

## 2 Formed by Scripture



Anglicans value Scripture. That should be clear to anyone who attends an Anglican service of worship, for our liturgy is filled with verses from the Bible. Almost any page of *A NZ Prayer Book* (or, indeed, prayer books from other Anglican provinces) will contain verses taken directly, or adapted,

from somewhere in the Bible. An example of is the versicle and response after the penitential rite (p 408) “The peace of Christ rule in our hearts. / The word of Christ dwell in us richly.” These are taken from Colossians 3:15-16. A version of the Psalter, “Psalms for Worship,” is a key part of the Prayer Book.

In addition to that, when we gather for Eucharist we hear three readings which show us what it is to be the people of God. We look back at the past and the lives of those who first worshipped God (the First, or Old, Testament), we grapple with the early experiences and contexts of those who attempted to live as church (the New Testament Epistles) and we focus on the words and actions of Jesus (the Gospels). In addition, we are able to make a response, usually to the first reading, by hearing or saying a psalm together. All of this is set out for us in the Lectionary which provides for reading the Scriptures in the course of the church's daily and weekly worship, allowing for most, but not all, of the Bible to be read in each three-year cycle.

Hearing the Bible when we come to worship reminds us that we read Scripture *together*. We learn what it is to be the people of God *in community*, and especially in the context of prayer and worship. Even when we read it individually or at home with our families we are able to draw on the insights that others before us have gained from their own reading and study. Our engagement with Scripture during worship forms us into a learning community, as we seek to live out our faith in the presence of God and of one another.

❖ ***What has your experience of the Bible been? Can you remember when you first encountered it?***

- ❖ *Do you have a favourite book or passage? Why is that one so special to you?*
- ❖ *How often in the course of a week do you engage with Scripture? Remember to include Sunday mornings (or whenever you come to worship).*
- ❖ *Why might it be important that we read Scripture TOGETHER?*

## How do Anglicans regard the Bible?

For Anglicans, the Bible is the prime, but not the only, source of authority. The first of the promises that all three orders of ministry (deacons, priests, and bishops) make at their ordination runs like this:

Bishop      Do you believe that the Bible contains all that is essential for our salvation, and reveals God’s living word in Jesus Christ?

Candidate    Yes, I do.  
 God give me understanding in studying the Scriptures. May they reveal to me the mind and heart of Christ, and shape my ministry.



Behind this is an understanding that the “Word of God” is Christ, not the Bible on its own. The Bible reveals to us in Christ God’s living Word: that is why we read it – so that we can encounter the mind and heart of Christ. As the Catechism (ANZPB p 930) reminds us, God speaks to us in the Bible through the work of the Holy Spirit, who guides God’s people in how to interpret and understand it. As we say after listening to readings from the Old and New Testaments during worship, “Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church” – a passage, incidentally, which is based on repeated phrases from the Book of Revelation (the section dealing with the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 – 3). The Bible is heard so that God can be heard. The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of the Scriptures, just as the Spirit continues to inspire our understanding of them today.

In particular, the Bible shows to us all that is *necessary* for us to know for our salvation – things we need to know about God, about ourselves, and about how we relate to God. In addition to these there are also things which are interesting

and useful (and possibly some things you may find less interesting and less useful). The scriptures are authoritative on matters of faith and salvation, but we are free to hold other opinions about things which are not central to that.



The classic Anglican understanding of the authority of the Bible is generally permissive: anything can be done which is not obviously contrary to Scripture. (An alternative perspective to this, in some Reformed denominations, is that things can only be done if they are explicitly commanded or allowed in the Bible, one example

being the discipline of singing only unaccompanied psalms because that was described in the Bible, rather than singing hymns or anthems accompanied by organs or other non-biblical musical instruments.) The idea is that our ministry should be shaped by our reading of the Scriptures.

- ❖ ***How does the Bible shape your ministry? Can you give an example?***
- ❖ ***What is something you consider to be “essential for our salvation” and what is something we find in the Bible which (while useful or interesting) is not “essential”?***

## **Other sources of authority**

We noted above that the Bible is, for Anglicans, the primary, but not the only, source of authority: what else do we pay attention to? One of the distinctive things about Anglicanism is less a set of doctrines and much more a method: a way of searching for truth which aims to establish a balance of authority between Scripture, tradition, and reason. This is sometimes referred to as “the three legged stool” since the whole point of a stool and what makes it stable is a balance between the legs.



We read the Bible alongside the lenses of tradition – principally the theology and practice of the early church – and reason. We see ourselves as having a historical continuity with the life, worship, and ministry of the church from its beginning. Tradition is what is received and passed on, like the baton in a relay race. Examples of this include the two historic creeds (the Apostles’ Creed, and the Nicene Creed), which are said regularly in Anglican worship, and the threefold order of ministry: deacons, priests, and bishops.

The Anglican appeal to reason reminds us that thinking is a God-given gift – we don't have to leave our brains behind when we go to church! Our reason helps us to understand the world around us and is one of the ways by which God reveals things to us. This also means that we don't have to get tangled up in what some people see as an opposition between faith and science. Indeed, Anglicans welcome scientific advances that add to what we know of creation,



and thank God for technological developments that can improve the quality of human life. Part of our Anglican heritage – and this comes from our commitment to Scripture, tradition, and reason – is a rich scholarly engagement with the Bible and with other spheres of learning, into which comes a tradition of scholar bishops like Bishop Tom (NT) Wright (pictured) and Archbishop Rowan Williams.

- ❖ ***Within the trilogy of “Scripture, tradition, and reason” some people find they connect most easily with one of these. Does this apply to you, and if so – which one resonates most with you?***
  
- ❖ ***Some people add “experience” to this trilogy. What do you think?***

### **A text about Scripture: Hebrews 4:12-13**

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

It's a vivid image, isn't it – a declaration of the power of Scripture and our accountability to the God who has spoken. This follows a warning to the writer's audience not to replicate the same lack of trust as was shown by the generation of Israelites, who had to wander around in the wilderness for 40 years. The author wants this audience to take this seriously, to live responsively to God's word.

The word of God – and this relates to all of God’s utterances, spoken and written – can separate out what really matters from what only seems to matter. There is no point of a person’s being to which this word cannot penetrate as it can cut through the human spirit, exposing the inner workings of the heart, what is really going on inside us.



- ❖ *Isn't this a bit scary? How do you react?*
- ❖ *In what sense is the word of God "living and active" within you? What does this feel like?*
- ❖ *In what sense is it "living and active" within the church? Can you give an example?*

## THOUGHTS / QUESTIONS

## Meet the Family

### William Tyndale, Translator of the Scriptures (1494-1536)



Tyndale is sometimes described as “the father of the English Bible” and the translation of the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew into contemporary English became his life’s work. Up until that time most people read the Scriptures in a Latin translation, which meant that it was not universally accessible, particularly for lay people. Tyndale had encountered the New Testament in Greek while at university, and he later learned Hebrew in order to translate the Old Testament. He was strongly sympathetic to the ideas of reform circulating on the continent and opposition from church leaders in England led him to settle there. He was arrested and imprisoned in Brussels, condemned to death and executed, not for his work of translation, but for his support of doctrines that were considered heretical. His feast day is 7 October.

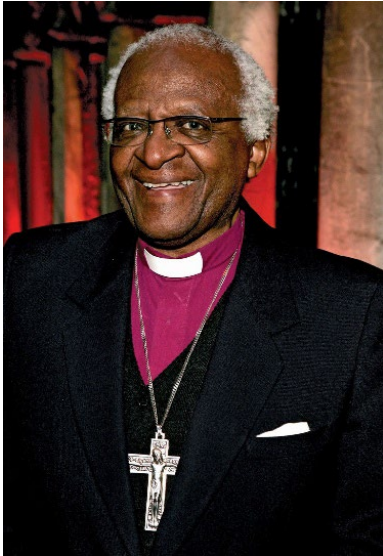
### Tarore of Waharoa (c 1824-36)

Tarore was from the Ngati Haua tribe, the daughter of the chief Ngākuku. She attended a mission school and learned to read, and in 1836 she was given a copy of the Gospel of Luke published earlier that year. When her mission school was evacuated, Tarore read to the children from her Gospel, at evening prayers. The campfire attracted a raiding party and in the fighting Tarore was killed; the next day Ngākuku preached forgiveness at her tangi. (The picture shows Tarore’s grave.) Her Gospel of Luke was taken by one of the raiding party, who was subsequently converted and made peace with Ngākuku. Later it was taken to Ōtaki where its message led to the conversion of Tāmihana Te Rauparaha. Tarore’s story has become a profound witness to the power of the gospel to bring reconciliation, healing, and new beginnings for the people of this land. Her feast day is 19 October, the day she died and coincidentally the day after the feast of St Luke the Evangelist.





**Desmond Tutu, Bishop and social justice activist (1931-2021)**



Tutu, a leading anti-apartheid activist and campaigner for the oppressed, was the first black Archbishop of Cape Town and bishop in Southern Africa, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. His argument was a biblical one: that all people – including those who are black and coloured – are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and so should be treated well and treated equally. Tutu said, “When people say that the Bible and politics don’t mix, I ask them which Bible they are reading. It’s not the one I’ve been reading.”

- ❖ *Why is it so important to be able to read the Scriptures in our own language?*
- ❖ *Do you have a story about someone being changed through encountering the gospel? Has that happened to you?*
- ❖ *What insights have you found in the Bible that can help us navigate thorny political and social issues?*
- ❖ *A translator, a bishop, and a twelve year old girl – what does that variety say about who our church values?*

**How has Scripture formed you?**