

# *The Messenger*

**Parish of St Thomas, Tāmaki  
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## The Profound Significance of Easter in our faith

Noel Cox

Easter, one of the most celebrated events in the Christian calendar, holds profound significance for believers around the world. Beyond the colourful



eggs, chocolate bunnies, and festive gatherings, Easter is a cornerstone of Christian faith, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this article, we delve into the spiritual and historical importance of Easter, exploring how it encapsulates the essence of Christian beliefs and offers a message of hope and renewal.

At the heart of Christian theology lies the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, sent to Earth to redeem humanity from sin. The Easter narrative unfolds against the backdrop of the crucifixion, where Jesus willingly sacrificed himself on the cross to atone for the sins of mankind. This act of selflessness, central to Christian faith, symbolizes divine love and serves as the foundation for the resurrection, the pivotal event that Easter commemorates.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday is the triumphant moment that distinguishes Christianity from other religions. According to the Gospel accounts, Jesus rose from the dead three days after his crucifixion, validating his divinity and conquering the power of death. This event is not only a historical occurrence but a spiritual revelation that signifies hope, renewal, and the promise of eternal life for believers.

Easter holds significant theological implications for Christians. The resurrection of Jesus is seen as the ultimate victory over sin and death, offering believers the assurance of salvation and reconciliation with God. It reaffirms the Christian belief in the afterlife and the promise of a new existence in the presence of God for those who embrace the teachings of Christ.

The timing of Easter, occurring in the spring season in the Northern Hemisphere, is laden with symbolism. Spring, with its blossoming flowers and revitalized nature, mirrors the spiritual themes of renewal and rebirth inherent in the Easter message. The resurrection is not just a historical event but a symbol of the potential for personal transformation and spiritual renewal in the lives of believers.

Easter is not only a religious observance but also a time for cultural and familial traditions. The custom of decorating eggs, a symbol of new life, and the Easter bunny, often associated with fertility and rebirth, have become integral parts of the celebration (though the latter is now rarely seen in this country). While these customs may vary across cultures, they contribute to the festive atmosphere that surrounds Easter, fostering a sense of community and shared joy.



Easter also emphasises the importance of community and fellowship within the Christian faith. Churches around the world come together to commemorate the resurrection through special services, prayers, and festivities. The shared experience of celebrating Easter reinforces a sense of unity among believers, fostering a deeper connection to their faith and to one another.

While Easter is central to Christian faith, its message extends beyond the confines of religious boundaries. The themes of sacrifice, love, and hope resonate universally, offering a message of redemption and renewal to people of all backgrounds. The story of Easter encourages reflection on the universal human experience, reminding individuals of the transformative power of love and the possibility of overcoming life's challenges.

Easter stands as a beacon of hope for Christians, symbolising the triumph of light over darkness, life over death, and love over sin. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not merely a historical event but a transformative spiritual truth that continues to inspire and guide millions of believers worldwide. As Easter is celebrated each year, Christians and non-Christians alike are invited to reflect on the profound significance of this event, embracing the message of renewal, redemption, and eternal hope that Easter embodies.

Easter is also a time for us to celebrate our Christian faith by spreading the Gospel, not just amongst those already familiar with it, but to those who are wholly or largely “unchurched”, those especially who are ignorant not just of scripture, but of Our Lord’s great commission, from Matthew 28:16-20, where Jesus commands his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”.

# Why Personal Faith and the Teaching of the Church Go Hand-in-Hand

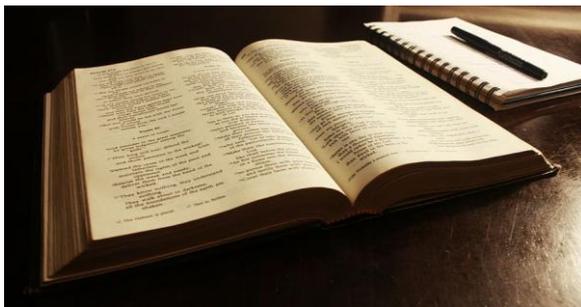
Noel Cox

In an age that values individual experience and personal interpretation, it is perhaps unsurprising that many Christians speak of “my faith” as something private, unique, and inward-looking. And while it is true that faith must be personal – one cannot believe by proxy – it is equally true that Christian faith is never merely personal. The faith of each believer is part of something larger: the faith of the Church.

This tension between personal conviction and corporate belief is not new. The Anglican tradition, with its roots in both Catholic and Reformed thought, has long held that personal faith and the teaching of the Church are not in competition, but in harmony. This brief article offers some reflections on why the two belong together, drawing on the classical Anglican triad of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.

## Scripture: The Faith Once Delivered

The Christian faith is rooted in divine revelation – not in individual insight or spiritual enthusiasm, however sincere. The Scriptures, as the Church has received them, are the primary witness to God’s self-disclosure in history: in creation, in covenant, and above all in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

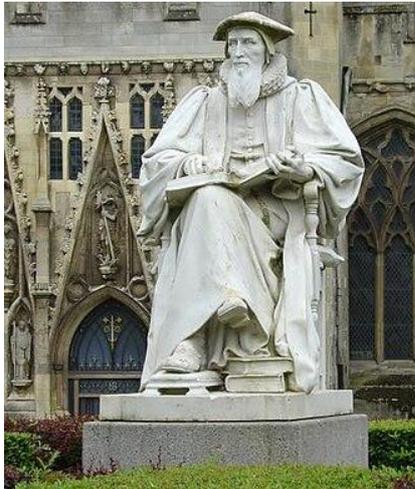


To say that our faith must be personal is not to say that it can be invented. As St Jude exhorted the early Christians to “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3), so the Church in every age is called to receive, guard, and pass on the apostolic faith. Personal engagement with Scripture is essential – but it is the *Scriptures of the Church*, not a private canon of spiritual impressions, that form and inform authentic belief. In other words, reading the Bible is important, but must be done carefully. We have all experienced preachers and others using a passage of the Bible to prove their point, whether it is what God intends or not.

## **Tradition: The Wisdom of the Saints**

Anglicanism is a tradition-rich Church – not traditionalist, but rooted in a living tradition. Tradition, rightly understood, is not the dead hand of the past but the wisdom of the saints, the accumulated discernment of the people of God.

To speak of “the teaching of the Church” is not to deny development or reform, but to affirm that we do not begin the Christian journey in a vacuum. The creeds, liturgies, and doctrinal formularies of the Church exist to provide shape, clarity, and protection for our faith. They offer an anchor amid the shifting currents of culture and opinion.



Indeed, the very fact that one can speak of *heresy* presupposes that there is an authoritative body of truth to which personal belief is accountable. Without such boundaries, every opinion becomes equally valid – and equally meaningless. As G. K. Chesterton wryly put it, “When people stop believing in God, they don’t believe in nothing – they believe in anything.”

## **Reason: Faith Seeking Understanding**

Anglicans have often described their approach as one of *faith seeking understanding*. This is not a mere rationalism, nor an attempt to explain away mystery, but a recognition that God has given us minds to be used in the service of faith. Reason allows us to interpret Scripture faithfully and to discern the proper development of doctrine within tradition.

But reason alone cannot sustain faith. Reason is not the source of revelation, but its servant. When personal faith becomes unmoored from the Church’s teaching, it often drifts into individualism or sentimentality. But when reason is exercised within the framework of Scripture and tradition, it becomes a powerful tool for the deepening of faith – and for the proclamation of the gospel in every age.

## **Belonging to a Body**

To believe as a Christian is to believe *with* others. It is to enter into the “communion of saints”, and to be formed by the liturgy, catechesis, and pastoral guidance of the Church. One cannot meaningfully say “Jesus is Lord” apart from the Church that has taught us what that means.

This is not to suggest blind conformity. The Anglican tradition has always valued conscience and the prayerful wrestling of the believer. But conscience is

not private opinion; it is the faculty by which we judge ourselves and our actions in light of God's truth – a truth most fully known in the life and teaching of the Church.

As Anglicans, we are invited to live out a personal faith that is not solitary, but ecclesial; not self-defined, but rooted in the Word, nourished by the sacraments, shaped by tradition, and illuminated by reason.



## Conclusion

In the end, to separate personal faith from the teaching of the Church is to risk losing both. The teaching of the Church without personal faith becomes hollow formalism. Personal faith without the Church's teaching becomes a mirror in which we see only ourselves. But held together, they nourish and correct each other. In the words of St Paul, "we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25) – and it is in that mutual belonging that our faith grows strong and true.

This is why regular church attendance is not merely a matter of duty or habit, but of spiritual necessity. In the liturgical rhythm of worship – in word and sacrament, in prayer and praise, in confession and absolution – we are formed, nourished, and sustained as members of Christ's Body. The Church is not an optional supplement to the Christian life, but the divinely instituted means through which that life is lived and deepened.

Yet for the Church to be truly life-giving, it must teach clearly and faithfully. Clergy have a solemn responsibility not to echo the shifting values of the age, but to proclaim "the faith once delivered to the saints" with courage, clarity, and compassion. Orthodoxy is not a relic of the past but a safeguard for the present – a guardrail that keeps us within the life-giving path of truth. Preaching and teaching that are vague, novel, or untethered from the Church's tradition do not nourish faith; they confuse it.

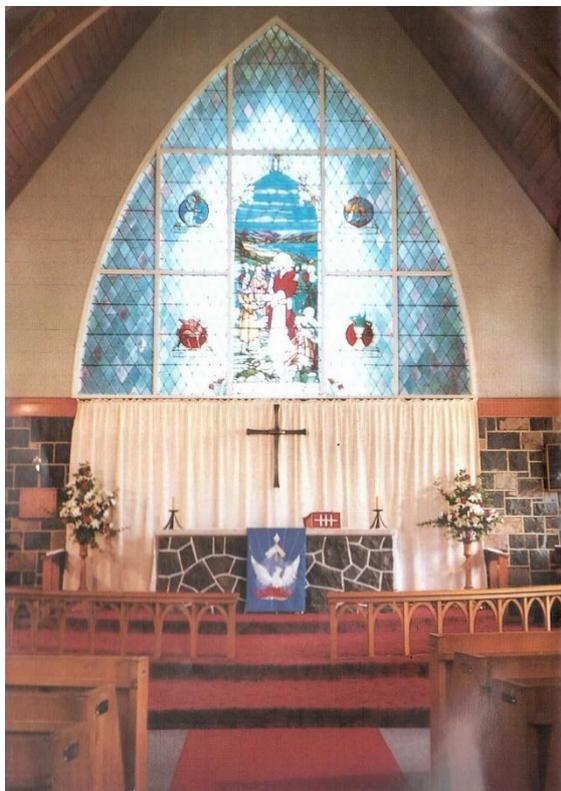
Ultimately, the Church's task is not to reflect the spirit of the age but to bear witness to the Spirit of God. We are not called to reshape the gospel so that it is more acceptable to the world, but to allow the gospel to reshape us – and, through us, to invite the world into new life. As our Lord said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

The Church should be changing lives. When we are rooted in Scripture, guided by tradition, and illuminated by reason, our personal faith is drawn into a transforming communion – one that conforms us not to the world, but to Christ. That is the faith we are called to live, to share, and to pass on.

# Radiant Reverence: Unveiling the Stained Glass Splendour of St Thomas Tāmaki Church

Noel Cox

Enter the hallowed doors of St Thomas Tāmaki church, and you will find yourself enveloped in a breathtaking display of stained glass windows. Beyond their aesthetic allure, these windows are an intrinsic part of the church's identity, telling a unique narrative that intertwines the local community with the broader tapestry of Christian faith. In this article, we delve into the historical, symbolic, and spiritual importance of the stained glass windows at St Thomas Tāmaki, exploring their role as storytellers, spiritual illuminators, and cultural treasures.



St Thomas Tāmaki Church, a beacon of worship in Auckland, carries a rich history reflected in its stained glass windows. The church's commitment to architectural excellence is epitomized by windows such as these, each pane bearing witness to the passage of time and the evolution of the local Christian community. From its earliest days to the present, these windows have stood as testaments to the enduring faith of the congregation.

The stained glass windows of St Thomas Tāmaki Church are more than mere decorations; they are repositories of profound symbolism. Crafted with meticulous care, each window tells a story, weaving together biblical narratives, local history, and the core

tenets of Christian faith. Scenes from the life of Christ, depictions of saints, and symbols of spiritual significance adorn the panes, creating a visual symphony that resonates with worshippers.

As a unique feature of St Thomas Tāmaki, these windows contribute to the distinct identity of the church, fostering a connection between the local congregation and the broader Christian tradition. The windows serve as a visual catechism, conveying not only the universal teachings of Christianity but also the specific journey and experiences of the community at St Thomas Tāmaki.



The interplay of light and colour within St Thomas Tāmaki’s stained glass windows is a metaphorical representation of spiritual illumination. As sunlight filters through the radiant hues, it mirrors the divine light of God shining upon the worshippers within. This ethereal glow enhances the spiritual atmosphere, providing a serene backdrop for prayer, reflection, and worship.

The transformative nature of light passing through stained glass aligns with the spiritual journey of those who gather within St Thomas Tāmaki. It symbolises the transformative power of faith, casting a luminous reminder that even in the darkest moments, the light of belief can bring hope,

renewal, and a sense of divine presence.

The architectural integration of stained glass windows at St Thomas Tāmaki is a testament to the careful planning and vision behind the church’s design, but also a sign of the curious and unique origins of the present building. Positioned strategically within the sanctuary and at the (liturgical) west end of the church, these windows contribute to the overall aesthetic and spiritual ambiance of the space. They are not mere embellishments but integral components that enhance the architectural harmony of the church, creating an environment that invites believers into a transcendent experience.

In the centre light of the west window Christ is depicted looking down on the congregation. On the left is St. Thomas and on the right Bishop Selwyn, for whom the original Church of St. Thomas was built. Beneath St. Thomas is the coat of arms of the See of Calcutta, with which the diocese of Auckland is closely associated, and under Bishop Selwyn is the coat of arms of the See of Auckland.

The east window features the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, with the arresting caption “There is a lad here” with the monograms of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John on the four supporting panels. The caption is a quote from the Gospel of St John, chapter 6 verse 9, which describes the scene; “There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?”

The stained glass windows at St Thomas Tāmaki, commissioned by Sir William Stephenson in memory of his parents, are not only religious artifacts but also cultural treasures. These intricate works of art, surviving the passage of time, reflect the craftsmanship of generations of artisans. Efforts to preserve and restore these windows are vital in ensuring that future generations can appreciate the cultural and spiritual legacy they represent.

Preservation endeavours become even more crucial when considering the unique story encapsulated in St Thomas Tāmaki’s stained glass. These windows

serve as historical markers, documenting the growth, trials, and triumphs of the local Christian community, making them irreplaceable elements of Auckland’s cultural heritage.



The stained glass windows of St Thomas Tāmaki Church are a radiant tapestry of faith, history, and community. Beyond their captivating beauty, these windows stand as symbolic gateways, inviting worshippers into a visual journey through Christian narratives and local history. The interplay of light and colour, the architectural integration, and the community connection embedded in each pane make the stained glass windows at St Thomas Tāmaki more than decorative

elements; they are sacred storytellers, sharing the unique and enduring journey of faith in Auckland. As worshippers gather within the luminous embrace of these windows, they are not only bathed in the glow of coloured light but are also enveloped in the timeless narrative of St Thomas Tāmaki’s spiritual legacy.

**Book Review – Noel Cox, *The Coronation and the Constitution in the British Tradition* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2025) ISBN 978-3-031-88959-2**

The Most Reverend Archbishop Sir David Moxon

One of the most poignant, paradoxically private yet globally public moments in the coronation of King Charles III, was the anointing of the King with holy oil. The new king was stripped of most of his robes, and his heart as it were was



consecrated. Millions around the world watched on television. There was a fascination with the choreography, the symbols, the ancient words and the people involved. It was as if many groups and cultures were sensing that something seminal, something crucial to one tap root of the

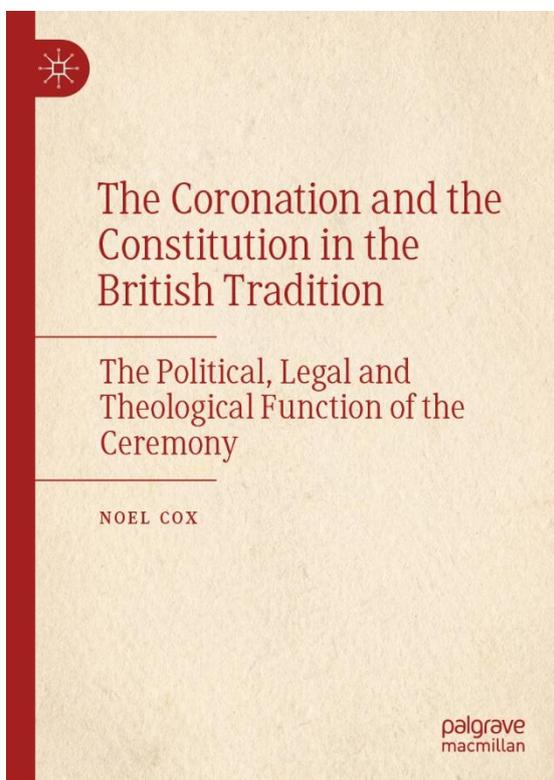
human story was being displayed. It was re-presenting ancient and modern terms of service, duty, the common good, and an intuitive focus for unity in a vastly increasing social diversity.

In this fascinating and unique book, Noel Cox argues in a meticulous and widely researched approach, that monarchy as a constitutional reality still has a vital role. Crucially, this role is described as primarily spiritual: involving and symbolizing spiritual values, embodying the sacred against private gain, and acting as a focal point in a centrifugal society around which many may gather.

In ‘The Coronation and the Constitution’, Archbishop Rowan Williams is quoted

as saying “It is there so that we can gather around something other than our preferences and anxieties and prejudices; around a gift of “kinship” in which we can stand together before God.” The word King partly derives from the word for ‘kin’. In this way, Noel argues, a society is held together by its internal agreement about the sacredness of certain fundamental moral standards. Even if these standards are deeply located or un-noticed at times within the ancient humus around the tap roots of our heritage and many storied history, they provide a moral nutrient that can be life giving. This has to include the legitimacy of government, through the secular and religious aspects of recognition or acclamation, coronation oath, anointing, investiture with regalia,

crowning, enthroning, and homage.





A coronation and constitution tradition is described as a possible avenue of communication with the realm of sacred values. “Within its society, popular constitutional monarchy can enjoy almost universal recognition in this capacity”. This tradition is therefore enabled to heighten the moral and civic sensibility of the society and

to infuse society with role models of self-giving and reaching out, in the name of our democratic citizenship and mutuality in a constitutional monarchy. Interestingly the sacred heart of this experience contrasts strongly with the imposition of empire and colonisation.

Even though they are intermittent, this timely book reminds us that the coronation rituals of the original Anglo Celtic tradition, as they have morphed and evolved over time, can still move and inspire society and many communities of interest. This book describes a heritage that offers a once and future vision of what upholds the common good and our highest responsibilities within hearth and home, parliament and state. Some prefer a republic in this day and age, but this book outlines the seminal and unique role that a coronation can still play, potentially, as a great act of national communion for many across the board.



[the book is due to be published 8 July 2025]

Above – King Edgar, crowned in 973 in Bath, in the earliest English coronation for which detailed accounts are preserved



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