

Charles Sherlock, *Words and The Word: Case Studies in Using Scripture* (Preston, VIC: Mosaic Press, 2013), pp. 179. ISBN 978 1 74324 021 2.
doi:10.1017/S1740355313000417

It might be said that Anglicans are by disposition a wordy bunch: we like our Creeds and Collects and Cranmerian Confessions. Anglicans take their words seriously, and none more so than the words of Scripture. Charles Sherlock's important and timely new book explores not just the place of Scripture as written words in relation to the incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth, but also the implications of how we read and apply the Scriptures for our lives as disciples of Christ.

This book is the product of a series of eight addresses given as part of the 2012 Moorhouse Lectures offered by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne and delivered in St Paul's Cathedral. It is structured according to four case studies ('The material Word', 'The Word beyond words', 'The bloody Word' and 'God's final Word') which together survey a sweeping breadth of content from the material history of the Scriptures through the ages of scrolls, codices, printing, reading, sound and contemporary multimedia to the hermeneutical considerations of gender, militarism, blood and sacrifice, judgement and eschatology in both our reading of the Scriptures and their application. This wide-ranging discussion is elegantly written and provides thoughtful insights into contemporary discussions within Anglicanism concerning their approach to Scripture and the authority and discernment of God's Word.

The first Case Study is presented as 'foundational' and clarifies the distinction which will feature throughout the text between the Word written, which has a mediating role, and the Word incarnate. It is argued that the 'voice' of God is both explosive and even mortally dangerous (p. 11) and requires mediation if it is to be encountered and received. The Scriptures then function as 'sacramental' in signifying what would otherwise be incomprehensible (p. 21). Throughout the book Sherlock treads a nuanced position between the traditional fault lines of Anglican theological and doctrinal disagreement - his discussion of sacramentality is such an example (p. 18). The remainder of this Case Study, through Chapters 2 and 3, provides an interesting, even if at times somewhat potted, romp through the history of the Scriptures' preservation and promulgation in response to changing contexts and technologies up to the present day. The purpose of the book is not to provide a great detail of analysis (p. 32) but rather to pick up themes and trends which inform our understanding of how the Scriptures have been variously encountered and interpreted.

The second Case Study grounds much of this breadth in the concrete examples of how both gendered and militaristic language have made an impact on Christian faith and continue to do so. The discussion of gendered language helpfully explicates many of the inherent factors - linguistic, cultural and theological - which have contributed to the monumental shift in Western society toward inclusivity and sensitivity to the power of language and its potential misuse and abuse. Similarly, the book's discussion of military language in both the Scriptures and in Christian songs and hymnody highlights the power of language to evoke imagery that has the potential to provoke and even legitimate violence (p. 75).

When analysing such language, a useful distinction is drawn between a text's 'primary' level, what it evokes 'in one's unconscious self', and the 'secondary' level, the fruit of a more considered and 'conscious reflection upon our experience' (p. 76). This distinction prompts Sherlock's plea not to wholly abandon military imagery in Christian ministry but rather to consider how such imagery might be employed to encourage Christian discipline and build up 'godly obedience' as opposed to enabling the vilification of a perceived enemy.

The book's analysis of blood, through both the feminine and masculine experiences of menstruation and circumcision in Scripture, as well as the practice of sacrifice and its relationship with atonement in both the Jewish and Christian traditions, is perhaps the most fascinating and insightful of the Case Studies. Affirming the life-giving, regular and healthy place of blood in female menstruation provides a positive analogy to the life-giving blood of Christ (p. 99), although it is acknowledged that in both cases such life comes at the cost of death. Drawing on feminist critiques of traditional Christian attitudes to menstruation, Sherlock breaks through taboos and is able convincingly to present the redundancy of clean/unclean distinctions through the ministry of Jesus and the ongoing communion with the Holy Spirit of the people of God (p. 103). Similarly, the expanding boundaries for belonging to the people of God which vexed early Christians at the Jerusalem Council concerning the requirement for circumcision are set within a wider discussion and affirmation of circumcision as 'a sign of God's life-giving covenant' (p. 108). This discussion of the centrality of blood to God's purpose, which finds its focus and ultimate efficacy in the blood of Christ at Calvary, makes for sometimes squeamish and uncomfortable reading but is well worthwhile.

Sherlock's final case study explores the Scriptural witness to God's judgment and argues for a mediated position between the extremes of universal toleration and uncompromising condemnation. In developing this thesis, as well as examining the nature of God's most severe judgment as expressed in the *Herem* of the Old Testament, Sherlock draws heavily on his experience with the *Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission* and particularly the 'Yes/No' and 'Yes/Amen' dynamic which was central to its agreed statement 'The Gift of Authority'. The reception of this statement has itself been highly contested and while extrapolation of the 'Yes/No' dynamic represents a sophisticated piece of theological disquisition and exegetical effort, it is not particularly accessible nor are its implications necessarily clear. The 'Yes/Amen' dynamic, however, in the example of Mary and the Annunciation (p. 152) is much more helpful.

Overall this book represents an excellent contribution to current discussions within Anglicanism concerning the use and authority of the words of Scripture and their mediating relationship with the incarnate Word. Sherlock's role as Regional Co-ordinator (Oceania) for the recent *Bible in the Life of the Church* project commissioned by the Anglican Consultative Council makes him well placed to offer these reflections. The book's genesis as a series of lectures, and its incredible scope in content, makes it at times a little eclectic and does occasionally tend to present more like 'scattered pearls' than 'jewels on common thread' (p. 5). However, the outstanding breadth of material surveyed will make this an invaluable resource for a much wider readership: the concise summary of the Bible's reception through print and other media would be well suited to introductory undergraduate

discussion; exploration of gender and power language will be of great value to liturgists; the intriguing and complex 'Yes/No' and 'Yes/Amen' dynamic deserves fuller explication and would be well worth further enquiry within the academy where it might be tested and developed. Sherlock's affirmation that words matter, but that understanding how they work is important to receiving them (p. 161), is a very welcome justification for the importance of a renewed emphasis on hermeneutical enquiry, particularly within Anglicanism.

This well-written and accessible yet sophisticated book has much to commend itself and much to offer a variety of readerships. Its avoidance of extremes and nuanced approach is particularly pertinent for Anglicans in the context of international ecclesial tensions. It offers fresh insights into the reading and application of the Word written and its relationship with the Word incarnate which are rooted in Sherlock's extensive experience and deep knowledge of the Anglican tradition. Moreover, in the great breadth of content which is presented there is to be found, surely, something for everyone.

*Alexander Ross
Melbourne*