

A Cultural History



The Bible in Australia

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Written by Meredith Lake

Reviewed by Peter Bentley

A short explanation of what this book is about is found in the subtitle - A Cultural History. This book provides a picture of how the bible's influence and impact has connected with Australian history and culture. It considers how the bible has been used and misused, and perhaps 'not used', in the context of the foundation and development of modern Australia. Meredith Lake has created a rare offering - a readable scholarly academic work.

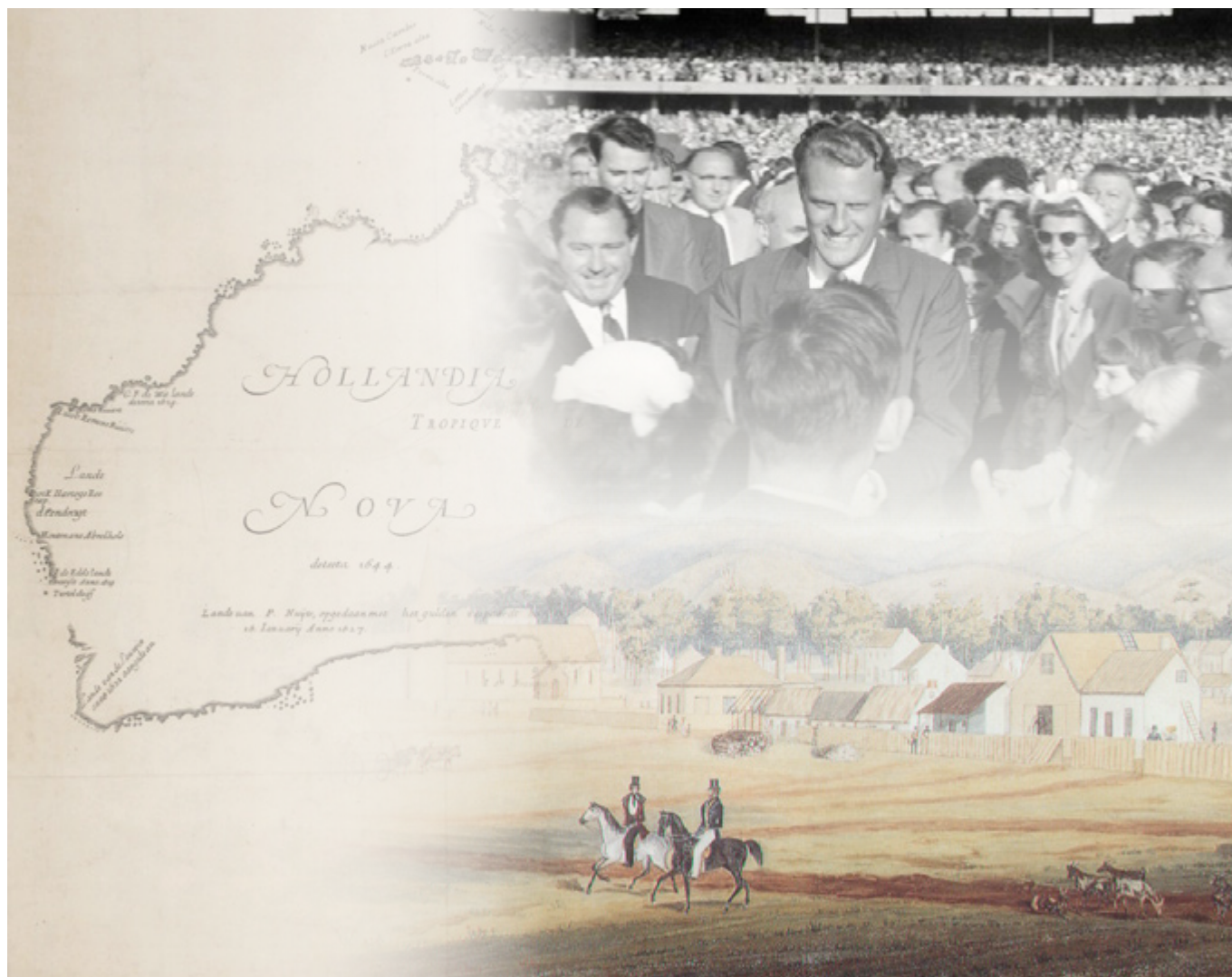
There are four parts:

Colonial Foundations

The opening section considers the arrival of the bible in 1788 and initial interactions in the convict era, and the overall immigrant context as the nation develops. Woven throughout the first part and indeed through the whole book are stories, and examples of connection related to Aboriginal and Islander people, especially in relation to translation and hearing the word in their own tongue, and the wider questions about indigenous theology and relationships.

The Great Age of the Bible

This part provides an excellent overview of the incredible stories of missionary endeavour and promulgation of the bible and the beginnings of the consideration of different ways of viewing the bible, its authority and status.



Bible and Nation

The third part looks at the place of the church (and bible) in Australia in the context of a consolidated Australia that was finding its own identity. A revealing chapter is the chapter on WWI and its aftermath. As it has been revealed during these WWI centenary years, the impact of this era has often been underestimated.

The final part **A Secular Australia?** Explores the place of the bible in the new era, looking at the changes in society and the impact of change on the church and the place of the bible. I noted quotes from people who would be known to ACC readers, including Deane Meatheringham in reference to his conversion at the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade. In this 60th year anniversary of the Crusade, it is illuminating to reflect on the differences in Australia in terms of our cultural history.

The chapter *'The Bible in the new millennium'* vividly highlights the pace of change, especially in the context of SRE (and certainly the fact that this is now the sole area of contact with the bible for a large

group of Australians), and the impact of new technology and how this relates to reading and understanding the bible.

Having highlighted this book's accessibility and wide-ranging material, I am still going to suggest that an abridged version is needed (not the twitter form), but more a pocket version that summarises and yet continues the main themes and ideas.

I found the last few pages especially fascinating and helpful as they raise the context for a wider discussion. These pages form a very interesting conclusion in the context of ethics and decision-making. It is a question I have long been asking - how do people make decisions today when for many there is no association with a book like The Bible?

The conclusion takes one back to earlier discussions and ongoing themes in the book about the cultural impact of the church and its role in providing for the common good in society. This enables one to understand, consider and discuss in hopefully a helpful way the continuing role of the bible today.

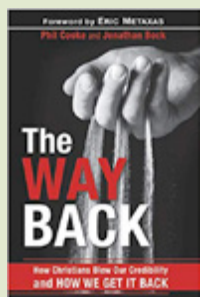
Dr Meredith Lake

Meredith is an award-winning writer interested in the ways Australians have understood the big questions of faith and meaning, and how that has played out in society and culture.

She studied at Sydney University with some of the leading cultural historians in the country. Her PhD research explored religious ideas of the environment in early colonial Australia.

Since 2009, she has worked in the education and not-for-profit sectors, telling true stories about history, faith and culture. She is currently an Honorary Associate of the Department of History, Sydney University.

BOOK REVIEW



The Way Back

How Christians Blew Our Credibility and How We Get It Back

Written by Phil Cooke & Jonathan Bock

Reviewed by Peter Bentley

Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbours. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honourable behaviour, and they will give honour to God when he judges the world.

1 Peter 2:12 (NLT)

First, I need to highlight that this is a book that looks at how the church and Christians relate to society and not the issues and nature facing the church internally. The context is evangelical faith in the USA, so the context for the reflection is how that evangelical com-

munity essentially blew it by becoming too associated with politics and the culture wars. It is not an apologia for liberal Christianity and a call to adopt the culture of the day. It is a simple challenge for Christians to become more the people of 'the way'.

The two authors have both been involved in a wider media and communication ministry and network and are well placed to report on the perceptions of society and change in how Christians and the church are viewed and provide pointed reflections on where we are and what to do.

Phil Cooke will be known to a number of readers as he has spoken in Australia and was a lead interviewee on the Andrew Denton documentary *God on Our Side* (this looked at evangelicals and their support for George W Bush in the context of the US National Religious Broadcasters Convention in 2006). Phil's blog (search philcooke.com) provides short reflections and practical examples and ideas to encourage people to re-think their way of doing things.

Of greatest help though in this book is the focus on our personal Christian lives and a call to renew our Christian walk. As we become more people of the way our hope is that people will see the way themselves.

