



Latimer Focus

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Editorial

There is great virtue in being a moderate person. A person who doesn't go to extremes, who is temperate and balanced. "Never go to excess" said Cicero, "but let moderation be your guide." Such moderation allows space for difference and discussion. A moderate person is often able to understand where others are coming from, and to appreciate different approaches and ideas.

Rev. Dave Clancey

The Anglican church is a wonderfully moderate church. One of our great strengths is that we can hold together breadth and difference. We typically eschew extremes and often seek to be a place where the middle way is found and followed. This moderation is a wonderful gift in our evangelism - it allows a great range of people to find a home, to engage with the Lord Jesus in a way which grants space and grace for them to work out their salvation at their pace. This moderation is also a great gift in our discipleship. Being in a church which contains those who are different to us helps us grow in our moderation, learning to live and worship with those who aren't exactly like us. We learn and live out grace in a very real way.

In the past century or so the moderation of the Anglican church has been seen by many in another way. According to many, we are a church which seeks moderation in the sources of our authority. What we believe and how we behave is determined by Scripture, Reason, Tradition (and Experience). In many popular articulations these four sources each influence and determine Anglicanism. Many trace this idea back to Richard Hooker - and what has come to be known as Hooker's three-legged stool. That is, Scripture, Tradition and Reason all operate as sources of authority (Experience was added a little later). The illustration of the stool implies that all need to be held in balance and considered equally - a stool with one leg longer than the others is good for very little!

The slight difficulty with this illustration is that Hooker never used it. While Hooker spoke of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, he never gave them equal weight. The closest

Rather than being a three-legged stool, what Hooker has suggested is a three-layered cake. The base layer is Scripture - the grounds and ultimate authority for God's people.

he gets to holding them together is found in the following quote:

What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason over-rule all other inferior judgments whatsoever
(Laws, Book V, 8:2)

Rather than being a three-legged stool, what Hooker has suggested is a three-layered cake. The base layer is Scripture - the grounds and ultimate authority for God's people. Upon this everything else rests.

This idea is also found in the founding documents of our church. The 39 Articles place the Bible as our primary authority - the church does not have the authority to 'ordain any thing that is contrary to God's word written', nor may it require Christians to believe anything which is against the Bible (Article XX 'Of the Authority of the Church', 39 Articles of Religion).

Locally, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia has continued in this tradition. The very first of the Fundamental Provisions of the Constitution states that this church shall "hold and

And of course the reason our tradition, our history, and our founding documents prioritise the authority of Scripture is because that is exactly what God does - all Scripture is God-breathed.

maintain the Doctrine and Sacraments of CHRIST as the LORD hath commanded in His Holy Word.” These are expressed in the Formularies (the 39 Articles, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal), and the church “shall have no power to make any alteration in the authorised version of the Holy Scriptures, or in the above named Formularies of the Church.”

And of course the reason our tradition, our history, and our founding documents prioritise the authority of Scripture is because that is exactly what God does - all Scripture is God-breathed declares the apostle (2 Tim 3:16). And the Lord Jesus himself condemns

those who let go of the commands of God and hold on to human traditions (Mk 7:8), thereby nullifying the word of God (Mk 7:13).

In this edition of Focus we see how the application of this central truth of Anglicanism - the priority of the Bible as the primary source of authority for the church - is lived out. We see it in the preaching of Hugh Latimer, whose confidence in the power of God’s word resulted in the prioritisation of preaching. We see it in the excellent historical work of Rev. Dr. Rhys Bezzant, and his reflections on the confessional nature of Anglicanism. And we see it in the work that Chris Spark has done examining the Bible’s teaching, and the church’s practice, regarding the remarriage of divorced persons. Let us continue to be a moderate church - in the areas where we can be moderate. And let us be a faithful church - seeking to bring all areas of our lives individually and corporately - under the authority of the good word of our good God.



Hugh Latimer: bringing ordinary folks to the obedience of faith through preaching God's word

Our protestant heritage: Celebrating the 1517 Reformation with Latimer Fellowship. Mark Hood's address to the Latimer Lunch, June 2017

Rev. Mark Hood

ROMANS 15:4

A favourite and oft-cited passage for Hugh Latimer was:

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.
(Romans 15:4)

The passage is referring to the ever-present value of the Old Testament. In God's good providence he has written the Old Testament with New Testament believers in mind. The Old Testament is written 'for our instruction'. I wonder if you are regularly in the Old Testament with this in mind?

The context of Romans 15 helps us see how the Old Testament finds its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that from the very beginning, God has provided the means for us to know him, to be loved by him and to be kept in the faith of Christ, steadfast and full of hope.

But in Hugh Latimer's day, and to his distress, ordinary people, ordinary Christians, were not hearing God's word. This very means by which God provided to sustain them, was being withheld from them. When we dig into history and look into the life of Hugh Latimer, what we find is a Christian man, indeed a sometime Bishop, spending his energies preaching God's word in order to bring men and women into what the Apostle Paul calls 'the obedience of faith', and the assurance of Christ's everlasting salvation.

As we continue our series on Reformation heroes and their continuing value for today, we are here outlining the life and ministry of Hugh Latimer. We've got good reason to do so, given that our Fellowship bears his name. It's a name our city bears also, with Latimer

Square. As a city we seem very concerned to keep connection with important buildings of the past. In my opinion, we do even better to look toward Christian leaders of the past, leaders including Hugh Latimer, that our city's founders have bequeathed to us, that we might walk in the good ways of Christ.

Above all, Latimer was a preacher, much loved and popular among ordinary folks. One who heard him said, "I have an ear for other preachers, but I have a heart for Latimer."¹

So I plan for us to explore Bishop Hugh Latimer in two ways: first (and at length) we'll trace his life, and see how he persevered with a costly gospel preaching ministry to his people. And second (and more briefly) we'll look into his distinctive preaching and how he is a distinctive Protestant, in order that we might be encouraged in our various ministries today.

COMING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Born around 1485 into a farming family at Thurcaston in county Leicester, his father was not materially wealthy, but he brought up his children in 'godliness and in the fear of God.'² And as we see God's work in Hugh's life, we take encouragement from this spiritually rich Dad loving his sons and daughters by teaching them about God.

Latimer was schooled locally. His older brothers died in infancy, and his father was eager for him to receive a higher education. So he enrolled at Cambridge University in the early 1500s, where he developed an eagerness to serve God in the church.

ORDAINED IN 1514

He remained at Cambridge as the university Chaplain for many years. In 1524, he was a

¹ From Angus Stewart, Bishop Hugh Latimer, cited from Chester, *Latimer: Apostle to the English*. Stewart's work in the original sources has been a great help in this paper.

² As he told King Edward, and cited by JC Ryle in *Five English Reformers*, Banner of Truth (1960), Revised Edition.

staunch Roman Catholic traditionalist, such that he gave a lecture speaking stridently against the European reformer Philip Melancthon. Looking back to this period, Latimer described himself, “as obstinate a papist [committed to the Pope] as any was in England”. He gave this lecture just seven years after Luther’s theses had sparked what we call the Reformation. Luther’s writings were making their way over the English Channel, through men like Melancthon, to Cambridge and they were influencing Englishmen like Thomas Bilney. Latimer met Bilney at Cambridge. Bilney saw Latimer’s zeal, and wondered if he knew the gospel. So following the lecture, Bilney asked Latimer to hear his private confession. This confession ended up being the means God used to convert Latimer. Latimer looks back on this moment and describes the story of Saint Bilney:

Saint Bilney:

Here I have occasion to tell you a story which happened at Cambridge. Master Bilney, or rather Saint Bilney, who suffered death for God's word sake, the same Bilney was the instrument whereby God called me to knowledge; for I may thank him, next to God, for that knowledge which I have in the word of God.

For I was as obstinate a papist as any in England, insomuch that when I should be made bachelor of divinity, my whole oration went against Philip Melancthon, and against his opinions. Bilney heard me at that time, and perceived that I was zealous without knowledge: and he came to me afterwards in my study, and desired me for God's sake to hear his confession. I did so; and to say the truth, by his confession I learned more than before in many years. So from that time forward I began to smell the word of God, and forsook the school-doctors and such fooleries.³

I love his comment, ‘I began to smell the word of God’. Like walking home from the office smelling a lovely roast; you can hear Latimer hungering for and savouring God’s word.

Bilney had himself been brought to faith by God through reading Erasmus’ Greek New Testament (a nod to all those who labour in the original languages). Bilney was transformed by God when he read in 1 Timothy, “This is a true saying and worthy of all men to be received, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners...” (1 Tim 1:15). Did Bilney cite this verse⁴ to help Latimer? We are not privy to this detail. What we do know is that the two men became firm friends.

Bilney was the leader of a group of godly men that included Matthew Parker, Miles Coverdale, Hugh Latimer and others. They were zealous in visiting the sick and imprisoned. They met regularly at the White Horse Inn (dubbed Little Germany) where they discussed Luther and his doctrine, Erasmus’ Greek, and Tyndale’s English translation. Latimer and Bilney walked together daily on Castle Hill discussing the Scriptures.⁵

So began a life dedicated to bringing the word of God to ordinary people. Latimer never married or had a family. God used his life to bring the English peoples to the assurance of justifying faith in Christ, and to lively good works following faith. His public ministry was in fits and spurts especially according to the powers in Court.

CHAPLAIN AT CAMBRIDGE

After Saint Bilney’s ministry, in 1525, Latimer slowly grew in Reformation teaching. And what he garnered from Luther, and Bilney and Little Germany, he handed on to students. One series of sermons he preached in 1529 were the Sermons on the Cards.

³ The first sermon on the Lord’s Prayer, preached before the Duchess of Suffolk 1552. From: *Select Sermons and Letters of Dr. Hugh Latimer*. London, The Religious Tract Society www.archive.org/details/selectsermonslet00lati (cited 16/6/17)

⁴ As some have suggested: www.gafcon.org/blog/christ-jesus-came-into-the-world-to-save-sinners

⁵ Stewart cites Chester, *Apostle to the English*, p21.

Here his aim was to lead those unfamiliar with the Bible into the ways of Christ. In order for his hearers, the students, to take on his point, he employed a pack of playing cards – which people used at Christmas time. Having established that Christ’s passion saves, and is applied to our benefit through baptism, Latimer asked how the Christian man and Christian woman will walk under the rule of Christ. And he answered, by inviting them into a card game called triumph where they use Christ’s cards. He equated various teachings from the Sermon on the Mount with a card. “Let every Christian man and Christian woman play at these cards”⁶ he said, “and everyone who plays shall win. The dealer shall win, the players shall win and even the on-lookers shall win. No one will lose who plays Christ’s cards...” and the first card to play is this:

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment (Mat 5:21-22).

And he proceeded to preach through this passage with pastoral skill, noting how forgiveness and patience will be natural outcomes of playing this card, and how sin against others might not be outward, but is nevertheless offensive and ignoring God and not playing this card is perilous.

His aim was both instructing what to do and what to avoid, and then exhorting God’s people to do it. He was helping them to walk in the obedience of faith.

PROVOCATIVE DOCTRINE

But it wasn’t his cards or his object lesson preaching that caused the stir. It was his doctrine. In instructing people how they are to live the Christian life, he made a distinction between necessary works and voluntary

works. The necessary works were loving God, serving neighbour. The voluntary works were things like lighting candles or gilding church ornaments with gold, or contributing towards church buildings:

*The Second Sermon of the Card:
Instructing Christians to attend to
life following faith*

...Now then, if men be so foolish of themselves that they will bestow the most part of their goods in voluntary works, which they be not bound to keep, but willingly and by their devotion; and leave the necessary works undone, which they are bound to do; they and all their voluntary works are like to go unto everlasting damnation. And I promise you, if you build a hundred churches, give as much as you can make to gilding of saints, and honouring of the church; and if thou go as many pilgrimages as thy body can well suffer, and offer as great candles as oaks; if thou leave the works of mercy and the commandments undone, these works shall nothing avail thee.⁷

This distinction, focusing the common folk on the weightier matters, had the effect of undercutting both the power of the church and the economic system in place. For example, it freed a woman grieving for her recently deceased husband, to learn that she need not pay money in order to see her husband free from purgatory. Such poor and otherwise ignorant people Latimer laboured to assure, leading them in the ways of Christ, but to the growing frustration of the church.

PERSECUTED PREACHER 1533

In 1531, after Cranmer favoured the King’s great cause and Latimer after him, Cranmer was appointed Archbishop. In turn, he appointed many of his ‘Little Germany’ colleagues into parishes, such that from 1531 to 1535 Latimer was Rector of West Kingdon parish in Wiltshire.

⁶ The Second Sermon of the Card, from *Select Sermons*, *op.cit.*

⁷ *ibid.*

During this time, he worked hard, especially in his visiting the poor, the sick and the imprisoned and in opening the Bible with his people. And when invited, he also preached in friends' parishes in other dioceses without the Bishop's permission.

Not surprisingly this transgression gave Latimer's opponents cause to bring him to trial before a Bishops council. For six weeks, he was brought before six bishops and others for interrogation concerning his doctrines. Three times a week he would be called to give his assent to Roman Catholic doctrines such as pilgrimages, masses obtaining merit, masses helping those in purgatory, deceased saints to be worshiped, prayed to and more.

He refused on three occasions to sign. Over an arduous three months, he was declared 'contumacious' [wilfully disobedient] and excommunicated, declared as outside God's salvation. He eventually gave in, renouncing his Protestant faith and agreeing to Papal authority and teaching.

He soon looked upon such assent with deep remorse, and returned to his reformation convictions and was restored to the ministry by the newly appointed Archbishop Cranmer.

For all his strengths, Latimer also had feet of clay, like the rest of us. He later spoke of expecting opposition to God's word, and drew upon experiences like this. It is a clear-eyed lesson that church power politics can sometimes be brutal.

THE CONVOCATION OF CLERGY 1536

The following year, Cranmer called on Latimer to preach the keynote address to the Convocation of Clergy in 1536. The restored and re-energised Latimer made a forceful assault on lazy clergy. In his morning address, he denounced religious abuses, including the 'purgatory-pickpockets'. In his afternoon message, he lambasted the clergy as unpreaching prelates with more love for the world than God's people:

*To the Convocation of Clergy 1536,
'Unpreaching prelates' are liked as
children of the world in contrast to
children of light*

*But God will come, God will come, he
will not tarry long away. He will come
upon such a day as we nothing look for
him, and at such hour as we know not.
He will come and cut us in pieces. He
will reward us as he doth the hypocrites.
He will set us where wailing shall be, my
brethren; where gnashing of teeth shall
be, my brethren. And let here be the end
of our tragedy, if ye will. These be the
delicate dishes prepared for the world's
well-beloved children. These be the
wafers and junkets provided for worldly
prelates—wailing and gnashing of teeth...
Our teeth make merry here, ever dashing
in delicates; there we shall be torn with
teeth, and do nothing but gnash and
grind our own. To what end have we now
excelled other in policy? What have we
brought forth at the last? Ye see, brethren,
what sorrow, what punishment is provided
for you, if ye be worldlings. If ye will not
thus be vexed, be ye not the children of
the world. If ye will not be the children
of the world, be not stricken with the love
of worldly things; lean not upon them. If
ye will not die eternally, live not worldly.
Come, go to; leave the love of your profit;
study for the glory and profit of Christ;
seek in your consultations such things as
pertain to Christ, and bring forth at the
last somewhat that may please Christ.
Feed ye tenderly, with all diligence, the
flock of Christ. Preach truly the word of
God. Love the light, walk in the light, and
so be ye the children of light while ye are in
this world, that ye may shine in the world
that is to come bright as the sun, with
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost;
to whom be honour, praise, and glory.
Amen.⁸*

⁸ To the Convocation of Clergy 1536, in *Select Sermons*, *op.cit.*

Latimer was not afraid to call out unfaithfulness and urge repentance, no doubt causing discomfort. But perhaps even more significant with this address, was that after preaching it in Latin to the clergy, Latimer had it speedily translated into English for all the common people. They read it with great interest.⁹ This message seems to have gained Latimer a place in the hearts of ordinary folks.

But the tide soon turned. King Henry had his Catholic reaction against Luther, writing his Six Articles, and in 1539 having this passed by Parliament. At the time, Latimer decried this event saying, “there was a bishop which ever cried ‘Unity, unity’ but he would have a popish unity.’ For Latimer unity must be according to God’s holy word: else it were better war than peace’.¹⁰ When these six articles affirmed transubstantiation and private masses and denying the cup to the laity, Latimer’s appeals came to nought when these were made law in 1539. He resigned his office of Bishop and withdrew from public ministry, to a private ministry and to reading.

THE APOSTLE OF ENGLAND RETURNS TO HIS PULPIT 1547

With an ebb came a flow. Henry died in 1547. And God gave to England a veritable Josiah in the boy king Edward VI. Under Cranmer’s leadership, Latimer returned to public ministry, not in the role of Bishop, but in his labour of preaching. The ‘Apostle of England’ as some have called him, had returned to the pulpit. It is not surprising to learn that in addition to his ministry, he also sought funding to educate preachers after him.

He used other means to increase the effectiveness of his ministry such as publishing his messages. Of the 40 or so sermons available, one that gives us great insight into his preaching is his famous message called ‘The Sermon of the Plough’ (London, 18 January 1548).

THE SERMON OF THE PLOUGH 1548¹¹

Comparing God’s word to the seed (as the Lord Jesus does in the parable of the sower), and comparing the congregation to the field that is being sown, Latimer declared:

“the preaching of the gospel is one of God’s ploughworks and the preaching is one of God’s ploughmen.” Preachers are ploughmen, who always have work ahead of them. As ploughmen need to work all year round, just so the preacher has enough to be fully occupied.

The particular duties of the preacher:

to bring his parishioners to a right faith, which embraces Christ and trusts his merits, and to confirm them in the same faith... now weeding them by telling them their faults and making them forsake sin, now clotting them, breaking their stony hearts and making them supplehearted ready to be taught by God; now teaching to know God rightly, and to know their duty to God and their neighbours: now exhorting them, when they know their duty, that they do it, and be diligent in it; so that they have a continual work to do.

Latimer thinks of preaching the word of God as meat; that is solid, daily food. Not like strawberries which come once a year and are soon gone. Preaching is a year-long labour, not a flash in the pan.

He warns of unpreaching prelates against taking their ease. He criticises contemporary ministers who prefer lording and loitering instead of labouring in preaching. He drives home the point by asking, “Who do you think is the most diligent preacher always at his plough, always working, always sowing?” He replied. “The devil is the greatest in England.” And he continues,

And his office is to hinder religion, to maintain superstition, to set up idolatry, to teach all kind of popery. He is ready

⁹ Demaus, cited by Stewart, *op.cit.*

¹⁰ Latimer’s Works, cited by Stewart, *op.cit.*

¹¹ Reproduced in *Select Sermons*, *op.cit.*

as he can be wished for to set forth his plough; to devise as many ways as can be to deface and obscure God's glory.

Oh that our prelates would be as diligent to sow the corn of good doctrine, as Satan is to sow cockle and darnel!

From this sermon, we learn the sad state of preaching at the time of the Reformation, along with the gripping style of Latimer, and from it we can begin to get a glimpse of the effect of his work.

As he goes on to speak before Edward, for example a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer, we hear Latimer's high view of preaching. He calls it "God's instrument of salvation" and concludes that to "take away preaching" is to "take away salvation."¹²

Where the pre-reformation church emphasised the sacraments and other voluntary works as the way of salvation, Latimer now, in 1548 a convinced Protestant, brings the sermon into the centre of the worshipping life of God's people. He is convinced it is through preaching that God brings and keeps and busies his people in the obedience of faith.

MARTYRED UNDER MARY

Such a rapid change occurred in English Christianity during the five years of King Edward VI. During these years, the men of Little Germany laboured to bring the word of God to their people. But in the couple of years that followed Edward's death in 1553, most were killed, burned at the stake by Queen Mary, as she turned England decisively towards her mother's Roman Catholicism.

When Mary arrived on the throne in 1553, Latimer also knew that his time was coming. He said that the stake at Smithfield "had long groaned for him". He was imprisoned for a time with Cranmer, Ridley and Bradford.

While in the Tower they continued to search the Scriptures and encourage one another to stand firm. Over many weeks and months, they were all tried and given Catholic articles for their signature in assent. While Cranmer gave in for a time, he later recanted his recantation.

So many of the 'Little Germany' men met their end under Queen Mary, including Hooper, Taylor, Bradford, Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer. They were given numerous chances to recant their Protestantism and return to Rome, but they declined.

Finally, at Oxford, on October 16, 1555, Latimer was burned alive along with Bishop Nicholas Ridley (probably the ablest scholar of the time). They were brought and chained to the stake. As the torch was applied to the faggots of wood, Latimer turned and spoke perhaps his shortest and most famous sermon of all. As the smoke began to rise he said to Ridley "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England as I trust shall never be put out."

He died aged 70, a life well spent in the Lord's service. A life we're right to learn from according to our Fellowship and our city's founders. A life that points us to the Lord Jesus, to believing in him, to a life of faith in Christ that is lively and full of good works.

This much is by way of sketching the life of Latimer; but now to move to consider more briefly Latimer's preaching. Mr Southey, contemporary, speaks of Latimer's work among the working class, saying: "Latimer more than any other man promoted the Reformation by his preaching."

And while preaching typically means speaking in front of a congregation, it is worth considering his work with a wider-angle ministry of the word lens (which I expect should be of encouragement to many of us).

¹² Second sermon before Edward, in *Select Sermons*, *op.cit.*

DISTINCTIVE PREACHER

As a preacher we might draw out five distinctives that are prominent and worthy of attention for us today:

1. Latimer considers preaching central in the Christian ministry

“Take away preaching and you take away salvation.” Citing Romans 10, ‘if people are to believe they need to hear, and they will only hear if someone proclaims.’

In general, the magisterial Reformers¹³ moved preaching to the centre of worship, because they understood that through preaching, God speaks savingly. This is the kind of message Luther and Calvin were teaching in Europe, that by the Scriptures God speaks and through his word he saves. Do we believe the same?

This is not to detract from the human side of preaching.

2. Latimer aimed to persuade and win people to God’s word

Rather than pronounce judgement or threaten eternal punishment, Latimer sought to win people. This meant he anticipated difficulties people would have with biblical ideas and teaching. He worked hard to pick up on what was common and known in order to teach what was unknown (for example, such as the cards; or that we need not be afraid of hyperbolic expressions like ‘pluck our your eye’). Latimer was a pastor of people. And he looked to meet people where they were at – and even supply them printed sermons to help them understand.

3. Latimer worked hard to connect to his hearers

In the 8 to 10 sermons I’ve read of Latimer’s, often he was found to be drawing on his personal experience with those in prison; drawing on their experiences and their

language and their way of understanding (for example the idea of ‘livery’ which would be familiar to a prisoner):

Our whole duty is contained in these words, "Love together." Therefore St. Paul saith, "He that loveth another fulfilleth the whole law"; so it appeareth that all things are contained in this word love. This love is a precious thing; our Savior saith, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye shall love one another."

So Christ makes love His cognizance, His badge, His livery. Like as every lord commonly gives a certain livery to his servants, whereby they may be known that they pertain unto him; and so we say, yonder is this lord's servants, because they wear his livery: so our Savior, who is the Lord above all lords, would have His servants known by their liveries and badge, which badge is love alone. Whosoever now is endued with love and charity is His servant; him we may call Christ's servant; for love is the token whereby you may know that such a servant pertaineth to Christ; so that charity may be called the very livery of Christ. He that hath charity is Christ's servant; he that hath not charity is the servant of the devil. For as Christ's livery is love and charity, so the devil's livery is hatred, malice and discord.

But I think the devil has a great many more servants than Christ has; for there are a great many more in his livery than in Christ's livery; there are but very few who are endued with Christ's livery; with love and charity, gentleness and meekness of spirit; but there are a great number that bear hatred and malice in their hearts, that are proud, stout, and lofty; therefore the number of the devil's servants is greater than the number of Christ's servants.¹⁴

¹³ Such as Luther, Calvin and Zwingli and the second generation English Reformers in their footsteps.

¹⁴ Sermon On Christian Love from *Select Sermons*, op.cit

We've noted before the Reformation distinctive to have the Bible and the preaching in the vernacular. Latimer was an exponent using 'the vulgar tongue', with common expressions like: 'Such a friend is our Saviour.' He used actual events with people to illustrate, explain, prove, and apply.

4. A Biblical and Christ-centred preacher

It is a long-treasured feature of the Latimer Fellowship (in my experience) to work to glorify Christ, and see that our Bible work in the Old Testament and the New Testament seek to point to the Lord Jesus. Latimer was doing this long ago, and were he here today, he would no doubt spur us on in this work. For example, in ministering to Christian women after childbirth, Latimer taught that Christians are not under the law, that Leviticus applies differently to people who have the sanctification of the Spirit. This brought great relief to his female hearers. It also modelled careful preaching of the whole Bible pastorally, applying it to Christian lives.

5. A courageous and accountable leader

Latimer was not afraid to call out unfaithfulness, especially in clergy. He did so with godly force and humility. He expected the highest standards and hardest work from Ministers of the gospel, when the opposite seemed to be the case (as in the Convocation). All clergy, in Latimer's view, should be hard working ploughmen, sowing the word of God.

Related to this, he taught that hearers should demand a preacher who held everyone to account under God's word, by routinely exhorting as well as teaching.

DISTINCTIVE PROTESTANT

J.C. Ryle details Latimer's teaching emphases that show him to be a convinced Protestant. Throughout Latimer's works we find him returning to central Reformation doctrines including: Justification by grace through faith; the merits of Christ alone in saving;

the good works that follow a true and lively faith; the spiritual presence in the Lord's supper, in contrast to the real presence; the unhelpfulness of Catholic symbols and rituals, which diminish the centrality of the Bible in the life of God's people; and more.

Latimer's emphasis on the word of God, while not new, is a point I found especially refreshing. He believed that the Holy Scriptures are the word of God, and that through this word, God's people flourish, like a rich field. As with Cranmer, Latimer labours to see the word at work in the lives of ordinary people. This shows that he believed ordinary people can hear and understand it, learn from it and put it into practice. He believed that God's word is a current and relevant message for all people.

This also shows Latimer's belief in the authority of God's word, that above church tradition (or in our day, above personal experience) God speaks with powerful authority for the good of people. Accordingly, we are right to be at our ploughs working hard in the text of Holy Scripture, and working hard to bring its message and its application home to the life of God's people now.

Latimer's wider ministry also provides much food for thought.

- He engaged in his life and times, including in the politics of the day. He didn't withdraw to a Christian or church 'holy huddle'.
- He was willing to step into responsible office and faithfully minister to the best of his ability. As Bishop, he preached numerous times to King Henry and King Edward, and he called both to repentance and faith. He taught all people what God expected of a King, of clergy and of people.
- Through his life we see the value, comfort and power of likeminded gospel relationships (Little Germany), forged through much time together in the scriptures, including while imprisoned.

- Latimer ever remained a Christian pastor who loved his people. He gave much time and attention to the sick and the imprisoned. He took the cause of the needy (for example, a woman wrongly imprisoned after her husband wickedly framed her with murder, and through Latimer's advocacy she was freed).
- Latimer stood for the gospel, and he was willing to suffer for the gospel. All these points, I suggest, challenge and encourage us on in our ministry.

To conclude with some particular challenges that arise from his teaching and example, I have two questions to consider:

Am I also an unpreaching prelate?

In ministry today, it is easy to find much to keep a Vicar occupied, looking busy and appearing productive. But am I labouring in the Scriptures for the sake of bringing God's word to God's people? Am I, through my many 'important' meetings, neglecting to feed God's people for whom I have responsibility with God's nourishing food?

Do I share Latimer's high view of the ministry of speaking God's word in practice?

It is one thing to affirm that preaching is important; but it is another to work hard personally and to train others

for it, to teach God's people to demand it, and to be looking to grow in the ministry of preaching. In our context we are routinely directed to Christ's ministry being more about hands and feet than about bringing his words to bear in the life of people. Do I succumb to this tendency also?

Do I hold off exhortation in order to be

'nice'? As a moment of personal reflection upon my own practice of preaching, I think I see a tendency to teach and to encourage and to try and win. I sometimes try to express possible objections to what is taught. I try to encourage us to see the goodness of what God is laying out for us. I even bring out the commands for New Testament believers. But for all of this, my own experience is that I am rarely pressing God's people to really believe and feed upon God's word, and really depend upon and put that word to work in their lives. In other words, I think I probably do hold back on exhorting. If it is easier to inform the mind, warm the heart, perhaps even relieve the conscience, it is much more difficult to press upon the will. Latimer's strong example urges me and all of us to be those who both teach and exhort God's people in the marvellous and wholesome obedience of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.



Rev. Canon Dr
Rhys Bezzant

Anglican Confessionalism: consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our Confession

After the Lord rescued his people from Egypt, he gave them his law and settled them in the Promised Land.

The Egyptians around them may have seen them as different through their servitude or language, but in fact the Hebrews were different because they had received a covenant from God through Abraham, and were about to receive another from God through Moses. They were to become a people to whom God spoke directly on Mount Sinai, though they were terrified and asked not to hear God in this way again. When they entered the land, they were taught to recite a confession to the Lord, “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (Dt 6:4) and thereby to keep up a distinction from the peoples around them who would assail them and tempt them. Later, when they no longer had access to the Temple, or priests, or to the city of David, their distinction from the nations around them would be shown by holding fast to the torah, God’s Word. The pilgrim people of the Old Testament could therefore say: ‘The Lord is my portion, I promise to keep your words.’ (Ps 119:57) To make a confession is to declare that we, the people of God, are distinct by virtue of the one whom we worship, for we have different values from the world around, and live with a different hope of a better city, towards which we march boldly, and God’s Word guides his pilgrim people how to confess to whom we belong.

When the Lord rescued his people not just from bondage in Egypt but from their sin, he sent a greater Moses, the Lord Jesus Christ. In reflecting on the meaning of his coming, the Apostle Paul appeals to defend his belief in the one true and living God, and Jesus Christ his Son, with deliberate reference to the Shema in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6:

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” Indeed, even though there may be

so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords— yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

With stunning change of script for a Jew, Paul confesses his faith in the Father alongside his faith in the Son. The writer to the Hebrews makes a similar point: ‘Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also “was faithful in all God’s house.” Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses.’ All it takes to be a confessional Christian is to affirm the highest dignity of the Lord Jesus Christ and to declare his name as the foundation of our faith. In Christian usage, to confess Christ ‘combines the characteristic Greek aspects of “affirmation” and “acknowledgement” with those of “open and binding declaration.”’¹ Being a confessional Christian is not so much about the structure or theological methodology of our church as the content and desires of our heart, and the basis upon which we stand. We are confessional Christians because we confess Christ as Lord. The word ‘confessing’ or ‘confessional’ often calls to mind the church formed during the Nazi dictatorship, when Christians refused to allow any human being to claim their ultimate allegiance. They drew together on this foundation: ‘We are bound together by the confession of the one Lord of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church ... We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other

¹ Otfried Hofius, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*.

events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.²

These considerations are important in various areas of the world, for the life and confession of the Anglican church needs to be reaffirmed in the face of opposition and obstruction. We live in a moment when it has become clear that declaring our commitment to Christ and demonstrating our distinction from the world around is a supreme act of worship. It might be that to confess in this way is expressed through particular statements of faith or structures of witness or acts of mercy, but in any case confession demonstrates to the world that there is just one Lord, and he has given us his word to mark out our distinct path. As it is expressed in the complete Jerusalem Declaration, 'It [the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans] is a confessing fellowship in that its members confess the faith of Christ crucified, stand firm for the gospel in the global and Anglican context, and affirm a contemporary rule, the Jerusalem Declaration, to guide the movement for the future.'³

Of course there are voices which argue that the Anglican Church is not confessional, and superficially there is merit to the argument. Our foundational doctrinal statement is called The Articles, not The Confession. Traditionally, we have not been asked to swear an oath to those Articles but to subscribe to them, perhaps a less demanding expectation. The Articles join with the Book of Common Prayer in creating a foundation for the church, which possibly minimises doctrinal commitment, or perhaps suggests to some that we pray our doctrine rather than confess it. Perhaps the political nature and national scope of the Anglican settlement, whether in the sixteenth or the seventeenth century, suggests that our church rests on national comprehension, rather than doctrinal concision. Confessionalisation has become a word amongst historians

describing the negative outcomes of the wars of religion in the seventeenth century, built on territory, scholastic method, and military defence of truth.

However, when all is said and done, we cannot avoid the necessary conclusion that our church is confessional in the biggest and most important sense. We confess Christ as Lord, unlike the world around us. We confess that Christ is the Word of God, who communicates like none other. We confess that Christ is the one true Saviour from our sins, so we confess that there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved. And though Christ is the head of all things, we confess that the church alone is his body, and that the world is not:

And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.
(Eph 1:22-23)

Our Tractarian friends in the nineteenth century also recognised that the church is different from the world and should not be seen as dependent on political conditions, or be administered as a department of state, but have its own theological and liturgical independence. I fully agree! J.C. Ryle, engaged in nineteenth century debates about the nature of the Anglican Church, wrote: 'Once for all. I must protest the modern notion, that it does not matter the least what religious opinions a man holds, so long as he is in "earnest" about them, that one creed is just as good as another.'⁴

To maintain our distinctive life, Christians have found it helpful to summarise theological views to defend and promote their distinct witness, for theological statements are not designed to undercut mission but instead to promote our engagement with a watching world. Archimedes put it like this long ago: 'Give me a place to stand,

² Barmen Declaration 8.06, 8.12

³ <http://fca.net/resources/the-complete-jerusalem-statement>

⁴ Ryle, J. C., *Knots Untied: being Plain Statements on Disputed Points in religion from an Evangelical Standpoint*, London: James Clarke, 1959, 46.

and I will move the world.⁶ More recently, J. Gresham Machen channelled the Greek philosopher and wrote: ‘This world cannot ultimately be bettered if you think that this world is all. To move the world you must have a place to stand.’ To put it in another way, doctrine can be understood as a strategy for “‘identity protection” in an age of internet enthraldom.’⁷ Theology helps us to protect our experience of the grace of God, it focuses our common life, and thereby becomes the sure base from which we engage the world around. Our knowledge of the Lord has a shape and pattern, according to the Apostle Paul, and this can be shown as part of the Anglican way. We have a place to stand, which is the vital centre of all our mission, and therefore we can move the world. In the remainder of this address, I want to give six reasons to understand the confessional nature of the Anglican church, and therefore its missiological usefulness. This address is asking the question, how do we tell the story of the English Reformation? How might we tell the story more faithfully so that its doctrinal commitments become more clear?

1. OUR CREEDAL FOUNDATION

We are a confessional church fundamentally not because of our Protestant distinctives, but because we say the creeds belonging to the early catholic church. Indeed, not only is our first Article a statement about God the Holy Trinity, but Article 8 affirms the Scriptural value of the Apostles’, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. We confess more particularly in the creeds that God is Holy Trinity, and that to refuse to confess God as Three in One is to risk eternal damnation according to the Athanasian Creed. To be confessional is thus to be counter-cultural. We make it our practice to stand and declaim the creeds in baptism and communion services, and if we are lucky, we affirm the Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday as well. We promote their doctrine in written

statements and verbal affirmation and thereby affirm the continuity of the Church of England with its pre-Reformation life. The first five Articles concern the faith of the Catholic church, though later Articles highlight distinctive Protestant convictions, and those at the end more particular English concerns. This creedal content suffuses any later confessional affirmations, especially in those contested in the sixteenth century.

Of course we must remember too that the doctrine of the Trinity is not just of antiquarian or speculative concern. This doctrine is necessarily missional, for by defending the deity of the Son and of the Spirit, we protect our preaching of grace and the offer of salvation. The doctrine of the Trinity is the great jewel in our crown as Christians, which declares how God can both run the world and save us sinners, how God is both holy and close to us at the same time. Together the creeds support our understanding of the purpose of the cosmos: for the Father to honour the Son by giving him a bride, and for the Son to honour the Father by returning to him the Kingdom, through the binding love of the Spirit. Our purpose as a church on mission is embedded within this creedal and doctrinal commitment. If you stand to say a creed in church you are making a statement about the confessional nature of our church.

2. OUR VERNACULAR SERVICES

One of the great stirrings for renewal in the English church came through the ministry of John Wycliffe (1320-1384) which predated the Reformation. He not only argued for moral reform of the church, and spoke against the privileged status of the clergy, but also most passionately espoused the importance of the Bible in English, and made an early translation of it. He died in Lutterworth, Leicestershire, and was declared a heretic in 1415, upon which his body was exhumed

⁶ Machen, ‘The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age,’ 47

⁷ Professor James McWilliams, Texas state University

and burnt and his ashes thrown into the river for his efforts. But his legacy survived in the Lollards, that amorphous group of proto-Protestants in East Anglia and the Midlands who upheld his insights and agitated for change in the church. The vernacular Bible and vernacular church services were their chief aspirations. Of course it is easy to think that the Anglican church began with a lusty King and political intrigue. It must not be forgotten however that before there were the Tudors there were the Lollards, giving a deeply principled case for reform of the church.

William Tyndale (c1494-1536), a century and a half later, also created an English Bible, which was of a piece with this pre-history, and energised the movement for reform in the sixteenth century. English Scriptures were illegal between 1415 and 1539, when Cranmer and Cromwell published the Coverdale version. Unlike Wycliffe, Tyndale translated from the Hebrew and Greek texts, substantiating claims expressed in the vernacular translation that doing penance was not a command of the Lord, and that popes were not an essential part of the church. His first edition of the New Testament was published in 1525, built on the dream that 'a boy that driveth the plough' would know more of the Scriptures than the highest churchman. In exile, Tyndale published his Testament in Cologne, then Hamburg, Worms, Antwerp, Marburg, Strasbourg, and Bergen-op-Zoom. From 1541, Henry commanded that the Bible in English known as the Great Bible was to be purchased for every parish church in the land with the famed preface containing the image of Henry giving out Bibles to Bishops, who would then distribute them widely. In time, prayers and services in English were also prepared. This was a revolution and made expectations of church more communal and confessional.

It is easy to think that the Middle Ages were the great period of communal spirituality and corporate life, with the modern world intensely individualistic. However, contrary to much popular imagining, the Middle Ages were much more individualistic than expected, with individuals during mass using the moment for private devotions. The Dean of Norwich, John Christopherson, wrote in 1544: '[churchgoers should] travail themselves in fervent praying, and so shall they highly please God ... It is much better for them not to understand the common service of the church, because when they hear others praying in a loud voice, in the language that they understand, they are [hindered] from prayer themselves, and so come they to such a slackness and negligence in praying, that at length as we have well seen in these late days, in manner pray not at all.⁸ With the use of English, services became much more communal, with clear intention to unify in doctrine and practice. English Bibles made the church transparently Protestant. Praying in English was a Protestant and confessional commitment. Using the vernacular, in England or in Germany, was a theological statement about the nature of the church and the part the laity should play. If, as many argue, the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was a movement to reevangelise the laity according to Gospel priorities, then vernacular communication was implicitly a confessionalising strategy. This is how Cranmer expresses his hopes in the Preface of the Great Bible:

Here may all manner of persons, men, women, young, old, learned, unlearned, rich, poor, priests, laymen, lords, ladies, officers, tenants, and mean men, virgins, wives, widows, lawyers, merchants, artificers, husbandmen, and all manner of persons of what estate or condition soever they be, may in this book learn all things what they ought to believe, what they

⁸ Jacobs, Alan. *The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography*. Lives of Great Religious Books. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013, 19.

ought to do, and what they should not do, as well concerning almighty God, as also concerning themselves and all other.

If you pray in English and hear the Bible read and taught in English, you are making a confessional statement. Vernacular services derive from the authority of the Word in Article XXIV: 'It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the Primitive Church, to have public prayer in the Church, or to minister the sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people.'

3. OUR JUSTIFYING FAITH

Furthermore, Tyndale's translation contained glosses in the margins, which interpreted the text, explaining for example the nature of justification and imputation. His preaching of justification by faith is early and not dependent on academics in Cambridge. Even when King Henry was trying to thwart the progress of reformation teaching, and was duly rewarded by the Pope with the title 'Defender of the Faith,' the confessional character of English reform was at stake. Teachers like Barnes, Bilney or Fish were promoting a theological agenda, which was expressed in their writings as well as in learned conversation at the White Horse Inn in Cambridge. It wasn't just that the formal principle of the Reformation – the authority of the Scriptures – had been affirmed, but the material principle – the doctrine of justification by grace through faith – was at the heart of efforts to reform the church too. Article XI states: 'We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings: wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of justification.' The articles point us to homilies, which were composed and published before the Prayer Book, which spelled out in more

detail normative doctrine for the church. The Homily on Salvation teaches not our merit but God's gratuitous gift, and the way that good works do not precede justification but follow it. It is worth pointing out that the original sub-title of the Articles described their function as 'the avoiding of diversities of opinions.' The articles were to be normative, and establish limits to theological opinion. It has been observed how the word 'only' functions in the Articles as well, picking up a contentious word from Luther's own writings. These Protestant convictions are amply demonstrated: 'The Scripture only,' 'Christ the only mediator,' 'Christ's merit only,' 'faith only,' 'Christ alone without sin,' 'Christ the only Saviour,' 'only the worthy,' 'only the spiritual,' 'Christ the only sacrifice.'⁹

Moreover, it has been aptly said that Cranmer's goal in creating Protestant communion services was to teach justification by faith. The prayer of humble access was to set the spiritual context: 'We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness...'. The Great Thanksgiving was to teach the nature of God's gift and our faithful response, not to highlight our merit. Christ has made the offering, and we receive the gifts of the creation, bread and wine. J. I. Packer highlights the structure of Communion services which embed Protestant principle:

To join in a service of worship is to be taken on a journey through a prescribed series of thoughts and actions. How did Cranmer secure evangelical worship? By "routing" his regular services via a sequence of three themes: first, the detecting and confessing of sin; second, the announcing of grace, in God's promise to pardon and restore the penitent through Christ; third, the exercising of faith, first, in believing God's promise and trusting him for pardon, and then in acts of praise, testimony, intercession, and obeying

⁹ Hague, Dyson. *Through the Prayer Book: An Exposition of its Teaching and Language; The Origins and Contents of its Services; With Special Reference to the more recent Features of the Canadian Prayer Book*. London: Church Book Room Press, 1948, 386-387.

*instruction, all based on the prior restoring of fellowship with God through forgiveness, all the main Prayer Book services have this built-in design ... sin acknowledged, grace announced, faith exercised in response.*¹⁰

It is easy to think that the Prayer Book is concerned with practice that binds Anglicans together, which is at least superficially true. But services were designed not just to teach us to pray, but to teach us how to understand grace and live obediently outside of church services. Our confessional commitments are embedded in our worship. Prayer Book services were designed to encourage us to confess Protestant convictions.

4. OUR CONFSSIONAL NETWORK

It is easy to argue that the English Reformation was isolated, as much of English history asserts, from continental European influences and ideas. Though many of the early English reformed thinkers may have drawn on indigenous Lollard traditions, they also benefitted greatly from German or Swiss doctrinal influences. When English printers refused to publish reform-minded books, a printer could be found in Germany or Belgium to provide the service instead. Conversely, many continental documents made their way to England for discussion, not least in Cambridge. It is increasingly acknowledged by historians like Diarmaid MacCulloch, Euan Cameron and Peter Newman Brooks that Cranmer's views of the 'true presence' of Christ in the elements was shared by Bucer, Melancthon, Bullinger and Calvin. Under King Edward VI, international scholars took up residence in England to work on liturgical revision. They provided pastoral insights for the compilation of the new Book of Common Prayer. Ian Breward, a New Zealander, discovered that works of the Englishman William Perkins were published in at least fifty editions throughout Europe, demonstrating the reach of the republic of letters.

Quite deliberately, the drafting of the 39 Articles reflected the earlier continental confessions of faith, like the Schwabach Articles, the Wittenberg Articles, the Augsburg Confession, and the Württemberg Confession. It has to be remembered that the word 'articles' does not mean undoctinal, but means summaries of points of agreement, doctrinal points among them. When Elizabeth was excommunicated in 1570, the way loyalty was expressed was through subscribing articles, so much the same as an oath. The Homilies preceded the Prayer Book in their composition, that is doctrine precedes devotion in our Church. Indeed, in the Gorham judgement of 1850 the Articles took precedence over liturgy in the considerations of the Privy Council in deciding whether Gorham's Calvinist views were permissible – he was subsequently allowed to take up his incumbency in Devon.

Together, Elizabeth's Articles, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal established a framework of doctrine, devotion and discipline for the English Reformed church. Even today in Australia it is the case that bishops declare their assent to doctrine, promise to correct and set aside teaching contrary to the Gospel, and are exhorted to proclaim the resurrection. Elizabeth's church was distinctly Protestant and confessional, even if the Puritans in her realm didn't think that her settlement had gone far enough. The English Reformation was part of a larger scholarly and ecclesiastical network, drawing attention away from its political motivation. England was not isolated from confessional debates on the continent. The intellectual borders between countries were porous. Claiming that the English reformers were different from continental reformers simply does not wash.

Connections with events on the continent further demonstrate the confessional character of the English reforming cause.

¹⁰ J. I. Packer, 'The Gospel in the Prayer Book' <http://www.stpaulsanglicanchurch.org/customsub.cfm?CustomLinkID=2>

Theological students in England read Bullinger's *Decades* to systematise the faith. The first draft of the Articles were published at just the same time that the Council of Trent, called to make a response to Lutheran theological claims, announced its decisions and published its anathemas: they were themselves a repudiation of Tridentine confession. Queen Mary's theological reflection was impacted by the Counter Reformation on the continent too. The later acceptance of the 39 Articles by Convocation in 1571 was also motivated by continental events, for Elizabeth had been excommunicated in 1570, the last step in moving the English church towards its own confessional stand. Many Protestant exiles from the reign of Queen Mary Tudor found themselves exposed to Reformed models of ministry in Frankfurt, or Strasbourg, or Zürich, or Geneva, which they subsequently brought home when Elizabeth ascended the throne, often to her chagrin. The English also negotiated from time to time militarily with the German Schmalkaldic League. To say that the English Reformation was not confessional is to read back into the period a view of nation states and academic isolation which simply does not hold true for the sixteenth century.

5. OUR PROTESTANT IDENTITY

It wasn't just that the church's doctrinal convictions had been written down. Our identity as Anglican Protestants was further reinforced through the opposition that they faced and the confession that they rendered under duress. Under Henry but moreso under Mary, Protestants were punished by sentencing them to death by fire which emboldened the confession of others still more. Identity is established not just through conviction but by association and experience. The Book of Common Prayer, upon which Cranmer, for example, took his stand, represented in his mind not merely political convenience but theological

conviction. Cranmer was executed for his view of the Lord's Supper. Cranmer's death was not for treason but for heresy, for making a confessional statement. The Supper was a confessional statement, telling the world what we understand about the work of the Lord Jesus, the gift of grace, the personal presence of the Spirit, the unity of the Scriptures, the reality of the Kingdom and the glories of the heavenly banquet. Cranmer's last words according to John Foxe were: 'As for the pope, I refuse him as Christ's enemy, and Antichrist with all his false doctrine.'

Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, from which we learn of the details of Cranmer's death, though inaccurate in places, creates an indelible link between personal story and theological confession, but less well known is that this theological confession is further situated within God's providential plans for England beginning with the early medieval period. The *Book of Martyrs* has an eschatological framework, and a nationalist edge. Published during Elizabeth's reign (1563), its goal was to create an expectation that England was elect of God and had responsibility to prosper Protestant conviction, and that Elizabeth was like a second Deborah to lead the nation in liberating ways, not just for the sake of England but for the worldwide church too. If you had asked members of the Church of England at the end of the sixteenth century if their church was confessional, they could easily have said yes, and also said that their nation was too!

Confessional identity was further formed on a national scale in the seventeenth century when the last Stuarts King William and Queen Mary were succeeded by Anne Queen of Great Britain 1702, beginning the Hanoverian dynasty which ruled with distinctly Protestant convictions and with more Parliamentary consultation than the Stuarts had ever attempted. Indeed, the national character of England was understood as confessionally Protestant until the requirement that any

graduate of Oxford or Cambridge subscribe the 39 Articles was repealed in 1829. The confessional character of the church was not a passing thing in the heat of Reformation debates, but it was assumed for generations afterwards that the English church stood for something and had a responsibility for the evangelisation of the world. Of course, we don't take our cues for our mission from John Foxe, but it should be noted that our church has expressed its confessional character not just in what it has written down but in what its leaders have decided to live for and to die for, and how the nation which it serves has imbibed the story.

6. RECASTING THE STORY

The conviction that the Anglican church has a confessional basis is widely ignored in contemporary debates. In part, this is the result of the study of Reformation history increasingly being housed in departments of religion in state universities rather than in seminaries or theological colleges. In secular universities, the Reformation is quickly subsumed under sociological or political categories. I once heard that Alister McGrath had written his books on the Reformation when he grew increasingly frustrated that undergraduates in Oxford were no longer being taught theological explanations for the Reformation. Under postmodern conditions, metanarratives are treated suspiciously, and intellectual history is often despised, for it assumes if not universal truth at least a larger story not of our own making. We would rather break history down into local and reactive stories, rather than investigate the deeper consistencies or causes of events. We prize spirituality over theology in a therapeutic culture in the West. Confessional treatments of history are marginalised. It ought to be said as well that much of what people today know of the English Reformation comes through movies and television shows, which necessarily highlight love interests, handsome protagonists, family jealousies,

human frailties, and romanticised backdrops. Very rarely does intellectual history figure prominently, though in the recent production of *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel Thomas Cromwell does just occasionally show some Protestant inclinations.

Much nineteenth century writing on English Reformation history was coloured by the contemporary political issues surrounding Catholic emancipation and problems arising from English rule of Ireland. An attempt was also made in the Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 to relativise the authority of the Scriptures by affirming alongside the Scriptures the creeds, the sacraments and the episcopate as means to reconcile with Rome: 'That, in the opinion of this Conference, the following Articles supply a basis on which approach may be by God's blessing made towards Home Reunion.' Other theological reflection in England repositioned the incarnation and not the atonement as the touchstone of faith in a volume called *Lux Mundi* (1889), which affirmed that in his birth and life, Christ healed the world's brokenness and established unity with the Lord, rather than through his atoning death and glorious resurrection. Protestant teaching on the radical disjunction between a righteous God and sinful human beings, and the essential unreasonableness of justifying grace, were deemphasised. The confessional nature of the Church of England was taking a hit.

It is often heard that Anglicans represent the *via media*, the ecclesiastical golden mean between Rome and Geneva, allowing or even encouraging movement towards Roman Catholic teaching or practice. It was not the case in the sixteenth century that Rome figured as an authority to placate. Rome had become under the most Catholic of monarchs Henry VIII an enemy to throw off. When historians or churchleaders speak of the *via media*, they implicitly make appeal to the moderateness and decency of the English, politically distinct in Europe and cautiously

reforming. Cultural bias blinds us to the confessional reality. Actually, when Elizabeth was excommunicated by Pope Pius V in 1570, her desire to settle England was to establish a via media between Wittenberg and Geneva and naturally not Rome, establishing a distinctly English Reformation that was Protestant and Reformed all the same.

We must learn to retell the story of the English Reformation, and recast it in terms of theological ideas and the Biblical story. This is a rebuke to me in the way I teach this material. It is of course true that the theology of the Prayer Book is liturgically cast, and the theology of the Articles is deliberately summarised and pastorally motivated, but this does not mean that our church is not confessional. All it means is that our church understands doctrine to have a role in defending an experience of grace rather than becoming the goal itself of Christian discipleship. While Adrian Hilton, editor of the Archbishop Cranmer blog, can argue that ‘The Anglican Communion is just a loose federation of contextual ecclesiologies; a trans-national mechanism by which Anglicans may fellowship with one another across borders; a consultative spiritual authority without any legal authority at all,’ and thereby apparently demote our confessional convictions, he is caught on his own petard. For ecclesiology is built on our convictions concerning Christ, whose body the church is, and fellowship itself is more than polite conversation but participation in the life of God and the Gospel, and spiritual authority is surely still authority in matters of dispute, even if this across jurisdictions is notorious to defend. Being a family together certainly assumes groundrules, boundaries, and common assumptions about its common life.

The Anglican church is a confessing church, for it places its confession of Christ as Lord at its theological and spiritual heart. And placing Christ as Lord in the centre necessarily entails other convictions, commitments and confessions in systematic understanding of the faith. Even if we are not a bounded set, but a centred one, confession of truth has a part to play. Even if we are a confessional church with English tone and context, polite and full of ‘gentlemen’s agreements,’ we are still a confessional one. A Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans in New Zealand is consistent with our formularies and a gift to the nation, which needs a clear presentation of Christ and a consistent call to follow him. Jaroslav Pelikan, the great Yale historian, described the Church of England in the sixteenth century in this way: ‘Lutheran in its intellectual origins, Catholic in its polity, Reformed in its official confessional statements, Radical in its Puritan outcome ...’¹¹ Without a hint of any twenty-first century agenda, Pelikan makes a persuasive case for the doctrinal and confessional character of the English church, even if its sixteenth century developments were spluttering. The life of the Anglican Church is built upon theological convictions about both faith and doctrine. To be an Anglican is to be a confessional Christian. Well may we then confess boldly:

Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15)

¹¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*. The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 2.

Divorce, Remarriage, and Same-Sex Relationships - Interview with Chris Spark



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Rev. Chris Spark is an assistant minister in the Parish of South Christchurch, and the author of the Latimer Paper ‘Double Standards? Divorce and remarriage in light of discussion on same sex relationships in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.’ Dave Clancey sat down with him to talk about his research and its implications.

Chris Spark

WHAT LED YOU TO LOOK AT THE ISSUES OF REMARRIAGE AND DIVORCE?

I like to look into things that are difficult but real issues. I had heard and been involved in discussion (in real life and online) where people were drawing parallels between the church’s attitude to divorce and remarriage and the proposals to bless same-sex marriage. Essentially people were saying there’s a double standard. That is, if you can live with different beliefs about the church remarrying divorced people, why can’t you live with different beliefs about same-sex activity?

When I heard that, I’d come back and say that the Bible says that it’s ok to be remarried after divorce in certain circumstances. And people would come back at me and say that’s not what the Bible says, or that the church hasn’t understood it in that way. And I realised that I hadn’t actually done the hard work of looking closely at what the Bible really says and comparing that with what our church actually does. And as a minister of the gospel I felt that I should do that, and that someone in our circles should be looking at this particularly closely.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT YOUR INVESTIGATION?

I’d been talking with my Vicar about it, and he said it was important and gave me some time to think hard and undertake some research which allowed me to get started in a focused way. The first thing was to take the text of the key parts of the Bible and look extremely closely at them in the original languages, with lots of commentaries open, to try to understand the text in its context really well. Along with that, I did some wider

reading about how people had understood these passages.

The other side of it was looking at the minutes of our General Synod from a number of different periods in history when changes had happened. I was seeking to find what the changes actually were, what was motivating them, and what people were saying about those changes at the time. This also involved looking at the legislation as to what changes actually were made.

Essentially people were saying there’s a double standard. That is, if you can live with different beliefs about the church remarrying divorced people, why can’t you live with different beliefs about same-sex activity?

After thinking about and synthesizing all this, I tried to understand what our church had done and why, and then to what extent those changes were in line with Scripture.

I’d also been thinking and reading about and considering same-sex relationships for a long time because they affect people very close to me in different ways. So the final part of the work was to seek to compare how our church is dealing with same-sex issues in light of what I had discovered about our changes with regard to divorce and remarriage.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU ABOUT YOUR FINDINGS?

I knew that the New Testament had a few different voices on divorce and remarriage, but I was surprised to see how genuinely oblique the picture of divorce and remarriage

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is compared to what the Bible says about same-sex activity. For example, 1 Corinthians and Matthew say things which were, to me, unexpectedly distinct to what Luke and Mark say. Mark and Luke each have one bit of teaching which is negative towards divorce and remarriage. In Matthew the same story is there, but he tells us that Jesus included an exception. He still spoke very negatively about divorce, but he includes this exception. There's also a clear exception in 1 Corinthians. We can certainly read all of Scripture on this topic together, but I was surprised at the difference I found. And this was very different to the single tone you get when you look at what the Bible says about same-sex activity.

In looking at the church history, I was also surprised by the extent to which the church was so strong about the importance of the exceptions in Matthew's gospel. In the early periods of our church's history that I looked at (the late 1800s), it was this issue of the exception and how church practice engaged with this, that they were really trying to deal with.

ON THE BASIS OF YOUR WORK, ARE THERE THINGS YOU THINK OUR CHURCH SHOULD CHANGE?

Yes. On the one hand, I think our church's legislation and canons are consistent with Scripture, in the sense that they don't go against it or allow us to go against it particularly when they are read in the wider

context of the Constitution. But I do think it was better when the changes were made in the early 1970s, because they more fully reflected the seriousness of divorce and remarriage that we see in the New Testament - it's not a light matter. Latter changes don't reflect that so clearly. In society around us, no-fault divorce is not seen as a big deal - sad, but not a big deal. The New Testament never sees it that way, and while our current church legislation can and should be taken with that attitude, for my money it leaves too much room, and doesn't reflect the seriousness with which the matter is treated by Jesus and the apostles. Originally, when the changes occurred to the church divorce rules and they did allow remarriage, there was an entire part of the canons about what needed to be done in order to remarry a divorced person. My opinion was that it accurately reflected the weight that we needed to treat this issue with as ministers of the gospel, before remarrying divorcees. While I think that weight is still upon us, because of our promise as clergy to work in line with Scripture, in my opinion our current marriage canon doesn't reflect that in anywhere near as clear a way. So a relook at that would be a good thing.

The other side is that I've been reminded that divorce and remarriage is, in some ways, like the same sex issue we're facing - and like so many other human issues we have to deal with - in that there is a tragic sadness about it, that sin has broken us and breaks us and causes wrong. There is a significant difference in how the Bible allows us to address that brokenness, but the similarity is that in both situations, we are dealing with people who are hurt by sin, and hurt others with sin, because that's what we all do. I'm hoping our church will continue to change in certain ways, particularly in how we can express love for all people in the way that Jesus and the apostles have called us to.

DO YOU MEAN THAT YOUR HOPE IS THAT WE WILL ACKNOWLEDGE SIN AND YET BE COMPASSIONATE TOWARDS PEOPLE?

I hope that we'll change in our attitudes across the board more and more to recognise that the apostles and Jesus know what they're doing in terms of how to love people. And so we will love people in whatever situation they are in maritally, with regard to their sexual orientation etc. That we will love people in a way that is in keeping with what Scripture says, but that we will truly love them. And not either think we need to change what Jesus and the apostles say in order to love people, nor will we avoid people or try and keep our distance from people who don't fit in or who might cause awkwardness for us. I hope we will change from both of those.

HOW DO YOU HOPE THIS WORK WILL HELP IN THE CONVERSATION IN OUR CHURCH ABOUT BLESSING SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS?

I hope it will help in some small measure, particularly regarding the sweeping claims that are often made between the parallels between remarriage after divorce and same sex marriage and blessings. I do think there are parallels between the two, but not the parallels that are usually claimed.

I don't think our church lives with the multiple convictions and integrities on divorce and remarriage that people think we do. I think legally – according to church law - we have the allowance of remarriage in certain cases, and that is okay because it fits with the biblical picture. It doesn't require us to live with two convictions about this. So I hope there will be clarity on what the parallels are and aren't, and that some of the sweeping claims that are made won't be as intimidating as I first found them.

It wouldn't be a bad thing to address the wording of our divorce and remarriage canons again, to allow them to better reflect the Scriptural weight. They're in keeping with Scripture, but could better reflect the weight and seriousness of divorce and remarriage.

I hope that Evangelicals would be encouraged to humble ourselves and consider whether our attitudes and practice regarding divorce and remarriage are actually in line with the Bible (because sometimes they're not). And that in both of the areas that the paper has dealt with, we will continue on with humility, seeking to be obedient and to trust Jesus that he knows what is best and loving and good for people.

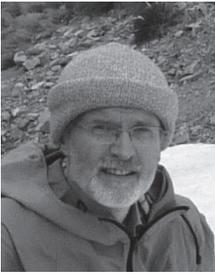


Photo: Les Brighton
Written by: Ron Hay

Les Brighton: A Tribute

On October 31, 2017 we remembered the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, recalling Luther's nailing of his Ninety Five Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. On that same day, several hundred people gathered in Christchurch's Transitional Cathedral to remember and honour Les Brighton who was General Secretary of Latimer Fellowship from 1985-1997.

Les was the first lay person to head up the ministry of Latimer and he brought unique gifts to the role. With degrees in English Literature and Theology plus a background in Secondary Teaching and as a Scripture Union staff worker, he injected new life and vitality into Latimer's quarterly magazine. He gave most issues of the magazine a major (but not exclusive) thematic focus which allowed for in-depth treatment of areas such as Christianity and other faiths, suffering, prayer and spirituality, evangelism and renewal, Christianity and culture, preaching, Maori and Pakeha, creation, psychology and psychotherapy, growing churches and many more.

Les's contribution extended beyond creative editing: he also wrote many articles which typically exhibited literary flair together with fresh and perceptive insight based on wide reading, life experience and in-depth engagement with the Scriptures.

Les's contribution extended beyond creative editing: he also wrote many articles which typically exhibited literary flair together with fresh and perceptive insight based on wide reading, life experience and in-depth engagement with the Scriptures. The magazine was an enriching read for church leaders and for disciples seeking to be faithful in the world.

In the early 1990's Les was part of a key group of leaders from the four evangelical voluntary societies within the Anglican Church – Latimer, Church Army, CMS, and

Anglican Renewal Ministries – who gave birth to AFFIRM – Anglicans for Faith, Intercession, Renewal and Mission. *Latimer* magazine was reborn as the bigger, brighter large format *AFFIRM* magazine which was A4 sized and 30 to 40 pages long. Les's first editorial addressed "a Church in crisis" – a crisis of numbers, a crisis of faith, a crisis of prayer, a crisis of purpose – and ended with the affirmation that "crisis is not necessarily disaster, but also opportunity. We are not the saviours of the Church – but Christ is!"

Faithfulness to Christ, to the Church, and to the Scriptures were hallmarks of Les's life and ministry. Having been brought up in a Brethren Assembly, he joined the Anglican Church in early adulthood, and he remained loyal and committed to the one parish (Burnside-Harewood) for the rest of his life. There his preaching gifts were greatly appreciated and he had a special ministry to and following among the young adults in the church. In early 2017, even though seriously ill, he led a creative Lenten Study series just months before leukaemia overcame him.

Les made a special contribution to his local church and, through Latimer Fellowship, to the wider church in New Zealand. He was the last full-time General Secretary of Latimer before financial constraints led to the sale of the Warden's House and Library at 101 Waimairi Road and the gifting of the library books to Laidlaw College.

But in God's grace, Les may yet make a special contribution to the world-wide church. All his life he has been a person deeply committed to Scripture. He has read, studied and taught the Bible in many contexts with different age groups. For a number of

years now he has been working on a book on Paul's letter to the Romans. Just weeks before he died he submitted his book to an international publisher. In his introduction to the book he writes:

The letter to the Romans is not for the faint-hearted. But what we are looking for is not safety and comfort but the word of the Living God; a word which, uncomfortable as it may be at times, is nonetheless a stream of living water in a desert land. Where else can we go? How could we be satisfied with anything less? It is my prayer that through this book, or alongside it—or even perhaps despite it—God himself may speak to us; that Paul's letter to the Romans may fall open to us, and that through it the glory and grace of God that first gripped Paul himself would shine, to the refreshment of our lives, and the transformation of our world.

For me, and for many others, Les was a special gift in our lives. By God's grace he may (if his book is published) continue to be a refreshing and transforming gift in many more lives yet.



Rev. Dr. Bob Robinson

Books Worth Reading

MAKING SENSE OF GOD

Timothy Keller (Viking, 2016, US\$27.00, 336pp, ISBN: 9780525954156)

Keller is America's most skilled public defender of the Gospel. In his latest book, he writes about and for the growing number of hard-nosed sceptics who have no questions for Christianity because they claim to know in advance that there *are* no answers given that life has no ultimate meaning. We have such people in New Zealand. Keller's opening two chapters deal with the claims that all religion is slowly disappearing, and that a faith-based worldview cannot match a reason-based view. He then continues with chapters that plausibly explain and appeal to meaning, happiness, freedom, human identity, hope, morality and justice in ways that secularism simply can't. These chapters take time to read because Keller is at pains to present sceptical positions clearly and fairly (with a stream of quotations and examples reinforced by some 70 pages of endnotes) before replying to them. As another reviewer tellingly notes, "You can usually tell whether apologist have learned apologetics from other Christians, or whether they have mainly learned it through lots of interactions with ordinary secular people; Keller is clearly the latter." Keller then concludes with two fine chapters on reasons for believing in God, and in the Christian God in particular. Let's make sure our public libraries have this clearly reasoned volume on their shelves.

IF GOD, THEN WHAT?

Andrew Wilson (IVP, 2012, US\$14.00, 159pp, ISBN: 9781844745692)

Despite this reviewer's praise for Keller's *Making Sense of God*, the book is a long and fairly demanding read. For many, including younger readers, a better choice might well be this shorter British paperback. The tone also gentle and irenic but the overall presentation is more engaging and personal.

The subtitle (*Wondering Aloud about Truth, Origins and Redemption*) hints at the style. Whereas Keller centres on meaning, Wilson appeals to hope: both the absence of hope if the universe is not sustained from beyond itself, and the evidence-base for God (from, for example, our finely-tuned universe), for the resurrection of Jesus, and for living as we know we ought to live, even when we fail. The IVP imprint shows that the book has university students in mind – though most of them probably won't discern the wide reading that backs up Wilson's case for faith but they will warm to the ten clever questions that introduce its chapters. Along with Ron Hay's *Finding the Forgotten God*, this is now my favourite give-away book about the truth of the Gospel.

THE CRUCIFIXION

Fleming Rutledge (Eerdmans, 2017, US\$30.00, 695pp, ISBN: 9780802875341)

From one of this generation's most powerful preachers comes a bracing and highly preachable volume that has been announced as the Christianity Today 2017 'Book of the Year.' The magazine's editor explains that "I can hardly think of a book more necessary for our time. Many well-meaning attempts to summarize the good news today barely allude to the cross, and we're left with an anemic if not a false gospel" – and Rutledge also notes this neglect of the cross of Christ as an incentive the volume. The book starts by showing the richly varied pictures used in the NT to describe the death of Christ. These are then helpfully illustrated and applied from both the whole history of Christianity and from today's world. Almost every page has material for a preacher or teacher – from literature and culture, politics and religion, war, cruelty, and every dimension of the human condition that needs the redemption that only the central event of world history can provide. This is an unflinching and uncompromisingly honest

and patient explanation of what the cross of Christ means for today's world – and written by a preacher who truly seems to have lived life shaped by the cross. A South African reviewer describes the book as: “Informing, reminding, critiquing, illustrating, unmasking, challenging, reassuring, encouraging, and inspiring.” And even a rather liberal American commentator adds: “To those who think they want a maximally mellow God who overlooks our faults and accepts us just as we are, Rutledge's challenge is to ‘get real.’ Twentieth-century atrocities bear witness: there is something drastically wrong with the human condition, which only God can fix. Setting things right calls for crucifixion, not only Christ's but also ours. Rutledge has given us a very Pauline book ... to provoke clergy to preach the cross to their congregations.” Despite its length, the book is clearly written not primarily for scholars, but for pastors and laypeople; its deep learning is wisely hidden under a cloak of engaging readability. After a first read, this reviewer is going to spend the coming year savouring its richness and challenges at a slower pace. Latimer readers, buy this book for a preacher you love!

KARL BARTH

Mark Galli (Eerdmans, 2017, US\$18.00, 192pp, ISBN: 9780802869395)

Mark Galli is the plain-speaking editor in chief of *Christianity Today*. In this book he presents what the subtitle calls ‘An Introductory Biography for Evangelicals’ about the life and writings of the twentieth-century's most influential theologian. Barth has had a mixed reception among evangelicals but advance suspicion is unwarranted; in Galli's summary, “because his theology is so grounded in Scripture, Barth is able as few can to remind us of the height, breadth, and depth of God's love in Jesus Christ.” His theology is based on the insistence that all talk of God must begin with God's self-disclosure. Galli gives special attention to topics of

concern for evangelicals, especially Barth's doctrines of revelation and of election (where Barth's Christ-centredness both appeals and puzzles). Barth bravely challenged his generation to reject both liberalism on the left and also the harsh fatalisms that still tempt some conservatives. Galli's book is both wisely appreciative and appropriately critical; it is written in a concise and accessible way as Galli pushes evangelicals to re-consider what Barth's theology contributes to Christ-centered preaching in today's pluralist world. This reviewer felt refreshed by several hours in the company of this great Christian thinker.

RACE AND REDEMPTION

Jane Samson (Eerdmans, 2017, US\$50.00, 284pp, ISBN: 9780802875358)

The subtitle, ‘British Missionaries Encounter Pacific Peoples, 1797-1920,’ is needed to explain why some readers might find interest in this volume (part of a scholarly ‘Studies in the History of Christian Missions’ series). Samson provides a historical examination of the encounter between British missionaries and Pasifika peoples, including Aotearoa New Zealand. It is a story that has been told before but there are two notable features of her approach: a determination to analyse the encounter in theological and not merely colonial categories (eg, the missionaries' biblical view of what it means to be human), and the way in which the missionaries themselves confound the usual stereotypes imposed on them by secular historians. Might some Latimer readers recommend this otherwise expensive volume to public and other libraries?

Latimer's Curate

"So you're condemning me to a life of celibacy then!?"

My heart went out to her.

She had already spoken of the pain of not feeling loved or accepted by others, and especially by the church because she was a homosexual.

I didn't want to make her pain worse. I wanted to show care and concern. How was I going to speak God's truth and show God's love?

Sometimes we find it hard to know exactly what to say.

I didn't know it at the time, but I was caught out by a red herring. A red herring finds its original meaning back in 1807 where a 'red herring' (a type of smelly fish) could be used to distract hunting dogs from their main task of hunting rabbits. In other words, a red herring is a diversion that leads people astray in a certain direction.

The diversion or direction that I was being led towards, is the direction that we as an Anglican church find ourselves going in. That is, the direction to adopt blessings of same gender relationships (and ultimately same gender marriages). Nothing less is satisfactory, because to withhold these blessings to people in a homosexual relationship is to say that they are not loved or accepted and are second-class humans.

This type of red herring is powerfully persuasive because I don't want to be unloving. I am tempted to just say that God loves you and it's okay to marry whoever you want. I am tempted to do this because I don't want to cause pain. I don't want to be a bigot, I want to be like Jesus who loves everyone, and who hung out with the 'sinners' of his day. I care for those who feel rejected and that life isn't worth living because they identify as homosexual, and I want our church to be one that accepts every single person, the same way that Jesus does.

However, if I believe that who I am is found in my sexual identity, and if you do not embrace and celebrate it with me, then it's understandable to conclude that you are rejecting me. I can understand why someone thinks this way. This is what the culture around us is telling us. It is connecting something deep in each of us – our sexual orientation - and linking it with our identity and fulfilment. Our hearts are tempted to embrace this version of love and acceptance.

Whilst persuasive, it's a red herring, because it diverts us away from the true reality Jesus offers.

The reality of Jesus' love and acceptance that he offers is that our identity and our fulfilment and hope is in a much greater, more fulfilling, more permanent place. It is not found in our sexual orientation or relationship status, but in Jesus himself.

It is the same for all of us. We breathe the same air, we bleed the same blood, we are more alike than we are different. My heart struggles with all sorts of things. As a single person, I longed for a marriage partner. I struggled with my sexual desires, and still do! But the Bible makes it so clear that if I were to remain single, that is not condemnation and likewise, if I were to not act out on my sexual desires, that is not a bad thing either.

My identity is not in my sexual orientation, my hopes are not found in a marriage partner, my fulfilment is not found in meeting my sexual wants or emotional desires. It is the same for anything - our work, family, friends, our leisure, our bank balance. All these good things, including the desires of our hearts, have been tainted by the fall. Whatever we desire, our hopes, identity and fulfilment is found only in something much more stable and permanent – in Christ.

So what I want to say is: you are loved, and with the greatest of loving concern, please be careful of those red herrings.

Whoever you are, whatever your sexual orientation, you are not less accepted by God, you are not any less of a human being because you experience same gender attraction. We are more alike than we are different; in fact there really is no difference at all, we are all tempted to seek false refuge and hope and assurance in the wrong places.

The road we travel, if you call yourself a follower of Christ, is in the same direction of discipleship; “when we come to Christ”, as Bonhoeffer famously said, “he bids us to come and die.” Jesus says “we are to take up our cross daily to follow him”. This means putting aside, and to sacrifice fulfilling our own desires in anything other than Christ himself.

This is not a life of condemnation, Jesus doesn’t call us to give up something good for something inferior – in fact the opposite is true: He gives us a life of freedom to serve Him who first served and loved us with his life. As Jesus said “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” God’s love and grace doesn’t leave us as we are, he gives us a new identity, a new hope, and he offers a fulfilment that is found nowhere else but in Christ alone.

He gives us a life of freedom to serve Him who first served and loved us with his life. As Jesus said “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”

