

A close-up photograph of a hand gently touching the heads of wheat in a field. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a soft glow and long shadows. The background is a blurred field of wheat stretching towards a line of trees under a bright sky.

The purpose of the Lord will stand

**Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.**

Proverbs 19:21 (ESV)

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The purpose of the Lord will stand



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As we approach Synod 2024, we come to that time of year where Synod members consider matters affecting the order and good governance of our Diocese. Synod receives reports, makes ordinances, passes resolutions and creates policies. These endeavours require great planning and wisdom. However, we would be foolish to approach Synod without remembering the greater wisdom of the Scriptures.

Proverbs 19:21 warns us by proclaiming, *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.* Similarly, James reminds us to be cautious in our human planning, *Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that”*

(James 4:15). This is not to undermine the place of planning and wisdom when it comes to something like Synod. Nor is it to deny the place of strategy and the necessity of hard work in all our ministries. Rather, it is to remember that as we come to yet another Synod event, we must begin in prayer and with great assurance that the purposes of the Lord *will* stand.

Before you go on to read this Synod edition of the ACR, can I therefore ask you to pray for wisdom for Synod 2024, even if you are not a member of Synod? Your brothers and sisters need your prayers. I further encourage you to read both the Synod and non-Synod specific pieces. Not only to inform your prayers, but also to help us all think critically on the matters pertaining to our Diocese. God has given us the great gift of fellowship, and as a fellowship of churches we need to help one another towards godly wisdom in all things.

This issue begins with some reflections on our need to speak together on the overall decline of church attendance in our Diocese. We then move onto a piece by Zaneta Neal on thinking theologically about strategy, followed by some of Archie Poulos’ research on clergy competency. Andrew Heard then wrestles with the

nature of ministry as ‘hard work’ and the increasing self-protectionism in ministry, with Andrew Rees’ piece on the Sabbath coming straight after.

The issue then shifts gears to provide some insightful interviews. The interview with Rico Tice is a great example of how things can turn when the structures of a diocese deny gospel truth.¹ Chase Kuhn’s interview helps us engage with some of the historical reflection on theological principles surrounding issues of church and ministry structures (as does our ‘From the Vault’ from D. B. Knox).

The final interviews are with two veterans of the Sydney Synod, Robert Tong and Laurie Scandrett.

Perhaps one matter that will cause some debate at Synod 2024 is the Statement of Faith from the Corporate Governance Policy.² Sandy Grant provides his reflections and thoughts as Synod comes to debate the matter.

Finally, we provide some book reviews at the end of our issue to help promote some recent publications.

On behalf of the ACR editorial panel, I commend this Synod edition of the ACR to you. We welcome your feedback and are glad to hear any suggestions for future editions. As always, nothing that follows claims to be the final word on the matter. Rather, the ACR seeks to encourage good and helpful debate for the furthering of the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Most importantly, what great assurance we have that God’s will *will* be done in all things. We rightly work hard in the ministries our Lord has given us to do, and faithfully plan away as knowing ***it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.***

In Him,

Mike Leite – Editorial director

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

1 The ACR sought an interview with those who have remained a part of the Church of England but was unable to do so in time for printing. Some readers may appreciate hearing this recent address from William Taylor of St Helen’s, Bishopsgate - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWnI5_rZgCs

2 On the Statement of Faith, the ACR sought some other voices on the matter to provide different viewpoints for readers, but the ACR was unable to obtain another writer on the issue.

Attendance decline report

Why we *must* talk about it

At Synod this year there will be a report on the overall weekly attendance patterns of all the churches in our Diocese. The Attendance Patterns Review Committee was formed following a discussion on the last day of the 2023 Synod. It's a discussion that almost did not go ahead during those final hours. I'm glad it did, for the report before the 2024 Synod is sobering, not only for those who will be at this year's Synod, but for all members of the Sydney Anglican Diocese. We must all take note and talk about this report.



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Major findings from the report

The report itself is clear in its major findings. Across the 436 Church Centres¹ that existed within the Diocese between 2013 to 2023, the overall **adult** attendance declined in raw percentage numbers by 6.7%, or by 14.4% when you consider population growth.

Here are some other key findings that stood out to me from the report:

- Of the Church Centres that existed in both 2013 and 2023 (some closed, as you'll see below) 189 of those Churches declined in attendance. That is roughly two thirds of all our Churches. Of those 189 Churches, 126 declined by more than 20% between 2013 to 2023.
- Of the 436 Church Centres that existed between 2013 to 2023, 55 of those Churches that recorded attendance in 2013 had closed by 2023. A further 16 Churches which had begun recording attendance after 2013 (so, new churches that opened after 2013) had closed by 2023. Thus, of the 436 Church Centres that had met between 2013 to 2023, only 365 remain.

¹ A 'Church Centre' as defined in the report is 'a specific geographical location where Anglican worship regularly occurs'. Many parishes under this definition have multiple centres such as branch churches or an aged care facility where Anglican services are held.

- There is an estimated growth of 1,000,000 people within the boundaries of our Diocese inside the next 15 to 20 years.
- The percentage of newcomers to our churches (according to NCLS data and the report) is down significantly. From 2001 to 2021, it has dropped from 12.4% to 5.4%.

Three thoughts regarding the report

We must talk about this report

Here are my thoughts (for what they're worth!). The first is, we **must** talk about this overall decline. Surely, the findings must sadden us. This isn't just about numbers. This is about the people behind those numbers. This is about the glory and worship that is being robbed of our great God, but also of the millions perishing without Jesus as their saviour. Regardless of the cause of the decline, it is deeply saddening. As a Synod, and as a fellowship of churches, we **must** talk about this reality. We can and should celebrate the growth of our schools and the activities of our organisations. We can and should as a Synod discuss policy, governance, and the specific wording of our ordinances (we are a governing body after all). But to speak little of the decline of the attendance of our local churches is to neglect the primary reason why our Diocese exists – it exists primarily *for* the churches.

Partly surprising to me is why the Synod hasn't been talking about this reality until now. One of the findings of the report is just how difficult it was to collect the data in relation to attendance. Personally, I commend the report's recommendation for new systems of tracking, reporting, and analysing numbers. I'd go further and suggest that there is much more data we could track. For instance, kids' and youth attendance, ordination numbers (both Deacon and Presbyter), clergy numbers (both incoming, but also outgoing, such as leaving the diocese or retirement), Moore College numbers, ministry apprentice numbers, and I'm sure we could think of others. Furthermore, instead of relying on the NCLS data, there may be some value in considering our own diocesan surveys.

Whichever way we do it, my point is, we must talk about the reality facing our churches using real (and reliable!) data and not give ourselves over to anecdotes and 'gut feels' when it comes to the health of our churches overall. It's much too easy to self-deceive through stories and narratives. This report is a good starting point.



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Scrutinise the data and the report

All that being said, my second thought is that we must scrutinise the data. Anyone who has been part of governance training has been told over and over again – scrutinise the data! Data can be hugely helpful, but it can also be misleading. In reading the report I have many unanswered questions. Some of the questions may have an answer, but most I suspect do not, as the data we have and the data we collect isn't sufficient to answer all our questions.

I remember having a rant to Phillip Jensen several years ago about the state of our Diocese and its churches, and whilst agreeing with some of my observations, Phillip also gave me some perspective. From his point of view, there have been many great wins in these last decades for the health and doctrinal faithfulness of our churches. Yes, attendance numbers may be down overall, but is our diocese overall more evangelical? More reformed? More biblically literate? Better trained and equipped for the work of ministry? Less nominal? Less Liberal or Anglo-Catholic? These are good questions to ask.

That's why we must scrutinise the data. Decline does not necessarily mean we've been doing a 'bad' job or have been unfaithful. Perhaps some who have left never really belonged to us (1 John 2:19). Numerical growth does not necessarily mean 'success'. There are many itching ears in every generation (2 Tim 4:3). As you read the report there are many stats and numbers, correlations and figures to draw conclusions from. We need to be careful in drawing those conclusions. Make sure you scrutinise the data. Raise questions in your mind. Consider your own context. The report is just that – a report. For me, it raises a necessary alarm of overall declining attendance – a matter which I've already said we must talk about. But the solutions are complex, situational, and multi-faceted. Data and things like the NCLS are only so useful.



Decline does not necessarily mean we've been doing a 'bad' job or have been unfaithful. Perhaps some who have left never really belonged to us (1 John 2:19).



There is both comfort and challenge

My third thought is slightly harder to articulate. I think the report brings both comfort and challenge. In speaking to the Rectors at this point, I know there are brothers (and in churches with ministry teams, brothers and sisters) who have laboured and slogged in their ministries with the result of declining attendance. We now know that that is true for 189 (two-thirds) of our churches. You're not alone. If the church you are in has declined significantly (up to 20%), you are not alone. You sit alongside 125 others. There are many tired and worn brothers and sisters, truly serving faithfully and with great zeal for the cause of our Lord Jesus, and yet are



There is comfort in the decline that God remains at work. Jesus remains King. The coming of the Kingdom and the King has not been thwarted.



doing so to decline. Be comforted that it's not 'you'. Decline is not an isolated case.

Furthermore, and more importantly, our God is faithful. This decline *is* His will for our Diocese. This is not some kind of hyper-Calvinism. It's theological reality. God does all things for the good of His people and for the sake of His glory. There is comfort in the decline that God remains at work. Jesus remains King. The coming of the Kingdom and the King has not been thwarted. As a fellowship of churches, we need to band together around those who are downcast and exhausted by the lack of numerical growth within their ministries. If that is you, keep going. God does not require of you numerical growth. He requires of you faithful, hard-labouring, Christ-honouring, sacrificial ministry. And regardless of numerical growth or not, the sheep who are part of your flock desperately need you to keep pointing them to Jesus and encouraging them in their Christian walk.

However, God uses means and warnings, and this report *is* an alarm bell for us. So, here is the challenge side. Faithfulness requires us to assess ourselves and our ways and to change what is necessary to change for the sake of God's glory and the salvation of souls. The majority of our church buildings are nowhere near capacity, and yet there are tens of thousands currently surrounding each of our buildings

who are failing to give God the glory He deserves and who are perishing – and it’s declining on the whole! Furthermore, given the predicted extra million people to come, we need to plant many more churches. True decline given population growth is far more daunting. We cannot rest at ease about that. It is a challenge.

We may need to go as far as asking whether or not ‘I’ am the problem. Again, speaking to the Rectors at this point, there are some of us who know we are in the wrong role, or no longer aspire to the office of overseer (1 Tim 3:1). If that is you, either get help or move aside. The ministry of the local church is far too important not to. The role of Rector can lend itself to laziness just as easily as it can lend itself to workaholicism. If ‘I’ am the problem, then I need to go for the sake of the local church.

Of course, there is much more we could say on both comfort and challenge. But my point is that we must hold firmly to both. We do not despair in light of this report. There is infinite comfort to be sought from our God. He is sovereign. And yet, there are infinite challenges, and we must hear the alarm bells that this report signals to us. God uses means and He uses us to accomplish His purposes. Faithfulness demands that like Paul, we labour and strive with His strength that works powerfully in us to see people presented mature in Christ (Col 1:28-29).

Let’s make sure we talk about this at Synod 2024 and beyond

To speak specifically to those at Synod 2024, the 2023 Synod was my first full Synod. I must admit, I left somewhat disappointed and disheartened by the experience. You might say, ‘Well, what did you expect! It’s Synod. Not exactly the most thrilling of events’. However, my disappointment was mostly due to the lack of focus on the local church. Given the vast majority of our Synod is made up of Parish Rectors and their Synod representatives, the business of Synod had very little to do with the ministry of the local church. Rather, the focus was overwhelmingly on our schools and organisations.



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Now, don’t mishear me. I’m not against our schools and organisations. And knowing I’ll be misheard on this point, I’ll say it again, I am not against our schools or organisations. I spent the last 7 years serving on Youthworks Council, giving significant hours each month to this organisation. I serve as the General Secretary of the Anglican Church League, which spends most of its time thinking about the boards and councils of our Diocesan organisations. I am ‘for’ all that our Diocese is.

However, it seemed strange to me that a gathering comprising all the churches of our fellowship had little to say about the churches of our fellowship. The only real attention to our churches came on that last day with some figures suggesting we had significant church attendance decline (and even then the debate that followed almost never happened).

I truly hope Synod 2024, and subsequent Synods, will be different. The attendance decline report gives good reason for things to be different at Synod 2024 and beyond. I do hope there is significant time given to pray (which must be our first response) and to proper discussion and reporting, even if the way forward remains unclear at this stage. Perhaps a greater focus on the local churches at Synod will aid the health of our churches into the future. All members of Sydney Anglican churches must talk about this and give themselves to prayer. **ACR**

What does *good* strategy look like?



Zaneta Neal is in her final year at Moore Theological College and is member of the College's Governing Board

When did you first encounter the idea of strategy?

For me, I could say that it was when I studied commerce and then worked as a management consultant – a job I had for four years, specialising in strategy and organisational design as I consulted with a variety of government, private sector and not-for-profit organisations (including a couple of Christian not-for-profits). But I think a better answer is that I first encountered strategy as a kid. My older brother and I would play games all the time: Connect Four, Monopoly, PlayStation games. As I lost these games to my brother – repeatedly – I learned that he had something I didn't have. He planned to succeed. He was (and is) a shrewd strategic thinker.

'Strategy' is bigger than corporate strategy

While the discipline of corporate strategy has thrived and entered the mainstream over recent decades, it is easy to forget that strategic thinking existed before the modern corporate world. The heart of strategy is *planning to succeed* (however we define 'success' in any given context), and humans have always intuitively planned for success – on the sporting field, the battlefield, or even the farmer's field. Strategy was a human intuition before it was a business tool for success.

Where we get stuck

When I left consulting and began my theological degree at Moore College, I noticed a couple of things. First, strategy is often a vexed topic in ministry circles. Second, and relatedly, when I compare the corporate realm to the ministry realm, I find that people ask very different questions about strategy. Consider these two questions:

1. Is strategy *good*?
2. What does *good* strategy look like?

In the corporate realm, no-one really asks the first question. It's a foregone conclusion that strategy is good, because it has proved itself useful time and time again. However, to get the most value from strategy, everyone asks the second question: 'What does *good* strategy look like?'¹

Compare this with the ministry realm. In my experience, our conversations tend to almost entirely circle around the first question ('Is strategy good?') and we



We can all benefit from a richer conversation about what good strategy looks like.



rarely get around to asking what good strategy looks like. Furthermore, answers to the first question tend to form two 'camps'. There are those of us who mostly see strategy as bad (or at least suspicious), and so don't even see it as necessary to ask what good strategy looks like. On the other hand, there

are those of us who answer the first question keenly ('Yes: strategy is good!') but perhaps still haven't explored when or how strategy might be good (or not good). Given that we all use strategic thinking at some level (that is, we all intuitively plan for success), we can all benefit from a richer conversation about what good strategy looks like.

How to move the strategy conversation forward

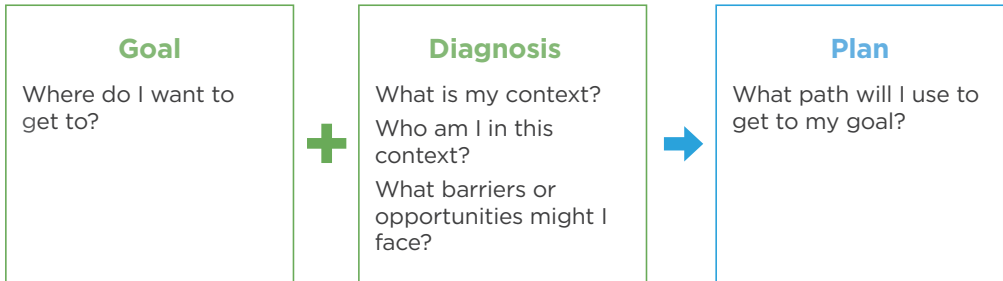
Here's the main thrust of this article: it's time for us to move the conversation away from *whether* strategy is good (question 1), and instead focus on *how* we can do strategy well (question 2). If we focus on what good strategy looks like, we will end up answering the first question anyway. Strategy *is* good – when it is done *well*. But as we evaluate '*good* strategy done *well*,' we need to bring our full theological muscle to bear on the words 'good' and 'well'. We also need a clearer understanding of what strategy itself actually is.

The rest of this article will lay some foundations that I hope will help us to continue the strategy conversation. First, I will define what strategy is, with help from both the Bible and the corporate discipline of strategy. Then, I will put forward some theological foundations of good strategy, especially in ministry.

1 The need to define *good* strategy is increasingly important amidst the proliferation of *bad* strategy in the world. For more on this, see Richard Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters* (2011).

Defining strategy

As I've already mentioned, the heart of strategy is *planning to succeed*. However, not every plan is a strategy; for example, my shopping list is a plan of what I want to buy, but it falls short of being a 'strategy'. Rather, strategies have a level of rigour that come down to three core components: *goal + diagnosis → plan*:



- Strategy is governed by a *goal*: 'Where do I want to get to?'
- plus a *diagnosis*: 'What is my context? Who am I in this context? What barriers or opportunities might I face?'
- which the strategist then uses to solve for a *plan*: 'What path will I use to get to the goal?'

A strategy is a *plan* to succeed that is discerned through *goal-setting* and *diagnosis*. This practice of strategic thinking is a kind of human wisdom. As humans, we have finite information, time and resources – but we also have goals we want to meet. Strategy is the kind of wisdom that helps us to plan a way forward to these goals, using finite resources and information.

Strategic thinking in Proverbs

Given that strategic thinking is a kind of wisdom, it is not unexpected that we see examples of strategic thinking in the book of Proverbs. Take the woman who embodies wisdom in Proverbs 31. Notice the *goal* she works towards: providing good things for others, including her husband ('She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life,' v. 12), her household ('She provides food for her family, and portions for her female servants' v. 15) and the needy ('She opens her arms to the poor', v. 20). Notice her *diagnosis* of the setting in which she works towards her goals: she is aware of what ventures are profitable (v. 18) and attentive to the current and future needs of others ('When it snows, she has no fear for her household,' v. 21; 'She watches over the affairs of her household', v. 27). All this shapes her *planning*, which she industriously brings into action, making things (vv. 13, 19, 22, 24), earning and investing (vv. 16, 24), and instructing others wisely (v. 26). This woman's exemplary wisdom is shown in her diligence to do good. Strategic thinking at its best is a kind of wisdom that directs diligent action towards good ends.

At the same time, Proverbs is full of statements that relativise human wisdom, placing it beneath God’s overarching wisdom as the one and only creator and sustainer of all things. For example:

- ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding’ (3:5)
- ‘There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death’ (14:12, 16:25)
- ‘Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails’ (19:21)
- ‘A person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart’ (21:2).

These proverbs are sobering, as they remind us of the limitations of our human wisdom due to our sin and creaturely finitude.

Taken as a whole, Proverbs shows us that strategic thinking can be a good exercise of wisdom that directs diligent action towards good ends. Yet even our best strategic thinking is still human, so we should strategise with humility and dependent faith in God (Jas 4:13-17).

The corporate discipline of strategy

Now that we have seen strategic thinking in Proverbs, how does this compare to the corporate discipline of strategy?² In short, corporate strategy takes the same logic of *goal + diagnosis* → *plan*, but helpfully bumps things up a notch in terms of rigour and codification. At the same time, corporate strategy has a different shape to the strategic thinking in Proverbs because it is not intentionally connected to theology. Let me expand on these.

First, corporate strategy takes the logic of *goal + diagnosis* → *plan*, but amplifies the ‘problem-solving’ rigour that underpins this logic. In fact, in the discipline of corporate strategy, ‘strategy’ is often described as ‘problem-solving’, because we are trying to solve the problem of how to reach our goal. Whenever we describe a course of action as a ‘strategy’, the discipline of corporate strategy expects that we should be able back up our claim by showing our working: ‘how does your *goal + diagnosis* lead you to this specific *plan*, as opposed to other plans?’

We can benefit from this rigour as we approach strategy in ministry. We sometimes call approaches ‘strategic’, but without showing our working. However, no course of action is *universally* strategic. For example, we might claim that it is ‘strategic’ to invest in ministry to a particular group of people because we’ve seen similar ministry be effective in the past – but then move forward without consider-

2 For an introduction to corporate strategy, see Roger Martin’s video, ‘A Plan Is Not a Strategy’, on the Harvard Business Review YouTube channel.



Photo: casanowe | vecteezy.com

ing if this choice makes sense for us, with our goals, in our specific context, and compared to the alternative ways in which we might invest our time and effort. Whether an approach is strategic *always* depends on the particular situation and the goal. Therefore, if we describe something as ‘strategic’ we should ask: For whom? In what context? And towards which goals?

Second, corporate strategy is normally defined without reference to God and his ethically-ordered creation. There are many implications that follow

from this, but I’ll highlight two for now.

Corporate strategy does not relativise itself under God’s wisdom as Proverbs directs us to do. This means that its value is real but limited. While corporate strategy may help us to squeeze more out of our limited information and resources, it cannot help us to humbly make peace with our human limitations under God.

Furthermore, corporate strategy creates a definition of what is ‘good’ in terms that do not relate to God. This contrasts with biblical wisdom, where the ‘good’ is defined by God and his creation. Look again at the definition of ‘strategy’ above. Do you notice that a strategic plan is effectively a miniature ethical framework? It defines a certain course of action as ‘good’ because it is likely to lead to a certain goal that we deem to be ‘good’. However, this miniature ethical framework is sealed off from what God defines as good – unless we thoroughly integrate our strategy into our theology.

What does good strategy look like?

To summarise so far: strategy is a practice of wisdom that plans for success, aided by goal-setting and diagnosis. But what does good strategy look like? Here is my summary, which I will then unpack in three parts: strategy is good when we wield the tool of strategy *skilfully*, with thorough *theological integration*, and with sensitivity to its *strengths and limitations*.

Good strategy is *skilful*

First, good strategy is skilful strategy. Sometimes we treat the ability to think strategically as an enigmatic thing, like an indefinable personality trait that some charismatic leaders are born with. However, strategic thinking encompasses a set of skills that we can all grow in, including: self-knowledge, observation and reflection on the context you are in, shrewd prioritisation (including the courage to say

no to some options) and team communication (so that you can develop and enact the plan together). I could go on. It is possible that God may give this span of competencies to a single person who plans and acts as competently as the Proverbs 31 woman. But God may also distribute each skill of strategic thinking separately across many different people in our church or churches, who can together produce wonderful strategic thinking. We should be prepared to recognise these skills and steward them well together.

Good strategy is *theologically integrated*

Second, as I've already begun to discuss, good strategy (as a kind of wisdom) should be integrated with our Christian theology. To be clear, I am not saying that Christians have a monopoly on wisdom: the Bible shows that people who do not worship God can still observe his creation and gain wisdom, and I place the discipline of corporate strategic planning in this category.³ But for those of us who



The Bible shows that people who do not worship God can still observe his creation and gain wisdom, and I place the discipline of corporate strategic planning in this category.



fear the Lord, our knowledge of God, his creation, and his saving work to bring all things in heaven and earth under Christ (Eph 1:9-10) must shape how we ethically deliberate and act.

In my experience, it is possible to treat theology as though it merely gives us ethical 'guardrails' that stop us from making wrong ethical choices: theology tells us what is out of scope, and then pragmatics helps

us to choose from the remaining options. But the theological integration I'm arguing for is more profound than that. Theology bears on *every* part of how we do strategic planning: what goals we choose, how we diagnose ourselves and the situations we are in, how we weigh up different courses of action and how we evaluate 'success' and 'failure' (see some worked examples of this below). Theology even informs when we might decide to use the tool of strategic planning, or whether we opt for a different tool altogether. Which brings us to the final point.

Good strategy is sensitive to its own *strengths and limitations*

Third, to do strategy well we should recognise that strategy is a tool that is suited for some jobs, but not for others – and so we need more than just strategy in our toolkit. My husband and I have a basic toolkit at home: a hammer, a spanner, Allen keys, and a screwdriver with a range of changeable tips. It would be very annoying

³ For example, see Acts 7:22. Proverbs also assumes that wisdom can be gained from observing creation (e.g. Prov 30:24-31), and the book of Proverbs also appears to include some sayings that originated from Israel's neighbouring nations.



Photo: shichaa | vecteezy.com

if we had to trade in our whole toolkit for just one Allen key. The Allen key would be good for some tasks (like tightening the connections of our Ikea bookshelf). But the fact that the Allen key is suited for some tasks means that it is not very good at others.

Likewise, for every strength that strategy has, it has an accompanying limitation. This is not to criticise strategy – that would be like criticising an Allen key for not being good at hammering in nails. But to use the tool of strategy well, we should use the tool for what it is good at, compensate for its limitations, and consider not using strategy at all if it's unsuitable for the job.

To make this more concrete, here are six paired **strengths** and **limitations** for strategy where each strength is a flipside of its limitation, along with a brief example for each pair.

1. **Doing** vs. **being**. Strategy has the power to stoke the fire in our bellies towards a goal. At the same time, strategy is not conducive to contentedness and simply 'being' without striving towards a goal. Relatedly, strategy tilts us to value people and activities based on how they contribute towards our goal. Without some compensation, strategy can foster a mercenary mindset that primarily values people for their performance.

- E.g. A growth group sets a year-long strategy together to share the gospel with unbelieving friends and family. A strength of the strategy is that it fans the group's zeal for evangelism. A limitation is that the strategy does not inherently place value on the group member who is suddenly hit by a debilitating chronic illness, and is finding survival hard enough without extra goals to evangelise his friends. The group members are therefore flexible with their strategy: they still strive towards evangelism, but also prioritise the care of their brother in a demonstration of his profound and steadfast value in the family of God.

2. **Responsibility** vs. **finitude**. Strategy helps us to be responsible with our finite time and resources in the face of uncertainty and limitations. However, strategy is not designed to regard the good in human limitations, weakness, and humility.

- E.g. A church plant sets a strategy to grow to a certain number of members in three years. The strategy is great at helping church members to exercise responsibility to reach out and invite local friends. However, the pastor recognises that the strategy intrinsically won't foster certain things, including humble dependence on God, and an appreciation of human weakness and need for rest. He and the church consciously bring these elements in to round out the strategy.

3. **Distilling for clarity** vs. **being simplistic**. As we do the 'diagnosis' part of strategy, we need to distil our complex situations down into key elements that seem most pertinent to our goal. This distillation helps us to cut through complexity and plan for success. However, there is a risk that the distillation involved in the strategy process can simplistically smooth down things that are necessarily complex.

- E.g. As I personally consider how to plan for my life in the future, I find it helpful to define some loose goals that will keep me focused on important projects that I may otherwise neglect to work towards in the busyness of life. However, I don't think it would be fitting to develop a *strategic plan* that governs all of my life. One reason is that life is too complex to be distilled down, so any strategy for a human life would necessarily be simplistic. If I try to avoid this problem by choosing the broadest possible goal for my life (e.g. to glorify God) that doesn't yield a particularly helpful strategy (e.g. how can I prioritise one course of action over another if I can glorify God in all things [1 Cor 10:31]?). So, I prefer to stick with flexible goals that can weave in and out of the complexity of my life, rather than design an overarching strategic plan that attempts to govern every aspect of life's complexity.

4. **Bespoke** vs. **universal**. Strategy is a great tool for forming a plan for a given group of people, in a given situation, in a given point in time. However, there is no universal strategic plan, just as there is no dress that fits every, or even most, women. Therefore, when we move into a new context, the strategic plan we developed for the original context easily loses relevance. A plan needs to be tailored again to fit the new context. Otherwise, we are in danger of applying the wrong strategy to the new situation, just because we know it worked well in the previous situation.

- E.g. A church that has been growing and maturing people well is planning to plant into a different suburb of their city. Before assuming their existing goal-directed approach to ministry will work just as well in the new plant, they will consider the new church and tailor their approach to its unique context.

5. **Planning** vs. **action**. Strategy helps us to plan what to do. But strategy itself doesn't get you anywhere: action does, under God's sovereignty. A good strategy will be *designed* for action, but if it only exists in theory and not in execution, it's still useless. Furthermore, sometimes we may need to act responsively without a concrete plan, and only then reflect and strategise for next time.

- E.g. The leadership team of a Christian not-for-profit develops a strategic plan for the next three years. However, they find after a year or so that the plan does not seem to be shaping people's attitudes or actions in the organisation. On reflection, they realise that their staff weren't trained with the skills needed to execute the strategy, so the strategic plan only remained a report on the CEO's desk.

6. **Bare consequentialism** vs. **a fuller ethical approach**. Strategy helps us to focus on the likely consequences of our actions, and then favour actions that we expect to lead to 'good' consequences (a kind of ethical reasoning called 'consequentialism'). In other words, when it comes to strategy the desired end (our goal) rationalises the means (the strategic plan). But strategy does not help us to consider other factors that determine whether a course of action is good. These other factors include whether an action may be inherently good or bad in God's eyes, what our attitudes or motivations are behind an action, and the degree to which our actions fit into God's purposeful design of the world.

- E.g. The church team who caters for afternoon tea has the goal of providing good food to facilitate good fellowship. However, one man mixed up his sugar and salt, and brought in inedible brownies. By a strict strategic logic this man's bad food was a failure because it didn't meet the catering team's goal – but the church recognises his attitude of love in his attempted brownies, so they thank him for his effort (even if the result was sub-par)!

Conclusion

So, is strategy good? Strategy is good – when we do it *well*. We do strategy well when we wield the tool of strategy *skilfully*, with thorough *theological integration*, and with sensitivity to its *strengths and limitations*.

Let's continue the conversation of what good strategy looks like, so that together we can diligently and humbly work together towards good goals, under our good God. **ACR**

Is there any value in exploring clergy competency?



Archie Poulos, Head of Ministry,
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Development, Moore Theological
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Clergy, the under-shepherds of God's flock, are one of the great gifts of God to His people. For over 30 years I have been researching how to develop their competency as shepherds. It is both such an honourable role and a most difficult task. I have been unspeakably blessed from the guidance, wisdom and care of those Sydney clergy who shepherded me through my life, but I have also observed that amongst my tribe there is often a reluctance to explore how to improve in our task. This observation led me to explore both how to develop in

ministry competency and the reluctance to embrace it.

My research examined the best of the secular wisdom on leadership competency, and the clergy of the Diocese of Sydney generously gave their time for individual conversations, focus groups, and completing long surveys which enabled a conversation between the literature and the clergy to occur. What follows is the fruit of this research, and the quotes come directly from Sydney clergy.

Reluctance to embrace development

Conversations with clergy revealed a widespread and deeply rooted disposition: a common reluctance to engage in formal competency enhancement. I explored why. Here are some of the conclusions from my investigations:

i. We are unique

Sydney Anglicans have a long, honoured, and much-loved identity as 'the Bible guys'. This perceived uniqueness easily transforms from being a distinctive to being all that matters for good ministry – and so becomes all that is necessary. As long as the pure, undiluted gospel is upheld, then nothing

more is needed. Ministry development (so it is thought) is unnecessary.

Another pathway that hinders development is ‘my pastoral situation is unique’; ‘generalised principles and practices will not work in my setting’; and ‘I am here so I know best’. This may morph into ‘no one has anything to teach me’. This attitude is sometimes intensified with the comment that ‘I am the rector and I am in charge’.

ii. The secular world doesn’t ‘get us’

That statement is certainly correct. Fortunately, church pastors are not corporate CEOs – just look at moral failings, drivenness by short-term incentives and financial KPIs that pervade the CEO world. But, to conclude the best practices of the secular world have nothing to teach us about good performance is to miss the wisdom literature that teaches us (with the eyes of faith) to learn from how the world functions.

iii. Congregational re-enforcement

Congregations think very highly of their clergy.⁴ They would leave the church if they didn’t. The regular statements regarding the strengths, convictions and morality of the clergy can reinforce that there is no need to develop.

iv. Fear

In the research, a universal, deeply felt, and, to me, surprising finding was that clergy are afraid. This fear seems to arise from two sources. The first is the Sydney tribalism. Pastors are afraid that if they try new things, or use words that are not

sanctioned by their group, then they will be cast out of the tribe. New practices are rejected because of this fear. One pastor put it as ‘keep your head low and do what is always done, so that no one labels you on the other team’. The second but associated fear arises from the age in which we live. We are assessed by short-term achievements, and in the Sydney setting, everyone knows where you rank in them. One clergyman summed it up as ‘no one wants to be known as the guy who failed. So we are very cautious about what we do’. One response when afraid it is to protect yourself. The easiest protection is to not hold yourself, or let others hold you accountable. One senior clergyman honestly expressed it as ‘I don’t hold others accountable because I don’t want them to hold me accountable. Just get on with business as usual’. It is obvious how this limits willingness to develop.

Competency roles

I asked clergy, ‘What comprises competency as a Sydney pastor?’ The information in their responses became a conversation with the best of the secular literature. The secular research is concerned to optimise performance; this is something we need to take seriously, but it ignores our purpose for existing. Sydney clergy crystallised a realm that captures this purpose for existence. From this interaction, ten sufficient and necessary roles were developed that a church must do if it is to flourish. To perform below a minimum standard in any one role will hinder church functioning even if performance in other roles is excellent. The ten roles are as follows.

4 The results of every NCLS survey confirm this

| Role | Description |
|-------------------|--|
| Defender | The defender knows and defends the received truths of the faith, the standard practices of ministry and the importance to society of Christianity. They strive to defend and protect the purity from perversion that may arise internally or externally. They execute this defence by using their position to limit the impact of divergent beliefs and practices through the active promotion of their theological stance. |
| Discipler | The discipler works to develop individuals to greater maturity in character, conviction and competency. They strive to achieve this goal by being aware of a person's individual needs and abilities, and training and equipping them. They also seek to both find and create the next generation of disciple makers. |
| Innovator | The innovator is responsive to creativity and innovation and encourages and facilitates this in others. They look for and encourage others in seeking new opportunities to develop and grow ministries and are willing to take risks in initiating these opportunities. |
| Modeller | From theological convictions (shaped by ethics, evangelism and sacrifice), the modeller advances the ministry's development through modelling of their personal behaviour, fearless communication and establishing structures that inspires others to behave similarly, with the goal that the culture of the ministry aligns with these convictions. |
| Missioner | The missioner is focused upon expanding gospel declaration and influence by maximising the resources to advance evangelism for the salvation of others, and seeks to inculcate this desire throughout the ministry. They seek to engage their ministry in the wider mission of the church and are willing to surrender their own resources to that mission. |
| Networker | The networker seeks to partner with both Christian and secular organisations with the goal of providing resources necessary for the mission with a 'win-win' attitude. They observe, maintain and enhance networks external to their ministry. |
| Shepherd | The shepherd watches over the souls of the congregation, and the congregational well-being. They strive to ensure the members are gathered in a manner that promotes maturity and are protected from danger through teaching and building them up. They establish patterns and structures for the congregation to be nourished. |
| Guardian | The guardian ensures that all aspects of ministry comply with adopted community and church standards of practice for individuals, teams and the ministry as a whole by setting, advocating for and monitoring the established standards. |
| Steward | The steward is focused on ensuring resources are optimised so that goals are met. They set realistic goals, motivate people to accomplish these goals, and manage the human and other resources to achieve the goals with minimal wastage and hold people accountable for their performance. They solve problems and conflicts that arise in the execution of the ministry. |
| Integrator | The integrator manages the competing roles of the ministry by being a theologically nuanced critical observer, and reflective learner so that resources are applied wisely. They integrate the internal operational needs of the ministry with the external desire to see the world changed and can integrate both short and long-term horizons, demonstrating flexibility and willingness to change course as circumstances change. |



Photo: lightstock.com

Sydney's greatest needs

The majority of Sydney clergy kindly completed a survey that explored behaviours associated with each of these roles. The results were illuminating. We excel in those most important tasks of caring for the flock: shepherd, modeller, discipler and missionary. But there are three roles that stand out as universal blind spots in abilities or even weaknesses. These are networker, steward and guardian.

What might we do about it?

What we must not do is let go of our treasured inheritance, which is a diocese that loves the revealed Word of God and analyses with theological rigour. But that is not sufficient. We need to be willing to develop a wider set of skills, to experiment with new ways, and to measure how we are functioning (accountability). This measurement is not to rank or rate pastors in their great task, but to assist them to develop further. Nonetheless, it does expose our shortcomings. We must keep our central core

stable and strong, and be willing to innovate and develop in our practices.

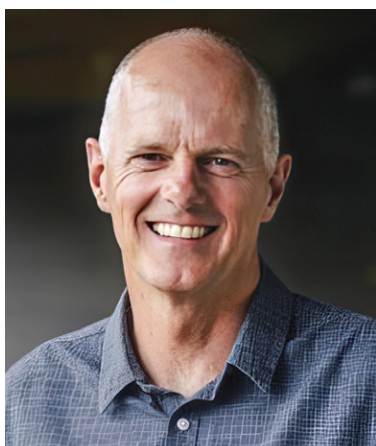
How do we do this?

Clergy must be humble and open to exploring their performance and growth needs, willing to ask for assistance, and have resources in place to facilitate this growth. Congregations need to rejoice in the shepherds God has given them, to support the church to progress in the different roles, and assist in challenging their pastors to do even better.

There are now many groups that offer to walk beside pastors and their churches to improve. For example, at the Centre for Ministry Development at Moore College, we have developed training modules to upskill clergy and congregations in each of the ten roles, as well as offering coaching and supervision.

I suspect great days lie before us, but we must not be complacent because of what has been. We need to keep improving. **ACR**

Wrestling with working hard and resting hard



Andrew Heard, Lead Pastor,
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This article was originally published in the form of a back-and-forth interview for a podcast episode, found at <https://reachaustralia.com.au/reach-australia-podcast-26-3-wrestling-with-working-hard-and-resting-hard-for-gospel-workers-andrew-heard-conversations-about-growth-and-change/>

In ministry, the more you care about making a difference, the more your life will be bound up with what happens with people.

That's the Apostle Paul. He says to the Thessalonians, 'now I live knowing that you're standing firm in the faith' (1 Thess 3:8). But that is so not psychologically healthy! I remember hearing people tell me, 'No, no, you need to create professional distance. You ought to be able to do what you do and not be bound up with what's happening with the person'.

Then I go, hang on, that wasn't Paul.

Maybe he just lived too early and he needed to have been matured by our psychological insights and help? Maybe he was just immature? Is there a difference between being deeply concerned for people in your congregations and finding your sense of identity in how they're going in the faith? Paul says, 'now I live knowing that you're standing firm'. Where does that become unhealthy in our cultural context?

It's complex! One of the challenges is that God himself grieves over his people. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. Paul cannot continue in his ministry because of the anxiety he has for what's happening, so he has to send someone to go and find out and report back. He has sleepless nights. Doesn't that all sound like someone who has at their centre something other than Jesus? When does it become inappropriately bound up with people, and when is it a natural expression of a loving person

who is connected with what's going on? Say, for instance, that my kids aren't walking in the faith. I would grieve over that and it would very much be on my mind. Or say a mother's lost a child. You can't just say, 'Jesus at the centre! Don't be brought down by that!' because it's part of a deep connection and relationship that's going to impact me in my emotions, my psychology.

Where you know it's problematic is when it spirals for you. That is, when you can't get out of the spiral and find the moment of rest and comfort in the sovereign care of a Father who's in control of all things.

But other than that, it's hard to know the particular recipe to make sure we get it right. Because there *is* a sense in which, as a pastor, my identity is bound up with the wellbeing of the people I pastor. Of course, if I mean by that, that my worth as a human depends on what the numbers are... that's gone too far. But still, as a parent, the wellbeing of my children is so much part of my life and my identity and my being—and something similar applies to being a pastor.

My fear is that we sometimes pursue psychological health at the expense of the kind of connection between pastor and people that we see in the pages of the New Testament. But I want us to be like Paul, who feels so entwined with his people that their ups are his ups, their downs are his downs, he wept with them and he rejoiced with them.

That's why, in my ministry, I've pushed back a little bit on the claim that if you're entwined like that you'll have a miserable life. I think, well, isn't that our calling? Weren't we called? 'I die that you might live': Isn't that our calling? Yes of course, that can trigger psychological issues: I can't get out of the spiral, my worth is bad. If that's happening, that's a real problem, undoubtedly. But what about the urgency of proclaiming the gospel before Jesus' return?

OK, then, what about the fact that we're running a long race? What about the necessity of persevering in ministry? People rightly raise the question of burnout. How do those things work together?

Again, these are complex matters. Burnout is not just a result of working hard. It's not just a consequence of doing too many hours. There *is* something we could label 'burnout' that's really just tiredness, and the solution to that is have a holiday, and you'll come back refreshed. But there's also psychological burnout (I admit I'm speaking as a non-professional here). That's more debilitating. It's not just resolved by a change of hours, a change of context, etc. In cases of psychological burnout, there's something more that you're bringing to the context that needs to be addressed.

But still, the challenge for Christians is that we are, quite rightly, people of love.



I want us to be like Paul, who feels so entwined with his people that their ups are his ups, their downs are his downs, he wept with them and he rejoiced with them.



When we see someone being hurt in the activity of ministry, we should do everything we can to remove the thing that might be causing the hurt. The *secular* world is concerned about burnout. We're concerned about it too, of course, because we're people of love. But we need to understand it all in the context of love for the lost, a love for the immature, and a love for the fringe people. Jesus did not live a 'balanced', 'flourishing' life! He didn't add his ministry into a richly orbed web of all the other things he did to make sure his life was as full as possible. He didn't do 'too much' ministry so that he didn't burn out. He did get taken to the cross. So also the Apostle Paul, and the other apostles, poured themselves out like a drink offering. We need to pay attention to this dimension of Christian ministry—while also being aware of the things we can bring into our ministries that predispose us to psychological burnout. But I worry about a culture that's arisen in recent times, where the first questions candidates for ministry ask is: 'How will this affect my health? What are the boundaries? What will it do for my family?' Yes, they're important questions. But in our culture, they become the first question.

On the other hand, we do want people to stay in ministry for the long term. It takes years to develop someone and for them to mature and be equipped for ministry. How do we sustain people in ministry over the long term, considering those challenges of ministry?

Yet if you begin with the thought, 'How do we sustain ourselves?' it can predispose us to ask the question (which for us is a cultural blind spot), 'How can I make

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The better question is: 'How do I sustain myself for the sake of serving the cause of the gospel most effectively for the longest time?'

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sure my life's okay?' The better question is: 'How do I sustain myself for the sake of serving the cause of the gospel most effectively for the longest time?' We can tend towards a situation where we want a pastoral team that models the 'balanced' Christian life, where the team are flourishing and enjoying serving. Yes, that's a beautiful thing. But if

that's our main aim, all we do is cultivate a congregational experience where they think pursuing the beautiful life is the end goal. I don't read that in the pages of the New Testament!

I'm particularly wanting to push into one side of things, appreciating my brothers and sisters who push to the other one as well. I think together we need to wrestle with that.

So let's remember: all good things are created for our enjoyment, and Sabbath rest is a good thing. There's a number of reasons why we need to rest. One is the refreshment we need for a sustainable life. Another is that we're not God. So taking a day off at least a week helps impress upon me that I'm not indispensable. I don't make the world turn. I trust God for this people and I can take a day out from it. The other reason is, of course, to anticipate the rest to come. So, my day off is a way of



Photo: Siraphol Siricharattakul | vecteezy

anticipating the new creation and the hope that I have there.

But we need to not make ‘rest’ the main goal. A couple of the women who are doing our trainee program told me that the first year was just overwhelming and they were thinking, ‘This is unhealthy!’ But then in the second year, they said, ‘You know, we’re finding we can work harder than we did before. And we’re starting to work out what triggers us and what are the things that undo us when the pressure comes on’. They reflected that they were forced to start to pay attention to who they were, to how they best functioned, to what

kind of rest they needed and what things they needed to pay attention to. They also observed that they became more resilient by pushing themselves to the edge and coming back. That doesn’t happen if you enter into the work thinking, ‘I’ve got 45 hours and I’m just going to stick to that’. But as you are drawn out and stretched, you learn that you’ve got particular limits that are different to someone else’s limits. We need to pay attention to that and know who we are.

Our age also makes a difference. There’s a freshness and an energy that can come when you’re younger. You come out of College with a romantic idealism about ‘the changes I’m going to make, how it’s going to be this and that. I’ve been in churches and I’ve watched what’s happening. Why wouldn’t a leader do X? How come they don’t do Y? And when I’m there, I’ll...’ But the reality is always much more complex. The younger leader needs to recognise there’s edges to knock off, and learn the challenges of compromise.

But as the older leader—you just get tired. Especially in a context where you’ve not seen much fruit, and you’ve worked through the heat of the day, and you’ve been labouring faithfully. One result is that your ambitions can close in and get smaller. That’s why the older minister needs to be open to the possibility that there’s more that could be done. Patterns might need to be changed, repentance might need to happen, and we might need to consider what God might do in the future. I remember one older pastor said to me some years ago, ‘I’ve gotten into ruts, I’ve gotten into patterns, and I need a shot in the arm. I need a group of people around me to lift my vision and get me going again’. That’s what we’re wanting to do with Reach Australia.

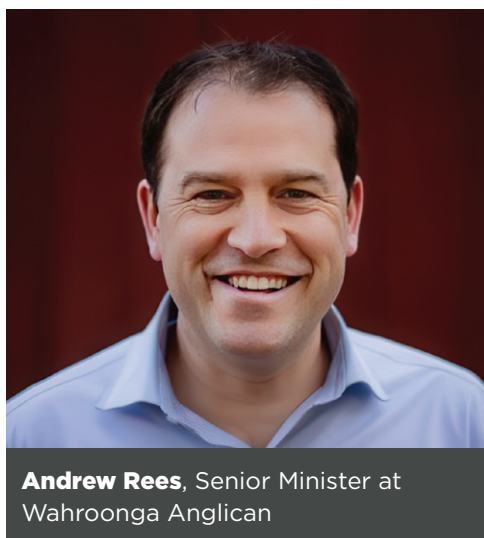
I found in the first 15 years of church life that every two or three years, I had to go through dramatic changes to keep freeing up the work for it to grow. It was just evident that if I didn’t step back, if I didn’t give things away, if I didn’t let others in,

I would become an impediment to the growth of the ministry. But to step back was to reinvent *myself* to some degree. And there was grief involved in that. One of the things that became very clear to me early on was that change brought grief with it. I could no longer be what I was—and I loved what I was! There was something about those things that I wanted and enjoyed. And so, a lot of grief has been part of the change journey. It was helpful for me to identify that in my own life, because it gave a way to process it more readily, to accept the grief, to own it, to feel the pain of it, to not pretend otherwise, to live it, to let it out, to give it to God, and to come to clear reasons as to why I needed to embrace the loss and grief. Sometimes, change creates conflict. Some changes have occurred in the context of having to say no to people. And that shows you how much you're in it to please people, and how much you're in it to please your heavenly Father.

So while the pain of the change has been costly, even in those painful changes, there's been growth in my own discipleship. It's following in Jesus' footsteps. It forces you to reflect on yourself, to work out what parts are from the flesh and what are from the Spirit, and to ask, 'How can I cull and cut and grow?' But through that process, you become more and more what God intends you to be.

An overly self-protective ministry is just not worth it. You will be here for 60, 70, 80 years and then you'll be gone. Remember: some of the most influential, impactful ministers died early. We're not here that long. It's worth it. **ACR**

Observing the Sabbath



‘Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you.’
Deuteronomy 5:12

‘Dear Andrew,
Unfortunately, we are going to miss church for the next five months, due to commitments involving our daughter’s sport.
We are looking forward to returning later in the year.’ 😊

Observing the Sabbath offers Christians an opportunity for revolutionary living in 24/7 Australia. However, our passivity towards the Sabbath is a profound challenge. This article is a call to return to a careful observance of the Sabbath, because the LORD has promised it is for our good always.

Evangelical, Reformed observance of the Old Testament command to observe the *Sabbath day* has swung on a pendulum between strict Sabbatarianism and laid-back Libertarianism. This article is an attempt to let the Scriptures (specifically Deuteronomy 5:1-15) lead us. The conclusions are open to challenge but are designed to stimulate careful consideration of the 4th commandment by contemporary Australian Christians.

The Context of the 4th Commandment (Deuteronomy 5:1-5)

Deuteronomy reveals God’s intention for his people – to create a people wholly devoted to the LORD, who is already wholly devoted to them (Deut 6:4-5). In Deuteronomy 5 we meet a second generation of God’s people, the children of the

generation who had been rescued out of slavery in Egypt by the LORD's mighty arm and led through the wilderness to the promised land. But they did not go in, because they mistrusted the LORD's intentions and the LORD's ability to deliver on his intentions.

In Deuteronomy 5, the LORD gathers the next generation together and calls on them to carefully observe all that he commands them (including the Sabbath command). Consider the details of this gathering.

Who's there?

The whole assembly... (Deut 5:22). The whole generation are gathered. And notice that the commands spoken to the first generation are also for the present generation:

It was not just with our ancestors that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. Deut 5:3

The commands of the LORD are living and active. This remains true for us (2 Tim 3:16).

Who's speaking?

It is the word of **the LORD** (Deut 5:2). The speaker of the commands is fearfully awesome! He speaks words of fire (Deut 5:4), that cause his people to tremble (Deut 5:5). As he speaks, prepare to listen, prepare to tremble!

It is also the of the LORD **our God** (Deut 5:2). This is personal. His commands are to be understood in the frame of a covenant relationship. We are bound together with the LORD our God by his big, brilliant, beautiful promises!

Why he speaks the commands?

The LORD doesn't speak commands to establish or save the relationship. That has already been done.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Deut 5:15-16

Why the commands then? The LORD speaks his word of command so that they might hear and follow (Deut 5:1) because this is the way to live rightly in the land the LORD has given them (Deut 5:16,33).

Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children. Deut 5:29

God's people are to hear his commands in this context; he speaks *for our good always* (Deut 6:24). Confident of this, let us *be careful* to do what the LORD has commanded us (Deut 4:9, 23; 5:32).

Considering the 4th Commandment carefully (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

To carefully consider the Sabbath command, let's consider *what, why and how*.

What is the command?

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work... Deut 5:12-14

God's people were to observe a Sabbath day. It was to be a *holy* day, set apart to rest from the working and striving of every other day; set apart from the surrounding culture's idols and desires. The Sabbath was a day set apart *to the LORD*, for the hearts of God's people to be reset on the one they were called to love with all their heart, soul and strength (Deut 6:5).

Why the command?

The Bible gives three reasons.

First, the command to sabbath rest is **because of creation**.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Exod 20:11

Sabbath is embedded in God's very good order in creation. We are creatures made in God's image; this is his rhythm! We are creatures. We are dependent and limited. We are not robots! Our need to rest is not a mistake. It is VERY GOOD! Sabbath is a day to enjoy our creatureliness!

Second, the command to sabbath rest is **because of salvation**.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. Deut 5:15

Sabbath is embedded in their salvation. It is a day to remember that God had delivered them from this sub-human existence in Egypt, as mere units of production in Pharaoh's economy. They were saved, to rest, to the LORD.

Third, sabbath **anticipates the rest that is yet to come**.

Sabbath whets the appetite for the rest that is yet to come. It sets our hearts to make every effort to enter that rest by following God's word that leads to life, now and yet to come! (Heb 4:9-11).

How to observe the Sabbath, by faith in Jesus Christ?

As those who live by faith in Jesus Christ, we know he has fulfilled the law on our behalf (Matt 5:17). When it comes to your relationship with the LORD, it is Jesus' observance, not yours, that holds. You are not under the law, but under grace (Rom 6:14). You are not under the Sabbath but under the one who is the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt 12:8). And your rest is found in the one who says, 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest' (Matt 11:28).

What a sweet relief this is! Jesus has fulfilled the laws demands perfectly. He stands in your place. He represents you. You are hidden in him, by faith. You are loved. You are saved. You are free!

However, let us not misunderstand The LORD's ongoing intentions for his saved people. So complete is Jesus' fulfilment of the law, so abounding is his grace, that we can forget that the freedom Jesus brings is freedom to hear and follow God's good intentions for us. The commands of the LORD are not an arbitrary rule book, just designed to expose our sin and lead us to Jesus for rescue. Yes of course, God's commands do expose us and our need of rescue. But they are not arbitrary. They are *for our good always!* He speaks that we might live.

Jesus Christ frees us, not to become enslaved again to our own sinful intentions, nor to ignore God's good commands. We are freed to wholeheartedly hear and follow his wise commands. And in his kindness, God gives us his Spirit to write these commands on our hearts (Heb 10:16). His law is not arbitrary. His law remains his wisdom to us. His law calls to us to choose life!



God's commands do expose us and our need of rescue. But they are not arbitrary. They are *for our good always!*



Therefore, we must not ignore the Sabbath commandment any more than we would the commandment not to murder. We are not to use God's grace like some credit card that we lay down to justify our freedom to ignore God's wise commands. We are to consider carefully the ongoing wisdom of God's

commands, as Jesus himself does in the Sermon on the Mount. He drives at the heart of the commands, because he knows his Father speaks for *our good always*.

For Christians, the principle of the Sabbath remains. Indeed, it remains for the same reasons that the Old Testament gives. We are still creatures of God, dependant on him for life, and needing to rest. Moreover, we join in the celebration of our salvation, foreshadowed in the Exodus and wonderfully fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We too celebrate our liberation from slavery (Deut 5:15), but how much more, for we have been liberated from sin and death (Rom 6:1-14)!

For Christians, a key to understanding how to observe the Sabbath is to see the connection between what's called *Sabbath* in the Old Testament and *The Lord's Day* in the New Testament (Rev 1:10). The relationship between the Sabbath and



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the liberation of God's people (Deut 5:15) is paralleled by the relationship between The Lord's Day and Jesus' resurrection. Our liberation by Jesus' resurrection is the reality of which Exodus is the shadow. The church of Jesus Christ (from that first Easter Day) renewed their commitment to observe the Sabbath by gathering on The Lord's Day – the first day of the week, resurrection day (Luke 24:1; Acts 20:7; 1Cor 16:2) – to rejoice in that liberation, to set the day apart as holy.

The Sabbath and now The Lord's Day was, and remains, a weekly rejoicing and resetting our hearts to rest in the Lord. A day set apart, because we are

creatures (dependent and needing rest); because we are saved (by his death and resurrection); because we are heading home to the rest yet to come! We observe The Lord's Day to rest and reset our hearts to that.

While setting Sunday for this day has obvious and significant connections to that first Easter Day, Romans 14:5-6 helps us to see that there is freedom observe this day, holy to the Lord, on other days. There is freedom to observe any (or indeed, every!) day as holy to the Lord. What there is not freedom to do (if we are following God's wise commands) is to not regard any day as holy.¹ I suggest this is where we often end up if we use our freedom to simply disregard God's sabbath command.

1 Some translations of Romans 14:5 add the word 'alike' as if to convey that a legitimate standpoint is to consider no day as special (holy). However, the original Greek does not have the word 'alike'. The options outlined in Romans 14:5 is the (weak) person who observes one day as particularly holy and the (strong) person who observes all days as holy to the Lord. There is no commendation of the person who thinks all days are alike, as if none are special (holy). One is left with two options, observing one day as holy (a concession to the weaker brother) or observing every day as holy. Interestingly, Calvin makes a similar point in a sermon from Deuteronomy 5, on the Sabbath: *'True it is that this ought to be done continually: howbeit for our infirmities sake, or rather by reason of our slothfulness, it is requisite that some one day should be chosen out. If we were as earnest in serving of God as we ought to be: we should not appoint one day in a week, only but every man ought to meet both morning and evening...'* John Calvin, '34th Sermon on Deuteronomy, 20th June, 1555', in *The Sermons of John Calvin on Deuteronomy* (printed by H. Middleton, 1583), 203-204 <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/Sermons%20on%20Deuteronomy%20-%20John%20Calvin.pdf>

Our current neglect of the Sabbath

How regularly hearts mistrust that the LORD *speaks for our good always*. Our hearts grow unwilling to follow his word. Consider your own heart when it comes to the sabbath command.

Let me start with my own heart. I hear the call to rest, but too often I have a workaholic's heart. Part of me thinks my church wants me to work like that as their minister. But the truth is, too much of my identity is bound up in my work. And, as I take time off during the week, all too often I cave to the pull to work, chasing the idol of achievement. Of course I am free, but I am meant to use my freedom to depend on my creator who in his kindness grants me rest and says follow.

As to the call to rest 'to the LORD', in one sense it is tricky for a minister to observe rest on 'The Lord's Day'. I am exhausted by Sundays. But I also need Sundays, gathered with the church family. It resets my soul! Because of my 'job' on Sundays I must wrestle to engage my heart to be set not merely to work, but to be resting in the Lord. And I need my church family for that. I need to hear them sing. It does my heart good to hear them. I need to hear them pray. It reminds me that God is our Father. I need to share in conversation, to entreat each other to love him, heart, soul, strength.

That's my heart under the X-Ray. Now to consider with me the heart of the church in Sydney. The truth is, a heart is ultimately known only to a person and to God. However, our patterns as churches give some indication as to the rhythm of our hearts. Here are some of the indications I have observed.

I often see 24/7 hearts, that seem to want to fill every space in the week. I see hearts that enjoy rest, but is it rest 'to the LORD'? One heart measure is our commitment to gather on The Lord's Day. I think our passive approach betrays that our hearts do not trust or take seriously the wisdom of God's sabbath command. All sorts of activities pull on our hearts. A big one for families in Sydney is Sunday sport for children. It is a decision that doesn't impact one Sunday, but whole terms.

We are free. We are under grace, not law. But if we establish such patterns, we are not observing this command with the care he calls us to. We are ignoring his good intentions for us.

I suspect that for many of us, we are simply unaware of how casually we are taking this command. Do the maths with me: Four Sundays a year we may be away on holiday, plus perhaps a long weekend. On two or three Sundays we may be unable to gather because of sickness. Two or three Sundays may be filled with family commitments. Perhaps another couple with helping



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others in some way. Without even noticing, that's a quarter of the year's Sundays! Moreover, here's the new dynamic I have observed in my own church. If we add to the above a long-term commitment for ourselves or our children, we can find whole terms of Sundays impacted. By then we are gathering on The Lord's Day about a third of Sundays each year.

There are several factors that make this hard for us.

First, there is no longer any cultural architecture to aid observing The Lord's Day. It is hard to rest when the whole city around us is active. It is hard to rest when there are endless opportunities for us and for our children. Our city no longer stops to rest on Sunday. Our culture is structured against us doing that.

Second, we are part of a relentless culture of connectivity. How do we switch off when we are literally plugged in to a constant online scroll-feed? This drives our fear of missing out; it compels us to be available, to feel a part of things.

Third, we must recognise our passivity. The last thing a hedonistic culture wants is for us to have time to think carefully about how we or our children approach life. We become passive decision-makers, simply reacting to opportunities as they arise. We lose the ability to be discerning.

Fourth, there is our own internal resistance to follow the command of the LORD. Our hearts pursue what we want. We become restless to fill the space. We cave to the push back of family, friends, community when they challenge a commitment to set The Lord's Day apart.

A renewal of our observance of the Sabbath

The more I listen to the commands of the Lord and see my failure, the more I see my need of Jesus. What a sweet relief running to Jesus is! The engine room to freely following this command is not guilt about these things but looking honestly at the X-Ray and then running to Jesus, who declares over our 24/7 lives: 'Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Let us pursue that rest. Let us pursue it all the more by carefully hearing and following his commands.

Let us observe the Sabbath as reality. Enjoy and rest in your creatureliness. Being overly busy is the pursuit of god-like status, where we think we can pursue our way to significance. Sabbath rest is observing the reality that we are not God!

Let us observe the Sabbath as resistance. Let us push against the relentless 24/7, FOMO, impulsive, reactive, passive priorities of a culture that cannot discern what life to the full is. The restless pace of our culture is a tidal force against our hearts. Keeping The Lord's Day holy is an act of resistance, that grows our heart and soul muscles toward the LORD.

Let us observe the Sabbath as resetting. When hearts are running on their created and redeemed rhythm, they will be devoted to the LORD. All the rhythms of the week in this city will mess with that rhythm. Observing the Sabbath is an act of reset! Resetting our hearts to the LORD. That's what the church of Jesus Christ has done since that first resurrection Sunday. It is what we need today. The Lord's Day is preparing our hearts for the six days to follow. To do that effectively, we need each other. It does our hearts good to hear others sing with gusto! It does our hearts good to hear people claim God's grace in prayer, and to see them respond to his word.

Let us observe the Sabbath as revolution. Don't underestimate the revolutionary change that putting the rest and reset of The Lord's Day first will have on your heart, your family's heart and our witness to the community. To paraphrase Tim Keller, Sabbath is a declaration of our freedom. It means you are not a slave - not to your culture's expectations, your family's hopes, your work's demands, nor even your own desires or insecurities. Sabbath is a declaration of triumph. It is finished.

ACR

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**ACR ONLINE
BE INFORMED**

Interview with Rico Tice on the Church of England



In our last issue [Easter 2024] we included an interview with Micky Mantle and Rico Tice on the topic of evangelism. This issue, we have Rico and Micky on Rico's recent experience with the Church of England.

Micky: Rico, you've been going as a Christian, a follower of Jesus, for some time now. What is it that keeps you? What has kept you?

Rico: Well, it's interesting, at the time I got converted, I got converted through the school, through the Maths teacher, but the school chaplain was not someone who was telling people the truth

about sin and the cross and judgement. John Stott always said the motives for ministry are threefold: love, truth, and anger. And I still remain very angry that lies are being told.

You know, I find ministry incredibly stimulating in the sense that we have to contend for the truth and the Church of England in England has now for 150 years allowed in false teachers, and now we are reaping what we've sowed. But I do find it incredibly stimulating. The truth is so good. 'Jesus is Lord', 2 Corinthians 4 verse 5 as Chappo taught us, but you know, we preach Jesus as Lord and it keeps me going to

say how we've been faithful to that 'Jesus is Lord', both in proclamation and defence of the gospel.

Micky: You spent time in Sydney with Chappo, and you've been blessed by his ministry in Sydney. I myself have been reminded about how blessed we are here in Sydney, in coming back to Sydney, as evangelicals in our history, in our resources. There's always a danger to take that for granted. What would you say to us about that?

Rico: Well, fight for it. Now, one of the things Chappo told me was you have to fight for things politically. You know, I think his father was a trade unionist, and in Armidale he fought; in Sydney, he would fight. We have to do politics as an evangelist. You might think I don't do politics, but I've done and do politics. I've got no platform for statements at Gafcon, but I was absolutely going to make those statements.

At All Souls, there would be issues that would come up and I would be battling for the person I felt who would be most conservative or whatever. I mean, I don't want to go into the detail of that but Chappo taught me that you need to do politics. We do have to get our hands dirty. That doesn't mean that Chappo was underhand, it meant within the processes that were there to elect officials, you have to have a voice, you have to give time to it. It is right to be persuading other people to be voting about what you think is important and how that would shape out. You know, I think for Peter Jensen [as Archbishop], Chappo was absolutely key to supporting Peter because Chappo went around



Photo: unsplash.com

the parishes. He visited people. Rightly, the pastors trusted him. So as Chappo said 'I think we must support Peter on this', I think that a lot of people took his opinion as incredibly important. So you know, that may be interesting, but what I'd say is don't take things for granted; fight. And if we learn from Judges, everything is prone to slipping: our doctrine of the fall and of total depravity means it's always prone to slipping; you've always got to battle.

Micky: The slide, you're always going on the slide.

Rico: Yeah. And you know, I become a Presbyterian three weeks ago; I've left the Church of England. Because I don't think that there's going to be repentance. I've left because I don't believe the leadership of the Church of England is going to change.

Micky: Is that right, Rico, I thought you left more because of – this is an aside thing – I thought you had left because it

was just a time thing, that is, a balance of work and so on.

Rico: Timing? Yeah. But I could see where this was going and for *Christianity Explored*, how do you expect other gatekeepers to take your material if you're part of an apostate denomination in the Church of England? But also I wasn't in all good conscience prepared to submit to the Bishop of London. So I mean, there are a number of issues that came together. But a huge push for leaving All Souls was I went and saw the Bishop of London and I said I think we can only flourish under the Word of God. And the truth is, at the moment, they are saying we can only flourish if we stay together allowing different opinions. Well, that was not true of David Hope, or Richard Charters, although they were very different in terms of one being Anglo-Catholic, the other being Greek Orthodox. So I was very 'broad church' in terms of that, but I wanted orthodoxy. But there is now an embracing of heresy. There is an embracing of false teaching over repentance, which is the centre of the gospel. And that was a huge spur to me leaving. The Bishop of London and I had a very cordial meeting, in which I just said, 'Look, we can only flourish under the Word of God'.

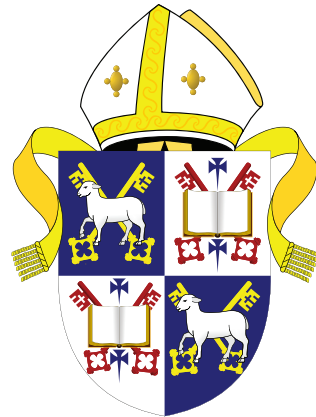
Micky: That's really helpful.

Rico: Politics is important, isn't it? And people trusted Chappo. And they were right to, and Chappo's judgments were good. He might get the odd thing wrong though, I'm sure he did.

Micky: One of my concerns in Sydney

is that we're too worried about what the *Sydney Morning Herald*, or what the world will say about us. What would you say to that?

Rico: Look, I think one of the things we've got to be good at doing is asking good questions. Sometimes we just make statements. I think Jesus over 200 times asked questions in the Gospels, so ask questions. Particularly as a minority. But you're right. I've got to have my identity in the grace of God.



The Bishop of Down and Dromore [David McClay] for the Church of Ireland has done 16 five-minute talks on the absolute hot button issues, so that the clergy can point people to what he has said when someone comes up in the congregation. That's the exact opposite to the Church of England. They have said to their incumbents, 'You're on your own. I won't be blamed'. And I thought that Bishop David was just amazing the way he just said, 'No. Every time this comes up in your congregation, point them to my five-minute talk, so their problem is with me'.

Micky: Well done him, that's a real bishop!

Rico: So he's protecting the clergy as a father, a pastor of the diocese. So I just think we've got to be prepared. And I've got no platform; we've got to be prepared to put our heads on the block. Because otherwise, the trouble is, the shrill voices can be heard, but we've got to make sure our tone is *for* you, and gracious. Which Chappo was so good at.

Micky: How can we be praying for you and evangelicals in the UK?

Rico: We've got to learn the lessons of church discipline which this crisis has thrown up. For decades we haven't had church discipline in terms of how we've

selected people for ministry. So I was ordained with people who I should have refused to be ordained with. There was one man who was a practising homosexual and I think it's all of us learning what the Bible tells us in the pastorals about who a leader should be. If you don't put that in place then the sheep will be destroyed. So these bishops at the moment should have been weeded out when they were curates. I think if there's something it's pray that the church here will all learn the lesson of church discipline and of who you recruit.

Micky: Thank you so much Rico. **ACR**

Learning from our History

Theological reflections on the nature of church



Chase Kuhn, Rector,
St Matthias Centennial Park

An interview with Chase Kuhn

As the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney continues to make decisions about gospel ministry and mission, it's helpful to recall the deliberations of previous generations who sought to apply biblical, theological principles to issues of church and ministry structures. The following interview with Dr Chase Kuhn was published on the ACR website in 2017.¹ We have republished it here to help our readers to engage with some of these provocative and influential ideas from our history and to encourage us to continue the ongoing task of thinking theologically about all our structures and decisions.

If you've grown up in Sydney Anglican churches chances are your understanding of what church is and what it's for has been significantly shaped (perhaps unknowingly!) by two people: Donald W. B. Robinson² and D. Broughton Knox.³ However, no one has undertaken a systematic and extended articulation and appraisal of this approach to church ... until now. We chat to Moore College lecturer Chase Kuhn about his new book *The Ecclesiology of Donald Robinson and D. Broughton Knox*.⁴

- 1 Chase R. Kuhn, "Putting It in Print: The Robinson-Knox View of Church Interview with Chase Kuhn," *Australian Church Record*, 31 May 2017, www.australianchurchrecord.net/putting-it-in-print-the-robinson-knox-view-of-church-interview-with-chase-kuhn/.
- 2 Vice Principal of Moore College 1959-1973, Archbishop of Sydney 1983-1992.
- 3 Principal of Moore College 1959-1985.
- 4 Chase R. Kuhn, *The Ecclesiology of Donald Robinson and D. Broughton Knox: Exposition, Analysis, and Theological Evaluation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

What first led you to be so interested in this topic?

I changed contexts in America moving from Los Angeles, CA to Birmingham, AL and noticed significant differences in church culture between the two locations. These differences, as superficial as they may have been, led to deeper questions of what the church is and/or should be. Some kind and patient mentors pointed me to the work of Robinson and Knox and sent me to Sydney for a Summer to spend time working with Anglican churches. From this experience I began to notice that there was no systematic treatment of their work. The rest is history.

We realise it's a difficult question as you've just written a whole book about it but ...how would you summarise the Robinson-Knox view of church?

The shortest explanation I can give people is that the church is a gathering. Nothing more, nothing less. This is grounded in a recognition that *the* thing that makes the church the church is the presence of Christ, and this presence being experienced in the congregation of believers.

This view of church is sometimes seen as unique or unusual, what's so different about it?

This view seems odd to some because it emphasizes an activity, namely “gathering,” over-against thinking of church as an identity or institution. The reason this is strange is because so many perceptions of church are institutional (read, denominational) or people think about “being” the church in the world. Robinson



This view seems odd to some because it emphasizes an activity, namely “gathering,” over-against thinking of church as an identity or institution.



and Knox did not devalue the denomination or Christian identity, they simply stressed that these things are not properly ecclesial. Naturally, notions of a universal church on earth do not fit within this theology either, and so thinking about global church unity has no place. This too can be bothersome to people who hold an ecumenical ideal for

the church. Again, Robinson and Knox did not devalue unity amongst Christians, however with regards to ecclesiology they stressed that unity is expressed in the congregation, and catholicity is only ever realized in the heavenly congregation.

How does the Robinson-Knox understanding of church impact what we do church?

The ecclesiology of Robinson and Knox brings a sharper focus to what church is. The emphasis on the activity of gathering leads to questions of “what for?” Their answer was that the people of God gather for fellowship with God and with one

another around the Word. Therefore, church is always Word-centred. The church is a creature of the Word, and the church's life and sustenance depend upon the Word. Therefore, the church is, according to Article XIX, where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered – proclamation and the sacraments both being Word ministries.

What, in your opinion, are the strengths of their understanding of church?

The strengths of this ecclesiology (and I am lumping them together here) is that the Word of God has been taken seriously, both in formation and practice. That is, both Robinson and Knox cared to listed afresh to what the Word said about God's purposes for his people in biblical theology. The church features as a very important part of God's plans for and dealings with his people. Robinson and Knox were careful to allow the text of the Bible to set the parameters of their ecclesiology. This ecclesiology was therefore shaped by the Word, but also stressed the importance of the Word in the life of the church.

With this, I believe that their work brings a different sort of dignity to the church. That is, even the smallest of gatherings is the church because Christ is present *even* there.

Are their aspects of the Robinson-Knox view of church which you disagree with or would like to nuance?

The work of Robinson and Knox remained quite abstract, and has often been seen as lacking concrete expression and application. How, for example, could Robinson write what he did and then become Archbishop? Did he brush aside his theology for the sake of a good ministry opportunity? I don't think so. In fact, I have speculated about reasons for his episcopal ministry in view of his ecclesiology. This example, however, highlights that there is work to be done in thinking through the concrete application of their ecclesiology. What does/should polity look like within their theology of the church? Is there anything about the constitution of the church that demands leadership structures, or are these "norms" in scripture optional?

The team at the ACR are quite chuffed that in your book you've relied on articles which Knox and Robinson wrote for the Australian Church Record back in the 1940s and 1950s. How significant were these ACR Vault articles for your research?

These articles were of great importance for two reasons. First, both Robinson and Knox engaged in the issues and theological discussions of their day through writings in the *ACR*. This gave me insight into the "battles" they were fighting. Second, while many of these were occasional pieces, a great deal of their ecclesiology was developed and articulated through these short pieces.

The sneaky privilege that I was allowed, by special permission, was access to the Knox archives which contain his annotated editions of the *ACR*. Most of the editorials were written anonymously, but Knox, being the editor, had penciled in who had authored each section. This gave me understanding of the different voices contributing to the ecclesiological discussion. Most importantly, I was able to identify the distinction between Robinson and Knox.

On the following pages of this edition, we have included an further excerpt from the *ACR Vault*: a provocative article by D. Broughton Knox on the nature of denominations written in 1987. The article can also be found at our website,⁵ along with other *ACR Vault* articles.⁶ **ACR**

5 D. Broughton Knox, "'The Church,' and 'The Denominations,'" *Australian Church Record*, 11 May 1987, pp. 4–5. Online: www.australianchurchrecord.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/11th-May-1987.pdf.

6 See www.australianchurchrecord.net/acr-archive/.

From the vault

Broughton Knox on
“‘The Church,’ and
‘The Denominations’”

“The Church,” and ‘

Should evangelicals leave their Denomination when it embraces beliefs and practices that the bible states to be untrue? The answer will in part depend on whether you believe the “Denomination” is the “Church”. As have other evangelicals, Anglican evangelicals are likely to face the question of whether they should leave their denomination because women are to be ordained to leadership of local congregations.

Rev. Dr. D. B. Knox is well-known to our readership as a former Principal of Moore Theological College. He is a respected theologian and writer, continuing to write and lecture in his fields of expertise. Dr. Knox here seeks to clarify current use of the terms “Church” and “Denomination” against the biblical use and to show that proper definition is necessary for practical ministry. Dr. Knox’s article helps focus the role of the denomination in the purposes of God.

The important word “church” is used in current language with at least six different meanings. It is used for a building, a denomination, or a profession. But interestingly enough it is seldom used in its basic New Testament meaning. We should be on our guard lest what is true of the word in one of its meanings is transferred to its use in another meaning. In particular we need to be on guard lest the aura of glory which surrounds its New Testament meaning is used to heighten loyalty to institutions other than the New Testament church.

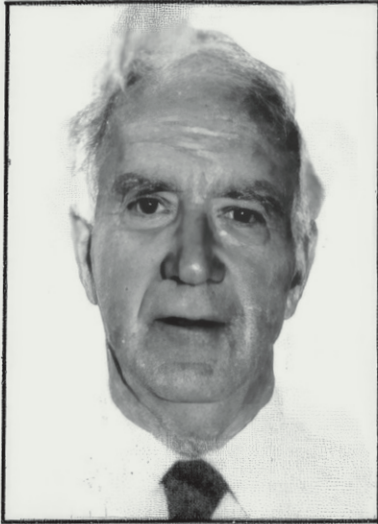
In the New Testament the word “church” always means “a gathering” or “an assembly”. Acts 19 shows it was not a technical ecclesiastical word, for in verse 32 St. Luke used it of the gathering of the mob in the amphitheatre in Ephesus, and in verse 39 of the regular political assembly of the citizens. In the Old Testament the two Hebrew equivalents of the Greek *ekklesia* are applied to the Old Testament people of God, especially when that people is conceived of as assembling or gathering; for example when gathered around Mount Sinai for the giving of the law, or later on Mount Zion where all Israel were required to assemble three times a year. The usual English equivalents of the Hebrew are “congregation” and “assembly”, but Stephen in Acts 7 used the word church (i.e., *ekklesia*) of this Old Testament congregation of God. In the New Testament

the Christian church is the fulfilment of the Old Testament assembly. Jesus Christ is its constituent. Just as in Exodus 19:4, 5, God is said to have gathered His people around Himself at Mount Sinai, and as later they regularly gathered at His command around His dwelling place on Mount Zion, so Christ gathers His people around Himself as their shepherd. He gathers them through the preaching of the gospel: “The Lord added day by day those that were being saved” (Acts 2:47). It is Christ Who builds His church (Matthew 16:18). He calls into one flock around Him His sheep, whether near or far off (John 10:16, Acts 2:39).

The Epistle to the Hebrews makes clear that the assembly, or church, which Christ is building now is primarily a heavenly assembly. In Hebrews 12:18-24 the writer contrasts the assembly of which his readers are members with the Old Testament assembly of the people of God. That earlier assembly was gathered around God on Mount Sinai but the present assembly into which Christian believers have been gathered is around the Heavenly Zion, the City of the Living God. This assembly is ascribed as “the Church of the Firstborn enrolled in Heaven”. This is the essential Christian church and it is gathered round Christ where He now is. Our membership of this assembly or church is not some future hope but is a present reality. The Book of the Revelation gives us several

'The Denominations'

D. B. Knox



D. B. Knox

glimpses of this heavenly assembly around Christ, (Revelation 7:9, 14:1). Christ is now primarily to be thought of as in Heaven. (Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:22; Acts 3:21; Acts 7:55).

Christ is in heaven

Since Christ is now in heaven, it is there that the New Testament thinks of Him as building His church, because the Church of Christ is the assembly which He calls into being around Himself. This church or assembly round Christ is a present, not merely a future reality, and we are to think of ourselves as already members of it, assembled with Him in Heaven. This is the primary reference of the word "church" in the New Testament. (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:25). This is the church affirmed in the Nicene Creed, "I believe in one Holy Catholic Apostolic church." Its principle of unity is the fact that Christ has assembled it around Himself. It is logically impossible for Him to assemble two churches; for Christ is to be thought of as in one place only, that is, in

Heaven, if we are to use Biblical imagery which is the only imagery available. This gathering or church is holy, because it is God's; it has been called out by God for Himself. It may also be called holy because its members are holy, not only in status but also in character. (1 John 3:2). It is catholic because the Gospel is no longer confined to the literal seed of Abraham, but rather Christ is gathering into His church "out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues". It is apostolic because it is founded on the Apostles, that is to say, Christ's commissioned missionaries who founded the church by preaching of the Gospel of Christ. It is the heavenly church which is apostolic, as well as catholic, holy and indivisibly one.

We are called into membership of this one church of Christ by the preaching of the Gospel. As a consequence of membership of Christ's church there is a duty on Christians to assemble in local gatherings. This duty was not so obvious to the early Christians that they did not need to be exhorted not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Hebrews 10:25). The letters of Ignatius of Antioch are notorious for their constant repetition of the duty of Christians to assemble together rather than each to worship God on his own. These exhortations confirm that in its primary meaning in the New Testament, the word "church" refers to that heavenly assembly which Christ is gathering. To this assembly every New Testament Christian was vividly conscious of belonging, as he awaited his Lord from Heaven. The fact that these early Christians nevertheless required exhortation to assemble together, shows that their concept of the church of Christ, of which they all knew themselves to be members, was in essence other than the local group.

Though a derived and not a primary use, nevertheless the most frequent use of the word in the New Testament is of the local gathering of Christians. These local gatherings, whether at Corinth or in the cities of Galatia, or in Jerusalem, were

manifestations of the one Church of Christ. Christ had gathered them, and He Himself was present according to His promise where two or three were met together in His Name. Thus they were gathered round Christ through His Spirit, and consequently nothing was lacking for a complete church of Christ. They were never spoken of as part of Christ's church because they were Christ's church, gathered by Him round Himself at a certain time in a certain place. They were manifestations of the heavenly church of which every member of the local church was at that very time a member. It is a grave mistake, common in current theology, to reverse the order and to think of Christ's universal church as made up by adding together the total membership of the local churches whether backwards through time or extensively over the earth's surface. It is worth noting that Ignatius who was the first to use the term "the Catholic Church" applied it to the gathering of Christians around Jesus. "Where Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church" (*ad Smyrn.* 8). It is the heavenly assembly ("where Jesus is") which Ignatius here designates as Catholic or universal, and he contrasts it with its counterpart, namely its local manifestation in the assembly of Christians round their minister.

The local churches come into being as their members are joined to Christ. These local churches will never be visibly one assembly until the Second Coming. Then, when Christ will be manifested, the church will be seen to be united around Him; and St. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 speaks of this quite correctly as our "gathering together" around Him in the air.

A question remains to consider. What is the relationship between the local manifestations of Christ's church, one or more of which all of us are members? The basic and only essential bond between these local churches is the mutual love, interest and prayer that members of one assembly have for members of the others. They receive members of other assemblies as fellow Christians, when they are assured of the individual faith of those members. They are interested in the Christian progress of one another, not only of those within their own assembly but of those in other assemblies. It is impossible to discover in the New Testament any other link or

relationship of the local churches one with the other than this invisible bond of mutual love for the members one for the other.

Things are very different today. The various local assemblies of Christians are grouped in patterns of fellowship, called denominations. These groupings or denominations arose in history for various reasons but what delineates a denomination at the present time and its principle of continuity is the restriction of

"The essential bond . . . mutual love, interest and prayer"

fellowship by Christians within the denomination with Christians outside the denomination. A denomination need not consist of more than one congregation, but if this congregation restricts its fellowship in one way or another with regard to members of other congregations, it is rightly called a denomination. In fact it would be difficult to find a Christian assembly today which though not linked in any way with other assemblies, nevertheless recognises other assemblies as on all points equally Christian as itself. Such an attitude of full acceptance of other congregations is now limited to those within the same denomination. Denominationalism is not solely a modern phenomenon.

Nowadays denominationalism is greatly strengthened by the centralised service structure which has been built up to serve denominationally linked churches. This service structure very frequently has a control of the denominational property and so is able to apply effective sanctions over the local congregation and its ministers. Denominationalism depends very largely for its continued existence nowadays on property ownership. If property were not owned on trust for the use of the denominational "church," denominational edges would soon be blurred, for it is the continuance of this church trust property which perpetuates the separate denominations when the original

raison d'être for their separate existence has ceased. It is not for nothing that Christ warned His disciples against the danger of owning property. Perhaps the most serious danger which the denominational groupings of Christian congregations presents is that such groupings provide a focal point for loyalty. For many members, especially for the more carnal members, the denomination replaces the true centre of loyalty which a Christian assembly should have, namely Christ Who gathers His assembly together. Thus nowadays we witness Christians assembling, both locally and on a world-wide scale, on the ground of their denominational allegiance, and the issue is confused by the fact that invariably the denomination is called "the church," as though Christ Who assembles His church were also the One Who is assembling the denominational gathering.

A denomination is seen in its best light when viewed from the service which it provides for the local Christian assemblies. Thus it normally provides expert advice and mediation in many areas; it provides training colleges for the ministers; it provides financial facilities for the purchase of congregational amenities, such as a church building to assemble in, a residence for the minister and such like. It also provides a channel for supporting missionaries in their ministry overseas, and in this respect it has a New Testament prototype in the aid the Philippians provided Paul for the full time exercise of his ministry. When viewed as a service organisation, the union of denominations is beneficial as leading to greater efficiency, so long as this efficiency is not purchased at the cost of truth or liberty. Thus the union of denominations is normally an object to be encouraged, though it is unwarranted to think that such union in itself is a spiritual objective which Christians are under obligation to strive for.

“Denominationalism depends . . . on property ownership

Denominational organisation increases the influence of the denomination in the community. Some denominations, specially those who give high sounding titles to their office-bearers, are more effective than others in securing influence in the community. But it remains true that influence secured by denominational organisation is worldly influence rather than the influence which arises from the power of the Gospel, and so it may fail to advance God's glory. It falls under the ban "it shall not be so among you". God's purposes are not advanced by pressure groups, but by prayer, preaching and Christian living and suffering. A strong denominational structure enables a "denominational witness" to be maintained in areas where otherwise the congregation would die out. Thus when there is a prolonged failure to preach the Gospel with the consequential absence of the Spirit of God at work, it is only the existence of a church building, parochial structure, parsonage, and stipend which keeps a congregation in existence. It is normally assumed that such continuity of the "Church's" witness, even though more or less a dead witness is a good thing, and to God's glory. But the assumption is highly questionable.

"Parallel denominationalism" may be defined as more than one denomination having churches in the same locality. The blessing that parallel denominationalism brings with it, is liberty of conscience. A single denomination has always been a persecuting denomination and has maintained its monopoly only by persecution. It is well to remember this as we witness the present efforts under the umbrella of the Ecumenical Movement to bring about an amalgamation of denominational structures. Amalgamation through negotiation will never completely succeed nor be permanently monolithic without the aid of persecution. The old fashioned method of burning at the stake is for the time being at least out of favour, but there are other forms of persecution to suppress liberty of conscience. Moreover the efforts of the Ecumenical Movement in aiming at the unification of denominational structures are directed towards achieving an irrelevancy, and if successful will accentuate the temptations of denominationalism in

proportion to the success in creating a big denomination. The real way forward is a return to the ancient pattern of mutual acceptance of one another without negotiating a "union scheme" of the denominations of which the local churches happen to belong. The restrictive character of the denominational link-up should be weakened by allowing with good will, an ' indeed encouraging, congregations and individual Christians to be in fellowship with each other across the denominational barriers. Enlarging the link-up by denominational amalgamation or "church union" will only strengthen its exclusiveness.

It will be of great assistance to the clarity of theological thinking if the word "church" were restricted in its use once more to the church which Christ assembles around Himself in Heaven and to the local manifestation in time and place of this one church of Christ. These local manifestations are as numerous as there are assemblies of Christians meeting together in Christ's name with His promised presence in the midst. Thus there may be a church in Corinth and again a church within that church, meeting in a house in Corinth. Each such assembly, meeting in Christ's name, is complete, for Christ's presence makes it a complete church or gathering of Christ; it is not as though the larger were made up by adding together the smaller. But in addition to these two New Testament usages we have in modern language other uses of the word. The distinctive characteristic of these modern extensions is that the word is applied (in contrast to the New Testament) to entities never thought of as assembling, nor which could in fact assemble. We freely recognise that when we speak of the church as a building or a profession we are not using it in a New Testament sense. But it is not always so clearly recognised that when we use it as a shorthand term to describe all our Christian

"Influence secured by denominational organisation is worldly"

brethren at present living in the world (as in phrase, "the church militant here in earth") or when we use it for a denomination, as the Church of England, or the Presbyterian Church, these are also non-Biblical senses; and it is here that the confusion arises, because we bring over into these modern non-Biblical uses the theology of glory which applies to the New Testament church. Yet as the late Dr. Gabriel Hebert, well known to Australians as a leading High Churchman, says in his book, *Apostle and Bishop*, p. 148, "It is of course an improper use of words to call denominations churches; for in the New Testament the word *ekklesia* means 'the Church of God,' and 'a church,' such as that of Ephesus, is a local unit of the Church."

It would help clarity of thought if wherever the word denomination can be used without altering the meaning of the sentence we used it instead of the word church. Thus we should speak of "Heads of Denominations", rather than use the horrible new fangled phrase "Heads of Churches"; and we should also speak of "Council of Denominations" rather than "Council of Churches", and "the amalgamation of denominations" rather than, "church union". Such usage would enable us to see these things more clearly in their true proportions. We may affirm that in our judgement the structure and doctrinal basis of association of the denomination to which we belong does not contravene the word of God, but to assert that our denomination, per se, as distinct from the regenerate Christians associated with it, is part of Christ's church is to attempt to combine concepts utterly disparate. Christ's church is certainly visible on earth (for invisible gatherings on earth is a contradiction) but it is not to be identified with the confederations called denominations.

An Interview with Robert Tong AM



Robert Tong AM, Solicitor of the Supreme Court of New South Wales and the High Court of Australia.

Robert is one of Sydney's longest continuous serving lay members of Sydney Synod. He has served on parish councils, as a church warden, in various diocesan committees, the General Synod, and is also the immediate past-Chancellor of the Murray Diocese.

ACR: Why did you originally get involved with Synod?

RT: When I was a member of St Stephen's, Bellevue Hill, some of the younger members of the congregation thought that a younger person should be a Synod rep-

resentative for the parish, one of the then reps being very elderly.

I got put up on the basis that I was a law student. I also had experience in teaching Sunday School, helping to run the Senior Fellowship, and Youth Group. So, I had some hands-on ministry experience in the parish.

ACR: What roles do you currently hold in Sydney Synod?

RT: I am currently the Chair of Committees. This means that when an ordinance is debated and members want to amend the text of the draft, the Chair of Committees takes the chair for that debate.

ACR: What changes have you witnessed over the past four decades of serving on Synod?

RT: The obvious ones are visible changes. When I started, Synod was men only. All in suits in the Chapter House. All the clergy were in dog collars. It was all very formal.

However, at around the same time as the Ordinance changes were made to allow women to become church wardens, women were also allowed to be elected as Synod reps (I remember there was some debate about these issues!).

ACR: How important is Synod to the Diocese?

RT: Synod is the one forum at which each parish unit has representation via the Senior Minister and two lay people, elected by the parish. So, in that sense, Synod is very important. Not just for the Diocese as a whole, but for each individual parish.

ACR: So, then, how does the ‘centre’ (or the institution) relate to the individual parishes?

RT: Well, in some ways, this question is too simplistic. Let me explain.

The centre can be viewed as the Synod making policies. It could also be viewed as the leadership of the bishops (external to the formalities of Synod). However, while the Archbishop, and his regional bishops, can ‘lead’, they can’t compel.

So, the Archbishop sets a tone and a theological framework – especially in public preaching and application of the Scriptures.

Within Synod, the bishops also bring their influence to bear in the debates that take place. If there’s a policy presented, like the education policy, and bishops speak into that debate, then that could be considered leadership of the centre.

Or, similarly on matters of money. For instance, the Synod has a budget amount at its disposal. How much money will it allocate for a certain use? Buying land in new housing areas or improving brownfield holdings are issues the bishops can speak for or against – just like any other member of Synod.

But, Synod ultimately decides where and how to use it. That is, the clergy alongside their lay elected representatives of each parish decide.

So, the concept of what the ‘centre’ is needs to be nuanced. At the end of the day, each parish controls how it reacts and responds to the episcopal leadership as well as shaping the decisions made by Synod.



Synod is very important. Not just for the Diocese as a whole, but for each individual parish.



ACR: With all that in mind, what encouragement would you give to new members of Synod?

RT: Well, they can read and refer to my guide!¹

All members of Synod should read the briefing papers.

The ACL also do podcasts that cover some of the essential business items in the lead up to Synod. Listen to those.

Apart from that, engage by listening. And if there’s a debate you feel strongly about, stand up and have a say! **ACR**

1 *The Synod Survival Guide*, Robert Tong (6th edition, 2023): <https://acl.asn.au/guide/>.

ACR Interview with Laurie Scandrett



Dr Laurie Scandrett, former Chief Executive Officer of the Anglican Schools Corporation from 1999 to 2016.

Dr Laurie Scandrett served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Anglican Schools Corporation from 1999 to 2016, during which time the Corporation grew from 9 to 20 schools across NSW and, more importantly, from 4,000 to over 14,000 students. Subsequently he served as the Interim Chief Executive Officer of Anglican Youthworks in 2017 and as the Chief Operating Officer at Moore Theological College from 2019 to 2023.

According to its website, ‘The Anglican Schools Corporation caters for the academic, spiritual and pastoral needs of over 16,500 students in NSW, ranging in age from four to eighteen years. The Corporation seeks to provide quality and affordable education to local communities whilst communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ.’

This is a mighty responsibility, and one that has been slowly building since 1947 when the Corporation was established. It ‘now owns and operates schools and campuses at 19 sites across the greater Sydney area, the South Coast and Central West of NSW’.

As Sydney Synod meets, the role of education will be one issue discussed.

With this in mind, the ACR took the time to interview Laurie Scandrett, former CEO of The Anglican Schools Corporation.

ACR: Tell us about your former role as CEO of the Corporation. What drew you to the role? Were there immediate challenges you faced?

LS: I joined the Corporation as its CEO in September 1999, after completing a PhD in Chemical Engineering, half of a

Master of Commerce degree and working in the investment markets for about 15 years. While I was not actively looking for a new role I was starting to think about it; and then one day my phone rang. I have always regarded this as one of several ‘God moments’ in my life. Subsequently I was CEO for 17 years, retiring at the end of August 2016. During that time the Corporation grew from 9 to 20 schools across NSW and, more importantly, from about 4,000 to over 14,000 students.

I was attracted to the role for three reasons; firstly I was taken by the Corporation’s mission – I loved the idea of growing the number of Anglican schools in the Diocese. Secondly, I was attracted by the challenge of the role and thirdly, I believed that I had a skill set that would be useful in the role.

I started with a staff of nine people, including myself, in the Corporation’s Group Office. Probably the biggest immediate challenge was that at the beginning of 2000, only about four months after I started in the role, we not only started two new schools, being Nowra Anglican College and Thomas Hassall Anglican College, but actually grew the number of students in Corporation schools by, from memory, 23% over 1999. We had not calculated or otherwise anticipated that percentage increase and were completely unprepared. There were fraught days in early 2000. However what I learnt from this was that we needed much better planning. This led to the second major challenge, which was to set stretch, but achievable, goals for the Corporation. In other words, to have a good Strategic Plan, on one page of

course. The concept of the one-page Strategic Plan is I hope one of my legacies.

ACR: The year 1997 marked somewhat of a turning point for TASC. This is when the Corporation began starting new schools. Can you give a bit of background to that? Why was that seen as necessary?

LS: The Anglican Schools Corporation was formally established in 1947, in response to the difficulties a number of parishes were having in operating pre-schools. But its mission to start new schools also dates from that time. Over the next 35 years a number of schools were acquired, generally because they were experiencing financial difficulties. Danebank, which had joined the Corporation back in 1947, was the first school. In 1982 the Corporation finally started its first new school, Peninsular Anglican Boys School at Warriewood.

However, the real turning point was when the Rev Ian Mears became Chair in 1992, although the first major issue that Ian had to contend with was the combining of Peninsular Anglican Boys School, St Luke’s Girls College and Roseby Preparatory School (the latter two both at Dee Why) into what became St Luke’s Grammar School at Dee Why. As a result, the number of schools in the Corporation reduced from seven to five in 1993. In 1994 the Corporation only had a total of 2,545 students enrolled across its five schools. This was very much the low point in terms of student numbers. These were tough days for the Corporation.

However, Ian Mears had a personal



Photo: shutterstock.com

great vision to start new schools. Around 1993 he was joined by the amazing John Lambert, who had previously been a Deputy Director General of the Department of Education and more recently the inaugural President of the Board of Studies. Together they formed a most formidable team. Somewhere I still have the map of Sydney on which John marked every Anglican school in Sydney in about 1994. There were none between The King's School and Tara at North Paramatta and the Blue Mountains Grammar School at Wentworth Falls. Western Sydney was completely bare of Anglican schools. If the Diocese of Sydney was to be serious about an Anglican school education, then this was its mission field. As previously mentioned I joined the Corporation as its CEO in September 1999. I always said that my job description was somewhat simple: 'to make it happen'.

In his 1994 Presidential Address to Synod, Archbishop Harry Goodhew said, in part:

Church Schools and Low Fee Schools

An initiative that I would like to encourage in 1995 is the establishment of low-fee, mission minded, Anglican Schools, in growth areas.

...

The Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation, with my strong encouragement, has been exploring the possibility of setting up as many as 15 new schools over the next decade or so in growth

areas of Sydney and with the lowest possible fees. I commend the Corporation's report to you for more detail about this project.

Subsequently the Synod determined the following resolution:

33/94 Low-fee Schools

This Synod encourages the Archbishop and the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation to develop further the possibility of setting up some new Anglican schools, staffed by teachers who are Christians, in the population growth areas of Sydney, that will be organisationally separate from, financially independent of and interrelated with the outreach programme of the local Anglican Churches. Synod urges the Corporation to institute close advisory links with those Anglicans in each area who are already involved in the management of low-fee paying Christian schools. It asks the Standing Committee to support these endeavours and requests a report on progress at the next session of Synod.

(The Rev Ian Mears - 19.10.94)

Over the next couple of years the combination of Ian's vision and John's drive saw the Corporation firstly take over Arndell Christian School (renamed Arndell Anglican College) and Croob-yar Christian School (renamed Shoalhaven Anglican School). Both were small struggling Christian schools. Then in 1997 the Corporation started its first new school under Ian's and John's over-

sight – Richard Johnson Anglican School at Oakhurst. Penrith Anglican College was started in 1998 and the aforementioned Nowra Anglican College and Thomas Hassall Anglican College at Middleton Grange in 2000. The rest, as they say, is history.

ACR: How did that fit with the Diocesan mission?

LS: Under Archbishop Donald Robinson we had ‘Vision for Growth’, and under Archbishop Harry Goodhew we had ‘Vision 2000’. Archbishop Goodhew also encouraged us to be ‘Dynamically Anglican’. Well, I believe that starting the new Anglican schools as we did was certainly dynamic, so I am sure that as such we fitted in well with the then Diocesan mission.

ACR: More widely, how do Corporation schools work alongside local parishes? What features of a TASC school make it distinct, and why would a new family enrol their child in one?

LS: We always encourage a close working relationship between a new school and local Parish. While at times there was some tension, many a new church has been established in a new school’s facilities. Often as the church grows they eventually move out. And sometimes the ‘Diocese’ (represented in my time by the Mission Property Committee) did not want to accept our offer of land and/or use of buildings. Probably



We always encourage a close working relationship between a new school and local Parish.



Photo: shutterstock.com

the best recent example of successful close co-operation is Hope Anglican Church at Leppington and Leppington Anglican College – literally side-by-side and working exceptionally well together.

Put simply, a new family should enrol their child in a TASC school because it offers quality education taught within a Christian worldview.



A new family should enrol their child in a TASC school because it offers quality education taught within a Christian worldview.



ACR: Although, is there a danger that some TASC schools, and more broadly ‘Church’ schools, might become a hindrance to ministry? That is, when co-curricular activities take precedence over church commitments?

LS: Certainly I hope not! The Corporation has always held the strong position that the school Principal is to be the spiritual leader of the school. Hopefully this means that Christian mission is at the forefront of all that the school does. In my time (and still) we constantly reminded everyone that:

The Objects of the Corporation are:

Our Vision is: serving Christ by equipping students for His world

Our Mission is: to provide affordable quality Christian education

And our Strategic Objectives are:

- to provide high quality education that is shaped by the Bible;
- to communicate in word and deed the gospel of Jesus Christ to students, staff, parents and the wider community;
- to provide education that is financially accessible to local communities;
- to operate the Corporation efficiently and safely; and
- to grow the Corporation.

Once again, we need to thank Ian Mears for producing the earlier versions of these Strategic Objectives.

ACR: Can you tell us a little about the purchase of Macquarie Anglican Grammar School and Orange Anglican Grammar School in Dubbo and Orange? Was this part of Sydney helping Bathurst Diocese?

LS: These two purchases preceded Sydney otherwise helping Bathurst Diocese by several years. The two schools had been started using the Corporation’s model (the basic model being a K-12 school of 950 students sitting on 8 hectares, or 20 acres, of land), but the Diocese of Bathurst did not have the financial resources to support the two schools during their formative years. As I always say, you need very deep pockets to start a new school. Both schools also had very costly development requirements specific to their individual locations. In the end there was effectively a mortgagee sale by the Commonwealth Bank. The Corporation acquired the land, the buildings and the

business of each for a fraction of what it had cost the Diocese of Bathurst to construct, start and run them for 10 years (Macquarie) and five years (Orange). While the junior school at Orange was running well, its senior school was really struggling. I had the privilege of visiting OAGS in March this year, nearly 10½ years after the Corporation had bought it. In March this year the school already had 120 applications for only 96 places in their 2025 Year 7 cohort. The school is literally going gangbusters.

ACR: Finally, how do you see the future of Anglican education in Sydney Diocese? Any word of advice for budding young teachers? Or families looking for a school?

LS: We need more Anglican schools!

We need more Christian teachers working across all sectors of school education!

Anglican schools offer quality education taught within a Christian worldview – enrol your child now! **ACR**

Christian corporate governance, statements of faith, and upholding marriage



Sandy Grant, Dean of Sydney

In September 2024, the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney will be asked to delete the personal Statement of Faith from its Corporate Governance Policy.

However, this personal Statement of Faith should continue to be signed by those elected or appointed to be Board Governors and Heads/CEOs of our Anglican organisations. It has been an integral part of the Corporate Governance Policy since 2014, when it

was introduced as the culmination of 4 years' research, discussion, review and debate.

The Statement of Faith includes the text of the Apostles Creed, affirmation of the Nicene Creed, and 4 extra biblical particulars not covered by the Creeds:

- a) God's word written as the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct;
- b) Only one way to be reconciled to God, through Jesus' death and resurrection;
- c) Justification by faith alone; and
- d) Marriage between a man and a woman, and the only proper place for sexual activity.

This last particular was added, albeit unexpectedly without debate, by an overwhelming majority at Synod in 2019, after being raised for consideration after the secular marriage laws in Australia were amended in 2017 to permit same-sex marriages. The wisdom of



adding such a particular was canvassed at Synod both in 2017 and 2018.

I wrote the report in 2019 which helped carry the Synod on this addition. It can still be read from page 383 of the PDF of the 2019 Synod Proceeding Book.¹

The Governance Policy states that one of its key purposes is to ensure that the leaders and governors of our organisations must profess and display a Christian faith *shaped by the Bible*.

But with a key change in our cultural context represented by such a fundamental yet contested redefinition of marriage in 2017, we needed to update our Statement of Faith.

Back then Peter Jensen had repeatedly said that human anthropology is the ‘watershed’ issue of loyalty for Christians in our era. The orthodox, biblical view of marriage and human sexuality is repeatedly undermined and attacked in our society, not only by advocacy for legislative changes, but by

peer pressure and social engineering.

More recently, Carl Trueman has suggested that peculiar times call for specific emphases in our teaching:

As the fourth century wrestled with the doctrine of God, the fifth with Christology and the nature of God’s grace, and the Reformation era with sacraments and salvation, so our age wrestles with the question of anthropology. What does it mean to be human? More specifically, what does it mean to be an embodied human?

... This war against the body lies at the heart of so much of our modern politics. It connects to the sexual politics that deny that human genitals are to be used in some ways and not in others.

... How should the church respond? The easy answer is that the church must teach anthropology.²

1 <https://www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/2019%20Synod%20Proceedings.full.pdf>

2 <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2023/09/the-battle-for-the-body>

Let me demonstrate that the doctrine of marriage is more central to biblical witness and closer to fundamental doctrine connected to saving faith than may at first be obvious.

Marriage, of a man and a woman, groom and bride, appears in the first and last pages of the Bible (Genesis 1-2; Revelation 21-22). This central place at beginning and end of the meta-narrative of Scripture is seen as highly significant by many theologians.

Marriage is also a central image of the relationship between God and his people (e.g. in multiple prophetic books), and between Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:31-32; John 3:29; synoptic parables of the bridegroom; and in Revelation).

I further observe that the family is the fundamental, pre-political unit of society, and marriage is the fundamental building block of family. For example, marriage is central to the patriarchal narratives and promises, central to the 10 Commandments, (numbers 7 and 10), and central to New Testament ethics (e.g., Ephesians 5-6; Colossians 3; Titus 2).

Furthermore, our Diocesan Doctrine Commission's 2014 report, 'Human Sexuality and the 'Same Sex Marriage' Debate', affirmed the deep significance of marriage not only in creation but also in salvation:

Marriage, in fact, played the primary role from which the rest of humanity expanded. In the gospel we learn that now through Christ Jesus and in the church "the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known

to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:8-11). The purpose is both eternal and realized in Christ Jesus our Lord. So the significance of the original institution expands because, unlike the church, marriage is both a testimony to God as creator and God as saviour (a point repeated in Ephesians 5:22ff.).³

Reflecting further on Ephesians 5:22ff, the Doctrine Commission states,

Ephesians 5:31-32 allows us to see afresh the theological dimension to marriage. The bond between a man and woman which always had the potential to represent God in the world (cf. Gen. 1:26-28) finds its deepest meaning in the way it mirrors the relationship between Christ and his body. [...] the significance of the testimony of marriage is that the eternal purposes of God are being made known in the world. This gives marriage an extraordinary importance for God's activities in the world but, at the same time, it enables us to understand something extraordinary about God's intentions for marriage.

³ https://www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/reports/D/DoctrineCommission_HumanSexuality_SameSexMarriageDebate_Oct2014.pdf

Marriage, and the related issues of sex and gender, is where our loyalty to Christ as Lord and his sufficient Word are being tested. People in our churches and organisations need clarity and consistency of leadership that holds to the biblical teaching on these central matters.

Rightly did our *Book of Common Prayer* say that ‘so many as are coupled together otherwise than God’s Word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their Matrimony lawful’. This is fundamental biblical and Anglican doctrine.

Secondarily, the 2019 amendment was also added to assist us in answering the pressing need for each Anglican school and organisation to maintain that it is a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement for their governors and their most senior leader, to hold to the traditional Christian belief on marriage and sex.

However, this addition was narrowly targeted. So under our Policy, affirming the Statement of Faith was only ever required of board members and the chief executive or school principal. It is *not required* of any other executive staff, let alone regular employees, where considerable organisational discretion is already permitted.

My report also demonstrated that over church history, statements of faith address the doctrines under threat at the time. And they have covered a variety of matters – and not just those most central to salvation. I’ve also shown that marriage is seen in a number of such statements, historically and in the present day.

Was the GAFCON movement wrong

to include a statement about marriage (alongside a statement about stewardship of creation, social justice, and relief and empowerment of the poor) in its Jerusalem Statement among the ‘tenets of orthodoxy which underpin our Anglican identity’?⁴

Likewise, in January 2022, by constitutional amendment, the Church of England Evangelical Council realised it needed to amend its Statement of Faith by adding these words:

*We acknowledge God’s creation of humankind as male and female and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family.*⁵

Clearly it is not idiosyncratic for Anglicans to be updating their statements of orthodox faith in light of current controversy to make explicit what we have always believed.

But it is also clear from debates in and around Synod, and from feedback received by the Committee reviewing the Governance Policy, that a number of people, often associated with several of our Anglican Schools, don’t like its unpopularity in wider society. They have detailed via anecdote various relational problems, and some recruiting problems.

I have taken the time to speak to a number of School heads, chaplains, council chairs and members, so as to

4 <https://www.gafcon.org/about/jerusalem-statement>

5 <https://ceec.info/basis-of-faith/>

try and feel the force of these concerns. The governors and heads of these Schools appear to be strong Christians and far from ‘shrinking violets’.

It is hard to be criticised heavily and mocked for subscribing to orthodox Christian views.

Of course, one wonders why such members of school communities do not object so vociferously to our teaching that trust in the risen Lord Jesus and his atoning death is the only way to be saved. Surely this is equally offensive to a person of another religion or none.

But that is not the lightning rod issue of our age.

While sympathising with the difficulty of unpopularity, especially with those who are loud and aggressive in the media, we must not walk away from being clear on what we believe.

And we must uphold and embody the fact that it is perfectly possible to love those with whom we disagree over

doctrine or ethical choices. Our Anglican Schools, organisations and churches have been doing this for years. We can and do care pastorally in ways sensitive to a wide variety of individuals, often well, but not always.

There are also contrary anecdotes to be told as well.

In some areas of the Diocese, being clear and conservative on marriage is actually still a selling point to many in local communities.

And there has been no quantitative evidence presented to the Synod that enrolments or waiting lists at Anglican Schools have fallen in 2023-24, compared to 2018-19 when the Statement of Faith was changed. Notwithstanding the impact of COVID and the economic difficulties of rising interest rates and inflation, many of our Schools are in demand!



one wonders why such members ... do not object so vociferously to our teaching that trust in the risen Lord Jesus and his atoning death is the only way to be saved.



Photo: lightstock.com

A number of Anglican Schools have appointed excellent new Heads in recent years since 2019, who have willingly signed the Statement of Faith in its new form. Likewise, over this period, the Synod and Standing Committee has elected hundreds of godly Christian people of fine qualities, who have been willing to sign our Statement of Faith.

Of course, retaining the Statement of Faith does not remove the continuing need for the subjective assessment of character, convictions and competence, by nominators, with proper references as needed or required.

Like it or not, the battle today is being fought over issues of marriage and human sex. It is ubiquitous in our media. It has rent the Anglican communion over the last two decades. It has caused us to produce report after report, outlining and ably (in my view) defending our traditional view as biblical and good for society.

It has been famously, but erroneously claimed that Martin Luther said:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved. To be steady on all battle fronts besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

Mark Thompson has shown that even if Luther never said those fine words,

he did say something similar, in his Collected Works. Here is a translation (WABr 3, 81.113–82.119):

Neither is it of any help if someone should say, 'I will gladly confess Christ and His Word in every other article, except that I may keep silence about one or two that my tyrants may not tolerate, such as both species on the Sacrament and the like'. For whoever denies Christ in one article or word has denied the same Christ [...] who would be denied by [denying] all the articles, since there is only one Christ in all His words, taken all together or singly.

It's not quite as memorable a quote, but as Dr Thompson observed,

Today's point of attack may not seem a 'first order issue', at least at first. But it may be that this is the point at which the gospel needs to be defended today.⁶

We should keep our existing Statement of Faith. It continues to be focused on fundamental biblical doctrine, which it sets out clearly and publicly on a single page.

It assists us to ensure strong convictions, and not just conformity of behaviour, among our leadership at the highest level of our Anglican organisations, in areas where this is being challenged by our society. We need such courageous and faithful leaders! **ACR**

⁶ <https://markdthompson.blogspot.com/2010/11/evangelical-courage.html>

Book review

A Companion to the Book of Common Prayer by Gerald Bray



Stephen Tong is the author of *Building the Church of England: The Book of Common Prayer and the Edwardian Reformation* and is a lay member of Synod.

The global Anglican Communion is in the throes of an identity crisis. At the heart of this theological battle is the form of public worship. The content and character of regular Sunday gatherings is being challenged in various ways, not least by those who seek to promote unbiblical behaviours. This current struggle is not insignificant. Neither is it a new phenomenon.

For many Anglican evangelicals, 'liturgy' is a foreign word, often associated

with a distant past. An irrelevant relic of our denominational heritage that belongs to BBC period dramas.

However, as James K. A. Smith has reminded us, liturgies provide the framework for our lives, especially our devotional lives.¹ In layman's terms, liturgy is an order of activities. A sequence of events that unfold to create a context in which we find meaning and purpose. The repeated nature of these events reinforces those lessons as information is embedded (and embodied) into our lives through active participation. For instance, we brush our teeth daily not because we have fun doing it, but because we know it's important. In turn, the significance of that repeated activity is reinforced until we can't imagine our daily routine without that activity.

If this is true of our secular lives, how much more is it true of our devotional lives?

A danger many Anglican evangelicals fall prey to is that we do not consider liturgy to be of any great importance. At least two reasons exist for this.

¹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Baker Academic, 2013).

First, our liturgical senses have been dulled by a culture of low-church public worship. Second, Sunday services can take on an habitual regularity, which means we do not always think critically about what we do as the gathered people of God.

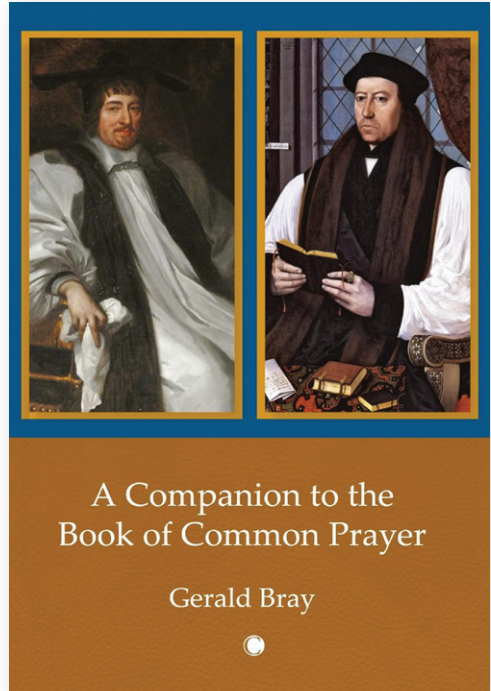
A case in point is the way public reading of Scripture has diminished in recent times.²

Which is why Gerald Bray's *Companion to the Book of Common Prayer* is such a necessary antidote.

At nearly 500 pages, this book is not for the faint hearted. But you don't need to read every page to benefit from this volume. As a companion, rather than a commentary, the interested reader can very easily dip in and out of the text as they please, focusing on specific features of liturgical practice. Divided into ten chapters, Bray breaks down the historical development of the Prayer Book into digestible sections. All the while dissecting liturgical studies with a razor-sharp theological edge.

The book opens with a lengthy essay on the history of liturgy. Bray pieces together the story of public worship from Ancient Israel through the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and into the modern era. In doing so, we can discern a continuous thread binding believers together across the ages via worship practices that honour God. What we need to realise is that the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) is not an

2 For example see, au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/brace-yourselves-the-reduction-of-public-bible-reading/; and, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/give-physical-bibles/>.



(James Clarke & Co., 2023), 506 pages.

Anglican novelty, but rather the final product of deep biblical discernment and theological inquiry (pp23-60). Archbishop Thomas Cranmer did not work in isolation. He drew from historical precedent but refined inherited traditions with the best Reformed scholarship of his day. For example, the Strasbourg reformer, Martin Bucer, played an instrumental role in shaping Cranmer's liturgical project. Each component of the BCP, from the daily offices to the ordination service, bears the mark of a wide range of influence from ancient texts and Reformed minds. One of Cranmer's main goals was to see the triune God honoured and His people edified according to Scripture. According to that objective, the BCP 'takes the biblical framework of God's covenant with His people and teaches us how to shape our

minds and prayers in ways that reflect our trust in His promises' (p102). As such, the BCP – perhaps more than the Thirty-nine Articles and Homilies – has bequeathed solifidian principles to Anglican worship in a concrete way.³

There are other lessons to be learnt.

As the title indicates, this volume focuses on the official rite of the Anglican Church, more commonly known as the Prayer Book. Various iterations of the BCP have materialised since it was first conceptualised by Cranmer in the late 1530s (the earliest manuscript evidence of Cranmer's liturgical drafts can be dated to around 1538). And modern revisions continued to be made into the twentieth century. But the real champion of Bray's work is the 1662 edition. This version quickly 'came to be seen as a standard of doctrine' (p79) in the Church of England. Part of the reason for this was that Anglo-Catholic traditionalists failed to make retrograde amendments to the liturgy that substantially shifted its evangelical character, despite holding positions of political influence (both ecclesiastical and secular). However, many non-conformist evangelicals could not in good conscience use what they saw as a compromised liturgy and were forced out of the Church of England in a moment known as the 'Great Ejection'. In 1662, public worship was a clear litmus test for orthodoxy. Even with many theological fluctuations over the past four centuries, the

BCP can still be viewed as central to the Anglican identity.

There is good reason for this. And it is worth quoting Bray at length:

The enduring greatness of the 1662 liturgy is that it is one of the best attempts ever made to turn the Word of God as revealed in Holy Scripture into the words of the Church as we absorb the divine teaching and return it to God in wonder, love and praise. ... The prayer book is focused on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, foretold in the Old Testament and realised in the New. It takes the biblical framework of God's covenant with His people and teaches us how to shape our minds and prayers in ways that reflect our trust in His promises (p102).

Liturgical reform has always reflected doctrinal understanding. This was as true for the Reformation as it is for our own time.

But Bray does not necessarily call for a wholesale return to Prayer Book services. Instead, his argument invites us to reflect on our own practices of worship and makes us consider afresh why we do what we do. Bray warns us that 'the eclipse of theology in liturgical studies cannot be sustained, as people come to realise that our patterns of worship reflect what we believe' (p100). As the old Latin adage puts it: *lex orandi, lex credendi* (how we pray shapes what we believe). In other words, changes to public worship have resonant spiritual consequences for congregations. Contemporary applications from around the

3 'Solifidian' refers to the theological principles of the Reformation, or the 'five solas': saved by grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, and living to the glory of God alone.



Image: Thomas Cranmer by Gerlach Flicke, wiki-commons

global communion will come to mind quickly. However, we would do well to reconsider the character of the Prayer Book, especially in our own low-church setting. Even a cursory glance reveals just how soaked in Scripture Cranmer's masterpiece is. Reflecting on the process behind its production provides a salient lesson. 'The sixteenth-century Reformers, [were] motivated ... more by theological than by historical or liturgical criteria' (p11). It is an enduring principle to keep in mind when piecing together an order of service for today's church.

The last couple of generations have proudly jettisoned the Prayer Book from Sundays. On the one hand, this is fine and fitting for the times. Indeed, it could even be argued that this modern trend is in keeping with Cranmer's original spirit of liturgical innovation.⁴ And,

4 See Cranmer's introductory essay 'Of Ceremonies' contained in the Prayer Book.

as Bray points out, modernisation and contextualisation of public worship is necessary – particularly as the global Anglican Communion continues to spread into non-Western, non-English speaking cultures (pp 90-96). Yet, there is a danger here. Bray warns that when 'there is a vacuum in public worship [it] is filled by what people see as expedients, a situation that is unstable and unlikely to last very long' (p99). This should give us pause to think critically about our current patterns of worship through a theological lens.

Flowing underneath Bray's historical survey is another implicit theme: the ever-present need to contend for the faith. The evangelical character of the BCP has never been taken for granted. It is worth remembering that the major flashpoints of liturgical history arose when a small, yet politically influential, coterie of clergy sought to moderate the Prayer Book away from its scriptural bearings. Such attempts by High



Even a cursory glance reveals just how soaked in Scripture Cranmer's masterpiece is.



Church traditionalists such as William Laud, John Cosin, and Edward Stephens are highlighted by Bray, who discusses these moments with sensitivity (pp60-81, esp. 61-64 and 78-79). Yet, acknowledging the impact a minority can have on doctrinal matters is an emphatic lesson nonetheless. It reminds us of the need to engage in church politics.

Paying attention to the internal mechanics of church governance is a necessary safeguard against the infiltration of unbiblical doctrine and practice.

With such depth of insight, Bray's introductory essay is well worth the price of admission alone. It could very easily find a place on the compulsory reading list for Anglican seminaries and theological colleges.

The following nine chapters are much more technical, and this is where one might decide to duck in and out of the volume. Having said that, one will not be disappointed by a close reading of these pages, since the quality of scholarship on display is manifest and breathtaking.

Like all of his academic works, the brilliance of Bray's analysis is perhaps best revealed in the micro-details. Two highlights include his discussion of the Prayer of Humble Access (pp313-15), and the significant reforms made to the burial service (pp417-25). Indeed, the concluding prayer in the burial service is a personal favourite. Its cadence is inflected by Scripture, giving it a triumphant and hopeful tone, even in the midst of grief and darkness. The chapter on 'Collects, Epistles and Gospels' is also illuminating, and offers a refresh-

ing challenge to personal devotional attitudes and practices. Similarly, the chapters on the Lord's Supper and Christian Initiation (Baptism) are thought-provoking commentaries on the sacraments. Here, Bray is unafraid to point out how the Reformers were limited by their own historical context. Of note is the observation that 'the Reformers made no provision for adult baptism, a defect that was not remedied until 1662' (p337). Throughout these chapters, the clarity of Bray's prose allows readers to easily follow his piercing analysis of the historical and theological character of the BCP, which is established on meticulous research.

The Companion to the Book of Common Prayer is a wonderful resource for clergy and lay alike. It is not just a history book. Nor is it simply a technical guide to the BCP. The extremely helpful and detailed commentary means this companion is an essential tool for anyone who thinks deeply and conscientiously about public worship. It has contemporary significance for the modern church. And it might just help preserve the biblical-theological posture of public worship in global Anglicanism. **ACR**

Book review

Australian Evangelical Perspectives on Youth Ministry



Dan Bishop is the Youth Minister at Engadine Anglican Church

How should parents and churches partner together in the discipleship of youth while including youth from non-Christian families? How do we help youth navigate their sinful nature without infusing them with either despair or ignorance of the horror of sin? How do we help the youth around us understand the beliefs and effects of the world they are immersed in when they've never experienced anything different?

How can we answer these important and deep questions when so many of the readily available resources for youth

ministry have shallow theology, hardly engage with the Bible and are driven by pragmatic questions such as: '10 fool-proof steps to grow your youth ministry!'

Australian Evangelical Perspectives on Youth Ministry provides biblically-based answers which help the reader to navigate questions such as these (and many more) as they minister to youth. And it doesn't provide these answers from a void; instead, almost all its contributors are a part of the Sydney Anglican Diocese which has an incredibly rich history of youth ministry experience, in addition to each contributor's experiences.

This book has provided me with an oasis of theologically sound reasoning amidst a desert of biblically ignorant resources concerning ministry to youth. The book itself is helpfully divided into four sections: Identity, Church, Culture and Discipleship. Each section provides perspectives on the section from various contributors engaging with God's word and considering in depth its application to youth ministry.

Each contributor has considered what the Bible says concerning their topic of study from a reformed theologi-

cal perspective as well as its implications for the discipleship of youth. As a result, the book can equip its readers with God’s word to minister in a way that is theologically informed, relational, and practical. A rare and glorious trifecta. I found each chapter a rich blessing, yet some standouts for me included ‘The Success of Colonial Sunday Schools and Their Ongoing Usefulness Today’ by Ruth Lukabyo which informed me of the rich heritage our ministries have been built upon. ‘The Joyful Task of Being Free’ by Andrew Errington wrestled with the topic of Christian freedom in relation to identity in Christ. Lastly, ‘The Path to Wisdom: Searching and Finding Order in Proverbs 2’ by Timothy Escott provided a deep reflection on how wisdom

can be pursued according to Proverbs 2 as a microcosm of Proverbs 1-9 and considering it through the lens of the whole salvation narrative of the Bible.

So many of my ministry practices have already been positively impacted by the teaching in this book, from



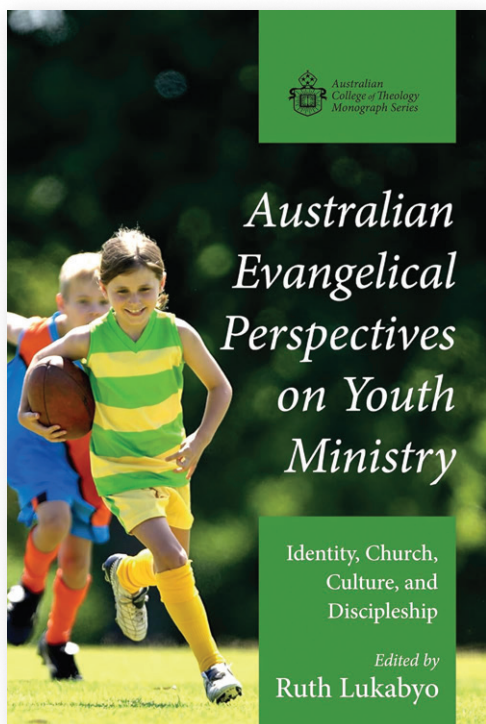
So many of my ministry practices have already been positively impacted by the teaching in this book.



engaging with youth on modern issues of identity, purpose and belonging, to the structuring of our youth ministries as a church. The most helpful thing this book has given me is not only the wonderful answers it provides to deep theological questions, but also questions I should have been asking but wasn’t.

For instance, I never thought to ask how a Christian’s freedom in Christ relates to their slavery to Christ and its implications on Christian living until I engaged with that question in Andrew Errington’s paper. Wrestling with this question has helped me have a higher view of the role of those in leadership and has impacted how I equip and train the youth and kids’ leaders in the church I serve in by teaching them how good and right authority is where freedom is truly found rather than in the absence of authority.

Additional to this, Tim Escott’s essay on the path to wisdom in Proverbs 2 outlined the nature of seeking wisdom as both accepting the wisdom that



(Wipf and Stock, 2023), 276 pages.

comes to us as well as actively journeying on the quest for wisdom. One big question that came out of this for me was how do we equip our youth to both accept Wisdom when she's calling to them and to seek her out when she's not?

Since wisdom is found in the fear of the Lord and in His word, I've made it a priority in my ministries to equip the youth in my context in how to both discern wisdom as it is presented to them using the Bible as well as how to bring their questions to the Bible with a desire to enact what brings God glory, out of fear of the Lord. For me this has begun as simply providing and teaching a basic biblical framework for considering what they hear and experience as well as a framework for how to bring a question to the whole of the Bible. In this way I'm prayerfully encouraging the youth in my local church to be

formed into God-glorifying men and women who live wisely in the fear of the Lord despite the attractive nature of the foolish paths that tempt them away from the path to wisdom. These are some of the many reasons I'm excited to keep using this book as I continue to grow in aligning my youth ministry practice with God's word.

Reading this book has been a great blessing to me personally and in my ministries as it has fuelled my desire to share the gospel with youth and those who minister to them because it presents the beauty of applying the Bible's teaching in the foundational youth years of life so wonderfully.

If you're invested in ministering to youth as a parent, a grandparent, a youth minister or in any capacity, then this book is a resource that will enrich your ministry for the glory of God. **ACR**

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Creatures of habit: Getting our habits under control



April 1, 2019 by [Beverly Whitaker](#)

In part 1 we looked at why it's so important to harness our habits for good. Now we turn to the nitty-gritty practical stuff about what this might look like. At the risk of stating the complete obvious, we made time for the things we really want...

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