

FAITH
IN A TIME OF
CRISIS

STANDING FOR THE TRUTH
IN A CHANGING WORLD

VAUGHAN ROBERTS
WITH
PETER JENSEN

EDITED BY
GEOFF ROBSON

This book may have begun with a couple of well-known Anglicans addressing the world of Anglicanism, but its voice penetrates to the minds and hearts of Bible-believing Christians everywhere. In a manner both bold and winsome, Vaughan Roberts and Peter Jensen show how the attempts to legitimize homosexual marriage are profoundly and tragically tied up with a denial of the gospel and a rejection of God and his Word. Rightly, they urge much more than a holding operation on one issue: they call for the massive repentance that returns to God and his truth and his grace. This book merits the widest circulation.

DA Carson

Research Professor of New Testament
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois

As the Anglican Church in New Zealand makes decisions regarding issues of human sexuality and faces the very real possibility of schism, I am tremendously thankful for this book. With a topic that is deeply personal for many individuals and potentially divisive for churches and denominations, truth and grace have never been more necessary. What Vaughan Roberts and Peter Jensen have produced combines careful and faithful biblical teaching, cultural awareness and understanding, and a gracious pastoral heart. I trust it will be helpful for many seeking to honour the Lord Jesus in these difficult days.

Jay Behan

Vicar, St Stephen's, Shirley (Christchurch, New Zealand)
Chair of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans New Zealand

This is a timely book. In a period when most mainline denominations are facing challenges to biblical authority, unity and discipline, especially over issues of human sexuality, this book will stand you in good stead. It tackles the issues of gospel, sex, love, unity and faith head on, with sound biblical and theological thinking, and a pastoral heart and love for the church. It provides a clear roadmap for us in these troubled times.

Dr Richard Condie

Bishop of Tasmania

Chair of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans Australia

This outstanding book will be a great help not only to individuals as we seek to follow the Lord Jesus faithfully, but also to the whole church as we seek to respond to one of the great issues of our day. I hope that many will read it, and I certainly intend to distribute it far and wide.

William Taylor

Rector

St Helen's Bishopsgate, London

What I found really valuable about this book is the main author's personal experience and testimony. If the Bible's teaching on human sexuality makes sense to Vaughan Roberts, it should make sense to all of us. He tells us, quoting Thomas Chalmers, of "the expulsive power of a new affection". This is exactly right: as Christ grows in us and we in him, our old affections of a fallen world are gradually replaced by recognizing the divine priority in everything. There can be,

indeed must be, a richness of relationships, but marriage between man and woman is the fulfilment of a particular kind of relationship for which our sexuality is designed. While Vaughan, as the rector of a parish, concentrates on the local and congregational, Peter Jensen reminds us tellingly of the Church as connection, as a fellowship of the local, regional and universal. Fidelity to the good news of Jesus Christ is crucial in every expression of the Church. I do hope that this little book will inspire many to sacrificial faithfulness in every area of discipleship.

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali

Anglican Bishop of Rochester (1994-2009)
President, Oxford Centre for Training, Research, Advocacy
and Dialogue (OXTRAD)

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SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

Faith in a Time of Crisis

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

WHY INVEST TIME in reading a book about controversies and divisions within the Anglican denomination?

For some of us, the answer is obvious. You may be a member of an Anglican church, and you're well aware that divisions over important issues have beset your denomination in recent years.¹ Maybe your local church hasn't been personally affected, but you know that other churches have, and you're keen to support your Anglican brethren—and to keep the wolves from your own door.

Or perhaps your own church or your diocese has been directly affected, and you want to know if it's really worth all the effort and pain that this division causes. Why can't we just happily coexist with those who have a different approach? Why not live and let live? Why are these issues so serious that they've pushed us to the brink of schism? And how are we going to handle the coming challenges?

Maybe you're a pastor charged with leading your church through turbulent times, and you want guidance and wisdom from those who've been on the frontlines of Anglican battles for many years now. You want the affirmation and confidence of knowing that others stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you

1 If you're unfamiliar with the issues besetting Anglicanism and would appreciate a primer, you'll find one in chapter 1. Peter Jensen's contribution (chapter 5) offers a slightly expanded overview of recent controversies and challenges.

as you look to draw lines in the sand on the current issues around human sexuality. Or maybe you're still working out exactly where those lines should be drawn.

If any of those categories apply to you then this book is for you, and you probably need no convincing about why.

But what about the rest of us? If you're not an Anglican, what does this book have to do with you?

On one level, I hope the answer is simple: we should all care about what happens to our Christian brothers and sisters. And the current controversies in worldwide Anglicanism directly affect many millions of fellow believers. None of us should be content to simply worry about our own little patch, our own church or denomination, while assuming that others can just sort out their own problems.

In 1 Corinthians 12, as Paul employs the image of the body to explain the nature of gifts and how a church should function, he writes: "If one member [of the body] suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together" (v. 26). Of course, those words are primarily about ministry and life together in the local church. But surely the principle holds true for how we think of our brethren in other churches and denominations. We should care about (and pray for) their faithfulness to the risen Lord Jesus and his word. We should be moved and encouraged whenever fellow believers face persecution or hardship. What happens to Anglican brothers and sisters affects our collective witness to the world. What happens to them tells us much about the world in which we live. What happens to them could happen to us. When a denomination that God has used to bless countless millions of people, not to mention entire nations, is facing a crisis, we should all care about that. History demands it, as does concern for the future of the gospel.

That brings me to the real reason you should read this book, regardless of your denominational affiliation. In the end, this is not a book about Anglicanism. This is a book about *the gospel*, and about how and why to contend for the gospel in a changing and challenging world. Nothing could be more relevant to any and every Christian believer in the 21st century.

Of course, the authors are Anglican. The issues they write about were triggered by various crises in worldwide Anglicanism (largely around the issue of human sexuality); and both authors have faced challenges to the gospel within an Anglican context—one as a denominational leader, the other as a local church leader, and both as influential leaders on national and international stages. But the answers and insights they provide transcend denominational boundaries.

Personally, I love Anglicanism. I was converted at an Anglican church, I'm an ordained Anglican minister, and I have served on the staff team of Anglican churches in both Australia and New Zealand. Though my current sphere of ministry is not within the Anglican denomination (I work in non-denominational university ministry), I care deeply about the future of Anglicanism.

And yet, growing up when and where I did, I was always taught to sit loosely to my denominational affiliation. I was told many times (by one of the authors of this book) that I must be evangelical first and Anglican second. That's sound advice for us all, regardless of our denominational background. Our first and last commitment is to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the word of God.

When I first listened to Vaughan Roberts giving the talks on which this book is based, I didn't get excited because of Anglicanism. I got excited because I was being reminded,

once again, that the gospel of Jesus is worth fighting for. I realized I was listening to a man who is passionate about the gospel, crystal clear in his understanding of our culture, and wise and insightful on how to defend and proclaim the gospel in challenging times. Peter Jensen's contribution is no less insightful or valuable. Together, they've given us a precious resource for anyone who wants to maintain and promote the biblical gospel in a time of crisis.

No matter your church background, read this book if you want to grow in your understanding of the times in which you live. Much more importantly, read this book if you want to grow in your passion for the gospel and the glory of God.

Geoff Robson
Editor

1

TRUE GOSPEL

WISH I DIDN'T HAVE to write this book. And there's a good chance you wish you didn't have to read it. But this book is written in the same spirit in which Jude wrote his New Testament letter. Jude says:

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (v. 3)

Jude is saying to his readers, "What I love to write about is the wonderful gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't want to get into conflict and controversy. I'd just like to positively revel in the wonders of the gospel. But I felt I *had* to write about something else. I have to compel you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to us as God's people."

And that's what's driven me to write a book like this at a time like this. I want to encourage you to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Jude continues:

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (v. 4)

Unfortunately, the parallels between what Jude saw taking place in the first century and what's happening in much of the world today are uncomfortably close. In particular, within the worldwide Anglican Communion—the denomination of which I am a part, a denomination I love—there are many cases of people perverting the grace of our God.² Faithful, godly Anglicans in places like the UK (my home), North America, New Zealand, and Australia have firsthand experience of exactly what Jude described. But we Anglicans are not the only ones. The gospel is being distorted in many churches, ministries, and denominations. And regardless of our denominational affiliation, all Christians are affected when the truth of the gospel is distorted or denied. When one church of the living God suffers, all of God's people suffer. Our precious unity is broken, and our collective witness to the world is impaired.

Within Anglicanism, Bible-believing Christians have long been responding to those who wish to distort the gospel and pervert the grace of God. The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans was launched in 2008 at the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) assembly in Jerusalem. This assembly met as a direct response to significant and disturbing developments within worldwide Anglicanism (for an overview of these developments, see the closing chapter of this book by Peter Jensen). During the conference, the Jerusalem Declaration was developed. When this statement was read at the end of the conference, I was moved to tears. To hear such clarity and conviction on the gospel in an Anglican setting was an unusual experience for me.

2 'The Anglican Communion' is the name given to the worldwide network of Anglican churches and dioceses.

The preamble to the Jerusalem Declaration begins with three facts at the heart of what GAFCON called a “crisis... concerning world Anglicanism”. Those three facts were the backdrop for the first GAFCON assembly, and they are the backdrop for this book.

First, another gospel is being proclaimed. I quote from the Jerusalem Statement:³

The first fact is the acceptance and promotion within the provinces of the Anglican Communion of a different ‘gospel’ (cf. Galatians 1:6-8) which is contrary to the apostolic gospel. This false gospel undermines the authority of God’s Word written and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the author of salvation from sin, death and judgement.

At the beginning of a book that will say much about the issue of homosexuality, it’s very important to recognize that homosexuality is not ‘the big issue’. It’s just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath this presenting issue, we’re focused on something much bigger. We’re focused on the fundamental issue of Scripture: its authority, its sufficiency, and its clarity. And we’re focused on the fundamental issue of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the only Saviour and Lord, who stands above all cultures and issues a loving command to all peoples to repent and believe the good news, and then to live out that good news in all of life.

When these fundamental truths are denied, another gospel is being proclaimed.

The *second* fact is a breach of communion: “provincial

3 The Jerusalem Declaration is part of the fuller Jerusalem Statement. To read the whole Jerusalem Statement, see the appendix.

bodies in the Global South... are out of communion with bishops and churches that promote this false gospel".⁴ Faithful, Bible-believing Anglican Christians (particularly those in the 'Global South') judge the proclamation of a false gospel to be so serious that they are no longer in fellowship with those who accept and promote this false gospel. Our shared commitment to the Bible's saving message—a commitment that had bonded us together for centuries—has been broken, and our relationships have been severed. This is a tragedy.

Some of us have been watching with great sadness as this fellowship has dissolved over a number of years. A key moment came in 2002, with the formal blessing of same-sex unions in the Canadian Diocese of New Westminster. In 2003, the Episcopal Church in America (ECUSA) consecrated Gene Robinson as bishop, despite the fact that he was in an open, active gay union. As a result of these steps and others like them, the basis of the Anglican Communion was breached. It's very important to recognize that those who taught falsehood and lived in the light of falsehood—not those who responded faithfully to that false teaching—caused the breach of communion. And make no mistake, it was nothing less than a breach of communion, a violation of the precious bonds of fellowship that God's people should cherish.

The Jerusalem Statement's *third* fact is an absence of discipline. The statement recognizes "the manifest failure of the Communion Instruments to exercise discipline in the face of overt heterodoxy". The Anglican Communion is served by four 'Instruments of Communion':

4 The 'Global South' is a name given to a network of non-Western parts of the Anglican Communion, primarily located in the southern hemisphere.

- the Archbishop of Canterbury
- the Lambeth Conference
- the Primates' Meeting
- the Anglican Consultative Council.

Among those four instruments, there has been a certain amount of handwringing about the proclamation of a false gospel, but there has been no effective action.

The primates of the Communion made it very clear that if the consecration of Gene Robinson went ahead, there would be serious consequences. But it immediately became clear that ECUSA and its presiding bishop at the time (Frank T Griswold, who had previously agreed to the primates' statement) had no intention of following through on the primates' statement, and Gene Robinson was duly (or we might say unduly) consecrated. And although the Archbishop of Canterbury (at the time, Dr Rowan Williams) had been at the Primates' Meeting, he nonetheless issued invitations to the 2008 Lambeth Conference (the once-a-decade gathering of all Anglican bishops) to those who had participated in consecrating Gene Robinson.

That proved to be a very significant moment: no fewer than 230 bishops declined the invitation to Lambeth, and GAFCON was convened in response. Around 300 bishops attended GAFCON, along with many laity and other clergy. The majority of churchgoing Anglicans were represented at GAFCON.

It's very important to recognize this. In today's Anglican Communion, faithful, Bible-believing, orthodox Anglicans can sometimes feel as though they are a small minority. But the truth is that the great majority of churchgoing Anglicans was represented by the leaders of the provinces who attended

the GAFCON assembly, not by those who attended Lambeth. I wonder if you know that there are more Nigerians in Anglican churches on any given Sunday than there are Anglicans in church in the whole of North America and Europe combined.

The Jerusalem Statement describes GAFCON—and the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FCA) movement that flowed out of it—as “a spiritual movement to preserve and promote the truth and power of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ as we Anglicans have received it”. Above all, this is a positive movement. It’s about the gospel. But if you’re going to promote the gospel, there are times when you have to speak against error, as you can see from the pages of the New Testament.

Since the first GAFCON assembly, much more has happened. Wonderfully, the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) has been launched, and has drawn together confessing Anglicans in that part of the world. ECUSA has continued down the path of heterodoxy, and has recently changed its definition of marriage to include people of the same sex. There has never been a greater need for orthodox Anglicans to come together to promote faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to offer one another fellowship and mutual encouragement.

The concern of the GAFCON movement is not ecclesiastical politics for the sake of it. If you like ecclesiastical politics, I’m sorry for you—and you’re probably a bit of a menace. Those who enjoy conflict are always a menace. The thing we should all love is being able to get on with the work of the gospel. We only engage in ecclesiastical politics for the sake of the promotion and preservation of the gospel.

That’s why this book begins by focusing on the gospel. Too often, the gospel is simply assumed. But the gospel needs to

be stated clearly and boldly at every opportunity. We need to be constantly reminded of what we stand for. We need to remember the wonder of what God has done for us in Christ. And when we proclaim the gospel, we're also reminded of what we must stand against.

So let's turn to Romans 1, where Paul introduces himself and his message in advance of a future visit to Rome. In the first five verses of this magnificent letter, we find a clear summary of the gospel message that he preached.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

(Rom 1:1-5)

These five verses show us four glorious truths about the gospel. It is (1) a divine revelation that (2) addresses a serious problem, (3) proclaims a glorious salvation, and (4) results in radical transformation.

The gospel: a divine revelation

In verse 1, Paul speaks of “the gospel of God”. This message is not a product of Paul’s fertile imagination or his brilliant theological mind. He didn’t invent it. It’s a revelation of God.

Just imagine this horrible thought: you and a whole group of others have been born inside a room with no windows, and none of you has ever left that room. Imagine discussing whether there's anything outside the room. Someone says, "I'm absolutely convinced there's a whole world out there, and it's full of green giants. I know it. That's the truth." And someone else stands up and says, "Nonsense! You're right, there is something out there—but not green giants. There's a whole world full of purple pygmies. That's the truth." Then someone else says, "Ridiculous, both of you. I mean, let's just face the reality: there's nothing out there! This room is all there is. That's the truth." And finally, someone who has patiently listened to all these conflicting declarations of 'truth' stands up and says, "Can't we just acknowledge the reality? We don't know. We can't be sure. So by all means have your guess that there are green giants out there, or purple pygmies out there, or that there's nothing out there. But please have the humility to recognize it's just a guess!"

In this (bizarre) scenario, the room represents the world of space and time. We're locked into it. We've never been outside. And when we start from this world of space and time, all we can do is guess that there might be a God and what that God might be like.

But what a difference it makes when, as we're having our discussion, a man comes through the door. He's come from outside the room. Once we explain what we're discussing, our visitor says, "Oh, I can tell you about that. There's a whole world out there! It's full of people, and trees, and cars..."

What would we say to him? We wouldn't say, "How arrogant—sit down at once!" This man speaks with authority. He comes from outside the room—from the very place that we're discussing and debating. We can abandon our guessing. Instead,

we simply listen as he provides the answers we've been seeking.

The Christian conviction is that Jesus Christ is the 'God-Man' from 'outside the room'. He's not just giving his best guess as to what God might be like. This is revelation directly from God. And Paul's conviction of the truth of the gospel is grounded in his conviction that Jesus Christ is the God-Man, one who has come from God and speaks with authority.

And this gospel from God is grounded in the Scriptures. Paul says it is the gospel "which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (v. 2). "There's nothing new here", Paul says. "What I'm expounding to you is what was promised long ago by the prophets in the Old Testament Scriptures, and is now proclaimed by the apostles. We apostles have been set apart by the God-Man, Jesus Christ, for this task of gospel proclamation."

And so Paul's letter begins with self-conscious authority: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle..." (v. 1). He is not just one man saying what he thinks might be right. Christ himself has commissioned Paul with the truth.

This understanding of the Christian gospel—that it comes to us by divine revelation—has been massively undermined in recent years, not least by the denial of the very concept of objective truth. In Western culture, it used to be widely assumed that truth came by revelation from God. Certain universal moral convictions flowed from the teaching of the Bible, and from the Judeo-Christian tradition on which our culture has been built. The result was a unified field of knowledge that bound together the particulars, the details of life, with the overarching, universal truths of reality that provide the proper context for the particulars. Not everyone lived according to this world view or these moral convictions, of course. But they formed our cultural basecamp.

But then came the Enlightenment, and the shift toward Rationalism, beginning with huge confidence that human reason could discover truth—that the truth about life could be uncovered by human analysis, thought, and observation from the bottom up.⁵ But all that this approach could deliver was an ever-greater picture of the details of life, with no universal truths to hold those details together. Our basecamp was destroyed.

The result was disintegration. Some, of course, revelled in these changes. They believed that throwing off universal truth claims had delivered humanity into a time of great freedom. But in fact what it delivered has proven to be confusion and despair. A world in which truth is only discovered by human reason is a world in which there is no overarching meaning, no objective morality, no ‘metanarrative’ to make sense of all that is happening in the world and of the little stories of our lives within it. Human beings are just searching in the dark, wandering around a windowless room with no-one to tell us what’s happening outside.

If there are no universal truths to hold everything together, you can never say, “This is absolutely right, and that is absolutely wrong”. The only basis for our beliefs, our actions and our morality is our own personal convictions. But what if someone else has a different conviction? In a world like this, morality becomes subjective. And that is a very dangerous place for a culture to be.

5 The Enlightenment is an intellectual and cultural movement that is generally regarded as having begun around the mid-17th century. It dominated philosophical thinking throughout the 18th century. At the heart of the Enlightenment was an emphasis on human reason and rationality as the primary source of authority and legitimacy. It is sometimes called the ‘Age of Reason’.

I was recently speaking to a distinguished journalist in the UK. He said to me, “No society can function with a moral vacuum. You have to have an agreement about moral conviction.” This man saw that we are in a very dangerous moment in our culture. “You just can’t go on with a moral vacuum; the vacuum has to be filled with something”, he said. “Maybe it will be filled by Islam, because Islam speaks with great clarity. Or perhaps it will be a form of totalitarianism: the government will tell us what we should think, and why we should think it.” He even suggested that there are just the beginnings of moves in that direction. “Or perhaps”, he added, and this was his hope, “we might return to our moral foundations in Christianity”.

But the great sadness is that, just when our society is so desperately in need of a clear witness to the ‘true truth’ (to use Francis Schaeffer’s evocative phrase), the true truth of Christianity has been compromised in so many of our churches. The one place that should hold fast to the objective truth of God’s word and Christ’s gospel has, in so many cases, abandoned that truth.

Instead, churches have adopted the mindset of the Enlightenment—including the suspicion about claims to objective truth. Even many churchgoers see the Bible as merely a human book. Consider, for example, the words of the notorious John Shelby Spong, formerly Anglican Bishop of New Jersey, who describes the Bible as “not a literal road map to reality but a historic narrative of the journey our religious forebears made in the eternal human quest to understand life, the world, themselves, and God”.⁶

6 John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible From Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture*, HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1992, p. 33.

Of course it's true that the Bible is, in some senses, a human book. It was written by about 40 authors at different times in history, and their books bear the marks of their personalities and cultural contexts. And yet the Bible's claim for itself is that it is also divine.⁷ God ensured by his Holy Spirit that the human authors wrote exactly what he wanted them to write. So the Bible is both human and divine.⁸ It was written at particular points in history, but it remains God's living word until the end of the present age.⁹ But Bishop Spong suggests that the Bible is *just* a human book, bearing witness to how humans used to think at a particular time in history—that it's no longer a reliable and authoritative guide for how we should live now, in our very different time in history.

Others pay lip service to the idea of revelation, but they locate it not in the Bible but underneath it. They might say, "Jesus is the revelation of God, and what we have in the Bible is just the human witness to the revelation of God that we find in Jesus. So we have to dig beneath the Bible to find God's real revelation."

But how do we discern 'real revelation'? Once you've removed any real authority from the Bible, the task becomes very subjective. Perhaps we can accept the revelation of Jesus in the four Gospels, but we question the apostles. After all, aren't they just fallible human beings? "I love Jesus, but I don't like Paul" is the attitude taken by many today.

Or should we accept, as some do, that the Bible is God's

7 E.g. Matthew 19:4-6, where Jesus quotes the words of the writer of Genesis as the words of the Creator. See also John 14:26, 16:12; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16.

8 For more on the authority of the Bible, see Kevin de Young, *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible is Worth Knowing, Trusting and Loving*, IVP, Nottingham, 2014; and Mike Ovey and Daniel Strange, *Confident: Why We Can Trust the Bible*, Christian Focus, Ross-shire, 2015.

9 Matt 5:17-18; Rom 15:4; 2 Pet 1:19.

book, but “we just don’t know what it’s saying” because we’ve adopted the relativism of the age? “That’s just your interpretation”, or “I agree that the Bible is authoritative, but I understand it to be saying something that no-one else in the history of the church has ever understood it to be saying”. When people think this way, the authority of the Bible has disappeared.

Relativism in our culture has led to what CS Lewis called “men without chests”.¹⁰ People without conviction. And relativism in the church has produced Christians without conviction—Christians who have denied the uniqueness of Christ and of the gospel.

The rector of our local church when I was a young Christian used to say that Christianity was one of many paths up the mountain to God. That is certainly not a belief that will inspire anyone to tell their friends about Christ, especially if there is a cost involved. What’s the point? After all, they can always find another path.

That is not the spirit that led to the great missionary movement of the 19th century, which produced the Anglican Communion. That is not the spirit that has prompted men and women to go out to the ends of the earth, risking their lives so that the good news of Jesus and the salvation that he alone offers could be proclaimed. That is not the spirit that prompted the apostles to go into the known world, proclaiming “Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised” (Acts 4:10), even if it meant being killed for their message.

Men without chests. Too many have become Christians without conviction, denying the uniqueness of Christ, undermining Christian morality, echoing the world—not least in their teaching about sex and relationships. This is not

10 CS Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, Collins, Glasgow, 1978, p. 7.

the Christianity of the Bible. At best it's diluted, and at worst it's a completely different religion. It is certainly not authentic Anglicanism, which, as we know, is rooted in the authority of Scripture as the word of God.

Here is how the Bible is described in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the defining doctrinal statements of the Anglican Church since the Reformation:

- Article 6: “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”
- Article 20: the Bible is “God’s Word written”.

The gospel of Jesus is not mere human invention. It is a divine revelation of ‘true truth’ from God himself.

The gospel addresses a serious problem

Human beings are not morally neutral. You can’t read the Bible for very long without recognizing that fact. By the time you get to the Bible’s third chapter, sin enters the world.

If a river is polluted at its source, it’s polluted all the way down. And human beings, from the moment of the Fall in Genesis 3, have been polluted at the source. We are utterly sinful, rebels against God, facing his judgement. The framework of the whole Bible depends on this reality: Creation, followed by the Fall. But then wonderfully, in the grace of God, there is a promise that instead of the curse we deserve, there will be blessing—a promise that finds its fulfilment in Christ.

The assumption of this serious problem is present not only in the framework of the whole Bible. It's also present in the argument of Romans: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes", Paul says (1:16). Salvation from what? Rescue from what? From the wrath of God: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (1:18). Human beings suppress the truth about God, and (in verse 25) we worship and serve created things rather than the Creator.

And so God rightly judges human sin. This will be clearly seen at the great day of wrath: "you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed" (2:5). But God's wrath is also seen today. Towards the end of Romans 1, a key phrase is repeated over and over again: God "gave them up" (vv. 24, 26, 28). In verse 24, God gives people up "in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves". What Paul means is that God doesn't intervene to stop us reaping the consequences of our own choices to turn away from him. He lets us face those consequences. And that act of 'giving people up' to their own ungodly desires, and to the consequences of following those desires, is his active wrath at work. We see this in the moral mess and disintegration of society, including homosexual behaviour.

In verse 26, God gives people up "to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another" (1:26-27). Now we might say, "Why start here, Paul? You've talked about human beings rebelling against God's revelation, but why begin with homosexual

sin?” After all, this is not the worst imaginable sin. If it were, you’d expect to find it cropping up more often in the New Testament. But Paul (and indeed the New Testament) only explicitly mentions homosexual sin here and on two other occasions (1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10). So why does he begin by focusing on this issue?

I think it’s because it’s a very clear illustration of human beings going against God’s created order. This fits the context of Romans 1 perfectly. Look again at verse 25: “they [human beings] exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator”. And so perverse thinking, the *exchange* of the worship of the Creator for the created thing, leads directly to perverse behaviour in verse 26—to the *exchange* (the same Greek word as in verse 25) of natural relations for unnatural relations.

By the way, the context tells us that when Paul speaks about what is against “nature”, he must be speaking of God’s creation. To behave against nature is to go against God’s good creation design. Paul is not talking about those who are ‘naturally’ heterosexual but are engaged in perverse homosexual behaviour. To believe that is to import concepts that are alien to the context of Romans 1. To engage in homosexual behaviour is not sinful because it goes against *one’s own* nature; it is sinful because it goes against *God’s* creation—God’s good design and intention for human sexuality.

But it’s also important to notice that Paul doesn’t just dwell on homosexual behaviour as if that is the only manifestation of the wrath of God. Far from it. In verses 29-31, Paul outlines “all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, [and] malice” that characterizes human existence, including such ‘everyday’ sins as gossip, slander, and boastfulness. He does not see homosexual behaviour as the worst of all sins.

And just in case, at the end of that long list of sins, there are people thinking, “That doesn’t apply to me, but other people are terrible and wicked”, Paul now trains his sights on the self-righteous:

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. (Rom 2:1)

If you start pointing your finger at others, you’ll find three fingers pointed back at you.

So it’s worth saying, just in case anyone doubts it, that the Bible does not point the finger at one group of sinners to say, “They are the terrible sinners, but the rest of us are righteous”, as if those who engage in homosexual behaviour are worse sinners than others. Indeed, in the wider context of Paul’s argument, these verses are part of an argument that ends with this emphatic conclusion:

“None is righteous, no, not one;
no-one understands;
no-one seeks for God.

All have turned aside; together they have become
worthless;
no-one does good,
not even one.” (Rom 3:10-12)

We’re all sinful. And we all deserve the wrath of God. There’s absolutely no biblical justification whatsoever for pride, or for looking down on anyone else. Every single one of us deserves the wrath of God.

Again, authentic Anglicanism has always taught this idea. I went to more than 2000 Anglican church services before I

was converted. I didn't hear the gospel preached clearly but, though I didn't realize it at the time, God used those services to prepare me for my conversion. The liturgy taught me that I was a sinner. So when I finally heard the gospel of God's grace, I was spiritually prepared for it. Sunday by Sunday, I had been taught to confess my sins in the language of *The Book of Common Prayer*:

We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and
wickedness,
Which we, from time to time, most grievously have
committed,
By thought, word and deed, against thy Divine Majesty,
Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation
against us.¹¹

This is the language of Anglicanism because it is the language of the Bible. But don't we have to acknowledge, sadly, that it is not the language of much of contemporary Western Anglicanism? Don't we have to acknowledge that so many Western churches fail to take sin seriously, fail to "acknowledge and bewail" that we have worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator?

All of this is part of a bigger picture, in which liberal theology consistently undermines and redefines both sin and wrath.

I was preaching in a school once, having been asked by the chaplain to speak as part of a series during Lent. Very few people had been coming in previous years, which had been embarrassing for him, so he took the risk of asking an

11 From 'The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion', *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1662.

unknown young man (as I was then) at the recommendation of a friend, in the hope that I might draw a crowd. I simply preached the gospel of salvation through Christ. I don't remember if I used the language of sin, but I certainly spoke about the concept of sin.

After my talk, the chaplain was very upset. He said to me, "Look, instead of talking about people disobeying God or rebelling against God or sin, I wonder—couldn't you just say, 'We've fallen short of our potential?'" That's what sin has been reduced to in much of modern liberal theology: falling short of our potential. And the very concept of wrath is rejected. It's a huge offence to say that God could possibly be angry.

I remember going to an ordination ceremony recently where one of the ordinands was a colleague of mine. All who were being ordained were allowed to choose one hymn that was special to them. My colleague chose the great modern classic 'In Christ Alone', which includes the line "on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied". There was a whole group of clergy who refused to sing those words. They were offended by the idea that God could be wrathful.

But the concepts of sin and wrath are both at the heart of the gospel. The Bible says we have a very serious problem—something far more serious than failing to live up to our potential. We have rebelled against our Creator and justly incurred his holy wrath. And, amazingly, the Bible also announces a glorious salvation. But that glorious salvation makes no sense if we haven't understood the problem: we sinners face the righteous wrath of a holy God. If you change the problem or deny the problem, you can only be left with a very different salvation—a very different gospel.

The gospel proclaims a glorious salvation

The biblical gospel is focused on Christ. The good news is all about Jesus: his unique identity and his unique mission. The gospel Paul proclaims is the gospel “concerning [God’s] Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 1:3-4).

Jesus Christ is the unique, divine Son of God, who came as the only Saviour of the world. And the salvation he offers was wonderfully accomplished by his perfect life, his sacrificial death, and his glorious resurrection.

The great turning point of the whole letter of Romans comes in chapter 3, beginning at verse 21. After Paul has explained that we are all sinners under the wrath of God—all of us, Jew and Gentile, religious and irreligious—we come to an amazing passage where everything hinges on the cross of Christ. Paul reminds us again that all have sinned without exception (v. 23), and therefore all deserve the wrath of God. But now (v. 21), all who have faith in Jesus are justified by his grace as a gift (vv. 22, 24). There are not two ways of getting right with God: one for Jews and another for Gentiles, one for righteous people and another for unrighteous. We’re *all* sinners under God’s wrath, and there’s only one way of getting right with God: through the justification that is offered by grace, received through faith, and made possible by the sacrificial death of Christ.

How did Christ’s death make our justification possible? “God put [Jesus] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (v. 25). Or, in the language of the Holy Communion service in *The Book of Common Prayer*: Jesus “made there [on the cross] (by his one oblation of himself

once offered) a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world”.¹² That’s Anglicanism, and that’s biblical Christianity.

But if you undermine or redefine sin and wrath, then salvation is redefined. It becomes about ‘discovering your true self’ or ‘finding inner peace’. Instead of the focus being on getting right with God, who is justly wrathful because of our sin, the focus shifts to human beings and their felt needs. It becomes the spiritual equivalent of self-help, which is bound to undermine the uniqueness of Christ: “If Jesus helps you get in touch with yourself, or feel close to God, that’s great; but if he doesn’t help, never mind—there’ll be other ways.” There’s no necessity of salvation coming through Christ.

This way of thinking undermines the atoning death of Jesus. After all, you don’t need a sacrifice if there’s no wrath and if there’s no problem with sin. Soon, the cross is marginalized; it’s hardly mentioned. If it’s mentioned at all, it’s just reduced to being a moral example that (somehow) shows us God’s love.

Katharine Jefferts Schori, the former Presiding Bishop of ECUSA, said this:

I believe that the whole world has access to God. I’m just not too worried about the mechanism. And yes, that does drive some Christians nuts. It does. It does, because in some parts of Christianity we’ve turned salvation into a work—that you have to say, “I claim Jesus as my Lord and Saviour” in order to be saved. That turns it into a work. It denies the possibility of grace.¹³

12 *ibid.*

13 Bryan Owen, ‘Presiding Bishop: “The Whole World Has Access to God”’, *Credal Christian*, 7 August 2009 (viewed 3 January 2017): www.credalchristian.blogspot.com.au/2009/08/presiding-bishop-whole-world-has-access.html

I hardly know where to begin in showing the ways in which that statement is so, so far from the Bible's teaching. It's a very different gospel from the gospel of the New Testament. There is only one 'mechanism'—or, more accurately, one 'name'—by which we may be saved, because the cross of Christ is the God-given 'mechanism' to deal with the reality of our sin (Acts 4:12). Claiming Jesus as your Lord and Saviour is the very opposite of a work; it is coming to God and saying, in the words of the wonderful old hymn 'Rock of Ages':

Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to your cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Saviour, or I die.¹⁴

There is only one gospel in the New Testament, and it is the gospel centred on Christ alone and his atoning death for sinners. Because Christ has accomplished that for us, the gospel proclaims a glorious salvation.

The gospel results in radical transformation

After completing his translation of the Bible, JB Phillips wrote a book called *Your God is Too Small*.¹⁵ Very often, our gospel is too small. Christ, by the power of his Spirit, offers a radical transformation when we turn to him. Indeed, the gospel brings more than personal renewal—it brings global

14 Augustus Toplady, 'Rock of Ages', 1763.

15 *Your God is Too Small: A Guide for Believers and Skeptics Alike*, Touchstone, New York, 2004 (originally published 1952).

and cosmic transformation, as seen later in Romans when Paul speaks about an amazing new creation that is to come (cf. 8:18-25).

Notice also that this gospel message is wonderfully inclusive. All nations are included, Jew and Gentile (non-Jew) alike. Men and women are included. Slave and free are included. And, yes, let's add it: gay and straight are included. This is a gospel for absolutely everyone.

A number of years ago, a new organization called 'Inclusive Church' was founded by some within the Church of England. It was intended as a response to those of us who were saying that active homosexual behaviour is sinful and requires repentance. The implication, of course, was that our position was exclusive. The claim was made that we were excluding gay people.

But the gospel does not just focus on a particular kind of sin committed by certain people. On the contrary, there is absolutely no distinction (3:23). *All* have sinned. All have sinned sexually, and all have sinned in every area of life. But just as *all* have sinned, so too *all* can be justified. God's grace is offered to *all* who believe in Jesus (3:22).

This is wonderfully good news for everyone—whatever your sexuality, whatever your background, whatever your race, whatever your personality. All people everywhere, without a single exception, can be justified through faith in Christ Jesus.

But the same gospel also calls on all people to turn from sin and to seek to live under Christ's lordship. While the gospel saves us, it is also a message that demands both faith and repentance. Christ is the one "through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith* for the sake of his name among all the nations" (1:5). Jesus calls on everyone to "repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

The call to repentance and obedience covers every aspect of our lives, and that must include our sexual lives.

Now, to be sure, that's a challenge for those of us with same-sex attraction. But it is also (although maybe in a different way) a challenge for those who have only ever known heterosexual attraction.¹⁶ There will be significant challenges in the area of sexual behaviour for everyone, and for some the challenges may be very great indeed. There may be someone who yearns to be married but who is single. And because they're single, obedience to Christ and his word means they have to deny their longings for sex. There may be someone who is married, but for some reason sex is no longer a feature of their marriage. They may long that it was, but perhaps their partner can't or won't have sex with them. And for that person, obedience to Christ and his word means they need to deny themselves. They're not free to look outside their marriage to satisfy their sexual desires.

Of course, the demand to be sexually pure in thought and deed is a challenge for all of us—and in discussing our sexual behaviour I'm only mentioning one area of life. The call to repentance and obedience covers every aspect of life for the Christian.

Here's how Professor Oliver O'Donovan puts it:

The righteousness of Jesus Christ is not comfort without demand, any more than it is demand without comfort. It is never less than that demanding comfort by which God makes more of us than we thought it

16 I've been open about my own experience of same-sex attraction in an interview, 'A battle I face' (*Evangelicals Now*, October 2012 [viewed 3 January 2017]: www.e-n.org.uk/2012/10/features/a-battle-i-face/), and also on the *Living Out* website (www.livingout.org/stories/vaughan).

possible to become. And from this there seems to follow an important implication: the gospel must be preached to the gay Christian on precisely the same terms that it is preached to any other person.¹⁷

He continues later in the same book:

It is one and the same gospel, witnessed to by gay and non-gay, a gospel of redemption from the enslavement of sin and the purification of desire. Yet gifts are given differentially to members of the body of Christ; vocations are distributed variously to serve the common mission. Some are given in the form of special skills and abilities, some in the form of special opportunities, especially opportunities of special experience and suffering.¹⁸

So there it is. We're all called to live out the life of Christ. That's not simply about self-denial, but it undoubtedly includes self-denial. Jesus himself said: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

Our age has done something that I think the first-century Christians would have thought unimaginable. We've somehow managed to make Christianity sound comfortable, safe, and middle class. So to deny yourself means giving up sugar in Lent. To take up your cross means having a difficult relative to stay at Christmas time. "Oh, we all have our crosses to bear." But surely something much bigger is at stake. Following Jesus is about a life of radical discipleship for all of us.

17 Oliver O'Donovan, *A Conversation Waiting to Begin*, SCM Press, London, 2009, p. 104.

18 *ibid.*, p. 117.

But it's not just a call to repentance and faith. There's a glorious offer: a new life, a transformed life. Paul speaks of a wonderful new relationship with God. As we continue to follow the logic of Romans, we find that yes, Christ died for us, but we also find that Christ gives new life to every person who comes to him in faith.

In Romans 5 and 6, we find that not only has Christ died for us, but we also died with Christ. Not only has Christ been raised from death, but we've also been raised with Christ! We now have peace with God, and we're now united to Christ by faith. Above all, that's the way the New Testament speaks of Christians—as those who are “in Christ”, joined to him by the Spirit.

Too often, we have a small gospel—a gospel that ends up being a caricature or a shadow of the true apostolic gospel. We end up with what a friend of mine has called a ‘kidney donor card’ view of Christianity. Perhaps you have a kidney donor card, which is kept in a safe place ‘just in case’, but which doesn't exactly help you or change your life in the here-and-now. You don't go to the supermarket and show your kidney donor card, because it can't buy you groceries. It's just sitting there, waiting until you die—which is the only time it can do anything.

Some people end up with a perverted, narrow form of Christianity—a ‘kidney donor card’ version of the gospel. It's just a certificate of justification that you put in your pocket and forget about. Being a Christian doesn't really change anything about your life until you die, and then you get the card out. “Well, I went forward at a Billy Graham meeting 40 years ago or at a youth camp in my teens; here's my certificate of justification.”

How wonderful it is that the true gospel gives us so much more! We have a new status in Christ, but we've also received

a new life now. We died with Christ. We've been raised with Christ. We should consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:11). We serve in the new way of the Spirit, not the old way of the written code (7:6).

One argument against Christian morality—not least in the realm of sexual behaviour—is that it's impossible. It's unrealistic. Well, maybe “in the flesh” it is (7:5). But it's not impossible by the Spirit. Christians aren't just given a certificate of justification. We're made alive with God in Christ. The Spirit has entered our hearts (5:5). We have new desires and a new relationship.

Our message must never simply be negative. Too often, what people hear is just a list of rules. People who only hear rules will often wonder, “Why should I live by those rules? I don't want to live by them; they seem so oppressive.” But the fundamental message of the gospel is not ‘No’, but ‘Yes’—God's ‘Yes’ to us in Christ: “I love you. I want you to relate to me. I've made it possible by sending my Son to die for you.” Our ‘Yes’ to him follows his ‘Yes’ to us. And only then do we have the proper context for understanding why God sometimes says ‘No’ to certain behaviours. In the context of relationship, everything changes.

There was a teenage boy who spent all his time on computer games, and his parents were becoming increasingly frustrated. They warned him, they tried reasoning with him, and they threatened him with punishment if he didn't cut down his time on the PlayStation. But nothing worked. Then suddenly, one day they noticed that their boy didn't seem the slightest bit interested in computer games any more. What had happened? He'd met a girl. It changed everything, and the video games no longer seemed interesting.

God, by his Spirit, doesn't simply point us to laws; that's the old way, the way of the written code (7:6). By the Spirit,

he points us toward his beloved Son. As we delight in Jesus, “the expulsive power of a new affection”¹⁹ doesn’t make ‘no’ easy, but it does make it possible. Repentance and godly living become achievable through a new power, new desires, a new relationship with God, and also through a new fellowship with the family of believers. Yes, there’s a cost for all of us. But we are not left on our own. The Holy Spirit gives great resources and great joy.

What’s more, we’re heading towards a wonderful future. It’s so wonderful that Paul can say: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (8:18). We live this life with tremendous hope, as we look forward to the time when all the consequences of Christ’s saving work will be brought to completion in a perfect new creation, without any hint of the sin that spoils life now.

This is not a message that should embarrass us. Whatever the cost may be, following the Lord Jesus Christ is not about missing out. The gospel is a glorious message revealed to us by God. It’s a message to believe and delight in, to proclaim, and to defend, for the glory of God.

19 This is the title of a famous sermon by Thomas Chalmers, the 19th-century Scottish preacher, which was originally published in 1855. You can read the sermon online at *Christianity.com* (viewed 3 January 2017): www.christianity.com/christian-life/spiritual-growth/the-expulsive-power-of-a-new-affection-11627257.html