

Episode 3 A Scriptural Emphasis

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SFC
SHORT COURSES

The original text

But the Reformation was pushed along by a second emphasis which arose on the continent and had its impact in England too. These forces sought more radical change to authority structures in the Church, pushed along by what were seen as abuses that developed in the medieval period. Allies in England wanted to incorporate in the English church the sorts of impacts Luther and Calvin were having elsewhere on the continent. This stream gave rise to the 39 Articles of Religion which became officially authoritative for the Anglican Church (Wolf, 1979b 141-143).

From this perspective, the key source of authority is the scriptures, every believer has an immediate relationship with Christ unmediated by anything other than the scriptures, and the primary expression of the church is the local congregation gathered around the scriptures. The 39 Articles assigned a normative role for the scriptures. The historic creeds of the church may be believed because they may be proved by the scriptures. The General Councils of the Church were not regarded as infallible. Their pronouncements, like all others, had to be tested against the scriptures. In the ordination liturgy the solemn handing over of the bible to those being ordained emphasised their duty to preach the word of God. This symbolic action deliberately eclipsed the older practice of handing over the sacramental vessels of the Lord's Supper emphasising the priest's role in the sacraments. Nowadays you will see bishops, in many places, handing over both the bible and the sacramental vessels!

The Book of Common Prayer of 1662 emerged through this reformation process and it is packed full of scriptural resonances, quotations and paraphrases.

This force flowed into the Anglican Church of Australia's Constitution, too. The second of the three Fundamental Declaration says:

- *This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate standard and rule of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.*

So the protestant emphasis on scripture as the primary source of authority and on 'justification by grace through faith', which was Luther's watchword, were used, and still are, to restore a sense of balance whenever too much emphasis was placed on ecclesiastical authority or sacraments.

The Discussion Questions

- a. Lay people (non-clergy) did not always have access to the Bible for their own use and interpretation. Many people around the world today can't access a Bible. If we looked at Bible reading as a gift, a privilege, then how would that change our perception/understanding?
- b. Placed in a hierarchy, scripture often comes first before tradition and reason. Explain how that makes sense (or otherwise) to you.
- c. Some suggest that whenever we read scripture, we do it through lenses provided by tradition and reason, often without realising it. What do you think?
- d. How do you see the emphasis on scripture expressed in the life of your Anglican context? (Parish/School/Agency/etc)
- e. What does the APBA mean to you?
- f. How would you describe the role that scripture plays in your life?
- g. Create a list of rights and responsibilities that come with accessing the Bible. What points would you include in each list?
- h. What extra strengths/benefits does reading the bible in community bring, as opposed to only ever doing so on your own?

Extra content – Some more to think about...

A Scripture-formed Communion? Possibilities and Prospects after Lambeth, ACC, and General Convention
Nicholas Thomas Wright - Bishop of Durham, England

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The Bible as a whole offers a paradigm, a framework, an overarching context in which the text itself is designed to function, as a crucial means of guiding God's people to be the people through whom new creation will come about. The Bible is there to be part of the action, part of the means by which

God does what God intends to do. This is a more dynamic concept of ‘authority’ than is sometimes imagined, and also more complex.

It wasn’t just that Jesus knew his Bible rather well and discerned in several passages clues about what he had to do, say, and suffer. It isn’t just that Christians today need to read the Bible again and again to be sure that they are believing, or doing, everything it says.

It is, rather, that Jesus read his Bible as the single great narrative of how the creator God had called out a people through whom God would redeem the world. The difference was that Jesus understood this story as funnelling down onto a single point, or rather a single person; and that he believed that he was the one who would fulfil this vocation through his own representative suffering and death.

A Christian follow-on from that is that the Bible itself urges us to read it knowing that we are ourselves actors in the ongoing drama. It simply will not do to pull proof texts out of these complicated narratives — though sometimes a particular line can, no doubt, remind us of the larger whole. It is vital that we learn to read the whole story and to understand our own vocations in proper relation to it.

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Tracking the transition into new creation is central and vital. Learning to read the Bible in terms of community formation and behaviour, and learning to discuss and argue out where the energy is to be focused and the boundaries are to be drawn is very largely a matter of learning to read the Bible in a layered and nuanced way, refusing to take texts ‘in the flat’ irrespective of where they come from, and insisting instead that all be read through the lens of the new creation accomplished and launched in and through Jesus Christ, his Kingdom-work and his death and resurrection. And is that not the task to which we are called in tomorrow’s Anglican Communion?

Paula Gooder interview: “A Biblical Relationship

Do we read the Bible well?

I think the problem is most of us don’t read it enough. And therefore not well. One of my big beefs is that the vast majority of people read the Bible just in the little bit that they read in church. You have a little five-verse chunk then off you go. It’s like reading a novel half a page at a time. You miss some of the key things if you do that.

So you recommend people sit down and read the Bible like a proper book?

Well, yes and no. If you’re reading Mark’s gospel, then I think you need to read the whole of Mark’s gospel. But the worst thing that people do is try to read the Bible like it’s a book, whereas actually it’s 66 books. The trouble is most people start with Genesis and get to Leviticus and think “I can’t be doing with this”. So read individual books, but read those as books.

What’s your best practical tip for reading the Bible better?

Never read the same translation all the time. Very few people would think it was right only ever to read one person’s Bible commentary, because you would recognise that it has a slant. And translations are people’s slants on the text. So if you just read one translation you’re getting one interpretation of the text all the time. Read a number of translations – at least three – so that you get a different flavour of what’s going on.

<https://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/2013/02/a-biblical-relationship/>

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