

## Be careful how you build



**According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.**

1 Corinthians 3:10 (ESV)



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## Editorial

# Be careful how you build!

**One of my great joys in local church ministry is training up our young adults. At Hope Anglican Leppington we run a program called “Ministry Minds” that seeks to grow 25 or so of our young adults in their understanding of Christian ministry.**

One of the things we do is read through 1 Corinthians. There is so much wisdom to glean from the early chapters of the letter about the shape that ministry should take. Indeed, I take it that’s why Don Carson wrote a whole book on it!<sup>1</sup> I won’t recite all the lessons here, but I will point out 1 Corinthians 3:10. Paul is clear that when it comes to the task of Christian ministry, leaders are to *be careful how they build*.<sup>2</sup> For one, these leaders must build their Christian ministry upon the foundation that is Christ and Him crucified, and not lay some other kind of foundation. To do so is to build a completely different building (1 Cor 3:11)! But more than that, even as they build upon the foundation that is Jesus and Him crucified, they are still to be careful how they build. Why? For the day of judgment will reveal the quality of each one’s work (1 Cor 3:12–14). As Carson puts it, “This ought to be extremely sobering to all who are engaged in vocational ministry. It is possible to ‘build the church’ with such shoddy materials that at the last day you have nothing to show for your labour”.<sup>3</sup> It is important for those starting out in the task of Christian ministry and leadership to be aware of the responsibility and accountability that comes with the task. Hence why we read 1 Corinthians, and especially chapter 3 verse 10 with our young adults! However, we must not only *start* Christian ministry with 1 Corinthians 3:10 ringing in our ears, but also *continue* with it ringing in our ears.

We’ve called this issue of the *ACR Journal Be Careful How You Build* as the vast majority of our readers are active in Christian ministry and leadership. Furthermore, this is our Synod edition of the *ACR*. The leaders of our Synod

1 D. A. Carson, *The cross and Christian ministry: Leadership lessons from 1 Corinthians*, Baker Books, 2009.

2 Some take Paul’s reference to *builders* as referring to *all Christians*, however the context makes it clear that *Christian leaders* are in view.

3 Carson, 80.

Anglican churches are about to gather together to conduct the business of Synod. Here is a warning for us to heed as we lead in our churches, read our Synod papers (which of course, we all do), make decisions and drive debates at Synod, and implement our various ministries: Be careful how you build! We are to live and serve in the light of the final judgment, for we will give an account for our Christian ministry and leadership.<sup>4</sup>

We therefore hope this issue of the *ACR* Journal will help stimulate and shape your thinking in how you conduct ministry. Lionel Windsor's piece concludes his discussion with Andrew Heard about the place of secular wisdom in our church practices. Raj Gupta raises some very important questions in relation to Synod reports and the lack of meaningful assessment when it comes to our local churches, the heartbeat of our diocese. In his article on preaching, Mal York asks whether we've been rigorous enough in applying 1 Timothy 3 for *only certain men* exercising the preaching task. This is followed by two interviews, the first on Authentic Anglicanism and the second on Evangelical history. We then have a good warning from Phil Colgan: Are we seeking to live about 20 percent better than the world around us, or as Christians will we live out the radical call and example of Christ? An even stronger warning comes from Andrew Barry's article: Whilst wanting rightly to obey the government and live as honourable citizens, are we in danger of quibbling over the letter of the law whilst being too slow to simply obey God and not man? As is our custom, our issue then finishes off with a book review, this time by Robert Doyle on a new Matthias Media release celebrating the Nicene Creed.

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We do hope that this issue of the *ACR* Journal pushes you to consider how you build in your Christian ministry and leadership. Not all the views expressed are necessarily the views of the *ACR* Editorial Panel itself, which is in line with our intentions. The panel itself has been stretched and challenged to think more in light of these issues, and our great prayer is that you too will be stretched to live more radically and thoughtfully for your Lord.

God bless,

Mike Leite – Editorial Director

(On behalf of the Editorial Panel – Meagan Bartlett, Renee Capel, Charles Cleworth, Jocelyn Loane, Stephen Tong, Bronwyn Windsor, Lionel Windsor) **ACR**

4 Carson, 81.

# Eyes wide open

## Using secular wisdom to achieve ministry goals

Recently, I had the joy of spending time with some ministers in an area of Sydney where Anglican churches are growing and thriving. Several of the ministers had participated in church consultations that used an outcomes-oriented framework based on solid gospel convictions and utilising organisational systems theory.

**T**he consultations had helped the ministry teams accurately measure their present situation and make concrete plans to achieve goals for reaching the lost. This had already led to substantial gospel growth and had given these ministers renewed optimism and Christ-centred confidence in ministry. I praise God for this. I believe there should be more of it.

The positive power and potential of frameworks like this leads me to keep sounding a note of warning. I'm not trying to dampen enthusiasm for such frameworks. I'm trying to help make their implementation theologically robust for decades to come. As we employ these frameworks and witness their power, there's something to "watch out" for. We need to have our eyes wide open. The warning I want to keep sounding arises from Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:10: "Let each one take care (or "watch out") how he builds ...."

This article continues a conversation that began with my article in the *ACR* Easter edition 2024. I'm writing here primarily for members of the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney. But I'm hoping what I write will be relevant to anyone who has discovered the tremendous power of goal-driven thinking in gospel ministry and wants to reflect further on it. If you haven't followed the prior conversation, don't worry; I've written this article so you can read it as a standalone.



**Lionel Windsor** is a lecturer in New Testament at Moore Theological College.

## A failure of communication

My original article was “Gospel Seriously: The Dangerous Necessity of Goal-Driven Ministry.”<sup>1</sup> Andrew Heard—a brilliant driving force for the consultations I described above—wrote a critical response, “Reflections on ‘The Dangerous Necessity of Goal-Driven Ministry.’”<sup>2</sup> The main thrust of Andrew’s response was unmissable: he found my original article confusing and lacking clarity. Since successful communication isn’t merely about what is said (the input) but what is heard (the outcome), it’s right for me to take responsibility for the miscommunication.

Happily, my failure to communicate is also an opportunity to clarify. And clarity on *this* topic is vital. That’s because it concerns the future of the gospel in Sydney, Australia and the world. Yet it’s not easy. As brothers in Christ, Andrew and I are approaching the same goal from different angles. On the one hand, Andrew is seeking to equip people to see the gospel of Jesus Christ passionately proclaimed and urgently responded to by as many as possible. On the other hand, I’m seeking to help ensure that the gospel we proclaim and respond to remains the same in 50 years and beyond. These are two complementary activities that work together but can’t be subsumed under one another. The difference requires robust discussion. So, we need to disagree precisely while avoiding polarisation. That’s why I’m grateful for Andrew’s critique and the chance to clarify.

In this reply, I’ll seek to clarify three things:

- 1) the nature of the danger I’m talking about,
- 2) the definition of “goal-driven ministry” I’m using, and
- 3) most importantly, the significance of Paul’s warning to “take care” or “watch out” in 1 Corinthians 3:10—and what it has to do with the metaphor of the “wise master builder.”

## Clarity on the danger

### Necessity and danger: Both eyes open

To reiterate the basic point of my original article: it’s vitally important to do *two things at once*. The two things might seem to be contradictory, yet we can only move forward by grasping both simultaneously:

*Appeal #1: Engage in goal-driven ministry for the sake of the gospel of Christ crucified*

*Appeal #2: Constantly critique your goal-driven ministry by the gospel of Christ crucified<sup>3</sup>*

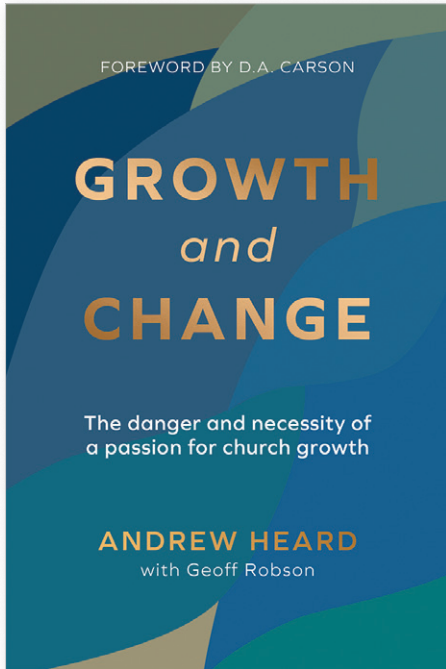
1 Lionel Windsor, “Gospel Seriously: The Dangerous Necessity of Goal-Driven Ministry,” *Australian Church Record* 1928 (2024): 5–15.

2 Andrew Heard, “Reflections on ‘The Dangerous Necessity of Goal-Driven Ministry,’” *Australian Church Record* 1930 (2025): 77–88.

3 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 6.



Think of these two appeals as two “eyes.” We need to have both eyes open to see the world in 3D and walk properly. I summarised this “two-eyed” approach using a provocative subtitle: “The *Dangerous Necessity* of Goal-Driven Ministry.” I thought the phrase “dangerous necessity” nicely captured the two-eyed approach. But when my article was published, somebody pointed out that Andrew’s newly released book, *Growth and Change*, contained an almost identical phrase in its



subtitle: *The Danger and Necessity of a Passion for Church Growth*.<sup>4</sup> I’d submitted the manuscript for my article before Andrew’s book was available, and I’d assumed I’d come up with the danger-necessity duality myself. But it’s far more likely that I’d heard Andrew or others using it over the previous few years and had internalised it so much that I thought it was my idea. Apologies, Andrew!

In his response to me, Andrew rightly draws attention to his book.<sup>5</sup> And now that I’ve read it, I can confirm that *Growth and Change* is transformative and powerful. It’s a theologically grounded defence of gospel-focused change and growth in church life, along with a clear, practical outline of how to implement such change. It’s an important book for anyone involved

in gospel ministry to get their hands on. And—as expected from the subtitle—it draws attention to *both* the necessity and some of the dangers of this way of thinking.<sup>6</sup> Granted, Andrew and I approach the necessity and danger from opposite directions. Andrew names some dangers but focuses on the necessity.<sup>7</sup> I affirmed the necessity but focused on a key danger.<sup>8</sup> But my focus on danger wasn’t designed to negate the necessity. After all, most things in life that are worth doing are dangerous. But still, we need to take the danger seriously. As we engage in this necessary thing, we need to always “take care” or “watch out” (1 Cor 3:10).<sup>9</sup> We need to have our eyes wide open.

4 Andrew Heard, *Growth and Change: The Danger and Necessity of a Passion for Church Growth* (Matthias Media, 2024).

5 Heard, “Reflections,” 78.

6 E.g., Heard, *Growth and Change*, 99–103.

7 E.g., “We must always live with the danger passion brings”: Heard, *Growth and Change*, 103. Cf. “there is nowhere safe” (98, 125).

8 Heard, “Reflections,” 77.

9 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 12–13.



## What danger, exactly?

The key danger I'm talking about is *not something Andrew directly identifies in his book*. Andrew focuses on more immediate and medium-term dangers for individual ministries: "Sinner-driven churches," "worldly respect," "The pursuit of cultural relevance," "theological compromise," "Stress and grief," "negativity," "Rampant pragmatism," and the ends justifying the means.<sup>10</sup> These dangers are all clear and present dangers. It's perfectly right for Andrew to focus on them in such a practical book.

Yet the danger I'm talking about is deeper than these. It may only become full-fledged in future generations, but that doesn't mean it's any less dangerous. The danger is this: allowing our ministries to be so shaped by the particular framework of speaking and thinking about ministry we've adopted that the gospel we preach—or, more importantly, the gospel that people *hear*—ends up becoming shaped by the values we've adopted in our ministry framework. Many of those values (understandably) revolve around human effectiveness. But the gospel we preach cannot revolve around human effectiveness. Hence, the danger.<sup>11</sup>

## Warning signs

In my original article, I listed some possible warning signs that might make us realise we've gone too far.<sup>12</sup> I wasn't pointing the finger at Andrew or any other particular leaders in this area—I don't think they have gone too far. I realise now from Andrew's response that it might have looked like I was taking covert aim at them—and if so, I apologise. To clarify: I was talking about attitudes that *I myself* feel tempted to adopt, and which I have actually seen expressed by some less informed devotees of these frameworks.

I identified four dangerous attitudes that arise from warnings in 1 Corinthians 1–4:

- 1) being "impressed" by goal-driven human leaders (e.g., 1 Cor 4:6),
- 2) being "fascinated" by human systems and measures (e.g., 1 Cor 4:3–5),
- 3) "despising" other ministries that seem weak (e.g., 1 Cor 1:28), and
- 4) "glorifying" effective ministries (e.g. 1 Cor 3:21).

I don't just mean commending and learning from effective ministries (we should do this!). I'm talking about that sense of superiority that arises when we realise that we're being intentional and getting results but others aren't. I'm talking about that satisfaction we can feel when we realise that we really do know how to do ministry better than others. I'm talking about the tendency we can have to tolerate

<sup>10</sup> Heard, *Growth and Change*, 21–32, 97–99, 198–201.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew does discuss the danger of our individual *methods* affecting our message: Heard, *Growth and Change*, 98–99. However, he doesn't address the deeper danger: that our *overall framework* for speaking and thinking affects our message.

<sup>12</sup> Windsor, "Gospel Seriously," 14–15.

leaders who are numerically successful but aren't displaying the fruit of the Spirit that flows from the humility of the cross. I'm talking about our tendency to truncate our prayers for God to act because our discussions about our own activities and results in ministry dominate our time and energy. These warning signs are real for me—and for all of us. And the more powerful and effective our ministry framework is, and the more it leads to real, God-honouring results, the more critical it is to be aware of the danger so we can consistently critique ourselves by the gospel of Christ crucified.

## Clarity on “goal-driven ministry”

But hold on, you might say, why does it have to be so complicated? Surely, all we need to do is to ensure the values in our framework for speaking and thinking about ministry are purely biblical and theological. Then we can just press on without worrying, can't we?

No, that approach is far too naïve. Our frameworks for engaging in ministry are never purely biblical and theological. That's just not the nature of the beast.

## What's the thing we're talking about?

At this point, we need clarity on the true nature of the ministry frameworks we're dealing with. In my original article, I identified a particular kind of framework. “For want of a better term,” I labelled it “goal-driven ministry.”<sup>13</sup> I laid out a definition at the start and sought to be consistent with it throughout:

*the kind of ministry thinking that tends to borrow heavily from the worldly wisdom of things like systems theory—inputs, processes, measurement, outputs—strategic planning, leadership, statistical analysis, quality control, business management, etc.*<sup>14</sup>

I continue to stand by this definition of “goal-driven ministry” (GDM). However, reading Andrew's response, I can see that my discussion needs clarification. Andrew argued that I was quite unclear, because the phrase “goal-driven ministry” has a broader, more “natural meaning” and “intuitive sense” of merely being intentional in ministry, i.e. “simply being focused on achieving a goal” in any ministry scenario.<sup>15</sup> And at one point, I did refer to this broader sense of intentionality when I was discussing the necessity of GDM. I argued from 1 Corinthians 8–10 that we *must* be intentional in ministry (generally), for the sake of the salvation of others.<sup>16</sup> Then, I argued that because such intentionality (broadly defined) is necessary, there's another step we need to take: “it's worth prayerfully and humbly learning

13 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 5.

14 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 5.

15 Heard, “Reflections,” 80.

16 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 6–8.



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from people in our world who have put significant thought and effort into working out how to turn goals into actions in our lives and our organisations.”<sup>17</sup> I was saying that A) we *must* be intentional (generally); and B) since intentionality means action, we need to make use of the best language and thinking we can find to help us to do it. And whether we admit it or not, most of the best language and thinking about goals comes from the secular world.<sup>18</sup> I called that “GDM”. I also called it “Plundering the Egyptians” (PTE)—i.e., using secular wisdom to be truly intentional, i.e., to think and talk about achieving ministry goals.

Sometimes, our use of secular wisdom to achieve ministry goals is obvious. We analyse numbers and organisational life cycles. We employ statistical analysis of populations and church life. I’ve benefitted from productivity management gurus to help take control of my life and achieve life goals (I’ve even blogged about it).<sup>19</sup> In my teaching at Moore Theological College, I utilise secular pedagogical methods focused on achieving “learning outcomes.” Right now, an expert organisational psychologist is helping me to develop in leadership. This is normal, necessary, and unavoidable. And yet, it’s dangerous. As I said: “The gold we plunder (i.e., the worldly wisdom we adapt) is never merely a neutral building material. It always glitters and tempts us to love and treasure it in its own right.”<sup>20</sup>

17 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 8.

18 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 8, 10.

19 Lionel Windsor, “Sustainable Sacrifice,” Blog, *Forget the Channel*, 2016, <https://www.lionelwindsor.net/bible-resources/biblical-series/sustainable-sacrifice/>.

20 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 9.

## Plundering the Egyptians: The brilliance of *Growth and Change*

Now that I've read Andrew's book *Growth and Change*, I can see quite clearly that this necessary and dangerous use of secular wisdom—plundering the Egyptians—is *precisely what Andrew is doing*. That's the brilliance of the book. It's not just a theological argument about why we need to be goal-oriented as a concept. It is this, but it's more. It's a book that adopts secular wisdom in the cause of change. Secular wisdom permeates Andrew's book. For example:

- He expertly appropriates organisational change management theory, including its potent theoretical metaphor of “heat.”<sup>21</sup>
- He has a chapter discussing a modern psychological framework—Maslow's hierarchy of needs—not only critiquing its shortcomings but also showing how this piece of “worldly wisdom” can be fruitfully “[a]ppplied to biblical thought.”<sup>22</sup>
- He helpfully draws insights about leadership from ideas in secular organisational theory—e.g., the “Stockdale Paradox” (a practical application of ancient Greek Stoic philosophy),<sup>23</sup> resource management, investment, delegation, recruitment, management, reviews, leading leaders, vision casting—all while avoiding the idea that a church leader is merely a CEO.<sup>24</sup>

Most significantly (consistent with my definition of GDM), Andrew frequently utilises *organisational systems theory*. This is a robust, pragmatic secular framework informed by insights from engineering, economics, and management theory. For example:

- He deliberately and creatively appropriates various kinds of systems theory terminology—e.g., “inputs,” “outputs,” a “feedback loop,” and “intermediate output targets”—to discuss the importance of intentionality in ministry.<sup>25</sup>
- He recognises different kinds of systems thinking, insightfully arguing that it's better to think in terms of the “branch of modern psychology” called “family systems” theory rather than the kind of systems theories tailored to large businesses.<sup>26</sup>
- Systems theory thoroughly informs his “overall philosophy of ministry,” which is about pathways, strategies, and ecosystems involving interconnections and interdependencies.<sup>27</sup>

21 Heard, *Growth and Change*, 13–14, 106, 143.

22 Heard, *Growth and Change*, 77–95 quoting 77, 86.

23 James B. Stockdale, *Courage Under Fire: Testing Epictetus's Doctrines in a Laboratory of Human Behavior*, Hoover Essays 6 (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1993); term coined and applied to organisational theory by Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't* (London: Random House, 2001), 83–87.

24 Heard, *Growth and Change*, 80–81, 119, 128, 176, 238, 240–42.

25 Heard, *Growth and Change*, 107–10, 179–205.

26 Heard, *Growth and Change*, 242.

27 Heard, *Growth and Change*, 233–49 quoting 234.

- He explicitly tells his readers he is seeking “to apply ‘systems thinking’ to the life of a church community.”<sup>28</sup>

This is powerful stuff. As I mentioned, it also fits my definition of goal-driven ministry (or “Plundering the Egyptians”) very well. It’s a robust, theologically informed adoption of secular wisdom (based on modern pragmatism) to theorise about the centrality of ministry goals. Andrew said about my definition: “If this is GDM, I’m not a fan.”<sup>29</sup> But I guess that’s because I wasn’t clear enough. After all, as I said, I’m a fan myself. And in fact, I think Andrew is a fan, given that it’s everywhere in his book! Maybe Andrew’s reticence to own it comes from the fact that I mentioned the word “business”



**And I think it’s great. But it’s also dangerous.**



as one element in my list of examples—and it’s clear in his article Andrew is very keen to distance himself from the suggestion that church is a “business.”<sup>30</sup> But his adoption of secular wisdom goes way beyond merely suggesting that a church is like a business! And I think it’s great. But it’s also dangerous.

### How do we respond?

So how do we respond when engaging with such ministry frameworks that helpfully adopt secular wisdom to theorise about the centrality of ministry goals? Here are three possibilities:

**Response 1.** We could react against the existence of secular wisdom in the framework and reject the whole framework merely because it’s using something “worldly.” Andrew rightly calls this the “genetic fallacy.”<sup>31</sup> He suggests my readers might go down that route. So readers—please don’t! We must realise that using secular wisdom isn’t merely necessary; it’s unavoidable (to adopt Andrew’s language).<sup>32</sup> We’re *always* doing it, whether we realise it or not. We can’t avoid being human. This means we’ll always be using the wisdom and structures of the secular human world in some way.

**Response 2.** We could downplay the existence of secular wisdom in our framework and instead emphasise the theological element. This might help us to persuade the “Response 1” people for whom the mere existence of secular wisdom becomes a “heat dissipator” to avoid change.<sup>33</sup> However, if we did this, we would have our eyes closed to the mixed reality of our ministry frameworks. We would

28 Heard, *Growth and Change*, 243.

29 Heard, “Reflections,” 81.

30 In fact, Andrew’s discussion of my article made it sound as if I was *primarily* discussing “business practice”: Heard, “Reflections,” 81. Yet I only mentioned the word “business” as one brief example of a range of secular ideas.

31 Heard, “Reflections,” 84.

32 Heard, “Reflections,” 77.

33 Cf. Heard, *Growth and Change*, 143.

end up “baptising” the secular wisdom in our frameworks as if it were actual theology—and the gospel itself would be confused.

**Response 3.** With our eyes wide open, we could simply admit we’re adopting secular wisdom. We could then use it effectively while not confusing the human aspects of our ministry philosophies with true theology. This would allow the gospel to constantly critique our ministry philosophies. It would enable us to watch out for the danger that the gospel of Christ crucified might be muted by whatever secular wisdom we’ve used in our ministry philosophies.

## Clarity on the wisdom of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1–4

That’s why 1 Corinthians 1–4 is so helpful. But since Andrew disagrees significantly with me about some parts of 1 Corinthians 1–4—in particular, the meaning of 1 Corinthians 3:10—some clarification is needed.

### What’s Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 1–4?

In my original article, I opened my discussion of 1 Corinthians 1–4 with the sentence: “If you approached 1 Corinthians 1–4 with a strongly goal-driven pragmatic filter, you’d probably conclude that Paul had gone completely mad.”<sup>34</sup> I then listed the mad things you’d probably conclude. The reason I listed these mad things was to show that you *can’t* approach 1 Corinthians 1–4 this way. Paul didn’t write these chapters as a list of practical tips for ministry. If you try to read it that way, you end up thinking it’s foolish.

In doing this, I was trying to make a point about the absurdity of approaching 1 Corinthians 1–4 as a list of ministry tips. But I can see from Andrew’s response that I wasn’t clear enough. Andrew says my readers would look at my list of absurdities and conclude that I genuinely believed the passage *was* giving us a list of practical tips for how to do ministry—but bizarre tips about being deliberately stupid and never pursuing any goals! He suggests I was saying that Paul “deliberately acted in the most thoughtless, foolish and stupid ways imaginable.”<sup>35</sup> A serious miscommunication on my part!

So to clarify, let me double-underline the next sentence in my original article: “What’s going on? It’s not that Paul was crazy, or that he merely wanted to be perverse.”<sup>36</sup> My point (along with that of many commentators) was that what seems foolish in the eyes of simplistically pragmatically driven readers makes sense when we understand the purpose of 1 Corinthians 1–4. Paul wasn’t just talking here about his general ministry strategy. He was countering a situation where secular wisdom *dominated* the Corinthians’ thinking and actions. Their “worldview (their big-W

34 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 10.

35 Heard, “Reflections,” 87.

36 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 10.





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Wisdom) prized rhetorical effectiveness and following human leaders. This was diametrically opposed to the values of the gospel of Christ crucified.”<sup>37</sup> This meant that in *this* situation especially, Paul *deliberately avoided* utilising the ministry framework the Corinthians valued, even though it would have seemed highly effective in communicating the gospel to them.

Even though we don’t face precisely the same situation as the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 1–4 is still highly relevant to us. That’s because it helps us to understand and interact with secular wisdom. It helps us to treat it with care. Even though secular wisdom is worth adopting and using in ministry, there are times when we or the people we preach to can become like the

Corinthians. We can become so enamoured of the effectiveness of the secular wisdom we have adopted in our ministry frameworks that our very use of it undermines the message of Christ crucified. And it’s a real danger.

Surely, effectiveness in preaching the gospel can’t be a danger, can it? Of course it can. Why? Because, as Paul emphasises in 1 Corinthians 1–4, the gospel is fundamentally a message that we are *ineffective* at achieving the great goal: salvation. We need God to save us. And he’s done this in a way that opposes all human power and wisdom: through the cross. So if we become *too* focused on human effectiveness and wisdom in ministry, then no matter how much we’re saying we believe the message of the cross, we’re not actually holding to it. That doesn’t always happen, but it’s what had happened in Corinth. And that’s Paul’s primary topic *throughout* 1 Corinthians 1–4. That’s why these chapters are so helpful for us to critique ourselves today, even as we rightly pursue goals in ministry.

### “Wisdom” in 1 Corinthians 1–4

“Wisdom” is the key term throughout 1 Corinthians 1–4. Paul uses the word group 26 times, plus many other related terms. So, to understand these chapters, it’s important to grasp what “wisdom” means in the Bible.

In discussing wisdom, Andrew points mainly to the book of Proverbs, which portrays “a world that, generally speaking, operates on the basis of cause and effect” and undergirds a theologically principled pragmatism.<sup>38</sup> That’s why prag-

37 Windsor, “Gospel Seriously,” 11.

38 Heard, “Reflections,” 84; cf. Heard, *Growth and Change*, 133–41.



matism works—because it’s true! But it’s not the whole truth. A full-orbed biblical account of “wisdom” must go beyond this basic cause-and-effect idea in Proverbs. To be truly wise, we need to consider Job and Ecclesiastes, where again and again the Bible underlines the fact that true wisdom involves humility before God in the face of *not* being able to discern cause and effect. We need to consider the “wisdom” of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, who confounds human plans and rulers and achieves God’s purposes through suffering (e.g., Isa 52:13–15; cf. 29:14). We need to consider Daniel’s “wisdom” which looked to God to reveal his mysteries in a way that humans cannot discern (e.g., Dan 2:30).

These latter themes are all prominent in 1 Corinthians 1–4 (in fact, Paul often quotes from the Old Testament to make his point). Paul is here emphasising the wisdom of the cross that stands *against* human wisdom, strength, and power (e.g., 1 Cor 1:18–31). This is why 1 Corinthians 1–4 provide us with an essential corrective to any overly optimistic “cause-and-effect” understanding of wisdom.

### The “skilled/wise master builder” (1 Corinthians 3:10)

I argued that this overall topic of 1 Corinthians 1–4—the clash between human wisdom and God’s wisdom—is critical to understanding Paul’s discussion of ministry in 1 Corinthians 3:5–15, especially v. 10:

*According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled [or “wise”, sophos] master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care [or “watch out”, blepetō] how he builds upon it. (1 Cor 3:10 ESV).*

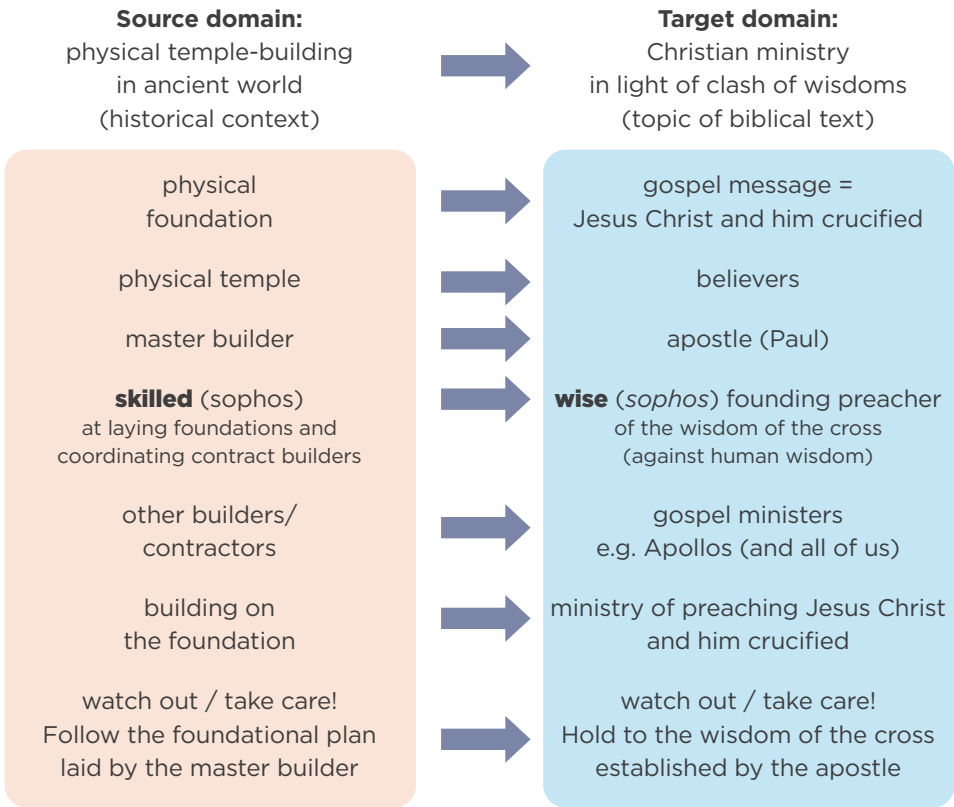
Paul is here employing a metaphor. Because Andrew and I disagree about how to read this metaphor, it’s helpful to spell out in more detail how the metaphor is functioning and exactly where Andrew and I disagree.

A metaphor occurs when an author uses an image that naturally belongs in one area of life well known to the readers (a *source domain*) to make a point relevant to another area of life that the author wants to discuss (a *target domain*).<sup>39</sup> Here, the source domain is the historical world of physical temple-building projects. The target domain is Paul’s discussion of Christian ministry in light of the clash between human wisdom and God’s wisdom. In terms of the historical source domain (physical temple building), Paul is portraying himself “like” a “skilled master builder.” He’s inviting his readers to imagine him in some way like an expert temple-building project manager with practical know-how in laying physical foundations and coordinating contractors.<sup>40</sup> In terms of the textual target domain

39 This is standard cognitive linguistic terminology; see, e.g., Oscar E. Jiménez, *Metaphors in the Narrative of Ephesians 2:11–22: Motion towards Maximal Proximity and Higher Status*, LBS 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

40 A definitive article on this source domain is by Jay Shanor, “Paul as Master Builder: Construction Terms in First Corinthians,” *New Testament Studies* 34.3 (1988): 461–71.

(Christian ministry and the clash of wisdoms), Paul is actually talking about his role as the founding apostle who proclaimed the gospel of “Jesus Christ and him crucified” as the foundation for all future ministry (2:2; 3:11). A diagram can help to illustrate Paul’s metaphorical language (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Paul’s building metaphors in 1 Corinthians 3:10–17

The Greek word *sophos* contains a double meaning that enables Paul to create a deliberate link between the source domain (the “skilled” activity of physical temple building) and the target domain (the “wise” activity of preaching the message of the cross). To drive the connection home, Paul explicitly draws together the threads of the temple-building metaphor (3:10–17)—and indeed his whole discussion to this point—by using the word *sophos* in a way that reminds his readers he is talking here not about human ability but about the clash between divine and human wisdom (3:18–23):

*Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise (sophos) in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise (sophos). For the wisdom (sophia) of this world is folly with God. (1 Cor 3:18–19a ESV)*

Andrew insists that when we read the phrase *sophos archtektōn* in 3:10, we must choose between the source domain (historical context) or the target domain (biblical text/ context). He firmly lands on the source domain, i.e., the ancient world of physical temple building. For Andrew, therefore, Paul’s language is “straightforward.” He treats the phrase like a literal term, arguing that we can and should import further ideas from the historical context to fill it out. So, for example, because a master builder in the ancient world was “skilled” at practical tasks and led a team of contractors, Paul must also be using the idea here to focus his readers on his own “practical ability” and “experience” as “the one who leads a team.”<sup>41</sup>

However, this fails to consider that we’re dealing here with a *metaphor*, not a literal phrase. Metaphors, like sermon illustrations, are only valid for the points the author explicitly seeks to draw out. That’s why we can’t import everything we know about ancient master builders into Paul’s use of the phrase. We need to examine



**Paul is the unique master builder who laid the one foundation.**



how Paul is *using* this metaphor in his argument here (the target domain). When we look at the text, we see he’s *not* using the image here to portray himself as a great example of skilful team leadership. (Sure, Paul led missionary teams, but that’s not what he’s talking about here.<sup>42</sup>)

Instead, he’s focusing on his unique found-

ing role as the *apostle* who lays down the gospel—i.e., the wisdom of the cross, which stands against human wisdom—as the standard that all future ministers must conform to. Paul is the unique master builder who laid the one foundation. Everybody else (including all ministers today, regardless of whether we lead teams) are mere contractors, bound to follow the apostolic master pattern: Jesus Christ and him crucified (3:11; 2:2). Throughout this passage, Paul is consistently talking about the wisdom of the cross. He’s not making a concession to human skill, as Andrew seems to suggest.

I don’t think Andrew is correct when he states that “many commentators” share his line of interpretation.<sup>43</sup> The claim is not actually supported by the commentators Andrew cites.<sup>44</sup> One of these commentators (Hays) argues strongly for the

41 Heard, “Reflections,” 85–86.

42 We can see from elsewhere that Paul leads a “team” that includes Timothy and Sosthenes (1:1; 4:17; 16:10). However, Paul isn’t talking about Timothy and Sosthenes in this passage. Instead, he’s talking about Apollos (3:4–6) and others like him. Apollos *isn’t* on Paul’s immediate “team”; he’s in broader gospel partnership with him (3:6; 16:12).

43 Heard, “Reflections,” 85–87 quoting 87.

44 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Paul D. Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018); Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).



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understanding I've outlined, not for Andrew's view.<sup>45</sup> Another commentator (Gardner) briefly mentions both interpretations without coming to a firm conclusion.<sup>46</sup> A third commentator (Thiselton) does sketch something like Andrew's view. However, Thiselton is almost exclusively focused on the historical background of the image; he does not engage at all with the issue of how *sophos* relates to Paul's theological exploration of wisdom in these chapters.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Andrew does not mention the commentators I cited in my original article (Carson, Ciampa & Rosner).<sup>48</sup> Rosner & Ciampa engage with *both* the historical background *and* Paul's text in most depth, arguing compellingly at multiple points for the interpretation I've advocated here.<sup>49</sup> I think it's fair to say that biblical scholarship supports my interpretation quite strongly, whereas Andrew's interpretation is an outlier at best. In any case, I'm happy to leave it to my readers to check out these sources and evaluate these claims.

45 Hays, *First Corinthians*, 53–56 esp. 54. Andrew ("Reflections," 87 n 8) quotes Hays selectively; he also appears to misunderstand what Hays means by the terms "double sense" and "ironically."

46 Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 173.

47 Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 308.

48 Donald A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993); Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

49 Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 150–57; cf. Carson, *Cross and Christian Ministry*, 77–82.

To summarise: Paul uses the metaphor of the “skilled/wise master builder” not to refer to his practical ability as a leader but to focus on his unique apostolic role: preaching the wisdom of the cross *in contrast* to human wisdom and power/ability as the basis for all future ministry.

### **The warning: “Take care” / “Watch out!” (1 Corinthians 3:10)**

And so Paul has a warning for all future ministers: “watch out!” / “take care!” (*blepetō*) (3:10). We need to have our eyes wide open to danger. The specific danger is that we might end up building in a way that *doesn’t* match the foundation laid by the apostolic master builder: the wisdom of the cross. We need to watch out that whatever other building materials we choose to use (secular or otherwise), we don’t deviate from the key task of preaching the gospel of Christ crucified, even when it may seem foolish in the eyes of our world that values human wisdom and power (3:12, cf. 3:19).

Paul sharpens the warning by pointing to a future measurement of our ministry work. This isn’t a humanly measurable outcome; it’s an evaluation that God will disclose through apocalyptic judgment (3:13). What exactly will be tested and measured? All the scholars cited so far (both by Andrew and by me) agree that the measure God will use is not the results of our ministry (the “outcomes,” to use Andrew’s systems-theory terminology) but our adherence to the wisdom of the cross.<sup>50</sup>

*In a nutshell, Paul teaches that God will judge Christian workers on the single measure of their avoidance of human wisdom and adherence to the wisdom of the cross as they go about their work.*<sup>51</sup>

To summarise: While practical human skill in ministry is necessary, that’s not what Paul is talking about in 1 Cor 3:10. Paul wrote this passage as a vital warning for ministers to build according to the *wisdom of the cross*, which stands against human wisdom. This is a warning that we all need to heed in case we become *too enamoured* of practical human skill in ministry.

### **Eyes wide open for us today**

Here are some closing reflections on what we should do with any powerful frameworks for ministry that incorporate the best insights from secular wisdom but also carry the danger I’ve pointed to.

Firstly, let’s do this dangerous thing! We mustn’t avoid using secular wisdom simply because it’s dangerous. We need to use it for the very reasons Andrew outlines in his book: for the gospel of Christ crucified, for God’s vision, for the reality

50 Shanor, “Paul as Master Builder,” 55; Carson, *Cross and Christian Ministry*, 80–81; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 312–13; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 155–156; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 55; Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 171–79; contra Heard, *Growth and Change*, 184.

51 Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 156.

of heaven and hell, for the brevity of life, for love.<sup>52</sup>

But, secondly, the danger is still real. So let's do it *with our eyes wide open*. Let's not baptise our practical ministry frameworks as if they're pure theology. Let's freely admit we're incorporating secular wisdom, then get on with it. That will give us true clarity. Then, as we rightly pursue effectiveness in achieving ministry goals, we can also avoid the danger—which is more real and subtle than we might think—to start *valuing* human effectiveness, especially when it comes to salvation.

Thirdly, we need to realise that there might be times when we need to *deliberately set aside* certain uses of secular wisdom because we realise it's taking over in our hearts and minds or the hearts and minds of our hearers. This is the situation Paul found himself in among the Corinthians.

I'll finish with a mother of all warnings from Martin Luther. Luther experienced an extreme form of this danger in the Medieval Catholic church. Centuries of exceedingly effective church growth in Europe had tragically been accompanied by the glorification of human strength and power in ministry and salvation. This had actually changed the gospel that was being preached. Picking up Paul's warnings in 1 Corinthians 1–4 and elsewhere, in his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), Luther wrote:



**Firstly, let's do this dangerous thing!**



*18. It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.*

*19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in the things which have actually happened.*

*20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.*

*21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.*<sup>53</sup>

Admittedly, we're a long way from the situation Luther had to address! But it's still worth heeding the warning so that we never get anywhere close. As we strive to achieve God-honouring outcomes, let's keep our eyes wide open. **ACR**

<sup>52</sup> Heard, *Growth and Change*, 37–56.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation (1518)," in *Luther's Works 31: Career of the Reformer: I*, trans. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 35–70 here 40.



# Going beyond bums and dollars

Picture this: Every September, the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney receives detailed annual reports from Anglicare (aged care outcomes, community impact metrics, financial sustainability indicators), Moore College (graduate placement rates, theological competency assessments, student satisfaction scores), Youthworks (program participation, leadership development statistics, ministry effectiveness measures), and the same concept is true for pretty much every other Diocesan organisation.

**W**e scrutinise their performance, have the opportunity to ask probing questions, and make funding decisions based on data about their kingdom impact. Perhaps the real power is in the back end. As each organisation reports, it must look at and reflect on its tangible impact according to objective criteria. Behind the scenes, a myriad of data must be developed and maintained, and this data is some reflection of the objectives of the organisation. The objective data offers a means of evaluation, and in turn to allocate limited resources.

But when it comes to our churches—the heartbeat of our diocesan mission—we operate largely in the dark, knowing little beyond bums on seats and dollars in the plate.

The irony is striking: we demand rigorous accountability from our supporting organisations while giving our core ministry units a free pass on meaningful assessment. The cost of this approach is



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significant. Without comprehensive church health data, we're making critical strategic decisions—where to plant churches, how to deploy limited clergy and staff, which ministries to resource—based on anecdote, assumption, and often outdated information. I will never forget the comment of someone years ago: “We are doing all of these things; it must be making an impact.” But the reality was that the inputs were not translating into the desired outputs. The same dynamic is often true within parishes.

Imagine if we brought the same level of thoughtful assessment to our churches that we already require from our diocesan organisations. This isn't about creating burdensome bureaucracy or judging ministers—it's about developing a framework to enable us all to reflect on the wise stewardship of the limited resources God has entrusted to us. This involves people and is ultimately about reaching more people for the Lord Jesus Christ.

This article will argue that Synod should establish annual reasonable church health reporting that moves beyond basic attendance and finances to capture a fuller spectrum of gospel activity in our parishes. Yes, this would provide the data foundation necessary for strategic decision-making about church planting, staff deployment, and resource allocation. But even more so, and more importantly, developing such a framework will help parishes count what they value and assist in making strategic decisions about how to use limited God-given resources. In addition, such a development has the potential to enhance our culture of continuous improvement and shared learning across the parishes of the Diocese.



**Jesus teaches the concept of counting the cost and wise planning.**



## **The biblical and theological foundation**

### **Stewardship and accountability**

The biblical mandate for faithful stewardship runs throughout Scripture. Paul reminds us that “it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2), extending beyond good intentions to measurable outcomes. Paul demonstrates transparency in Christian leadership when he writes, “We aim at what is honourable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man” (2 Cor 8:21). Jesus teaches the concept of counting the cost and wise planning (Luke 14:28–30), and the principle can be applied in corporate ways too.

### **Facing reality for God's glory**

Truth-telling forms a fundamental aspect of Christian character, and this should include an honest assessment of ministry effectiveness. The danger of avoiding uncomfortable data that reveals areas needing attention ultimately serves neither God's glory nor the good of those we are seeking to reach. This is not about being

discouraged personally, and this must be avoided. Rather, honest assessment enables better strategic decisions for kingdom growth. The “Stockdale paradox” demonstrates the power of confronting facts and circumstances, even if they are brutal, for the sake of longer-term success. The dynamic is that confronting realities are usually part of the process of “pivoting.” In the words of Aubrey Malphurs: “Evaluation elicits ministry improvement. Inviting and accepting critique are difficult, but the result can and must be learning that leads to improvement. We must ask ourselves how we can get better”.<sup>1</sup>

In the last few years, we have had yet another group look at our Diocesan attendance patterns. It continues the same observation that I made almost a decade ago: “[raising] questions about the success or otherwise of the mission of Sydney Anglicans”.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Andrew Heard challenges us pointedly (and helpfully provocatively): “As evangelicals, we proclaim that the gospel is powerful to save, yet in many of our churches we don’t see the inevitable gospel growth that should follow”.<sup>3</sup> He argues for the need to ask “hard questions about what we leaders do, or don’t do, that is getting in the way of gospel growth” and contends that “having specific goals and assessing if they have been met is confronting, but also that this feedback loop is [ultimately] empowering”.<sup>4</sup>

### The stewardship imperative

With limited clergy and staff, limited funds, and growing communities, strategic deployment becomes a moral imperative. If the efforts of a denomination such as Sydney Anglicans are not seeing more become Christians, it is reasonable that the nature of such efforts be re-examined. This applies at both a Diocesan level, as well as an individual parish level. Without data that goes beyond attendances and blunt financial measures, we’re potentially wasting kingdom resources through uninformed decisions about where and how to deploy our people and funding.

Paul provides a powerful principle for strategic thinking about where to invest ministry effort: “I have become all things to all people, so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22). It necessarily implies some method of assessment about what works and what hasn’t. This isn’t abandoning divine sovereignty but embracing wise stewardship within divine sovereignty.

The theological foundation for measurement reaches back to creation itself. One may observe that God made wisdom as the first of his works (Prov 8:22). One of the powerful lessons of Proverbs is for the person of God to learn from the

- 1 Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004, 300.
- 2 Rajeev Gupta, “Sydney Anglican Churches Breaking the 200 Barrier: A Study of Contemporary Growth Dynamics and Strategic Implications for Church Planting and Development”, DMin thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2017, 78.
- 3 Andrew Heard, *Growth and Change: The Danger and Necessity of a Passion for Church Growth*, Sydney: Matthias Media, 2024, 89.
- 4 Ibid, 126.



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**We have dropped the ball when it comes to tracking, reporting and analysing numbers.**

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wisdom that God has embedded in the world. To be sure, the culmination of God’s wisdom is Christ (1 Cor 2:6), and not all of the wisdom of the world is to be heeded. Nonetheless, the lesson of Proverbs is to actively seek and utilise the wisdom that God has embedded in the world, at its creation.

## **The practical case for annual church health reporting**

### **Current data gaps and their impact**

The 2024 Attendance Patterns Report reveals that “We have dropped the ball when it comes to tracking, reporting and analysing numbers”.<sup>5</sup> When we do apply rigorous analysis—as this report demonstrates—we discover valuable patterns about church size, regional variations, and demographic trends that inform strategic decisions.

While we may supplement reporting with the National Church Life Survey (NCLS),<sup>6</sup> we only do it every five years, and many parishes don’t participate.

<sup>5</sup> Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, “Attendance Patterns and Mission in the Diocese Report”, *Second Session of 53rd Synod: Proceedings for 2024*, Sydney: Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, 2024, 149.

<sup>6</sup> John Bellamy, “Diocesan Mission Indicators: NCLS 2021 Update.” Prepared for Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, March 5, 2024.

## Learning from existing Diocesan models

The Diocese already operates successful reporting frameworks across its organisations. Our Diocesan Governance policy states that “Christian organisations take pains to ensure the appearance (as well as the substance) of propriety and accountability” and mandates that “A diocesan organisation which manages church trust property must submit to the Synod for tabling an annual report and such other reports as Synod requires”.<sup>7</sup> Whilst this is certainly about transparency and accountability, it also provides a framework that helps keep the eyes of organisations on objective data which promotes honest assessment.

The governance framework emphasises that organisations should seek “the highest standards of governance appropriate to the size and nature of each organisation” and that funding decisions should assess “whether the present distribution of funding is helping to produce the ‘best’ outcomes for our current priorities”.<sup>8</sup> These principles apply equally to parishes as the frontline of our mission.

I am arguing that we should take the principles that we as the Synod are applying to other organisations and apply the same principles to ourselves as the parishes of the Diocese.

## The precedent of biblical measurement

Scripture itself shows us the early church tracked data, and it formed part of strategic assessment. Acts regularly records growth statistics: “about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41); “the number of the men came to about five thousand” (Acts 4:4); and “the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly” (Acts 6:7). Acts is interested in this impact, and even the numerical measurement of the impact, for it indicated the power of God at work.

“

**Paul’s strategic ministry demonstrates effectiveness-based decision-making.**

”

Paul’s strategic ministry demonstrates effectiveness-based decision-making. When ministry wasn’t effective in one place, he redirected efforts to more receptive audiences (Acts 13:46, 18:6). Jesus himself instructed his disciples to “shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town” where they weren’t welcomed (Matt 10:14). Effectiveness was at the very least a legitimate consideration in ministry deployment.

<sup>7</sup> Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney. “Governance Policy for Diocesan Organisations.” *Synod 2024: Synod Books Consolidated*. Sydney: Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## Addressing biblical and pastoral concerns

### The pastoral oversight imperative

Don Carson provides some further insight. Reflecting on 1 Timothy 3, he argues that separating Word ministry from oversight creates a false dichotomy that “fails to grasp that a comprehensive vision of the ministry of the Word demands oversight ... of the entire direction and priorities of the church”.<sup>9</sup>

Carson asserts that biblical overseers must engage in “casting a vision, figuring out the steps for getting there, building the teams and structures needed for discharging ministry and training others, building others up, thinking through the various ways in which the gospel can be taught at multiple levels to multiple groups within the church, how to extend faithful evangelism and church planting”.<sup>10</sup> When I recover from feeling overwhelmed at this breadth of responsibility, I realise that all of these require assessment, which requires measurement.

Aubrey Malphurs has written on strategic planning for Christian organisations and observes: “Far too many churches have offered up ministry mediocrity under the guise of ‘It’s a spiritual undertaking for God!’ Scripture encourages God’s people to give and do their best for him”.<sup>11</sup>

### Balancing faithfulness and fruitfulness

The 2024 Attendance Report provides a helpful theological perspective: “While we hope and pray that churches would grow, there is very little exegetical or theological evidence to suggest that all churches, in all locations and all ages will always grow ... We reject the tacit accompanying idea that ‘good ministers’ will always see growth and lack of growth is always proof of ‘poor ministry.’ Jeremiah and Isaiah, and even Paul, conducted ‘good ministry’ but this was not always met with numerical growth”.<sup>12</sup>

This balanced perspective acknowledges God’s sovereignty while maintaining human responsibility. Andrew Heard argues that “The Bible gives leaders a real responsibility for the outcomes of our ministry—something that is often denied” and that “Faithfulness must include fruitfulness, not be set against it”.<sup>13</sup> He warns against the tendency to “settle for kingdom-less results” when we avoid measurement altogether.

The purpose of measurement is not to judge ministers but to enable wise stewardship of resources and strategic deployment of limited personnel and funds. As someone once said to me: “Numbers are certainly not everything. At the same time, they are not nothing.”

9 D. A. Carson, “Some Reflections on Pastoral Leadership”, *Themelios* 40, no. 2 (2015), 195–197.

10 Ibid.

11 Malphurs, 2004, 295.

12 *Attendance Patterns and Mission in the Diocese Report*, 2024.

13 Heard, *Growth and Change*, 142.



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**How many people in your congregation would say they became a Christian in the past year?**

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## **A practical framework for implementation**

### **Core metrics for kingdom impact**

Building on existing successful practices, I propose five core metrics that reflect our theological priorities while remaining practical to collect. These are intended to be a starting point for discussion, not necessarily the final set of measures.

#### **1. Evangelistic fruitfulness**

Just recently, one of my staff shared the challenge which we all feel: “I have spoken with two people in recent weeks who were not a Christian a year ago but now, they seem to be.” When do we count them as becoming Christian? The point is: we must try. We once recorded data like baptisms and confirmation numbers. Perhaps the question could be: “How many people in your congregation would say they became a Christian in the past year?” The exact methodology matters less than consistency longitudinally and across parishes.

#### **2. Christian maturity**

Growth Group membership provides one measure, though this may need modification given a growth group’s attendance patterns. If 70% of people are in growth groups with 70% average attendance, perhaps 49% of the total congregation represents a more realistic maturity engagement metric. Alongside this measure could sit regularity of members at Sunday (or mid-week) services. I totally acknowledge the limitation of such measures for Christian maturity (that is, just because someone turns up does not mean they have engaged), and am totally open to alternatives being proposed.



### 3. Visitor numbers and retention

The easiest metric to monitor is certainly number of visitors. However, this combined with retention rates over 3–6 months provides more meaningful insight into a church’s capacity and effectiveness for genuine welcome and integration.

### 4. Proportion of people serving

I would posit to start with total volunteer involvement and also noting how many are involved specifically in teaching ministries as a subset. This metric helps churches assess whether they’re developing the volunteer capacity needed for their size and growth stage and provides important insight into reverse engineering for the next level.

### 5. Demographic composition

This is ethnic and demographic composition compared to the local community. While acknowledging that language barriers may limit some churches’ reach, this promotes self-awareness about missional effectiveness in local contexts.

The welcomed development of systems like Growing Healthy Churches can streamline the collection of much of this data.

### Implementation principles

The framework should prioritise starting simple with readily available data rather than pursuing perfect measurement from the beginning. Consistency over perfection matters more because using the same metrics regularly provides trend. The metrics should reflect our theological priorities rather than generic business measures, and the framework should emphasise learning, monitoring, and shared improvement rather than any form of performance ranking.

Andrew Heard, in advocating for change that brings gospel growth, rightly notes that “Leading for change is not primarily a matter of techniques and skill sets, but of deep conviction—of being fuelled by a heart that pulsates with the gospel, with God’s love for the lost, and with God’s love for his people”.<sup>14</sup> Heart transformation must precede structural change, but structural accountability can also shape hearts toward gospel priorities.

### Addressing common objections

#### “God is sovereign—he gives the growth, not us”

While acknowledging God’s ultimate sovereignty over spiritual fruit (1 Cor 3:5–7), this truth cannot excuse “both / and” faithful stewardship as well as strategic thinking.

The Parable of the Talents clearly shows that masters expect an account of

<sup>14</sup> Heard, *Growth and Change*, 178.



results, not just effort (Matt 25:14–30). Paul’s strategic ministry pivots when rejected in one place demonstrate that effectiveness considerations are legitimate within God’s sovereignty. The purpose is not condemnation for missing numerical targets, but stewardship: helping us think thoughtfully about how to apply God’s resources with care and effectiveness and helping us face reality about where God may be blessing efforts and where strategic changes might be needed.

### “We don’t want to become obsessed with numbers”

This objection reflects a legitimate concern but creates a false choice. Numbers should serve the gospel, not the other way around. Carson’s biblical framework shows that strategic assessment and leadership is part of comprehensive pastoral oversight. The distinction lies between worldly metrics focused on institu-

tional success and kingdom effectiveness focused on spiritual transformation and community impact.

Craig Hamilton captures this tension in his observation about ministry conversations: “When ministers meet together, the first question they often ask is, How many people are at your church?” The irony is that “when other ministers ask me this



**I often wonder if they’re asking so they can try to work out whether they’re doing a good job or not.**



question I often wonder if they’re asking so they can try to work out whether they’re doing a good job or not”.<sup>15</sup> We intuitively understand that measurement matters—the question is whether we’ll approach it strategically or continue measuring informally and haphazardly, if at all.

## Conclusion: Embracing comprehensive accountability

The integration of annual church health reporting represents a natural extension of our existing diocesan governance principles rather than a revolutionary departure from current practice. We already require detailed accountability from every other diocesan organisation because we recognise that “ultimately such purposes seek to promote the kingdom of Christ and give glory to God”.<sup>16</sup> Let’s take what we are asking of others and apply it to ourselves, as the parishes who comprise the Synod.

Our theological convictions about stewardship, transparency, and strategic wisdom provide the foundation for this approach, in the context of affirming both divine sovereignty and human responsibility for faithful resource management.

With comprehensive annual data, we can make informed decisions about

15 Craig Hamilton, *Wisdom in Leadership: The How and Why of Leading the People You Serve*, Sydney: Matthias Media, 2015, 403.

16 *Governance Policy for Diocesan Organisations*.

church planting locations, staff deployment, and resource allocation. The concept applies both at the Diocesan level and within local parishes. We can identify churches needing additional support and parishes with transferable insights for others facing similar challenges. The 2024 Attendance Report has already demonstrated the value of rigorous analysis with limited data—imagine the insights possible with consistent annual data across all parishes covering a fuller spectrum of church health indicators.

The framework I've proposed—focusing on evangelistic fruitfulness, Christian maturity, visitor retention, service participation, and demographic engagement—provides a starting point for developing a comprehensive annual assessment and creating a culture of continuous improvement grounded in biblical stewardship. Annual church health reporting provides one tool for identifying obstacles to gospel growth and celebrating breakthrough where God grants it.

The choice before us is whether we will apply the same standards of accountability to our core mission—the local church—that we already apply to our supporting organisations. Our aim is not burden but blessing—creating a systematic foundation for strategic ministry that honours God's sovereignty while embracing our responsibility to be found faithful with what he has entrusted to our care. The question is not whether we can afford to implement expanded church health reporting, but whether we can afford not to. **ACR**

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# Where we complementarians can get it wrong with preaching



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## The problem

Over my past 26 years of ministry, I have become increasingly aware of a problem in the way complementarians teach about who should be allowed to preach. Let me be clear—I am a complementarian, and I believe that a faithful application of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 includes a prohibition against women authoritatively teaching (now referred to as preaching)<sup>1</sup> to a mixed congregation. I also believe that women who have the gift of preaching should be encouraged, trained, and given appropriate contexts to exercise that gift. I want to affirm and train women in this area.

However, complementarians often speak about 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in isolation from 1 Timothy 3:1–7. Complementarians often say, “There is a prohibition for women to preach to a mixed congregation, but not for men.” That’s not accurate. I want to argue from 1 Timothy 3:1–7 that Paul has a bigger axe to grind. His main point is that *only* certain men should preach.<sup>2</sup> Let’s examine the text to see why.

1 Rob Smith & Claire Smith, *Women’s Ordination Revisited* (Equal, but different, 1996), 47.

2 D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 100.

## The text: 1 Timothy 3:1–7 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.* <sup>2</sup> *Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,* <sup>3</sup> *not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.* <sup>4</sup> *He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,* <sup>5</sup> *for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?* <sup>6</sup> *He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.* <sup>7</sup> *Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

### Context

The context of this passage is Paul’s instruction on how people are to conduct themselves in God’s household (1 Tim 3:15). The application of this passage is for God’s people in the local church, and especially in its public gatherings, where the main form of authoritative teaching is the preaching of God’s word. We see in 1 Timothy 2:1 that they are to offer petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all people. Verse 4 states that God desires all people to be saved. Men are to pray without anger or disputing (2:8), and women are to dress modestly and be adorned with good deeds (2:9–10). Women are not permitted to teach or have authority over a man but are to learn (2:11–12), grounded in Paul’s creation argument (2:13–15).

Then, in chapter 3, Paul outlines qualifications for overseers (3:1–7) and deacons (3:8–13). Notably, only the overseer is required to be “able to teach” (3:2). The argument of this paper is that anyone who preaches in the public church setting must meet the criteria of an overseer. This includes students, itinerants, lay preachers, or church staff (ordained or lay) who preach to a mixed congregation.<sup>3</sup> Paul is raising the bar—and we must not lower it. By failing to uphold this, we can easily appear inconsistent: especially if we rigidly enforce 1 Timothy 2:11–15 but only loosely apply 1 Timothy 3:1–7.

### Sin and these qualifications

In pastoral conversations, I have heard it said that because of sin, we can’t hold to the criteria of 1 Timothy 3:1–7 for men who preach to a mixed congregation as tightly as some would prefer. After all, “Let the one without sin cast the first stone.” But Paul wrote these words with full awareness of original sin. He did not expect perfection; he knew they were not Jesus. Yet he gave this list of qualifications.

3 For further discussion on whether only the elders are those who should be preaching, please see Graham Bynon & Jane Tooher *Embracing Complementarianism* (The Good Book Company; 2022) 141–143.

## The “good” desire (1 Tim 3:1)

Notice how Paul begins this section: “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a good work.” Interestingly, many translations render “good” as “noble,” but “good” is likely more accurate.<sup>4</sup> Why is it a good desire?

There are two possibilities. First, given the leadership issues in Ephesus where Timothy was serving, Paul may be affirming that it is good for some men to desire this leadership role. If so, this might imply that any man who desires the office should be encouraged. However, while this may be true, I don’t believe it is Paul’s primary point.

More likely, Paul calls it a good desire because such a man will aim to live according to the qualifications required of an overseer. It is good because it reflects a serious commitment to holiness. Yarbrough puts it well: Paul is calling for “an enlistment in a duty that is always exacting and often thankless.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, the desire is good if it is shaped by the sober recognition of the role’s demands.

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**These men will, by God’s grace, through prayer, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, pursue godliness.**

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These men will, by God’s grace, through prayer, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, pursue godliness, endure hardship, and make themselves publicly accountable in ways that go beyond the expectations of most church members.

It is good because it is costly. It is a role that comes with significant scrutiny, inside and outside the home. Yarbrough rightly warns that it should not be seen as a career move, a path to self-fulfilment, or a means of gaining influence.<sup>6</sup> That’s why, in 1 Timothy 5:22, Paul warns Timothy not to be hasty in laying on hands. Only certain men—those who are demonstrably qualified—should be appointed to this role. For such men, this is a good desire.

Only those men who commit to daily putting this into practice and sacrificially living this way should be able to preach in our local public meetings, in God’s church.

## Essential criteria

We now turn to the specific criteria that Paul outlines for overseers. These qualifications should be met by anyone preaching in the local church. Importantly, the overseer is not simply to meet most of these criteria—he must fulfil all of them. This raises the bar for who should be allowed to preach. Only certain men, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will be able to meet these standards.

Let us examine each criterion in detail and consider its implications.

4 Lionel Windsor, “God’s goodness in 1 Timothy”, *Australian Church Record* issue 1926 (Easter 2023), 14–20.

5 Robert W. Yarbrough, “The letters to Timothy and Titus”, *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 192.

6 Robert W. Yarbrough, *The letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 193.

### Above reproach (1 Tim 3:2)

This phrase acts as a heading for the entire list of qualifications.<sup>7</sup> To be above reproach means to be blameless in conduct and character, especially within the church. This doesn't imply sinlessness but rather a life of integrity and visible godliness. The final qualification, being well thought of by outsiders,<sup>8</sup> bookends this standard. The church and the watching world must not see hypocrisy in the life of the preacher. If a man who preaches publicly falls into sin, the fallout can damage the faith of others. Therefore, only those who demonstrate consistent integrity should be allowed to preach. Sadly, we don't need to go too far to see examples of those who have failed publicly in ministry. We need to be better at ensuring that we only allow certain men, who are above reproach, to be allowed to preach God's word.

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### Husband of one wife (1 Tim 3:2)

This requirement affirms faithfulness in marriage. A preacher must be morally and sexually faithful to his wife. It excludes those engaged in ongoing unfaithfulness or polygamy.<sup>9</sup> The debated question is whether this prohibits remarried divorcees. Interpretations vary, though it is possible that the text is suggesting that such a man may not meet this qualification.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, this does not disqualify single men (Paul is not specifying that the man must be married, but that he must be faithful in marriage), but they must live above reproach in singleness, especially in dating and future marriage.

### Sober-minded (1 Tim 3:2)

This speaks to mental clarity and spiritual seriousness. A sober-minded preacher is stable, wise, and focused on the responsibilities of ministry. He does not get distracted by personal ambition and give himself to competing ministry opportunities at the expense of the people in his ministry. Yarbrough says: “the candidate should regard his calling and duties with sobriety rather than flippancy and should demonstrate self-control rather than impulsiveness, lack of concentration, or distracted behaviour”.<sup>11</sup> Only men who are grounded, humble, and prioritise the spiritual well-being of their congregation should preach.

7 Perkins, Larry J., *The Pastoral Letters: A Handbook on the Greek Text*. BHGNT. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017, 51.

8 1 Timothy 3:7.

9 Philip Towner, Introduction to the letters to Timothy and Titus (NICNT).

10 Allen, Jason K. *Discerning Your Call to Ministry: How to Know For Sure and What to Do About It* (Function), Kindle Edition. Location 560 of 2114.

11 Robert W. Yarbrough, *The letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 196.

**Self-controlled (1 Tim 3:2)**

Self-control includes emotional, relational, and spiritual restraint. A preacher should not be prone to outbursts, bullying, or using the pulpit to dominate others. This includes refraining from so-called “righteous anger,” which is often a cover for sin. Multiple times in the New Testament, we are commanded not to have anger as part of our lives, places like 2 Corinthians 12:20, Galatians 5:20, Ephesians 4:26,31 and James 1:19. A man who cannot control his temper or tongue must not teach the Word publicly. Such behaviour disqualifies him from being a model of Christlike leadership. Coulton helpfully identifies that “a preacher requires particular attention to and prayer for humility if we are to balance the authority we exercise in teaching with our need for accountability to the fellowship of God’s people.”<sup>12</sup>

**Respectable (1 Tim 3:2)**

To be respectable is to live consistently and with honour. The man who preaches should be the same person at home, at church, and in public. If people do not respect him, they are unlikely to listen to his preaching. Respectability means more than charisma or likability—it includes maturity, humility, and responsibility. Only certain men will attain this high bar, and for the sake of the gospel, not allow other men to preach who do not. This church plays a great role in identifying those who are respectable enough to preach. Lloyd Jones says, “Before you can be quite sure that a man is called to be a preacher, his personal call must be confirmed by the church, it must be attested by the church.”<sup>13</sup> A man who is not seen as respectable in the church should not be allowed to preach.

**Hospitable (1 Tim 3:2)**

A preacher must open his home and life to others. While in the early church, to be hospitable was more aimed at the traveller, today, hospitality demonstrates authenticity and availability. It is not merely a gift but a requirement. If a preacher is unwilling to share meals, relationships, and even parts of his private life with the church, he is not modelling biblical leadership. Hospitality exposes a person’s character and family life, and it is only those with nothing to hide who can do this joyfully. People want to know if you are authentic, and not everyone is open to having their houses open to people in this way. This is why only certain men should be considered to preach: those who are happy to open their lives to this scrutiny.

12 Stuart Coulton, “The preacher as a person” in David Cook (ed) *How to prepare a Bible Talk* (Sydney Missionary and Bible College, 2003), 110.

13 D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 108.



### Able to teach (1 Tim 3:2)

Teaching ability means more than delivering a talk; it includes the faithful and engaging communication of the gospel.<sup>14</sup> Not all who go to theological college are able to teach. Some improve over time; others do not. This standard must be upheld. If God has not gifted a man to teach, he should serve in other ways. Jason Allen concludes: “Preparation, practice, and godly mentorship can mature the preacher. Seminaries can grant a degree, and churches can hire a pastor. But only God can make a preacher. Do not pursue the ministry if God has not gifted you to teach”.<sup>15</sup> This is where honest feedback can help. Of course, this does not discount a young preacher learning how to preach, who is given opportunities. However, there will come a point when the truth needs to be spoken to them in love.

### Not a drunkard (1 Tim 3:3)

A preacher must not be addicted to alcohol or any substance. Enjoying alcohol in moderation is not the issue; addiction, dependency, and lack of control are. Addiction shifts one’s loyalty away from God. If alcohol or drugs master a man, he must not lead God’s people. Only men who demonstrate restraint and godly priorities should be trusted to preach. John MacArthur captures this when he says, “If a man cannot control his life when he is alone, he does not belong in the pastorate. If he is the kind of person who needs to have a committee to keep him in line, he will end up bringing grief to the church.”<sup>16</sup> This needs to be applied not just to alcohol, but also to any illegal drugs and especially the ones that are mind-altering.



Photo: Aleksandr Korchagin | vecteezy

14 For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the preaching aspect of teaching. However, I recognise that to teach here is more than preaching to a congregation.

15 Jason K. Allen, *Discerning Your Call to Ministry* (Kindle Edition). Location 764 of 2114.

16 Cited in Allen, *Ibid.* Location 454 of 2114.

**Not violent but gentle (1 Tim 3:3)**

This qualification prohibits both physical and emotional abuse. It includes bullying, shouting, intimidation, and spiritual coercion. Ministers should not raise their voices in anger at staff, family, or church members. They must not manipulate Scripture to control others. A preacher must be gentle, or he disqualifies himself from the pulpit. Allen concludes, “The shepherd who loves his sheep doesn’t have a pattern of exploding when he engages them.”<sup>17</sup>

**Not quarrelsome (1 Tim 3:3)**

A preacher must not be combative. He may need to correct false doctrine, but he must not seek conflict or pick theological fights for sport. Quarrelsomeness alienates people and creates division. It reflects immaturity. A preacher must know when to engage and when to hold back in love. Only men who embody peace and discernment are fit for this task. Sadly, some ministers feel they need to be proven right on everything and so seek out these discussions so that no one feels they can engage properly with them. This can be a form of spiritual abuse, so it is important that a preacher is approachable and willing to engage in everything with humility.



**The shepherd who loves his sheep doesn’t have a pattern of exploding when he engages them.**

**Not a lover of money (1 Tim 3:3)**

Greed compromises ministry. Whether it’s seeking wealth through church roles or improper financial practices, a preacher must be free from the love of money. Payne and Robson highlight that by accumulating money, “we store up power for ourselves—power to get things, or to do things. We build

security for ourselves, and gain influence over others.”<sup>18</sup> Instead, a preacher should model generosity and humility in financial matters. If his lifestyle raises questions about his priorities, his ministry can be compromised. Only those who treasure Christ above material gain are qualified to preach.

**Manages his household well (1 Tim 3:4)**

A preacher’s home life models whether he is living what he is preaching. He must love and lead his wife sacrificially and raise his children with discipline and dignity. If he is absent from his home, then his marriage is in danger of failing. If his marriage fails, then his ministry will fail. This does not require perfect children, but it does require active, godly leadership. Allen helpfully defines what this means when he says, “while the pastor cannot microwave conversion or obedience in the hearts of his children, he must faithfully nurture them in the fear and admo-

<sup>17</sup> Allen, *Ibid.* Location 502 of 2114.

<sup>18</sup> Tony Payne and Geoff Robson, *The Generosity Project* (Matthias Media, 2020), 67.

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dition of the Lord.”<sup>19</sup> The point here is that the preacher must be enacting what he preaches in leading the church firstly in his family. If he can’t preach to himself and his family, then he is not qualified to preach to God’s church.

### **Not a recent convert (1 Tim 3:6)**

New believers must not be rushed into leadership. Maturity takes time. A recent convert may be vulnerable to pride, especially if placed in the spotlight too quickly. Teaching and preaching require humility, which grows with experience. Time in the faith allows for tested character, deeper understanding, and resilience.<sup>20</sup> Only mature men, who have walked long enough with Christ, should preach. Later in 1 Timothy 5:22, Paul urges Timothy not to be hasty in laying hands on those who would be leaders in God’s church. His doing so would “take part in the sins of others”. Yarbrough points out that Paul is referring to “The person who appoints is responsible for what the person appointed does while holding office.”<sup>21</sup> For the sake of God’s church, we must be certain in our encouragement of those who would be preachers in his church.

### **Well thought of by outsiders (1 Tim 3:7)**

Finally, a preacher must have a good reputation in the wider community. He should not be known for dishonesty, unreliability, or arrogance. This does not mean universal popularity, but it does mean general respect. If an unbeliever visited the church and recognised the preacher as someone who mistreated them or lived

<sup>19</sup> Allen, *Ibid.* Location 594 of 2114.

<sup>20</sup> Sean Nolan, ‘My Pastor Made Me Wait To Enter Ministry. I’m Grateful.’ (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/wait-ministry-grateful/>)

<sup>21</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 297.

hypocritically, the gospel would be discredited. A preacher must embody consistency, integrity, and grace in public life. Of course, this means every aspect of a preacher's life is under scrutiny. When they go to the local shops, when they fill up their tank with petrol, when they are taking the dog for a walk, and so on and so on! Not everyone is willing to be in the public eye and have every aspect of their lives scrutinised! Which is why only certain men should desire this and take up the preaching cross, and follow Jesus in this way.

## Conclusion

I hope you can see that this is a high bar, and rightly so. Teaching and preaching authoritatively in God's church is not for everyone. In fact, it is only for certain men who meet these criteria. Paul writes in Romans 2:21, "You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" Complementarian leaders (myself included) should apply these verses in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 to ourselves. If we cannot live up to these criteria, then we should not preach in the public meeting of God's church. If we know of those who do preach but do not fulfil these criteria, then for the sake of the truth of the gospel, we must urge them to step down.

We cannot firmly uphold 1 Timothy 2:11-15 while ignoring these verses. That inconsistency has led to allowing men who should not be preaching to preach, some of whom have abused their position and brought the gospel into disrepute. When these men preach, it leaves some asking why complementarians apply 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and yet disregard 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Terms like "misogyny" and "spiritual abuse" are then wrongly applied to the whole complementarian position.

First, then, let's clarify publicly that Scripture prohibits both women and most men from preaching to a mixed congregation. Let your language reflect this as you explain your convictions. Second, let's train and encourage both men and women with teaching gifts, giving them biblically appropriate contexts to use those gifts. Third, when a man expresses a desire to be an overseer, commend the desire, but outline clearly the cost and criteria. If he fails to meet any of these, he should not preach. The gospel is too precious.

Teach 1 Timothy 3:1-7 in your churches. If a man lacks the character, competency, conviction, or capacity to meet these qualifications, guide him toward other avenues of service. Finally, live it yourself. As Paul exhorts in 1 Timothy 4:15: "Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress". This ministry is not about us. It's about heralding the Word of God with faithfulness. For those who pursue this calling, know that it is good, but it is also costly. And it is only for certain men. **ACR**

# Hope for the Illawarra



**Ella Leach** lives in Helensburgh, a leafy suburb tucked up next to the Royal National Park and, together with her husband, she is thankful to work and serve the local church there. As a graphic and textile designer by trade, any opportunity to be creative or to enjoy the creativity of others is a favourite way to spend her free time—but in this season of life, a fair bit of it is spent on the sidelines, cheering for her young, soccer loving son!

In my time in ministry, I have encountered many people who, while acknowledging Jesus' command to "go and make disciples" feel impossibly ill-equipped, and so are reluctant to do so.

In fact, many of these people further claim that they lack any ability whatsoever to evangelise, presuming the work of evangelism is for those whom God has so gifted. Yet what is apparent is that God typically calls people to himself through the patient, prayerful and consistent sharing of the gospel by regular Christians, despite how prepared they may or may not feel. Having said that, it should be our constant desire to better equip Christians for evangelism to grow their confidence in sharing the gospel with others.

Some of the key ways this can happen is through the encouragement of other believers, through training and equipping one another, but also by engaging with those who have a gift for communicating the gospel clearly and winsomely.

Listening to someone who is gifted with communicating the gospel can be an encouragement for Christians, but it can also provide us with a great opportunity to invite someone to hear the gospel taught with clarity and faithfulness.

This was precisely what the churches in the Illawarra were offered when Christian broadcasting organisation *Leading the Way* invited them to participate in a mass-scale mission campaign, which would culminate in evangelistic outreach events at



HOPE FOR THE ILLAWARRA



Photos: Kramer Photography



which Dr Michael Youssef would speak. It was an offer that was gladly accepted.

*Hope for the Illawarra* was initially planned as a two-part event to be held on Friday 28th and Saturday 29th March 2025. The Friday evening would be specifically geared for youth (headed up by the *Christ for the Coast* team—an already successful and well-established youth event, held annually around the same time), and the Saturday evening would be for adults. Straight-shooting Aussie evangelist Dave Jensen was lined up to speak to the youth, and Dr Michael Youssef to the adults. But as momentum built, it became clear that churches were keen for an event which kids could attend, and so an additional third event was added—with a talk pitched for children by Youthworks’ Adam Jolliffe, and Colin Buchanan to keep everyone entertained.

From the outset *Leading the Way* and Dr Michael Youssef were firm that churches understood the outreach events or celebrations were merely to be the climax of a much broader evangelism scheme. In the weeks and months leading up to the events, each participating church was invited to utilise the ‘Come and See’ programme designed to train and equip church communities with greater confidence in evangelism. Furthermore, church members were encouraged to pray for their family members, neighbours, friends and co-workers who didn’t know Christ, in order to invite them to attend the celebration events in March. In its email correspondence with churches, *Leading the Way* made clear how the outreach events were not for Christians, but for non-Christians: *we want thousands to gather at WIN Entertainment Centre in Wollongong, from right across the Illawarra, and hear the uncompromising truth of Christ proclaimed. Hope for the Illawarra is about much more than the outreach events... [we] will train and empower your church to reach your community for a greater harvest.*



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The preparations and planning for *Hope for the Illawarra* were, at times, a significant source of stress, in part due to unique logistical and financial challenges. I suspect that there were many who, in the lead up to the March events, wondered how on earth WIN stadium would ever be filled. Some of the more arduous challenges had to do with the hurdles regarding access, registration and ticketing for a venue that didn’t typically support free events. Organisers of *Hope for the Illawarra* wanted to ensure that there was no barrier of finance which might prevent someone from hearing of God’s free gift of salvation, but this meant there was the added pressure of raising a substantial amount of money. *Leading the Way Australia* generously contributed \$200,000 with an additional \$200,000 necessary for the events to run. Praise God that these targets were met. Even in the midst of challenges, God generously provides for his people, stirring their hearts for the far greater reward of seeing the lost return home.

As a member of the Executive Committee, I encountered many of these challenges firsthand, but it was within this context that I was likewise afforded the rare privilege of working alongside leaders from an array of denominations, all firmly united by a shared passion: to proclaim Christ and see lives transformed in Him. I can attest that when believers set aside secondary differences and instead focus on the gospel, a powerful sense of unity emerges—one that ultimately reflects the heart of Jesus’ prayer for his followers to be one (John 17:21). Working as part of this team was a wonderful reminder that the mission of making Christ known transcends denominational lines, and that when we work together in humility and love we strengthen the witness of the Church to a watching world.

Rev Jason McPhail of Keiraville International Church was seconded to *Hope for the Illawarra* and was instrumental in gathering and mobilising hundreds of



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church representatives and volunteers. Jason’s example of a life that is driven by prayer was pivotal in reviving the hearts of God’s people across the Illawarra. A weekly Tuesday morning online prayer meeting was established, as well as combined prayer gatherings (including a paddle-out at Wollongong Harbour and an assembly at the top of

Mt Keira) were some of the ways people were encouraged to lift their gaze from their own ‘little patch’ and instead fix their attention on the thousands wandering blindly across the Illawarra.

In terms of turn out, the three events were a great success: 2500 attended the youth event, 1700 the kids’ event, and a further 3600 people at the adults’ event. At least 1000 people across the three events responded to the gospel and declared that Jesus is Lord.

There are numerous stories of God’s Spirit breathing new life including: a couple who arrived, one a Christian the other a Hindu, but left *together* following Jesus; parents weeping tears of joy as they witnessed their adult child committing to trust Jesus; a man who had been prayed for for close to a decade repented and turned to Jesus; as well as a young adult who’d spent many years around church—but from a distance—left with new life. From those who attended the youth event come countless reports of the droves of youth who responded to God’s love for them in Christ, the sound the chairs made as they flicked shut when people stood, and the sight of some people who literally climbed the barricades so that they might “come down the front”.

Yet, I’m ashamed to admit that on Saturday night, after Dr Michael Youssef implored people to come forward if they had heard God speak to them, I was stunned by how many had. It is humbling (if not also good and necessary) to be reminded that God continues to be at work! Undoubtedly, he is not done drawing

people to himself! He will *still* leave the ninety-nine in search of the one; he is not silent and despite our (my) faithlessness and doubting, he remains faithful to his promise to open the door for any who will knock.

There is much encouragement we can take from *Hope for the Illawarra*. Certainly, it is amazing to think of the number of people who responded in March, but there are the other, albeit less obvious ways we can be greatly encouraged too. For instance, from my church there were very few non-Christians who accepted an invitation to attend an event, perhaps even none at all. Even still, God has reminded us that he is sovereign and in control as we bear witness to his answer to our prayers. One couple were busy and could not accept the invitation offered, but expressed interest in learning more about Jesus and subsequently agreed to meet for coffee and further conversations. Another young mum who would have loved to attend with her children, instead accepted the follow-up invite to our weekly after-school kids' program. She has continued to enthusiastically bring her child along, while we build a relationship with her and she with us. Similarly, in another parish, one person shared that while their friend did not go forward on the night, they did agree to meet weekly to read the Bible together.

Perhaps what is even more encouraging are the testaments of so many in our region demonstrating growth in faith and boldness to speak about Jesus. Not only have Christians in the Illawarra boldly stepped out of their comfort zone to proclaim the gospel of Jesus and invite those they love to a relationship with him, we also have been reminded of the power of prayer. Like Moses, who pleaded for the Lord to send someone else, someone who would know what to say to the Egyptians—the events, planning *and* aftermath of *Hope for the Illawarra* remind us that God is true to his promise: he is our God and he rescues his people. **ACR**

# Authentic Anglicanism: Interview with Ed Loane



**Ed Loane** is an Anglican Minister who is currently serving as the Warden of St Paul's College, Sydney University. He teaches at Moore Theological College and serves on several other boards including the Sydney Diocese Doctrine Commission. Ed is married to Joc and they have five children.

**ACR:** Ed, thanks for chatting with the ACR in your role as a member of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission. In his presidential address to the Brisbane Synod on the 25th of June, 2022, Archbishop Philip Aspinall made comments that caused the Sydney

Diocesan Standing Committee some concern. What were these comments?

**EL:** The Archbishop spent a large section of his speech focused on the Diocese of Sydney, and particularly its advocacy of the traditional Christian position in relation to human sexuality. He sought to downplay the seriousness of fundamental differences in theology by portraying them as simply typical of Anglicanism throughout its history.

In his opinion, arguments about human sexuality are just the latest in a long list of disagreements within the church dating back to the sixteenth century. He argued these differences come from two approaches to Scripture. One that is “a single, narrow interpretation which must be authoritative for everyone” and another which “allows for more exploration, a broader range of possibilities in shifting contexts, a tendency towards including rather than excluding”.

Aspinall then went on to argue that “Comprehensive Anglicanism”, which is the outcome of the second approach

to Scripture, was the better course of action. Indeed, he argued elsewhere that authentic Anglican identity is based on comprehensiveness—that is its genius. This undermining of the Churches historic doctrine of the authority of Scripture, along with the claim that this relatively novel stance is an accurate account of authentic Anglicanism (in contradistinction to the position of Sydney Diocese) caused concern for Sydney’s Standing Committee.

**ACR:** As a result, Standing Committee requested that the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission produce a report on Authentic Anglicanism. Can you tell us the particular aspects standing committee wanted covered?

**EL:** The Standing Committee asked the Commission to explore this issue particularly noting the Anglican Church’s confessional character, its fidelity to the supreme and final authority of Scripture, the contingent authority of ecclesiastical pronouncements and institutions as well as the role of bishops as guardians of the faith.

**ACR:** How does the report seek to answer the question “what is Anglicanism”?

**EL:** The report acknowledges that there are different ways to approach answering the question of “what is Anglicanism?” One way to answer the question is a descriptive approach which gives an account for what is practiced under the banner of Anglicanism around the world and declares that to be authentic expressions.

Another way to answer the question is a theological approach which looks at what authoritative formularies intended Anglicanism to be. In this idealistic approach, the question is genuinely interested in “authentic” Anglicanism because it is seeking to find out what Anglicanism ought to be. The Doctrine Commission chose to answer the question by taking the theological approach and in particular focus on its confessional, liturgical and episcopal character.

**ACR:** What were the key findings in the report regarding what defines authentic Anglicanism?

**EL:** The report begins its answer by highlighting the central role of Scripture as authoritative in the Anglican church. While this is not a unique character of Anglicanism but is rather a feature of all Christian churches, it was felt that highlighting this truth was an essential foundation for the report. This was especially so considering the context of the Archbishop of Brisbane undermining the Bible’s authority in his Presidential Address. The report highlights that not only were the Scriptures to be given supremacy in the church theologically, the outworking of that for Cranmer was the sustained and public reading of the Bible in the church’s practice. The Word of God, in the language of the people, is the bedrock of Anglicanism.

On top of this, the report showed that Anglicanism is *confessional*, adhering to agreed doctrinal standards. These doctrines are lived out in *liturgical* expression which is intended to have a

commonality across all churches. Also, the church is governed *episcopally*, not because bishops are essential for the church but because they are helpful for the good ordering of ministry.

**ACR:** What critique did the report make of alternate characterisations of Anglicanism?

**EL:** The final section of the report seeks to contrast authentic Anglicanism with the fabricated claims that have been made for authentic Anglican identity. It refutes the false claim that Anglicanism is a *via media* (middle way) between Rome and Geneva. It also demonstrates that the idea that being Anglican is equivalent to being in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury is historically novel. Finally, the report demonstrates the problematic nature of the relatively recent and yet widely pervasive contemporary articulation of Anglicanism's distinctive character being its comprehensiveness. None of these claims for authenticity are robust in their historical or theological basis.

**ACR:** Why does this matter for the average minister of an Anglican church

in Sydney, or the average congregation member?

**EL:** If you are an Anglican this report is significant for at least a couple of reasons. Firstly, just like the Presidential Address that prompted the report, there are sustained and powerful attacks that undermine genuinely authentic Anglicanism and compete for acceptance as the norm. We need to be aware of the history and theology of our church to ensure that we can assess between true and false claims. Secondly, we need to assess our own practice against what is authentically Anglican. What does it mean for our local church to be biblically based, confessionally driven, liturgically expressive and episcopally governed? Perhaps many of the ministries we call Anglican fall short of authentic Anglicanism. Hopefully this report will help all of us to be aware of what it actually is to be Anglican and reflective about our own situation in light of that.

**ACR:** Thanks for your time today, Ed. You can find the full report at: <http://bit.ly/authenticanglicanism> **ACR**



# Evangelicalism, David Bebbington, and Moore College



**Professor Bebbington** is a pre-eminent scholar of Evangelical history at the University of Stirling, Scotland, and has written numerous influential publications on our Evangelical heritage.

On 9 May 2025, Professor David Bebbington (University of Stirling, Scotland) visited Moore Theological College. Professor Bebbington is a pre-eminent scholar of Evangelical history and has written numerous influential publications on our Evangelical heritage. He conducted a public interview on “Writing Evangelical History” with Mark Earngey which can be found on the Moore

College Youtube Channel,<sup>1</sup> and below is an additional conversation recorded especially for readers of the *Australian Church Record*:

**ME:** David, how did you become interested in Evangelical history?

**DB:** When I was still at school, I was interested in trying to do something on the side on local history. So, I went to see the secretary of the local history society of the county, asking whether I might do something on heraldic symbolism in the county, or perhaps on the history of my local Baptist Church. He wisely suggested that I did the history of my local Baptist Church. I therefore did it ready for the centenary celebrations of the church. But in writing about my local Baptist Church, I realised its driving force was Evangelicalism. So, I realised Evangelicalism was really important, and that was really the beginning of my wanting to study Evangelicalism per se.

However, there was a further stage, because after doing my undergraduate degree, I was able to do a PhD, and the PhD was about the relationship of poli-

1 [www.youtube.com/@mooretheologicalcollege](https://www.youtube.com/@mooretheologicalcollege)

tics to the Evangelical nonconformists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In studying that, I realised there were two really important phenomena that interested me. One was William Gladstone (1809–1898), the political leader supported by the Evangelical nonconformists at the time. So, I have done work on Gladstone. The other was the Evangelical impulse that conditioned their political style. That Evangelical style was something I wanted to investigate more thoroughly. So, I decided I would write a general history of Evangelicalism in Britain, which emerged as the book of 1989.



**It is an emphasis on those four features that marks out the Evangelical**



**ME:** Thank you very much. David, in your work on Evangelicalism in modern Britain, you outline four core characteristics of Evangelicalism. How have they fared in scholarship over the years since your publication?

**DB:** The four characteristics that I felt were most emphasised by Evangelicals were Bible, cross, conversion, and activism. By activism I meant evangelism, but also social activism often associated with evangelism.

I want to lay some stress on that word *emphasise* because a lot of other Christians actually did talk about those things as part of wider theological schemes or practices. But they did not emphasise all of them. So, it is an empha-

sis on those four features that marks out the Evangelical movement over time. And those have been features from the early 18th century right up to the present time and they have always been there wherever the movement has existed.

Other people have wanted to criticise it by saying, “Well, they may be emphases but there have been other emphases as well.” Some people have said that an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit has been there in Evangelicalism. Of course, in many ways, they are right. There was a very strong emphasis in the preaching of George Whitefield in the 18th century about the work of the Spirit in causing conversions. However, it is definitely the case that at some times, some people who were Evangelicals have wanted not to emphasise the Spirit, and the most obvious case is that of Fundamentalists during the 1920s in America. They wanted to say that, yes, the Spirit may be at work in bringing about conversion, but it is not the work of the Spirit to lay emphasis on Himself. The work of the Spirit is to point to Christ. Therefore, they actually discouraged people from talking about the work of the Spirit, partly in reaction to the rise of Pentecostalism in the early 20th century.

So, there has been a type of Evangelical, those who began to call themselves Fundamentalists in the 1920s, who actually did not emphasise the Spirit. If you are talking about the movement as a whole, you need to have qualities that were there at all times, and in all places. An emphasis on the Spirit does not fit into that category at all. Therefore, I remain an unrepentant Quadrilateralist.

**ME:** David, what are some challenges in the writing of Evangelical history as an Evangelical?

**DB:** I think there is always a risk for Evangelicals to want to write popular history that actually builds up souls, without remembering that there are many people who read the history who will not themselves be Evangelicals and may alienated by that emphasis on building up souls.

Now, I don't want to decry that. I think there is a definite place for writing more popular history that is for edification and that provides inspiring heroes of the faith. I think that is perfectly acceptable. But as well, there must be really good scholarly, critical history, following the same standards as the contemporary academy, in order to ensure that other people who do not want to be inspired, see the importance of the Evangelical movement.

A crucial thing here I think is to contribute Evangelical material to a wider public through engaging with general history. There has to be good quality history written by Evangelicals about the Evangelical movement so that it can be injected into accounts of the broader history of nations and movements; inserting Christian history into social history, political history, and so on. Unless that's done, people will not read in general history texts about the work of the gospel, what God has actually done.

So, it needs to be an aim of the Evangelical historian to write about Evangelical history, but to do it in such a way as it becomes integrated in general history. To do that you have to

accept the canons of the time within the discipline of history. For instance, you have to accept the ways in which footnotes are used. And I must say that over time, I have come to love footnotes.

**ME:** David, what do you think Sydney Anglicans can or should learn from Evangelical history?

**DB:** I think that there are particular things and there are general things. Let's give you a particular instance first. I noticed that on many buildings around Sydney, including Christian buildings, there are notices paying tribute to the indigenous people who looked after and cared for the land, and in a sense are still its custodians in our day. Those notices have become a feature of Australian society which is quite marked. Of course, they are unfamiliar to a visitor from elsewhere, but they are a striking and very reasonable tribute in view of the history of relations



**To write about Evangelical history, but to do it in such a way as it becomes integrated in general history.**



between incomers to this country and the indigenous Aboriginal people.

I think what Sydney Anglicans can learn from Evangelical history is, in part, what has happened in the past about relations between those incomers and the Aboriginal peoples. In doing so, much can be learned about what must not be done in the present

day. For instance, that there must not be discrimination, which has been a very sad and painful feature of those relations at many times in the past. And there must not be a dismissal of the cultural inheritance (such as the beautiful Aboriginal art creations which I saw in the NSW Art Gallery). It would be good for these things to be appreciated by Sydney Anglicans.

I think there is a more specific theological point to be made here as well, in that what Sydney Anglicans can come to appreciate, is what some of the First Nations (as they call them in other parts of the world) traditions have emphasised, such as the importance of community. Sometimes Evangelicals have been so insistent on the necessity of personal conversion (which is, of course, true!) that they become individualistic in their attitude to religion. The emphasis of First Nations peoples on community is admirable. And Evangelical Christians in Sydney know it is admirable because we read about Christian community in the New Testament, which involves the obligation towards our neighbours. So, where there is overlap between what the

First Nations recommend, and what the Bible commands, that should be obeyed. We can only discover a lot about these overlapping concerns while reading a lot more about history, and in some cases, sad instances of history. That is the particular.

In general, I think what Sydney Anglicans can learn is that they are part of a global movement. That global movement is partly about their origins, largely from England. But also, they have themselves sent out missionaries, in very noble ways, not least to East Africa. Those missionary movements have helped create a global Evangelical Anglican community at an international level. This is a remarkable achievement, and one which should lead not only to continuing fellowship and interaction, but also to intellectual and spiritual stimulus. So, that would be one general thought about what Sydney Anglicans can learn from Evangelical history.

**ME:** David, thank you very much for your time and for your encouragement.

**ACR**

# Why 20 percent better is not good enough



**Phil Colgan** is the Senior Minister of St George North Anglican Church where he has served for over 20 years. Phil is passionate about St George North being a church that trains and sends people out for gospel work. He is married to Victoria and they have three adult children. Phil enjoys watching sport (especially the Canberra Raiders), playing board games and reading detective novels.

Over recent years a lot of ink has been spilt considering the implications for Christians of the seismic changes in Australian society over the last 50 years. The reality is that we have seen a massive shift as our culture has moved further and further away from its Christian roots,

such that we now realise that we live in a post-Christian society.

Of course, some like to point out that that that change does not mean there are fewer converted Christians than there were in the 1950s or 1960s, and that may be the case. Yet, the reality is that forty years ago, even if most Australians didn't follow Jesus, they at least knew that the Lord they didn't follow *was* Jesus. In the same way, even if they didn't worship the one true God, they knew that the God they didn't worship was the God of the Bible and they believed His ways were good.

However, most of our thinking in this area has been focused on the implications of this shift for our relationship to the world. In some circles this has led to a focus on politics and ensuring that Christian rights are maintained. In my own circles, the focus has been more on the implications for our evangelism. Paper after paper and conference after conference have helped us to think hard about how we need to do evangelism differently now that our mission field consists of people who have never been to church or Sunday School or youth group.

These are important discussions, and we need to keep thinking about

how we present the gospel in this new world. As an example, we have had to work out that often this means we shouldn't expect people to understand the gospel and its implications in just one conversation or one moment. I am convinced that this is one of the reasons churches are currently seeing the value of using evangelistic courses, rather



**We often believe ... that what we need to be is 20 percent better than the world.**



than one-off events like churches used to do 30 years ago. The reality is that for most people now it takes more time to work through and grasp the gospel. Similar discussions abound about the place of apologetics, the form of gospel presentations we need to be utilising, and other such questions.

Of course, this thinking about our engagement with, and especially our gospel witness to, our post-Christian world is vitally important, and I hope we continue to think hard about these things. However, I don't think we have realised quite how this change in society has impacted the church in other ways. Especially I wonder if we have put enough thought into how our thinking about godliness and the Christian life has to change because of these societal changes. By this, I mean both our thinking about our own personal godliness as well as the implications for our teaching and preaching to God's people. Allow me to explain why I think this lack of attention is unfortunate and vitally important to address.

## The wrong yardstick

Over my Christian life I have observed that many Christians (me included) often define godliness by using the world around us as our yardstick. We may not articulate it this way, but I think we often believe (even subconsciously) that what we need to be is 20 percent better than the world. Of course, I am not using that number scientifically. What I mean is that we believe that Jesus calls us to be substantially different to people who don't know Jesus, but we still think we're playing in the same ballpark.

To use sex and relationships as an example. While our society was "Christianised" that "20 percent better rule" generally worked out pretty well. When society thought that marriage was the basic building block of society, that sex was (at least in theory) preserved for, if not marriage, at least monogamous, heterosexual relationships, and that sexual promiscuity was to be frowned upon, then being 20 percent better than society might just have brought us close to God's beautiful picture of relationships and sex. However, now that these things are not assumed or even considered to be good, what does 20 percent better look like? It is nowhere near the picture that Jesus has for this area of life! As a result, it is not uncommon today to talk to Christians (especially younger Christians) who say that they love Jesus and love God's word, but they cannot comprehend that a committed, monogamous homosexual relationship could be sinful. Indeed, one might argue that that is still much more than 20 percent better than our world.



Another example is what we watch on television or the internet. The idea that we would watch programs with graphic nudity was foreign to Christians 30 years ago. However, we are sometimes now tempted to think that it's okay, because "you should see how horrible the things our world watches and even encourages others to watch are!" Indeed, we might be far more than 20 percent better than our non-Christian friends who watch pornography on the internet.

Perhaps we don't feel that struggle in those areas. Well even more subtle might be our attitude to money. Christians only one or two generations ago would never contemplate the level of disposable income most middle-class people in Australia have now (even in the midst of a so-called cost-of-living crisis!). As a result, the standard of living

we accept as normal would probably have been considered sinfully profligate by many Christians even 40 years ago. A generation ago, a family might be able to go away once a year for a beach holiday. Now, many of us take for granted that we can go on overseas trips regularly. Of course, we're not as greedy as our non-Christian neighbours (or perhaps we are!?), but is that really the measurement we are meant to be using?

I have just picked out those three examples. However, I fear that in many other ways, in many areas of godliness, we are like the proverbial frog in the pot, who does not realise that the temperature of the water is rising until it is too late. In the same way, we don't take into account how much the environment we are comparing ourselves to has moved.

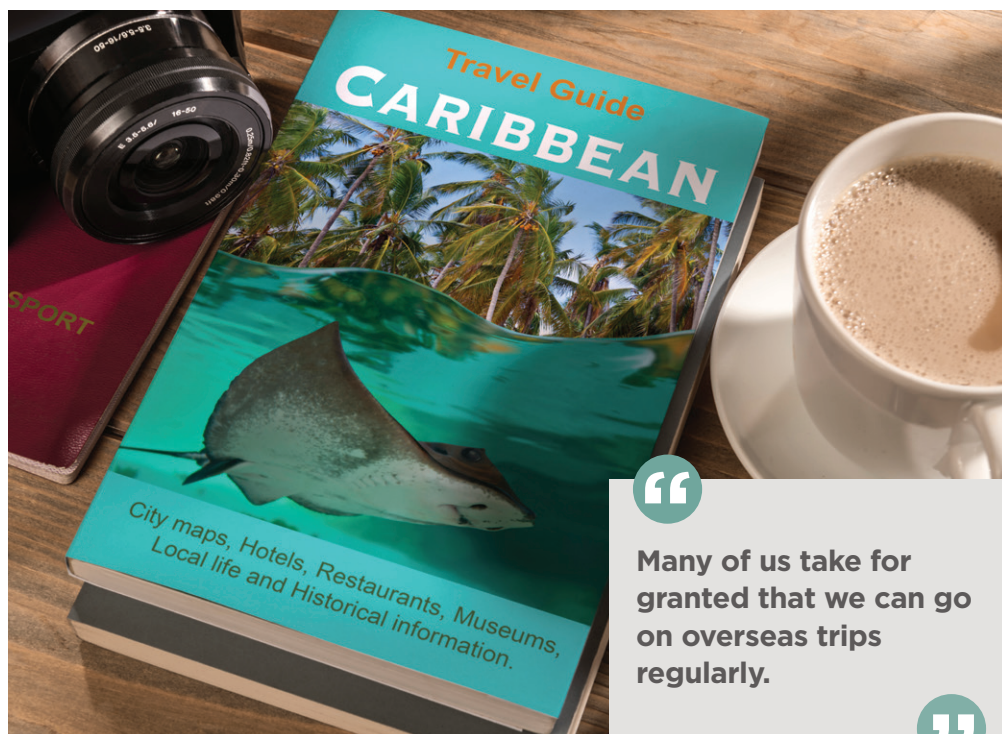


Photo: istockphoto.com

### The correct yardstick

The reality is that seeking to be “a bit better” than the world was never what Jesus called his disciples to be. The Scriptures do not envisage the Christian life as a subtle improvement on how we lived before we came to know Jesus.

Jesus does not anticipate that his disciples will be slightly different to the



**The world's values are totally opposed to those of a follower of Christ.**



world around us. Instead, when we become a Christian, we are told that our old worldly self has died and we are a new person in Christ. As Paul says in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”. This shift is so radical that we can now be described as a “new creation” in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). As a result, through the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1–2) we are called to undergo a radical transformation rather than a subtle renovation. We do not just seek to improve ourselves; instead we put off the old ways of the world and put on an entirely new person. Sometimes I wonder if I can ever fully grasp how radical these calls of the New Testament are? We are called “to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the

new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth” (Eph 4:22–24).

Our point of comparison is never the world. The world is not something to be a bit better than; instead the world's values are totally opposed to those of a follower of Christ. The world's moral compass is not slightly askew; its north is south and its south is north. This is why we are told to not be yoked in any way to those who do not believe, for “what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial?” (2 Cor 6:14–15).

Instead, our point of comparison is always Jesus. Peter tells us, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” Similarly, the Apostle Paul challenges us to follow his example he follows that of Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

It is only if we grasp that our point of comparison is Jesus and not the world that we will ever even come close to seeking to live out the radical calling of our Lord and Saviour. If I might return to one of my earlier examples, how do we make decisions about what we watch and fill our minds with? It is wonderful if we avoid pornography and the graphic content that our world normalises for us. However, we are called to something far greater than just avoiding such filth. Paul exhorts us in this way: “Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is

any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things” (Phil 4:8). In that light, of course we will avoid pornographic material, but it is also hard to see how an episode of *Married at First Sight* could ever be something considered “morally excellent”? Or for that matter, even the greed of an episode of *The Block* shows itself for what it is.

On that note, I have recently been preparing some talks on greed and contentment and so read through the New Testament with that topic in mind. I was struck at just how radical the calls Jesus makes were in his own generation. How much more radical are they when compared to a generation as wealthy as ours? However, as I then came to apply Jesus’ teaching to myself, I found myself trying to justify my lifestyle decisions by comparing myself to other people rather than to the example of my Lord. The reality is that while I am easily 20

percent better than the world, I am a long way from following the example of Christ. Am I alone in this?

I share these thoughts primarily for us to consider our own lives and decisions. However, I believe we need to remember this in our teaching and especially when we think about application. We need to make sure we do not tone down or “de-radicalise” the calls God makes on us to make them seem less foreign to our world. We need to remember that they were just as foreign to Jesus’ or Paul’s “pre-Christian” world as they are to our “post-Christian” one. We need to make clear that the Christian life is not a matter of tinkering at the edges but is instead a radical transformation.



**We need to make sure we do not tone down or “de-radicalise” the calls God makes on us.**



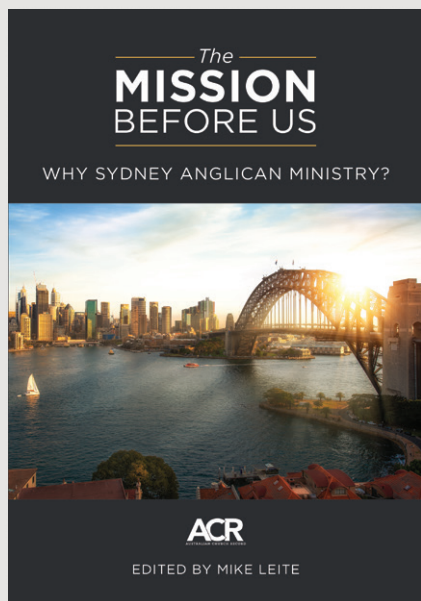
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This is also why I would argue that what some call “world-view” preaching is so important. By that, I mean teaching that exposes the lies of the world, deconstructs the entire framework that people have assumed and then reconstructs a new framework in line with God’s word. People are not starting with a slightly off world-view that needs to be corrected. Instead, we need to help people deconstruct a world-view that is opposed to God and then reconstruct a way of thinking and way of life that is radically different. I wonder if we need to especially think about this in our teaching of young people in the area of human sexuality?

The reality is that most people under thirty today have been raised with an understanding totally at odds with God's understanding. They do not merely need teaching about how to do relationships differently to our world. They need teaching that exposes the lies we have believed and helps them see that God's way is totally different. More than that we need to show how God's way is not just to be accepted, but delighted in. Twenty percent better than the world is not even in the ball-park of what God

calls for from his people in this area.

Perhaps for a brief period of history, seeking to live 20 percent better than our world might have come close to the radical Christian life Jesus calls on his disciples to live. However, if that was the case, then it certainly is not the case anymore. Let's not be people who seek to live a little better than our world. Instead let's be people who seek to live like our Lord and Saviour. Isn't that the yardstick we want to compare ourselves to? **ACR**



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# An honourable approach to dishonourable laws<sup>1</sup>



**Andrew Barry** serves with Christ's people at Menai Anglican Church. He is married to Ruth, has five children with him and one who is now with the Lord.

Australian Christians face increasing challenges in balancing our obligations to civil authority and God's word. The question of when to obey God rather than government has become one of the most significant issues confronting the modern church.

**W**hat the government does is one thing; how the church responds is another. We must tread carefully, courageously, and biblically, remembering that it is in the Christian DNA to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Taking up the cross must at least include a willingness to suffer under the hand of an unjust government, laws, or abuses of those laws, as we seek the salvation and good of others and live for God's glory. If Jesus was willing to die, we must at least be willing to go to jail.

## A contemporary challenge: Prayer, sexuality, and gender

One law, and particularly our government's interpretation of that law, provides a very important watershed moment for many in Sydney Diocese. On April 4, 2025, the *Conversion Practices Ban Act 2024* came into effect in NSW. Christian leaders had been aware of the bill for more than a year, but when we saw the advice on the government's Anti-Discrimination NSW website, many were deeply disturbed:

<sup>1</sup> Modified from a sermon given by Andrew Barry and Menai Anglican Church on Sunday, 27th April 2025.



*The Conversion Practices Ban Act 2024 does not prohibit prayer. However, praying with or over a particular person in an attempt to try to change or suppress that person's sexuality or gender is unlawful. It is unlawful even if that person has asked you to pray for them to be able to change or suppress their sexuality or gender identity.<sup>2</sup>*

This governmental body's advice was updated in July 2025. While appearing to be a marginal improvement, it is essentially the same advice:

*The Conversion Practices Ban Act 2024 does not prohibit prayer. However, praying with or over a particular person in an attempt to try to change or suppress that person's sexuality or gender is unlawful. It is not unlawful for a person to seek counsel or guidance from within their faith. Counsel and guidance, including prayer, can still be given as long as it is not an attempt to change or suppress the person's sexuality or gender identity.<sup>3</sup>*

A certain kind of prayer is now publicly deemed “unlawful”, regardless of whether that person asked for it or not. If a six-year-old girl thinks she is a boy, or if a 60-year-old man thinks he is a woman, and that person comes to you and asks you to pray with them so that they will be happy in their biological sex, this would be unlawful according to both versions of the advice. This would apply to all: parents, friends, youth leaders, or ministry workers.



**This would apply to all:  
parents, friends, youth  
leaders, or ministry workers.**



While these situations do not occur very often, does the bureaucratic government really have authority to control our prayer lives? Surely, we believe that we can ask anything in Jesus' name and that God can give peace and healing to those who are confused. We especially believe that we can pray with, and

for, a brother or sister who seeks out this kind of prayer. I have prayed this kind of prayer in the past, and if the right circumstances arose, would do so again. If a friend asked you to pray with them that they would be comfortable in their own biological sex, how could you not pray with them? Are we meant to be afraid now?

We want people to know Jesus Christ, to have their lives transformed by him, expressing both gentleness and grace at the same time as truth and a call for obedience. Every Christian needs a saviour, and we learn to follow him as Lord. We will see some transformation this side of heaven. We await even more. We say the lines, “that is what some of you were,” at the same time as “but we have not yet reached

2 <https://antidiscrimination.nsw.gov.au/discrimination/conversion-practices/frequently-asked-questions.html> (accessed April 2025)

3 <https://antidiscrimination.nsw.gov.au/discrimination/conversion-practices/frequently-asked-questions.html> (accessed July 2025)



the goal.” Surely any Christian claiming the name of Jesus and with a scintilla of love in their heart would pray for the holiness and wholeness of any Christian who comes to us. The government can forbid us to pray with people, especially when they come to us, but can we obey such a law?

Orders of magnitude more upsetting than what the government forbids is how churches have forsaken our commitment to God’s word. Jesus said the words: “*Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34). He said these words about the soldiers who crucified him, not the religious leaders who should have known better.

### **A cautionary warning: Melbourne Anglicans’ policy response**

Have Sydney Anglicans capitulated in the face of this kind of directive? Only time will tell. Our first reactions were to oppose the law, but our settled response hasn’t had enough time. Perhaps our 2025 Synod might be instrumental, one way or the other.

Melbourne Anglicans’ response over the last few years provides us with a very salutary warning. A similar law was introduced in Victoria more than two years ago, and how the church hierarchy responded is truly awful. *Vision Christian Media* reported in April 2025:

*Melbourne Anglicans face a dilemma. They must decide whether to obey state laws or the teachings of the Bible. Their diocese demands that members sign a Code of Conduct that among many other rules, agrees not to seek to change or suppress a child’s gender — as dictated by Victoria’s conversion laws under the Change Or Suppression (Conversion) Practises Prohibition Act 2021. Those who don’t sign the Code are banned from serving in the church or attending synods.<sup>4</sup>*

The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne’s *Code of Conduct for Child Safety and Well-being* is their requirement for all volunteers and church leaders to sign. Interestingly, at the bottom of every page of the document are the words, “*Making the Word of God fully known.*”<sup>5</sup>

Elizabeth Kendal, a former Melbourne Anglican and religious liberty spokesperson, explained:

*“Article 6 has a long list of about 30 prohibited activities. When you get right down to 6.2 (y), you’ll find that you will not engage in any conduct to change or suppress a child’s gender identity or sexual orientation.”*

4 <https://vision.org.au/read/news/australia/conversion-laws-dilemma-for-melbourne-anglicans/>

5 <https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ADOM-Code-of-Conduct-for-Child-Safety-and-Wellbeing-2023.pdf>

*“It does tell you that the referring legislation is the Victorian state government’s Conversion Prohibition Act. So there can be no confusion what it’s talking about.”*

*“I just immediately saw it and said, well, I can’t sign that.”*

*“I mean what if a 12-year-old girl tells me that they’re going to socially transition and they don’t want to be called Mary anymore, they want to be called Kevin, and then they’re going to start on puberty blockers and testosterone.”*

*“There’s no way known I can affirm that child and assist them in their transition.”*

*“That’s what the state government requires and that is now what the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne is complying with.”<sup>6</sup>*

Essentially, the Melbourne Anglicans have enshrined in their ministry requirements that even though God’s word says  $2+2=4$ , if the government says, no,  $2+2=5$ , then all their own ministry workers would have to line up with the government on this one. Trans ideology must be upheld by all church workers. What the government has done in Victoria is to leave their own sphere of civil authority and tell the church what to think.

The saddest thing about the Melbourne story is that as of the time I’m writing this article, there are not many leaders who have publicly refused to sign this Code of Conduct. Perhaps I have missed something, but I can only find examples of a handful of retired ministers and godly lay members who have taken a public stand. Radical trans ideology is now the official state religion of Victoria and, according to what they have written in their policy, also the official religious position of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.

While it’s completely outrageous for the government to create laws which tell us what we can and cannot pray or what we can say to people about God’s word, it is even more scandalous for church leaders to fall into line with them. But this is not new and should not surprise us. Let’s leave this one example behind and think more about the principles.

## **Are there dishonourable laws?**

Most laws are good and are completely in line with what’s right and fair, or they’re just different ways of structuring things, and we’ve got to give up our preferences and submit to them. If you are a Christian and you don’t like paying for a fishing licence or you don’t like the building codes, tough—you do what the government says. You don’t say that it’s just a government body pushing codes, licences and even speed limits. It is the government, whether it is elected, judicial or bureau-

6 <https://vision.org.au/read/news/australia/conversion-laws-dilemma-for-melbourne-anglicans/>

cratic. God's word commands us to obey the governments over us (Rom 13:1-7). We're called to be the best citizens, make that our aim, and respect the rulers and leaders that God has appointed over us.

The default setting for us all is that all state and federal laws should be obeyed. As an Anglican minister, I made a promise before God according to the Ordinal that said, *"Will you maintain and promote to the best of your ability the quietness, peace, and love of all Christian people, especially among those committed to your care?"* And I said, *"I will; the Lord be my helper."*

But before God, I also made a promise: *"Will you be ready to drive away false and strange doctrines that are contrary to the word of God?"* And to this end, both publicly and privately, warn and encourage all within your care, both the sick and the well, as often as the occasion demands. *"I will; the Lord be my helper."* And so we must gently teach the truths of the word of God against all false claims. We seek peace and love in God.

Even though most laws are good or neutral for Christians, church history is painted with occasions when dishonourable laws were in effect. We should remember the Christian DNA of courage.

- In the 3rd century, Christians were commanded to pour out libations to honour the emperor. It was just words with a bit of wine or oil. Many—not all—Christians took this as a deadly serious issue. They would not regard the emperor as divine. They would not dishonour God.
- In 16th century England, the Bible in our own language was illegal. Christians like William Tyndale broke that law. He was garrotted by the King's men because he served the King of kings.
- In the USA during the 20th century, there were Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation of churches. Some Christians broke those laws. They were courageous.
- Even in the late 20th century, communist countries were closed to the gospel. There would probably be hundreds of Sydney Anglicans who were involved in breaking the law by smuggling Bibles. These men and women are heroes in our midst.
- Even now in countries like Pakistan and Iran, there are laws against sharing the gospel of Jesus. In fact, one in four countries in the world do not allow people to convert to Christianity. All authority in heaven and on earth was given to Jesus Christ. He told his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-19). Jesus was not given  $\frac{3}{4}$  of authority to make disciples of only  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the nations. In some of those countries, the gospel has been growing, because Christians have obeyed Jesus first.



**Will you be ready to drive away false and strange doctrines that are contrary to the word of God?**



There are some dishonourable laws, especially for Christians, that forbid what God has allowed or command what God has forbidden. There are some laws that might be well-intentioned but get weaponised against Christians.

## The New Testament answer: We continue following Jesus

We follow Jesus with honour. We see this throughout the Bible:

*Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor (1 Pet 2:16-17).*

Peter, who wrote this, would later be killed by the emperor, probably because the emperor thought he disobeyed him. Is this a contradiction? Not at all. We honour those over us. We live as free citizens of heaven. Since we belong to God, we freely give honour to our leaders. We use their titles, respect their positions, and obey them whenever we can.

In all circumstances, the impulse is always the same: we always, always obey. The Christian disposition is not disobedience, but obedience. While sometimes we use the shorthand of disobeying the authorities, it is more correct to say that we always obey God. Like courage and taking up the cross, obedience to God is our Christian DNA.

When Jesus told his disciples they would take up the cross and follow him, we think of it as a symbol of suffering and humiliation, and yes, we remember it as a symbol of dying and living for God. But we must not forget the cross was the symbol of Roman state power crushing those who stood in its way. To take up your



**The cross was the symbol of Roman state power crushing those who stood in its way.**



cross is saying, “I will cop the worst that anyone can offer,” even if it’s the emperor. And as Christians, we are willing to face hardship and suffer for Christ. It’s not “pick up your grenades and follow me” and “Let’s lob grenades at unbelievers”. No. Pick up your cross.

The way of Christian conquest is by radical obedience to God, and radical commitment. The more Christians put obeying God above personal safety, the more Christlike his people will be, and the more society will be impacted for Jesus.

In the long run, we will be a blessing to our country by obeying God. Jesus blessed the world when it killed him. The early Christians who stood against pagan worship ended up seeing many onlookers saved. Tyndale, who disobeyed the laws of England, ended up blessing the country by printing the Bible in a language they could understand. Those in our churches who have smuggled Bibles into communist countries ended up blessing those countries. In the long run, costly obedience to God will bless others.



Image source: commons.wikimedia.org

When there are unjust and dishonourable laws, what's the best way to respond? Focus less on the government but focus more on God. I often see Christian organisations working really hard at appealing to the government to change their law, but I see them doing absolutely nothing about making a commitment to disobey the government if they need to. We're good at the one side, but we're not good at the other side—saying, “I'm going to obey God regardless.”

When the law mentioned previously came into place in NSW, many Sydney Anglican ministers rushed to become experts at what the law said. I got a bit carried away myself. As much as there is a time and a place for understanding the laws of the land, it is much more important

that we be experts in what the word of God has always said. The answer is simple: We just keep following Jesus. It's the same advice you'd give to the early Christians, William Tyndale, and the sister in Iran.

A Christian who takes a costly stand and obeys God is not a B-grade Christian. If they do it for his sake, they are more like Jesus than the rest of us. The “heroes of the faith” are not just those in Hebrews 11. In the previous chapter, average Christians were just as, if not more heroic than the patriarchs:

*“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 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” (Heb 10:32–34).*

They stood with each other. We should follow their example. Instead of merely thinking, “What will I leave my kids for their future?” we ourselves should be willing to joyfully accept the confiscation of our \$2 million family homes. They were not the losers, but cosmic winners. Christian organisations that are obsessed with insurance and forget the insurance of the life to come will never count the cost and follow Jesus. In a city that worships real estate, are we willing to risk it all to gain everything in Christ Jesus?

The answer is simple: We follow Jesus, obeying God in every situation, come what may, for the good of other people and for his glory.



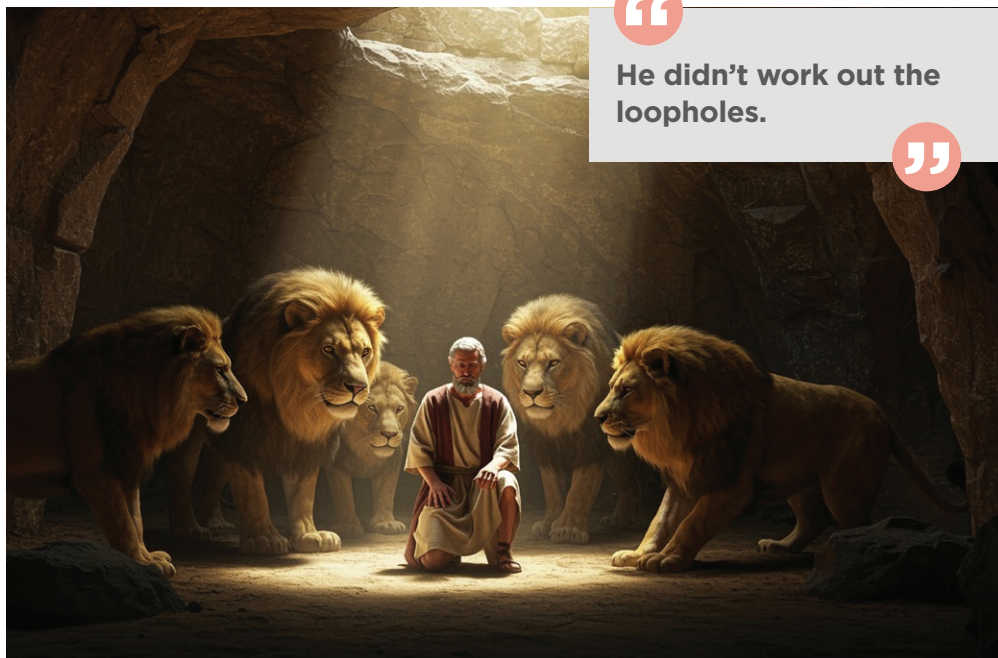
## An Old Testament example for our current situation: We pray as we did before

Loved by King Darius, hated by the civil service, Daniel's continued his devotion to God in his captive land. The satraps pushed a law on the king that for the next 30 days, anyone who prays to anyone except the king will be thrown into a lion's den. Daniel prays. He's thrown into the den. God saves him, and the king pronounces a decree that people should worship Daniel's God. There's a beautiful end to the story. As was mentioned before, costly obedience to God by one individual resulted in good for the people of God and even for those who came to know him. But it's what Daniel does in just one verse, verse 10, that I think is so important for us today:

*Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before (Dan 6:10).*

When did Daniel pray? As soon as he heard the law had been passed. He didn't investigate the law. He didn't work out the loopholes. He did not go and meet up with the king and satraps and argue for freedom of religion. He prayed as he had done before. He didn't wait for the perfect time to make a stand. He just went on with his prayers.

Sometimes we think there will be an amazing opportunity. If someone says you can't speak on that topic, speak on it soon. The longer you leave it, the more you self-censor.



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He didn't work out the loopholes.

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Daniel didn't pray in secret. If he opened the window before, he'd do it again. He didn't stop using God's name and make it ambiguous, like he could be praying to the king. He prayed to God as he had before. He prayed three times before. He continued to do that especially after he heard about the law.

This is the simple model for us. He didn't organise a prayer march. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. But he didn't get all the other people together and say, "Let's storm the capital city. Let's storm the satraps." He just quietly went about his business and prayed as he did before. He didn't turn the prayer into a protest. And why? Because he didn't think that the highest authority was the government. The person you petition is the person you think has the authority. Daniel thought God had the authority, not the king.

The kingdom of God doesn't grow by changing the government or fine-tuning laws. The kingdom of God grows, in part, by Christians obeying God and continuing to be faithful to him come what may. In fact, the kingdom of God could grow conceivably more at times when the laws encroach against what God's word says and dozens and hundreds of Christians stand up for it. Is now that time?

If the government says you can't pray, the answer is simple: Keep praying as you always have. If the government says you can't call people to trust and obey what God's word says about sexuality, keep doing what God's word says. And hopefully, by the time this article is being read, Melbourne Anglicans will have changed their policies and Sydney Anglicans will be even more willing to lose everything and gain even more. **ACR**

# Electing an Archbishop in Melbourne



**Rhys Bezzant** is the Principal at Ridley College. He is also Director of the Jonathan Edwards Center Australia. He serves as Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, and as a member of the General Synod Liturgy Commission and Doctrine Commission.

It was an extraordinary day in May 2025 when our Synod elected a new Archbishop for Melbourne. Our electoral politics have so often been divisive and bitter, but this was not the case this time. After a few sessions of debate concerning the merits of four individual candidates prepared by the Board of

Nominators, it took us just one cycle of balloting to reach an outcome, and that one round did not consume all the votes which one round could include. We were stunned by the speed, given the lengthy process in 2006 when our last archbishop was elected, when it took us two synods over six months with almost twenty balloting cycles. This year, the four candidates on the list were all Evangelical. In the election of 1990, in the second electoral synod, no Evangelical names were presented. The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne has undergone such enormous changes in this period of thirty-five years.

I remember in one of my first synods in Melbourne, around 1997, hearing attenders hiss when the word “mission” or “evangelism” was spoken. No longer. Until recently, it would have been unheard of for motions to include mention of church-planting. No longer. Once upon a time, there was no organised group active within the synod for Evangelical advocacy, neither for elections nor for motions. But now the New Cranmer Society, a coalition of orthodox believers generally (but comprising Evangelicals chiefly) is active and visible, though for a number of years significant liberal voices within the

synod publicly criticised its existence, despite the fact that a liberal ticket was regularly circulating.

In this election synod, a large number of younger Evangelicals spoke graciously, generously engaging with issues under discussion. Indeed, Evangelicals have always existed in the Diocese of Melbourne. Our first bishop, Charles Perry, nurtured an Evangelical diocese from 1847. But in the 1980s, there were three leaders in particular who promoted the Evangelical cause: Peter Adam (Carlton), Peter Corney (Kew), and Peter Crawford (Emerald), the “Three Peters.” Their commitment was not just to their parish, but significantly to wider reform in the diocese as well.

There has of course already been much discussion of how the election of Bishop Ric Thorpe, bishop of Islington in the Diocese of London, was possible in Melbourne, with these narratives often focusing on single factors. We speak of what we know and have experienced. But the historian in me—yes, I teach Church History at Ridley College—wants to suggest many more factors that have contributed to this wonderful outcome. These election results should not be reduced to just one causal factor. Others often neglected in analysis are suggested here.

For example, there is a **structural** factor. Without commitment by clergy and laity over many years to the structures of the diocese, undertaking the thankless tasks of governance and creating space for Evangelical voices, our witness would have remained marginal. The election of a Board of Nominators who were largely Evangelical is a case

in point, returning the list that they did.

There is a **resourcing** factor. Though Ridley is not officially a diocesan College and receives next to no financial support from the diocese, archbishops have continued to ordain our graduates, given the quality of their training and the potential of their leadership. The significant institutional support offered to Ridley by parishes and individuals is the backbone of diocesan transformation.

And there is a **cultural** factor. The cultural winds have blown against all kinds of Christian witness in this period, but liberal leaders in the diocese have especially failed to develop and promote pathways into ordained ministry which are responsive to the conditions of the moment. In the last

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**The historian in me ... wants to suggest many more factors.**

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twenty years, the number of Anglo-Catholics entering vocational ministry has been half those of Evangelical ordinands. However my tribe must not be triumphalistic; we have made some great advances, but our successes must also take into account the weaknesses of those who have traditionally stood against us.

We have this year elected an archbishop who prays, who wants to see men and women, boys and girls, come to faith in Christ, who has a strategic vision and energy to pull it off, and who is committed to the revitalisation of

parishes and the planting of new churches. We have so much for which to be thankful. Of course, Bishop Ric is known for his ministry of church-planting, comprising new initiatives both small and large which he has promoted both in the UK and beyond, which have

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**We have this year elected an archbishop who prays, who wants to see men and women, boys and girls, come to faith in Christ.**

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been celebrated especially by our church-planting colleagues. They have themselves made a significant contribution to renewed ministry pathways

and evangelistic outcomes in Melbourne and Geelong in the last fifteen years or so, and importantly for this election have provided a plausibility structure for Bishop Ric's election. We know what church-planting can look like in post-Christian Australia, and we have valued what we have seen in their creativity, sacrifice, and determination. But when Bishop Ric arrives in Melbourne in Advent this year, we will want to celebrate many reasons which together have led to his election. There are many ways that the Lord can reform and grow a diocese or a denomination, and with the fourteenth Archbishop of Melbourne we can look forward to the renewal of our dreams to reach the world for Christ. **ACR**

Book review

# *The Nicene Creed: The nature of Christian unity and the meaning of gospel words*

Edited by Mark Gilbert and  
Leonardo De Chirico



**Robert Doyle**, now in semi-retirement, was for 4 decades a lecturer in systematic and historical theology at Moore College, Sydney and George Whitefield College, Cape Town. Publications include books on eschatology and ecclesiology, and peer reviewed articles on trinitarian thought.

In summary, this book is a carefully written, informed, and thoughtful examination of basic Roman Catholic beliefs following the implicit and explicit trajectory laid out in the Nicene Creed: the doctrines of the authority of Scripture, Trinity, person and work of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the virgin Mary, salvation, church, and the world to come. It arises out of the teaching and pastoral ministries of the authors, who all—whether in Italy, France, Belgium, Ireland, Australia or the United States—are involved in proclaiming and explaining to today's Roman Catholics the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is presented in the Scriptures. The book is marked by careful attention to sources and fair critical evaluation of them. It is missiologically. The intended audience is Bible study groups in Evangelical churches. More widely, its analysis and presentation

make it an excellent introduction to contemporary, foundational Roman Catholic beliefs and how the scriptural gospel speaks to them.

Often it “has been argued that the Nicene Creed is an important basis for achieving greater unity among evangelicals and Catholics.” Pope Francis especially stated that the creed as a “hymn of praise and thanksgiving” represents a summons for Christian unity. The Nicene Creed is endorsed by most Christian denominations, and rightly so, as its statements about who God is and what he has done in Christ offer an important framework within which Christian thinking and practice may develop well. But, with respect to Nicaea being a basis for unity, there is an import-

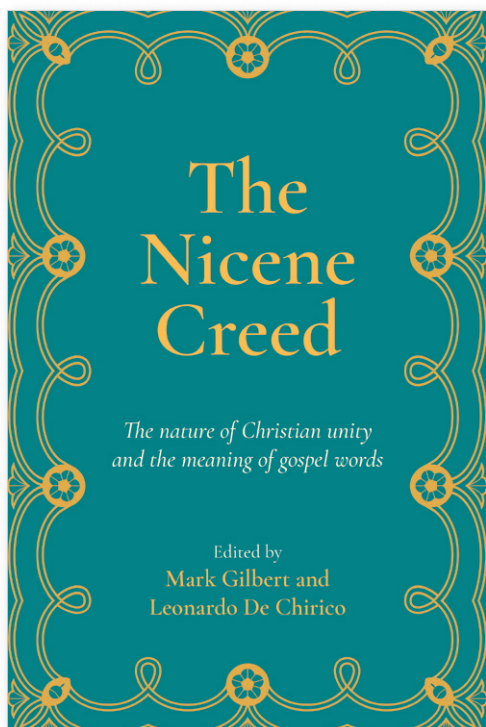
ant assumption operating: “that evangelicals and Catholics share the faith expressed in the Creed.” “This book will respectfully challenge that assumption.” Not to deny what is in common, “but to ask questions about its depth.” Because Evangelicals and Catholics hold fundamentally different understandings of the gospel, is the Creed sufficient for a shared basis “for meaningful Christian belief, confession, fellowship and ministry”? Is it a pathway to unity?

In 11 chapters, each about 3,500 words in length, the writers seek to answer this question about the claim that the Creed offers a pathway to unity between Evangelicals and Catholics by systematically looking closely at each article of the Creed along three lines:

- 1) appreciate what that article testifies to in our Christian faith
- 2) show how Evangelicals and Roman Catholics have applied that article in the development of their doctrine and practice, and
- 3) show where the Roman Catholic Church has taken the meaning of that article beyond biblical teaching.

Each chapter ends with questions for further reflection and discussion.

Importantly, the book examines two doctrines that are not found in the Nicene Creed, but touch on its fundamental intent to speak truthfully about God and his work, and in which Evangelicals have deep differences with Roman Catholicism: the authority of Scripture; and salvation, especially Mariology, the person and role of Mary in salvation, and the nature of justification.



192 pp, Matthias Media, 2024.  
matthiasmedia.com.au, and USA matthiasmedia.com.



What follows is a brief review of each chapter, to indicate something of its trajectory and occasionally offer evaluative comments that seek to extend the scope of the chapter's analysis.

In chapter 1, The history of the Nicene Creed, Rachel Ciano sets out and examines its historical and theological context. That Jesus was fully God, God incarnate, was being denied by a widely embraced and dominant Arianism: Jesus was divine, but unlike the Father, his essence was not eternal; he had a beginning. This meant that Christians had two Gods. The Creed of Nicaea sought to affirm both that there is only one God, and that the Son is also truly, eternally, God. Ciano also identifies the ambiguities that surrounded the original Nicene statements, ambiguities which effectively affirmed that the Son was not co-eternal with the Father. Thus a Semi-Arianism resurged. It took a difficult 60 years before the ambiguous reading of the Creed was corrected, at the Council of Constantinople. Therefore what we recite today is actually the “Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed”. The following chapters have a closer examination of each article of the Creed, “so we can understand what each mean and what is at stake when the very words used are contested in terms of their theological meaning.”

In chapter 2, “The Nicene Creed and the authority of Scripture”, Alastair Dunlop draws on the Apostolic writings to the Christian churches as he examines the nature and authority of the scriptural foundation of our faith. He thus argues for and explains the Evangelical doctrine of the authority of Holy

Scripture: that it is the only one true foundation, it is complete, it is written, it is supremely authoritative. To use Calvin's words, we know no Christ except Christ clothed with his gospel, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. To this, Roman Catholicism is opposed. “Its foundation and authority are not constituted by Scripture alone, but rather a three-legged stool of Scripture, tradition and the magisterium (the teaching office of Rome, consisting



**What we recite today is actually the “Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed”.**



of the pope, bishops and councils).” In this, it is the traditions (known or yet to be known) of Rome and its teaching office which effectively have authority over Scripture, for they determine what must be authentic interpretations of Scripture. Their four-fold beliefs about Mary, not found in the Bible, are a prime example (see chapter 7) of the distortion that the Roman Catholic position produces. The “Bible alone”, “Christ alone” stance of the Reformation finds its footing in Jesus' prayer (John 17:20–21) for unity for us all: we come to believe in him, come into saving relationship with him, based on the apostolic message. Our creedal statements, in all their usefulness and authority, must be subordinate to that enscriptured message. It is worth noting that the Reformers also affirmed that the saving and authoritative operation of Scripture is not a



**Christ is present to us,  
directly, in person, by his  
Word.**



distant instrument, a mere sign, pointing us to a distant God. They emphasised that Christ is present to us, directly, in person, by his Word; his Word read, preached, and meditated on.

In chapter 3, “The trinitarian framework of the Nicene Creed”, Leonardo De Chirico affirms the foundational, formative importance of the trinitarian account of God in the Creed. With close attention to official Roman Catholic sources, De Chirico then tracks theological statements which precede and determine how their doctrinal statements about the Trinity are to be arrived at and viewed; then, what is actually contained in the trinitarian confessions themselves, and what follows them, especially the doctrine of the church.

When viewed in their own context, do Roman Catholics embrace the same trin-

itarian faith? No. And the differences are not minor. For example, included in the Catechism statements on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and on the Holy Spirit, are interwoven statements on Mary, her own immaculate conception, her perpetual virginity, that she is the Mother of the Church, and that “the Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship” (Catechism 971).” De Chirico’s conclusions are appropriate: “Mariology is not a separate attachment to the trinitarian foundation but an organic part of the Roman Catholic account of it... Mariology tends to be an intruder into trinitarian harmony and an obstacle to fully appreciating who the triune God is and what he has done for us. Jesus says, ‘Come to me’ (Matt 11:28)

and ‘no-one comes to the Father except through me’ (John 14:6), but Roman Catholicism encourages people to invoke Mary for help.” Further, “when the catechism speaks of Christ, it interweaves him with the Church to the point of making them one.”

This means that although the Nicene words recited both by Evangelicals and Roman Catholics are the same, “the theological worlds they open are different.”

In chapters 4 and 5, Matthew Johnston and Robbie Bellis look at the person and then the work of Jesus Christ. The two are interrelated.

Following the Council of Constantinople’s clarification of the Nicene Creed in AD 381, 70 years later the Council of Chalcedon dealt with a tide of misunderstanding that thought Jesus’ divine nature had in fact “divinised” his human nature. That is, Jesus Christ was and is less human than we are. Chalcedon affirmed otherwise: his soul, intellect and will are not swallowed up by his divine nature. Clearly, how we understand Jesus’ human nature has implications for how we understand his saving acts. A key question is thus: Since we both affirm the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedon clarification, do Roman Catholics have the same Christ, and the salvation he brings, as Evangelicals do? Yes, the same grammar, the same words. No, for many centuries leading Roman Catholic theologians have denied the full humanity of Christ, and thus have had to supplement his saving work. So John Calvin will state that Jesus of Nazareth, as presented in the Gospels, really was ignorant of some things, because he was truly human. But against

that, the Roman Catholic theologian Robert Bellarmine asserted that because Jesus’ humanity was in personal unity with his deity, then anything he seems to have learned experientially, he must have already known in another way. And that affects how we ought to view Christ’s suffering. Bellarmine would allow that Christ could and did suffer in his body, but not in his whole soul. Other consequences follow this view of the relation between the divine and human, where the divine penetrates and divinises the human, at least in part. The Church is also seen as an intermingling of the divine and human, so the Priest is *alter Christus* (another Christ), who possesses Christ’s sacred power.

Against the “No” of Roman Catholic theology, and its partial divinisation of Jesus humanity, Johnston points out that Hebrews 5:8 states: “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.” Further, we may also



**Although the Nicene words ... are the same, “the theological worlds they open are different.”**



consider Romans 8:3: The Father sent his “own Son *in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin*” by which he condemned sin in the flesh. The context makes it clear that “likeness” here is not implying any “unlikeness”, but stressing real likeness, the same form as fallen human nature. The HCSB translation is helpful: “He condemned sin in the flesh by sending His own Son in flesh like ours under sin’s

domain, and as a sin offering". To save us, God did not create nor send a "super-man", but he acted entirely within our fallen situation. And it is that Son, incarnate, by his person, life and work, who has destroyed sin, death, and the devil.

Robbie Bellis' chapter on the work of Christ mainly, and helpfully, focuses on the penal substitutionary nature of Christ's death. His use of Isaiah 53 is not



**To save us, God did not create nor send a "super-man".**



unhelpful, but in my view has two problems. First, in verses 4c and 5c, most English translations do not use the word "punish", but "stricken" (4c) and "chastisement" (v 5c)—ESV. In the context of the Suffering Servant, "chastisement" can refer to God forming and directing his faithful servant, cf. Hebrews 5:8. Second, although the New Testament quotes Isaiah 53:3-5 about 5 times, it does not cite verse 4c and 5c. Better to establish a doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement from both OT and NT, not Isaiah 53 alone.

With respect to Roman Catholicism, although penal substitution was upheld until the middle of the 20th century, since then it has been denied in both formal statements of belief and individual writings. This denial has reinforced the Church's long-standing teaching that salvation also requires the sinner to make satisfaction by works of penance, and that we are saved by sacramental participation, not by faith in Christ alone.

Speaking then with our Catholic friends about the Nicene statement "who for us men and for our salvation... was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate," we have an opportunity to point to and explain the New Testament's teaching on penal substitutionary atonement for us.

With the same clarity and depth of analysis which characterises the earlier chapters, 7, 8, 9 and 10 cover the other doctrines affirmed in the Nicene Creed: The Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary, one holy, catholic and apostolic church, one baptism, the world to come.

Lauren J. Montenegro's chapter on the Virgin Mary is especially worth close attention, for arguably both the content and place of Mariology in Roman Catholic belief and practice stands as the greatest obstacle to unity between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. It effectively denies the Christ of the New Testament. Nicaea states concerning the Son of God: "by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man." But, over a 1700-year period, till 1950, four other key beliefs were articulated:

- Mary as the "Theotokos" (God-bearer): the belief that Mary is the mother of God.
- The perpetual virginity of Mary—that she remained a virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ.
- The immaculate conception of Mary: the belief that Mary herself was conceived without the stain of original sin.
- The assumption of Mary: because she was without the stain of original sin, Mary's body and soul were assumed up into heaven at the end

of her earthly life, and she didn't suffer the corruption of the grave as a consequence of sin.

Additionally, the “central premise of Mariology is that she was not fully revealed in Scripture but is being progressively revealed and discovered over time by the Roman Catholic Church.” In this way, Mary's place in the creed and Roman practice has increased significantly. Mary as “Theotokos” (God bearer) does describe the reality of Jesus' incarnation and was affirmed by both Martin Luther and John Calvin. But, said Calvin, the idolatrous veneration of the Virgin Mary characteristic then, and now, of Roman Catholic belief and practice, means we ought to be aware that Catholics might understand this title in a way that is different to that of orthodox Christology. It may indeed be the shape of that idolatrous veneration. “When Roman Catholics recite the creed, [they are] professing a belief in a Mary who is actively engaging in the world, who is to be venerated and prayed to, who was born without original sin, and who was assumed bodily into heaven.” In effect, if not in title, Mary has become a mediator between us and Christ. As a priest in France told Lauren Montenegro: “If you want something from Dad, the best way to get it is to go to Mum. Mum has Dad's ear. Mum can twist Dad's arm. He said it is the same with Mary.” That is not what Evangelicals mean or imply when they recite the Nicene Creed's statement about Mary. Effectively, there is no unity possible on that clause.

In my opinion, the Roman Catholic

understanding of the Creed—especially seen regarding the person of Jesus and the place given to Mary, and other saints—is a denial of the fundamental doctrines Nicaea affirms. The book of Hebrews, laying the foundation in chapters 1 and 2, teaches that Jesus Christ is indeed and in practice the perfect and sufficient Mediator between God the Father and us, poor, lost sinners. From God's side, in chapter 1, he is fully God. In chapter 2, from our side, he is fully man—our elder brother, like us in every respect, but has conquered sin, for us. “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (4:6)”. He prays for us at the right hand of the Father (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34; Luke 22:31–32). When we pray, we are joining in his prayers. To place other “pray-ers”, other intercessors



**The Roman Catholic understanding of the Creed... especially is a denial of the fundamental doctrines Nicaea affirms.**



like the saints and Mary on our behalf to the Father, is to effectively deny who Jesus really is and what he has done.

Briefly, in closing, the chapter on the “one baptism” affirmed by Nicaea “for the forgiveness of sins” helpfully explains the difference between the Roman Catholic “causal” view of baptism by Priests, and the general Evangelical view that the ceremony of baptism is a sign pointing to the promise that we are saved by faith

alone in Christ alone. That Christocentric emphasis can be further strengthened by observing that the only *Christian* baptism depicted in the Gospels is Jesus' baptism, that is his death. "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! (Luke 12:50; also Mark 10:38-40)". In this, Jesus uses the word "baptism" in the metaphorical sense, well known in the wider use of Greek language, "to be overwhelmed." Indeed, sailors who drowned at sea were said to be "baptised", i.e. overwhelmed by water to death. Arguably, more than 50 percent of the use of the word in the New Testament is metaphorical, not primarily denoting

a religious ceremony. So then, what saves, what is *causal* in our salvation? Not water baptism, but Jesus' baptism on the cross (Rom 6:3-11).

It is the sheer poverty of understanding and applying the Christocentric witness of Scripture in Roman Catholic belief and practice that has trapped them, distanced them from what the Nicene Creed seeks to do, and ensnared them in a self-focused ignorance. This book well facilitates understanding this and speaking the truth in love. It offers us assistance to share "Jesus Christ, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30)." **ACR**



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