

## Unprecedented ministry

Jodie McNeill on adapting to bushfire and pandemic

— 4

## Resilience in ministry

Chris Brennan processes a helpful conversation

— 6

## Are we still the church?

Chase Kuhn on the theology of church during lockdown

— 8

## Three paths on same-sex marriage

Andrew Judd sizes them up.

— 9

## The key text for sexuality

Steven Daly on Genesis 2

— 12

## God for us

Ivan Head puts Romans 8 simply.

— 14

# essentials

Winter 2020

EFAC AUSTRALIA



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

As I write this it seems that everything has changed. A number of media commentators have already begun to speculate as to what life will be like once the COVID-19 restrictions are eased. Will there be a new 'roaring 20s' post-pandemic as there was post-WW1 and Spanish Flu? Will there be a reassessment of value and meaning after so much upon which we have come to depend was so radically upended?

In 1625 an outbreak of the bubonic plague killed more than 10,000 people in London, during which time the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral was the poet-priest John Donne. In his biography of Donne, John Stubbs writes of the fear that gripped London during lockdown.

*'Certain of waking up with the telltale sores on their bodies any day, people were gripped by criminal fearlessness to seize and enjoy what they could while they were still alive. Donne understood what motivated the spirit of suicidal hedonism that was loose in the city. [In a sermon he] described those who said to themselves, "We can but die, and we must die... Let us eat and drink, and take our pleasure, and make our profit, for tomorrow we shall die, and so were cut off by the hand of God".'* (John Stubbs, John Donne: The Reformed Soul, Norton and Co. 2006, p. 424-5).

Will we see a revival of this same worldly fearlessness and hedonism, much like was witnessed in the 1920s? What we can be certain of is that even as the world stops its ears to the

word of God and lives for the present moment, the word will not be chained. The eternity set in the hearts of each person will certainly be reawakened for some by the failing of earthly confidences and the collapse of worldly forms of security.

This edition of *Essentials* includes good food for thought in our 'lockdown' state, as well as continuing to make a contribution to issues that will no doubt return to the prominence in the not too distant future. Jodie McNeill reflects on some flexible ministry methods and opportunities during the recent bushfire season, and now during the suspension of public services. Chase Kuhn asks a theological question about the nature of church particularly relevant to those with an ecclesiology centred on gathering and fellowship—are we still the church if we cannot meet? Chris Brennan thinks through the issues of ministry resilience, expectations and burnout. In two separate but related pieces Andrew Judd and Steven Daly contribute to the ongoing conversation on same-sex marriage and human sexuality. We also join Ivan Head as he leads us into the deep riches of Romans 8. Finally, the issue also includes several book reviews, on the assumption that, while some of us are working frenetically at the moment, others among us might have some spare time to dig into a worthy tome!

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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:

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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:  
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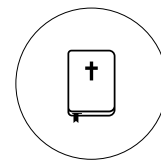
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## Revelation 2 and 3 Seven what? Seven letters? Or something else?

BEN UNDERWOOD

The messages Jesus sends to the seven churches of Asia found in Revelation 2-3 are often thought of as letters – since the command to John is to write to the angels of those churches. But in many ways what is dictated does not have the form of a letter. The message-sender is identified, but not by name, and nor are there greetings. The opening formula, ‘these are the words of’ are more reminiscent of a prophetic oracle than a letter. Is ‘letter’ the best way to think about what these pieces of communication are?

‘Why worry?’, you might ask. Isn’t the point to read them? Which is true. But we might have expectations of a letter that make what Jesus says in these messages strange. Why is he so stern? Why the rebukes and the threats to remove lampstands, to come like a thief upon sleepers, to spit his church out? Where is his tender love for his people and his unshakeable commitment to them? Are we allowed in the church at the start by grace, but need to stay in by our works? Is that the point of these messages?

It may help to think of these messages as more like communiques from the field commander to the troops on the battlefield, than personal letters from one individual to others. Jesus the Messiah, who stands at the head of the armies of heaven (Rev 19:11-16), whose troops are willing in the day of battle (Psalm 110), is writing as the great general to his churches, ‘personified’ here as angels, angels who might be imagined as part of the hosts of heaven. (The churches are ‘angelified’ rather than personified, really). The book of Revelation is a book full of conflict, conflict in which Christians are caught up, and must play their part. Sometimes the church is numbered (Rev 7:4-8, 14:1) like an Old Testament muster of fighting men (Numbers 1). And each message concludes with a promise to ‘the one who is victorious’, which sounds like a general exhorting his troops to fight in the hope of what victory will bring.

This may help explain why Jesus speaks so fiercely, and his expectations are so high. Jesus must lead his churches through a great conflict, and so he wants them to be fit for the fight. He must point out weaknesses in his churches and he must expect



Photo by Richard Catabay on Unsplash

pictured

them to be dealt with, or he must deal with them himself. For this is not a drill. His people can come through, stand firm, bear witness, suffer and be victorious if they are ready, and not weakened by apathy, fear, entanglement with idolatry or impurity, inattention, lack of endurance, or a failure of insight. But if they lose their ability to love (Ephesus) or give way to fear and prove unwilling to suffer to be faithful (Smyrna) or fail to see teaching which leads them into sin (Pergamum), or allow such teachers to continue unopposed (Thyatira), or if they fall asleep (Sardis) or give up in the face of pressure (Philadelphia) or fail to see their true spiritual need, and fail to go to Jesus for it (Laodicea), then the churches will not be fit for the fight, and the hope of victory will be eclipsed by uncertainty.

This is not to say that Jesus’ troops will not be ready for the fight. I take it that Jesus is the kind of general that knows how to prepare his troops for battle, and to give them all they need to be victorious. But part of what they need is a frank communique to cause them to address their weaknesses so that when the day of testing and battle and suffering witness comes, they may stand.



# Unprecedented Ministry

JODIE MCNEILL

Churches everywhere have scrambled to respond to the crises of coronavirus. Jodie McNeill in Jamberoo, NSW had the bushfires to contend with before that. He reflects on the ministry opportunities we have now and may take into the future. Jodie is Senior Minister at Jamberoo Anglican Church on the south coast of New South Wales.



Jodie McNeill

pictured

If we expected that the defining event of 2020 would be the Australian bushfires, then we were wrong. As green shoots begin to emerge from the blackened landscape, a new crisis has confronted our communities, and the impact is global. In drought, bushfire, flood, and now pandemic, our everyday life has been profoundly disrupted, and through this momentous occasion we will have fresh opportunities to glorify God as we minister his word.

Over summer we used the word ‘unprecedented’ on many occasions to describe the ferocity and widespread impact of the bushfire disaster that ravaged our country. Yet, as COVID-19 grinds our world to a halt, it has already demonstrated the potential to unlock new ways of doing church ministry. Whilst they are unrelated, the two disasters have built upon each other as our church has grown to become more connected with our community through crisis.

Initially, during the bushfires I was able to strengthen connections with my local community through my involvement as a volunteer firefighter with the NSW Rural Fire Service. This gave me many opportunities to speak about my faith with my compatriots on the fireground who knew me as the local ‘Rev’. It’s also helped grow my friendships and connections more widely with the greater community. This inspired me to call a village prayer meeting in our church, which welcomed people from the brigade and beyond to ask God to bring rain to extinguish the fire, and to bring protection and comfort to all who were affected.

**The bushfire crisis brought together our community, and our church was there to offer leadership and light in a time of uncertainty and grief.**

What’s more, God clearly answered our prayers as he brought rain which overflowed the dry rivers and extinguished the unstoppable fires. It felt like this bushfire crisis brought a degree of engagement and trust from the community to talk more about spiritual things, and my own conversations about Christ served to further energise parishioners to speak more freely about their faith with friends and neighbours.

And then when we thought things might settle down, the coronavirus has shaken our world, and changed the way we

do life. Though we are grieving the loss of propinquity, (as one of my theological lecturers once described face-to-face engagement), we are finding new opportunities to connect with each other and the wider population. As soon as the doors to our church building were closed, I chose to replicate our normal services using live streaming. I hastily moved around the furniture in church to enable me to stand taller and closer to the screen that displays our lyrics and liturgy, and I scrambled some tech to try and beam us into the homes of churchgoers and the wider, community audience. Even though a ‘live’ broadcast had many rough edges, I was keen to help our parishioners to keep the routine and experience of church, especially given the tectonic changes to interaction and scheduling. Plus, it meant that viewers were more likely to engage real time through comments and reactions, and it helped prevent people skipping forward through pre-recorded videos.

**Yet, the greatest boon has been the opportunity to welcome many newcomers to our services, largely through their connections through social media with existing congregational members.**

People I’ve been praying for have now tuned in to watch my church, and fellow RFS brigade buddies have even commented on my guitar playing! Also, I’ve heard that non-Christian spouses have been watching our livestream with their church-going husband or wife.

What’s more, I’ve been sharing the link to the livestream on our Jamberoo community Facebook page, and complete strangers have been telling me that they’re connecting themselves or their family members with our church services. We’ve even had some banter on my posts, which has led to an opportunity for me to engage in some full-on apologetics in the public Facebook group, which has brought about other ‘offline’ conversations between parishioners and neighbours. Even



*'Church' during the coronavirus restrictions*

pictured

though our church building is closed, we're welcoming many more people through our virtual doors from around the world, and we're praying that they will join us physically when we're able to open our doors soon, God willing.

What's still more, we've now been able to welcome some of our older and technologically challenged members to simply phone into church and listen via Zoom to the whole service. This is something we didn't use before, but now should be a new part of life after this virus. In addition to streaming church through Facebook Live, we've also run a virtual dinners and morning teas after church, encouraging members to join a Zoom video meeting to chat, together, about life. I've 'chaired' the gathering of around a dozen or so screens, asking people to share about their experiences of the week and to answer a sharing question based on the sermon.

Yet, there have been other significant changes that we have begun to enjoy over this period of isolation. Inspired by the daily rhythm of the sixteenth century, I encouraged members of my church to join me on Zoom for morning prayer each day at 7:30am.

**To my surprise, up to a dozen people have gathered with me to start the day with prayer and readings from the scriptures.**

Now we've got control over our diaries, maybe the people might revolt against the nine-to-five and reclaim time to enjoy precious fellowship with others on a daily basis? As our routines have vanished before our eyes, I have sought to put things into our life that might end up remaining with us in the post-coronavirus world.

It may be that the ease of videoconferencing means that we can grab half an hour of peoples' time during their day, without any need of travel. Maybe this can be a new way of connecting that will supplement our normal face-to-face ministries, and

redeem some of the small blocks of time that are frequently wasted in our lives? Similarly, I invited one of our overseas missionaries to join an ad-hoc 'missionary hour' one Tuesday night at 7pm, and even though I gave the congregation only a few days' notice, we were able to pull together a dozen or so people to meet in Zoom and to pray. This is the kind of thing that otherwise would have required more logistics and careful scheduling. But with the simplicity of videoconferencing, we can enjoy these kinds of events without too much effort. I'm thinking of launching a similar thing for regular training events for our parishioners and key leaders. Perhaps now that videoconferencing is becoming as ubiquitous as SMS, we might be able to supplement or transform our current programming with short, half-hour sessions on screens? No longer will it require people to have a 'night out' to do a church event, because now we can grab 30 minutes of time, without taking up an entire evening?

There is no doubt that after the virus there will be a new 'normal' in our schedules and life. As we have been forced to adapt to using technology to beam out church to the world, we can also use this as an outreach strategy to encourage newcomers to 'watch us online and then decide if you wish to join us'.

**Maybe this is the way we can ease the transition of people into our gospel communities.**

Maybe this dramatic change to life is giving us the special opportunity to harness the widespread use of social media as a tool for engaging the non-Christian world with the powerful message of the gospel. But we're also praying that there will be one, significant change after we come through this virus. We're praying that many people would look back on 2020 and say that through this crisis they came to know Christ. For these unprecedented times offer our world a wake-up call that might make them alive in Christ. That's our prayer.



## Resilience in Ministry

CHRIS BRENNAN

Resilience is a buzzword in many circles, and aren't there plenty of days we would love a good dose of it for ourselves? Chris Brennan encourages us to reflect on ourselves and our situation to help us get that dose. Chris is the Dean of St Peter's Cathedral Armidale.



Chris Brennan

pictured

One of the big topics in ministry circles at the moment is resilience. It certainly seems big to me as I experience varying occasional sequences of busy-ness, tiredness, disfunction, envy, frustration and then discouragement in ministry. It happens enough for me that I can sometimes find that I have taken my eyes off all that God has done in the Lord Jesus and is doing through me and around me. And then I hear the crushing news of those ministry fellows who have stumbled, stumbled out of ministry, stumbled out of positive relationships, and even stumbled out of faith. Resilience in ministry is certainly worth the discussion. Some time ago I asked the resilience question of one of those who stumbled. I asked 'Why is ministry so hard?' His answer was fulsome, grounded in experience, and practical wisdom, and I'm going to share his insights, mixed with mine, as I have reflected further on what was said. What follows is not a carefully researched study, but merely a reflection of what I found to be a really helpful conversation.

Along with crucial self-care, a careful management of our expectations seems to be an important but often overlooked key to hanging in there. My dear brother helpfully reminded me that firstly, and most importantly, ministry has always been hard. This fact is worth pointing out because we will all live it. We tend to moan about tough days, or particularly busy and stress-laden months, but the apostles daily faced death and hardship in a hundred different ways. In later centuries faithful ministers worked away in their plague-ravaged villages, often succumbing themselves. Missions into war zones, leper colonies and into dangerous and violent jungles are less than a generation old, and even today some really brave and faithful Christians willingly give away daily face to face contact with family members, familiar streets, comfortable climates, and good coffee for the sake of the gospel—hard to believe, but true! In reality, our hard days, here in Australia at least, don't end in a beheading or crucifixion, but our expectation of ministry should be to expect hardship and personal cost. To have a different expectation is to ignore what Jesus says, and what his people have experienced down through the ages. We need to foster within ourselves a realistic expectation of this, while at the same time developing a right priority of obedience to Jesus over comfort. Even if this stands against what our culture and our sinful selves might attractively counsel, desire, and justify. A thorough and personal reading of Matthew—or at least 10:34-39 if you are really busy—will be a good corrective, along with the pastoral epistles, and the Ordinal for

that matter, especially if it is a while since you looked at them.

Secondly, each personality type creates different pressures for each minister of the gospel. It is well worth taking the time to reflect on what kind of person you are (and your spouse too, if you are blessed to have one). The task-focused and driven among us will experience stress as people fail to meet what we see as necessary expectations. The flow on will be the major stress of relational conflict, where our side of the conflict will often be unhelpfully and liberally seasoned with self-righteousness and presumption. On the other hand, the more relationally focused, or academic among us, may struggle to be organised, or to be able to get through all that we need to get through because we are so busy caring or learning. The pressure of time, and the danger of permeable work-relationship boundaries can cause real issues at this point.

**Each personality is different, and each will carry with it unique dangers that can impact on us in different ways, at different times.**

We need to know ourselves in humility and acknowledge properly that the church is a body with different members: different in maturity, ability, role and responsibility, but equal in value. This will go some of the way towards building more realistic and theologically balanced expectations for ourselves and others.

A second, related danger here is that our personalities will lead us to hear or read unhelpfully. If I am a task-focused pastor located in a remote community with a small population, reading the latest mega-church, step by step leadership guide to awesome godliness and a church of a thousand, may be far less than helpful. It might even be downright unhelpful and depression-inducing if we can't recognise our unique selves, and unique situations as we hear or read. Similarly, if I don't

recognise myself well, then I may not read at all something that might helpfully correct my lack in this area or that. Ministers of the gospel have been victims of living in the social media opinion bubble for longer than social media has been around, I think. It is important too, to remember that aspects of our personality and effectiveness are properly open to reform by God's Spirit through exposure to his word and the godly counsel of the wise. Some weaknesses are sinful and require repentance.

A third reality is that our post-Christian and increasingly individualistic society brings to bear new and unique pressures that eat away at our time and confidence and therefore at our resilience. We need to note up front that we are part of this society, products of it, and therefore not innocent collateral damage of the shift—in some ways we propagate it. Although ministry has always been hard, individualism brings with it a staggering complexity. Only a generation ago, denominational ministers followed pretty closely to a set format, both liturgically and in terms of congregational expectation. They carried an authority that was rarely challenged, and their role revolved around Sundays and the regular occasional services (hatch, match, dispatch, and umpiring the local games of cricket). Evangelism could be run comfortably from the church through those services, Sunday schools and youth groups, trading on community expectations and a widely accepted authority. This form of ministry and evangelism sat comfortably in what was a basically Judeo-Christian world view, blessed with a fair biblical literacy and Sundays reserved for just these purposes. Clearly, the situation has changed.

### **Individualism has impacted both the wider population and the institutions that serve them, including the church.**

People are far more suspicious of denominations, churches and church leadership (and with some good reason it must be said). People are far more focused on themselves, and seek self-actualisation, rather than fitting in with a broader paradigm ('we're all individuals' someone once famously said). More comfortable with the supermarket approach, people seek options and points of difference. For the minister this has huge impacts. No longer is the denomination trendy, so we'll go independent. No longer is the office valued, and so we'll change the title and redefine the role. (I'm no longer a minister. My desk slab says 'cool, relatable, lycra-wearing, fun-loving teacher of truth and eternal direction. See me for the best climate-neutral, and social-justice-approved coffee bean advice going around'). That creates a pressure. A pressure to be entrepreneurial, sadly competitive, and relevant in accordance with the assessment of a changing society, and deeper questions of worth from within. Our people too, having dispensed

with clerical authority, have become more vocal about their preferences, not as preferences, but as essentials to connect with them and a society increasingly distanced from the church and less biblically literate. That's why you must dress this way or that, play this type of music or that, with these lights, using these new technologies, addressing these particular hot-button issues, and for this long. Rocking up to church to work through the Bible as an authoritative and revealed text, using a set liturgy, a set song book and holding to basic orthodox theology does not easily sit with many of us and with the society thirsting for the new and exciting that we now inhabit. This creates extra work, and a perceived or real need to engage more fully with a quickly-changing and suspicious world. Conflicts arising today would have been unimaginable to many in the generations before us. On top of this there is now a new and significant administrative load created, at least in part, by the failings of those who came before us. This is particularly evident in the areas of safe ministry and compliance. Again, these burdens were not within the normal experience of those who came before. That said, our expectations must be built for the now, not for what once was. If we are going to minister in today's world, we are going to have to acknowledge the situation and work in it, holding on to that which is essential and good, while being prepared to jettison some of that which was just easier. We will need to develop an expectation of flexibility and heightened relational engagement. We will need to be sure of the positions and directions that we take, why they matter, and be prepared to communicate this clearly, confidently, and with great patience.

### **All of this is about knowing ourselves, knowing our situations, and then in humility building realistic and godly expectations in the midst of this.**

After all it is God's church. If we want to survive in the ministry world, we will of course have to take on board all the self-care wisdom that has been helpfully generated, but we will need to do this carefully, not selfishly, slavishly or without consideration for others, but with godly flexibility and a view towards loving our neighbours and ourselves over the long term. We need to work on our own relationship with the Lord Jesus through prayer and Bible reading. We need to take our days off when we can, and make sure our staff, if we have them, can responsibly do the same. We will need to look after our marriages, and families as we seek to present those closest to us holy and blameless before the Lord, and we will need to develop a proper love for the brothers and sisters given over to our care in our churches. All of this will take time, energy and organisation, but perhaps the building of proper godly and humble expectations and understandings of ourselves and situations might help us here too.



# Are we still the church if we can't meet?

CHASE KUHN

Chase R. Kuhn lectures in theology and ethics at Moore College. This article was first published online by The Gospel Coalition Australia and is republished with their permission and that of Dr. Kuhn.



Chase Kuhn

pictured

The current situation with COVID-19 has raised many questions, and amongst them are important theological questions about what we believe the church is, and whether the church continues when we are commanded not to 'gather'. Throughout the Bible the people of God are depicted as the people called into a covenant relationship with God. One of the key identifiers of this people is the fact that they meet together with one another, in the presence of God, to hear from God's word. This is what the Bible teaches is the 'church': the gathering of God's people. God called the Israelites to be his people, and he assembled them (gathered them) together in his presence to receive his word (Deut 4:10). It was at this assembly, in the first instance, that God established his covenant with the people (Ex 19:4-6). Likewise, new covenant believers are charged to continue meeting (Heb 10:23-25). Historically, the distinctive marks of the church are the word preached and the sacraments duly administered—these sacraments being signs of the new covenant in Christ. But if gathering together is something so crucial for the people of God, what are we to do—and believe—in times such as these, where meeting together physically is not possible? I want to consider four abiding theological truths about the church, before turning to four practical implications for our lives today.

## 1. OUR IDENTITY IS PRIMARILY IN CHRIST

It is Christ who establishes us as a people. This statement is important because of its ordering. Our identity as the church is to be a collection of God's people, brought together because of our union with Christ. This union is what is celebrated in the sacraments. But the union is not dissolved because of our inability to gather. Rather, we gather because of a union that transcends time and space. This should be deeply reassuring to Christians: your identity isn't fundamentally as a church member, but as a person united to Jesus. Right now—in this very moment—you are part of the people of God. And it is precisely because you are one of God's people by faith—not insignificantly, a faith given to you by the Spirit (Gal. 4:6)—that you meet with other Christians regularly.

## 2. OUR LIFE IS DEFINED BY THE WORD

The definitive marker of our life together is hearing God's word—the word that saves us and tells us who we are by the grace and mercy of God. In Scripture, God communicates rich truth about who he is, the way he has made for us to relate

to him, and what it means to live in that relationship. The word of God transcends the inestimable chasm between God's transcendent, infinite holiness and our fallenness and finitude.

## 3. CHRIST'S PROMISED PRESENCE

God promises his presence amongst us when we gather together. In Matthew 18:20, Jesus made it clear that he is with believers whenever two or more are gathered. This is intended to reassure us of Christ's abiding presence with us corporately, even in the tiniest gathering. Furthermore, the apostle John tells us that though no one has ever seen God, he is manifested to us in our love for one another in the Spirit (1 John 4:12-13). This means that life-together presents us with more than may initially meet the eye: God's presence is known through the presence of others, as we demonstrate mutual love for one another.

## 4. MUTUAL DEPENDENCE

Our Christian growth and maturity depends upon our relationships with others. We don't simply grow through receiving from others, but also giving—by assuming our proper place in the body. Put simply, the Christian life requires both active and passive participation: other people need you, and you need others. God's plans for the church are illustrated wonderfully in several of the key metaphors used in the New Testament for the church. The temple (Eph. 2:21-23) depicts a place where God's presence dwells, and a place that is being built of many different pieces (people). This image highlights how we are being constructed together, and the wonderful promise of the presence of God in the midst of our life together. The body (1 Cor. 12:12-26; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-16) depicts a unity of purpose and mutual dependence on one another. There is an interconnectedness that is indispensable. There is a building and developing as we 'grow up together' into Christ our head.

## FOUR PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY

First, don't despair that you can't meet as usual. You are still in Christ! But precisely because you are in Christ, seek out ways to 'meet' with others. We have unprecedented opportunities to gather virtually as a church. So, even in days like these,



we should not forsake coming together. In fact, especially in days like these we should be all the more diligent to seek out opportunities to meet together. Because the times demand change for us, we must be patient and persistent.

**And we must remember that there is great promise even in few numbers; even where two or three are gathered, for Christ has promised us his presence.**

Second, when you ‘meet’ with others, don’t forsake the significance of hearing from God’s word. The word of God is the richest thing we can offer to someone. We should find ways to mutually encourage one another from the truth, especially when the world seems turned upside down. Helping brothers and sisters to fix their eyes on Christ once more will prove to be an anchor in the midst of much turbulence.

Third, recognise how important we are to one another. On our worst usual Sundays together, we allow church to be a passive experience for the majority of the congregation. Now more than ever we are in danger of only receiving. But in the midst of change, we should expect different people to exercise gifts that may otherwise lie dormant in church life. We must prayerfully consider the needs of others and how we might serve our brothers and sisters. In particular, we should be mindful of those in our churches who will be most needy in times of isolation. In times of forced seclusion, there is a temptation to turn inward and only think about our individual needs in the confines of our own bubble. But we must pursue a thoughtful awareness of others. This will be an opportunity for us to be appropriately counter-cultural, rejecting the panic-hoarding of the world around us, and turning instead to think of our neighbours. And, as people serve us, we should be prepared to offer them encouragement and gratitude. But we also should consider how we can help others be more aware of needs. People will both need to seek others out, but also communicate openly when they are struggling and have practical requirements.

Finally, we should not lose hope. Though things look, feel, and certainly are very different during this pandemic, we must remember the promise that Christ gave us: he is building his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

**Even if we are unable to physically gather, we can still ‘gather’ together under the word.**

As we do, even then as we meet virtually or in few number, Christ has promised to be with us. And, when we meet under the word of God, in the presence of Christ, we can be assured that he is maturing us as his people.



## Three paths on the Bible and same-sex marriage

ANDREW JUDD

*Anglican synods have been debating and discussing issues of sexuality and especially the status of homosexual relationships. and will continue to do so. Andrew Judd seeks to describe the paths that are before us, and to recommend the path he sees as most faithful to God. Andrew is Associate Lecturer in Old Testament at Ridley College in Melbourne.*

I find the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality a difficult topic to talk about. This is not because I think the Bible’s teaching on marriage and sexuality is especially unclear, but because its implications are so deeply personal. During last year’s discussions at Melbourne synod on issues of human sexuality, I felt a great concern for those dear friends who identify as gay or are exclusively same-sex attracted—some who I have long been sharing the gospel with, some who are beloved Christian brothers and sisters, some who were in the room. Coming together as a church to discuss this topic can be difficult and even painful, but it is important. Anglicans around the world are now being asked to decide whether to revise our standards of worship and doctrine to accommodate rapidly changing cultural attitudes to homosexuality in western countries. Our Constitution and the Thirty-Nine Articles give the power and responsibility to us as a national church to change our traditions and ceremonies in light of changing times, with only a single restriction: that *nothing may be done that is contrary to the word of God* (Article XXXIV). We must begin our conversation by seriously and humbly wrestling with Scripture, asking what the Bible teaches about God’s intention for our sexuality.

My purpose here is to support my fellow Anglicans in wrestling with this issue by offering a summary of the scholarly discussion over what the Bible teaches on homosexuality, and an explanation for why I believe the traditional path on marriage and sexuality is the one that Christ is calling us to take. As Christians have engaged with the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality, they have tended to take three main paths:

### A. THE TRADITIONAL PATH

This view says that the Bible teaches that sex is designed for marriage between a man and a woman, and that we should do what the Bible says. Under the traditional view, sex is intended as part of God’s vision of lifelong marriage between one man and one woman. Western culture has become very skilled at separating what God has joined together: contraception allows sex without reproduction; reproductive technology means you can have children without sex; Tinder means you can have sex without relationship. But the traditional view stubbornly insists that sex, marriage and family are not things that humans



Intersection. Photo by Victor Garcia on Unsplash

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invented; they are joined together with a particular purpose within the creator's design for human relationships.

Anglicans teach doctrine through liturgy. Our first order marriage service establishes the three biblical purposes for marriage: 1) as a symbol of the union between Christ and his church, 2) for companionship, faithfulness and strength, and 3) to establish families within which children can be born and nurtured. This doctrine of marriage and its distinct purposes within creation is anchored in Genesis 2, which celebrates the archetypal account of the first marriage, between Adam and Eve. Sex is designed for marriage, because one of the things marriage is designed for is to enable humans to fulfil their task and blessing of filling and ruling the earth by growing families. God's people are consistently called to honour the creator's design by avoiding those sexual practices of other cultures that fall outside this purpose for marriage. Leviticus 18, for instance, tells Israelites to avoid any sexual activity outside God's original design. Verse 22 gives the example of sex between two people of the same gender: 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman.' This is not an arbitrary new rule just for Israel (in fact it applies to foreigners as well as Israelites), but an expression of the design established in the beginning.

This design for marriage is assumed by the New Testament. When Jesus is asked about a contemporary issue of marriage and sex, he answers based on the design principles established in Genesis (Mark 10:6–9). When Jesus uses the general term 'sexual immorality' in Matthew 15:19 this includes any sexual activity that is outside the creator's design and hence unlawful for God's people under the Jewish Torah. When Paul wants to give examples of sexual practices that fall outside this design, he explicitly refers back to the examples in Leviticus (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). While consensual homoerotic sex between adults was known and often celebrated in the ancient world, God's people were called to be unashamedly different. The Old and New

Testaments assume that sex between two people of the same gender is outside God's intention and plan for marriage.

At the same time, the Bible does not condemn anyone for being attracted to the same sex, or for having a sexual orientation towards the same sex. Whether we are exclusively attracted to people of the same sex, or the opposite sex, the call for any follower of Jesus is the same: to honour and worship God with our body, to resist temptation as Jesus did (Hebrews 4:15), to flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18), and to claim our situation as an opportunity to celebrate the kingdom to come. Christ does not call us to heterosexuality but to holiness.

## B. THE REVISIONIST PATH

This view says we should do what the Bible says, but it turns out the Bible is actually positive, or at least neutral, about homosexual sex. We've been reading it wrong all along. This is a relatively new path, which has been around since 1980 when John Boswell published *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Boswell and his followers raise doubts about the traditional interpretation of a number of passages in the New Testament. In particular, they focus on the standard translations of two key Greek words (*malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*) which appear next to each other in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and are often translated separately as 'male prostitutes, sodomites' (NRSV) or together as 'men who have sex with men' (ESV). *Malakoi* means 'soft' and is traditionally understood in this context to refer to the passive male partners in a homosexual act. *Arsenokoitai* is a new word which doesn't appear in any of the literature we have before Paul. Paul may have coined the term. It is made by putting two words together – man (*arsen*) and bed (*koite*) – to make the word 'man-bedders': men who take other men to bed for sex. Those on the revisionist path argue that the meanings of these words are in fact unclear and that the New Testament may be urging us to avoid only one particular type of homosexual sexual activity rather than homosexual

sex in general. The suggestions for what that type of sex might be vary depending on whom you ask, but some theories are: exploitative relationships, such as sex between men and boys; or sex in the context of pagan temple prostitution; or homosexual sex between people who are really heterosexual (and so going against their nature): or even anal sex without a condom. A slightly broader argument is that first-century Jews like Paul had no concept or experience of homosexual orientation, or of consensual same-sex relationships, and so what they were condemning was something very different to the modern, exclusive, lesbian couple or gay couple.

This path has much to commend it. Those who are on it are genuinely seeking to understand what the Bible says and to put it into practice. Good scholarship has indeed shown that some of our traditional assumptions need revision: for example, translators were almost certainly wrong to use the traditional words 'sodomites' (NRSV) or 'effeminate' (KJV). The sin exemplified by Sodom (Genesis 19) is not homosexuality in the straightforward sense people sometimes assume. Homoeroticism is indeed one element in the story, but the concept of a settled sexual orientation and identity implied by the terms homosexual and heterosexual was completely foreign to most humans who lived before the twentieth century. The ancients had a far more fluid concept of sexual desire and practice than we do. So the revisionists are absolutely right that when we apply a text to our own situation, we need to be aware of the gap between our own context and the situation being spoken into.

The problem with the revisionist position, however, is that 40 years after Boswell's exciting new hypothesis the evidence needed to prove his ideas just hasn't arrived—in fact, it's mostly gone the other way. The best scholarship on the historical and linguistic background for the words in Leviticus 18, 1 Corinthians 6 and Romans 1 still points to a basic meaning of men who practise homosexual sex.<sup>1</sup> Even more significantly, when we move from narrow linguistic questions to consider Christianity's theological and ethical vision of human relationships, Boswell and his followers struggle to get around the fact that only two ways of expressing our sexuality are ever celebrated in the Bible. The first is faithful lifelong marriage between a man and a woman which embodies the creation mandate to fill the earth. The second is chaste singleness within a community of deep love which embodies the kingdom to come, where marriage will be replaced with a new kind of intimacy. The revisionist path has an uphill battle to find space for other types of sexual activity within these two biblical visions of human relationships.

### C. THE PROGRESSIVE PATH

This view says the Bible teaches that God's purpose for sex is heterosexual marriage, but the Bible is wrong and needs updating. Those on the progressive path agree with those on the traditional path about what the Bible says. This view recognises that Jesus and Paul almost certainly assumed that homosexuality was contrary to God's design for marriage—of course they did, they were first-century Jews! To the first Christians, who were all Jewish, homosexuality represented the parts of Greek and Roman culture that were most foreign

to Israel's distinctive ethics. This view, which is emerging as the consensus amongst secular scholars of ancient sexuality, sees the revisionist path as wishful thinking with little historical merit.<sup>2</sup> However, these progressive voices depart from the traditional path on whether the Bible is right. They suggest that the Bible contains errors in its doctrine and morality at points, and so we can and should resist or even improve on those parts of it that do not sit comfortably with our modern values. The church wrote the Bible, and we can rewrite the Bible.

I admire those who hold this view for their honesty, and we agree with them about what the Bible says. However, I do not agree that we should privilege our own cultural views on the purpose of sexuality over the theology of creation and marriage which is consistently developed from Genesis to Jesus and has been championed by Christians everywhere throughout history. I hold grave concerns about rewriting those parts of Holy Scripture we find challenging. Walking away from Scripture as the authoritative word of God does not lead us closer to Jesus.

### CONCLUSION

I believe that the biblical vision for human sexuality is clear. I also believe that it is beautiful, and that God's commands are for our good as well as for his glory. The traditional path may be a hard one to travel, but it is the one we are called to take.

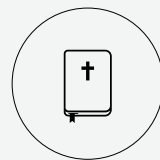
It is a source of great joy and encouragement to me to share life together with the many gay, lesbian and same-sex attracted men and women in our churches who love Jesus and are quietly committed to following him on this path, trusting him with their whole lives—even, and perhaps especially, with their sex lives. The church as a whole can learn much from their example about what following Jesus looks like as we await his return. Jesus calls us to give up our lives, take up our cross, and follow him no matter the cost. If, for some of us, life has become a little too comfortable, a little too much like the world, incurring too little a cost, then we might look to these celibate gay, lesbian and same-sex attracted saints whose lives can serve as a living, breathing sermon, an example to follow, and a reminder not only of the cost of following Jesus but also that he is worth giving up anything to follow.

*'there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.'* (Mark 10:29)

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: William Loader, "Reading Romans 1 on Homosexuality in Light of the Biblical/Jewish and Greco-Roman Perspectives of its Time", ZNW 108.1 (2017): 119–149; Roy Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 241–242.

<sup>2</sup> For a leading example see William Loader's exhaustive study *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).



## The Key Text on Human Sexuality

STEVEN DALY

*If we should be shaping our thinking and living by the teaching of Scripture, we should give Scripture our particular and careful attention. In this extract from a longer presentation Stephen Daly attends to Genesis 2, the key text that bears on the current debates about God's will for our sexual behaviour. Steven is Rector of Leederville in WA.*

### GENESIS 2

I'm assuming we know the story well. In fact, the better we know the story of Adam and Eve, perhaps the less we understand how shocking this story would have been in the ancient world. Shocking in the sense that it contains a number of shocks or surprises—points in the narrative where events take a turn that would have either been unexpected or indeed where the opposite may have been expected. One shock is that the Adam (his name means 'Earthling') will serve and preserve the Garden. We were expecting that the Adam would have been created to serve and preserve the gods. But no! God will look after the Adam as the Adam looks after the Creation and not the other way around.

Another shock is the method Yahweh God chooses for answering a problem, a problem that he himself has spotted, that problem being that is is—quite emphatically—*not good* for the Adam to be alone. Given that no suitable helper was found for the Adam amongst all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the wild animals, the surgical intervention that follows comes as a complete surprise. Why? What we're expecting is for Yahweh God to stoop to his knees and begin again with the modelling clay, just as he did with the Adam in the first place (2:7) and also every other breathing, animate organism (2:19). The creation of the woman—who we will come to know as Eve—is an utterly unique and distinctive creation event. The causing of the Adam to fall into a deep sleep, the removal of part of his side, the closing up of his side, the making of the part into a whole, a woman, the bringing the woman to the now awake man—not something we've ever seen before in the biblical narrative nor will ever see again. Why? Because this methodology is commentary on things we've already been told.

You see, firstly, we already know that the woman will be for the Adam a 'suitable helper'. This phrase, literally, 'like-opposite helper' is in no way demeaning, for Yahweh God himself is the helper of Israel. But the sense of it is this: the helper will be a complementary partner, matching and suitable, not identical—indeed radically different in way that is complementary and complimentary. They'll be radically different, maybe even opposites, but in ways that makes each other look good. The methodology displays an opposite truth: that the woman is just



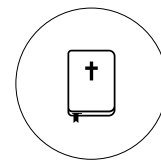
*Adam und Eva* by Otto Mueller.  
Wikimedia Commons

pictured

the same as the man, ultimately of one being, of one substance, of one kind. Someone—as the Adam will recognize perfectly in just a moment—someone just like me.

Secondly, the bizarre methodology of creation that we find in Genesis 2 makes emphatic and unmistakable something that we were told in Genesis chapter 1. God made from nothing, from uniformity, from disorder and chaos, a bipolar cosmos: light and darkness, heavens and the earth, dry ground and seas, night and day, water creatures and birds of the air—polarity everywhere. The crowning achievement of the six-day creation story is the creation of humankind. Humankind is created in order to rule, to have dominion and to subdue, continuing the work of bringing order from disorder, of creating and maintaining boundaries, of bringing diversity and complexity and beauty out of chaos. The crowning polarity in a bipolar universe is the last polarity created—humanity made male and female, and both male and female created in the image and likeness of God. In the Bible, the language of image has to do with representation. Humanity has been created to be image-bearers, created in order to represent God, like God.

Both chapters present the creation of sexuality as of supreme importance. In Genesis 1 the crowning glory of this bipolar cosmos is the creation of gendered, sexual humankind, male and female, representing God. In Genesis 2 the special glory of this relational universe is the creation of gendered, sexual humankind, man and woman, serving and preserving. Both stories have the same ending, the creation of sexuality. The making of humanity with male and female gender is extremely important to the mission of humanity, as they faithfully represent Yahweh, Lord of Hosts, Almighty God, Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, and work with him and for him in the Garden.



A third shock—out of many—and indeed it’s a scandal—are the words the Adam says in response to seeing Eve for the first time, for he does not say what we expect him to say. Genesis 2:23, ‘the Adam said, “This time it’s bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh. This one I call ‘Woman’ because from Man this one was taken”.’ What he doesn’t sing and dance about is how beautiful she is. He doesn’t celebrate her sexual attractiveness even though she is brand new and completely naked and those of us who have given it any thought—which is at least some of us—have assumed that she was the most beautiful woman ever created. And given the values of the Ancient Near East, this omission is astonishing. But nevertheless, her beauty is left to our imaginations; nothing is ever said about it directly. And there is no celebration of romantic love. Rather, what the Adam does see is twofold: this one is family; and in the making of woman you also have the making of man.

I’ll explain that second statement first: In the making of woman you also have the making of man. The original human was always referred to as being male, but the Adam represents humanity; man as opposed to the other animals. To be a Son of Adam is to be a human being. Now we get the Hebrew words *eesh* (man opposed to woman or husband) and *eeshah* (woman opposed to man or wife). And now to the first statement: this one is family. The Hebrew phrase ‘bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh’ is a common Hebrew saying, meaning, ‘of my own family.’ The equivalent English expression is ‘my own flesh and blood’ which is actually how the Hebrew euphemism is routinely translated. We belong together by the closest and most unbreakable of ties is the meaning of both figures of speech. The man is celebrating the fact that he recognises her instantly as family. They belong together intrinsically. God split the Adam in order that there might be a reconciliation and recombination, a coming back together again that is creative. The reconciliation will create family.

The scene ends with one last shock, verse 24: ‘Thus so a Man (or husband) leaves his father and mother and clings to his Woman (or wife), and they will be one flesh.’ For the ancient reader, the shock of this verse would be very considerable, for what he or she would have been expecting was: ‘Thus so a woman (or wife) leaves her father and mother and clings to her Man (or husband). And they will become one flesh.’ In most traditional cultures—and certainly in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East—when a young woman marries, is expected to join her husband’s family. Upon marriage, the young woman has joined her husband’s father’s household, and she is usually a long way down the honour ladder (lots of people get to tell her what to do). Even though this was the universal, Ancient Near Eastern pattern, the Bible asserts that it is wrong. No, *the man leaves his parents* and cleaves to his wife so as to create a new family. God’s design for marriage was counter-cultural when it was first revealed and it has been offending people ever since. All cultures and societies have had a problem with it, in one way or another, as they find that either it fails values to value what they value in marriage (such as patriarchy

or fertility) of that it values things that they dislike (such as faithfulness).

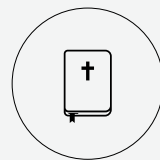
We already know what the words ‘one flesh’ mean—it means one family. But in a secondary, and yet undeniable way, the phrase ‘they will become one flesh’ refers to sexual intercourse, for that is also how the Bible uses the phrase—see Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 6, for example. Sexual intercourse will be a private, intimate, relational and physical picture of a public, legal and social truth—these two people are one flesh, that is, one new family. Sexual intercourse creates a new family, whether or not children are the result of that sexual activity. Sex before marriage—a familiar and meaningful phrase in our culture—becomes something of a contradiction in terms, biblically speaking. And indeed, the Bible condemns fornication (consensual or not) and adultery because both

**God’s design for marriage was counter-cultural when it was first revealed and it has been offending people ever since.**

acts are theologically unreal—these acts ignore the bond and boundaries established by the act itself—and therefore are acts of faithlessness.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of Genesis 2:24 in biblical revelation. This verse is the cornerstone when trying to understand what the Bible thinks about sex and marriage. Paul refers to Genesis 2:24 directly in 1 Corinthians 6, which is the only place Paul discusses sexual sin in any detail, that is to say, explains why sexual sin is sexual sin. In that passage, Paul could have used any number of arguments to cut the ground from his opposition, who were arguing for the acceptability of having sex with temple prostitutes. He doesn’t use a moral or ethical argument. He could have; but he doesn’t. His text is not The Sermon on the Mount, or the Golden Rule, but rather Genesis 2:24. And his argument is a spiritual one and it is this: You cannot have sexual intercourse with a prostitute because you are already having spiritual intercourse with Jesus. You are one with him in Spirit. The step that’s missing is the one that is assumed: sexual intercourse includes spiritual intercourse. What God has brought together let humankind not separate.

Paul also refers to Genesis 2:24 directly in Ephesians chapter 5, telling us something already that we know: That the real and substantive importance of marriage is that it represents something important about God and marriage will find its fulfilment in the marriage of the Lamb: Marriage has a spiritual meaning, a prophetic aspect—telling the world about God’s saving work on behalf of humanity through the person Jesus of Nazareth. Thus the point of sexuality is marriage and the point of marriage is to represent God and representing God is the mission and purpose of (the point of) humanity.



## Romans Chapter 8 Put Simply

IVAN HEAD

*Romans 8 is a powerful affirmation of the way in which God is on our side. The Rev'd Dr Ivan Head seeks to make plain some of its depths. Rev'd Head was a member of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission for about ten years. He is a parishioner of St Jude's Bowral NSW.*



Ivan Head

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Romans chapter 8 from beginning to end affirms that God is for us—from our beginning to our end. I use the phrase God's 'for-us-ness'. William Tyndale, the Bible scholar and a primary translator of the Bible into English as it then was, coined the phrase 'at-one-ment' (atonement) to better translate Paul's Greek language into an English New Testament (1526). His translations made a significant, creative change to the English language, both then and now.

In Romans 8, we discover that God is for us, and for us irrevocably. Paul exclaims that 'It is God who justifies' (8:33b). God puts right, and God is for us (8:3b), acting fully on our behalf, as one who would be our Father. Human salvation in Christ emerges, unshakeably, from deep within God's time, from where God has anticipated and foreseen our core need that is now addressed and met in Christ (8:29-30). This provision consists not only of the death of Jesus as 'God's Son in the likeness of sinful man' (8:3b) but most importantly by means of an unbreakable relationship established between the believer and the Spirit of Christ (by the Spirit of Christ) which Spirit indwells at the centre of the human person (8:11). Metaphors for closeness (inter-personal, spatial, and built), only take us so far at this point. For instance, if the Spirit of Christ dwells within us it may be more accurate to speak of an intra-personal relationship.

Twice in verse 11 Paul refers to indwelling, to place double stress on this remarkable claim. Indwelling follows the raising of Jesus from the dead by the same Spirit of God, which is a pre-condition for the new relationship, and the new mind-set in the believer. It is remarkable to consider that the agent of the resurrection dwells within each human person awakened to faith.

At the beginning of this chapter (8:1-2), Paul tells us that God has provided for us in Christ. We read that God has removed us from the zone of negativity and penalty: 'There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus set us free from the law of sin and death.' At the end of the chapter (8:38-39), Paul exclaims: 'I am convinced that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' This inseparability is remarkable and demonstrates the *for-us-ness* I refer to.

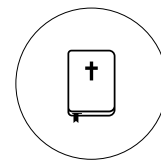
Having said that the Spirit of Christ dwells in the believer,

Paul writes what may be considered one of the most profound statements in the whole of the New Testament. At 8:16 he writes: 'The Spirit himself co-witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God'. John Wesley said that this testimony of the Spirit was immediate and direct. This aligns with the modern philosopher Alvin Plantinga where he asserts that 'we are right to take belief in God as basic'. Belief in God can properly be the move the mind makes prior to all other moves—neither inferred nor deduced but given; and this is neither a prejudice nor a refusal to think.

Romans 8 is saturated with the word *Spirit*. The Spirit is both the agent of Christ's resurrection and the agent and matrix of Christ's unbreakable relationship with the human person. Paul uses the word Spirit more than twenty times in this chapter. A very specific renewal of the human person is outlined. The renewal exchanges one human mind-set for another (8:5-9). One mind-set is purely human and closed in on its own resources. It may even be hostile to the very idea that there is a God. The new mind-set is informed by the Spirit of Christ which begins to co-form us. The indwelling Spirit literally informs us (8:29). The person in Christ is said to be conformed to, or co-formed to the image of God's Son. Paul uses the word *symmorpho* which could pass untranslated into English, as has the word *synergy*.

Paul believes that men and women in Christ share a new destination that is achieved by God's seamless intervention through Christ and the Spirit. This destination is not a goal or set of achievements in the modern sense of a better future made by human endeavour alone, a kind of utopia created by adopting self-help points, programs, or political policies. This destination involves an end to death itself. He makes this very clear in 1 Corinthians 15:26 where death is 'the last enemy to be destroyed'. This challenges our imagination. For Paul, raising Jesus from the dead cannot stay confined to raising Jesus from the dead. This act is inherently an act of *for-us-ness*.

That death is said to be destroyed is profound. For us now, it is a reality at the limit. Death sits on our life-horizon. It is not something we have mastered or can master even with our best



thoughts. We ponder it from this side of our own death, and daily we move closer to it. We know that the destination Paul hopes for and trusts in is not yet seen (8:25): 'But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.' Paul is hoping for a renewed human existence in a glorified creation where death is no more.

I offer four translations from the Greek text for Romans 8:17, where this claim is made.

*King James: 'And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.'*

*RSV: 'and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him, in order that we also may be glorified with him.'*

*NIV: 'Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.'*

We can also translate this verse by picking up one element of the NIV in its use of 'co' in co-heir. Thus: 'And if children of God, we are also heirs, heirs of God, and co-heirs of Christ if indeed we co-suffer that we may be co-glorified.'

I am using the prefix *co-* in the translations to stress the closeness of the Spirit which is sent to indwell (8:11) the human person. We must be careful not to self-isolate at this point. The Spirit minutely achieves our salvation from within us. However transcendent and mysterious, the closeness of the Spirit is real and as much internal to the human person as transcendent. Closeness and internality do not blend the identities of Christ and the believer, but neither does it leave the identity of the believer alone.

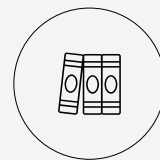
Paul wrote (Galatians 2:20): 'I have been crucified with Christ, so it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.' The Greek verb has the same *co-* prefix (*sunestauromai*) which could be translated 'co-crucified' as much as crucified with. Using *co-* really focuses on the closeness that Paul says holds between Jesus Christ, the Spirit, and the believer. There is an inclusion

that claims to be real. Paul stresses that closeness again in the challenging passage at Colossians 1:24 where he says 'Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church.' Romans 8 invites a longer study of the working out of the Spirit's indwelling.

Paul's trajectory across Romans 8 heads to the moment when 'the children of God will be revealed.' Believers will be revealed in a resurrection glory already seen in Jesus. The resurrection of all the dead is as important to Paul as the one-off resurrection of Jesus. This can be difficult for the modern Christian to realise but Paul says explicitly at 1 Cor 15:16: 'For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.' For Paul, neither makes sense without the other, however much the resurrection of Jesus is the core of all his content. At 1 Cor 15:17 Paul says: 'And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain (empty, futile), and you are still in your sins.'

The NIV (picking up a specific phrase from the Septuagint Greek Bible) says that God's own Son dies in the flesh 'as a sin offering' (8:3). From the moment of resurrection and our receipt of the resurrecting Spirit, God establishes a new, unbreakable relational bond with us. The Spirit makes us children of God and siblings of Jesus. Paul says that as a result, each person in Christ becomes 'more than victorious' (8:37). At 8:32 he asks: 'will he not give us all things with him?' This statement is focused entirely on an unbreakable personal relationship with God that holds throughout all the circumstances of life. Paul notes these extreme highs and lows in the last two verses of chapter 8 which once again stresses the unbreakable relationship with God. 'For I am sure that *not* death, *not* life, *not* angels, *not* principalities *not* things present *not* things to come, *not* powers *not* height *not* depth *not* anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

The inseparability in the Spirit of Christ and the believer may be the main point of Romans 8. In all these 'nots', those things that cannot break the bond of God's love in Christ, we also hear God's unequivocal 'Yes' as Paul said at 2 Cor 1:20: 'All the promises of God are Yes in him'.



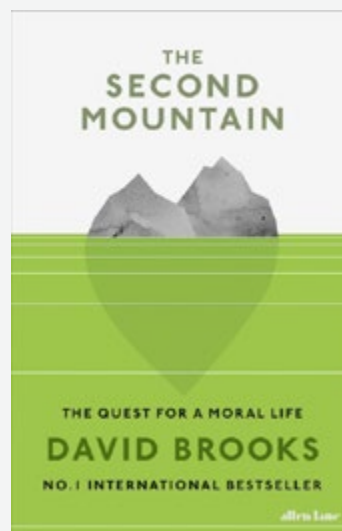
## The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life

DAVID BROOKS  
ALLAN LANE, 2019

I reviewed David Brooks's book *The Road to Character* in the last *Essentials*. At the end of that review I mentioned that I was considering taking the chapter on Augustine to my Big Questions reading group, because of its attractive discussion of Augustine's experience of God's transforming grace. Well I did that, and my mostly non-Christian friends and I had a very good discussion there. Then when I picked up Brooks's next book, *The Second Mountain*, it provided an illuminating personal backstory to the writing of *The Road to Character*, because as it turns out, Brooks has been on a spiritual journey, and during and since the writing of that previous book, he has embraced the Bible, the religious attitude to life, coming to faith in God, a Jewish-Christian identity, and even, almost—perhaps partially or waveringly—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You come across this surprising story in chapter 21 of the book, entitled 'A Most Unexpected Turn of Events'. But more of that a bit later.

Although it contains a chapter or so of spiritual memoir, the book is really a continuation of the project of his former book, about the spiritual impoverishment of our current culture's moral ecology, and the possibilities inherent in discovering a better moral ecology. The term 'moral ecology' is a term for the systems of belief and behaviour that we live our lives in. These may be local, such as the culture of an organisation that rubs off on those in it, or they may be quite encompassing, such as the classical honour codes of the ancient world. As Brooks tells it, we have moved from an early-to-mid 20th century moral ecology he calls 'We're all in this together', to a post-war, 60s-counterculture-influenced moral ecology he calls 'I'm free to be myself'. While this was an understandable shift, it has gone too far, and left us too self-focused. We live on what Brooks calls the first mountain, the mountain of life tasks: get an education, a job, a spouse; cultivate talents, reputation, success; seek personal happiness. But Brooks is convinced that we must see that there is a second mountain, and that mountain that is not about personal happiness but about moral joy; not about self, but about others, about communities. Our current moral ecology is too dominated by slogans like 'You can do anything', 'Follow your dreams' and 'Make your own way there'. The problem is that at the outset we don't know who we are or what 'our own way' might be. Nor do we have a dream to follow. We just don't know what will deliver to us the life we seek. Freedom is not what we need, but rather we need a tried and tested road shown to us, and encouragement to walk it.

So Brooks wants to give a plan for life that is aimed at the moral joy that is the promise of life on the second mountain. The heart of the book discusses four commitments for a second mountain life. These are vocation, marriage, philosophy and faith, and community. These four commitments become the arenas in which we build a life which goes to work on us.



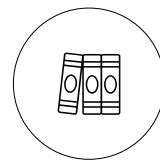
Making these commitments integrates us so that we escape the empty moral ecology of the Instagram life (individualistic, aesthetic and insecure) and discover the richer moral ecology of the relationalist life (interdependent, integrated, assured). Commitments don't erode individual freedom (as the hyper-individualist fears). Rather, our commitments actually give us what we seek, namely: identity, purpose, freedom and moral character.

Brooks carried me along with his enthusiasm, his urgency, his marshalling of anecdote, quotation, research and story. He gives the wisdom of self-help: how to get a handle on your life. He seeks to update and re-recommend the best of an old set of convictions about the centrality of commitment and community, of forgetting and submerging yourself in something bigger than you ('we're all in this together'). It is encouraging, heart-warming, inspiring. I think there's good advice here, and the basic Judeo-Christian ethic is expressed well in modern idiom. The right life is to love: to commit to others in a deep way seeking to serve their needs and weave a culture of mutual love, leading to deep joy. It occurred to me that my teenaged son could benefit from reading the chapters on vocation and marriage (so could my daughter, but she's a bit young yet).

But when Brooks turned to the long, very personal account of his awakening to faith, I was really engaged, and I ended up quoting Brooks in my Good Friday sermon: 'I am a wandering Jew and a very confused Christian, but how quick is my pace, how open are my possibilities, how vast are my hopes.' (p. 262). This book is influenced (strongly) by Christians and Christian ideas and convictions, and is written by a pretty famous Jewish New York journalist and writer who has discovered in Christians he encountered and the Christian perspectives he slowly grasped something unexpected, compelling, liberating and life-changing. His last chapter is an enthusiastic manifesto, bubbling and overflowing with newfound conviction about the importance of pursuing a different vision of the good life. Where his journey will take him is yet to be seen, but it is wonderfully interesting to watch him go.

It is also interesting to see Christians through his eyes, to hear





what struck him, confused him, put him off or attracted him as he engaged with Christianity. Walls obstructed his progress. 'I found that many of the walls in the Christian world were caused by the combination of an intellectual inferiority complex combined with a spiritual superiority complex.' (p. 256. He names evangelicals explicitly here). He sees these complexes building four walls that hinder. First is a siege mentality, 'a sense of collective victimhood' amongst some Christians, The second wall is 'bad listening', where in dialogue we just 'unfurl the maxims regardless of circumstances'. The third wall is invasive care, where 'people use the cover of faith to get into other people's business when they have not been asked'. The fourth wall is intellectual mediocrity, where 'vague words and mushy sentiments are tolerated because everyone wants to be kind'. By contrast, Yale professors are 'brutal in search of excellence'. (pp256-7)

Read this book for a thoughtful take on our modern predicament, some ideas for a different approach, for a modern spiritual memoir and also for a few perspectives on how Christians can appear to outsiders coming into our orbit.

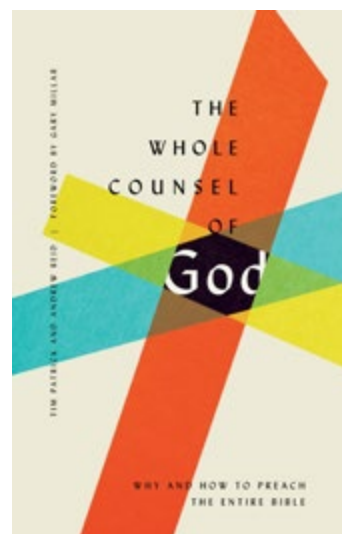
**BEN UNDERWOOD, WA //**

## The Whole Counsel of God: Why and How to Preach the Entire Bible

TIM PATRICK AND ANDREW REID  
CROSSWAY, 2020

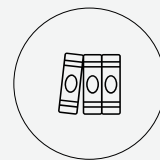
Tim Patrick and Andrew Reid have done us a great service in producing this challenging and practical apologetic for preaching systematically through the entire Bible. They recognise there are many good contemporary resources on how to preach. 'Instead, this book is about what to preach, and about how to plan and manage a long-range, ordered, and deliberate preaching program.' (p. 23) The authors' foundational conviction is that God has revealed himself progressively, that these words have been inscripturated, and that they are sufficient for the establishment of his people and their ongoing growth. Most importantly, they argue that all of these words are necessary for the growth of God's people today. So, 'we wish to encourage preachers to make it their goal to preach the entire Bible because we are convinced that all of it is the word of God for us.' (p. 22) They recognise that this is 'a monumental ambition.' (p. 23) Indeed, their argument ultimately leads to this challenge: 'All vocational preachers should set themselves the goal of preaching though the entire Bible over a thirty-five-year period.' (p. 81)

Although not their primary purpose, Patrick and Reid argue refreshingly for preaching solely from Scripture, given its



'inspiration, perspicuity, inerrancy, sufficiency and authority.' (p. 224) They remind us of how fortunate we are to have the written word of God (p. 36) and, more particularly, they argue well for the authority of both the Old and New Testaments (pp. 52-58). The authors remind us of the need 'to let the Bible set our agenda.' (p. 71) They note there is a significant difference between saying, 'What does God say about X?' and 'What does God say?' Asking the latter question should ensure appropriate proportionality in our preaching and, concomitantly, in our theological debates and lives. It should ensure we are alert and committed to what God is alert and committed to, proportional to his revelation. Simultaneously, it should prevent us from making claims where God is silent. As preachers, it forces us to ask the questions, 'Why is this passage in the Bible?', 'How does it contribute to the whole?' and 'What would we lose if it wasn't there?'

Patrick and Reid argue especially well for preaching that recognises the progressive and cumulative nature of God's revelation. In other words, preaching that lives and breathes biblical theology. 'The goal is to understand the theology of the passage itself; where the theology fits into the progress of the revelation of God's purposes outlined in the Bible, which find their focus in Jesus; how it engages with the theological priorities of the Bible already revealed; and how it contributes to further develop that theological revelation.' (p. 91) In addition to the integration of biblical theology, Patrick and Reid also argue for the integration of systematic and gospel theology into the regular preaching series (pp. 94-101). On this basis they argue against, for instance, preaching a doctrinal series synthetically, or having special evangelistic sermons. Incidentally, I am very mindful that the biblical, theological, pastoral and homiletical skills required to preach through the entire Bible in this way are substantial. The authors exemplify the implementation of their proposed preaching program by dividing the Scriptures into six different sections and planning for series from a variety of genres throughout the year. Where there is more than one preacher, they discuss the principles by which they have chosen preachers for texts. For those at home in reformed evangelical contexts, their illustrative program will not be unfamiliar and is quite accessible. However, for those used to using the common lectionary, moving to their proposal



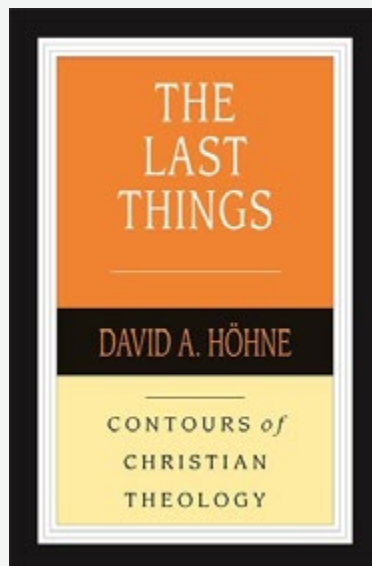
will require significant change and congregational training, which they address on pages 223-7.

While having great sympathy for the overall thrust of the authors' argument, I have wrestled nonetheless with some of the theological, pastoral and practical implications of their 35-year plan. While recognising that all of the Bible is God's word and is helpful, I need more help in understanding how, for example, the food laws or the dimensions of the temple need equal treatment compared to the New Testament passages of their fulfilment. The theological question is also raised as to whether some parts of Scripture are more pertinent than others to God's people at certain times and contexts. Of course, the danger is that many pertinent parts are avoided because of the preacher's competence, disposition, theological position, contextual misreading, external pressures, or any number of other reasons, so one well understands the authors' fallback position. Pastorally and practically, covering the Gospels and significant sections of the Old and New Testaments only once in 35 years may be unrealistic, even within a strong biblical-theological framework, where one is constantly bringing to the congregation the biblical, systematic and gospel implications. In our own Australian context, for instance, surely the issues addressed in 1 and 2 Corinthians bear repeating more than once every 35 years!

I wonder whether the authors may be placing too much freight on the sermon, even when it is accompanied by a weekly Bible study before or afterwards. Indeed, the book could be strengthened by more discussion of the place of the sermon within the broader task of training all in the whole counsel of God. Enabling families to train each other and their children, greater use of an adult Sunday School program, as is so ably done in many North American churches, greater use of a year or more at theological college and even greater encouragement of individual learning will take pressure off all that is being asked here of the sermon, which includes teaching, exhortation and evangelism. It would also give greater freedom to the preacher to use the sermon for those ministry aspects of the word of God for which it is best suited and needed in that particular context. Indeed, changing one's focus from the sermon to training by numerous means for all in their various stages of life and discipleship takes pressure off the sermon while still giving it a high place in congregational life. Such a focus does ask more of a preacher. It means charging them with the assessment and implementation of a congregation's teaching needs, including the preaching program. Nonetheless, that is the role we see Paul adopting in Ephesus, as outlined in Acts 20.

Such considerations aside, *The Whole Counsel of God* is a great encouragement to read, both for its affirmations and its challenges. Australians have much to be thankful for in terms of our contribution to biblical theology. This integration of biblical theology and preaching, with its practical call, takes this contribution to the next step.

**ADRIAN LANE, VIC //**



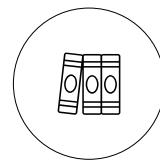
## The Last Things

DAVID HÖHNE  
CONTOURS OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY  
IVP, 2019

*(Author's disclosure: David Höhne is presently supervising my M.Th.)*

The Last Things are generally presented as four in number, being death, judgement, heaven and hell. In this volume David Höhne gives us six last things, taken from what may seem an unexpected source, namely the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. As soon as you think about it though, expounding eschatology using the framework of this prayer makes a lot of sense. The first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer are big petitions, oriented towards God's original and ultimate purposes for his creation. They set out a vision for our faith and hope and, as they are given to us to pray by Jesus Christ, we may expect that they do express the will and plan of God. To organise the teaching of Scripture about the last things under the heading of God's name being hallowed, God's kingdom coming and God's will being done seems like a sane and sound approach to eschatology. The last three petitions also lend themselves to being expounded with reference to ultimate things: daily bread is about the sustenance of life—will God sustain our lives despite death? Forgiveness of sins counts most of all at the last judgement, and deliverance from temptation and evil is the hope of the new creation.

Apart from the use of the Lord's Prayer as an organising framework, another distinctive of this work is that it seeks to say what can be said about the End from our current situation, living in what Höhne call 'the Middle'. The Middle is the



period between the resurrection and the return of Jesus. Höhne wants to describe the experience of Christian hope in this situation theologically. In the Middle we have the gospel, which is a promise from the past, for the future. In the Middle we do not see the Beginning or the End, but we have these promises, which are the means by which God gives himself to us. God is with us, the people whom he is perfecting, through his word of promise and by his Spirit. Life in the Middle is the life of prayer, the church calling upon God to fulfill the promises he has made, and trusting that he will. This is an experience of faith and hope expressed in prayer.

A third feature of this work is that it engages pretty seriously with both Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann. This makes it a stretching read. Höhne aims to construct his eschatology using the resources of Scripture, organised by the Lord's Prayer, drawing on the methods of Biblical theology that Moore College is well known for developing, leaning also on Calvin for theological method, and sifting Barth and Moltmann so as to integrate their best insights and critique their inadequacies. The *Contours in Theology* series is a set of 'concise introductory textbooks', but this is not an introduction to a first year theology course's section on eschatology. It is more at the level of an introductory textbook for a later specialist course in eschatology. Just so you know.

The chapters on the petitions of the Lord's Prayer come in two sets. To give you an indication of the guts of the book, let me describe the first of these sets of three chapters. The first set focusses on the hope that God's heavenly fatherhood will be perfected on earth. This is traced first through the theme of the hallowing of God's name. Philippians 2:9-11 is the touchstone promise, that 'in honour of the name of Jesus every knee shall bow'. Höhne traces the theme of the hallowing of God's name from Moses and the Temple through the Exile and to the Word made flesh who is given the Name above every name, through whom God's Name is and will be hallowed on earth as in heaven. The next chapter traces the theme of God's fatherhood perfected on earth by the coming of his kingdom. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 is the touchstone promise. There we learn that after the destruction of the enemies of the Messiah, finishing with death, he will hand the Kingdom over to God the Father, and God will be all in all. The chapter expounds the biblical development of the Spirit-empowered Son of God, chosen from the people to deliver the people. Jesus is that Messiah, 'mighty over sin, death and evil' (p. 113). He is not only king but rather king-priest, establishing right worship and leading the people in it. These things he does through the shedding of his blood, and sending his Spirit to gather his church. This church lives by God's promise of the defeat of death in the resurrection of the dead, and the consequent

entire advent of his kingdom on earth as in heaven. The next chapter is on the doing of God's will on earth as in heaven. The touchstone promise is Ephesians 1:3-10 where we learn that the mystery of God's will is that he intends to sum up all things in the Messiah. This chapter traces the planned and mysterious choices of God in bringing this will to pass. God plans 'to bring blessing to the many by the choice of the one/few' (p. 168). Jesus is the focus of God's plan for creation, and in this life he is the interpreter and executor of God's will, the one through whom the will of God is known and done on earth as in heaven. Through him the will of God in blessing and the curse will be perfectly realised.

I hope you get the idea, that this is not a book narrowly focused on what will happen in the End. It is a book about the whole plan of God from the beginning, through the middle and to the end. The End is known through promises received and believed in the Middle. These promises must be carefully considered and their various strands thoughtfully integrated. These promises are rooted in God himself, and contain the hidden fullness of what they offer even from the beginning. These promises all find their 'Yes' in Jesus Christ. So if you work through this book you will get a whole theology, really, not simply eschatology. There are discussions of the four last things to be found here: death (and resurrection), judgement (and forgiveness of sins), heaven (and the new earth) and hell. There's the millenium, the beatific vision and other topics too. But Höhne wants the book to ground eschatology in our ordinary Christian lives, so he repeatedly asks, 'What can we know?', 'What should we do?' and 'What can we hope for?' in the here and now, in the Middle that precedes the End. He wants to include our current eschatological experiences of prayer and church in his account of the last things.

This is, then, rather an ambitious book, and will ask readers to do some work. This is its biggest weakness for a general readership. I did not skip easily from page to page, but I am glad to have made the effort. Its best strengths are firstly its creative and useful way of framing eschatology through the Lord's Prayer. (I'm tempted to try a topical sermon series on the Lord's Prayer after reading this book.) A second strength is that its account of the End is consciously and explicitly drawn from the beginning and addressed to us where we really are: in the Middle. Another way of saying this is that it is evangelical, founded on the gospel. The last strength I will mention is its many stranded approach: using biblical-theological methods, grounded in lots of exegesis, but also reading theologians, most obviously Calvin, Barth and Moltmann, and allowing them to extend and refine this eschatology where their insights seem valuable.

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# essentials

