truth of Jesus. When it comes to the gospel, opportunities abound! Surely then, the call is for us as individuals and as a Diocese to keep going, to keep pressing forward, to not take our foot off the accelerator.

Here is where generosity and the proper stewarding of our wealth is so profoundly impactful, beyond the actual generous giving of the money. While money will continue to be needed for gospel work, our attitude towards generosity and giving will speak volumes in the worldly city of Sydney that has been distracted by the lure of materialism and hedonism.

15 Archbishop Kanishka Raffel's 2022 synod in the Greenfields Presidential Address, with a focus on the multiplicity of opportunities to make Jesus known across the Diocese. Full text here: <https://sydney-anglicans.net/files/PresidentialAddress2022.pdf>

The counterintuitive thinking of a gospel-minded person captured by the love of Christ will mean generosity and the willingness to bless others, as that continues to display the grace of God in the lives of those people. This is what we see in Paul's writing about being a 'cheerful giver' (2 Cor 9:6-15). After an introduction about the Corinthian churches' willingness to give to the collection for Christians in Jerusalem, Paul makes his point clear:

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Cor 9:6-8).

The underlying motivation for Paul's statement is in verse eight, tied up with God's blessing and having all our needs provided for ultimately in the gospel. It is because of what we have been blessed with in our relationship with God, that we are freed up for every good work, which includes the generosity of giving to others what they need, for the sake of the gospel.

This becomes all the more clear when in verse nine, Psalm 112:9 is quoted. This psalm begins with the reality of the *blessedness* of a person in a covenantal relationship with God. Such a person cries out in praise to God, for such a person fears the Lord and takes great delight in his commands (Ps 112:1-2). In Hebrew, this Psalm is also an acrostic poem, giving us a sort of A-to-Z of the righteous person who has this covenantal relationship with God. They will be blessed, *α λα* the Abrahamic promise (Gen 12:1-3); they will not be given to fear but instead have a firm heart (Ps 112:6-8); and interestingly, they will deal with others in a manner that is both just and generous (Ps 112:5, 9). This is all part and parcel of how Christians ought to act. How profound, then, that the apostle gives the motivation for generosity as a natural consequence of being blessed with everything we need because of the covenantal relationship we have with God, secure in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even more than that, Paul goes on to press home that the enrichment and blessing that will come to the generous is also producing



Photo by Emil Kalibradov

thanksgiving to God. That is, not only will generosity mean that the physical and spiritual needs of those around us is met, but also that they will glorify God because of the generosity that they see in his people (2 Cor 9:10-13).

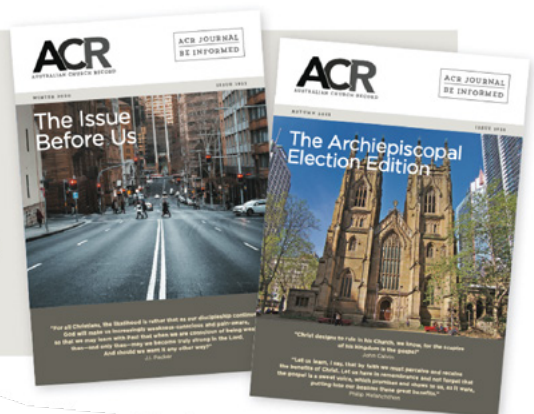
A better investment

The truth is that every aspect of the Christian life is to be guided by King Jesus, and this is both a profound privilege and an unbelievable challenge. We in Sydney (and more broadly speaking, in the developed world) are being attacked by the Father of Lies in the most cunning of ways: our wealth and our agency. Our relative comfort in our context of materialism and hedonism are in danger of blunting our evangelistic pursuits. Yet, we have such a profound opportunity to push against the grain of society, and decide on a better, Kingdom-minded and eternal investment. Jesus says as much in Matthew 6:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt 6:19-21).

We have the opportunity to look to our heavenly treasure, and as a result, adorn the gospel in which we have every blessedness because of our covenantal relationship with God in Christ. We ought therefore to be encouraged by all that we have been generously given, and press hard to ensure that we keep joyfully persevering in our generosity – and all for the sake of the glory of God being known across our city, that thanksgiving to God might overflow as a result. **ACR**

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Your gut is wrong

The gut plays a very important role in the day-to-day life of those born after 1980. For one, these generations are obsessed with food, with every second meal being posted on Instagram and every second TV show relating to food.

But the gut also plays a powerful role in the initial reaction to any given situation. The initial gut reaction often controls the emotions and determines the response that follows, even directing the ongoing course of action.

We see it in evangelism when we mention that Jesus is the one and only way to God (John 14:6). The hearer's gut reaction is: 'That can't be right! It just *feels* wrong.' The question that soon follows is: 'Does that mean that all the other religions in the world are wrong?' When we reply 'yes', the offense of our response can be felt.

Sadly we also see it in our churches amongst Christians. When we teach on some of those (supposedly) trickier passages, such as God's good design for human sexuality and the role of men and women, the initial gut reaction is often anything but positive. It's not that congregations want to openly rebel against God's word, it's just that 'it doesn't *feel* right'.

This is the tricky thing about the gut reaction. It's a reaction! It can't be helped. It's what people *feel* and *experience*, and these are such important drivers for millennials. So here are some helpful ways forward for our evangelism and our churches.

Firstly, we need to help people diagnose where their gut reactions are coming from. For most, they think that what they *feel* is natural. For them, if it *feels* wrong it *is* wrong. What we need to teach them, however, is that their reactions are *not* always natural or neutral, but are *culturally* formed. They are a product of their time and culture. And this time and culture, like all the ones before, are fallen and marred with sin.

In our evangelism, often it's as simple as asking them *why* they feel the way they do. In my experience, most people I ask don't know how to answer that question. At this point I sometimes use the 'Disney lie' as an example. For most born post-1980, the air they breathe is that 'you can be whatever you want to be'. And when I simply say to the person I'm evangelising, 'you can't', that instantly that doesn't *feel* right to them. But that's the point. As an example, I point out that I'm 6'3": no matter how hard I try, I'll probably never be able to be a great jockey!

People can be so offended initially by the message of the gospel that they tune out for



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the rest of the conversation. Yet the answer is not to withhold the proclamation of the gospel. Rather, helping them diagnose their initial reactions can clear the way for further gospel proclamation.

Helping fellow Christians diagnose their gut reactions is just as helpful, if not more so. I've spent a lot of time with 15-35-year-olds, and for most of them, *experience* is a powerful thing. This can leave them confused as to why, at times, God's word says one thing while they feel another thing. They know that God's word is good, and they hold to the authority of Scripture, yet it doesn't *feel* right.¹⁶

Of course we need to teach our people the doctrine of total depravity: our whole being and world is affected by sin and the fall, including how we feel. However, I've also found that helping them understand that their gut feelings are *not* natural, but are actually a result of sin and cultural formation, is quite liberating. It gives them a reason for why they feel the way they do.

But after helping people diagnose *why* some of their gut reactions don't align with God's word, we want to help them get their gut reactions right! We want our people (and ourselves!) to so know and love the word of God, that when the world screams its philosophy at us, our guts will be aching with how wrong it is (Acts 17:16).

For those amongst us who are leaders and teachers, this means watching our own life and doctrine closely; if we are not firmly grounded in the Scriptures we may follow our own gut reactions, risking our own salvation and that of our hearers (1 Tim 4:16). And we must preach and teach on those so-called difficult passages. I am shocked by those who decide not to teach on a specific passage, such as 1 Timothy 2, 1 Corinthians 6:9, or 1 Corinthians 11, because of their fear of people's reactions and getting them offside. Some have decided to skip a particular chapter while doing a sermon series through a book – or avoid that book altogether! But how can we expect people to have a right and godly gut reaction to God's good word when we don't teach it to them?

For all of us, aligning our gut reactions with God's word means meditating on it day and night (Psa 1:2) and remembering that it is a *good* word. In a world that screams lies at us constantly, we must be immersed in the word of God so that he is the one shaping our thoughts and behaviours. Then, instead of shrinking back from proclaiming Christ, scared of what others will think, we will be bold in telling them of the great salvation they need in Jesus. Why? Because once our guts are aligned with God, we cannot help but speak of what we have heard in the gospel (Acts 4:20).

Rightly understanding the gospel will cause our hearts to bleed for those who are deceived by the world and are sheep without a shepherd. Of course evangelism will often be hard, but if we are convinced that their thinking is wrong, and that they are facing eternal damnation without the forgiveness of sins found in Jesus, then we will risk offense and rejection so that some might be saved (1 Cor 9:22). **ACR**

16 In the contexts I have been in, generally people hold to Scripture as the final authority. If that is not the case in your context, then you will need to help people see how God has spoken sufficiently and authoritatively in the Scriptures.

What's so Christian about synod debates?

The synod of the Diocese of Sydney has a long and rich heritage. It was one of the first synods of clergy and laypeople in the world. Again and again it has played a vital role in reminding leaders and churches of the evangelical theology and evangelistic mission of our diocese. It has channelled the diocese's resources into long-term gospel mission strategies, supporting evangelistic initiatives, resourcing church planting, training the next generation of gospel workers for Sydney, Australia and the world, and providing practical pastoral care for those in need. It has resolutely stood with the gospel in the midst of a changing world. It is a genuine privilege to be part of our synod.

A diocesan synod is not a church, but it shares with church a profound awareness of Christ's promise to be present in the midst of his people when they gather in his name. Prayer, sitting together under the word of God, singing the praise of God, seeking the spiritual welfare of each other, fellowship — each of these things find a place in a well-functioning synod. Likewise, a synod is not a theological college, but it shares with a theological college a concern that our patterns of thinking and our decisions are shaped by the Bible and the understanding of God and his purposes taught to us in the Bible. We want to be doing the Lord's will rather than simply following the program of our secular culture.

Our decisions in synod, then, like the other decisions we make as churches or as disciples of Jesus, need to be wise, loving, practical, but above all theological. That just means they must arise from what we believe and proclaim about God and his purposes with their clear focus on Jesus and his gospel mission. We are not simply a parliamentary body or a debating chamber. Our gathering is not simply a business meeting. Elements of each of these things do contribute to the shape and character of our synod meetings: we do consider and amend legislation; we do argue the merits and demerits of proposals brought before us;



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Moore Theological College

and we do discuss finances, policies and strategy. Nevertheless, much more fundamental to our identity and function is the underlying reality that we are representatives of the churches and organisations of the diocese whose primary concern is the honour of God through the spread of the gospel of the crucified and risen Messiah.

This will mean that some at least of our decisions in synod will be profoundly counter-cultural. We will prioritise things the world considers unimportant. We will say things that those comfortable living without Christ will not want to hear. And we'll cop flack for that. Of course, some things will be valued in common with many in the wider community: for instance, transparency, integrity, wise stewardship of resources, and good citizenship. Others are a uniquely Christian concern: nurturing faith shaped by the teaching of Scripture, godly character, a ministry of prayer and the word of God, fostering a life of worship, growing and multiplying churches, and raising a new generation of workers for the Lord's harvest. We recognise that in all we do we are accountable to our God. Faith, hope and love should characterise not only the decisions that we make but how we make them. We need to be generous and charitable towards those with whom we disagree. Yet we must not be afraid of how the world will react to decisions made in good faith and in obedience to the word of God.

Not only the final decisions but also the manner of debate in our synod will have a particular character. The theological rationale for decisions being taken should be more prominent than in the gatherings of other decision-making bodies. We will regularly ask how the particular measure before us furthers the mission of the gospel. We will be mindful of the central role of the local church in that mission. We will test what is proposed against the godly principles of God's word. So above all we will want to keep asking the Apostle Paul's question: 'What does the Scripture say?'

One of the great dangers in a debating chamber is that matters will be decided on the basis of the skill of the speaker rather than the merits of their argument. Good speakers know how to carry an audience with them through heart-rending stories. They know how to generate concern, and even fear, at what is entailed in their opponent's proposal, or rather at what they are suggesting that proposal entails. They can throw up their hands at the complexity of their opponent's arguments or the self-evident offensiveness of the position being taken by their opponents. Of course, anecdotes, appeals to emotion, and other rhetorical devices are not all wrong in themselves, though some, such as attacking the speaker rather than his or her argument, are deeply unchristian. The real danger arises when these devices operate as a substitute for a compelling argument shaped by biblical and theological convictions.

We live in a moment of time when the most unassailable arguments seem to be any argument put forward by a recognised 'victim'. If you can cast yourself or those you represent as victims, and your opponents as oppressors, abusers, or the champions of injustice, then it is very difficult for someone to challenge what you say. To do so would simply be to compound the abuse. Of course, there are real victims and their voices must be heard. Their pain must not be dismissed nor minimised. But the use of victimhood as a strategy for ensuring your opponents' arguments are ruled out of bounds from the start, not even allowed to be heard,

is inappropriate.

Another danger is that winning the debate might become more important to us than speaking the truth. As a result, the truth is creatively reshaped to serve the argument of the debater. Opponents are misquoted. Motives are attributed. Benefits are minimised. Negative consequences are exaggerated or manufactured out of thin air. Ethel Annakin was right when in 1915 she argued 'Truth is the first casualty in war' ('Women and War', *International Congress on Education*), though in today's climate we should quickly add 'and in politics'. Statistics are particularly easy to invent or adjust to fit a desired argument. Famously, 'nobody checks up on Finland' (from the 2009 film, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*). The Greek dramatist Aeschylus once said, 'God is not averse to deceit in a holy cause'. But he was not talking about the one true and living God, 'the God of truth' (Isa 65:16). Those who know him 'speak the truth in love' (Eph 4:15).



We want to be doing the Lord's will rather than simply following the program of our secular culture.



Danger might arise from another quarter altogether. Misunderstanding Jesus' promise to his first disciples in John 16:13 – 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth' – some claim we should look to be led by the Spirit, or to discern what the Spirit is saying today to the churches, rather than to be directed and bound by the teaching of the Bible. Yet the Apostle Paul sought to exemplify 'not going beyond what is written' (1 Cor 4:6) and at a famous point in world

history the reformer Martin Luther insisted 'my conscience is bound by the word of God' (Diet of Worms, 1521). Scripture consistently teaches the inseparability of the Spirit of God and the word of God and this must prevent us from pitting the Spirit against the word. The word is brought in convicting power to the human heart by the Spirit, while the Spirit never leads us in directions which are contrary to the written word.

Having said all this, the calibre of debate in our synod is usually very high. There is a widespread acknowledgement that we are speaking to and about Christian brothers and sisters as well as in the presence of the God who created us, redeemed us and who will hold us to account for every careless word (Matt 12:36). Yet there is plenty of opportunity for humour and good-natured banter. Strange as it might seem, synod can actually be fun. It can be an opportunity to encourage our brothers and sisters and be encouraged by them. It can open our horizons to the scale of the global evangelistic mission of which we are all a part. So while it is definitely important to recognise the dangers mentioned above, and to regularly recalibrate our contributions to give priority to the biblical, theological and evangelistic aspects bearing on each question, we can do so with the grace and freedom that we have as those redeemed by Jesus. **ACR**

Pastoral consultation

Recommendation or imposition?



Jason Veitch, Senior Minister,
Campbelltown Anglican
Church

This September the Sydney Anglican synod will debate the imposition of a mandatory Pastoral Consultation (or Professional Supervision) framework for clergy and licenced ministers. This Consultation would roll out progressively over a few years and consist of approximately 6 sessions annually for all ministers at the expense of their Parish. In 2022, a Pastoral Consultation Recommendation Paper prepared for the synod set out two broad arguments for implementing Pastoral Consultation. The first derived from *recommendation* 16.5 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse report from 2017, as a possible means to curb sexual abuse. The second, a broader concern for the wellbeing of ministers and a general affirmation of the benefits of Pastoral Consultation in creating

a space for ministry reflection. These two justifications for Pastoral Consultation need not necessarily be linked but have become interlinked in this proposal. The final form of the proposal was not publicly available at the time of writing, but the 2022 paper combined with the recent *Faithfulness in Ministry* conference provide enough information to highlight an important concern. As the synod gathers to consider this proposal, we need to ask a fundamental question. Why should Pastoral Consultation be a mandated imposition? Why can it not be a recommendation instead? This is an important question to raise because the difference between a recommendation and an imposition reveals something about the relationship between the governing bodies and the local parishes within our diocese. For many, upsetting the balance between these two entities strikes at the very heart of what it means to be a Sydney Anglican.

It would be easy to assume Pastoral Consultation is just a *good thing*, approve it and move on. Unfortunately, that would overlook the fundamental issue here: the mandatory imposition of policy by the diocese. It would also overlook the secondary entanglement of the abuse responses with the challenge of maintaining a minister's wellbeing. It must



Photo by Sincerely Media

be said, of course, that sexual abuse of anyone, and specifically children, is an evil that must be uncompromisingly stamped out of churches and that sexually abusive behaviour is completely incompatible with Christianity. On the other hand, there are many real and potential benefits of Pastoral Consultation for ministers. It, along with other reflective practices arising in mentoring and coaching, are good tools to have in our ministry toolsheds. I've personally benefitted from a formal mentoring relationship over the past three years. However, imposing a particular form of Pastoral Consultation upon all local churches is unnecessarily heavy handed in the Sydney Anglican context, since it would go beyond the Royal Commission, which only made recommendations, not laws.

Where does diocesan imposition fit into Sydney Anglicanism?

Mark Thompson, Principal of Moore Theological College, recently offered a helpful explanation of 'Sydney Anglicanism'.¹⁷ Even though the Bible is the singular authority in this diocese, Sydney Diocese does not claim to be a 'church' in the New Testament sense. Indeed, a significant feature of Sydney Anglicanism is to recognise the centrality of local congregations in driving gospel ministry. By the same token, the role of the diocese (including the governing bodies such as the synod) is to serve and resource the ministry of local congregations. To put it another way, the diocese maintains the roads on which parish ministry drives, taking the gospel to people all over Sydney. Accordingly, the priority of the local parish church is central to our identity as Sydney Anglicans.

17 Mark D Thompson, 'What is Sydney Anglicanism?', *The Mission Before Us: Why Sydney Anglican Ministry?* (Camperdown: Australian Church Record, 2020), pp 37-43

This is not to say that bishops have no authority here. Rather, as according to the words of their consecration oaths in the Prayer Book, they are guardians of the faith, overseeing and coordinating the overarching gospel ministry and direction of the diocese under the rule of scripture.

Within this context, the imposition of measures that directly impact local parish ministers should be used rarely and with caution. Such a posture guards the mission and ministry focus of our local churches, if not our entire diocese.

So, why would we make mandatory what is a recommendation in the Institutional Abuse report?

Pastoral oversight is biblical, but where does Pastoral Consultation fit with our local-church-focused ecclesiology?

The Pastoral Epistles give us good biblical principles upon which to build our churches and denominations. Anglicanism itself is a good application of these biblical principles and it has stood the test of time. We are by no means perfect, but we do see God's Word informing our practices. Our bishops and archdeacons serve our local churches well, keeping ministers accountable for their leadership, resourcing local churches and helping churches keep their local mission focus.

The point is: our existing framework of pastoral oversight is informed by the Bible and shapes our ecclesiology. We have good reason to make use of what we already have. So why would we impose compulsory supervision?

Rather, shouldn't additional oversight or supervision be first and foremost filtered through the primacy we give the local church? Undoubtedly there will be times when local ministers are functioning well, and local resources could be directed towards other priorities rather than towards compulsory supervision.

Pastoral Consultation, whatever its final form, is not drawn as directly from biblical ministry models. Instead, it also draws upon some of the world's wisdom to encourage self-reflective practice and healthy work habits. There is nothing wrong with this at all. Indeed, Pastoral Consultation will have value some of the time for some

of our ministers. However, it clearly cannot be useful for all our ministers all the time. So, why impose it rather than simply recommending it?



This is an important question to raise because the difference between a recommendation and an imposition reveals something about the relationship between the governing bodies and the local parishes within our diocese.



Have we forgotten the theological reality that sin impacts systems, institutions, and organisations through people?

Sydney Anglicanism is doing many things well but there is no perfect structure or system to ensure our institution is perfect. The problem is sin. We live in a fallen world that is crying out for redemption. Sometimes, incredibly sad things happen, even in the church, even when we put all the right processes in place.

The answer is not imposing more supervision. We already have extensive training systems, meticulously crafted safe ministry procedures, abundant conferences, and countless opportunities for networking. Our training, systems and processes are close to the best in the world. I've made multiple visits to Africa where pastors dream of having the training, preparation, and support that we have. Yet, we still get it wrong because we can't legislate people's hearts – we are all sinners.

Sin will undoubtedly provoke cynicism in the hearts of some of our ministers about the usefulness of an imposed bureaucratic system. It is unrealistic not to expect that some will seek to satisfy diocesan laws at the least cost and time, so as to focus their scarce resources elsewhere.

Sin will also impact our wider system. It would be naive to think a compulsory system wouldn't draw consultants to pursue the profitable business opportunity. Perhaps, sadly, even tempting some ministers to quit ministry for consultancy and others to start side businesses in the consultancy space.

My fear is that all we will do by imposing yet another imperfect solution, is to send the message to the next generation that ministry really is too hard here in Sydney. No matter how many rules and systems, things still go wrong.

It is not just that our Sydney Anglican priority for the local church sees diocesan imposition as problematic, but that our doctrine of sin also tells us that imposition is problematic in practice. Any imposed system or institution will provoke unintended consequences arising out of human sin.

Is it possible that together, we might already have all the ministry tools we need amongst us?

Pastoral Consultation is one good tool for the ministry tool shed. It will be useful to many of us, some of the time. So will ministry consultants, mentors, and coaches. We are certainly privileged to live at a time with many ministry experts available to us.

However, I think we may have overlooked our best resources – us! The Apostle Paul gives a beautiful picture of ministry partnerships in several of his letters. Paul had support from Priscilla and Aquila, Demas, Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Onesimus and many others named in the New Testament letters. That was God's gift to him. In Sydney, we have the potential for many more ministry partnerships in our wide circles. This is a gift our diocese does and should continue to invest in – the creation of ministry partnerships.

For many ministers, the best support they have is the small group of minister friends from their time at Moore College that they catch up with regularly. They are accountable to these friends. They ask each other: Are you loving your spouse well in every sense? Living a holy life? Reading your Bible? Praying your prayers? Getting rest and exercise? This should be celebrated and encouraged more and more.



Photo by Dylan Gillis

There are countless other partnerships to also celebrate. How wonderful is it to work in ministry teams! Or to catch up with mission area teams! How excellent are ministry-minded spouses in ministry partnership! How encouraging to mentor a younger minister who you once sent out into ministry! How excellent are our bishops! How refreshing to have an older, more experienced mentor!

Imposing Pastoral Consultation upon a network that is actually already beautifully organic in its ministry partnerships, that already has great Safe Ministry systems, that has a shed full of ministry tools, and has already been acknowledged as having taken steps towards stamping out abuse, seems a little premature.

We are local church people. Perhaps we could instead create our own internal mentoring arrangements, share our ministry learnings better, look out for less-connected ministers and keep encouraging each other to find our joy in our local church mission and people.

Conclusion

The key issue here is not Pastoral Consultation itself, or our response to the Institutional Abuse report, or even a minister's wellbeing. It's our principle that local churches are the priority in Sydney Anglicanism. That we do not impose what is unnecessary to impose. Pastoral Consultation is an example of a good thing to recommend but not to impose. Let's ensure our local churches have access to it and other good ministry tools. However, let's not legislate when and how churches go about using their ministry tools. **ACR**

A view from the pew:

Lessons from lay members of Sydney synod



Stephen Tong has a PhD in the English Reformation, and is a lay member of synod

With Sydney synod fast approaching, it is worthwhile remembering that two-thirds of the synod are lay members. Quite apart from the numerical majority, lay folk play an important role in the business of the synod, and in its ministry outcomes. The ACR took some time to interview various lay representatives (old and new!) in order to gain a 'view from the pew'. We hope this will be encouraging for lay and clergy alike.

The Honourable Justice Michael Meek served on the synod some decades ago between 1987-1992 (or thereabouts). More recently, Michael has served since 2011. He is currently the Chancellor of the Diocese. This is an ex-officio role under Part 9 synod Membership Ordinance 1995 (clause 51).

1. Why do you serve on the synod?

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us: Rom 12:6. Using our gifts for our Heavenly Father's purposes is a means of honouring him and helping others.

2. What role do you see lay people having in this ministry? (i.e., How do you believe this ministry serves the Kingdom?)

The body of Christ includes Christian believers, lay and clergy. All play an important role.

None are indispensable: 1 Cor 12:12-27. The Diocese is a network of Christian ministries which is parish based. We are episcopally led and synodically governed. Laity are a vital part of the synod.

3. Do you need a specific skillset to serve as a lay representative? (i.e., Do you need formal theological or legal training to be useful?)

The primary 'skillset' laity can bring is that of humility, a gospel focus and a heart of service. The laity are a wonderful group of mature Christians who can participate from that perspective. Further, the synod considers many matters covering areas of human relationships, education, medical, finance (and the list goes on). The large number of individual laity members will have unique gifts and be able to contribute across many of the matters considered and discussed in synod. Usually, they will be able to contribute in a particular way with insights and learning from their God-given giftedness.

4. Do you have any lessons for new lay representatives?

First, pray for guidance and wisdom. None of us serve in our own strength. Secondly, aim to contribute as best you can. Considering a resolution, policy or ordinance and voting is a valuable contribution, not to be underestimated. If you would like to participate in debate, please do so. Don't be daunted by the procedural rules. You are welcome to participate. The synod staff and other seasoned members will help you.

5. How can clergy help foster a desire and vision for lay folk to get involved in governance issues (i.e., Parish Council, Wardens, synod Reps)?

By praying for our Heavenly Father to work out his purposes for his people, and by modelling how relationship with others works through humble leadership. Clergy can helpfully remind laity that gospel work including governance is a partnership born out of God's word to us in the Bible, love, and prayer: Phil 1:3-6.

Mrs Anna Davidson of St Barnabas, Fairfield with Bossley Park is new to the synod this year.

1. Why do you serve on the synod?

This will be my first synod (2023). I was asked to serve and thought I would give it a go! Others encouraged me and said we need to have lay people present who think biblically so that the decisions made will keep the denomination from becoming liberal.

2. What role do you see lay people having in this ministry? (i.e., How do you believe this ministry serves the Kingdom?)

As well as an opportunity for wider fellowship beyond my local church, I think it will provide accountability within the denomination, especially the leadership. I think the lay people can help the local Christians understand how decisions at a diocesan level are made.

3. Do you need a specific skillset to serve as a lay representative? (i.e., Do you need formal theological or legal training to be useful?)

I think one needs to be a mature Christian who enjoys reading (lots of synod papers) and can listen well (3-4 hours of synod proceedings!). Also, you need the time to read the material before and during the synod.

4. Do you have any lessons for new lay representatives?

I am thankful that a video has been produced for new synod members.

5. How can clergy help foster a desire and vision for lay folk to get involved in governance issues (i.e., Parish Council, Wardens, synod Reps)?

Feedback from any of these groups regularly is helpful – put in lay language and verbal or written. This will give others an idea of what is involved and why it matters.

Ms Janet Austin served on synod for many years as a lay representative for Lane Cove.

1. Why do you serve on the synod?

I was invited to consider being a synod Rep by one of the sitting members who was resigning her position. She believed it was an important role. I was willing to put my name forward at the AGM and to represent God's people across the various congregations in the parish if selected. It was a privilege to gain a wider perspective on gospel ministry across the different regions which make up the Diocese of Sydney. We are all involved in God's mission!

2. What role do you see lay people having in this ministry? (i.e., How do you believe this ministry serves the Kingdom?)

Parishes are represented in the synod by the Senior Minister and two lay people nominated by the congregation(s). Lay people significantly outnumber members of the clergy and bring wide experience and wisdom to bear on matters which are discussed. Important debates are often long and tortuous, but all sides get a fair hearing. I was always grateful for the insights and perspectives brought by lay people.



It was a privilege to gain a wider perspective on gospel ministry across the different regions which make up the Diocese of Sydney. We are all involved in God's mission!



3. Do you need a specific skillset to serve as a lay representative? (i.e., Do you need formal theological or legal training to be useful?)

Those ordained will have theological training and there are many lawyers about in the synod but a wide variety of other work and professional experience can be found amongst God's people as well. An understanding of 'parliamentary procedure' is helpful so that you can make sense of the procedures of synod business. You need to listen carefully and be

prepared to read the background material for important debates where voting is required.

4. Do you have any lessons for new lay representatives?

It is helpful to talk to others who have had this role before you. As mentioned, gain an understanding of 'parliamentary procedure' as this forms the basis of synod procedure. Ask the church to pray for you as you represent them in this forum. Read the diocesan magazine Southern Cross to be aware of current issues across the diocese.

5. How can clergy help foster a desire and vision for lay folk to get involved in governance issues (i.e., Parish Council, Wardens, synod Reps)?

Clergy need to help members of their congregations understand a little more about the leadership and structure of the Anglican Church, because the debates and resolutions of the synod are about matters that affect them. Good governance of the wider Anglican Church supports and enables gospel ministry to flourish at the local level of the parish.

Mr Andrew Buckley is a lay representative as Part 8.

1. Why do you serve on the synod?

I really value the opportunity to actively participate in the oversight and governance of the Diocese. synod provides a transparent forum for advocating for and debating critical decisions about how God's mission is to be carried out by the Anglican Church in Sydney. Even though to date my contributions do not extend beyond casting my votes, I am very conscious of the privilege and importance of my role.

2. What role do you see lay people having in this ministry? (i.e., How do you believe this ministry serves the Kingdom?)

Diversity in representation and decision making is a widely recognised benefit to any organisation. In the same way that our congregations are made up of many parts that each serve the body as a whole, so too do the lay synod Representatives, with their many varied life and professional experiences and perspectives, contribute greatly to the business of the synod. A strong and diverse lay representation, grounded in the gospel, is so valuable in ensuring that the Good News is being faithfully, passionately and prudently shared by the Diocese.

3. Do you need a specific skillset to serve as a lay representative? (i.e., Do you need formal theological or legal training to be useful?)

I certainly have no theological or legal training so I hope not! synod's many rules and procedures can be intimidating, and the volume of papers overwhelming at times, but I've found the synod to be much more accessible than I first thought. synod reps benefit from a love of (or at least tolerance for) rules and points of order and quick reading skills, but most importantly open-mindedness to carefully and respectfully consider different perspectives in matters of debate and the courage to prayerfully and respectfully 'weigh in' either through vote or active participation in debate.

4. Do you have any lessons for new lay representatives?

I have leaned very heavily on the experience of 'seasoned' synod-ers over the few years that I've been involved in synod. I always try to strategically sit with someone who can help me navigate papers and procedure on one side, and often a ministry rep on the other. I don't know all the answers, and frequently don't particularly appreciate why a particular matter might be controversial or fiercely debated, so I am very quick to ask for help and advice to get up to speed. In advance, it's also good to ask around to get help identifying the more important matters that will be coming before the synod so you can prioritise some pre-thinking.

5. How can clergy help foster a desire and vision for lay folk to get involved in governance issues (i.e., Parish Council, Wardens, synod Reps)?

Until I was approached to get involved, synod was always something 'behind the scenes' that I'd heard about a few folks disappearing to each year but not really discussed – quite an exclusive club for the chosen few. I think many might have the same view of getting involved at a parish level too. I'd encourage clergy, ministers, parish councils, wardens and synod Reps to be deliberate (and optimistic!) in explaining what the synod and these other governing bodies are and what they do, and really give that permission for anyone to put their hand up and get involved. Lots of us also need a bit of a nudge too, so don't be shy in asking people to help in these ways!

Mr Doug Marr served on the synod for more than 40 years. Most recently, he served in an ex-officio role as Registrar of the Diocese. Before that, he was a parish representative for the Parish of Ryde, and before that a parish representative for the Parish of (now) Macquarie. Doug has also been a member of the NSW Provincial synod and the national General synod.

1. Why do you serve on the synod?

I have been a member of synod for most of the last 40 years but am not currently a member. For most of the time I was an 'ordinary' lay representative and saw my membership as a form of service to my parish and to the wider diocese. I subsequently served as an ex-officio member of the synod and standing committee but still saw my membership as an opportunity to use my personal skills, background and experience in the service of the Kingdom.

2. What role do you see lay people having in this ministry? (i.e., How do you believe this ministry serves the Kingdom?)

Ordained people, and particularly those who have the responsibility of leading a parish, bring their own perspective to the issues of synod but they approach matters in the context of their theological training and ministry experience. The vast majority of members of the church have different experience and lay members are better able to bring these perspectives.

3. Do you need a specific skillset to serve as a lay representative? (i.e., Do you need formal theological or legal training to be useful?)

The best synod member is a mature Christian who has served as a parishioner in a local church. No formal training in theology, law or anything else is needed but it is important to be able to read substantial documents and carefully consider issues. However, my personal opinion is that the upfront involvement of lay people in the synod has dramatically declined in the course of the last 20 years with clergy dominating presentations and debate. Only a handful of lay 'old timers' now speak. This is a dangerous situation because at key times in the history of the diocese it was the lay people who took a strong stand and rescued the evangelical nature of Diocese of Sydney from initiatives supported by many of the clergy.

4. Do you have any lessons for new lay representatives?

Most new members of synod will not be accustomed to the procedures and processes of synod so it takes a while to learn how things work. A single person cannot understand or make a contribution on a wide range of issues. I suggest new members focus on a couple of matters in which they have a particular interest. Do not hesitate to ask questions or to speak if the occasion arises. Each person has a right to raise something but listen and learn from the response.

5. How can clergy help foster a desire and vision for lay folk to get involved in governance issues (i.e., Parish Council, Wardens, synod Reps)?

It is concerning that this question seems to suggest only clergy should be encouraging parishioners to be involved in church governance. All mature Christians should be actively looking out for people who may have an interest in serving in various ways. There are multiple forms of ministry and administration is one of them. The best approach is to speak with people and learn about their general interests to see if they have the necessary interest and skills for the relevant role.

Mrs Kim Windsor served on Sydney synod for St Stephen's Kurrajong (2005-2013).

1. Why do you serve on the synod?

I stood for the synod Rep positions because my rector, Sandy Grant, asked me. I had the time to do it, since I wasn't working and so could take the time to drive in from Kurrajong. And I was curious. I kept serving because I saw how worthwhile it was. It was, in the end, only a small time commitment over the whole year. I found it very interesting. It was great to see what the synod was *really* like as opposed to all the rumours and media reports you hear. It was good to meet and see the human side of the bishops and the big names that you hear about in the Diocese. Peter Jensen was the Archbishop at the time, and it was a wonderful time. There was a lot of fun amongst all the serious business. I heard some great Bible teaching, and the singing was fantastic!

2. What role do you see lay people having in this ministry? (i.e., How do you believe this ministry serves the Kingdom?)

The decisions that are made at synod are made to further the gospel – this is a great thing to do and support. The mission of the gospel, telling people about Jesus and obeying God's word, is so central to everything the Sydney Diocese does, and this is a key way to be part of it. Lay people have a slightly different perspective than clergy, because you're an 'ordinary' person, which is an important contribution in the synod.

3. Do you need a specific skillset to serve as a lay representative? (i.e., Do you need formal theological or legal training to be useful?)

You don't need formal training. But I do believe it's important to have a good Bible knowledge. You need to see how central the gospel is, and to understand important doctrines like creation and sin and judgement, biblical principles, and God's commands. You need to have a firm grasp of the Bible so you can make wise decisions.

4. Do you have any lessons for new lay representatives?

Always remember that the gospel is what it's all about. Keep that always there at the centre. It's important to listen to everyone's opinions with grace and respect. I learned so much from the way that people like Peter Jensen listened to people and gave them time to voice their issues and opinions. Some people became very emotional about certain issues. But I was conscious that I knew what the Bible said. It's important that we don't allow emotional reactions to outweigh biblical principles and commands when we're voting. So always vote with the Bible in your hand and not with your emotions being swayed by people's rhetoric. I also loved going to the Anglican Church League synod dinners – it's worth doing that.

5. How can clergy help foster a desire and vision for lay folk to get involved in governance issues (i.e., Parish Council, Wardens, synod Reps)?

They can encourage people they know have a good Bible knowledge and trust them to have a go. On the synod specifically, you can encourage lay people by helping them to see how valuable synod will be for them. It's a great time of fellowship with the rector, and a great opportunity to learn. You get to see how it all works, instead of just hearing all the negative media reports. It gives you a whole new perspective and understanding of the importance

of the synod and how it filters down to the churches. You get to know the key people in the Diocese much better when you watch and listen to them at synod. And it also helps you to see what your money is paying for! It's a great way to encourage your minister.



The mission of the gospel, telling people about Jesus and obeying God's word, is so central to everything the Sydney Diocese does, and this is a key way to be part of it.



Mrs Sarah Cameron has served since 2021 as a lay representative for St Barnabas', Fairfield with Bossley Park.

1. Why do you serve on the synod?

It's a position that's hard to fill at our church in south-west Sydney, and our senior minister asked me if I'd be willing to give it a go. I know it's important because the decisions made by synod affect ministry on the ground. Seeing the 'behind the scenes' working of the Diocese has made me thankful to God that he has given people the skills and gifts to make wise decisions that help us share Jesus.

2. What role do you see lay people having in this ministry? (i.e., How do you believe this ministry serves the Kingdom?)

It's important that the lay people in our churches are represented at synod as they make up the majority of our church families.

3. Do you need a specific skillset to serve as a lay representative? (i.e., Do you need formal theological or legal training to be useful?)

Ideologically no, we need all kinds of people involved in synod. Unfortunately, due to the pace of synod and the reading required, many in our churches are excluded from being able to participate. I'd love to think more about how a wider range of people in our church communities could be involved in synod.

4. Do you have any lessons for new lay representatives?

It's ok if you feel out of your depth! I sit with friends and my senior minister to ask questions and chat about the discussion. I find it helpful to read the papers beforehand to understand a bit of what's going on even if I don't always understand the intricacy of decisions and points of view.

5. How can clergy help foster a desire and vision for lay folk to get involved in governance issues (i.e., Parish Council, Wardens, synod Reps)?

Helping them understand what's going on in accessible, relevant terms. Showing a love for Jesus and joy in being able to do ministry together. **ACR**

Getting the time right

It's awful when you get the time wrong. Missing a meeting, a party, a flight. I've done all those things at various points and it's not a nice feeling!

It's important to get the time right. There's no point applying for a position which has already been filled, or waiting for a bus which has already gone.

But imagine getting the time wrong, not just for little things like that, but for your lifetime: living one's whole life prioritising one thing, when actually the purpose of that lifetime was something else entirely. It is something which is very possible to do and many, many people have done it.

In Haggai chapter 1, God sees his people standing on the edge of the rest of their lives and getting the time wrong. They are on the verge of wasting their lives on little dreams and, in love, he intervenes to stop it. This chapter may not have been written directly *to* us, as it was *to* them, but it is written *for* us as Christians. In it, God gives us a window to see what time it is and what our lifetimes are for.



God gives us a window to see what time it is and what our lifetimes are for.



The time in Haggai

Haggai, as a book, is a bit hung up on time. For each of its four prophecies we are told the date, down to the day. This use of dates is a striking feature of the book. Consider the opening verse:

Haggai 1:1 In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel Son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest.

In our calendar that would be 29 August 520 BC. But this verse tells us more than just the date. It reveals the situation: eighteen years prior, God's people had returned to Judah after having been exiled to Babylon for their disobedience. As prophesied, God had used the Persian king Cyrus to send them back to the promised land (or what remained of it) to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4; Jer 29:10). This is why in Haggai 1:1 they have a Jewish governor but a Persian king. Further, having been back for 18 years, surely the temple is well under way! After all, that was what this time back in the promised land was for. Yet verse 2 tells a different story:



Annabel Nixey is a member of Crossroads Christian Church Canberra, and is on the team for EQUIP and Canberra Women's Christian Convention

This is what the LORD almighty says: 'These people say, "the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house"'. (Hag 1:2)

Is it time to rebuild God's house? The people's answer is: 'not yet'.

A few months ago, some paint and plaster started peeling from our bedroom ceiling. At first, the need to fix it felt quite urgent. But as time has gone on, and the ceiling hasn't fallen in and the roof hasn't leaked ... it's become less urgent. Each day we look up and think 'It's on the to-do list. Not today though'.

It's as if the temple became a bit like that for the Israelites. At first it was so urgent. After all – it was God's house, it was why they had come back to the promised land. But as eighteen years passed, it got less and less urgent. One can imagine God's people walking through the city, looking up at the ruins of the old Temple and thinking 'It's on the to-do list! Not

today though.' It's not that they didn't think it needed doing. It's just that they didn't think it needed doing today.

To the Israelites' credit we know from Nehemiah that times were tough. They had faced significant opposition at least early on in the build (Neh 4). The rest of Haggai 1 suggests that times were tough economically as well (e.g., verses 6, 11). But whatever the reason, from the people's perspective, it was not yet time to rebuild God's house.

But then God's word (as is so often the case) reveals the real situation:

'Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?' (Hag 1:3)

According to the people, it is not yet time to build God's house. However, they have had time to build their own 'panelled' houses.

That term 'panelled' is rare in the OT. But interestingly, it can be found clustered in the descriptions of the palace and temple built by king Solomon in 1 Kings 6 and 7 (e.g., 1 Kgs 6:9; 7:3, 7). Eighteen years after returning to the promised land to build the temple, God's house remains a ruin but the people have managed to built houses for themselves that have a distinct whiff of palace or temple about them.

When they had first come back to Jerusalem, they knew what the time was for. The names of their families were recorded for posterity in Ezra 2. Surely as they stood on the border of the promised land they would have felt they were standing on the edge of their life's

work: They would get to rebuild God's very house! And we know from Nehemiah that they made a start. But then the opposition ramped up, the distractions moved in, the difficulties mounted, and they stopped building. Or at least they stopped building *God's* house...

As Dick Lucas remarked about this passage: 'The people felt they didn't have the time or means to rebuild the Lord's house, but their actions showed that they did have the time and means to build the things they wanted to.'¹⁸ Have you heard the line: 'No one is always busy – it just depends on what number you are on their priority list'. God knew very clearly where he was on theirs.

And so in verses 7-8, God calls for change:

'This is what the LORD almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured."



It's not that they didn't think it needed doing. It's just that they didn't think it needed doing today.



The importance of God's house

It's worth pausing and considering – why is God so concerned about the Israelites rebuilding the temple? Verse 8 helps us with the answer: 'So that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured'.

When God's house is built it will be something he takes pleasure in. It is something which will bring him delight and also something that will bring honour to him. This explains why the LORD goes to great lengths to get his house built. After all, he's raised up this prophet Haggai to get the work going again. But what's more, he has been using the land itself to highlight to the people their need to build again. We see this in verse 5 of chapter 1, but more explicitly in verse 9:

'You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?' declares the LORD Almighty. 'Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on [or 'a ruining of'] the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labour of your hands.'

God invites his people to carefully look around at their circumstances and consider: why aren't the crops growing, the rains coming or the cows breeding? The answer is that God

18 Dick Lucas, sermon, 'Time and Eternity 2 (Haggai 1:1-11), 20 May 1986. <https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/all/haggai/speaker-61/dick-lucas/>.

himself, as promised by his covenant at Sinai, has brought ruin upon his people to point out the state of their relationship with him and turn them back to him (see Lev 26; Deut 28). He has brought ruin on the land to show that his people are ruining their relationship with him – as seen by the temple which is a ruin. A word-play drives home the connection: ‘drought’ in verse 11 draws on the same Hebrew root (*ch-r-b*) as the word translated ‘ruin’ in verses 4 and 9, describing the temple. The state of the promised land is pointing out the state of the people’s attitude to God.

But rebuilding the temple will bring him pleasure and honour.

On one level, the story of the Bible is a story of God wanting to be with his people in spite of their sin. God wants to be with his people not just spatially (after all, he is everywhere) but relationally. He wanted to be their God even if that meant being in the midst of messy sinful lives. In the Old Testament, the temple was what enabled that to happen. In the middle of the people, and yet with its barriers, priests and sacrifices, the temple was the embodiment of both the closeness and distance of God. It made a way for God to belong to a sin-stained people, but not be stained by their sin. He could be with his people – which brought him such pleasure and delight! They could be with him and bring him worship-filled honour.

The temple showed that God wanted to be with his people and that they wanted to be with him. How the people treated the temple reflected how they were treating God. In Haggai 1, God is saying: ‘I want to be with you. Do you want to be with me? If you do: then you’ll go rebuild my house.’ And miracle of miracles ... they do.

In verses 12-15, Zerubbabel, Joshua and all the people obey God. These verses offer a great picture of what repentance looks like from the human perspective and from God’s.¹⁹ Verses 12 and 14 outline what the people did to repent. They heard God’s word, they obeyed, they feared the Lord and they began work on the temple. Sandwiched in the middle, in verse 13, is what God did to enable them to repent: He gave them his word. He (remarkably!) assured his people: ‘I am with you.’ And he ‘stirs’ each person’s spirit, each person’s will, to repentance. And in classic Haggai style, in verse 15 we are told the date they started to rebuild. After eighteen years, it takes them just 23 days to share the prophecy with everyone, get their tools and materials together, and kick off again. The Christian life is hard. But it is very simple, too. Hear God’s word: obey it. Hear something in the Bible I don’t agree with: change my mind. Hear something in the Bible I’m not doing: change my life.

After 18 years, a lot can happen in 23 days.

The time today

So what time is it today?

We stand in a very different time, historically and also theologically. We are no longer under that same Old Covenant. This land we live in is not tied to our relationship with God such that if we disobey there will be droughts and if we obey there will be more money in

19 See Anthony R Petterson’s commentary in *Apollos Old Testament Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi* (InterVarsity Press, Downer’s Grove, 2015), p 61.

our pockets. But we face the same risk. It is worth us also giving careful consideration to our ways and our time. What are our panelled houses? What are the things pulling me away from God's priorities?

After all, it's still time for us to pull up our socks and build God's house! Or is it?

Surprisingly, when we ask the question, 'What's the time today? Is it time for us to build God's house?' The answer God gives us first may not be what we expect.

In Christ, God says: 'I will build my own house. In fact, I already have'.

In John 2, the Lord Jesus Christ is walking through the physical temple, through his 'Father's house' (John 2:16). He sees how even the temple itself has been infected by people's warped priorities. People are using the temple to extort money from the vulnerable and boost their own sense of pride. And yet amongst those grand stone pillars he makes this extraordinary claim in John 2:19: *'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days'*. It must have been a real mic-drop moment.

The first temple, built by Solomon, took seven years to complete. The second temple, from Haggai, took 18 years to really get started! The next temple, the one Jesus was walking through, built by Herod – took 46 years. And each one of them ended up a rubble heap. Jesus says 'just give me three days'. And John adds: 'The temple he had spoken of was his body' (John 2:21).

God has always wanted to be with his people, despite their sin. In the Old Testament, he managed it through his stone house. In the New Testament, he achieved it through his Son, Jesus Christ.

But when Jesus speaks of himself as the temple in John 2, he's not talking about his birth (Immanuel though he was). In John 2, he's talking about his death and resurrection, hence the 3-day time frame. It was not merely his incarnation that made Jesus the temple. It was his death and resurrection. Because it was Christ's death and resurrection that enabled God to be with us and us to be with him forever. In his death, he took on the full cost of the build.²⁰ He took the punishment for our self-centred priorities and the mess we make in our lives and others' lives. In coming back to life three days later, he opened the way for anyone who trusts in him to approach God, find forgiveness, and begin a true and eternal relationship with him. This relationship is secured by God's own Spirit, who comes and sets up house in us. It is the Spirit who enables us to keep following Jesus, grows in us the character God loves, and equips us for what God wants us to do.

God has always wanted to be with his people. He walked in a garden, lived in a tent, he dwelt in a temple, he came as a baby, he died our death, rose to give us a new life with him in the middle.

So is it time to build God's house?

Jesus says: I've already built it.

But there's more to the story. We get to build the house that is already built. This is the image Paul gives in Ephesians 2 and 4. By virtue of Christ's death, 'In him [Christ], the whole

20 Iain M Duguid, *EP Study Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (EP Books, Leyland, 2010), p 31.

building [of God's people] is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling by which God lives by his Spirit' (2:21-22).

Jesus' death transforms God's very people into his temple. In a beautiful act of grace, Jesus is not a one-man-one-pillar temple. Rather we get to be the 'temple' with him, bringing delight and honour to God! God is not interested in special buildings anymore. He is building a special people. And we read in Ephesians 4 that he is using us to do it! A bit like running the race that we have already won in Philippians 3, we get to build a building that is already built. God is building a people, using his people to do it and *that* is what this time is for.

This is the time to be inviting people in to follow Jesus. This is the time to be strengthening one another so we can keep following Jesus together. We have great tools to do it – not a (physical) sword and tools like in Nehemiah's day – but God's word and prayer. This is why times like church and Bible study become so precious. They are worth protecting from division, distractions and competing priorities.²¹

How God delights over the young woman in my Bible study group who chooses to show up, newborn in arms, toddler in tow, dog tired, baby-vom shirt, but eager to meet with God's people. She is bringing him such honour! And the woman who prays and encourages as she is able, in her weakness, in chronic illness. God grieves the hardship of suffering in this life but he delights over her heart. These sisters know what their lifetimes are for.

And since we are building that which is already built by God, we know it will last. It has Christ as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20). We can invite people to learn about Jesus, not out of guilt or suspecting no one will ever say yes, but rather knowing that some will because we are building a building that God has already built. We can encourage one another, pray together, and teach the Word not with the weight on our shoulders of the mindset 'we're the ones who've got to build God's people' but with canned heat in our feet – 'we get to build God's people'. God is with us.

Haggai 1 gives each one of us the chance as we stand on the edge of the rest of our lives, to look out and consider: 'What will be my life's work? What is this lifetime for?' Let it be for rejoicing in *being* God's people and striving to *build* God's people.

Eighteen years they waited. They wasted. Then through the prophet Haggai, God's people heard God's word and they changed.

We serve the Lord Jesus who said 'just give me three days. I'll build God's house'. And we get to build his people, *with him*, for a lifetime. So let's get building. **ACR**

This talk was originally given at the EQUIP women's conference, God With Us - The Book of Haggai, June 2023. www.equip.org.au



And since we are building that which is already built by God, we know it will last.



21 Worth a read on this topic is *Unmissable Church* by Richard Sweatman & Anthony Barraclough (Matthias Media, Sydney, 2022).

South Asian discipleship

As a second generation Indian, born in Australia, grappling with my culture and the one I grew up in, I struggled to work out how to fit in. Meeting others of a similar culture and faith was a huge encouragement as I could share my faith journey with those who understood those challenges of being from a different culture. They encouraged me as I grew to better understand my Lord and Saviour. I was blessed to have people who met with me one to one and showed me how to read God's word and understand it. As a product of cross-cultural discipleship, I have experienced the powerful way God works through his people to share the gospel in a variety of contexts and bring them to maturity in Christ.



Lana Kularajah, HR Business Partner, SDS & ENC Board Representative to the SATYA Committee

God's heart

In one sense, all ministry is cross-cultural as we work to bring the gospel to bear in the context of our world that is in darkness. Having a focus on an ethnic group, language group and even regions can help us fulfill the mandate given by Christ to 'go and make disciples of all nations...' (Matt 28:19). We are privileged here in Australia to have religious freedoms protected in the constitution and we have the nations here on our shores. Walking down the streets of Sydney, we can see all continents represented in a variety of colours, cuisines, dress and languages. In particular, the South Asian population is now the biggest migrant group in Australia, with more to come as a result of recent India-Australia trade agreements.²² We have a huge opportunity for cross-cultural discipleship to this group as they are coming to us. This is particularly significant as South Asia has become increasingly hostile to the Christian faith in recent years.

²² Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (A-IECTA). More information can be found here: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/in-force/australia-india-ecta>



Sharing the gospel here in Australia, the land of privilege and freedom, is a wonderful opportunity to exercise the freedoms of living in this nation; freedoms that South Asian nations don't have.



God's picture of his final heavenly church is one where people of all tribes and tongues are gathered around the throne, worshipping Jesus our King (Rev 7). This is our end goal as well, as we partner in God's work to build God's kingdom of all nations. Sharing the gospel here in Australia, the land of privilege and freedom, is a wonderful opportunity to exercise the freedoms of living in this nation; freedoms that South Asian nations don't have. Sharing the gospel here doesn't just reach individuals, but also has the potential to

reach family and friends even back in their home countries. The gospel can cross borders, without us even needing a passport!

Their hearts

It is a challenge for individuals from a communal culture to consider Christianity, as they are also having to wrestle with breaking out of their society and family and their very identity. Making a decision to follow Christ is more than just a personal decision for them. It has implications for their family and community. Cross-cultural discipleship then isn't just about teaching them to read the Bible or doctrine, but it also means walking with them through this journey and showing them the gospel in their life and becoming their family and community in Christ. Cross-cultural discipleship to South Asians is a long-term relationship in loving people, walking with them through life, and reflecting Christ to them as we invest deeply in their lives. In 1 Corinthians 9:22-23, Paul says, 'I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.' This means that we need to look at ways that would help minister to our South Asian friends. The aim of adapting our ministries is so that we may save some for Christ. Christ has given us the privilege of using us to build his kingdom. This means we have a responsibility to use the opportunities he has given us to minister to the people he has brought to our land. This includes thinking outside our normal approaches to ministry and thinking differently about how we can minister to this group. Food, friendship, inviting people to your home, being consistent, showing up for people – these are the ways to foster relationships which help give expression to the gospel in our lives as we share Jesus with them.

Communicating the gospel is another important aspect of cross-cultural discipleship. It requires us to understand the worldview of South Asians, whether it be cultural or religious, or a mix of both. This means asking questions, listening, engaging with the view to genuinely understand them. Understanding helps to develop relationships, build trust and help us think through their struggles, hopes and beliefs. Then we can consider how the gospel speaks to that. In Acts 17, Paul says, 'People of Athens! I see that in every way you are

very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you’ (Acts 17:22-23). He engaged with them, understood what was going on for them and brought the gospel to bear into their cultural and religious worldview. His understanding of them helped him to communicate clearly to them. In saying that, Paul doesn’t compromise on the truth of the gospel. ‘For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed’ (Acts 17:31). He makes it clear that there is only one way to live – in relationship with the true and living God and so a decision has to be made.



Understanding helps to develop relationships, build trust and help us think through their struggles, hopes and beliefs. Then we can consider how the gospel speaks to that.



Our hearts

Our love for God should drive us to love people the way he loves us – not half-heartedly, but with everything he has – even with his only Son given up for our sake (John 3:16). This requires sacrifice and putting others first. Paul’s heart is grieved at what he sees in Athens. In Acts 17 Paul ‘was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there’ (Acts 17:16-17). In the same way our hearts must grieve at the many who do not yet know the grace of our wonderful God. And our grief must drive us to share the gospel and take seriously the challenge of cross-cultural discipleship. Those who are living in darkness need the light. People living in the futility of idols is heartbreaking to see, when we have the truth and we know the living God has made a way for a relationship with him with his free offer of grace. It should move us to give up our assumptions, comforts and prejudices for the sake of others.

At this time in history, in 2023 in Australia, we have a particular privilege to minister to those from South Asia, as God opens doors for even more of them to come to our shores. God has given us these opportunities and so as a church we must be prepared for this, equipped and ready for the challenge of ministry to this people group. Ministry which can have even wider impacts than just reaching an individual, with the potential to reach families and communities both here and back in their home countries. In my faith journey, the power of cross-cultural discipleship changed my life, made the gospel alive and showed me who Jesus really is to me. God used particular people to show me his Word. This transformed my priorities to seek him first. This has brought me great comfort in times of trial, certainty in times of doubt and hope for the glorious future that awaits us. As workers for God’s harvest, let us rise to the challenge and take up cross-cultural discipleship so that we may save many.

ACR

Celebrating 25 years of EQUIP

Interview with Isobel Lin

ACR: Watching EQUIP women this year, I was struck by the centrality of God's word in everything that happened. Your first EQUIP conference was back in 1999; what led you and others to start this ministry 25 years ago?

LIN: Back in 1999, there wasn't the bounty of Christian women's events that exist today. So, EQUIP began as a joint venture between seven friends. We were theological students,²³ ministry workers and ministers' wives. We'd all completed ministry apprenticeships at the University of New South Wales, so we shared a common understanding of discipleship, and central to that was faithful Bible teaching. We each invited twenty young women along, and on August 14, 135 women turned up at Moore College for Bible talks and small group discussion, finishing with dinner and a testimony by an older woman.

Even though we were pretty green, we planned the program and did the preaching ourselves – inviting along women who already knew us enabled that opportunity. We nervously reviewed all the talks together as a committee, which was the genesis of our infamous 'EQUIP practice day', which occurs 2 months before each conference.

EQUIP has been on-the-job training as Bible teachers for us. Over the years, seasoned preachers (including our parish ministers and husbands) have critiqued our talks and helped us develop the skills of preaching – and as we grew, we sought to pass on those skills to the next generation of women preachers. That aim of passing the baton is why EQUIP continues to have Australian women speakers and it's why we have a modest pool of speakers who we invest in training.



Isobel Lin, Chair of EQUIP women and works in pastoral care at Moore Theological College

23 Moore Theological College, Sydney

It feels a bit surreal that many of the women who watched EQUIP this year weren't even born when it began!

ACR: I've heard you say that EQUIP is a Bible-teaching conference for women, not a women's conference that teaches the Bible. What do you mean?

LIN: Before our second conference, we made a decision that profoundly shaped EQUIP.

On the advice of a ministry mentor, we decided to preach chapter by chapter through whole books of the Bible – which is conventional practice for a church program but was and still is out-of-the box for a conference. So, if you look through our history (equip.org.au/history), you'll see we've worked through 2 Corinthians, James, 2 Peter, and 1 Corinthians – consecutively teaching one or more chapters each year.

I don't think we appreciated the significance of that decision at the time, but we have benefited from its legacy.

Instead of starting with a topic or a speaker, we always start with the text of the Bible. The number of talks, who speaks, and any other accompanying elements, are all governed by what best serves a faithful engagement with that text. Although we were convinced that every part of Scripture is relevant to women, exegetical teaching has forced us to embody that belief, like the year when we did a whole conference on 2 Peter 2 and the destruction of false teachers! I think this pattern has kept our teaching fresh.

ACR: How has EQUIP evolved over the past 25 years?

LIN: In many ways, EQUIP has 'grown up' with us.

We moved through a series of locations as EQUIP grew by word of mouth – from a small group of friends at Moore College (1999) to a large conference at the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre (SCEC) at Darling Harbour (2005). In 2006, we started running a double-shift conference (Daylight and Twilight Sessions), enabling more women to attend, and then started offering a simple livestream, in conjunction with the in-person event. We also added a concurrent conference for teenage girls at the same site and on the same Bible passage. There were several years at other venues²⁴ whilst SCEC was being rebuilt,²⁵ but it continued to be our 'home' until COVID-19 propelled us to a fully virtual conference.

People often ask me if EQUIP will go back to Darling Harbour. I don't think we know!



Renee Capel interviewed Isobel Lin on behalf of ACR. Renee is student at Moore Theological College

24 At Rosehill Gardens Event Centre

25 It was renamed the International Convention Centre

Even just a few years ago, we could not have imagined what EQUIP has become today. It's now a virtual community of local hubs – the content is delivered virtually but the women gather locally to watch together, usually at their church.

EQUIP-day is a bit lonelier now. I'm in a small studio, surrounded by cameras and computers. But seeing the photos of the groups watching EQUIP is deeply encouraging. This re-invention of EQUIP has made it more accessible to women of different ages, life-stages, geographic locations, and demographics. This year, a group watching from Townsville shared that some of the women had driven 3 hours from Airlie Beach to join them – and that story is repeated all around regional Australia. Now we have more than 8,000 women hearing God's word and a strong partnership with so many local churches – it's very humbling.

ACR: As the format of the conference has changed, what are the ingredients that have not changed?

LIN: We started with the aim of building up the young women in our own local ministries by faithfully teaching them the goodness and sufficiency of God's word.

I recently found a photocopy of the minutes from one of the first team meetings. It said our aim was 'to encourage young women to trust the Scriptures' and 'to provide a context for growing their vision of women's ministry'.

This year, one of our delegates, Alison, sent us this encouragement:

'I love the way you've now anchored EQUIP in the ministry of the local church, resourcing local churches with a quality day of Bible teaching for women that many local churches would otherwise struggle to present.'

25 years later, I think we are still about encouraging women's discipleship in the local church by faithful Bible teaching.



ACR: In what ways have you seen EQUIP keep forming the minds of women to the word of God, so that we are not conformed to the world?

LIN: Personally, EQUIP has considerably formed my own mind.

Each year, there's a new part of the Bible to marinate in – I have it on the 'back-burner' for months (as do the speakers). It's a slow and deep engagement with one part of God's word. EQUIP13 was on the women in Luke – as I read the Gospel of Luke over and over that year,



It takes courage and humility to teach the whole counsel of God's word, especially in the face of cancel culture; the temptation to avoid certain Bible passages and to protect our speakers is real.



it became familiar in a way it hadn't been before. Years later, when I was involved in evangelism via storytelling, it was Luke's words that came to mind again.

One of the perks of being online is having the capacity to provide tools for other women to also marinate in the text beyond the conference.

As local groups partner with us by taking up the important and necessary work of setting-up, catering and other

logistics, the planning team's time and energy have been freed up for creating Bible-reading resources to accompany each conference. This year, we had a pre-conference video on 'How-To-Read-Haggai', a manuscript of the text with discovery questions, and a post-conference set of Bible studies to assist women in looking more deeply into the text themselves.

It takes courage and humility to teach the whole counsel of God's word, especially in the face of cancel culture; the temptation to avoid certain Bible passages and to protect our speakers is real. Even more basically, the renewing of our minds, by God's Spirit through his word, is at times painful due to our sinful nature. But since we are convinced that all the Bible is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16), we should not be afraid to teach all of it. And God continually encourages us to persevere in this when we hear each year about women who have learnt something at EQUIP that has changed their lives.

ACR: What have been some highlights for you throughout the 25 years of EQUIP?

LIN: Every year, we hear stories of women becoming Christians through their friends inviting them to EQUIP – praise God.

A constant source of joy has been the many godly women who I have worked alongside on the planning team. They are mostly invisible to the EQUIP delegates who they pray and work so hard for.

Finally, seeing God's provision for 25 years. We often feel out of our depth, but He always provides exactly what or who we need, to keep us going.

ACR: What's next?

LIN: We've started reading Revelation 1-5 :) **ACR**

Catechising – a short introduction

“Believe me, Sir, the Church of God will never preserve itself without a Catechism, for it is like the seed to keep good grain from dying out and causing it to multiply from age to age.”

So wrote the Genevan reformer John Calvin to Lord Protector Somerset during the reign of King Edward VI in 1548. He wanted to stress the importance of instructing the youth so that gospel ministry would go from strength to strength during the English Reformation. In other words, it was about children’s and youth ministry. In particular, it was the importance of catechising.

But what exactly is catechising? In short, it is verbal instruction (*institutio viva voce*). In the context of Christian ministry, it is a way of teaching the gospel to the next generation of God’s people to know, love, and serve the Lord. Indeed, God himself has always cared about raising the next generation and his people have always cared about the same. In the early church when Gentiles were converted to the Christian faith there was a process of instruction required before they would be admitted to the Christian services and sacraments. They received verbal instruction in the central articles of the faith, and this was catechising.



Mark Earngey, Head of
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Catechising: in the Bible

The Christian community had it from the beginning, and the Jewish community had it too. So perhaps the best place to begin is recalling that right from the start of the biblical story, God has always wanted children to know and to love him. He created Adam and Eve so that humanity would increase and fill and subdue the earth. The idea was that Adam and Eve’s children would know him and love him. But Adam and Eve’s faithlessness and fall into sin throws a really significant spanner into the works.

Which is why Abraham’s faith and rise into grace is just so marvellous. In fact, the

beautiful covenant that God makes with Abraham has countless children in mind – more than the sand on the beach and stars in the sky (Gen 15:5, 22:17). But in order for this to happen, Abraham is required to pass on the faith to his children: God tells Abraham that he needs to



God himself has always cared about raising the next generation and his people have always cared about the same.



‘direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right’ (Gen 18:19). Abraham must direct his children – that is, instruct them so they will keep the way of the Lord.

It’s little wonder, then, that when we come to Moses, we see the same thing. Deuteronomy 6 records us the special giving of the Shema – ‘the Lord our God, the Lord is

one’ – and the command to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength’ (v 5). But then God says, ‘Pass these on’. ‘Impress them on your children’ (v 7). These commandments are not just for you; you need to pass them on. And you need to do that when you’re sitting at home, when you’re walking along the road, when you’re lying down, and when you get up (v 8). In fact, he tells the Israelites to take these instructions, tie them onto their hands and heads, and write them onto their houses and gates (v 8). That’s how important they are.

I think this sort of thing is probably in the background of Solomon’s Proverbs – especially at the start of the book: ‘Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They are a garland to grace your head’ (Prov 1:8-9). It is certainly foregrounded in another proverb: ‘Train a child in the way he should go’ (Prov 22:6). In fact, this verb for instruction (*chanakh*) gave rise to the important thirteenth-century ‘Book of Instruction’ (*sepher hachinukh*) which sought to catechise Jewish youth. The famous English Reformation preacher John Donne once called attention to this ‘Book of Instruction’ (*liber institutiones*) in a sermon at Paul’s Cross and said, ‘And if we should tell some men, that Calvin’s institutions were a catechism, would they not love catechising the better for that name?’

Now, Solomon’s wise catechetical advice was evidently not sufficiently heeded. After his death, the Kingdom of Israel divided and spiralled into chaos and confusion. But when Jesus of Nazareth was born hundreds of years later a new epoch had dawned. The Son of God listened perfectly to the instruction of both his heavenly Father and his human father. In him we find not only the model learner, but we also glimpse God’s love for children. In that beautiful episode in Matthew 19:13-15, we see Jesus caring for children, praying for children, and declaring that the kingdom of heaven is also theirs. Furthermore, after Jesus’ mighty sin-bearing death and earth-shattering resurrection, he declares in the Great Commission that his disciples, both adults and children, need to be baptised and taught to obey all his teachings (Matt 28:19-20).

We can also see the faith being passed on to Jesus’ disciples – his followers, both young and old – in the Apostle Paul’s writings. In Ephesians 6, fathers are not to exasperate their

children, among other weighty things; instead, they are to ‘bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord’ (v 4). Of course, Paul also recognises the important place of motherhood for passing on the faith: he speaks about the transmission of faith in Timothy’s own life and story: from his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Tim 1:5).

So even from this whistle-stop tour of the biblical story, we can see that the passing on of the faith to the next generation really does matter to God. In fact, one of the key words used to describe this is ‘catechising’: it comes straight from one of the Greek words of the New Testament and it means ‘teaching’ or ‘instruction’ (Luke 1:4; Gal 6:6). It is different from preaching. Whereas preaching takes a passage or topic and brings it into a singular discourse, catechising contracts the whole of Scripture into a summary; whereas preaching is to all sorts of people, catechising is directed to the unlearned. Furthermore, most sermons are monologues, and most catechisms are dialogues. So, catechisms are not the only kind of teaching and instruction, but they are one of the big ones. And it’s something that Christians have kept on doing in the church and in the home ever since New Testament times.



...we can see that the passing on of the faith to the next generation really does matter to God.



Catechising: in church history

In the early church, catechesis was the moral and doctrinal instruction given to new converts who rejected their pagan past and embraced the Lord Jesus Christ. So, for instance, we know from Hippolytus, writing in the third century, that a catechumen (i.e. someone being catechised or taught) was taught the basics of Christianity for three years before they could belong to the church properly. Catechesis was also important for the training of ordination candidates. We know from Cyril’s *Procatechesis* in the fourth century that lots of doctrine was taught and examined – doctrines like the virgin birth, the cross of Christ, the resurrection, the ascension, and so forth. In fact, these sorts of biblical truths were central to the great catechetical schools in places like Alexandria (Clement and Origen), Antioch (Diodorus), and Carthage (Optatus). Thus, as the church grew significantly there were significant catechetical needs in order to instruct new converts, train their children, and teach future ministers.

That’s also what we find when we come to the mighty Reformation in the 16th century. The great German friar Martin Luther wrote catechisms, and he expected churches and families to use them. In fact, he even wanted Christians to drill themselves with catechetical questions:

... I appeal once more to all Christians, especially the pastors and preachers, that they not try to become doctors too soon and imagine that they know everything. (Vain imaginations, like new cloth, suffer shrinkage!) Let all Christians drill

themselves in the catechism daily, and constantly put it into practice ...

What are these questions, then? They're short and memorable – easy to teach and easy to learn questions like, 'What does "You shall have no other gods before me" mean?' Answer: 'That we should fear, love and trust in God above all things'.

The great Archbishop Thomas Cranmer published a short-lived catechism in the early stage of the English Reformation.²⁶ The preface to his catechism sets out the biblical warrant for catechesis, and notes the importance of teaching, among other things, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed (which he calls 'The Articles of the Christian Faith') and the Lord's Prayer:

And truly it is no new thing that the children of godly parents should be instructed in the faith and commandments of God, even from their infancy. For does not God command his people to teach his law to their children, and their children's children? ... Does it not appear by plainly expressed words of Paul, that Timothy was brought up even from a child in the Holy Scriptures? Have not the commandments of Almighty God, the Articles of the Christian faith, and the Lord's Prayer, been necessarily always (since Christ's time) required of all, both young and old, that professed Christ's name?

Cranmer's more determined program for evangelical youth ministry was set forth in the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* which contained a rubric stating that curates (assistant ministers, more or less) ought to catechise candidates for confirmation at last once every six weeks and this became a weekly ministry under the 1552 revision of the prayer book. Bishops would ensure this took place through episcopal visitations which investigated whether clergy were indeed catechising their parishioners – if not, they would face church discipline!

As an important excursus it is worth noting that the most significant catechism of the English Reformation was written by Cranmer's chaplain and theological advisor, Bishop John Ponet (1516–1556)²⁷. The *Short Catechism* had the full backing of the English reformers, Lord President Northumberland, and most importantly, King Edward VI. Published in 1553, this 88-page catechism was structured around the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Decalogue, and used the dialogue format between a Teacher and a Scholar. For example:

Master: *I would like to hear your belief in the Holy Spirit.*

Scholar: *I confess him to be the third person of the Holy Trinity. And since he is equal with the Father and the Son, and of the very same nature, that he ought to*

26 It was an English translation of the catechism written by the Wittenberg theologian Justus Jonas, but quickly became redundant due to its Lutheran theology of the Lord's Supper.

27 For more, see my chapter 'John Ponet's *Short Catechisme*: A Neglected Formulary?' in Mark Earngey and Stephen Tong (eds.), *Reformation Anglicanism: Essays on Edwardian Evangelicalism* (London: Latimer Trust, 2018). A full modernised version of the catechism is found in Appendix B.

equally be worshiped with both.

Master: *Why is he called Holy?*

Scholar: *Not only for his own holiness, but because by him the chosen of God are made holy and members of Christ. And therefore have the Scriptures have called him the spirit of sanctification or making holy.*

Scholar: *In what does sanctification consist?*

Master: *First we be made new by his inward motion. And therefore, Christ said: we must be new born of water and of the spirit. Then by his inspiration we are adopted and, as it were, by choice made the children of God. For this reason he is called the Spirit of adoption. By his light we are lightened to understand God's mysteries. By his judgement are sins pardoned and retained. By his power is the flesh with her lusts kept down and tamed. By his pleasure are the manifold gifts dealt among the holy. Finally, by his means shall our mortal bodies be relieved. Therefore in the author of so great gifts, we do not without a cause believe, honour, and call upon him.*

The *Short Catechisme* covered the full scope of subjects which would be covered by a modern systematic theology textbook, and it focused especially on important reformation doctrines, such as justification, holy scripture, ecclesiology, the Lord's supper, and baptism. It is thus one of the most comprehensive official theological treatises of the early English Reformation. In its own day it was understood to represent the theology of the English reformers. Indeed, Bishop John Randolph (1749–1813) would later remark that 'it may fairly be understood to contain, as far as it goes, their ultimate decision; and to represent the sense of the Church of England, as then established.'

The significance of Ponet's *Short Catechisme* may also be seen by the fierce opposition it received under Queen Mary ('Bloody Mary'). It was severely suppressed, burned, and was regarded as the *Catechismus Reprobatus* of her first convocation. Furthermore, the examiners at the heresy trials of both Cranmer and Ridley attempted to attribute the authorship of the catechism to them. The former Bishop of London retorted, 'that book was made of a great learned man, and him which is able to do the like again: as for me, I ensure [assure] you (be not deceived in me) I was never able to do or write such like thing. He passeth me no less, than the learned master his young scholar.'

The final – and perhaps most important – point to note about the *Short Catechisme* is that the 42 *Articles of Religion* first saw the light of day as an appendix to the catechism.²⁸ In fact,



If you want to build a strong church, you need catechesis.



28 Which later became the 39 *Articles of Religion* in 1563/1571.

the whole publication was known as the ‘Book of the Catechism’ or ‘Articles of the Catechism’. While the English Reformers were aware of this it is less widely known today. We know about the *Articles* but many may never have heard of the *Short Catechisme*. However, it is important to realise that the *Articles* were an appendix to the more verbose *Short Catechisme*. It is important because this fact enables us to see that Ponet’s catechism is the most proximate and accurate commentary on the *Articles of Religion* we have available. Should we need to explore the meaning of ‘predestination’ or ‘congregation’ or ‘justification’ in the *Articles of Religion* then the *Short Catechisme* supplies us with ample theological commentary.

Evidently, catechisms have a significant place in Reformation thought and practice. This is what John Calvin understood when writing to the newly Reformed Church of England: if you want to build a strong church, you need catechesis. This is what Cranmer and the English Reformers understood also. You need to catechise the children of God’s people.

In Anglican ministry today

Catechesis is the necessary bridge between the baptism of children and their later confirmation in the faith. The *Book of Common Prayer* baptismal service concludes with the explicit (and lengthy) command to godparents that they would teach the children the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Decalogue. Indeed, that the child would be ‘further instructed in the Church Catechism set forth for that purpose.’ The Church Catechism in the *BCP* is explicitly subtitled: ‘An instruction to be learned of every person before he be brought to be confirmed by the Bishop.’ The preface to the Confirmation Service within the *BCP* reiterates this principle, stating that no-one will be confirmed without recitation of the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Decalogue, and other questions from the Catechism (e.g. the Sacraments).

A brief glance at some of the more recent local liturgical revisions reveals a significantly decreased emphasis on being catechised in the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Decalogue, and with the Church Catechism. *An Australian Prayer Book* (1978) preserves much of the emphasis on these traditional elements of catechising, but they are far less present in the *Common Prayer* book (2012). The decline in catechetical emphasis and the disappearance of the traditional catechetical elements (e.g. the Decalogue) would have surprised the theologians of the Reformation. However, they also may have been pleasantly surprised by the standards of biblical literacy and quality of children’s and youth ministry in modern day Sydney Anglicanism. Nevertheless, it is still worth asking the question about how well our children are raised to know the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Decalogue. For these were not only the theological standard of children’s and youth ministry in the Reformed tradition, but these were – and are still – some of the most tried and tested tools for understanding how to live the Christian life.

Practically, we would do well to encourage this sort of catechising – and not just in the wonderful children’s and youth ministries in our churches. Anglican Youthworks does a marvellous job of training children and youth ministers in this way. However, catechising

ought not be delegated entirely to their ministries. It needs to be done in our homes too. In one of his excellent little books on the ministry, Broughton Knox encourages churches to set aside half a dozen leaders per church whose first ministry should be to minister to families – to fathers and mothers, to encourage them to ensure that their home is a school of Christ. He says that fathers and mothers should spend an hour a day teaching their young children the Christian faith and its consequences for living. These family ministry leaders are important, because, Knox says, the parents will never persevere in this unless encouraged to do so by leaders visiting them in their homes to enquire and exhort them along this line.²⁹ That advice reflects something of the time in which he was writing. But the point is a good one: what are we doing in our churches to encourage mothers and fathers in the catechising of their children? Do we expend as much ministry capital in this area as we do in our children's and youth ministries? There may be windows of ministry opportunity for us here.

Perhaps those who are parents could ask themselves: what are we doing in our homes to



Photo by Olya Danilevich

catechise our own children? It might seem like a clunky and awkward practice to introduce, and we might lack confidence in our ability to even begin. But it is worth remembering that catechising ought to be something simply woven into the average fabric of life. So, to paraphrase Deuteronomy, you can do it when you sit down at home for dinner, when you walk along the road to drop the children off at school, and even before you put the children down to bed at night. If it sounds tricky, my advice is simply to give it a go. As a starting point, check out the **First Catechism: Teaching Children Bible Truths** (Great Commission Publications, 2003 – we have used this with our own modifications in our family). If you like to sing, consider using **Songs for Saplings** (Dana Dirksen). Or for a bit of fun, try **The Acrostic of God** (Gibson & Brindle, New Growth Press, 2021). Try doing them at the dinner table or even the change table.

Above all, take a non-anxious approach: remember, have fun, push through frustrations, and keep praying. Catechesis is a great way of passing on the faith to the next generation. It's in the biblical story, it's in the story of the church, and it's all about God's great story of salvation in Christ. Perhaps you could make it part of your story – or better yet, part of the story of a child's journey of faith. **ACR**

29 Broughton Knox, *Sent by Jesus*, 53-54.

Straight talk on gender



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Book review:
The Gender Revolution
by Patricia Weerakoon with Robert Smith and Kamal Weerakoon

When you're asked to share your pronouns at work.

When your friend announces that they are now a different gender and have a new name to match and would everyone please use this new name from now on, thank you.

When you want to be loving towards your family member who's transitioning, but you don't think you can wholeheartedly affirm their decision because you're a Christian. But Jesus famously accepted those whose lifestyles were divergent. What

would Jesus do?

When you're not sure if your child's interests and behaviour matches up with societal norms for a boy or a girl. Is it just a phase? Or were they born in the wrong body?

What do you do? Where can you find information from trustworthy sources on what these terms mean? Do you have to have some grasp of the medical field to know about puberty blockers; or how sex relates to gender; or whether transitioning

is the pathway to alleviate distress? What about sexual orientation? And where can you find information on what *God* thinks of all this? Where do you even start?

Well – start with this book.

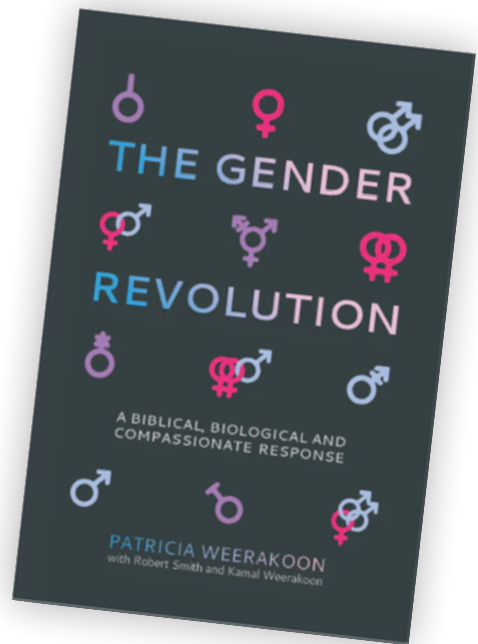
The authors Patricia Weerakoon, Robert Smith and Kamal Weerakoon have answered all of these questions, and more, in their clear and easy to read book *The Gender Revolution: A biblical, biological and compassionate response* (Matthias Media, 2023).

I say ‘easy to read’, but I only mean that it’s easy to understand. It’s also not easy to read, because the authors are real about the difficult things that really do affect us as people who live in a world groaning under sin and rebellion against God. They pull no punches on the issues. Yet, it’s clear that what moves them to write such a book is love for people – you can tell there’s a deep pastoral heart for those who are struggling. Sadly, the confusion and incoherence of what the world tells us about sex and gender is loud, and it isn’t helping. Especially when it comes to children and young people.

For instance, ‘Transgender ideology says that if a child behaves according to the stereotypes assigned by society to a particular sex, then the child must be that sex, regardless of their biology’ (p 97). Yet ‘Part of the danger and tragedy of transgender ideology is that it fools vulnerable young people into thinking that the reason they’re unusual is *because* they are trans’ (p 103). And ‘What’s even worse, [transgender idealogues] then intimidate parents and teachers with the threat that they must let the child transition or the child will commit

suicide. The chilling ultimatum, “do you want a dead son or a living daughter?” (or vice versa) is often issued’ (p 105).

The authors are willing to engage. They point to studies that are showing that ‘mental health and even suicidal ideation is not notably decreased with transition’ (pp 49, 105). They firmly but gently state the truth: ‘No amount of medication or surgery can change ... biological, chromosomal reality’ (p 56).



Most helpfully, the book uses the illustration of a tree to explain the relationship between biological sex, gendered behaviour, sexual orientation and gender identity. The roots of the tree are our biological sex (which is determined at conception), and out of this grows the trunk and then the branches which are these behaviours and feelings. Importantly, the authors explain that each component of the ‘gender tree’ can be

observed and measured by science – except the component of ‘gender identity’. That is only felt within the person themselves. But transgender ideology turns the tree upside down. ‘Transgender ideology claims that the branch called gender identity is the root, and expects everything else – our biological sex, sexual orientation and gendered behaviour – to grow out of that supposed root’ (p 45).

This is enormously helpful – no wonder our world is confused. It’s heartbreaking.



It’s clear that what moves them to write such a book is love for people



In the face of this, the authors articulate a thoroughly Christian critique of our culture: ‘... many people take for granted that our inner feelings tell us who we really are ... by way of radical contrast, Christianity doesn’t look inward for true knowledge of ourselves, for the simple reason that we didn’t create ourselves. This is why the meaning of our existence is not to be found inside of us. We find ourselves only by looking outward and, ultimately, upward to the God who made us’ (pp 18, 22).

Weerakoon, Smith and Weerakoon make some bold statements: ‘Biology is not bigotry. Our embodied biology tells us the truth about ourselves. We can and should pay attention to that truth and seek to live well according to it. Transgender ideology is anti-reality. It is anti-woman. It is anti-

man. It is anti-human’ (p 70). Yet, the authors are not in the debate to stir up antagonism or to make it personal: ‘We protest against an *ideology* which claims that those feelings are the ultimate indicator of a person’s true self, and therefore encourages people – particularly young people – to act on them in ways that are harmful and permanent’ (p 156).

Despite what it might look like, there is hope. And Christians know that the hope comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. The authors also demonstrate a greater model of inclusion than the one our world offers up. And they celebrate the wonderful diversity in the two genders God has made.

There was one part of the book that I need to think about further. The authors argue that ‘the God of the Bible is not a fan of bodily alterations... Yes, there are steps we can and should take to mitigate the deterioration process, but only up to a point’ (p 32). This left me scratching my head. Aside from the instruction about piercing in Exodus 21:5-6 that seems to indicate there was at least one other kind of bodily alteration acceptable for God’s people, I’m left wondering, What point is too far? Pierced ears? Two piercings? Is God not a fan of my haircut or false nails and how would I know if he was?

Nevertheless, the point they make is



Despite what it might look like, there is hope. And Christians know that the hope comes from the Lord Jesus Christ.



one I wholeheartedly affirm as I advance through my middle age: 'The *real hope* of resurrection allows us to let go of the *false hope* of having to obtain our best body now' (p 32). Hallelujah!

Finally, the authors issue a challenge to the church:

*'... more than simply understanding the issues in an abstract way, we need to understand that when it comes to sex and gender identity, every **person** presents with their own unique story. We need to understand **people**. We need to love **people**. And as a church we*

need to be prepared to be a community that supports and walks the hard road with people who are wrestling with their gender and sexuality' (p 128).

Their clear pastoral heart keeps coming through in the way they suggest these responses might play out.

In sum, 'We must get to know real people and understand the particularities of their situation in order to love them well' (p 128). Isn't this exactly what the Lord Jesus taught us to do? This wonderful book helps us to love in truth. **ACR**

Truth be told

Book review:

Truth Be Told: Living Truthfully in a Post-Truth World

by Lionel Windsor

The last time you lied, did it trouble you? What about the last time you were lied to? What value do we really put on the truth? And does anyone even care about lies anymore?

Lionel Windsor's new book brings questions such as these to the forefront of our minds. It is a timely discussion to have since the post-truth world in which we live can sometimes be disorienting, uncomfortable, and unreliable. This book speaks directly to these issues, and is a great resource for Christians, and non-Christians, seeking to live authentic lives. Or rather, as Windsor helpfully explains, a better way to put it would be to live with integrity in relationships characterised by trust.



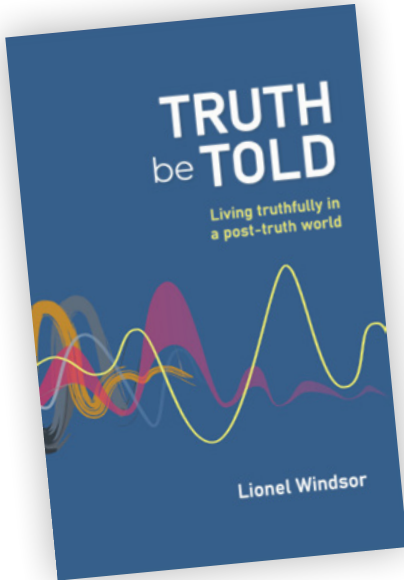
Truth does indeed matter. This is because truth is an essential characteristic of the Triune God.



Stephen Tong has a PhD in the English Reformation, and is a lay member of synod

Perhaps the most helpful observation Windsor reminds us of is that truth does indeed matter. This is because truth is an essential characteristic of the Triune God. To paraphrase Windsor, who points us to scripture time and again, the Father is 'abounding in steadfast love [chesed] and

faithfulness [*emet*]’ (Exod 34:6); the Son is ‘full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14); while the Spirit ‘speaks the truth in love’ (Eph 4:15). So, regardless of the changes and challenges of this fickle world, God remains our Rock because He is faithful, trustworthy, and true in nature, and in the way He relates to us.



Set out in three parts, this very readable book diagnoses the modern penchant for self-adulation, before turning to the source of truth, the Scriptures, and then concluding with some practical suggestions for truthful living. Each chapter begins with a relevant vignette, which gently draws the reader into a specific topic by exposing common issues with truth that we all encounter. For instance, the recent media attention on Prince Harry

and his wife Meghan’s interview with Oprah opens a door to discuss the attractive power of subjective truth in our modern society. In the final section, Windsor turns to the mundane habit of brushing his teeth twice daily to help illustrate how truth ‘isn’t just about information. It’s about *formation*’. And then he challenges us to develop habits that enable us to ingrain truth into our identities.

It is clear from this book that Windsor is a teacher and preacher, but one never gets the feeling that he is ‘Bible bashing’ us, or guilt-tripping us into feeling badly about ourselves. Instead, the tone is overwhelmingly positive. Moreover, Windsor draws on non-Christian academics, and up-to-date scholarship, to help us consider the ways in which ‘truth’ has been undermined, sidelined, relativised, and subjectified in our modern world. Yet despite taking a realistic view of the current state of affairs, Windsor presents us with a better model of truth. He constantly redirects our focus to the only authentic representation of truth: He who said of Himself, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life’ (John 14:6). **ACR**



It is clear from this book that Windsor is a teacher and preacher, but one never gets the feeling that he is ‘Bible bashing’ us, or guilt-tripping us into feeling badly about ourselves.



From the vault

Worthy Christian living

WORTHY CHRISTIAN LIVING

Romans 12, 1 and 2, provides us with a significant description of Christian living. It gives us, in a few brief phrases, a comprehensive pattern, which indicates in essential activity, in necessary equipment, and in ultimate achievement, what our Christian living ought to be.

Note at once that it is described as a "service" or "worship," which should be "reasonable" or "spiritual;" that it involves the use of both body and mind; that it should be determined, not by what is fashionable among men, but by what is acceptable to God; and that it should issue in the delight of doing God's will.

In form these words confront us as Christians with a **practical challenge**. For the words of Romans 12, 1 and 2 are an exhortation addressed to "brethren," who have experienced "the mercies of God." These mercies both provide a constraint, and guarantee an enablement. Such an exhortation implies that Christian morality should be the expression, not of a man-made resolve, but of a divinely-inspired response.

To quote Professor C. H. Dodd: "It does not begin with a man's ambition to make himself a fine specimen of virtuous humanity, and so, it may be, win the approval of God. It begins with the thankful recognition that God, the source of all goodness, has done for him what he could never do for himself."

Its essential character: divine service or worship. The double truth here to be learnt is (i) that henceforth all our living should be an activity of worship or devotion to God; and (ii) that the

highest form of true worship is not engagement in elaborate ceremonies, but the practice of daily obedience. For the Christian, worship is primarily a matter not of ritual performance, but of moral behaviour. This is supremely illustrated in the human life of incarnate Son of God. Consequently the pattern of Christian worship is to be found not in the ceremonial law, but in the obedience of Jesus in life and death to His Father's will.

Its practical cost: (i) presenting our bodies. Such obedience involves the use of the whole man. In particular we must yield our members to God to be used in His service. Christianity does not teach us to treat the body as evil and as needing to be suppressed and cast off. It teaches us rather to regard the body as capable of becoming the temple and instrument of God's indwelling Spirit, where and with which God is to be worshipped.

Also—in contrast to the ritual sacrifices of the old order, which involved putting animals to death, because only by bloodshedding could sin be remitted—now that Christ has died for our sins, and now that in Him risen we are alive from the dead, we can offer to God the sacrifice of our lives—by living daily to His glory.

Its practical cost: (ii) using our minds. The worship which we ought now to render to God

is also to be "reasonable." It involves, as ritual performance does not, the use of the mind and will in a response of intelligent and considered choice. This exercise of the mind is necessary in order to discern in daily living what actions will please God.

For God does not treat us for ever as children, and keep us under rules. He intends that we should grow up to have a Christian mind of our own.

Such full exercise of the mind we can engage in only as new creatures in Christ. It is not possible to our sinful nature. It is possible only as our minds are renewed by God's quickening and illuminating Spirit.

Its practical cost: (iii) changing our standards. This new awareness is necessary, and needs to be exercised because, as Christians, we are called to cease to order our lives according to the prevailing fashions of this world, and to promote their transformation by choosing day by day to do what is pleasing in God's sight.

Its intended goal: doing God's will. The issue of such response should be threefold. (i) We should discover what God's will for us is in each particular situation of life. For we should learn, by the exercise of our new mind, to discern good from evil, and to recognise what pleases God. (ii) We should delight in its personal acceptance and practice, rejoicing in the realisation that, because it is God's will, it must be "good," it is to be welcomed as "acceptable," and it will prove to be "perfect." (iii) Finally, the will of God which we have thus learnt to discern, and which we thus love to delight in, we should spend our days actively doing. "I beseech you, therefore"—so to do.

The
MISSION
BEFORE US

WHY SYDNEY ANGLICAN MINISTRY?



ACR
AUSTRALIAN CHURCH RECORD

EDITED BY MIKE LEITE

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“Now, as always, we need the next generation to step forward and commit their lives to the mission before us – to proclaim Jesus Christ and him crucified for the forgiveness of sins.”

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