

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Coming into this weekend, I've been undertaking a lot of time reflecting and studying not only the Scriptures set for today, but also, looking back at the Synod that was just held here, also in Sydney, Ballarat, Willochra, Adelaide, Perth, Newcastle and Wangarratta. As we meet now, the General Synod Standing Committee is meeting, no doubt exercising its collective mind on the so-called *schism* within the Anglican Church of Australia, and within the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Several Bishops have been referred to the Appellate Tribunal for breaking the intent of the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10, and thus, shattering the already fragile *instruments of communion*. Now, for most of us, this is not something we don't already know about, but let's do a quick refresher of what it means to be part of the world-wide Anglican Movement.

The Instruments of Unity, or Communion, are vested in 4 bodies. Firstly, the Lambeth Conference: a meeting of Bishops of the Communion once every 10 years in London. Secondly, the meeting of the Anglican Primates – the head bishops of each region, and their deliberations on matters before them. The third is called the Anglican Consultative Council which meets every 3 years. It met in Hong Kong earlier this year. The other leg, so to speak, is the fidelity to the Archbishop of Canterbury as *first among equals*.

Underpinning all of the above is the concept of the *Ecclesial Polity* as defined by Richard Hooker in addressing the Puritan movement under Cromwell; the Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference being

binding; and the so-called *Chicago -Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888* which affirmed:

- a. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
- b. The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.
- c. The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ's [words of Institution](#), and of the elements ordained by Him.
- d. The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.

Now, throw in one more baby with the bathwater and we find that in 1998, another resolution was passed at Lambeth, and unlike Lambeth 1.10 of the same year, this one is conveniently forgotten.

Resolution 72 of 1988 "1. reaffirms its unity in the historical position of respect for diocesan boundaries and the authority of bishops within these boundaries; and in light of the above; 2. affirms that it is deemed inappropriate behaviour for any bishop or priest of this Communion to exercise episcopal or pastoral ministry within another diocese without first obtaining the permission and invitation of the ecclesial authority thereof."

So, what does this mean? It means that any participation in the ordaining to the three-fold orders of ministry in a Church outside the Anglican Instruments of Unity is just as bad as not upholding the sanctity of marriage.

So...let's pick up this exciting gem of a journal, and you will see that most of it is looking at the mayhem unleashed across the Anglican

Church within the Great South Land churches, and find yourself wondering, “What tha?”

And so I have been...but not from the view point of trying to justify variation from any resolution, nor embracing the journey of sanctity of marriage, LGBTQIA+ issues, or whether this bishop or that is validly ordained or heretical. No doubt, in 2000 years’ time, someone will look at the *schism* with the same enthusiasm as Eusebius did with the Arian controversy; the split of the Eastern and Western Churches, the concepts of a Pontifex Maximus as the one sole authority on Earth, and whether or not Luther was a vandal to nail anything to an innocent and unsuspecting Church door.

What is going on? I asked myself, as I began to read through this book: *Damascus* by Christos Tsiolkas. In his book, he has fictionalised the time of Paul, Peter, Thomas the Twin (also called the Doubter) and other early leaders of the Church. He entered into this through his experience of being a young gay man bullied as a student, a form of persecution in its own right, and harmful. A timely read? I think so.

There is nothing wrong in the approach Tsiolkas takes. In literary terms, it is called *presentism* and it is alive and well in the interpretation of scriptures now as it was at the time of the early Church.

In context the scriptures when looked at against the geo-political issues of the time brings light, nuance and exploration of what is being told to us. Now, as a modern Anglican Church, we would find no problem with this approach. What is the context of this reading? Whom is it addressing? Who is listening? What is the message conveyed? How do we understand it in the times it was made, and what can we draw from that today, noting our journey to the present?

All of those questions neatly fall into Hooker’s Ecclesiastical Polity of being Anglican: scripture, reason and tradition. But wait...is there another way?

Well, yes: there are many ways of arriving at a conclusion on any subject. My Jewish Rabbi friends remind me: put 2 of them in the room and immediately you have 3 opinions! Put any Anglican in a Synod, and it can be just as pluralistic. So, how do we know what is right?

I wrote in my editorial a background on the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, as well as pointing to the difficulties presented in 2 Thess 2 known as *sola scriptura*. There are 5 *solas* and each, whilst meritorious in their own right, do not necessarily reflect the path to salvation. *Sola Fide* is faith alone; *sola Gratia* by faith alone; *sola Christe* by Christ alone; *sola Deo Gloria* by God alone, and *sola scriptura* the scriptures.

The early Church began to pull itself apart as the written and oral words (given the high level of illiteracy) began to be problematic. Some contended they had the answer because they were entrusted with the traditions of the Apostles. This led rise to the heretical sect *Gnosticism* in which special gifts were received to interpret Christ’s words and actions.

Others saw that scripture meant both oral and written, and extensively quoted Paul and Peter. By the end of the second century, even though the modern understanding of the New Testament had not been settled, just by the writings of the early Bishops, we could assemble the entire canon from their letters and sermons. To do so would be to rely on tradition and reason.

In looking to see what others had to say, I found the following interesting. Most online commentaries avoided Haggai and Job; duck for cover at the second letter of the Thessalonians and give the

teaching on marriage in the Gospel a wide berth. Now, let us rejoice and enjoy Psalm 145 or 98 as it has nothing controversial in it!

And there, my friends, has been the Anglican Church, Roman Catholics and every other split since the time Jesus left us with the words "...and I will be with you to the end of the eons." I know the incoming head of the Church of England, Prince Charles, as Prince of Wales, has three ostrich feathers as his symbol. I think the rest of the Church could be portrayed as the rest of the beast as we bury our heads in the sand...

But we cannot do that. We have a rise in different philosophies and approaches to scripture that threaten our unity. All five of the *solae* are active and omnipresent. We have different approaches to *biblical truth* pushing for dominance. There are those who see it is the scriptural integrity of the word that is at risk if we allow marriage outside the biblical defined understanding. I can live with that. Whilst I am not called into the vocation of marriage, I'm happy with you to have as many wives as you like, unless you are a Bishop. Then you can have only one and you must be a sober man in control of your children.

I'm happy to teach that a man and women are complimentary to one another and have gender defined roles. The Bride should be educated in the Song of Solomons and run the business from the city tower as well as tending to the children, and then say nothing on Sundays from beneath her covered head.

I cannot talk about nuclear disarmament or climate change without referring to Genesis lest I look back and become a pillar of salt; and I would be perfectly justified in ignoring the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah as defined by the rest of the Bible as lack of hospitality but concentrate on the threatened act instead. All is possible.

I started with what I think is the most beautiful prayer in the Book of Common Prayer. It came to mind as I continued with the novel *Damascus* and looked at the issues of what was happening in the early Church. They expected Jesus would return in their lifetime. They were getting impatient and losing members. The best way to control a mob is to tell them they are in trouble and keep repeating it until they yield to your teachings. Paul reminds the Thessalonians to do just that. Remember what I said; remember what I wrote.

Jesus, on the other hand, highlights a failure of the early Church leaders. They failed to marry and have sons and continue, as was the philosophy of the Sadducees, to continue the line of succession. Sorry, says Jesus: there is going to be no sex in heaven. None of that matters. What matters happens here and now. God is God of the living and the dead, all are alive and that power thing doesn't cut it.

David Marr, in his review of *Damascus* points to Paul as being a repressed and bigoted and miserable homosexual. It's hardly a novel view point, even if the term didn't exist before 1850 let alone get a mention in the Bible until the RSV English translation of the 1950s. Every other country calls them "men who sleep with boys: pedarists". How deliciously ironic to see the Churches in trouble for just that, and yet, when it comes to ignoring justice, hides behind *tradition* alone

No, the Word of God, contains all things necessary for salvation.

In five words in that beautiful Collect, we find ourselves at the ending of the novel *Damascus*. "*My twin is dead,*" *Thomas said. "I buried him. I was the one who washed the hands and feet that had been pierced by nails. I was the one who wrapped him in his shroud and who placed him in his pariah's tomb. My brother is dead. But his words live."*

For me, I have felt strongly the call into service, watching the Church rhyme in its history.

There has, and always will be tension and friction. Without friction, there is no movement. Without movement, we stagnate. Often in the movement or disagreements we experience birth pangs as we long for all people to live together in harmony.

Maybe it is akin to taking a pot-bound plant and giving a chance to grow without the limits of the hard boundaries that leads to new growth elsewhere. Maybe some of the plants need to be contained. Whatever the case, as Jesus said, we will know if it is God-given by the fruits born.

Jesus replied in temptation to turn stones into bread: *it is written that we do not live by bread alone but by the very word that comes from God.* This is why I believe that the Collect I opened with is most important. We must hear, read, mark, learn, and most importantly inward digest them, and encourage others to do the same.

I believe that we are called to see the light, immerse ourselves in the word and listen to what the Spirit is indeed saying to the Church. It may help now, but in time, it will, if we read history, bear much fruit to God's glory.

I have seen Christ's light in others; I have responded to many things that are not covered in the Torah, let alone the New Testament. I have taken the only currency that I know, love, to be the only thing of value that I can truly give that is understood, and even then, exposed myself to risk, ridicule and slander.

Should I be charged with not having *Biblical Truth* as a result, so be it. Before anyone throws their first anathemata at me, allow me just one last prayer: *into your hands, Lord, I commend my Spirit.*