

Editorial

Author — 2

Global Anglican Update

Stephen Hale — 4

Authentic Anglicanism

Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission — 6

When Memory Fades Memory Remains

Sarah Bull — 10

How the Churches are missing out on their mission to the aged

Mike Flynn — 12

In God's Image – A Confession About Human Nature

Michel F. Bird — 14

essentials



Essentials is the journal of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion. Promoting Christ-centred biblical ministry.

Summer 2025

EFAC AUSTRALIA





Editorial

GAVIN PERKINS

In the midst of Anglican realignment it remains vital to remain focused on the ministry and mission we have together.

This edition of Essentials certainly touches on some of the wider issues of Anglican realignment, including a summary of the state of play from Bishop Stephen Hale, and a contribution to the broader question of what it means to be distinctively Anglican as we reproduce here the very helpful paper from the Sydney Doctrine Commission on Authentic Anglicanism. Yet alongside that we each must keep our eyes on the central task of the ministry and mission of our local churches.

That is why it has been so refreshing in Sydney that we have committed together through our recent Synod to have a focus on conversion growth. As the Archbishop of Sydney said in his Presidential Address, “I believe in conversion”.

This focus has arisen in the context of reported data from recent years identifying a downward turn in

attendance in the diocese, especially when considered alongside population growth. So while the most recent data has indicated a positive rebound in attendance, for this to be sustained and increased we need to long prayerfully and proactively for growth by new Christians, not merely by transfer.

The Sydney Synod has held before the churches a goal of seeking to grow by 5% each year by conversion. I think this is a helpful and activating goal. In our local context it means that we have been called to consider what we can do under God to seek to see 20 people to become Christians in our church next year. Acknowledging the divine miracle expressed in each moment of conversion does not in any way deny the role of human planning and effort used by God in such moments, and so it is good to be praying and planning for such an outcome in our church.

At the same time caring well for those that move into the area and find their way into our churches is a vital part of the work. Even the churches with the highest levels of growth by conversion still have the vast majority of their growth from transfer. People arrive in our churches perhaps looking for Christian

Essentials is published by EFAC Australia.

www.efac.org.au.

ISSN 1328-5858.

Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of EFAC nor of the editor.

Material is copyright and may not be reproduced without permission.

Scripture taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Editor for this Issue: Gavin Perkins

Sub-editing, printing and distribution:

Chris Appleby

Journal design: Clare Potts

Issue layout: Doug Rolfe

Editorial correspondence

essentialsd@gmail.com

To notify of a change of address,

contact Rev Chris Appleby

20 Gordon St Fairfield VIC 3078

cappleby@cappleby.net.au

Photo credits (Unsplash): Front cover - Marvin Yoder, p3 Rimón Mori, p6 Sixteen Miles Out, p9 Ian Tan, p11 Stefan Kunze, p13 Mathias Reding, p15 Rachel Cook, p16 Dave Hoefler, p18 Jessica Mangano.

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.

Essentials subscriptions and EFAC membership

You can subscribe to Essentials for \$25 per annum, which includes the 4 print issues delivered to you. Go to www.efac.org.au and click the membership menu tab. Follow the link to sign up as a member and click the Essentials only option.

Membership of EFAC includes a subscription to Essentials, which may be in pdf form in some states. EFAC membership is arranged differently in different states, but is available through the membership menu tab at the EFAC website. The rates are:

\$50 per annum full cost

\$25 per annum for students, missionaries or retired persons.

Subscriptions, memberships and donations all at:

www.efac.org.au



essentials



community in a new town or suburb, or perhaps wounded from a previous church experience. We must care for the sheep and bind their wounds. At the same time we believe in conversion.

In our own parish the approach to seeking conversion has been multi-faceted. We want rich and thoughtful Sunday services to be the open front door of our church, expecting non-believers to be present in our midst. There is no doubt that in the current social and cultural malaise of the West that every week people are walking into our churches because they sense deeply that something is missing and they want to find out if there is something more. Michael Bird's article explores issues in our understanding of human nature and how our church life can be shaped by thoughtful Christian anthropology. It is often in this area that people find themselves asking questions and wondering if there is a better alternative. We must be alert, ready and expectant.

We also intentionally seek to build links to people at times of crisis and life reflection. Courses and Christian input through Divorce Care, Griefshare, parenting seminars, and Blue Christmas services, all seek to place Christians and non-Christians in a shared environment where their shared experience of dislocation in this fallen world creates opportunities to hear afresh, or perhaps for the first time, a message of hope and life. From these courses and relationship connections people flow into Life Series or Christianity Explored, and then God-willing into our regular bible-study groups. Each year God has chosen to lead people from darkness to light, from death to life, through a process like this. This edition of Essentials reflects in two different articles on the role of trials and grief in leading people to explore and find faith in Christ. The Sydney synod in setting this vision for growth by conversion, also chose to put a deliberate emphasis on

youth and children's ministry. This makes sense practically and strategically, and the statistics bear out the way in which so many make their commitment to Christ under the age of 18. However, this goal must be considered alongside the shifting reality of the last two decades in which the youth and children's ministry of most local churches no longer consists of large groups from non-church-going families, but is instead dominated by the children of existing church members. In such a context there is a danger that a focus just on youth and children will see us simply treading water. While we must focus on youth and children this must always include reaching those from families not already in our church. This prevents a call to resourcing youth and children's ministry from becoming merely sub-contracting out Christian parental responsibility in the raising their children in the faith. Youth and children's ministry must believe in conversion not just discipleship of children from Christian homes.

Another danger of this emphasis is that we can lose sight of other ministries that might seem less strategic. And so it is wonderful that in this edition of Essentials we have two articles that focus on the joy of ministry to Seniors. In our church we have found this to be not just encouraging and fruitful, but each year we see elderly members of the wider community renew faith in Christ, or perhaps grasp the gospel of grace for the first time. In the midst of our Anglican realignment this all must remain at the heart of what we do, because we believe in conversion.

Editor
Gavin Perkins, Bowral





Global Anglican Update

BISHOP STEPHEN HALE



pictured

This article is an attempt to capture the current situation in global Anglicanism. It needs to be borne in mind that the current situation is very fluid and between this being written and published another shift could have taken place! The writer is seeking to convey the broad picture and is not offering a commentary on the various developments. All Statements referred to here are to be found on the EFAC Global website.

Stephen Hale

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The actions authorised by the General Synod (by the barest of majorities in the houses of clergy and laity) have been deemed to be illegal. As such the provision of stand-alone services for same sex blessings and any attempt to authorise same sex marriages are on hold. They therefore need to resolve at the next General Synod in February what to do next.

The incoming Archbishop of Canterbury can take a lead to pull back from the past seven years of all-consuming tension and conflict. See the EFAC Global Statement on the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The appointment of the Bishop of London as the next Archbishop of Canterbury has received a mixed reaction both within the Church of England as well as globally. See the EFAC Global Statement on Living in Love and Faith.

THE CHURCH IN WALES

The new Primate in Wales is in a civil same sex relationship. This has been condemned by GAFCON, GSFA and EFAC. The Bishops in Wales have just issued a statement recommending to their General Synod that they make their current trial arrangements re blessings permanent and they progress to introduce same sex marriage. EFAC Global has called for the provision of alternative episcopal oversight for those who cannot in conscience agree with these arrangements. See the EFAC Global Statement on Wales.

GLOBAL SOUTH FELLOWSHIP OF ANGLICAN CHURCHES¹

¹The numbers of members listed here are current at the time of writing and may change in the light of the recent announcement from Gafcon Global given there is significant overlap of membership.

In April 2024 the GSFA held its first Assembly at an Orthodox Conference Centre north of Cairo. GSFA became an ecclesial entity and fellowship of Orthodox Anglican Provinces and Dioceses within the Anglican Communion which originated with 25 Provinces, 12 of which are full covenanted members. There are 3 Associate Provinces/Dioceses and 15 Mission Partner Anglican networks, theological colleges and mission societies (including EFAC Global). GSFA members have a covenantal relationship of mutual accountability. GSFA has three strategic areas of focus:

1. Economic Empowerment
2. Mission Partnerships
3. Bishops' Formation

The current Chair is Archbishop Justin Badi (Primate of South Sudan). The Secretariat is based in Singapore and Cairo.

GAFCON GLOBAL²

Gafcon is a global movement, gathering authentic Anglicans, guarding God's gospel, growing orthodox leaders, and generating missional resources, for the glory of God.

Following on from the Martyrs Day Statement (2025) Gafcon has established itself as the Global Anglican Communion. It is made up of autonomous Provinces/Dioceses that have rejected the instruments of Communion of the Anglican Communion and are bound together by a commitment to the authority of the Bible and the Jerusalem Declaration.

Gafcon Global as a new ecclesial entity is holding a Bishops Conference in Nigeria in March 2026 at which a new Chair will be elected. It is led by a Primates council.

²The numbers of members listed on their website may change in the light of the recent announcement, given there is significant overlap of membership with the GSFA and some Provinces/Dioceses have constitutional links to Canterbury and the Anglican Communion (including Australia).



The current Chair is Archbishop Laurent Mbanda (Primate of Rwanda). The Secretariat is based in Plano Texas.

THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

The IASCUFO Report on the future of the Anglican Communion was released in December 2024. There was much to be critical of in relation to this report including their unwillingness to uphold an orthodox position on human sexuality. The key recommendations will be considered by the Anglican Consultative Council when it meets in Ireland in July 2026.

The IASCUFO Nairobi-Cairo Proposals include the following proposals:

1. That the 1930 Lambeth Conference description of the Anglican Communion be amended, including the deletion of the phrase “*in communion with the see of Canterbury*” and its replacement with words which include “*bound together through ... historic connection with the See of Canterbury*”.

2. That the existing structures be changed, including a rotating presidency of the Anglican Consultative Council.

See the EFAC Global Statement on the IASCUFO proposals.

ANGLICAN CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

In November this year Bishop Mark Short became the Primate of the ACA. Bishop Mark has been the Bishop of Canberra Goulburn since 2019 and is the first evangelical Primate since we started electing Primates in 1982. Also in November Bishop Ric Thorpe will be installed as Archbishop of Melbourne. Bishop Ric has been the Bishop of Islington since 2015, a suffragan bishop in the Diocese of London. He has been responsible for church planting and the church growth work of the Diocese as well as nationally.

Bishop Stephen Hale is Chair of EFAC Australia and General Secretary of EFAC Global.

Authentic Anglicanism

A REPORT OF THE SYDNEY DIOCESAN DOCTRINE COMMISSION

‘Anglicanism’ is the label attached to a form of Christian corporate life that traces its theological convictions and ecclesiastical practice to the New Testament, with an especially formative moment of clarification and development at the time of the English Reformation. Its congregations are particular instantiations of the one holy catholic and apostolic church confessed in the ecumenical creeds, yet they share distinctives that mark them out from other communions and denominations. These distinctives could be defined and described in a number of ways, of which two are most common: a phenomenological approach and a theological approach.

A phenomenological approach often begins by drawing attention to the diversity of practice that has emerged over the past 500 years, despite numerous Acts of Uniformity. It then proceeds to infer from this a distinctive ‘ethos’ of Anglicanism that claims for itself apostolicity, catholicity, comprehensiveness, and so on. The advantage of this approach lies in its attention to history and the way canon law has or has not shaped the practices of the church. In other words, it emphasises description. Its disadvantage lies in the way it sidesteps the question of what Anglican

identity should be on the basis of its foundational documents. In other words, it ignores what is normative. A theological approach, in contrast, draws attention to the common convictions that shape the doctrine and practice of Anglican churches and which have proven to be stable markers of Anglican identity. These arise from Scripture and are given formal expression in The Articles of Religion (1571), the Book of Common Prayer (1662) and the Ordinal (1662), together known as ‘the formularies’. The theology contained in these documents provides a summary of an Anglican reading of Scripture and its application to Christian corporate life. The advantage of this approach is the way it gives due weight to these foundational documents of Anglicanism and the intention of those who wrote them as part of their attempt to reform England. Its disadvantage lies in its potential to be doctrinaire and to disregard the historical complexities of application.

We will take a theological approach, convinced that it has always been the case that Anglican practice ought to be explained by Anglican doctrine. Put differently, the confessional aspects of Anglicanism are (or at least should be) the best explanation of its practice and the way it orders ministry. In order to avoid the disadvantages mentioned above, and to prevent a presentation of Anglicanism that is merely a projection of our own preferences on to a larger canvas, this theological approach is anchored in the formularies, recognising that the formularies themselves allow for a flexibility to



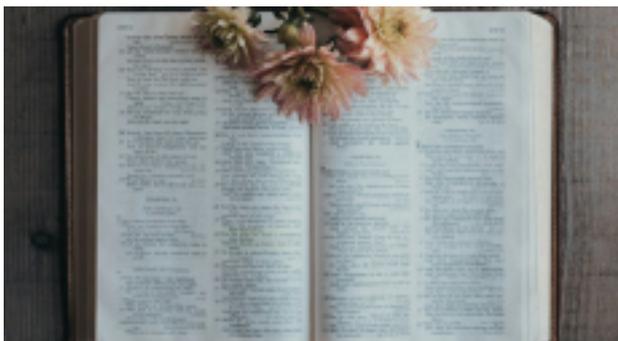
respond to the changing context of the church in its ministry and mission.

Whatever its accidental features may be, the Anglican Church can be authentic only on the basis of its confessions of faith as they are expressed in the formularies. Perhaps the three most distinctive elements of authentic Anglicanism are its confessional, liturgical, and episcopal character. However, before turning to these, it will be important to consider the place of Scripture in authentic Anglicanism.

THE PLACE OF SCRIPTURE IN AUTHENTIC ANGLICANISM

Every legitimate form of church gives a central role to engagement with the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. In doing so Anglicanism can hardly claim to be distinctive. The reading and exposition of Scripture has been part of Christian gatherings since the time of the apostles, just as the reading and reflection upon the Hebrew Scriptures was a central part of synagogue gatherings before the time of Jesus.

However, the English reformers recognised a critical role for sustained engagement with the Scriptures as a key strategy for the reformation of the English Realm. In one of the prefaces he wrote for the Book of Common Prayer, Archbishop Cranmer, the chief architect of reformation Anglicanism, presented this as a return to ‘the godly and decent order of the ancient Fathers’: ‘For they so ordered the matter, that the whole Bible, (or the greatest part thereof) should be read over once every year; intending thereby, that the Clergy, and especially such as were Ministers in the congregation, should (by often reading, and meditation in God’s word) be stirred up to godliness themselves, and be more able to exhort others by wholesome doctrine, and to confute them that were adversaries of the truth; and further, that the people (by daily hearing of holy Scripture read in the Church) might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion.’ (‘Concerning the Service of the Church’).



Cranmer was convinced that the word of God written (Article 20) is powerful and that the Spirit is able to transform lives as he writes God’s word on human hearts. Only doctrine that can be proved by Scripture is to be believed as ‘an article of the Faith’ (Articles 6, 20).

Nevertheless, he did not restrict those things done within church to only those things that could be proved by Scripture. Rather, he retained ‘ceremonies’ from the pre-Reformation church as much because they promoted ‘a decent order in the Church, (for the which they were first devised) as because they pertain to edification, whereunto all things done in the Church (as the Apostle teacheth) ought to be referred’ (‘Of Ceremonies, Why some be Abolished, and some Retained’). In other words, from the beginning Anglicans upheld the normative principle — what is not forbidden in Scripture is permitted — rather than the regulative principle — only what is commanded in Scripture is permitted.

In line with this new and somewhat distinctive emphasis on Scripture as the means of national reform, access to the Bible in the vernacular was championed. When the Book of Common Prayer was presented, its shape was determined by and its language saturated with the words of Scripture. This even found expression in Elizabethan church architecture, which placed neither an altar nor a pulpit in the most prominent place, but rather made the focal point the Bible on a lectern.

AUTHENTIC ANGLICANISM HAS A CONFESSIONAL CHARACTER

To speak of Anglican identity as ‘confessional’ is not merely to make a statement about its contingent historical foundations. It is to align that identity with a set of normative doctrinal commitments. The content and structure of The Articles of Religion give formal expression to these normative commitments.

First, the Articles uphold the supreme authority of Holy Scripture as ‘the pure Word of God’ and the norming norm of Anglican identity (Article 6). The unique and irreplaceable foundation of Scripture ensures that all doctrinal statements made by the church, including the Articles themselves, are always derivative and subordinate in character (Article 8). Their validity and normative force only arise from their consistency with the totality of biblical teaching (Articles 20, 21). In other words, the normative character of the Articles is itself normed by Scripture.

However, to refer to Scripture and its teaching as the foundational authority for Anglican identity, while indisputable, does not capture the totality of that confessional identity. Besides attesting to the final rule of Scripture, the Articles provide an authoritative doctrinal



framework that assists the reading of Scripture. They make clear the way Anglicans read Scripture, not least in their insistence that no part of Scripture is to be read in a way that contradicts another (Article 20). In this the Anglican approach to Scripture finds its origin in, and shares much in common with other early confessional documents of the European Reformation, both Lutheran and Reformed.

In addition to their commitment to the supreme authority of Scripture, the Protestant character of the Articles is evident in their affirmation of the doctrinal authority of the Ancient Creeds (Articles 1–5, 8), the depraved condition of humanity, sovereign election to salvation in Christ, the necessity of justification by faith in the finished work of Christ alone (Articles 9, 10, 11, 13, 17, 18, 31), the two dominical sacraments of ‘Baptism and the Supper of the Lord’ — especially the baptism of children (Articles 25–28), and the broad contours of a magisterial ecclesial settlement (Articles 36–39). It is made even more clear by their rejection of key elements of distinctively Roman Catholic piety and doctrine, especially concerning the Mass, works of supererogation, purgatory, the invocation of the saints, and the authority of church tradition (Articles 7–9, 19, 20, 22, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34).

While the Articles exhibit a certain minimalism when placed alongside some other Reformed Confessions, their Reformed character (in distinction from being merely Lutheran) is unmistakable and unambiguous. The doctrinal Homilies enlarge upon key Reformed doctrines. The notebooks of the key drafters of the Articles, especially those of Thomas Cranmer, make clear their Reformed convictions. It is not at all surprising that within ten years of the Articles being promulgated (1571), works were published that demonstrated the Reformed character of the Articles and so of Anglican identity (e.g., Thomas Rogers, *A Harmony of the Confessions of Faith of the Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, 1581).

Correspondence between the English reformers and Reformed theologians on the Continent, such as Calvin, Bucer, Vermigli and especially Bullinger, further establishes that the foundational documents of Anglicanism were meant to embody Reformed theology. Consequently, any interpretation of the Articles that contradicts their essentially Reformed character is a clear violation of their historical intention.

The purpose of the Articles was to provide binding guidance regarding the Anglican Church’s fidelity to Scriptural orthodoxy. This is underscored by the longstanding and widespread requirement of *ex animo* (from the heart) clerical subscription to the Articles extending back through the Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical (1604) to The Subscription Act (1571). The 1604 Canons, mostly in place in Australia until the end of

the twentieth century, even warned of excommunication for any laity who could not assent to the Articles in good conscience. The principle of clerical subscription to the Articles remains enshrined in contemporary versions of the Ordinal, and is implied in the Canon Concerning Holy Orders (2004) of the Anglican Church of Australia. So, once again, any interpretation of the Articles that treats them as a merely contingent historical statement is inconsistent with their historical intention.

It is undeniably true that the Articles have been received and interpreted by Anglicans in ways that do not neatly align with their Reformed heritage. It is also true that their original historical setting does not neatly align with the global context of Anglican identity today. Contextualising these doctrinal commitments in a way that is sensitive to the breadth of cultures represented in this global setting is a pressing need (e.g., concerning the character and expression of the church’s establishment in relation to the state). However, respecting and preserving their enduring Reformed character remains paramount.

AUTHENTIC ANGLICANISM HAS A LITURGICAL DISPOSITION

The first major formulary of the English Reformation was the Book of Common Prayer (BCP). Authorised and issued in 1549, it replaced the various pre-Reformational service books used in the Realm. It was written entirely in English, and the reformation principles of justification only by faith and the sufficiency of the Scriptures for salvation shaped the services significantly. Nevertheless, there were some problematic ambiguities and residual Roman features within the liturgy which required further revision. As a result, a second and more definitively reformed BCP was produced in 1552. An only very slightly modified version of this book was republished and authorised after the restoration of the monarchy in England (1662). It is this 1662 version of the Book of Common Prayer that has had a global influence and is still regarded in many places, including in the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, as ‘the authorised standard of worship’.

The major principles that shaped the ‘Publick Liturgy’ of the BCP were explicitly outlined in its prefaces. These were (1) the preservation of the best liturgical practice of the previous fifteen centuries; (2) a simplification of the many and varied books and devices needed to conduct public worship; (3) purification through the removal of unbiblical aspects of Roman Catholicism; (4) intelligibility of the service through the use of understandable language which enables participation and edification; and (5) uniformity of worship across the thousands of parishes in order to strengthen unity between parishioners and



throughout the national church. These remain relevant and desirable principles which inform authentic Anglican liturgical variations or revisions today.

Some of the major liturgical features of authentic Anglicanism include the following.

Services guided by the public reading of Holy Scripture. The ‘continual course of the reading of the Scripture’ is the Cranmerian principle which implies that the lectionary is the backbone of regular worship. Cranmer’s lectionary took the congregation through the whole of the Bible in a year, the New Testament twice, and the Psalms once a month. These readings may but are not necessarily tied to the topic or text of the sermon when there is one, but they do direct and supply much of the substance of church services.

Services which regularly use ancient and biblically-based elements of corporate worship for the edification of the congregation. Such elements include declaring together one of the creeds (Apostles’, Nicene, or Athanasian), corporate confession and a general ministerial absolution of sin based on the promises of the gospel, the singing or saying of hymns of praise, and the seasonal collects and intercessory prayers.

Services which are tied to the pattern of Jesus’ earthly life. Though challenged by some on the basis of texts such as Galatians 4:8–11, the Anglican liturgies retained the yearly, weekly, and daily rhythm of the church calendar (especially focused on Easter and those which, from Advent to Trinity, provided an opportunity to rehearse the entire course of Jesus’ life).

Services which value both word and sacrament. The preaching of the pure word of God and the due administration of the sacraments according to Christ’s ordinance are the confessional marks of the Church (Art. 19). Neither the preaching of sermons, nor the celebration of sacraments are to be seen as appendages to the ordinary liturgical diet of authentic Anglicanism. This is because they are gifts of God’s grace, given to grow, mature, and build his church. There is a rich pastoral dimension to Anglican liturgical expression. The BCP itself includes services for the Solemnisation of Matrimony, Public and Private Baptism, Visitation of the Sick, and the Burial of the Dead. A Catechism is provided for the spiritual strengthening of the young, and – though less used in modern contexts – the ‘Churching of Women’ service demonstrates deep care for the challenges related to childbirth. Moreover, the BCP’s prayers show sensitivity to both the problem of sin (‘We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table’) and the solution of salvation (‘But you are the same Lord, whose nature of always to have mercy’). Altogether, these liturgical words evince much pastoral wisdom from the past for the present. While the BCP itself is no longer used in many contemporary churches, its doctrine and principles continue significantly to shape authentic Anglican

corporate worship. The ordered and principled shape of what we do when we are gathered by the Spirit to hear God’s word, to respond to that word in prayer and praise, and ‘to stir up one another love and good works’ does need to be expressed in an appropriate contemporary idiom. Cranmer himself envisaged that revision to the BCP would continue, guided by the principles of preservation, simplification, purification, intelligibility and uniformity. Above all, an authentically Anglican approach to liturgy is undergirded by an important Scriptural interconnectedness in both form and substance. This requires careful thought and preparation, paying due attention not only to the liturgical features mentioned above, but also to the intention lying behind them. Authentic Anglican liturgy is not chaotic but draws on this great heritage in order to promote the edification of God’s people (1 Corinthians 14:26), and the manifestation of the wisdom of God in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10).

AUTHENTIC ANGLICANISM HAS AN EPISCOPAL GOVERNMENT

Finally, a confessionally Anglican identity is distinctively episcopal, with a commitment to the three-fold order of Christian ministry: Bishops, Priests (Presbyters), and Deacons (Article 36). This order is reflected in the BCP and affirmed in the Ordinal, the third traditional formulary of Anglicanism. It is also embedded in section 3 of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia.

Why did the English reformers retain this threefold order when others on the Continent had dispensed with it? The answer lies in the principles of reformation we have already identified in Cranmer’s preface to the BCP. One of these was only to abolish ceremonies that were a perversion of Christianity and to retain other traditional aspects of church experience. In addition, to retain those forms and practices that were not inimical to the gospel reinforced the conviction of the Reformers that they were not creating a new church but calling a compromised church back to its true heritage. The emergence of Anglicanism was an exercise in Reformation not reconstruction.

Cranmer believed that episcopacy ought to be retained as it was compatible with the teaching of the Bible and it had been a consistent feature of ecclesiastical order ‘from the Apostles’ time’. Yet Cranmer did not believe that bishops are essential to constitute the church. Rather, they are provided for the welfare of the church.

The consecration service constructed by Cranmer emphasises the upholding and teaching of Holy Scriptures as central to episcopal ministry. Those being consecrated are asked if they are persuaded of the sufficiency of the



Scriptures for everything required for salvation. They are asked if they are determined to use the Scriptures to instruct the people in what is essential for salvation and not teach anything as necessary which is not contained in the Bible. Thirdly, they are asked to commit themselves to the study of the Bible so they may uphold what is true and drive away false teaching.

This emphasis on the role of an Anglican bishop as a guardian of the faith is significant in grounding the spiritual authority associated with the role of the bishop. It is an authority that is derivative from the authority of God's word and its legitimacy is forfeited when the bishop begins to teach or condone things contrary to the Bible.

CONCLUSION

We have endeavoured to give a theological account of authentic Anglicanism that is grounded in its foundational documents: The Book of Common Prayer, The Ordinal, and The Articles of Religion. This approach has been taken because of a fundamental conviction that doctrine should determine practice rather than practice dictate doctrine. What we are committed to believe as Anglicans is given to us in the formularies and those beliefs fleshed out in practice lie at the heart of what it means to be Anglican. However, through the centuries other Anglican 'identities' have been fabricated that are grounded quite differently. Some have attempted to characterise Anglicanism as a middle way (*via media*) between Catholicism and Protestantism, or more specifically between Rome and Geneva. However, this way of conceiving of Anglican identity is fatally flawed. In the first place, the term is not explicitly used by the first English reformers. It finds no expression in the Articles of Religion, which repudiate Roman doctrine and that of the Anabaptists while affirming mainstream Reformed doctrines, as noted above. The idea of a *via media* does not appear even in Richard Hooker, to whom it is regularly attributed. Even Archbishop Matthew Parker's use of the expression 'golden mean' was not about a doctrinal mid-point between Catholicism and Protestantism. The *via media* idea emerges, rather, in the context of the Oxford Movement as part of a call for a more 'Catholic' form of Anglicanism. John Henry Newman manufactured this conception in Tracts 38 and 41 of his *Tracts for the Times*, published in 1834. Newman came to realise any attempt to reconcile Anglican doctrine and that Roman Catholicism was futile, and so he converted to Roman Catholicism (1845), and was eventually made a Cardinal (1879).

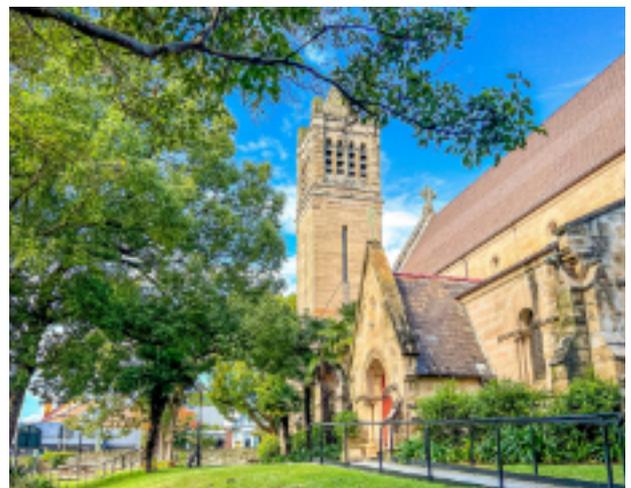
From at least the time of Resolution 49 of the 1930 Lambeth Conference, it has been common to speak of a defining characteristic of Anglicanism as 'communion with the See of Canterbury'. The expression had been in use for century earlier by that time, but it was not until the second

half of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century that it was elevated to the measure of membership of the Anglican communion and so of Anglican identity. Yet, as Andrew Atherstone makes clear, this involves the misstep of taking an expression originally meant to counter 'the universalising claims of the Church of Rome' therefore applied externally, and using it to distinguish between those claiming to be Anglican, and so applying it internally. To define being Anglican by communion with the See of Canterbury also raises a number of very difficult questions, such as what to do when the See of Canterbury is occupied by someone who has abandoned the teaching of Scripture at one point or another.

A third approach to defining Anglicanism adopted by some in recent years has been to emphasise toleration of doctrinal diversity as characteristic of Anglicanism and so to valorise its comprehensiveness. This view was promoted strongly by Anglican theologian F. D. Maurice in the nineteenth century and Archbishops Runcie and Carey in the twentieth. Perhaps none has been more scathing of this conception than Professor (later Bishop) Stephen Sykes, who wrote of how 'it has served as an open invitation to intellectual laziness and self-deception' and 'has led to an ultimately illusory self-projection as a Church without any specific doctrinal or confessional position' (*The Integrity of Anglicanism*, 19).

None of these alternatives are satisfactory as a definition of authentic Anglicanism, even if they provide descriptions of perspectives valued by many contemporary Anglicans. Anglicanism that is true to its heritage is not indifferent when it comes to theology. It has a clearly confessional character which is not simply a matter of doctrinal assent but also determines church practice and even the shape of church government: confessional, liturgical and episcopal.

Sydney Anglican Doctrine Commission 16 December 2024





When Memory Fades Memory Remains

SARAH BULL



Sarah Bull

pictured

Imagine, for a moment, what it might feel like if your mind began to slip into confusion and forgetfulness. Imagine the disorientation of not being able to attend Sunday services week by week, to no longer participate in the ministries that once filled your heart with joy, or to miss the regular fellowship of believers who have long been your church family.

Now imagine knowing that others think you are “faithful and solid” in your faith—someone who has walked steadfastly with Christ for decades. They assume you are fine, confident you will endure to the end. But quietly, you begin to doubt. Bible passages you once recalled feel lost. You find it difficult to bring the right words together in prayer. You long for the closeness of God’s Word and His people but feel your capacity slipping away.

This is the reality for many older saints among us. And this is where the beauty and necessity of seniors’ ministry comes into sharp focus.

THE MINISTRY OF PRAYER AND THE POWER OF THE WORD

Seniors’ ministry calls us back to the simplicity of Christian service: the ministry of presence, the reading of Scripture, and the offering of prayer. It is, in many ways, ministry at its purest—meeting people where they are, with the Word of God and the love of Christ.

In my four years serving in this ministry, I have been continually amazed by how deeply God’s Spirit works in hearts and minds, even in the midst of dementia and cognitive decline. The Word of God and the truths of the Gospel are not easily forgotten; they are etched deep within the souls of those who belong to Him.

Just last week, I spent time with an older woman who could easily be described as someone “safe in Christ.” As we met, we sang the first verses of some well-known hymns. The tunes and long-held words were drawn from her core memory. When we began “How Great Thou Art,” her voice joined in, hesitant at first but growing stronger with each familiar phrase. I then read Psalm 23 aloud, and she quietly echoed some of the words, “The Lord is my shepherd...”

Afterwards, I prayed for her, and to my delight, she wanted to pray too. Her words were not always coherent, yet within her fragmented sentences were pockets of deep truth and devotion:

“We come before you, Father... our hearts... we thank you, Father for... what a glorious time... we continue to pray, Father...”

In that moment, I could see that the Spirit of God was still renewing her inwardly, even as her outward self was frail. What a profound picture of the grace and faithfulness of our Lord, who does not abandon His children even when memory fades. God is not hampered by dementia. He continues to powerfully work within us. He is as close to us as he has ever been.

SEEING GOD’S WORK IN THE HIDDEN PLACES

Encounters like these are a visible reminder that God is at work, but not every visit looks like this. Some dear brothers and sisters I visit have not opened their eyes in years. They make no response that can be seen or heard. Yet I still read the Scriptures and pray aloud with them, trusting that God’s Spirit is doing His quiet, unseen work. It’s in those moments I find myself asking: *Do I really believe that God renews His people day by day, even when I can’t see it?* The answer, I must remind myself, is yes. Because He promises it in His Word.

A NEW KIND OF MINISTRY

Many of the older saints I meet express a deep sense of loss. They tell me, “I can’t do anything anymore for God.” There is a grief that comes with no longer being able to serve as they once did—to lead Bible studies, sing in the choir, or volunteer at church events. But I often remind them that even in this season, God is shaping within them a new kind of ministry.

It may be quieter and less visible, but it is no less significant. It is the ministry of prayer, of patient endurance, of showing those around them what it means to trust in God through weakness. It is the testimony of faith that endures when strength is gone.



For family members and caregivers, this too is a ministry of great love—showing Christlike patience and compassion, often in small, unseen acts of service. These moments, sustained only by the grace of God, become a living witness to the truth that His power is made perfect in weakness.

A PERSONAL STORY OF GRACE

This ministry also has personal meaning for me. My own mum lived with Alzheimer's disease for many years. In her later stages, she spoke only occasionally, and even then, her words were often difficult to understand.

One day, two nursing staff were helping her while talking to each other about their teenage children and the worries they carried. They turned to my mum and said, half-jokingly, "You'd know all about this, Ros." To their surprise, she replied clearly and simply, "Pray."

Just one word—but what a word! Who knows the impact of that quiet response on those two women? It was a moment of clarity, a glimpse of Christ's enduring presence in a frail vessel. God was still using her life and witness, even in her physical and cognitive limitation.

THE CHALLENGES AND THE JOY

Of course, this ministry is not without its difficulties. Many of the volunteers who visit and care for seniors in aged care or at home are themselves dealing with health issues, family responsibilities, or other constraints. This means we must be flexible, thankful for the times when we can serve, and prayerful and understanding when we cannot.

There is also the recurring sorrow of farewelling dear friends. In this ministry, loss is a regular companion. We grieve, but not without hope. Each farewell is a reminder that it is goodbye for now, not forever. Caring for our own hearts through these moments is essential if we are to continue serving in this space with tenderness and endurance.

And yet, despite these challenges, the joy of seniors' ministry runs deep. There are moments when the comfort of Scripture and the hope of the Gospel are almost tangible—in a tear that slips down a cheek, in a word of recognition, in the squeeze of a hand. These are incredible moments if we only take notice, glimpses of God's work breaking through our frailty.

Almost without fail, when I drive away from a visit or a group gathering, I find myself profoundly blessed. To listen, to be present, to read Scripture and pray with those who have walked with the Lord for so long—these are gifts.

Truly, Proverbs 11:25 comes to life here:

*"Whoever brings blessing will be enriched,
and one who waters will himself be watered."*

In serving others, we are refreshed. In blessing them, we are blessed. And in walking alongside those nearing the end of their earthly race, we are reminded of our own hope—that one day, we too will see our Lord face to face, whole and renewed forever.

Sarah Bull ministers in both parish and school contexts in the Southern Highlands and Wollondilly areas of NSW





How the Churches are missing out on their mission to the aged

MIKE FLYNN

Doug had been a decorated, high-ranking military leader, an experienced and inventive engineer, and a determined Christian from Presbyterian roots. It was he who first explained to me that when ministers sought to close traditional worship in the name of relevance and outreach, the message they conveyed to the people who depended on that worship was the Christian truths they had been taught in their youth were no longer considered true.

Doug described the harm he had seen this produce, as people left their churches of many years, their faith in Christ damaged at a time in life when maintaining confidence in the world to come was vitally important.

I have met many of these traditional refugees, angry and wounded. Most could not articulate as well as Doug what has hurt them but changing and devaluing their worship traditions and personal history had damaged their faith as effectively as teaching them heresy. Their confidence in what they were first taught had been lost.

However, as pastors, we also know other ways of diagnosing the faith struggles of older church members. Sometimes there are older traditionalists who are unable to adapt. Some act as gatekeepers against gospel mission because their congregations lost their gospel heart to the optimistic naivety of old-school liberal teaching decades ago. The result was these churches eventually became about themselves. Their history and community mattered more than the mission, truth and glory of God's gospel. Pastors who want to see these churches grow feel compelled not only to stop liberal teaching but the traditions it became associated with. These pastors will then swim against a strong tide to update the style of worship in the name of mission and growth. In my denomination these efforts are often not welcomed and will mostly be costly for both the pastor and the congregation, too often ending in mutual frustration.

But, there is evidence we can do better and that it is possible to turn our ministry to older people and declining congregations into fruitful gospel opportunity. After all, if we are students of the Bible we know we are taught to treat our elders with respect¹, and respond to our

¹ For example: Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:32; 1 Timothy 5:1.



Mike Flynn

pictured

opponents with gentleness,² even love.³ I have seen this approach create an invitation that is more likely to help some turn towards God during a critical and confronting time of life. However, grace and graciousness will also confirm the hardness of others. Nevertheless, to be fruitful in any mission to older people, I suggest we begin our diagnosis of their faith by first describing, valuing, and nurturing them according to Paul's advice in Romans 14 rather than rebuking or dismissing them by drawing parallels with Romans 2.

ROMANS 14

In Romans 14, Paul continues the application of the gospel (Romans 1:16,17) he began in chapter 12. By chapter 14 he addresses how to worship God (12.1,2) by acting in love within the cultural and religious diversity of the first-century church. The question is, how does a congregation live out the gospel expounded in Romans 1 to 11 given the diverse spiritual traditions that were being drawn together by this powerful gospel? If we consider the many strands of Jewish devotional practice and the multiple sensibilities burnt into the souls of Gentiles escaping their pagan pasts, it looks like an unworkable diversity to manage.

In Romans 14 there are religious clashes over traditions of meat eating, alcohol consumption, fasting, and the observance of holy days (14:2,5,21). Paul's solution is to ask the church in Rome to protect and build up the faith of those whose religious identity is linked strongly to their traditions. He wants the strong in faith (whose beliefs free them, to some extent, from the traditions they inherited⁴) not to cause the weak in faith (those who link their

² For example: Ephesians 4:2; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:25; Galatians 6:1, James 3:17-18, 5:19,20; Jude 20-22.,

³ Matthew 5:43-48.

⁴ See 1 Corinthians 8 for a longer explanation



traditions more firmly to the truth of their beliefs) to act against their conscience because, for them, it would be a sin (14:23).

This is not pastoral relativism; this is Paul addressing a pastoral problem that remains common in our churches. That if we act against our conscience on non-essential traditions, that nevertheless was the packaging in which truth was delivered to us, then we risk becoming disoriented and could act against our conscience on essential gospel truths and behaviour.

The application of this for us as pastors today is, rather than seeing our elders as roadblocks of our ministries, it is wiser to spend our energy working out how to encourage their Christian discipleship using the traditions that helped



form their trust in Christ. We also need to consider our wider mission field. Our ageing population relates more readily to traditional forms of Christian worship and many young, disillusioned post-modernists, are fascinated and moved by the traditional forms of Christianity they see are still ‘standing at their post’.¹ Meanwhile, contemporary forms of worship are viewed with increasing suspicion².

I have seen how, in my denomination and others that, if sincerely done, traditional forms of worship combined with biblical, creedal beliefs, result in changed lives and therefore God’s heart for mission is revived. It is then possible for those congregations to grow in even the most unpromising parts of our city. The issue is less with the forms of worship and more with the openness of our hearts towards God and his words affecting our lives.

OUR TRADITIONS, OUR OPPORTUNITIES

All of us carry traditions which, at their best, have formed us to believe and live gospel truths and we are wise to be careful about our traditions because they are useful servants but deadly masters³. But if we are formed by what now passes as contemporary worship, we need to accept it will be outmoded and set aside by the new leaders who are coming. The worship and church styles that once nurtured us will be challenged. As we age and we too struggle to hold onto energy, focus and habits that prompt our memories, we too will find the form (our traditions), has become a strong vehicle for the substance (the gospel).

So, dear pastor, please do not risk harming the faith and conscience of others or miss out on the missional opportunity older traditions offer to move many to Christ Jesus and deeper into him. Try to honour our elders and, in gentleness, test if they are in any way open to the words of God, even if that means honouring them as your weaker brothers and sisters.

Mike Flynn has worked in ordained Anglican ministry for over 30 years as a local church minister, university and aged care chaplain. He currently serves as Vicar of St. John’s Brunswick West in Victoria and as Archdeacon for Essendon in the Diocese of Melbourne.

¹ James Marriott, Full Fat Faith, the young people filling our churches (The Times, 28th of August 2025)

² For example: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-06-11/after-the-demise-of-hillsong-is-there-a-place-for-the-church-in-/102465418>

³ For example: Mark 7:7-13



In God's Image – A Confession About Human Nature

MICHEL F. BIRD



Michel F. Bird

pictured

I've long argued that theological anthropology is the # 1 issue that Christians must wrestle with today. Whether we are talking about sexuality, gender identity, transgenderism, transhumanism, artificial intelligence, disability, or even the soul, it is all comes down to "what is a human being?"

What follows below is my Beta-Test of some ideas on theological anthropology.

Now, this is spectacularly hard and I might be spectacularly wrong, because some of these issues are very complex, they defy simplistic analyses or resolution, and they involve a combination of biology, psychology, and sociology. Or else, many theologians within the Christian tradition might legitimately dispute the validity or cogency of the various assertions I make below. But these are the issues that we simply must address today in the second quarter of the twenty-first century.

I'm using a format of we confess, we affirm, we deny, and we commit. I hope it reads well - but remember, it is only a first draft!

THE IMAGE OF GOD

We confess that all human beings are created in the image of God, bearing inherent dignity, worth, and value that cannot be diminished or destroyed (Genesis 1:27-28).

We affirm that by God's grace, this image is present in every person from conception to death.

We deny that this image is based on human ability, is reducible to a capacity for either rationality or relationships, or is a cultural mandate. Instead, we affirm that the image comprises the glorious status of all persons as God's royal representatives in the world who are called to be custodians of creation.

We commit to affirming the image of God as the basis for our missions, acts of mercy, and the pursuit of justice in the world.

DISABILITY

We confess that the church is called to be a community of inclusion, belonging, accessibility, welcoming and empowering all people to participate fully in worship, fellowship, and service according to their gifts and calling. We affirm that all persons with disabilities fully bear the image of God and possess equal dignity, worth, and value.

We affirm that disability is part of the diverse expression of human experience in a fallen world, and we recognise that persons with disabilities often demonstrate profound faith, wisdom, and gifts that enrich the body of Christ. We affirm that some disabilities involve significant suffering and challenges, while recognising that living with disability itself does not automatically equate to suffering or diminished quality of life. We affirm the value of medical intervention and assistive technologies that can enhance independence and participation, while also celebrating the inherent worth of every person regardless of their abilities or limitations.

We deny any notion that disability diminishes one's humanity or reflects divine punishment or a lack of faith. We commit to removing barriers—physical, social, and attitudinal—that prevent full participation and to learning from the unique perspectives and contributions of our brothers and sisters with disabilities.

THE HUMAN SOUL

We confess that humans are embodied souls, created as unified selves who are comprised of both material and immaterial aspects.

We affirm that God created human beings as integrated persons whose bodies and souls together constitute our full humanity. We affirm the goodness of embodied existence while recognising that both our physical and spiritual dimensions have been affected by the fall and are in need of redemption through Jesus Christ. After the separation between the soul and body and death, the two are wonderfully reunited in our future glorified bodies at the resurrection of the dead.

We deny that humans are merely physical beings, or are merely souls temporarily trapped in the prison of their bodies. We deny that the Christian hope is akin to the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, or nothingness.



We commit to loving God with our bodies, souls, and the whole fibre of our being.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

We confess that God created humans as sexual beings and sexuality is an important facet of human existence, inherently good, while open to corruption and debasement.

We affirm that sexual intimacy is a gift from God, designed for the context of marriage between one man and one woman, where it serves the purposes of personal union, procreation, and mutual flourishing. We affirm that sexuality encompasses physical intimacy as well as our capacity for deep relationships. We affirm the damage and dangers wrought by sexual abuse, sexual violence, sexual addiction, and pornography.

We deny that sexual congress is inherently sinful, that all sexual desires should be met, or that singleness and celibacy (though trying for many) are lesser states of human existence.

We commit ourselves to enjoying and disciplining our sexual desires to the glory of God.

SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

We confess that some believers experience same-sex attraction even as they live in holiness, love, and obey the commandments of Jesus.

We affirm that there are biblical prohibitions about homoerotic intercourse, even as all Christians struggle with various sexual temptations and are called to faithful discipleship in their sexuality.

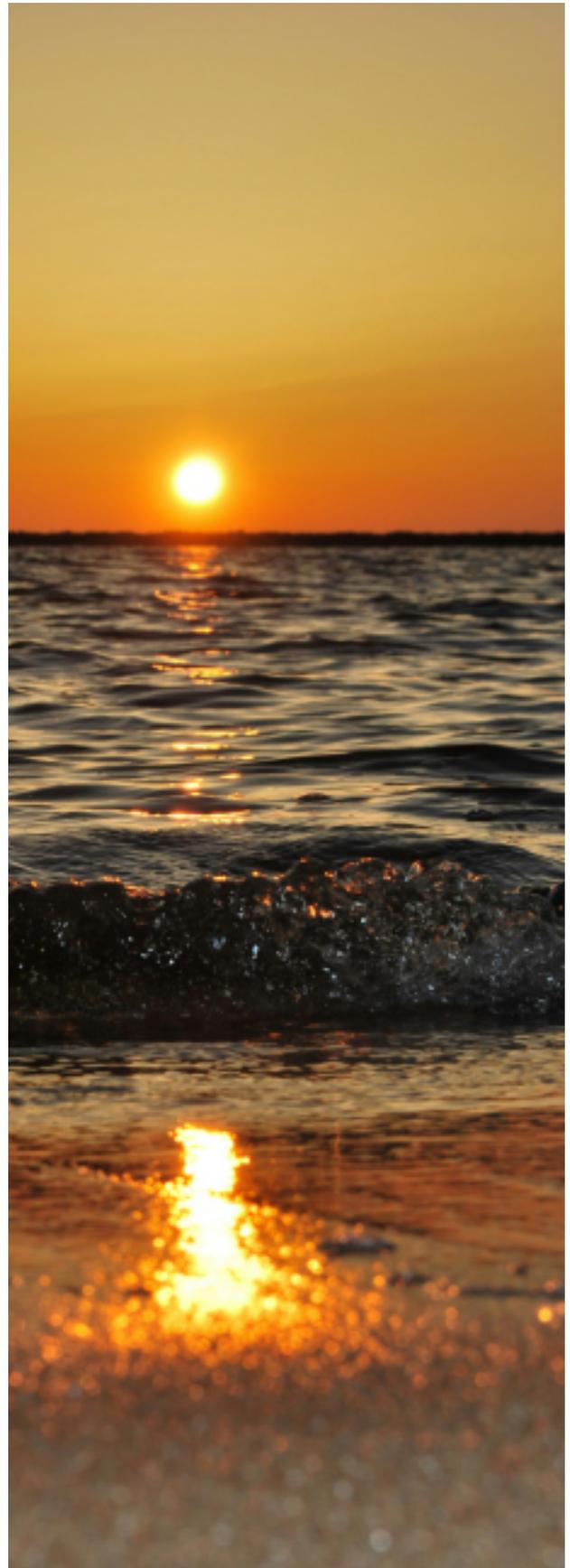
We deny that same-sex sin is more sinful than heterosexual sin. We deny that one's sexual orientation is inherently sinful, it diminishes someone's worth, deprives them of their ability to live faithfully as followers of Jesus, or disqualifies them from service and ministry.

We commit to providing a loving community, pastoral care, and opportunities for meaningful service and relationships for all members of our congregations irrespective of their sexual orientation.

SEXUAL DIMORPHISM AND GENDER IDENTITY

We confess that biological sex is determined at conception and not assigned after birth.

We affirm that biological sex refers to our procreative function in producing either large (egg for women) or small (sperm for men) gametes. We also affirm that gender refers to the various ways that societies and cultures create social mores to regulate expectations about men and women and the relationship between them. We affirm that while sex is binary and gender is a social construct, both





can be complicated by genetic, psychological, and social flaws in persons and confusion in cultural discourse.

We deny that an ephemeral gender identity supercedes a person's empirical biological identity as male and female when it comes to law and human rights.

We commit ourselves to championing sex-based rights even as we seek to discern the negative implications of the artificial overlay of gender in legal and cultural discourses in our societies.

INTERSEX PERSONS

We recognise that some individuals are born with intersex conditions that affect their sexual development.

We affirm that these persons fully bear God's image and deserve compassion, need medical care, and should receive inclusion in a Christian community. We affirm the complexity of these sex developmental disorders as well as the challenges it represents for persons experiencing their conditions.

We deny that intersex persons are proof that human beings are not sexually dimorphic beings as we also deny any diminishment of their humanity and value within the church body.

We commit to including and loving intersex persons as they navigate difficult decisions about their condition with wisdom, prayer, and medical guidance.

GENDER DYSPHORIA

We confess that some individuals experience distress regarding their biological sex and commit to providing pastoral care marked by patience, compassion, and careful listening.

We affirm that gender dysphoria can cause significant mental anguish and requires sensitive, individualised ministry. We affirm that God's design for sexual dimorphism is good even as we recognise that the complexities of psychology and biology mean that some persons will struggle with how to align their sex, sexuality, and understanding of their gender.

We commit to listening and understanding the stories and situations of people with gender dysphoria and discerning how best to meet their spiritual needs and welcome them within the church.

NON-BINARY PERSONS

We confess that God's creation of male and female reflects his design for human flourishing, even while we recognise the complexity of individual experience means some individuals may not be aligned with gender-norms in their culture.

We affirm that while biology can give humans a predisposition to behave and respond in certain ways,





even so, their biology determines nothing essential about their character, interests, or vocation.

We deny the value of treating cultural gender norms, whether biblical or cultural, as absolute demands for how men and women of faith must live.

We commit to treating persons as individuals and not measuring them according to cultural standards of masculinity or femininity, but instead loving them as baptised persons who are co-heirs with Christ.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

We confess that artificial intelligence is a remarkable achievement of human industry and ingenuity which can enhance the human condition and further human flourishing, even as it constitutes challenges to human labour, and is open to abuse by malevolent actors.

We affirm that artificial intelligence has the potential to be a powerful tool for improving human productivity and alleviating suffering if artificial intelligence is wisely and justly stewarded.

We deny that artificial intelligence can fully replace human consciousness or eliminate the inherent good of human labour.

We commit to exploring the opportunities that artificial intelligence offers as we carefully engage with such technologies with care, concern, and conscience, to ensure that artificial intelligence serves a greater good and reinforces, rather than obscures, the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life.

TRANSHUMANISM

We confess that technologies designed to enhance human living, whether bodily or cognitively, simultaneously present great opportunities and substantial ethical challenges.

We affirm that advancements in this field hold promise for improving lives and exceeding human limitations. We affirm that the attempt to transcend physical and cognitive limitations should be constrained by consideration of its moral implications, preventing any technology from undermining the dignity and sanctity bestowed upon humans by their Creator.

We deny that humans should seek to convert their biological bodies into hubs for advanced technological functions or attain a post-human or even god-like state.

We commit to navigating the technological advancements associated with enhancing the human person through wisdom, ethical consideration, and the guidance of the Spirit to ensure such endeavours serve humanity rather than make humans servants of technology.

HUMAN RIGHTS

We confess that all humans deserve to be treated with dignity, compassion, and justice.

We reject all forms of discrimination, violence, and dehumanisation based on race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, age, or any other immutable characteristic. We affirm that human value is not dependent on ethnicity, gender, age, ability, or economic utility. We affirm that protecting the vulnerable, caring for the marginalised, and upholding human worth are essential expressions of Christian faith and obedience to God's command to love our neighbours as ourselves.

We deny that human rights are based on anything natural, legislative, or judicial, as they are rooted in and derive from the God of righteousness, justice, and love, making these rights immutable and inviolable.

We commit the church to uphold human rights for all persons and to remind society of the Christian roots of its discourse on human rights.

OUR COMMITMENT

We confess that we have often failed to embody the love, compassion, and wisdom that should characterise Christian anthropology. We repent of times when we have dehumanised others, failed to provide adequate pastoral care, or allowed fear to replace love in our interactions with those whose experiences differs from our own.

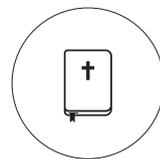
We commit ourselves to:

- Upholding the dignity and worth of every human being
- Providing safe, supportive communities for all believers
- Engaging in respectful dialogue about complex issues related to sex and sexuality
- Seeking wisdom through Scripture, prayer, and the wisdom of our traditions
- Offering hope through the gospel of Jesus Christ
- Walking alongside all who struggle with questions of identity and belonging

We believe that God in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit offers redemption, healing, renewal, and hope to all humanity, and that in him we find our truest identity as beloved children of God. We look forward to the day when all creation will be restored and our full humanity will be perfected in a relationship with God and one another at the resurrection of the dead and the consummation of all things.

Amen

Michel F. Bird is Deputy Principal (Academic) and Lecturer in Theology at Ridley College in Melbourne



The order of Genesis 1 justifies the assertion of Isa 45:18 that the purpose of creating the world was so that it might be inhabited. Only in v. 26 does God begin to speak in the first person. Clearly the purpose of creation had been reached. In so doing he uses the word 'us' or 'our' three times and 'let us make', 'as our image', 'in our likeness'. Like the other stages, the creation takes place in communication with other members of the Trinity (cf. 1:2, John 1:1-3). Human beings do not have the image of God since God has no image but are as the image of God. Thus, the text does not say anything about God's likeness to the human being but only something about the human being who is in a relation of likeness to God. However, this analogy does not offer to us any concrete information about God.

In v.26 the quite distinctive 'let us make man in our image' (Gen. 1:26), suggests the uniqueness of humankind as a species. The plural address 'let us' has been variously interpreted within the OT complex as a piece of fossilised myth - an address to the heavenly council, a royal plural, or an indication (cf. the Spirit in 1:2) of plurality in the Godhead. Christian expositors have tended to see it as an address to the Trinity. Such address does not fit the general Old Testament evidence but does the canon as a whole. In any case the singular unity of the divine being is reasserted by the singular of Gen 1:27. The addition of the phrase 'in our likeness' in Gen 1: 26 seems designed to exclude any notion of an exact copy contained in 'image' while seeking to convey the idea of some resemblance either in nature or more likely, in function. The connotation of the term 'image' is thus weakened by the addition of 'likeness' probably in the interests of avoiding the potentially idolatrous idea of an unqualified 'in our image'.

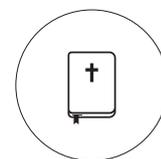
The Hebrew term *tselem* 'image', always in the Old Testament, as well as beyond it, conveys the note of visibility. Basically the Akkadian cognate *tsalmu* refers to a statue in the round and to a representation rather than to a model or a copy. However, even though the emphasis in the term 'image' is on externality, we need to remember that humanity in the Old Testament is always a psychic unity. Thus the word refers to the whole of humankind viewed in terms of a representative function in the world. Man as a species, humanity, is on view. While 'image', therefore cannot be narrowly understood as rationality, intuitiveness, personal awareness etc., but if the term refers to the whole human being it must include such things. We should preserve the translation 'in our image' but note the implications of the 'in'. If the 'let us make man' of v. 26 is a heavenly self-address by the Trinitarian God then the 'our image' which, in some sense humankind is to reflect and in which he is made, is in

heaven and possessed by the Godhead alone. As made 'in' the image, mankind will thus be simply an image of the heavenly image, a representative of what is divine. Since Col 1:15-20 speaks of the eternal sonship of Christ as being the pre-existent image of God, some hint is thereby given as to the real character of the image on view here.

Given the nature of man as described in the Old Testament, 'image' in 1:26 refers to the whole person, but with the major emphasis falling upon relational function. In both Egypt and Mesopotamia in the ancient world the notion of mankind as the image of the deity was well known. In Egypt, the Pharaoh of the day was regarded as the image of the creator god Re, and as the incarnation of Re. In Mesopotamia the term image was commonly used to refer to the statue of a god or king, but when used in priestly or royal designations, the human representative on view was presented as the possessor of the power and authority of the god.

The exact phrase 'in the image of God', occurs only again in the OT at Gen. 9:6 in an important account which





indicates God will continue with his intention of Genesis 1 and 2 so that post-flood humanity will commence again in the new beginning of the relationship with God but with a different future possible than that of Gen 6:1-17 before them. The similar phrase at Gen. 5:3 indicates that being in the image of God is a representative function of a paternal relationship transmitted by procreation. Original sin will thus be the continuance (by spiritual connection) of the transmitted ability for humanity to refuse, as Adam had done, obedience to the divine will made clear in successive covenants, all drawing upon the basic premises of Genesis 1-2.

As made 'in' the image, humankind individually (5:1-3; 9:5-6) will be simply an image of the heavenly image, a representative of what is divine. Additionally, Gen. 1:26c is to be translated as a purpose clause 'in order that they may have dominion'. Gen. 1:27a,b recapitulates Gen. 1:26 but Gen. 1:27c with the return to the plural and the addition of biological terms for male and female anticipates and signifies the 'male and female he created them'. On this view, gender distinctions would form no part of the image. The sexual distinctions referred to in 1:27c are not a component of what is meant by creation in the image, while unlike the animal species humanity is not instructed to reproduce after 'its kind'. Verse 27b may be more than simply a repetition of verse 27a and may anticipate the blessing conferred in verse 28.

'Image' thus appears to confer kingly distinction on humanity as a whole with humanity in a special relationship to God then being differentiated by the gender terms. Mesopotamian analogies to which we could appeal indicate that the king as an image of the deity was conceived of as a servant of the gods, and the phrase referred to his royal function as having a mandate from the gods to rule and thus as one possessing divine power. In Psalm 8:5 with clear reference to Genesis 1, humankind is depicted in kingship terms (cf. Pss 29:1 4; 90:16; 104:1; 111:3; 145:5; Job 40:10). The allusion in Psalm 8:6 to all things being put under the feet of created man is to an ancient Near Eastern symbol of submission to authority (cf. Josh 10:24; 1 Kings 5:3; Ps 110:1). Finally, 'have dominion' in Gen 1:28 has reference elsewhere in the Old Testament to the exercise of kingly functions (cf. 1 Kings 4:24; Ps. 72:8; 110:2; Isa.14:6; Ezek. 34:4). The notion of image as referring to royal authority is attested in both Mesopotamia and Egypt.

The creation of man in Genesis 1 thus climaxes in his presentation as vice-regent set over creation. The account stresses the essential dignity of the image, and authority, which is not lost as a result of the fall (9:6). As an expression of their difference man is created to be rulers

in their domain and, in view of their role in the garden in chapter 2, to be priests, kings and priests. The human rule over creation, will include that over all living creatures, fish, birds and land animals, with no reference however to wild animals, is thus clear from the later meditation of Psalm 8 as well as from the language of Genesis 1:26-28 ('have dominion' and 'subdue'). If the Fall robbed human beings of this function, we would expect the biblical doctrine of redemption partially to restore it. The presentation of Jesus in the New Testament both as the image of God and as true man points to what individuals in Christ will become.

With 'image' human beings have something in their nature like God and then the question arises as to what is this something, a physical correspondence or a spiritual likeness? Some suggest that the likeness is functional, that human beings rule. However, it seems to be incorrect to separate essence from function for what becomes is humanity as a whole, a relational being. The human being both is and becomes the image. But passages such as Gen 5:3 and Exod 25:40 show that image is the work of God of creation. Man is so made that he resembles the divine image. Thus image refers not to visible likeness but to the mental and spiritual qualities man shares with his creator. It is hard to pin down what these are; reason, personality, free will, self-consciousness or intelligence? There are too few references to image in OT to make final judgements. However it seems image is not a double or a derivative and is different in kind from the original.

Humankind created as the image is understood to have a mandate from God to rule and hence possesses divine power but is not itself divine. Humanity is yet the creature and yet has rule over other creatures. Verse 27b by its description of male and female man finds a location among the creatures, which prepares for the blessing of v. 28. This statement, though it is one which is assumed for all other creatures, must be inserted because of the image theology which has preceded and thus, though exalted over creation, it needs to be understood that humankind are still creatures. While also unlike God but like the other creatures humankind is characterised by sexual differentiation.

Dr. Wiliam Dumbrell (excerpt from an unpublished manuscript in the Editor's possession)

Bill Dumbrell (1926-2016) was on the faculty of Moore College from 1963-1984, including serving as Vice-Principal for 10 years. He also taught at Regent College Vancouver and Trinity College Singapore.

If undeliverable, return to:
EFAC Australia
20 Gordon St
Fairfield, VIC 3078



essentials

The logo for EFAC Australia, featuring a stylized letter 'E' inside a diamond-shaped border.