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Author: D. Neville
Author Address: dneville@csu.edu.au
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Abstract: This study examines the Bible as a public document in the matrix of Anglican history and theology. It argues that the early Church of England raised the public profile of the Bible, even if with some consternation. It also points out that the Bible's imprint on the Anglican liturgy ensures that the Bible continues to have public import in the Australian context. Finally, it contends that the distinctively Anglican approach to interpreting the Bible is conducive to public theology.
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St Mark's National Theological Centre
ABN: 295 77 118972
15 Blackall St, BARTON ACT 2600 Australia
Reception +61 2 6273 1572
General Email stmarksadmin@csu.edu.au
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Editorial

Tom Frame

When the administration of British Prime Minister William Pitt 'the Younger' announced its intention to establish a penal settlement at Botany Bay in July 1786, there was no religious motivation in either the choice of the location or the immediate aspirations of those who deemed it necessary for Britain to take physical possession of New South Wales. Although the decision to appoint a chaplain to the First Fleet was an afterthought, the formal orders issued to the governor, Captain Arthur Phillip RN, required him 'by all proper methods' to 'enforce a due observance of religion and good order among the inhabitants of the new settlement,' and 'take such steps for the due celebration of public worship as circumstances will permit.'

As a British colony, the spiritual and moral character of the new society was entrusted initially to the clergy of the Established Church of England. For the next thirty years, the Church's ascendancy in New South Wales was maintained by the structures of an English colonial administration with assistance from missionary organisations and wealthy benefactors in Britain. Much has changed since then.

The 2006 national census revealed that the Anglican proportion of the Australian population was 18.7 per cent, down from 40.3 per cent at the time of Federation in 1901. For me, the proportional decline was not the startling figure. I was astonished to learn that 3.7 million Australians still declared an affiliation with the Anglican Church. Although the majority of these people do very little about their adherence to Anglicanism, this nonetheless represents a very substantial constituency within the Australian nation, with Anglicans heavily represented in positions of political power and cultural influence. Although it is not the national church, the Anglican Church is intentionally inclusive and porous because it still aspires to be a church for the nation.

Although there are Australians who want to end any public discussion of religion and to exclude all religious bodies from the public square, the open character of our democratic system, which accepts religious diversity and the constitutional entitlement of churches to operate without government interference, means that Anglicans will continue to engage in conversation about the kind of society Australia ought to be. But what do Anglicans have to say? Is there a social vision peculiar to Anglicanism? In his short book Christianity and the Social Order published to coincide with
his appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942, William Temple gave Anglicans something approaching a charter for public life.

Temple argued that the Church was bound to interfere in civil matters on four distinct grounds:

[First], the claims of sympathy with those who suffer; second, the educational influence of the social and economic system; third, the challenge offered to our existing system in the name of justice; fourth, the duty of conformity to the ‘Natural Order’ in which is to be found the purpose of God.¹

In other words, the Church was ‘bound to interfere’ because it is by vocation the agent of God’s purpose, outside the scope of which, Temple said, ‘no human interest or activity can fall’. He was equally succinct in his description of the manner of the church’s interference:

[First], its members must fulfil their moral responsibilities and functions in a Christian spirit; second, its members must exercise their purely civic rights in a Christian spirit; third, it must itself supply them with a systematic statement of principles to aid them in doing these two things, and this will carry with it a denunciation of customs or institutions in contemporary life and practice which offend against those principles.²

It was also clear to Temple that the church ought to recognise and respect the limits of its competence to comment on and interfere in social and political matters, and leave to informed Christian citizens the implementation of religious principles in their own social and political contexts.

Anglicans will continue to be active in the public square in response to what they believe to be divine prompting. Being an Anglican does not imply electoral support for one political party over and above another. It is possible to be an Anglican of good conscience and be a member of, or cast one’s vote for, either the Coalition or Labor. Neither party can presume the votes of Anglicans by saying they have captured the Christian social vision in their respective policy platforms. This leaves the entire Church plenty of scope to be active in the public square while respecting the religious plurality of contemporary Australian society. But what could and should the Church say in the context of public debate? In what ways could and should the Church be active in the public square?

These questions were the focus of a public seminar held at St Mark’s on 21 September 2007. The theme was ‘Public but not Official: Anglican Contributions to Australian Life’ and our keynote speaker was the Reverend Canon Robin Gill, the Michael Ramsey Professor of Modern Theology at the University of Kent at Canterbury. Professor Gill is a leading public theologian in Britain and was, with his wife Jenny, a visitor at St Mark’s for several weeks during Spring. We look forward to welcoming them back to St Mark’s.

This edition of St Mark’s Review contains all the edited addresses from the seminar. Readers will quickly realise that the speakers, other than Professor Gill and Professor James Haire (Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture), are members of the St Mark’s academic faculty. This was deliberate. As the majority of the faculty are also members of the Charles Sturt University Public & Contextual Theology (PACT) Strategic Research Centre which has a particular focus on the content and conduct of public theology, this seminar was an opportunity for some detailed and deliberate discussion on what constitutes the sub-discipline of public theology and what kind of contribution St Mark’s can make to its development.

I am most grateful to my colleagues for taking this invitation seriously and much appreciate the thoughtfulness of their papers. This edition of St Mark’s Review will, I hope, set the public theology agenda for the Anglican Church and influence the attitudes and actions of the church’s members as they go about their daily lives and participate in conversations about the kind of nation Australia ought to be.

Professor Tom Frame
Director, St Mark’s National Theological Centre
30 November 2007

Notes
² Temple, Christianity and the Social Order, pp. 31–32.
The Bible as a Public Document

A Perspective on the Contribution of Anglicanism

David Neville

The role of scripture in public theology is an important but relatively neglected topic. Perhaps these words by Philip Knight explain why: 'In our contemporary pluralistic age any reading of the Bible can be privately inspiring and good for just that reason. However, the institutions and ideologies through which we shape our common life no longer defer to the Bible as a source of public meaning.' A collection of texts that begins with the creation of the cosmos and ends with its renewal can hardly be said to focus solely on the private — as opposed to public — sphere. Indeed, the Bible addresses matters of concern to a broad public, not simply those pertaining to private morality or interior spirituality. It is as concerned with power as with prayer, with structures as with spirituality, with money as with mercy, with justice as with 'justification.' But is it a public document? And if so, how does the judgment that it is intersect with public theology in Anglican garb?

While the Bible was never intended to be an esoteric document, at various historical junctures it became a more public document through the process of translation. The translation of the Tanakh into Greek made Jewish scriptures accessible both to non-Jews and Diaspora Jews who knew Greek better than Aramaic or Hebrew. Subsequently, after the New Testament writings had been written in Koine Greek, the lingua franca of the Mediterranean world at the time, translation of the Greek Bible into Latin, especially Jerome's Vulgate (circa 400 CE), opened up the Jewish and Christian scriptures to Latin-speakers for centuries. As late as the mid-sixteenth century, 'the council held by the Roman Catholic Church at Trent (1545–63) made the Vulgate official and authoritative both in its canon and in its text.' And the various reform movements to which Trent was the official Roman response precipitated a host of translations of the Bible into various European languages, including English.

The Bible and the English Reformation

In late-medieval Europe, concern for ecclesial reform and concern to make the scriptures available in the vernacular seem to have been two sides of one coin. Martin Luther is the outstanding example of a reformer.

David Neville is Senior Lecturer in New Testament Studies at St Mark's National Theological Centre and Associate Head of the School of Theology, Charles Sturt University.
whose priority was to translate the Bible into a common tongue, but in this respect he was preceded on the other side of the English Channel by John Wyclif (circa 1330–1384) and succeeded by William Tyndale (circa 1494–1536), both of whom found their zeal for making the Bible a more public document staunchly opposed by church and sovereign. As William Haugard observes,

Vernacular Bibles tended to be associated with dissident groups whom church authorities regarded as heretics. In England the Oxford scholar John Wyclif, as part of his theological program for the renovation of church and society, initiated and encouraged the translation of the [Latin] Bible into English, so that, as he judged, clergy and people might clearly understand how far the church had strayed from its biblical roots.³

In 1536, Tyndale paid with his life for his determination to make the Bible intelligible to the common person. The year after, however, two versions of the complete Bible in English by former associates of Tyndale, Miles Coverdale (1488–1568) and 'Thomas Matthew',⁴ were in circulation, followed in 1539 by the so-called 'Great Bible', which was commissioned by Thomas Cromwell, edited by Coverdale and 'rescued' by Thomas Cranmer upon Cromwell's demise. 'Supported by royal and episcopal injunctions [issued in 1536, 1538 and 1541] the new Bible was in great demand.'⁵

Although continental reform movements relied heavily on the support of secular authorities, church reform in England was either driven or driven back by the monarchy itself. Thus, despite a number of pendulum swings between prohibition against and encouragement of the Bible in English translation, by 1545 royal decree had made available the Bible in English for public reading and edification.⁶

It is tempting to view the widespread Reformation commitment to translate the Bible into the vernacular as the public expression of the Renaissance catchcry, *ad fontes* ('to the sources'). Scholars discovered that by returning to the primary sources of the Christian church in their original languages, resources for ecclesial reform and renewal were recoverable. Yet those in authority within church and society were precisely those least likely to want the status quo disturbed by perspectives nurtured from antiquity. Hence the need on the part of would-be reformers to create a groundswell of grassroots support by encouraging and enabling more and more ordinary people — the public — to see what was to be seen through more direct access to scripture.

A direct consequence of making the Bible a more public document, however, was the discovery that scripture was neither so lucid nor so homogenous as had been conveyed when biblical teaching passed through the interpretive grid of the church’s official teaching office, the *magisterium*. More public reading of the Bible and more reading of the Bible by the public, meaning those outside the academy and clerical offices, opened up possibilities for scripture to connect more directly with issues that concerned ordinary persons on a day-to-day basis. Greater accessibility to the Bible inevitably resulted in more diverse interpretations of biblical passages, including those pertaining to the social order and how best it might be governed. Claims regarding the perspicuity of scripture were intended to bring order out of chaos but did not diminish interpretive options on a plethora of texts. Pandora’s Box had been opened anew, which required responses on the part of Reformation churches about how best to negotiate the interpretive problems raised by more and more people having direct access to the Bible.

Before turning to the Church of England’s response to what must have seemed like interpretive mayhem, at least to those with political and ecclesiastical authority, one other consequence of the Bible’s increasing accessibility deserves comment. Making the Bible more public helped to shape the English language to such an extent that the only other comparable influence on English as a language is the corpus of Shakespearean plays and poems. That kind of influence may never be replicable, but the Anglican Church, by means of its biblically seasoned liturgy, continues to provide the necessary language to enable the broader Australian public to celebrate key joyous occasions and to process grief associated with personal loss and public calamity. Language is not only the medium of thought but also, in certain respects, the shaper of thought. So, in continuing to provide language that enables people generally to celebrate life and to deal with its ambivalence, the Anglican Church continues to play a vital role in the public life of Australia. In this, it is not unique; other churches also offer this public service. But in view of the historic reality that the Anglican Church in Australia has been part of the establishment, even if not officially established since the 1830s, it will likely continue to be one of the more visible ecclesial presences in Australia’s public space.
The 'Publicness' of Anglican Interpretive Method

It is well known that the various reform movements in sixteenth-century Europe were authorised (by their leaders) on the basis of scripture. Sola scriptura became a defining principle of the Reformation, whether Lutheran, Reformed or 'radical'. But for none of the leading reformers was scripture authoritative in and of itself; rather, scripture was authoritative both because it witnesses to Jesus Christ and because through it the Word of God can be heard and heeded. For this reason, the reformers regarded scripture as the normative criterion both for theology and for perpetual reform of the church. Despite agreement on the authority of scripture, however, the reformers could not agree on how scripture was to be interpreted. Medieval Roman Catholicism had granted to its pope and magisterium (the Church's teaching office) the responsibility to determine the meaning of scripture, thereby facilitating doctrinal accretions that were not only absent from scripture but also, according to the reformers, contradictory to scripture. In response, the 'magisterial' reformers (Luther, Zwingli and Calvin) emphasised the perspicuity and objectivity of scripture, thereby implying, although this may not have been their intention, that each individual is capable of hearing, through scripture, God's direct communication unaided by anything older (church tradition) or wider (the broader community of believers) or deeper (special training).

By the time the English monarch had determined that it was time for the Church in England to become the officially established Church of England, squabbles between continental reformers regarding the interpretation of scripture had revealed that while the principle of sola scriptura might be theologically necessary, it alone was an insufficient interpretive rule. A classic case of interpretive deadlock was the Eucharistic dispute between Luther and Zwingli during the late-1520s.

The Anglican answer, patiently developed over many decades, was to acknowledge the primacy of scripture, thereby ensuring that the Bible was the touchstone for both doctrine and the moral life, but to nuance this affirmation by appealing also to reason and tradition. Article 6 of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion affirms the sufficiency of the scriptures for salvation, 'so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of anyone, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite as necessary to salvation.' Crucially, this article does not over-reach itself, either by claiming for scripture any specific conception of inspiration, let alone inerrancy or infallibility, or by asserting that scripture contains all knowledge that might prove profitable for human well-being. What is attested to in the Bible, both Old Testament (see Article 7) and New, is sufficient for human salvation — no less, which is the decisive point affirmed in Article 6, but also no more with respect to what is binding on the Christian conscience. Appealing to Richard Hooker, Michael Ramsey put this point succinctly: 'Scripture tells us what is necessary for salvation, but it is not a source of authority for countless other things as well.'

This article also hints at the proper role of reason in Christian interpretation of scripture — in the phrase, 'nor may be proved thereby.' Alongside an affirmation of the primacy of scripture is the practical recognition that the Bible must be comprehended, interpreted, reflected upon and even argued over. Otherwise, nothing could possibly be proved by reading scripture. The discerning and discriminating role of reason is also implied in Article 7 on the abiding value of the Old Testament. After insisting that the Old Testament is not contrary to the New, on the interpretive basis that both offer everlasting life to humanity by Christ, Article 7 proceeds to discriminate between ritual laws and civil precepts, which are not binding on Christians, and the moral commandments, which are. That is not a scriptural distinction, but a reasonable rational differentiation based partly on New Testament precedent.

Article 8 also implies the role and responsibility of reason in affirming the abiding validity of the Nicene, Athanasian and Apostles' creeds, 'for they may be proved; it states, 'by most certain warrants of holy scripture.' Here three traditional creeds are reaffirmed because they are understood to conform to scripture. In turn, the affirmation of these creeds clearly signals the Church of England's developing conviction that its break from Rome did not signify starting from scratch. There are within the tradition of the wider church, especially what is traceable to the first five centuries, valuable resources not only for ecclesial reform but also for interpreting the Bible. So, alongside scriptural primacy and the responsible exercise of reason, tradition was also granted a role in the process of biblical interpretation.

For the Church of England, tradition meant something different from what it was understood to mean at the Council of Trent, which stipulated that alongside scripture could be traced an independent tradition of apostolic teaching. For historic Anglicanism, the patristic period of the first five centuries, the early ecumenical councils and the three creeds identified in Article 8 were privileged above other aspects of the Christian tradition, on the grounds that this early period in the church's history was more closely
in touch with, and consciously dependent upon, scripture. In short, tradition was judged against scripture, even if it also served as a lens for right reading of scripture.

Michael Ramsey queried the effect of this characteristically Anglican appeal to tradition, especially as preserved in the church of antiquity. His response was that apart from bequeathing to Anglican theology a 'certain archaic flavour', this connectedness with antiquity opened Anglicanism to the influence of both Latin and Greek theology, thereby broadening its base, scope, ethos and perspective. In Ramsey's view, this broadening enabled Anglicanism to find creative solutions to doctrinal impasses, for example, the doctrines of the Eucharist and the Communion of Saints. But this characteristically Anglican appeal to tradition also has ramifications for ecumenism and public theology, in so far as its intentional grounding in diverse theological traditions facilitates a greater capacity for recognising the potential enrichment of present-day theological diversity and for openness to hearing an edifying or salutary word from outside the Christian tradition.

Theologically understood, tradition is both blessing and curse. We have learned that thought and practice are inconceivable outside some particular tradition, but tradition-bearers also tend to be self-justifying rather than self-critical. Thus, over time, tradition may stray from its roots, accumulate accretions alien to its original charter, vision or spirit, or even undermine itself by emphasising certain features internal to itself to the detriment of other, equally significant, features. Hence the need for critique from within and openness to critique from without. The Anglican interpretive approach makes room for both. The primacy of scripture provides leverage for critique from within, whereby tradition is judged against its source; respect for the responsible use of reason precludes a closed mentality and implies openness to external critique.

Of course, appeal to the primacy of scripture is not itself free from difficulty. More than at the beginnings of the Church of England, we are cognisant that scripture is not only the origin of a particular tradition but also the repository of a variety of traditions, some reinforced and extended in the New Testament while others are repudiated or renovated. It is more difficult today than it once was to say, 'The Old Testament is not contrary to the New, for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to humankind by Christ' (Article 7). Moreover, neither the scriptural writers nor their original and successive audiences bypassed reason as they wrote and received the scriptures. In scripture, reason speaks to reason no less than faith speaks to faith, even if a principal scriptural tenet — the mystery of God's presence in and pressure on the world — intimates that reason acknowledge certain limits and take faith as its starting-point.

Even if one is inclined to agree with John Wesley that additional components such as experience are necessary for a holistic approach to interpreting scripture, it is nevertheless the case that the value accorded to reason in the Anglican tradition helps — or should help — to guard against obscurantism, ecclesiastical authoritarianism and ecclesial isolationism. With respect to the first of these damaging tendencies, Maggi Dawn's remarks on the appeal to reason within Anglicanism are pertinent:

Anglicanism is built on a three-cornered foundation — an equal appeal to Scripture, to tradition and to reason. This has always been the safeguard of Anglicanism. The dependence upon Scripture keeps our faith rooted in the faith of ancient Israel and in the story of Jesus Christ. The dependence upon tradition gives it continuity — a steady and measured development, in step with, but not eclipsed by, that of the culture it is part of. And its dependence upon reason — its commitment to make the faith make sense in the light of human thought — prevents it from becoming a religious ghetto: the commitment to reason is a commitment to interact with the thoughts and ideas and cultural development of [the] world we inhabit.

In other words, the appeal to reason within historic Anglicanism is an implicit commitment to theologise in a way that invites public dialogue and scrutiny. Openness to the wider world and its intellectual challenges helps to keep the church honest — and may even point the way to necessary reform or new insight.

In conclusion, three points emerge from our considerations concerning the Bible as a public document within the matrix of Anglican history and theology. First, in whatever way one might be inclined to judge the earliest history of the Church of England, it cannot be denied that both crown and established church contributed to raising the public profile of the Bible, leading ultimately to the King James Version of 1611 and its subsequent culture-shaping impact.

Second, even in our post-Christian western world, the Bible's imprint on the Anglican liturgy ensures that it continues to have public impact in the Australian setting. This is most evident when the Anglican liturgy is used in mixed-faith contexts, and in interfaith dialogue. This is a fact that many of our denominational leaders are aware of, even if they have not fully articulated it. It is a fact that needs to be highlighted and prioritised.
enables Australians to process grief associated with calamities that impact on wider Australian society, for example, the Port Arthur massacre, the Bali bombings or devastation caused by earthquakes, floods, drought and fire. But the same applies, even if less obviously, as Australians witness the way in which the Church provides both the ritual and the language for welcoming people into God’s world through baptism, for celebrating the covenant of marriage and for farewelling the dead in a respectful way. And in so far as people know that the story of Jesus stands behind and authorises the Church’s care and social-justice agencies, there, too, the Bible’s reach stretches out into the wider world, even if only as a hazy but persistent memory.

Finally, the distinctively Anglican approach to looking into and learning from the Bible is conducive to public theology, by which I mean a non-insular theology concerned with issues of pressing public concern and willing to share the resources of its heritage with the wider world in an accessible way. In this connection, the Anglican interpretive tradition makes more possible interaction with scripture, both by people of faith capable of relating the Bible to questions of public concern in intelligent and creative ways and by the broader public, including people with no clearly defined faith stance, thereby facilitating public dialogue with the potential to enhance life within the church and society at large.

Notes
2 Here I use the terms ‘Anglican’ and ‘Anglicanism’ to refer to the tradition stretching back to the beginnings of the Church of England in the sixteenth century, even though these terms gained currency only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively.
6 Coverdale had worked with Tyndale on the continent, and ‘Thomas Matthew’ was an alias for John Rogers (circa 1500–1555), a close associate of Tyndale’s and later an early casualty of Mary Tudor’s reign.
8 See David S. Katz, God’s Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004, pp. 27–39. As Katz observes, ‘One of the most interesting shifts of policy during the Tudor period was the government’s toeing and froing over the question of the vernacular Bible’ (p. 32).
11 Lints, The Fabric of Theology, p. 291, contends that '... neither Luther nor Calvin ever intended that this principle [sola scriptura] serve as the means by which individual interpreters might bypass the contributions of the larger interpretive community, either past or present. The Reformers maintained that interpretation of the biblical text is a responsibility not of the individual but of the community of believers gathered. It must be a corporate exercise'.

12 See Reginald H. Fuller, 'Scripture', in Stephen Sykes and John Booty (eds.), The Study of Anglicanism, SPCK, London; Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1988, p. 83: 'The primacy of Scripture means that Scripture is the norm of faith and the norm by which other norms (creeds, tradition, confessions of faith) are judged.'

13 The so-called 'triple' or 'three-strand cord' of scripture, reason and tradition is commonly associated with Anglican theology and spirituality. See, e.g., Alan Bartlett, A Passionate Life: The Anglican Tradition, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2007, in which the 'three-strand cord' serves as an organising principle. Rowan A. Greer, Anglican Approaches to Scripture: From the Reformation to the Present, Crossroad, New York, 2006, contends that the 'triple cord' heuristic oversimplifies the diversity of Anglican perspectives across time. But he does not discard the concept and finds it useful for examining how reason and tradition served as interpretive tools for formative Anglican thinkers. The 'three-strand cord' of scripture, reason and tradition can be seen as referring to dispersed (but not disparate) sources of theological authority, as in Bruce Kaye, A Church without Walls: Being Anglican in Australia, Dove, North Blackburn, Vic, 1995, pp. 121–34. Here I focus on the 'triple cord' as interpretive method.


15 Throughout the church's history, it has been acknowledged that reason is not a faculty or function isolable from the totality of human life and experience. Nor is reason capable of 'rising above' the many factors that shape and condition a human life, so as to be able to serve as either sole or ultimate arbiter for what is true and good and right.


19 Maggi Dawn, "I Am the Truth": Text, Hermeneutics and the Person of Christ, in Duncan Dormor, Jack McDonald and Jeremy Caddick (eds.), Anglicanism: The Answer to Modernity, Continuum, London and New York, 2003, p. 66 (emphasis mine). Having highlighted the pertinence for public theology of Dawn's observations regarding Anglicanism's appeal to reason, it should also be noted that her opening statement erases historic Anglicanism's commitment to the primacy of scripture.