

# ESSENTIALS

EFAC AUSTRALIA

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## Are there too many voices?



**Is the Christian world too noisy for us to hear the voice of God as he speaks to us?**

Dale Appleby, rector of Christ the King, Willetton WA  
and editor of *Essentials*

**T**RADITION AND CHANGE, OLD AND NEW, DEBATES, OPINIONS, discussions, experiments, can make one feel a bit sea-sick. If you pay attention to social media you will hear lots of voices telling you what's wrong with church and why people don't like going. To a lesser extent you will hear some discussion of what kind of message, or what form the message might take, in relation to different groups – Muslims, secular atheists and so on. You might even hear a variety of ideas about the Bible and how to read it.

Church, gospel, Bible are of great interest to evangelicals. And the broad church that is modern evangelicalism has a whole range of views on these topics. And these are not even the controversial Shibboleth topics. So much talk could drive you to the monastery.

Or make you think you were in the monastery and wanted to get out.

What we may not hear much of in the monastery is talk about the criminally oppressed poor. Or talk about our indigenous brothers and sisters. But, I suppose that depends on which cell you are in.

Are there too many voices? Is the Christian world too noisy? Is it a post-Babel world where everyone talks and no one understands? Maybe. But the post-Babel world is a very old world. And although God spoke everything into being before Babel, he continued to speak to the world after Babel as well.

Can he be heard? Can I hear him? Sometimes we can identify with David who recognised that God had dug out his ears for him (Ps 40.6 ESV fn). Quite an interesting picture, don't you think? Paul says it a bit more eloquently, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." (2 Cor 4.6).

Both of those can be turned into excellent prayers. Amongst the noise, we want to keep hearing the voice, and seeing the light, of God himself.



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# Recovering our Mission



**Richard Condie tells us what the Anglican Future Conference planned this March in Melbourne is aiming at.**

Richard is the Chair of the Anglican Future Conference and vicar of St Jude's Carlton.

**I**T MIGHT NOT BE TOO FAR FETCHED to claim that the Anglican Church in Australia is at a cross-roads. With one third of our Dioceses now declared unviable, and several more teetering on the edge, at the least, we have a serious problem to address. It seems to me that we need to come together to make some positive decisions about our future direction.

One of the glaring omissions in the viability report that was presented to the General Synod last July was the recovery of mission and evangelism as the only real strategy to reverse the trend of decline. There was an assumption that if we got the structures working better, then somehow we would see improvement.

I was recently talking with a ministry colleague of a different tradition. The ministry they were doing was primarily around trying to get people to “come to church”. That was the expressed and assumed goal. When I tried to prod that perhaps helping people come to faith in Jesus might be a more effective goal (and even delivering the desired outcome), I was met with a slightly mystified look, as if I was espousing some arcane idea from a bygone age.

But before I feel too smug, I weep when I see the relatively few people who have made first time professions of faith through our own ministry. If I am brutally honest, the vast majority of people who have become disciples of Jesus at our church have been from overseas, and vastly different cultures from the one in which I have grown up. Praise the Lord for students from Asia, and refugees from the Middle East who are hungry for the gospel, and who want to learn about Jesus!

But to borrow Paul's phrase in Romans 9, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart ... for my kindred” Aussies. Perhaps it has something to do with living in “the most livable city in the world”, but they seem almost

immune to the gospel message that we try to hold out to them. While Melbourne claims that moniker, the rest of the country ain't that bad either. I remember as a curate in rural northern NSW preaching at a harvest festival on Deuteronomy 8 about the dangers of “forgetting the Lord”. In many ways the fertile valley where we lived was the Aussie equivalent of a “land flowing with milk and honey”, well at least bananas and sugar cane!

**S**o what are we to do? If Australians already live in something they think of as close to heaven, and quite frankly see no need for the God that we speak about, then we need to do some pretty clear thinking if we are going to make any kind of impact, let alone see a future for our denomination.

At one level we need to be concerned more about the progress of the gospel than we are about the viability of Anglicanism. But at the same time, our Anglican heritage and identity is exactly what Australia needs. The English reformation was about transforming the church so that it was able to present the pure word of God to a world that was in the dark. Sound familiar? And the prayer book, was an attempt to put the word of God and the worship of God into a form that was understandable to the masses (pun intended). It was a missionary endeavour, to reach the people in a way that made sense.

We have just sent out a family from our church to work in cross-cultural mission in East Asia. They have spent the better part of the last 10 years learning about the culture and the ministry context into which they are about to step. They will learn the language, they will find appropriate illustrations of gospel truth that will work in their new context, they will think hard about how the gospel challenges the idols and systemic sins of the country in which they work.

We Aussies need to do the same. We need to realize that we are losing ground for the gospel in Australia by our refusal to change. I do assume with the general readership of Essentials that I am preaching to the converted. However even the converted need to keep sharpening their tools. We recently did an exercise among our leadership team to develop a spiritual profile of the area we are trying to reach – a series of observations about what people believe and how

the gospel addresses each of these beliefs. It was a fascinating exercise and we have much more work to do on it. So far we have identified that the typical person in our neighbourhood views themselves as:

- Autonomous – valuing freedom to govern their lives.
- Secular – valuing the here and now, the material, and rejecting the supernatural.
- Consumerist – where their consumerism is focussed on experiences.
- Activist – passionate about social and political causes.
- Tribal – belonging to groups of like minded individuals.
- Culturally diverse – in ethnicity but also subcultures.
- Distrusting of institutions – therefore suspicious of the church along with other institutions.
- Egalitarian – believing that every individual has value and a say.
- Sexually active and libertine – where sexuality is a matter of personal choice.
- Highly educated and affluent – most with tertiary qualifications and or well paying jobs (with significant pockets of exception).
- Highly engaged with technology – constantly connected through social media and tech devices.

That list might resonate with your context too. But that is a very different kind of person to the one who was being reached by Anglicans in Australia even in the 1980's when I came to faith. If we don't adapt, and don't think how the gospel addresses these changing aspects of our society, and then build an action plan around them, then we will be tossed onto the scrap heap of irrelevance.

We know the Gospel still has something to say. We know that it is the Word of Life for our broken world. We know that it is powerful to transform lives. We know that it answers the deep assumptions and yearnings that are behind many of these observations. But we are going to have to work hard at finding new ways of communicating and engaging with the world and communicating in their language and culture, which I think is a very "Anglican" thing to do. The Anglican Church of the next generation may look very unlike the Anglican church of the last (or even this) generation. But being culturally adaptive, while holding on to the

faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3), is exactly what Anglicans are supposed to be good at.

Enter, The Anglican Future Conference, 2015. My hope and prayer all along has been that this national gathering of Anglicans will grapple seriously with the issues that I have raised. The conference has six strands:

### **1. Hearing from God's Word**

It is right that we listen to what God wants to say to us as his people. Kanishka Raffel will open up 2 Peter for us with its challenge about the importance of doctrine and the godly life, and its call to action.

### **2. Recovering our Anglican Identity**

As I have said above, the Anglican movement has been a force for gospel good in our world. Recovering what it really means to be Anglican in a theological sense will help us see the relevance and beauty of what our tradition has to offer for mission in the 21st century. Anglican identity is "what we believe", and Ashley Null (an internationally renowned Anglican scholar) will unpack this for us over our three days together. Our desire is that it will make us confident about our Anglican future.

### **3. Standing in the Global Anglican Community**

We are not alone in dealing with rapidly changing mission environments. In fact the whole Anglican communion is engaged in different ways. From the challenges of Islam, to the rise of secularism, and the changing face of mission, we need to learn from each other. We are bringing the world to Melbourne in March, where we will hear from Anglican brothers and sisters across the globe about what contending for the faith means for them.

### **4. Understanding our Missionary Context**

As we have noted above Australia is on the move. Our plenary session on our missionary context, and the seven workshops that follow, will help us encounter some of these changes, and think how the gospel helps us to engage them. Simon Smart from the Centre for Public Christianity and Julie-Anne Laird from AFES at Melbourne University will help us think like missionaries at home.

### **5. Encountering Critical Issues for the Western Church**

There are many issues we need to grapple with if we are going to adapt for mission. New ideas and opportunities

abound, and a few hurdles must be overcome. A plenary session led by Stephen Hale (Chair of EFAC Australia) with a panel of practitioners will identify the issues, and again 8 different workshops will help us think about how to put this into action.

## 6. Imagining Our Anglican Future

We have the potential for a strong positive and healthy future. In the plenary session Peter Adam will share some thoughts about what this might look like, and then a panel will respond to him. Contrary to the thoughts of some, this is not about the secession of FCA and EFAC from the Anglican Church of Australia, it is about our positive contribution to its future. Various workshops will help equip us for a strong faithful future.

On the Thursday evening we will launch the Australian branch of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, and invite people to become members. We think this fellowship of likeminded orthodox Anglicans will be a necessary alliance as we move forward together.

**M**y hope and prayer is that this conference will be a positive contribution for all Anglicans in Australia. We have a great gospel to proclaim, and much work to be done. Registrations continue to grow and so I'm glad that it looks like we will have a strong group of Anglicans gathered to work out how to move through our cross-roads to a fruitful and exciting future.



## ANGLICAN FUTURE CONFERENCE 2015

**25 – 27 MARCH, 2015**

*Join us in Melbourne to be part of developing a strong, faithful future for the Anglican Church of Australia, as we respond to the challenges before us.*

### KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

*The Rev'd Canon Dr Ashley Null*

### SPEAKERS & PRACTICAL WORKSHOPS:

*Kanishka Raffel, Eliud Wabukala, Peter Jensen, Peter Adam, Stephen Hale, Glenn Davies, Tracy Lauersen, The Centre for Public Christianity and more...*

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*The challenges before the Anglican Church of Australia are enormous. The pressures of rapid social change, a growing secular agenda, and confusion about how to address these things, are presenting us with an uncertain future.*

*This conference will address these issues head on, and grapple with what it means for us to be on mission in the 21st Century and to continue "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).*

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# What Is Church For?

What is the business of church? Why does the congregation congregate, and when they get together what should they be doing and why should they be doing it?



Ben Underwood is an Associate Minister at St Matthew's Shenton Park in the Diocese of Perth.

IN ANSWERING THIS, OUR THOUGHTS MIGHT FIRST TURN to the kinds of things that we do in church, things like praising God, learning from the Bible, praying, sharing with and serving our fellow Christians. But is there anything that holds these things together, some purpose that they all serve?

This seems to be a useful question to ponder. For if we were clear what church was for, it would help us participate in church, and give us a way to help others participate too. More than that, knowing what the congregation was supposed to be doing when it met, and why, would also help us assess how well church was serving its God-given purposes.

I notice that reformed and evangelical Christians take different approaches to this question (to say nothing of those with other theological outlooks). I want to explore two contrasting approaches to these questions: those of John Piper and of D. Broughton Knox.

## CHURCH IS FOR THE PURSUIT OF WORSHIP – JOHN PIPER

One answer that might occur to you is that the God-given purpose of church is the *worship of God*. The church service is 'corporate worship'. Speaking this way about church places the emphasis on us making some response to God, and *towards God*, whether that response is the reverent and orderly participation in a proper liturgy or joyful praise and adoration in song, or receiving God's word with open ears and ready hearts.

John Piper is a pastor and writer for whom worship is a fundamental category for talking about the Christian before God, and his thinking on the church as worship is worth our attention. In what follows I am following his seminar notes 'Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning: The Pursuit of

God in Corporate Worship'.<sup>1</sup> Piper sees the business of the Christian life as worship, and the business of church as corporate worship, unfolding as an awakening, a pursuit and an experience, all of which are worship in some manner, for they show forth the glory and worth of God. The awakening is that we are stirred up to pursue satisfaction in God by hearing the word of God, supremely in preaching, which is an act of expository exultation. The pursuit is pursuit of satisfaction in God in the common activities of the church service, and the experience is of satisfaction in God, in which God is glorified by our enjoyment of him.

## The Experience: Worship

Piper works backwards through this triad, because for him the essence of worship is the experience of satisfaction in God, and the awakening and pursuit are only worship inasmuch as they lead to the experience. So, as he often does, Piper begins with the foundational thesis that there is no other greater than God and that our great good and purpose is to glorify him (i.e. worship him) by enjoying him forever. Worship is an inward, spiritual experience. In his words, 'The essential, vital, indispensable, defining heart of worship is the experience of being satisfied with God because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. The chief end of man is to glorify God BY enjoying him for ever.'<sup>2</sup>

It may seem to fly in the face of the New Testament to think about church from the category of worship, but Piper faces this difficulty explicitly. He looks at NT usage of two main words that might be translated 'worship' (*proskuneo* and *latreuo*) and acknowledges that these are not used to describe what happens in the Christian gathering. Piper seeks the explanation of this in Jesus' aim to divert attention 'away from worship as a localized thing with outward forms to a personal, spiritual experience with himself at the centre. Worship does not need a building, a priesthood, and a sacrificial system. It needs the risen Jesus.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning* Seminar Notes from September 12, 2008. Downloaded on August 16 2011 from <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/seminars/gravity-and-gladness-on-sunday-morning-part-1>.

<sup>2</sup> Piper, *Gravity* under '2. The Intensification of Worship etc. Thesis.'

Piper takes Jesus' words that 'true worshippers will worship the Father *in spirit* and truth' (John 4:23) to mean that 'this true worship is carried along by the Holy Spirit and is happening mainly as an inward, spiritual event, not mainly as an outward, bodily event.'<sup>1</sup> And, as Piper sees it, the New Testament writers continued Jesus' programme so that in their writings worship, 'is being significantly de-institutionalized, de-localized, de-externalized. The whole thrust is being taken off ceremony and seasons and places and forms and is being shifted to what is happening in the heart – not just on Sunday, but every day and all the time in all of life.'<sup>2</sup>

Piper suggests that for the NT writers to use worship language for church would have suggested an identity between worship and certain occasions or acts. Hence, by avoiding worship language and categories in speaking of church gatherings, the NT does not marginalise worship, but underscores that worship is located ultimately in the heart, not in any outward form, place or act.

## The Pursuit of Worship

If, as Piper reasons, the *essence* of worship is the *experience* of being satisfied in God, then since we are to worship God, we should *pursue this experience* of being satisfied in God. This *pursuit* of satisfaction in God then becomes a kind of extension of worship out from its essence. The ambit of worship widens to include both the experience of satisfaction, and the activity of pursuing that satisfaction. Indeed all things in life should serve the pursuit of this satisfaction in God, including church. So, if Christians are convinced that 'nothing is going to bring satisfaction to their aching hearts besides God', then: 'This conviction breeds a people who go hard after God on Sunday morning. They are not confused about why they are there. They do not see songs and prayers and sermons as mere traditions or mere duties. They see them as means of getting to God or God getting to them for more of his fullness.'<sup>3</sup>

This pithy answer to the question *What is church for?* explains why Piper's *Philosophy Of Music And Worship* begins with 'God-centeredness', which is expounded as 'A high priority on the vertical focus of our Sunday morning service. The ultimate aim is to so experience God that he is glorified in our affections.'<sup>4</sup> Congregation members are to 'Come on the look out for God, leave on the look out for

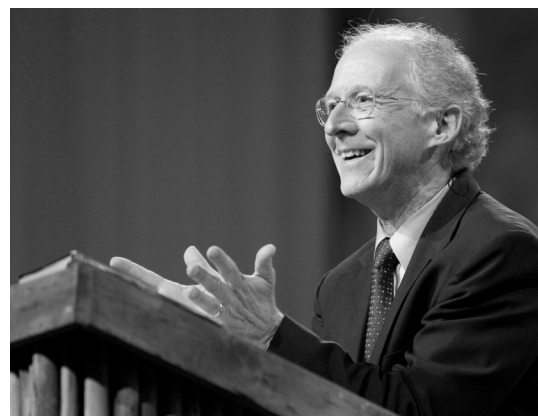
<sup>3</sup> Piper, *Gravity* under 2. The Intensification etc. Possible Answer.

<sup>1</sup> Piper, *Gravity* under 2. The Intensification etc. Question. What do etc.

<sup>2</sup> Piper, *Gravity* under 2. The Intensification etc. The Language of etc.

<sup>3</sup> Piper, *Gravity* under 3. What is the Inward Ess. etc. Some Implications 2. '

<sup>4</sup> Piper, *Gravity* under 5. What Unites Us in Worship: A Philosophy etc.



John Piper

photo: Micah Chiang [https://www.flickr.com/photos/micah\\_68/5170297736/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/micah_68/5170297736/)

people.' And they seek to 'Remove horizontal intrusions between vertical acts.' (I take this to mean that a focus on people should not interrupt the congregation's focus on God.)

## The Awakening of Worship

However, there is something else to be taken into account: 'In the real world of ordinary Christians, the pursuit of satisfaction in God through supplication, thanks, and praise do not usually arise in the hearts of God's people without being stirred up in some way when they come together.'<sup>5</sup>

The stirring up is accomplished by the Word of God, by the mouth of the preacher, augmented by the example of the preacher: 'in this world it is normal to go backward without continual exposure to the Word of God awakening in us the spiritual affections God deserves from us.'<sup>6</sup> 'God also designs that some of this continual exposure to the Word of God be provided by leaders in the church whose calling it is to make truth known to the people and to be examples of Godward affection for them.'<sup>7</sup> 'The content of God's Word will be woven through all we do in worship. It will be the ground of all our appeal to authority. Preaching (expository exaltation) will be central.'<sup>8</sup>

This high valuation of the preaching of the word leads Piper to a further widening of the ambit of the word worship. Worship is not only the experience of satisfaction in God, and the pursuit of this satisfaction, but the stirring up of others to pursue satisfaction in God through preaching ('expository exaltation') is itself worship too, 'because the declaration of God's truth and the demonstration of its value

<sup>5</sup> Piper, *Gravity* under 4. Worship Services Are Normative etc; Thesis 3.

<sup>6</sup> Piper, *Gravity* as above.

<sup>7</sup> Piper, *Gravity* as above.

<sup>8</sup> Piper, *Gravity* under 5. What Unites Us in Worship: A Philosophy etc.

with appropriate affections is worship. That is, it displays the value of God in that it shows he is worth knowing and proclaiming and feeling strongly about.<sup>1</sup>

Two observations about all this. Firstly, Piper is thinking out of a theological foundation into the practice of church against the background of Scripture and his context. Worship is the big theological category for everything in Piper's view of what it is to be a human being before God, so worship is the foundation for thinking about church too. This is not surprising. What we should note is that in this analysis, church is complex – it is not a simple, uniform act of worship that goes on in a congregation, but centres about sluggish, forgetful human hearts being stirred up to seek satisfaction in God, centrally by the expository exaltation of a preacher, and the congregation together using the activities of the service as the means of seeking and expressing that satisfaction in God.

The second observation I would make here is that this analysis is an antidote to any approach to church which does not place the relationship we have with God at the centre of what church is about. It is an assault on the church as social-cum-community group or cultural habit. It is a theological, un-sociological account of church designed to reveal the real *significance* of what it is to go to church.

## CHURCH IS FOR THE EXPRESSION OF FELLOWSHIP – D. B. KNOX

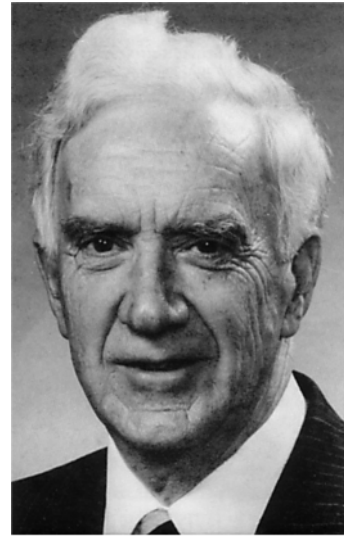
To be frank, Piper's approach to church seems foreign to me (unsurprising, really, since he is from a slightly different culture). Engaging with Piper's vision of church has sent me back to examine the influential voices in my own Christian culture to understand my own instincts about church. If the pointy end of John Piper's theological vision is worship, then D. Broughton Knox, who taught influentially in Sydney Anglican circles, had a theological vision with a pointy end too, namely, *fellowship*. Knox sees the business of the Christian life as fellowship, and the business of church is to express and enjoy that fellowship. We may summarise Knox's view of the aims of church as the increase and expression of the experience of fellowship.

## The Experience: Fellowship

Whereas John Piper thinks of the true end of human beings as the *worship* of God, Knox thinks of the true end of

<sup>1</sup> Piper, *Gravity* under '4. Worship Services Are Normative etc; Thesis 1.

This quotation makes clear a more fundamental definition of worship at work in Piper's thinking – that worship is the display of God's value, and to worship God is to display his value.



D. Broughton Knox

human beings as *fellowship* with God and one another in Christ. As Piper sees it, God's basic delight is in his glory and its display. Our fundamental way of sharing in God's basic delight is our worship, which is the enjoyment and display of God's glory. As Knox sees it, God's basic delight is the fellowship – the shared love and activity – of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our fundamental way of sharing in God's basic delight is to come into fellowship with him, and his people.

In his essay 'The Biblical Concept of Fellowship', Knox defines fellowship as, 'friends sharing a common possession, leading to a common activity on the basis of that sharing'.<sup>2</sup> For Knox, although 'fellowship is a basic and delightful human experience'<sup>3</sup>, fellowship begins in God – the full, perfect and blissful fellowship within the Trinity. Their common possession is the self-giving love the persons of the Trinity have for one another, and all the divine works of creation and salvation are their common activity.<sup>4</sup>

Human enjoyment of fellowship with one another 'springs directly from the image of God in which men and women have been created'.<sup>5</sup> We are made for fellowship. This fellowship is to be with God, and with one another, and although the fall has broken that fellowship with God and one another, in Christ, that fellowship is restored. A favourite verse of Knox's is 1 John 1:3; 'that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.'

In Knox's view a verse like this describes the heart and reality of the Christian experience and the goal of salvation. Christ has brought Christians into fellowship with himself

<sup>2</sup> D. Broughton Knox, 'The Biblical Concept of Fellowship' in D. Broughton Knox, *Selected Works, Volume II: Church and Ministry* ed. Kirsten Birkett (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2003), 58.

<sup>3</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 57.

<sup>4</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 61-63.

<sup>5</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 59.

and his Father, with one another ('we') and, through their proclamation of Christ, with still others ('you').

Elsewhere Knox writes: 'In the Scriptures, God has made known his plan and purpose and final objective for mankind, which he is bringing to pass. It may be summed up in one word – fellowship; God has made us for fellowship. Heaven is fellowship with one another in God's presence'<sup>1</sup>

Fellowship is friends sharing in a common *activity*<sup>2</sup>, and Knox sees this fellowship with God and one another as being experienced by the Christian in several areas of activity. Christians share together in the praise, thanksgiving and intercession directed to the Father, led by the Son and helped by the Spirit.<sup>3</sup> We share together with Christ and one another in the fellowship of evangelism, of living by faith in God, of suffering, of generous giving, of hope, of the inheritance of God's people, of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Knox writes that 'our truest fellowship is the sharing of Christ', and, 'to be conscious of this fellowship means being conscious of our relationship with God and one another in God.'<sup>5</sup>

This is the Christian life – a life of fellowship with God and one another, which is fundamentally a delight. So then, as Christians, we should seek to express and to increase this fellowship.

## Expressing Fellowship

Church, then, is an expression of this fellowship. 'The church service should provide this fellowship', writes Knox, going on to say, 'The real reason [for church] is that the Spirit of God has drawn [the congregation] into each other's company to meet with Christ in each other, in accordance with his promise to be present with them. The Spirit has drawn them that they might experience the fellowship of the Spirit whom they all share.'<sup>6</sup>

Knox lamented the failure he perceived in his own culture of church to appreciate the centrality of fellowship – 'friends sharing in a common activity'. Neither pulpit nor pew thought they were in church for fellowship, and the formal, solemn, quiet, constrained conduct of church services provided little opportunity 'to see the faces of our fellow-Christians [...] shining with the light of Christ'.<sup>7</sup> Rather, Knox

laments that in his church culture, 'the only thing a worshipper at Morning Prayer sees of his fellow worshipper from the moment he enters the building, til the time he leaves it again, is the back of his head.'<sup>8</sup>

Rather, the expression of Christian fellowship, friends sharing Christ in common, as we meet, 'doing together what we do on our own, seeking Christ's face for he is in each of us and we meet him in one another.' I'm not sure what Knox would have said to Piper's 'Come on the look out for God, leave on the look out for people' quoted above, but he might have said, 'If you are on the look out for God, look for him in his people.' Knox is concerned our recognition and appreciation of one another as we gather is natural, genuine and primary in our engagement as church.

## Increasing Fellowship

Knox holds that the end of church is Christian fellowship, and this fellowship is not a means to a further end, and always exists as it has been established by Christ. However, our consciousness and enjoyment of that fellowship can be and should be increased. The means to Christians experiencing the fellowship of the Spirit 'is remembering Jesus, dwelling in him, setting our minds on things above, where he is. All these phrases mean the same thing – namely being consciously in his presence.'<sup>9</sup>

One important way to increase our consciousness of the reality of our fellowship, our consciousness that we are together in the presence of Christ and his Father is teaching the word of God. 'Christian fellowship is evoked on the word of God, and response to that word.'<sup>10</sup> The word of God brings a knowledge which is the first thing necessary for the strengthening of fellowship. He writes, 'Christian fellowship is based on knowledge; knowledge of our common possessions, our common calling. This knowledge stirs the imagination, warms the affections, energizes the will to work, to suffer and to hope, and unites us all into one, God and his people. Knowledge comes through being taught with a receptive, obedient mind.'<sup>11</sup>

Knox therefore treats the teacher of the congregation as one exercising a foundational function in the strengthening of fellowship. But his emphasis falls more upon the 'receptive, obedient' minds of we who hear, who 'must act on our knowledge and direct our wills to the things of God' to experience fellowship with him, whose fellowship is weak be-

<sup>1</sup> Knox, 'Heaven is People', *Selected Works II*, 247.

<sup>2</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 57.

<sup>3</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 64-65.

<sup>4</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 64-70.

<sup>5</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 70.

<sup>6</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 74. See also p76.

<sup>7</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 75.

<sup>8</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 70.

<sup>10</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 74.


<sup>11</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 73.

cause we fail to set our minds on things above, where Christ is.<sup>1</sup>

The things we do together at church help us to set our minds on things above – not only hearing his word, but praising him, thanking him, praying to him, sharing the Lord's Supper. All these things help us remember Christ, and that we are in him and he is in us. When we do these things together at church, our fellowship 'is not only directed towards God, but also towards one another, building one another up as Christians. The Spirit's gift of love for one another will ensure that when we come into each other's company, an important consequence will be helping one another to be better Christians through instruction, exhortation and encouragement'.<sup>2</sup>

There are obvious points of similarity between Piper and Knox. They both have an *experience* taking a central place in their vision of the Christian life. For Piper it is the inward, spiritual experience of being satisfied in God, for Knox it is friends sharing a common possession, namely Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And for both, church has important role in strengthening that experience for the Christian. And further, the preaching or teaching of the word of God has a central place in that strengthening role.

There are also striking differences. In Piper the oneness of God is to the fore. He is God and we are his worshippers, and the great pleasure of God is the display of his glory before his creatures for our joy and his. In Knox, the triunity of God is to the fore. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and his great pleasure is in his own fellowship, shared with his creatures for our joy and his. Perhaps as a result of these differences Piper also focusses more upon the individual 'going hard after God' for him or herself in church, with other parties somewhat secondary, whereas Knox focusses on the primacy of the sociality of church, of mutual recognition and appreciation.

Both Piper and Knox offer robustly theological accounts of church designed to reveal the real *significance* of what it is to go to church, and how we should see and engage with the activities of church and the people we meet there. I can't read what they have to say without being challenged to examine what I am thinking and feeling and seeking when I go to church on Sunday. And I have a hankering to read what some of the reformers had to say on this topic. 

<sup>1</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 73.

<sup>2</sup> Knox, 'The Biblical Concept', *Selected Works II*, 80.

## Reading the Bible

**It is not uncommon for our strengths to become our weaknesses. Could this be a problem with our love for a rigorous exegetical method of preparing sermons?**



Peter Brain is the former Bishop of Armidale and is presently rector of Rockingham, WA

MINISTERS ARE SOMETIMES TOLD that there is no need for a devotional reading of the Bible since all our reading and preparation should engage us with God. I believe this is a half-truth which can so easily lead us away from one of our great evangelical strengths. The strength of a warm devotion to the Lord Jesus has nurtured and strengthened the hearts of evangelical Christians and pastors alike. The daily quiet time has been an essential expression of this devotion.

The very concept of a regular time alone with God has often been branded legalism. A moment's reflection ought to dispel this as unwise, unbiblical (Lam 3:21-23 and Matt 6:11) and singularly unhelpful since we regularly make time to eat our evening meal with our family and applaud the husband who arranges a regular date with his wife. Anything worthwhile requires planning and discipline.

Pastors who forget that they are Christians before they are pastors are at great risk in many areas of their life. Perhaps the chief danger is that of a professional approach to the Scriptures that is content with a knowledge and careful handling of the Bible rather than a growing loving relationship with God.

# is more than reading the Bible

The advice given to me by one of my parish leaders shortly after I was converted was both wise and helpful. “Peter, try to read the Bible every day and expect God to speak to you”. Reading the Bible is more than reading the Bible. It is to engage in relationship with the living God who loves to speak to his children. This is a prior responsibility to our role as pastor, meeting as children with our Father rather than as servants with our Master. The primary purpose is not to prepare a sermon, but to be trained, corrected, encouraged, led, indwelt and nurtured by our loving, triune God.

A number of blessings follow this prayerful expectation. The first is that the Bible will always be seen and experienced as a living book. Devotional reading will always keep our preaching and pastoring fresh because our relationship with God will always be growing. The S.U. chorus will be at the heart of our approach to Scripture. “Make the book live to me, O Lord, Show me yourself within your Word; Show me myself and show me my Saviour, And make the book live to me”. Our evangelical tendency to exalt the objective above the subjective will be moderated as we expect God to speak to us in this way. We will not only preach the third day resurrection of Jesus, but remind ourselves that every day he lives to be our great understanding High Priest and our Friend. We will take great heart from his desire to fellowship with us, that abiding antidote to lukewarmness (Rev. 3:20), that persistent enemy of western Christians and zealous pastors alike.


One of our dangers is to slip into a “Christism”, as devastatingly erroneous and unhelpful as deism. This is the trap of so focussing on the propositions of scripture as to neglect the three Persons to whom the propositions testify. The recent trend to speak of “gospel ministers” as the way of describing our role rather than “ministers of the Lord Jesus” could be an unintentional way of robbing ourselves of the joy of being called into and involved intimately with our Lord in our Father’s business.

At a very practical level of encouragement in ministry, meeting with our heavenly Father is surely more important than simply reading or studying the Bible. Devotional reading will expect God to speak to us through the text rather than our exegetical methods. Our Lord’s “do not be afraid” to

his disciples on the lake becomes a timely word to us when buffeted with life’s demands and problems. The fearful Israelites quaking in their boots at Goliath’s taunts will be a rebuke to our fears just as David’s boldness, a spur to action, along with biblical theology’s insight that David represents Christ who has won the battle for us. Would we argue with the doyen of 18/19th century expository preachers, Charles Simeon, finding strength from our Lord, when, following prayer for God’s comfort from a plain verse of scripture upon opening his Greek Testament, put his finger on the text “they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; they compelled to carry his cross” (Matt.27:32)? It may not be pure exegesis but it does express the love of our Father for his son who was in need of encouragement to press on in his faithful exegetical ministry. If we expect our fellow Christians to apply all the exegetical skills of homiletics which we apply to sermon preparation might we in effect be closing the Book to them and missing out on God’s comfort ourselves?

Marital unfaithfulness and addiction to pornography are more likely to be kept at bay by those who engage in “a devotional pattern that places us starkly in awe before a fearsome God. A God-angled view of sin and its consequences.” (Bill Halstead).

We are far less likely to sin against One with whom we meet daily and far more likely to find the strength and pleasure of obedience from our gracious Lord who lovingly encourages us every time we meet with him.

Our heritage is as priceless as it is satisfying. And herein lies our greatest danger when we can so easily be satisfied with our heritage rather than the One who has so graciously blessed us with it. As we remember that the same Holy Spirit who guided the Biblical authors to write the Scriptures also dwells in us we should not be at all surprised that he will make God’s written Word alive for us every time we make the time to meet with him. 



## Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

What exactly does Jesus resist when he stands against the Devil's temptations in the wilderness? The history of the reception of this passage and its parallels offers a number of possible answers to this question. Chrysostom is representative of the fathers in seeing here a rejection of specific sins – gluttony, vain ambition and the desire for riches. Calvin charts a different course as an explicit correction of this exegetical tradition, taking the Devil's offers as an attempt to provoke Jesus to doubt God, to rise up in rivalry against him, and to seize his gifts apart from him. Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov famously perceives in Christ a refusal to adopt a tactic of coercion whereby allegiance would be forced through an irrefutable display of miracle, spectacle, and power, and instead a commitment to the preservation of human freedom. These readings ought not to be dismissed out of hand; yet what none of them seems explicitly to reflect (with the one possible exception being Calvin's reading) is the extent to which it is Jesus' sonship that is at stake in the wilderness ("If you are the Son of God..."). Here we might offer another answer to the question of what Jesus rejects that seeks to take this into account, specifically by reading the temptation narrative in the light of what immediately precedes it – the account of Jesus' baptism.

In Jesus' baptism, a paradox is revealed to be lying at the heart of his identity and task, and it is a paradox of sonship. On the one hand, at the Jordan, Jesus' identity as the Son of God is publicly manifested – he is the one who stands in unique relationship to the Father, and who comes as his king and judge. On the other hand, it is also revealed that this sonship doesn't

secure for Jesus a path of ease and comfort; on the contrary, it calls him to the work of suffering in the place of his people. This is made clear both by the second half of the heavenly announcement of Luke 3:22, with its allusion to the servant song of Isaiah 42, and by the action of the baptism itself, in which Jesus the judge adopts the posture of a sinful and repentant Israelite, and so stands in solidarity with the judged. Jesus' sonship, then, far from promising him the earthly career that one might expect for so exalted a figure, delivers him into its opposite; his will not be an impervious life marked by an immediacy of glory, but rather one of weakness and affliction in the self-giving service of his own.

With this in mind, the Devil's temptations that follow may be seen as each offering Jesus an alternative way of being the Son to that revealed in his baptism. We may take each temptation in turn, to see how this is so. The first temptation, to turn a stone into bread, invites Jesus to prove his sonship, not simply by performing a mighty deed, but one that will do away with his own hunger and lack – for surely, if he is God's Son, God wouldn't let him starve? The second temptation, proposing universal sovereignty in exchange for a shift in Jesus' allegiance, offers him something that the Father has, in fact, already promised his Son, but offers it now, with no expectation that the path by which the Father has determined the Kingdom will come – the path of rejection and crucifixion – need be trod. The third temptation, to put God to the test, goads Jesus in a way similar to the first to evidence his sonship through a demonstration of an automatic divine protection that will spare him harm in all circumstances. Each temptation, then, coaxes Jesus to act on the basis of a very different vision of what it means to be the Son of God to that which has been revealed and embodied in his baptism – one which doesn't direct him into the passion for the sake of his people and commit him to trusting God through it, but instead spares him such things,

proffering entitlement, safety and suffering-free glory.

Jesus, of course, resists these temptations through God's word. In doing so, he reaffirms that vocation which, though manifested in his baptism, is grounded in the depths of eternity; his "No" to the Devil is in fact a "Yes" to the Father, and in this he triumphs over the one who would turn him from the Father's course. This triumph, however, is not so much for himself, as for us; and it is such in at least two ways.

Firstly, as is often noted, Jesus triumphs for us in that the battle he wins is one that had previously been lost – by Adam, by Israel, and with them, by all of us. Luke tells the story of the temptations expressly to show that where those 'sons of God' failed, here the true Son of God – the true Adam, the true Israel – resists temptation, refuses to yield to sin and to Satan, and so undoes the knot that we had tied.

Secondly, Jesus triumphs for us in that his refusal to turn from suffering is a refusal to turn from the path by which he will redeem us. Jesus suffering isn't, of course, something arbitrary that the Father has set upon him; it is the means of our salvation. This is how Jesus will bring not only himself, but us with him into his kingdom – by refusing to insist that his sonship ought to afford and preserve him certain rights and privileges, and instead committing to relinquish such things for us. Therefore, when Jesus says "No" to the devil in the wilderness, he says "Yes" to God, but as such he also says "Yes" to us. Jesus will not abandon the way of the cross, because he will not abandon us. He will not be Son simply for himself; no matter the cost, he refuses to be king without his people.



Thom Bull is priest-in-charge at Ellenbrook, WA & chaplain at Swan Valley Anglican Christian School.



# BOOK REVIEWS

## Review Article



***A Rightful Place. Race, recognition and a more complete commonwealth.***  
**Noel Pearson.** Quarterly Essay 55, 2014. ISBN 9781863956819

***The Last Man. A British Genocide in Tasmania.***  
**Tom Lawson** IB Taurus. 2014. ISBN 9781780766263

***Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History.***  
**Bain Attwood** Allen & Unwin 2005. ISBN 9781741145779

As far back as 2007 there has been bipartisan support for changes to the Australian Constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to remove clauses to do with racial discrimination. This support was affirmed at the 2010 election. Recent reports suggest a referendum might finally happen in 2017. In the meantime Noel Pearson has written a *Quarterly Essay* outlining his arguments for Constitutional Reform.

The general question posed by Pearson is: “how do 10,000 distinct peoples [in the world] live well and prosper – and get along with each other – within 200 nation-states?” (6) The immediate question that affects Australians is that the Constitution of 1901 did not recognise the peoples who were here prior to the settlers arriving, but did provide powers to the Commonwealth to make laws based on race. Even the reform of 1967 still included indigenous peoples on the basis of race (more on this later).

Pearson takes some time to review the difficult issues of history-writing, and the differences of perspective that have plagued the debates. He thinks Bain Attwood's *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History* is a fine circuit breaker to the “History Wars”, but wants to affirm a stronger view to what happened on the frontiers: the fate of the Tasmanians was genocide; and “the profoundest moral problem of this history: the heavy discounting of the humanity of the Aborigines” (20).

Bain Attwood does provide a very helpful and insightful understanding of the so-called “History Wars” which emerged over the last decade or so, spearheaded in the popular understanding by Keith Windschuttle's *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (2002).

One of the things he identifies is a change in the way history is understood and done. Once upon a time the professional academic historian was seen to be the one who could tell us “what happened”. In fact there are now in the public arena a variety of historical discourses.

Attwood divides his book into three parts. Part 1 aims to trace the roots of the controversy. In Part 2 he critiques Windschuttle's work and attempts to show why it is flawed. In Part 3 he discusses how academic historians might better tackle their research, especially with respect to frontier history, and what role their discussion might play in the public sphere.

A lot of the book concerns the nature of historiography: who can tell the story? Much Australian history has been told by the settlers and their heirs. Only recently has the Great Australian Silence been broken to hear an Aboriginal history. One of the issues in the book is the nature of oral history and the different ways history is preserved in oral tales. It also concerns the status of the field of Aboriginal history and its relationship to the studies of anthropologists and linguists.

Attwood also discusses what could be called national myths. Stories about a nation that the nation uses to define itself. With respect to the "History Wars" one thing that became apparent was that the public debate was not carried on, by and large, by professional historians, but by public intellectuals who were readers of history. In the process the academic historians appeared to have been marginalised, and their claims to authority weakened. This was part of the process of the democratisation of historiography.

This has led to a plurality of histories in the public arena. Attwood gives a masterly survey of a variety of ways of doing history and the way they relate and compete. In the end he writes to help Australians deal with the truth of the past so that a future can be made with two groups going together. He doesn't think reconciliation is the right word. It "implies that historical difference can somehow be transcended." (194). He thinks that there will continue to be differences but that the task is to try to moderate these. A truthful exploration of all aspects of the story will assist this.

Pearson affirms Lawson's thesis that the British project was not aimed at genocide but nevertheless had a fatal logic such that even policies of protection "ultimately envisaged no future whatsoever for the original peoples of the island." (23).

Tom Lawson writes as a British historian and a scholar of genocide. His interest is in what happened to the original inhabitants of Tasmania. Australian scholars have reflected on whether this is a genocide that is part of Australian history. Lawson thinks it is a British question, and argues that it has been part of British public knowledge since the mid 19th century (H. G. Wells used it as the stimulus for his novel *The War of the Worlds*). Raphael Lemkin, who prepared the groundwork for legal definitions of genocide, defined genocide as a "total social practice" involving two stages: destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; and the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. For this reason Lawson agrees with the authors of the *Bringing Them Home* report. The forcible transfer of children with the intention to undermine the viability of a community is defined as genocide in the 1948 Convention (20).

One question is whether it was intentional. The Secretary of State for the Colonies wrote in 1830 to Governor Arthur, warning that the 'extinction' of the indigenous population of Van Diemen's Land would leave an 'indelible stain' upon the reputation of the British government. Lawson's argument is that while protection was strongly in mind there was no concept of a shared future. The indigenous people would give way to the settlers, at best they would be Christianised

and civilised. Even protection was a means of 'extinction'. The idea of the 'extinction', of course, ignores the descendants of those original people and has become part of a continuing cultural historical debate.

Pearson says he has "always understood that protection worked in concert with frontier dispossession and facilitated it." (24) Yet as the inheritor of a mission's religion and traditions, he holds complex perspectives on the history. "... without the Lutherans my people would have perished on the Cooktown frontier." (26). It is this complex history which each of these writers help us to understand better, and which needs to be heard in its complexity rather than read selectively.

One of the issues in Pearson's essay is the question of identity, for which Pearson proposes a concept of layered identities, so that the various identity markers everyone has can be seen, not in competition but as layers. In this way indigenous people can share a bicultural future while retaining important aspects of their traditional heritage. There is no monocultural past they can return to.

Pearson comments on the lack of consent by the indigenous peoples to the arrival of the settlers, and goes on to urge that indigenous people need to have real choice, because with this goes both power and responsibility. He wants "indigenous Australians to become active agents in our own development." (48). These are well-known Pearson themes.

A significant part of his argument is that "the basis of our inclusion in Australian citizenship in 1967 was fatefully wrong. We were included as citizens of our own country on the basis of race..." (52). Culture, language, ethnicity, religion are not shared uniformly, but there is only one race - all are part of the human race. So constitutional reforms need to remove the concept of race. He sees the Australian nation in three parts: the ancient indigenous heritage; the British inheritance; and the multicultural achievement. "Constitutional recognition of indigenous Australians ... will make a more complete commonwealth." (55) As part of this Pearson appeals for the protection and preservation of the indigenous heritage.

He makes a strong appeal to the conservatives, concluding, "... you cannot have a unified nation, this cannot be a fair nation, without the proper inclusion of that 3 per cent of the nation who were originally excluded from the constitution. And who, when belatedly acknowledged in 1967, were included on the fatefully wrong basis of race." (72)

These books and the issues they discuss are of great relevance to evangelical Christians, because it was our forebears who, in many places, stood (admittedly often with their own

faults and racist views) between the indigenous peoples and their destruction. The departure of the missions from direct involvement in aboriginal communities may have reduced our view, and the apparent take-over of indigenous "aid" by the "left" may have further isolated many of us. But it is not too late to pay attention and contribute to what is now a national debate.

**Dale Appleby, Willetton WA**

## ***Washed and Waiting***

*Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*

**Wesley Hill**

Zondervan, 2010 ISBN 9780310330035



A gay friend once said to me, "You know why I reject Jesus? Because I want a loving relationship just like you have. I want a man to snuggle up to at night and watch TV with. Otherwise, what hope do I have?" His reference to "hope" transcends the trenches of morality and truth – it is grounded in heart-affections. And this is the realm of the universally human.

*Washed and Waiting* by Wesley Hill asserts how Christ can provide new affections which can help those who experience same-sex attraction and how the church is key to this. Hill's book gives hope that is biblical, relational, sophisticated and timely.

*Washed and Waiting* is biblical. The title refers to two texts. The "washed" aspect refers to I Corinthians 6:9-11,

where the Apostle Paul describes Christians as being "washed... in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." The "waiting" refers to Romans 8:23-25, where Paul refers to the groaning of all creation for glorious renewal. Hill holds the historic Christian understanding of sex as a gift from God that is expressed obediently in the context of a heterosexual marriage (see pp 51-53). But you won't find an encyclopaedic, rigorous or systematic analysis of the biblical material such as in Gagnon (see [www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net)) or Schmidt (*Straight & Narrow?*). And that's ok. However, such a scripture-saturated book would have benefited from an index of passages used.

*Washed and Waiting* is a personal book. Hill recounts how he struggled from a young age to uphold relational fidelity. He gives moving insight into his intense feelings of loneliness, shame and guilt. Hill's honesty is purposeful and challenging. Regarding purpose, he says, "I hope this book may encourage other homosexual Christians to take the risky step of opening up their lives to others in the body of Christ." He challenged me to be the kind of straight supportive person who takes the midnight call and listens for 3 hours, or who takes the day off to spend with a lonely heart. Missing in the book, however, is a page or two on how churches can practically work toward being this community of support for the gay Christian.

*Washed and Waiting* is a sophisticated book. Hill weaves together reflections and stories of people as diverse and ecumenical as Henri Nouwen, C.S. Lewis, Alan Paton, Aristotle, the Pope and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Negatively, this could prove too 'high-brow' for many. Positively,

Hill occupies the cultural territory often claimed by the Cultural Revolution (Peter Hitchens' term) and frequently barren of any authoritative Christian voice. Hill is no 'Westboro Baptist' type! His sophistication means that his arguments cannot be conveniently dismissed.

*Washed and Waiting* is a timely book. Hill seems agnostic with regard to the origins of his same-sex attraction. He has no story of childhood abuse or parental absence. He doesn't advocate "heterosexual reassignment." He therefore dodges another popular missal of dismissal: that of the Christian who advocates a 'solution' to same sex attraction. Hill simply considers himself a gay Christian who is – like all of us – 'washed and waiting'.

I recommend *Washed and Waiting* for all Christians who experience same-sex attraction. You might even find it appropriate to give to a gay non-Christian. Its impressionistic biblical references, relational and sophisticated approach, and Hill's own undoubted authority on the subject makes it an excellent way to present the "new affection" of Christ. This makes it a rare book on the topic. And gives hope for people like me who love and pray for my gay friends.

**Francis Chalwell, Surrey Hills NSW**

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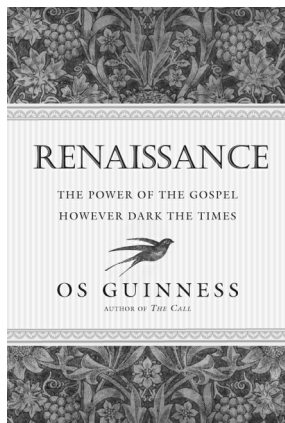
[www1.libertychristianministries.org.au/2015-conference](http://www1.libertychristianministries.org.au/2015-conference)

## **Renaissance**

*The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times*

**Os Guinness**

IVP 2014. ISBN 9780830836710



In *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times*, Os Guinness grapples with questions surrounding the decline of the church in the West and whether or not there is hope for a renewal of vital Christian faith. Drawing upon biblical truth, keen cultural insight, and an extensive knowledge of church history, Guinness' response to these questions is marked by both a profound and confident hope, and at the same time a thoughtful and cautioned realism.

In the first chapter, our attention is brought to the decline of the Christian faith in the West. Churches are emptying in droves. Cultural captivity and worldliness are rampant even in the churches that remain. Many claim that modernity has dealt Christianity a death-blow. And even though the church in the global South is exploding, why should they fare any better when the tide of modernity reaches their shores?

In response to this bleak and discouraging picture, Guinness affirms that we do indeed have real reason to have hope in a Christian renaissance.

By this he is not referring to the 15th century Renaissance, but simply the revival of vital Christian faith. Whether you call it revival, renewal, rebirth, renaissance (the French word for 're-birth'), or whatever else, Guinness argues that the character of God, the nature of the Kingdom, and the experience of church history all suggest that the current decline of the Church in the West should not be interpreted as its death throes.

He quotes G. K. Chesterton, who noted, "at least five times... the Faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases, it was the dog that died."

Guinness builds a convincing case that it is not only possible and realistic for Christians to hope in a Christian renaissance, it is also necessary for us to do so, and to work towards it.

So how does he suggest we work for revival?

He is quick to point out that the work of revival is ultimately God's work.

But he is also careful to show that throughout the Bible, God's sovereignty never justifies our passivity. God is in control, but we are still responsible. And so while we must recognise that only God can bring about spiritual revival, we must at the same time roll up our sleeves and get to work.

He argues that cultural influence is a by-product of Christians faithfully living out our callings, following Jesus, and being "in the world but not of the world." This is a well-trodden saying, but Guinness argues for its value and relevance in a persuasive way.

While *Renaissance* is a book marked by confident hope, it is anything but naïve. Guinness demonstrates a well-grounded realism. As one example of this, he cautions against looking back to any time in

history – whether it be the New Testament era, the time of the Patriarchs, or the Reformation – and thinking that that was the golden era to which we must return.

Guinness reminds us, with many historical examples, that no 'Christian culture' is perfect. So we should pray and work for Christian renaissance, but always recognise that our golden age is not behind us. It is ahead.

Only when Christ returns and consummates his perfect reign will we experience our golden age.

Until then, Guinness argues, it is our job to live faithful and godly lives, to engage lovingly and critically with our culture, and to pray for God to bring about renewal – because ultimately, it is his work.

Guinness brings us back to the essentials and gives us firm grounds to trust in God despite the languishing state of the church in the West. My one criticism of *Renaissance* is the lack of positive historical examples of Christians engaging their culture in the way that Guinness describes.

There were a plethora of examples throughout history where the church has failed to engage with the broader culture and become secularised. These were helpful warnings, but the absence of any positive examples of Christians engaging culture was sorely lacking. This would have provided a helpful point of reflection, encouragement, and application for the Christian reader.

On the whole, however, I would commend *Renaissance* warmly, especially to those disillusioned by the state of the church in the West. A great read.

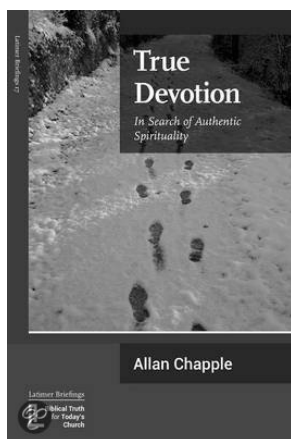
**Ben Smart, Shenton Park WA**

### **True Devotion**

*In Search of Authentic Spirituality*

**Allan Chapple**

Latimer, 2014. ISBN 9781906327279



Allan Chapple has written an excellent study of what is commonly called 'the Christian life', or 'spirituality', or, 'the devotional life'. The title of Allan's book is *True Devotion: In Search of Authentic Spirituality*, and it is one of a series of Latimer Briefings, published by the Latimer Trust in England.

While much writing and speaking on this topic drives an artificial and ungodly wedge between head, heart and hand, Allan follows the Bible in refusing to separate them. We can distinguish between them, but must not separate them. So Allan's quest is for true devotion, as well as for authentic spirituality, and devotion which transforms our lives.

In Part 1 he describes gospel spirituality as responsive to God's word and work, paradoxical in living out the tensions of time, focus, death and life, and the already and the not yet. Then too gospel spirituality is relational, expressed in faith, love and hope, and expressed from our hearts, that is, from the core of ourselves.

In Part 2 Allan tackles a common expression of spirituality, that of mysticism, whether in its Protestant, Quaker, Catholic or Charismatic expressions. Here he provides a clarifying perspective on a complex topic, and helpfully points to all the relevant issues.

In Part 3 Allan describes the Biblical view of meditation, that is, meditation on the words and works of God. As he points out, Bible reading and prayer are not enough: we must practise Biblical meditation, so that we are not only informed but also nourished and transformed by God.

Here Allan provides the most positive way forward for those whose spirituality is often separated from the Bible, and also for those whose reading of the Bible is only intellectual, clarificatory, and disconnected from their inner selves, their emotions, or their actions. He wants to encourage a form of Biblical meditation which reveals in the meaning of Scripture, and which also reads and engages deeply with the drama, the emotion, the power, and the practicality of God's words.

In his words: "Meditating on Scripture....enables me to appropriate and absorb what the Bible says in a manner that makes it more personal and me more prayerful...it leads me to a heartfelt response to what the Bible teaches me. It makes me more prayerful by giving me lots of reasons for turning to God with thanksgiving and requests" [pp. 219-20].

Through all this, Allan provides useful and memorable insights from the saints of former days, and these greatly enrich his writing, and help us to focus on key issues and practices.

In my opinion the valuable insights of this book also need to be applied to the corporate life [the

body-life] of the church. This would reflect the Biblical pattern of corporate spirituality, found so clearly in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, in many of the Psalms, in Colossians, and in the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Communal spirituality has a big impact on every believer: we are shaped by the churches we belong to. While the Bible does describe personal spirituality, its greater focus is on the spiritual welfare of God's people, and Christ's church. The insights that Allan gives us could be applied just as significantly to our churches, and to the shape and content of our meetings or services. We need to hear the Bible read in our services, and then our preachers should help us meditate together on the words of Scripture we have heard, and then turn our meditation to prayer and practise in our corporate life.

This book is deeply enriched by Allan's theological, pastoral, and personal experience, and this experience is useful for others because it is so deeply shaped by the Bible.

I recommend this book very highly: it would benefit a young Christian, as it would benefit a seasoned believer. It would be useful as a discussion book for a small group or church book club. And it will not only help us in our own life with God, but also help us to encourage others as well.

The book is available from [www.latimertrust.org](http://www.latimertrust.org).

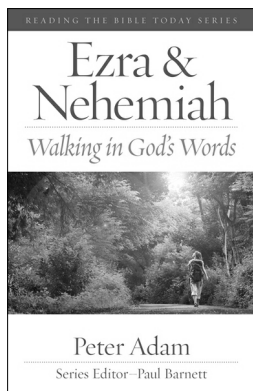
**Peter Adam, Carlton Vic.**

## **Ezra & Nehemiah**

*Walking in God's Words*

**Peter Adam**

Aquila 2014 ISBN 9781925041187



Why read Ezra & Nehemiah? Why read whole books of the Bible as they have come to us through history and tradition and the sovereign guiding hand of God? Why (as the Prayer Book enjoins us to do) read, mark, learn and inwardly digest all of the Scriptures – and not just our favourite selections?

This new book by Peter Adam gives us the answer. This book gives great help and encouragement. It does so all the way through the book, but it also starts as it intends to continue. In the six short pages of chapter one, Peter offers us brief but pointed, theologically-insightful and pastorally-helpful reasons for keeping on reading whole books of the Bible – like Ezra-Nehemiah. It's a chapter well worth presenting again and again to maturing disciples as we encourage them to love - to read, mark, and learn - whole books of the Bible.

But perhaps we don't need all that much encouragement to get into Ezra & Nehemiah. Anyone who has been part of a church with a building programme has probably sat through a sermon series in these books – I know

I have! The narrative is so rich in detail and interesting!:- benevolent Cyrus, returning exiles, the prayerful administratively-able leader, turning hearts and hands back to God, willing followers and co-workers, opposition and defensive tactics, the organised building plan. Its richness leads to the common temptation to preach these books as a kind of 'how to' manual and model. 'How to successfully execute a church building programme', or, 'How to build a church wall – especially around the pesky youth group'.

What Peter does in this book is to examine all that rich detail, but within its richer historical and theological context. He thus drives our reflection, our appreciation and our ultimate application deeper in and further on. He does this consistently in every chapter, but let me highlight two in particular.

When I go shopping for a commentary one of the things I do is zero in on the troublesome passages. That's often a litmus test for the quality of the rest of the commentary. How does this commentator deal with the difficult bits like the warning passages in Hebrews, the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2, anything in Revelation after chapter three? How does this book deal with the putting away of the Gentiles wives in Ezra 9-10?

Peter's pastoral gifts come to the fore here. The relevant chapter of the book is entitled, 'First Sins', and there he highlights the significance of 'first sins' in the Bible, and, by implication, in us. Peter rightly calls the reader to develop our cross-cultural sensitivities. He notes that today we are particularly attuned against racism and towards individual choice in marriage. So to read Ezra & Nehemiah in our context means we need to work hard to understand their 6th century

BC culture: in particular, the place of marriage in relation to corporate worship, religious syncretism and the corporate leadership of the people of God. Or, if you're married today: what does your marriage have to do with church worship, with wholehearted devoted faith in Christ, and with your church's leadership?

The Israelites put away their Gentile wives. How can that be right? What about the kids? Who paid their monthly maintenance? Peter's handling of this tricky issue is considered, pastoral, biblically-informed, makes God the rightful hero of the narrative, set in the context of a deep concern for the honouring of both God's Word and God's people then and now, and gives the reader eminently helpful advice about marriage and holiness for today. All that packed succinctly into one chapter.

A second highlight revolves around a second tricky issue. How does Peter deal with Nehemiah's repeated refrain at the end of the book for the Lord to remember him, and his deeds? Will Peter agree or disagree with Don Carson's assessment that this marks Nehemiah – great and prayerful leader as he was – as ultimately still a person who didn't get grace, and hence is another Old Testament pointer towards our need for the greatest leader and rescuer of all, the Lord Jesus?

What Peter does here is typical of him and his long ministry among us but sadly atypical among many Christians today. Peter reflects theologically and pastorally, within a robust biblical framework, on the repeated prayer. He draws our attention to additional evidence in Ezra & Nehemiah, in the minor prophets, indeed in the whole body of Scripture, Old and New Testaments. And then he drives it all

home by applying his findings to our prayers and our relating to God today. This is very helpful stuff: for understanding the chapter, and for understanding how to work through difficult Bible passages.

The great achievement in this book, and indeed of the series itself, is that it condenses so much in so little. It does not aim to be a rigorously aca-

demic commentary, but this does not mean it lacks intellectual or theological clout. There's a clear overview of the text, right attention to particular parts that need more detailed explanation, a firm focus on context and overall theme and purpose, informed and engaging theological reflection, and pastorally-helpful and challenging application.

It is not a simple thing to include so much value in such a small package. We should be grateful for this particular fruit of Peter's labour – and take full advantage of it. It's a valuable resource for when your church comes to this preaching series, full of solid food for preachers, every small group leader and every keen Bible reader.

**Wei-Han Kuan, CMS Vic.**

## **EFAC Australia membership (incl. Essentials)**

\$40 per year (\$25 students, missionaries, retired persons).  
Essentials subscription only \$25 p.a.

### **What is EFAC?**

EFAC is a group of Anglican clergy and lay people who value the evangelical heritage of the Anglican Church, and who endeavour to make a positive, constructive contribution at local, diocesan and national levels. EFAC Australia is part of the world-wide Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion.

The purpose of EFAC is to maintain and promote a strong biblical witness in and through the Anglican Church so as to advance the cause of the gospel in Australia.

The aims of EFAC are:

1. To promote the ultimate authority, the teaching and the use of God's written word in matters of both faith and conduct.
2. To promote this biblical obedience particularly in the areas of Christian discipleship, servant leadership, church renewal, and mission in the world.
3. To foster support and collaboration among evangelical Anglicans throughout Australia.
4. To function as a resource group to develop and encourage biblically faithful leadership in all spheres of life.
5. To provide a forum, where appropriate:
  - a) for taking counsel together to develop policies and strategies in matters of common concern
  - b) for articulating gospel distinctives in the area of faith, order, life and mission by consultations and publications.
6. To promote evangelism through the local church and planting new congregations.
7. To coordinate and encourage EFAC branches/ groups in provinces or dioceses of the Anglican Church in Australia.



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