

**Removing the Shackles:
Wilberforce, Civic Leadership and Faith-Centered Social Reform**
by

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I appreciate the invitation to speak to you today about the great work that Anglicare does for those in need in Australia.

But first, I have to make a confession. It is true my wife and I are regulars at the Sydney's St. Andrew's Cathedral. But **I have to confess we are not Anglicans** – so I appreciate the ecumenism of Anglicare.

In the US, where I come from, your **religious affiliation often reflects certain social realities**.

- You are born a Baptist.
- As your fortunes improve, you become a Methodist.

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² The views expressed herein are the personal views of the author and are not intended to – nor do they necessarily – represent the views of Telstra in any way, shape or form.

- When you get a job in the big end of town, you sign up with the Presbyterians.
- And when you arrive, you become an Episcopalian.

My confession is this: We are Presbyterians. We haven't arrived.

Actually, I was baptized as a Methodist, so I had a bit of a head start.

Before I graduated from high school, we had moved up to the Presbyterians. I've been stuck there ever since.

My wife, Mary Sue, is also a Presbyterian – though she was christened a Catholic....well, we can talk about that later.

But we do feel an enormous attraction to Sydney's St. Andrew's Cathedral:

- to that **magnificent house of worship** on the corner of Bathurst and George – that is also a community centre...and a nursery...and a school...and a place of fellowship...and all the other functions performed by the modern church;
- to the Cathedral's **Anglican fellowship that has welcomed the participation of two in-transit Americans** in Sunday services, Bible studies and all aspects of the church community, and
- to the Dean of the Cathedral, **Phillip Jensen**, and his always-insightful sermons and inspiring and thought-provoking books and pamphlets – all communicated in kitchen-table English...and to the Archbishop, **Peter Jensen**, who keeps brother Phillip on the straight and narrow.

Most of all we like being Anglicans in Australia because we can practice being Episcopalians in America – for that day when, the Lord willing, we arrive...and move up from being plain old Presbyterians.

Enough of that...let's get to the topic of today.

I've been very impressed as I have come to learn more about the work of Anglicare, the urban mission and welfare arm of the Sydney Anglican Diocese.

The numbers are impressive – including how Anglicare reaches out to more than 400,000 people every year, people struggling with poverty, family dysfunctions, disability, illness, and despair.

I've been equally impressed by **personal testimonies** I've heard in recent weeks. When several of my colleagues learned I was speaking to you today, they shared moving stories of how Anglicare had touched them, helping them get through crises in their own personal lives.

I like that Anglicare is a results-oriented non-profit, reaching out to real people with real solutions to real needs – with services like:

- emergency relief for families in crisis
- foster care and adoption for abused children and those with special needs
- counselling and support for children and youth with disabilities
- migrant services
- elderly care through both nursing homes and community services
- opportunity shops providing low-cost clothing
- emergency services in times of disaster

I like this because it brings to life the Judeo-Christian **commitment to the “Six Mercies”**:

- feeding the hungry,
- clothing the naked,
- giving drink to the thirsty,
- comforting the sick,
- housing the homeless, and
- ransoming (or visiting) those in jail.

I like what you do because what you do **represents the essence of compassion** – which is primarily about actions, not primarily about feelings. Compassion is about **action verbs**:

- **doing** things for people that they can't do for themselves,
- **helping** people where assistance is needed to live a full or better life,
- **sharing** in their suffering.

In his widely acclaimed book, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (1992), Marvin Olasky reminded us that **“compassion” is not about the emotion of “caring,” “sensitivity,” “sympathy,” or other such “feeling” words now typically used as synonyms.**

Compassion is not just about giving money. Giving money is important, and that is called **charity**. Charity is a key element that enables groups like Anglicare to practice the six mercies on our behalf.

Compassion is certainly not about button-holing political authorities to spend more money or to legislate new programs. That’s called **lobbying** and it has an important place in democratic governance – but it is not compassion.

Compassion is, as the 1834 edition of Webster’s dictionary said, **“suffering with another.”**

So, compassion is about “doing.” Olasky reminds us that compassion, at its root, is about **“personal involvement with the needy, suffering with them, not just giving to them.”**

Compassion is about one person **personally involved** in helping to meet the needs of another person...dramatically personified by foster parents.

To paraphrase the Apostle James, “Caring without deeds is not caring at all.”

Deeds are important. As the sociologist Rodney Stark documents and argues so persuasively in his important book, *The Rise of Christianity*, **it was the deeds of the early Christians** – assisting the sick during several First Century plagues and other acts of love and caring – **that accounts for the rapid rise of a tiny and obscure messianic movement** on the edge of the Roman Empire and how that movement dislodged classical paganism and became the dominant faith of Western civilization.³

Put another way, **deeds trumped doctrine** to account for the rapid spread of the Christian faith.

³ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal, Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force*, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997. Christianity also had lower what we would call today “barriers to entry” than did Judaism (e.g., requiring adult circumcision) and competing pagan religions.

I also like the methods and strategies used by Anglicare to go about changing lives and communities – not just by good works but also through community partnerships that include churches, business enterprises, non-profits and other institutions in the wider community.

Strong democracies require a strong civic order, and from all accounts Anglicare plays an important role in knitting together the fabric of the civic order in this community.⁴

That’s what I would like to focus on today – building what I call **civic leadership networks, like Anglicare, to change lives and communities.**

Let me talk about this in cultural terms. Though both the US and Australia are societies characterized by great ethnic diversity – a diversity that is an important part of our strength and our capacity for renewal.

Still, both societies have deep roots in the Anglo-Saxon tribe which includes a Judeo Christian worldview.⁵

That means we have a lot in common – including a **common heritage**. When you have a common heritage, you also have **common heroes**.

- From Winston Churchill to the Beatles
- From Abraham Lincoln to Bono and U2
- And what about Banjo Patterson or Steve Irwin...or Rolf Harris

These are all names that are well known in the cultures of the US and Australia – and, of course, in the UK.

⁴ The importance of a strong civic order (as opposed to the “public order”, dominated by government) is expressed throughout the work of Harold Lasswell, one of the great social scientists of the 20th Century, and in the writing of Alexis de Tocqueville, one of the great social observers of the 19th Century, especially his *Democracy in America*, first published in 1835.

⁵ On the concept of worldview, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 2002. See also Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1992. For a secular view see the concept of “paradigm shifts” in Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3rd edition, 1996. For a secular application of the worldview concept, see the recent work of *Megatrends* author and futurist John Naisbitt, *Mindset*, New York: Collins, 2006.

I might have mentioned the late **Sir Donald Bradman**, the great Cricketer, but I have been here 23 months and still can't get the hang of Cricket – so I'm not going there.

But I came here today **to talk about another common hero**. He may be less well known than **Churchill** or **Lincoln** or even Don **Bradman**. But he is no less important – and this year of 2007 is the 200th anniversary of one of **humankind's greatest achievements**, where he was a key leader.

I am talking about abolitionist Parliamentarian **William Wilberforce**

- **born** in 1759,
- **entered Parliament** in 1787 at age 28, and
- laboured for 20 years to **end British involvement in the slave trade** that was “legal, lucrative and brutal”⁶ until it was abolished in 1807; and another 26 years to **abolish slavery in the colonies**, achieved in 1833.

Wilberforce was a man small in stature but huge in his impact – described by a contemporary as a shrimp of a man who became a whale when he opened his mouth.⁷ Wilberforce was the **guiding spirit behind a group called the Clapham Circle**, one of the most influential political and social reform networks of his time...actually of any time in modern history, since the advent of modern democracies.⁸

The Wilberforce network was named after the **town of Clapham** in Greater London. **Wilberforce** often used Clapham as a gathering place for dinners and discussions among distinguished friends and influential allies.

In a way, **Wilberforce was an early practitioner of the marketing concept of “touch points”** – finding as many opportunities as you can to

⁶ According to Probe writer the 18th Century British slave trade “was legal, lucrative, and brutal.” Altering that reality was a life-cause for Wilberforce and his abolitionist brethren. Rusty Wright, “Amazing Grace Movie: Lessons for Today's Politicians,” *Probe*, 2007.

⁷ James Boswell, Dr Johnson's biographer, once said of the short (5' 4") and sickly Wilberforce, “I saw what seemed a mere shrimp mount upon the table; but as I listened, he grew, and grew, until the shrimp became a whale.”

⁸ For details on Wilberforce and the Clapham Society, see John Pollock, *Wilberforce: God's Statesman*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001.

make **personal and emotional contact with your customers**, or in the case of Wilberforce, to engage with members and potential members of the coalition you are building to change the political culture of Great Britain.⁹

The Clapham Circle grew to include many people over time. Still, there was a hard core of friends who drove change – not just in the cause of abolition but other social reforms as well. And the friends came from all walks of life and **represented all political persuasions** – from what today we would call the socialist left to the conservative right.

The core members of the Clapham Circle included:

- **Josiah Wedgwood** – of Wedgwood pottery fame – and the creator of the famous plate showing a slave in chains with the plaintive but disarming inscription, “Am I not a man and a brother?”
- **John Newton** – a former slave trader and author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*.
- **Thomas Clarkson** – perhaps the greatest and the most overlooked of all the abolitionist activists, whom the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge called “a moral steam engine” and “a giant with one idea”. Clarkson was a man of colossal achievements who had a genius for organization, imaginative publicity, along with innovative methods and techniques for investigating social phenomena – methods that now go under the heading of “policy analysis”.¹⁰ Clarkson is the man who had the greatest influence on Wilberforce – encouraging Wilberforce to take up the abolitionist issue, providing facts and data and eyewitness stories that gave substance and urgency to Wilberforce’s speeches.¹¹ His close friendship with Wilberforce lasted over 50 years.

⁹ In the marketing literature, touch points are “moments of engagement” between people and brands, and the ideas, emotions, and memories that these moments create. Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson were both acutely sensitive to the power of ideas and emotions as well as facts and data to motivate people to action and drive change. On these points see Steve Diller, Nathan Shedroff, and Darrel Rhea, *Making Meaning: How Successful Businesses Deliver Meaningful Customer Experiences*. Dublin: New Riders Press, 2005; or V. A. Zeithaml, A. Parasuraman and L. L. Berry, “Delivering Service Quality: Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations”, New York: The Free Press, 1990.

¹⁰ It is not a reach to suggest that Thomas Clarkson is the inventor of modern policy analysis – or the systematic study of the causes and consequences of social, political and economic trends.

¹¹ On these points, see Isabel Wolff, “How did the real hero of the anti-slavery movement get airbrushed out of history?”, *The Daily Mail*, March 22, 2007.

- **Henry Thornton** – a banker and financial genius who gave generously to support the work of the Clapham Circle.
- **Zachary Macaulay** – philanthropist and estate manager in the West Indies who was disgusted by Jamaican slavery and whose financial support was also key to the work of the Clapham Circle,

The work of the **Claphamites inspired a broad agenda of political and social reforms** in late 18th and early 19th century England – including:

- a ban on bull fighting and bear baiting,
- suspension of the lottery,
- prison reform,
- improved working conditions in factories,
- banking reform,
- setting higher standards of morality for public officials and politics.

The Claphamites passed more than 70 reforms over a half century, setting the stage for the **Victorian Age** and for the many political and social reforms that marked that period of history – not only in the UK but also in America and later in Australia.

Wilberforce and the Claphamites are also important for another reason: Guided by Scripture and a faith-centered approach to life, they were the **first modern social reformers to use facts and data** to support their political and social reform arguments. They pioneered what today goes under the heading of “**policy analysis.**” Examples:

- **public opinion polls**– used to assess changing “sentiments” of the people about the slave trade and slavery in the colonies.
- **systematic surveys and interviews** of eyewitnesses – e.g., seamen and ships’ surgeons – about the squalid conditions surrounding the transport of slaves;
- **testimonials** – e.g., of seamen who had witnessed the squalor and brutality on board the slave ships or testimony of slaves who had been beaten.
- **“before” and “after” studies** used to make a case – e.g., by have people to count the slaves boarding a ship and others to count those disembarking, Claphamites were able to establish how many slaves died in transit from Africa to the West Indies in the Caribbean. By

- also counting the number of British seamen who died, they showed that the slave trade was not just immoral, it was also uneconomic.
- **books and pamphleteering** – including books by Wilberforce and Clarkson that became national best sellers.¹²

"**Measures, not men,**" was a favourite saying of Wilberforce. By using that phrase, he called for the **use of facts and data** – not personalities or ideology – to identify **problems**, advance **collaboration**, and facilitate **conflict resolution** among people and groups.¹³

The Clapham Circle also pioneered what are today commonly-used **approaches to “movement politics”** or **“issue campaigns”** by political parties or special interest groups. These include:

- **the petition** – to exert pressure on Parliament. At one point Clarkson produced a petition from Manchester with more than a 11,000 names – more than a fifth of the city’s population at the time.
- **the boycott** – for example, a pamphlet by William Fox advocating a boycott of West Indian sugar that had been grown on plantations using slave labour.
- **campaign buttons** – e.g., with the inscription “Am I not a man and a brother?” on the pin.
- **campaign posters** – e.g., a diagram of a slave ship (the *Brookes*) showing the gruesome and revolting reality of 482 shackled slaves packed like sardines into the hold of the ship. Known as *The Print*, “the diagram was one of the most effective pieces of propaganda ever produced and came to hang in many homes.”¹⁴
- **arm bands** – including bracelets and pendants worn especially by women, who did not have the right to vote, so they could show their solidarity with the cause.

¹² When Wilberforce wrote *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System. . . Contrasted to Real Christianity*, the publisher issued only 500 copies, supposing it would never sell. But by 1826 it had gone through 15 editions in England and 25 in America. See Ken Curtis, *Glimpses #87*, Christian History Institute, 2007.

¹³ This approach to political, social, and economic reform has continued to the present day. Today, we have schools of public policy, schools of social work, business schools, and law schools and approaches such as “the Brandeis brief” that use social data – and many other institutions that teach young people skills and approaches of modern policy analysis and how it can be used in advancing the process of reform in democratic societies or to meet objectives in business.

¹⁴ Wolff, op. cit.

- “**photo opps**” or dramatic “show and tell” examples of the brutality of the slave trade by collecting manacles, leg-irons, whips, thumbscrews, and the like.

The Clapham Circle also pioneered the use of **voluntary societies** and **organized advocacy groups** to advocate causes – such as:

- (the first) *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*
- *Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery* (later called the *Anti-Slavery Society*),
- *The Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor*
- *The Society for the Reformation of Prison Discipline*
- And many missionary organizations such as *The Church Missionary Society* and the *Society for Missions to Africa and the East*.

So what are the **lessons** from this remarkable group of **faith-centered social reformers**. I have been an amateur student of the Clapham Circle for many years now, and I think the lessons are huge.

First, effective **social reform is often backed by a movement, and movements are driven by leaders with ideas**.¹⁵ It’s another example of the old notion that “ideas have consequences”.¹⁶ In the case of the Clapham Circle, the organizing idea was that part of the **Judeo-Christian worldview** that calls us to love our neighbour and make the world a better place.¹⁷

¹⁵ For an example of my early interest in the elements of social movements, see Philip M. Burgess and C. Richard Hofstetter, “The ‘Student Movement’: Ideology and Reality.” *Midwest Journal of Political Science* XV:687-702, November 1971.

¹⁶ For the classic on the importance of ideas and standards of truth in political and social affairs, see Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984 (1st edition, 1948).

¹⁷ According to the basic Christian worldview – where the code is creation (what life ought to be), fall (what life is), redemption (what life can be), and restoration (what life will be) – social reform within a conservative (or “Christian realist”) perspective is guided by the “oughts” that come from creation and the “can be” which represents the possibilities for amelioration tempered by the reality of the fall. Utopian reform ideas – whatever the political perspective – are not tempered by the reality of the fall and hence seek “heaven on earth”. The idea of social reform also has roots in the Social Gospel movement, a more left-leaning perspective among Protestant intellectuals in the 19th and 20th centuries. Theologically, the Social Gospel approach takes a post-millennialist point of view, which holds that the Second Coming cannot happen until humankind takes action to get rid of poverty, crime, slums, inequality and other social ills – in contrast to a pre-millennialist theology popular among fundamentalists (e.g., in the southern states of the US), which holds that the Second Coming is imminent, and Christians should devote their energies to preparing for it (i.e., their personal salvation) rather than addressing social ills and worldly issues. Many of those advocating a Social Gospel approach are left-leaning, even socialist, in their perspective and include

Second, effective **social reform** is not just about the cold pricklies of facts and data. It is also about the warm fuzzies of **social engagement** – finding ways to truly **connect with people** and to help them understand and bring them along.¹⁸

Third, there are lessons related to what I would call the **organizational requirements of social reform**.¹⁹ You need to have organization to make things work. And from the experience of the Clapham Circle, I draw four **requirements of an effective civic leadership network**. These include:

- **Networks** or forums for direction – and priority-setting associations that are inclusive and diverse, reflecting important and influential segments of the community;

people like Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson in the US and the World Council of Churches internationally. Perhaps the most well-known Social Gospel manifestation was the “What Would Jesus Do” (WWJD) movement spawned by Charles Sheldon’s widely-read book *In His Steps* – originally published in 1887 and is still being sold today. The WWJD movement experienced a rebirth in the 1990s in the US and elsewhere in the world and so did the book. At least this is the way I understand these various theological, political and ideological currents that define the different approaches taken by modern Christians to the question of social engagement and social reform.

¹⁸ For an inspiring account of how Christians can be movers and shakers of social and cultural change, see Bob Briner, *Roaring Lambs: A Gentle Plan to Radically Change Your World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993. For a review of the responsibilities of a Christian, see Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*. Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1981. For a sobering account of how Christians can easily go off the rails, see Bob Briner, *Deadly Detours: Seven Noble Causes That Keep Christians from Changing the World*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

¹⁹ Ken Curtis, op. cit. of The Christian History Institute identified important leadership lessons from the experience of the Clapham Circle. These include (edited for clarity and consistency):

1. Set clear and specific goals
2. Focus on issues. Do not allow opponents' vicious or personal attacks to distract from the mission or provoke a similar response.
3. Transcend a single issue mentality by addressing issues in the context of the moral climate of the larger political culture.
4. Build a committed support community. Battles cannot be carried on alone.
5. Commit to the struggle for the long haul, even if it takes decades.
6. Refuse to accept setbacks as final defeats
7. Accept incremental gains when they are available.
8. Empathize with opponents' position so that meaningful dialogue can take place.
9. Work through recognized channels without resort to dirty tricks or violence.
10. Cultivate grassroots support when rebuffed by those in power.
11. Use research to produce reliable and compelling evidence
12. Proceed with a sense of mission. For the Claphamites that also included a conviction that God would providentially guide them if they were truly acting in his service.

- **Analytical skill** – e.g., policy analysis or an action-research capacity for problem identification and analysis;
- **Advocates** – i.e., campaigners, activists, elected leaders or other people who can make things happen, get things done, deliver;
- **Money** – i.e., a capital support base that is stable, dependable, and diverse.²⁰

Fourth, there are lessons about how we think about the **communal and stewardship aspects of a Judeo-Christian worldview**. The work of the Clapham Circle over nearly 50 years is a stark reminder that God’s Word is not just about personal salvation and spiritual growth. Our faith calls us to pay attention to *all* of God’s Creation...that’s why we pray, “thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, in Earth as it is in Heaven...”

In the words of Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch reformed pastor who was also a theologian, scholar, journalist, educator and, for a time, prime minister of the Netherlands, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which the Lord...does not cry: 'Mine!'"²¹

Today, unfortunately, we have a tendency to *privatize* our faith and *compartmentalize* our view of the world.²² Too often, we condemn and withdraw from the culture – including the arts and entertainment, which, in earlier times, were powerful conveyers of the faith.²³

²⁰ I have been long interested in the concept of the “civic leadership network” and how it can be used to strengthen civil society. For an earlier version that I called the “civic leadership coalition”, see Philip M. Burgess and Delore Zimmerman, *High-Performance Communities: New Economy Ideas into Action*, Denver: Center for the New West, 1992, 2004, pp. 33 ff.

²¹ Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in James D. Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1944, p. 488.

²² See, for example, Kuyper in Bratt, *Ibid.* C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 1996 (1944); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995; John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1975; Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

²³ See, for example, Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1976 (1983), especially Chapter 10. When the going gets tough, we too often retreat to Christian bomb shelters, disengaging from the world, comfortable only with people like ourselves²³ and indifferent to Paul’s practice of “[making] myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible” (1 Cor. 9:19)

Too often we abandon the public square and retire from what US Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes called “**the action and passions**” of our time.²⁴

Or we treat religion as a **ritualistic activity** that doesn’t much matter to everyday life – except perhaps in times of joy (like marriages), ritual celebration (Christmas, Easter), tragedy, suffering or death.²⁵

When we *privatize our faith* by focusing primarily on our personal salvation while ignoring communal issues and obligations of stewardship – and when we *compartmentalize the world* into separate domains of faith, work, parenting, recreation, and commerce, to name a few (which we then try to “balance” – as in “I lead a “balanced life””), **we say, in essence, that there are parts of ourselves and parts of our life – indeed, parts of Creation – that God doesn’t care about.**

From Scripture to Kuyper and from C.S. Lewis to Francis Schaeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr we know this is not true.

That’s why **Anglicare** presents an important opportunity for each of us to practice **a holistic approach to our life and our work.**

That’s why **Anglicare** presents an important opportunity to **connect Sunday to Monday** with a new commitment to use our gifts to help others, in the Christian spirit of loving your neighbour that brought so many to our faith in the early years of the 1st century.

We can never restore the purity of the human condition before the Fall, but **we can make improvements at the margins and progress in the aggregate.** And we are called to do so.

And that is the mission of Anglicare, a mission of personal engagement in the suffering of others that its staff and volunteers perform each and everyday to the benefit of our entire society.

So, in closing, **I urge you to give generously of your assets –**

²⁴ Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Mind And Faith Of Justice Holmes; His Speeches, Essays, Letters, And Judicial Opinions*. New York: Little, Brown, 1943.

²⁵ On this point, see Mike Metzger, “The Fine Print,” in *Current Observations*, a commentary published by The Clapham Institute, March 30, 2004.

- your time,
- your money,
- your contacts, and
- your knowledge.

By giving of these assets, we can, each in our own way, **help Anglicare share in the suffering of others** that they might be made whole again...and through the compassion we show them that we might also benefit, all of us.

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