



ANGLICANS TOGETHER

NEWSLETTER No. 31 November 2006

ANGLICANS TOGETHER ONLINE: <www.anglicanstogether.org>

Chair's Column

James' Jottings

Dear friends,

May you know the peace and joy of Christmas more deeply this year than ever before!

Christmas is at best an ambiguous season in a secular society. It seems to be reverting to its pagan roots by celebrating the end of the working year and the start of the summer holidays, instead of the winter solstice - with only a cursory nod towards anything Christian. As the lead-up to Christmas, Advent therefore opens many useful doors to Christian conversation!

After all, many Australians believe they know what Christianity is about because they have seen the displays in the shopping malls. The Jesus of those displays is the passive infant, who receives our adoration but makes no demands. You can pause; feel good; then move on with real life.

I suspect there are also many who believe that eternal salvation is, like Medicare, an automatic benefit of Australian citizenship.

Some questions to raise: who is this God who comes among us as Immanuel? On what terms, and to what purpose? How come this passive infant grew up to become such a troublemaker that the Romans executed him? If God can come among us as meekly as an infant born in poverty and squalor, and as strongly as one who made powerful enemies because of his teaching and his miracles, what areas of life can ever be secure from God's intervention? How can we know for certain when God is at work even though the circumstances suggest otherwise? After all, many who opposed Christianity in its early years did so out of loyalty to God - just ask Saul of Tarsus!

Most importantly, what response does this "Son of God" expect from us?

I recall the words of the introduction to the traditional *Nine Lessons and Carols Service at King's College, Cambridge*, as a bidding to prayer, and slightly updated for today:

Because this of all things would rejoice his heart, let us at this time remember in his name the poor and helpless, the cold, the hungry, the oppressed, and the dispossessed; the sick and those who mourn; the lonely and the unloved; the homeless and the unemployed; those who live under the awful shadows of violence, drug abuse, and sexual exploitation;

These are familiar and much-loved words. For some years now, with the logic of those words in mind, **I have been encouraging my family to indulge me in a counter-cultural Christmas observance.** Instead of trawling the malls in search of a suitable gift for me, I ask them to make a donation on my behalf - through one of the international aid agency gift catalogues. In turn, they know they will get nothing from me for Christmas, by way of purchased gifts; instead, someone will get an orange tree or some chickens or a goat ...

Many of you will have heard on the grapevine that I have been diagnosed with prostate cancer, and therefore currently "star" in a number of parish intercessions. Marcia and I are grateful for - and very encouraged by - the many prayers and expressions of support/love from St Mark's Granville and many individuals. I have just successfully completed "round one" of my two-stage treatment, to be followed by the implantation of radioactive [Iodine 125] "seeds" just before Christmas. My joke is that I will glow in the dark. I understand from my urologist that my prospects for a complete cure are excellent.

Two resources I have found spiritually helpful, that I encourage you with. First, a book by **Herbert**

Anderson called ‘*Jacob’s Shadow. Christian Perspectives on Masculinity.*’ (2002). He describes his own response to being diagnosed and treated for prostate cancer, although the book itself goes way beyond any self-indulgent telling of his prostate cancer experience. I commend it warmly! Especially (but not exclusively) to the men.

Second, I was telling a friend recently that God has four ways of answering prayer: Yes, No, Wait, and Do It Yourself. He responded, “**No, God has only one answer: ‘I love you, and whatever the outcome, I’ll not abandon you’**”. I found that insight very helpful indeed, and I encourage you to remember that in all your praying.

James
Pilgrim with you

SYDNEY SYNOD 2006

A Synod Representative’s Review

If you are expecting an uncritical report.

Read elsewhere.

One - the Agenda.

In the last few years the time for debate has diminished.

The first Monday is taken up with ‘formal matters’, the Presidential address, Mission presentation celebrating the 150th anniversaries of *Anglicare* and *Moore College* and then the *Synod Service* – no not in the cathedral but in the comfort of the Wesley auditorium.

The following Monday night was taken up with ‘*Missionary Hour*’ (in fact missionary hour and a half) and a report by the Archbishop on the Anglican Communion worldwide – more of that below. The final Tuesday night was taken up substantially by a report from the Mission Board.

Does it matter? Yes it does.

Too frequently, inadequate debate is permitted for important issues. As a result many key points do not get made. We can also run out of time. On the last Tuesday there was no time to debate some amendments to the code for personal behaviour and practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and church workers – *Faithfulness in Service* – did not get reached. This is an issue, which should have been prioritised.

‘*News items*’ have increased in number, length and sophistication of presentation

Two - the quality of some of the debate.

Not surprisingly, the motion to approve the *Law of the Church of England Clarification Canon 1992* was defeated. The *Rev’d Chris Albany* and *Caroline Bowyer* presented their case in a calm, restrained manner, which fortunately set the tone for the whole debate. They, and *Canon James McPherson* covered a breadth of issues. Unfortunately, the speakers against stuck to their narrow points. ‘*We have had this debate before and made our decision and the Bible*’ is very clear. I wonder how they can reconcile the *King James Version of 1 Timothy 3:12* which required ‘*deacons to be the husbands of one wife*’ with the current translations which enable women to be appointed deacons. Unfortunately, I did not receive the call.

What else happened?

Synod:

- Defeated my motion to bring decisions on Affiliated Churches back to Synod
- Withdrew the Capital Projects Funds Ordinance
- Announced the Diocesan Policy on Education, calling for comments by 31 March 2007 - **if you are at all involved in education at any level, suggest you read the papers in the Report and Supplementary Report of Standing Committee to be found on the Sydney Anglican website**
- Compensation for injured clergy
- Passed a motion for everyone to pray for the end of the drought.

What could happen?

A lot more if those who are concerned with some of the directions our Diocese is travelling ensured that their parish representatives became involved and attended!

Standout?

Justice Michael Adams speech in opposition to the motion commending the Primates of the Global South for their stand in upholding biblical truth. Part of this speech was quoted on *ABC AM on 24 October*. Whatever your views on this subject, this was a compelling speech condemning the excesses of language of some of those in support.

Susan Hooke, St Peter’s Church, Cremorne

Reflections on a Visit to 'The Holy Land'

As the time of the trip drew closer, I had little idea what to expect. I somehow thought that I would come away with at least a few clear ideas about the political situation and possible desirable future solutions. I returned feeling that the complexity is such that more than the 'wisdom of Solomon' is needed.

My first rude shock came before I left Sydney, when I told a friend I was going on a trip to Israel and she rather snapped at me "Try 'The Holy Land'!". Oops!

Before the organised Retreat Tour began, I spent a few days with a young cousin who has become an Israeli citizen. She lives in Tel Aviv, commuting Sunday to Friday by bus 50 minutes north, to work with a large firm. With a law background, she is part of a team providing quotes for telecom giants to streamline the computer billing for their systems.

When we went out, she carefully steered us away from restaurants/bars known to be frequented by American tourists and from any large coffee shops that had an armed guard on duty at the entrance. She was always alert and sensibly proactive about her safety.

She confirmed that only a very small proportion of the population are "religious" Jews, actively practising the Jewish faith. **Most see themselves rather as nationally Israeli and ethnically/culturally Jewish, celebrating the holidays and following traditions such as food customs.** (I guess much like Australians who do not consider themselves Christians, but have a special Christmas dinner and exchange gifts with family and friends.) Most of the small number of "religious" Jews seem to be the orthodox, recognisable by their garb, barely changed from what their ancestors wore in a village in Russia, Poland or wherever in a totally different age, society and climate.

We picked up that many resented the 'orthodox' who do not go out to paid work and therefore draw on the taxes of others, rather than contribute economically to the society. Their very large families (13 or 15 children) and their days spent studying the Torah, are perceived as inappropriate to a modern state striving to thrive economically. There was a strong feeling evident of so many people having been drawn "home" from all over the world to the land/soil of Israel and a sense of

pride in what that emergent nation has achieved; its industry, agricultural production, the arts, infrastructure and services as well as its rising position in the world of technology. Perhaps it is this sense that invokes some quiet resentment towards migrants from the former USSR states (numbering about 20% of the population). They have come without that shared sense of being drawn "home" and are seen to be benefiting from the provision that gives citizenship on application to anyone who can prove one Jewish grandparent. The economic benefits and higher standards of living are attractive to this group, perceived often to be clannish and reluctant to learn Hebrew.

It is amazing but true that we can live almost in isolation in the midst of groups we would classify as "other".

In May 2004, a young Israeli woman chose to live at International House while pursuing her studies at the University of Sydney. She commented that this experience gave her the first real opportunity to encounter other cultures. "I come from a place that is embroiled in a very difficult conflict and ...the two sides do not communicate properly...throughout my life, I have hardly ever had any serious conversation with Muslims." She rejoiced in "the chance to share a way of living and to make friends with people ... allowed me to see other sides of Islam and of the Arab nation; it gave me a greater hope for Peace."

Sadly, this spirit of understanding and goodwill is not readily evident as the Middle East conflict escalates and as those in the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority suffer increasingly.

Our Ascension Day service at an outdoor chapel on Mt Karmel, virtually within view of the northern Israeli border with Lebanon, was interrupted by the shrieking overhead of Israeli military jets flying south, an ominous sound at the time and truly an omen of things to come.

What of the Christians in The Holy Land?

Our trip had included visits to *Nazareth* and *Bethlehem*, both of which were once virtually 'Christian' towns. When our Retreat Tour came to an end, three of us, with our leader, were invited to revisit Bethlehem - a 20 minute trip on a little local bus from Jerusalem, to have lunch with a family who are old friends of hers. **The bus dropped us off at the ugly cement walls, erected by the Israelis, that barricade off the area controlled by the Palestinian Authority. We made our way on**

foot through gates and checkpoints, past young armed men and women in military uniform, to be met by Angela. She drove us to the family home, a freestanding house and a flat where several branches of the family live together but independently. I am humbled to reflect on their hospitality to us (three of us strangers, but welcomed as friends and fellow Christians), with generous helpings of carefully prepared traditional dishes, when visitors to Bethlehem speak of seeing skinny, undernourished children in the streets.

Lunch was in the dining room, where once the family had been holed up under long siege, huddled for weeks under the table, with mattresses around the inside of the walls for protection from bombardment. We saw bullet holes in the outer walls of the house from when it had been under attack.

Then we were taken to see the olive wood and mother of pearl factory that the family has been operating since 1925. To our delight, nephew Elias made a sheep for a nativity scene for us out of olive wood so that we could see the techniques of carving and turning the wood.

An outer staircase leads to the roof of the factory and gives an excellent view of the rear and side of the Church of the Nativity. When it was occupied by militant Muslims several years ago, Israeli soldiers ejected the family from their factory and took it over as their headquarters. The weather was cold and instead of finding firewood, the young soldiers simply used all the stock of wooden Christian artefacts in the storeroom and burnt the lot.

Business and life in general have become very difficult for families such as the Giacamans. There are impositions and taxes that nearly drive the businesses into bankruptcy; there are restrictions on the movement of tourists that have decimated their trade.

If there is trouble afoot, they lock up the doors of the shop on Manger Square (as warned by Muslim activists) only to have the doors smashed and jemmied open by Israeli soldiers who insist they open the business. Several of their olive tree fields, in the family for generations, have been confiscated.

The sense of community and support has suffered badly since the Christian population of Bethlehem has dropped from 95% to 5% in recent times.

Celina, the two year old great niece of the family, has been granted permission to be treated for her

leukemia in a Jewish hospital in Jerusalem. Such permissions can take so long to obtain, that babies, the frail or desperately ill can die while waiting for them. *Celina's* grandfather queued for a whole day for the permit he needs to be allowed to leave Bethlehem to travel the 20 minutes to see her; the permit was not for the duration of the treatment, but only for the remaining four days of that week. The next week, he will have to devote another frustrating, humiliating day to queuing again...

Perhaps as we remember the Middle Eastern situation in our prayers, some of the above may give it a human face - several human faces. Perhaps we can pray for a spirit of tolerance, understanding and communication in the situation in 'The Holy Land'.

You might like to visit the *Giacaman's* website to learn more of their life and business in Bethlehem. Its address: www.holylandartsmuseum.com. This devout family would be uplifted by a brief email of encouragement to *Angela* (hlamgia@p-ol.com) assuring them of the concern and prayers of fellow Christians.

Ruth Shatford
Parishioner, St Alban's Epping

ANGLICANS TOGETHER INC. !

Breaking news. We have just received confirmation that Anglicans Together Inc has been registered as an unincorporated association.

The existing committee of the old unincorporated association remains in office until the first Annual General Meeting. You will be informed in the New Year of the date of that AGM.

During 2006, the Newsletter continued to be published, we held a very successful book launch for *Kevin Giles' book, Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Trinity* and an equally successful dinner meeting addressed by the *Rev'd Canon Dr Jane Shaw*. The rest of our time and energy has been taken up with planning and preparing for incorporation.

We now hope to move forward and plan an interesting and inclusive program for all our members, picking up on some of the issues discussed at the August meeting. More next issue!

James McPherson and Sue Hooke

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Opinions expressed are those of the contributors.

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Vengeance – Jesus Style

This is an edited version (by the preacher) of a sermon delivered at *St Mark's South Hurstville* on Advent 3 2005. It was based on the Old Testament reading - **Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11.*

So often in our increasingly violent world, the violence of God traditions in our sacred writings are used consciously or unconsciously to justify our human violence. **We need to be prepared to wrestle with and challenge such traditions in order to truly discover the God in whom there is no violence at all; Who in Jesus calls us to live out our vocation, as children of God, to be makers of peace.**

Later today, if common sense doesn't prevail, there will be confrontation down at Cronulla. Partly in response to violence there last week. It is payback time – retaliation for an attack on one of the lifesavers. Time for retaliation, revenge which is likely to lead to yet more violence in retaliation. Such is the nature of vengeance. Such an ugly word that - **Vengeance**. With all sorts of dark connotations has it not?

Did you note the discordant note in today's OT reading. It is all about good news for the poor, *Isaiah* says he is sent to bind up the broken hearted, proclaim freedom for captives, release from darkness for those in prison, to comfort those who mourn etc. Good news indeed as he proclaims the year of the Lord's favour. And then he has to cut across all that with talk of the day of vengeance of our God. Vengeance! What is it you associate with that word? Retaliation, retribution, revenge – and what usually is the result of those who seek and exact vengeance? Violence and yet more violence. And yet the scriptures speak of God's vengeance and it's not just the Old Testament. *Paul* in Romans reminds us that Vengeance belongs to God quoting Deuteronomy 32.

As I thought about this I thought, **it doesn't fit with the whole message of Jesus with the talk of loving ones enemies and turning the other cheek. It's as if God's vengeance (if that is the right word) turns our normal way of thinking about vengeance on its head.** Not that that's unusual, that's typical of Jesus. So I did a bit of research and discovered that **the Hebrew concept of vengeance is all about restoration of wholeness, integrity to the community and individual.** It has elements of pleading some-one's case. Seldom does it carry the sense of vindictiveness or revenge (and never in reference to God). The cries to *Yahweh* for vengeance are cries for redemption,

restoration, health and healing. Seen in this light vengeance as restoration is indeed what *Isaiah* is talking about. **This is God's justice at work and being proclaimed; restorative justice rather than retributive justice.** Something indigenous Australians built into their tribal law with its system of punishment which left the person punished (perhaps wounded by spearing,) **but restored to their place in the community which needed them.** Seen in this light vengeance can become a good and helpful thing. Breaking the cycle of violence and leading to restoration of relationship and rebuilding of community rather than the fragmentation and enduring bitterness and enmity. This requires much love and courage and faith and one is lead to wonder is such love and faith humanly possible? **Well I hope the following story, which comes out of the Truth and Justice commission in South Africa, convinces you that it is – and might give you the courage to seek vengeance of the right kind.**

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

A story from South Africa - Transforming Terror

(from 'Keep the Faith Share the Peace', Mennonite Peace and Justice newsletter and quoted in *Hope Beyond Terror* a resource booklet prepared by NCCA for the Decade to Overcome Violence)

the Hebrew concept of vengeance is all about restoration of wholeness, integrity to the community and individual.

Imagine this scene from a recent courtroom trial in South Africa. A frail black woman stands slowly to her feet. She is something over

70 years of age. Facing her from across the room are several white security police officers, one of whom, *Mr. van der Broek*, has just been tried and found implicated in the murders of both the woman's son and her husband some years before.

It was indeed *Mr. van der Broek*, it has been established, who had come to the woman's home a number of years back, had taken her son, shot him at point-blank range and then burned the young man's body on a fire while he and his officers partied.

Several years later, *van der Broek* and his cohorts had returned to take away her husband as well. For many months she heard nothing of his whereabouts. Then, almost two years after her husband's disappearance, *van der Broek* came back to fetch the woman herself. How vividly she remembers that evening, going to a place beside a river where she was shown her husband, bound

and beaten, but still strong in spirit, lying on a pile of wood. The last words she heard from his lips as the officers poured gasoline over his body and set him aflame were *'Father, forgive them.'*

And now the woman stands in the courtroom and listens to the confession offered by Mr. van der Broek. A member of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission turns to her and asks, 'so, what do you want? How should justice be done to this man who has so brutally destroyed your family?'

'I want three things,' begins the old woman, calmly, but confidently. *'I want first to be taken to the place where my husband's body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial.'*

She pauses, then continues. *'My husband and son were my only family. I want, secondly, therefore, for Mr. van der Broek to become my son. I would like for him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so that I can pour out on him whatever love I still have remaining within me.'*

'And finally,' she says, *'I want a third thing. I would like Mr. van der Broek to know that I offer him my forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive. This was also the wish of my husband. And so, I would kindly ask someone to come to my side and lead me across the courtyard so that I can take Mr. van der Broek in my arms, embrace him and let him know that he is truly forgiven.'*

As the court assistants come to lead the elderly woman across the room, Mr. van der Broek, overwhelmed by what he has just heard, faints. And as he does, those in the courtroom, friends, family, neighbours - all victims of decades of oppression and injustice - begin to sing, softly, but assuredly. *'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.'*

Now that's vengeance – Jesus Style!

Chris Albany,
Rector, St Mark's Anglican Church, South Hurstville

*

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to announce good news to the humble,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to captives, release to those in prison;
to proclaim a year of the Lord's favour
and a day of the vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn,
to give them garlands instead of ashes,
oil of gladness instead of mourners' tears,
a garment of splendour for the heavy heart,
They will be called trees of righteousness,
planted by the Lord for his adornment.
Buildings long in ruins will be rebuilt and sites long
desolate restored;
they will repair the ruined cities
which the generations have lain desolate.*

POSITIVE CHANGE

There was much in *Dr Peter Jensen's* Presidential Address to Synod 16 Oct 2006, which Christians of all shapes and sizes need to heed. His hammering of the need for people and parishes to embrace change, echoed the spiritual truth, *"To live is to change; to be perfect is to have changed often."*

But maybe *Dr Peter* would not want to be too identified with the author of that profound saying, the 19th century Anglican priest, *John Henry Newman*, who became a Roman Catholic and ended up a Cardinal! But like all memorable quotations, it requires to be balanced by other insights. Joseph Conrad said that, *"The things that do not change are an armour to the soul."*

Since 1990 in the Diocese of Sydney there has been an increasing attempt to impose certain ideas and formulae. A key turning point was in 1996 when *Peter Jensen* led the attack by REPA – the Reformed Protestant Association – against 'A Prayer Book for Australia' (Liturgical Resources authorized by the General Synod 1995). In the Synod debate *Peter Jensen* explicitly outlined his Manifesto: to go back and complete the Protestant Reformation which he thought had unfortunately been cut short by the compromises made in the 16th and 17th centuries! Nothing that has happened since then should surprise us.

It was an ideological "fantasy" to imagine going back to complete the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. In the intervening centuries there has been a seismic shift in human understanding of every aspect of life, and people cannot be squeezed back into a bygone age when people were coerced (often by extreme torture or death) into conforming. The questions that better educated people are asking today are different. They are not going to be satisfied *for very long* by pat, dogmatic propositions propounded by preachers turning up the volume, or using subtle forms of manipulation to get them in.

The Church of England was forged by the bitter conflicts of history - the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, the outworking of the principles of Magna Carta, the slow development of representative democracy, the Enlightenment and being at the centre of a world empire. The worldwide "Anglican Communion", as it came to be called, has in many ways expressed a more balanced and inclusive style of "being church".

In the Anglican church, what is taught and practising ("authority") comes (a) from studying

and meditating on the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, (b) from considering how the historic family of Christ (the Church down the centuries) has understood and expressed the faith in other situations and times, and (c) from applying reason and acting according to informed conscience. The criterion – the test by which we judge what is central - is what Jesus Christ taught and how he lived. The Anglican Church is very aware that every human formulation and decision may be flawed. **We live by faith, not by the propositions of professors nor the pronouncements of popes. Councils and Synod, bishops, ministers and congregations can err.**

Which brings us to an important question? Why do the leaders of this Diocese, in secular terms the most powerful Diocese in Australia, behave in such an anxious and dictatorial way? If the present Diocese of Sydney is to have a future as part of the Anglican Church, it is certainly NOT going to be by trying to stamp out divergent thinking.

In his more careful moments, when not addressing the Synod rally, Dr Peter seems to know this. On the ABC's Religion Report, being questioned about positioning Sydney Diocese globally to lead opposition against women priests/bishops, etc., he said, ***“local answers are better for local issues”***. One size does not fit all.

Parishes in Sydney who want to have female priests and deacons are not “permitted” to have them – by others outside who assume they know what is best for that parish. There are still quite a few parishes which have a different approach to evangelism and communicating the Gospel, who cannot get suitable clergy. Moore College cannot train priests and deacons who are suitable for or who want to serve in such parishes. The life-blood is being drained out of such parishes by the way the system works at present. Because of these policies, the leadership pool of potential leadership is being depleted each year.

Many committed and skilled women and men leaders are leaving Sydney Diocese and few can get in. Within a few more years, unless present attitudes change, only Christ Church St Laurence and St James King Street in the city of Sydney will survive – as token places of refuge and because they have some financial clout. To those who think they know what is best for the future of the Church of Christ, and seek to justify this sort of oppression to implement their objectives, I commend the words of **Oliver Cromwell** in 1650, *“I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken”*. Other dioceses respect diversity and

enable those who differ theologically to make their contribution; why is Sydney ceasing to do so?

When the statistics of the 10% brought in by “The Mission” are counted, let us not forget those being driven out of the Anglican Church by lack of wisdom. Many people are (a) disillusioned by the failure of local parishes and clergy to minister to ordinary people at times of birth, marriage, sickness and death, or are (b) put off having anything to do with the church because of the exclusive and judgemental attitudes they encounter.

Let **Dr Peter Jensen's** dictum, ***“local answers are better for local issues”*** about ecclesiastical matters in the global church, apply in our Diocese. Give liberty to local congregations to choose the leadership that they, as responsible and mature Christians, decide is right for them.

Rev'd Clive H Norton, 7 Dulwich Road,
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Archbishop Peter Jensen writes in the November 2006 issue of *Southern Cross*:

“Are we willing to welcome Sydney's future?”

“Change poses a problem for churches, but so does resisting it.”

See: www.your.sydneyanglicans.net/senior-clergy/archbishop_jensen

The Macquarie Dictionary gives 30 different ways in which the word “change” may be used.

Recommended reading:

“FAITH IN POLITICS

Inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Lutheran pastor and theologian hanged on Hitler's orders in 1945), **Kevin Rudd** has written a most significant article *“Faith in Politics”*. Don't rely on the extracts you may have seen, read the full text in **The Monthly** magazine Oct '06. In my opinion it's the best contribution on this issue by any Australian politician over the last 40 years. **Archbishop Peter Jensen** wrote a welcoming, insightful and expanding response in **The Australian**, encouraging ongoing vigorous and thoughtful discussion.

(www.your.sydneyanglicans.net/senior-clergy/archbishop-jensen > media releases>Peter Jensen *“Towards a state of grace”*)

Clive H Norton

IRAN – An ancient and fascinating Society

In May this year I spent two and a half weeks visiting Iran. I had several reasons for wanting to go there. Firstly a romantic reason - a dream for over 40 years, since studying a play at school called *The Poetasters of Esfahan*. I am also interested in the long, proud history of Iran; from the Medes in the 7th century BC, through the domination by the Persians in the 6th century ruling from Persepolis, invasion by Alexander the Great, the Arab conquest in the 7th century AD from when the people of Iran slowly began converting to Islam, through the British protectorate in the early years of the 20th century, the rule of the Pahlavis, and the revolution of 1979 which initiated the Islamic republic. I wanted to see the architecture and gardens of Iran; and I wanted to see for myself the Iran which has had such a bad press lately.

A friend and I travelled on an organised tour with a small group of mostly Australians, with a couple of New Zealanders, an American, an Englishman, and a Swiss thrown in for good measure. **The women in the party were required to wear the hejab – modest dress – with hair, arms and legs covered. We got very used to it. Only when visiting the shrines did we need to add a chador – a large piece of cloth wrapped around us.**

We started in Tehran, and from there travelled by overnight train to Kerman in the south east. From then on we travelled by coach: to Mahan, Yazd, to the site of ancient Persepolis, Shiraz, Esfahan, Natanz, Kashan and Qom; to Hamadan and Kermanshah in the west close to Iraq; to Masuleh in the mountains near the Caspian Sea and Anzali on the coast of the Caspian; then to Qazvin and Tehran, and finally the holy city of Mashad where Imam Reza is buried.

It's a beautiful and fascinating country, in large part a high desert plateau, surrounded by bare rugged mountains. Covered by snow in winter, the spring melt provides water for the country. There are few rivers, but long tunnels known as *qanats* bring water from mountain aquifers to provide water for villages and for irrigation. The water is used carefully, the qanats kept flowing freely by regular maintenance and the water is celebrated in the beautiful Persian gardens, which are effectively “oases” in this desert country.

Before we went to Iran many of our friends reacted with alarm and concern. **Since returning, the most common question has been “Did you feel unsafe at all?”** On the contrary, we felt extremely safe at all times and found the people unfailingly friendly, helpful and welcoming. **Wherever we went, we were greeted**

with shy smiles and “Welcome to Iran”. When we were out in towns in ones or twos, people would go out of their way to make sure we found our way. In the bazaars there was no hassling, just polite helpfulness – although the bazaris were of course keen for us to buy their goods, and how could we resist the saffron, the fabrics, the painted miniatures, the tiles, the carpets?

In towns we were often approached by senior school children (mostly girls) wanting to interview us as part of their English class work. They were intelligent and polite with delightful smiles. A teacher usually kept an eye of them from a discreet distance.

Although Iran is an Islamic country and the vast majority of the population is Moslem, the ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism is still practised in some areas, and Judaism and Christianity are also permitted. These religions are “registered”; it is not easy for other religious groups to practise or proselytise.

A number of Christian denominations are represented in Iran. Many members of the larger, older churches belong to ethnic groups with their own distinctive culture and language. The members of the newer, smaller churches are drawn both from the traditionally Christian ethnic minorities and to an increasingly larger degree converts from non-Christian background.

According to Wikipedia, the main Christian churches are:

- Armenian Apostolic Church of Iran
- Assyrian Church of the East of Iran
- Chaldean Catholic Church of Iran
- and various Protestant denominations, most important of which are:
 - Presbyterian, including the Assyrian Evangelical Church
 - Jamiat-e Rabbani (the Iranian Assemblies of God churches)
 - and the Anglican Church of Iran, which is part of the Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East.

In Esfahan, we were able to visit the magnificently decorated Armenian Apostolic Cathedral, the Church of Beit-ol Lahm (Bethlehem).

What I found particularly fascinating was being reminded of things which I had learned in Sunday School, and being able to put them in perspective. In Hamadan, there is a small

Jewish population. We met the rabbi at what is purported to be the tomb of Esther and Mordecai (see the Book of Esther). On the sides of the monumental staircases at the amazing ruins at Persepolis, built in the 6th century BC, are relief carvings of all the tributary nations, which includes carvings of Medes and Persians.

To learn a little about Islam in Iran, we spent a day in the city of Qom, considered to be a holy city in Shia Islam, as it is the site of the shrine of Fatema, sister of Imam Reza. It is also home to Iran's largest seminary,

and we were fortunate enough to be able to visit the International Centre there and spend an hour talking with one of the imams, a warm, gentle, interesting man. All our questions were answered with good grace. It was a fascinating experience.

Iranians are not all religious. Many are, and they visit the religious shrines to pray in the presence of the saint. Many others visit the shrines of poets, and it is lovely to see people, many of them young, walking around with their pocket volumes of Hafez, Ferdowsi or Saadi reciting poems to each other. Others again visit the "rose gardens of the martyrs" – the cemeteries for those who died in the Iran-Iraq war.

Altogether my time in Iran gave me a small insight into an ancient and fascinating society in a beautiful country, and I hope to return there soon.

Jennie Winton, Ashfield

STROUD RAIL PILGRIMAGE

- ◆ A Celtic Lenten Rail Pilgrimage to historic Stroud on *St Patrick's Day – Saturday 17 March 2007*
- ◆ Liturgy in the Church of St John the Evangelist with *the Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Rev'd Dr Brian Farran*
- ◆ The fare includes return rail travel, coach transfers, on train refreshments, drinks and luncheon, and Stroud sightseeing.

For further information and colour leaflet:

call (02) 9326 9660 or 0418 585 838,
email stjamesrail@yahoo.com.au or write to:

**Stroud Rail Pilgrimage
PO Box N400,
Grosvenor Place 1220**

NEW ARCHBISHOP FOR DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

The Melbourne Diocesan Synod recently elected *Philip Freier*, Bishop of the Northern Territory as the next Archbishop. *Philip Freier* was ordained in 1983 for the then Diocese of Carpentaria where he served as PiC at Kowanyama till 1988. Before being consecrated Bishop for the Northern Territory in 1999, he served in the parishes of Banyo and Bundaberg in the Diocese of Brisbane.



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Diocese of Colombo,

(Anglican) Church of Ceylon

The Right Rev'd Duleep de Chickera, Bishop of Colombo reported at the 121st Annual Sessions of the Diocesan Council:

Women Priests

"It was with thanksgiving to God and great joy that we ordained three Deacons the Rev'ds *Malini, Glory* and *Chandrika* as Priests on Holy Cross Day in September. This step was the culmination of a long process of prayer, study, discussion and perseverance.

The women of our Church are gifted and have as much to offer as men. Consequently our strivings to create a culture in which **women will share the work and decisions and leadership of the Church with men** must continue. The presence of a few women Priests in our midst will serve as a reminder that our work for Christ in this area is still unfinished.

Our women Priests will be required to meet the same standards in personal discipline and ministry as the men. As pioneers they will be watched and perhaps even scrutinized more closely! My request is that our expectations of them should not be any different from our expectations of male Priests.

Please receive them and support them with love, respect and kindness.

I am taking steps to commemorate this historic event with the painting of an appropriate mural in the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral."

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Ugandan Woman appointed Anglican Communion Observer at the United Nations

Mrs Hellen Grace Wangusa, currently the United Nations Africa Co-ordinator of the Millennium Development Goals, has accepted the call to be the next Anglican UN Observer.

Hellen, a lay woman, holds a BA (Hons), Diploma Ed (Hons) and an MA in Modern Letters.

Hellen with her experience as a representative to the United Nations for the World Council of Churches said "*I am keen to use my representative position to focus on War, Peace and promote diplomatic means of diffusing tensions and resolving conflicts and from my ecumenical experience, promote relationships between member churches.*"

Archbishop *Rowan Williams* said, "*Hellen's gifts of leadership together with her considerable experience in Uganda and Kenya, will be helpful to her and to the wider Anglican Communion in the*

critical days ahead for the UN."

MARY – Mother of the Lord

A Prayer Book for Australia designates August 15th as the festival of Mary Mother of the Lord. For many centuries now in both the East and West this has been a feast of Mary, celebrating her ‘dormition’, her falling asleep. In the Latin tradition it is generally known as the assumption.

That *Mary* died and was taken to God cannot be questioned, though the nature of her going, whether or not it involved a bodily assumption, is debatable. However that is not my concern today.

In my previous parish, one year, when August 15th fell on a Sunday, we happened that week to be having Choral Evensong and a visiting SAMS preacher (an Australian) who was Dean of Caracas Cathedral in Venezuela. The service ended with a procession in honour of Our Lady. Some lovely music newly composed by *David Coburn* on the theme of the day was played and sung.

After that Evensong I was interested to hear one of our parishioners, a woman in her late thirties, say how affirmed she felt by the service, which naturally had a feminine tone to it as we rejoiced in the obedience of *Mary*; in her motherhood; in her unflinching perseverance and hope in her reunion with her Son in heaven.

I would ask you to reflect with me for a few minutes on a prayer which some of you are bound to know and love, and others of you may possibly simply know second-hand as a devotion of some other Christians.

*Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee,
Blessed are thou among women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God:
pray for us, sinners, now and the hour of our
death. Amen.*

Protestant Christians usually hold back from this prayer as well as from all invocation of the saints. It is sometimes said that we should only pray to God. - And that it is God alone whom we worship.

Certainly God alone is God, and divine homage can **only** be paid to him. The word “worship”, like so many words, can have different breadths of meaning. Think of “His worship the Mayor” and of the vow of the groom in the old marriage service to worship his bride, his wife-to-be. Then again one must admit that within the Roman Catholic Church (in recent centuries particularly) there has often been an excessive cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Protestants knowing this are inclined to run a mile in the other direction. Mary is a stranger to their devotional life except perhaps when Christmas approaches and some of the old carols are sung.

We need have no fear that Anglicans will turn to *Mary* instead of *Jesus*. I would encourage Anglicans to

turn to *Mary* so that they may grow in their love of *Jesus*.

We don’t stop reading the Bible because of the outlandish claims made for it by some zealots. May our fear or distaste for Marian excesses not lead us to close our minds and hearts to the woman close to the centre of the Christian Faith, the woman who played an indispensable and unique role in our salvation, the woman who remains dear to Christ himself.

The ‘Hail Mary’ evolved in the Western Church. The Eastern Church praises Mary with exuberance as the All-holy God-bearer, and has its own rich treasury of invocations to Mary.

The ‘Hail Mary’ falls into 2 parts. The first part is based on St Luke’s Gospel and the words addressed to *Mary* by the angel *Gabriel* and by *Elizabeth*.

The second part, beginning, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.....” was a much later addition. There were variations of the whole prayer in the centuries beforehand.

Notice the words “Holy Mary, Mother of God”.

At the Council of Ephesus in 431 the undivided Church, represented by the assembly of bishops, was lead to define Mary as Theotokos, God-bearer, Mother of God. The Anglican Church has always accepted this Council as one of the great ecumenical councils of the early Church, helping to establish orthodox teaching.

At the time of the Council of Ephesus, understanding of the true nature of *Jesus Christ* as the Son of God was under threat. *Mary* was proclaimed ‘Mother of God’ to protect the true doctrine about her Son.

I believe that in the impetus to devotion to *Mary* that flowed from this Council we can see the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit, leading the church into a deeper understanding of her own nature, of Christ, and of God himself.

A sane and tender devotion to *Mary* has helped millions of believers to sense that God in himself includes all that is best in human gender and sexuality, God in himself is neither male nor female. Equally by definition God is not less than male or female.

I am sure that we cannot run away from the image of God as “Father”. It seems to me that those who suggest this image is just a hangover from early patriarchal societies are not giving full-value to revelation. It was *Jesus* in his teaching who placed at the centre the understanding of God as “Father”, the tender, just, protecting parent.

But the Divine Fatherhood can be misunderstood as history shows. Excessively masculine images can narrow our vision of God. A sane and tender devotion to *Mary* can help us open up to the motherliness in the Godhead.

Such thoughts were probably not in the minds of those Christians of the early centuries as they came to praise **Mary** and to ask her prayers. Their times in so many ways were different from ours. There were different needs to be met, and different aspirations.

In the 'Hail Mary' we say:

*Pray for us sinners, now and at
the hour of our death.*

We ask **Mary** to pray for us, much in the same way as we ask each other within the household of faith on earth, to pray for each other. We are one in the Spirit, sharers together in the Communion of Saints, members of the One Risen Body of Christ. To ask **Mary** and the other saints in heaven to pray for us is to express vividly our faith in the power of the Risen Christ to hold us together in one family.

It cannot be said that Christians are obliged to call on **Mary** and the saints. But it can be said that when Christians in the early centuries felt led to pray in this way there was no opposition. It was taken as a natural development. God's Spirit was seen in it. It was only in the Western part of the Church when the Reformation period approached that there was withdrawal from it.

Michael Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, has words of wisdom in this matter. (Reproduced below.)*

Brother Bernard, an Anglican Franciscan, in his book "**Open to God**" writes: "*Some Christians believe that prayer to **Mary** is to put her in the place of God, and is therefore idolatry. No doubt there have been mistakes and dangerous excesses at times. These are best corrected by understanding that it is because we are incorporated into Christ by the Holy Spirit that we stand before God with the whole company of heaven. From that stance, to wave to other members of the Body ("hail") is naturally human and fun. Above all, it is the solidarity of the new humanity in the corporate nature of our redemption, which corrects the distortion of a "me-and-Jesus" individualistic piety. **Francis** is so deeply united to **Jesus** our Brother and aware of his human nature given us by the glad co-operation of **Mary's** humanity, that he rejoices to pray with **Mary** and to ask her to augment what in his poverty he offers*".

If the 'Hail Mary' is not already a part of your prayer-life, I encourage you strongly to think about giving it a place in your devotions. I find it a most liberating form of prayer. It brings the Incarnation close to us. Through it I can get in touch, now, with **Mary** who is both my elder sister in the Faith and my Mother in the Faith. Remember the words to the beloved Disciple standing at the foot of the cross. "Behold your mother". And his words to **Mary**: "Woman, behold your son". The disciple at this point may be seen as our representative.

Mary is a strong womanly presence in the continuing life of the Church. We honour her obedience to God, her purity (i.e. her single-minded devotion), her receptivity to the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge and honour her motherhood. She knew

what it was to pray to God and gave herself quite unselfconsciously to him. She was full of humility, but no doormat. She asked the angel how this thing could be. Prayer for her did not shrink from dialogue. Her strength and courage revealed themselves finally as she remained with her dying Son on Calvary.

Through the grace of the Holy Spirit she revealed a most remarkable, balanced, inner harmony of soul and spirit. And so she was able to conceive and give birth to the Redeemer, her Redeemer as well as ours. Since the second century she has been called the New or Second Eve. She is the sacred porch through whom God the Son has entered the world for our salvation. The 'Hail Mary' is a prayer of simplicity and warmth. It invites us to look with **Mary** beyond herself to **Jesus**. In effect it invites us to give birth to **Jesus** in our own hearts.

We need silence before God, as **Mary knew.**

We need to centre ourselves on God as **Mary did.**

We need companions on the way, both now and at the hour of our death.

The presence of **Mary** with us in the communion of saints is one of Christ's many wonderful gifts to us. May we accept it with gratitude and grace.

*(The following quotation from **Arthur Michael Ramsey** is relevant to the above sermon. It is in a recent book on his spiritual theology and teaching - "**Glorious Descending**"; publ. 2005 William B Eerdmans (USA) and The Canterbury Press (UK). Contributors: **Douglas Dales, John Habgood, Geoffrey Rowell** and **Rowan Williams**.)

From "**The Gospel and the Catholic Church**" (1936)
*"The reverence of saints in the Eastern Church is practised as a part of the life of the one Body. It does not mean the elevation of marked individuals to special places of influence and intercessory power, enthroned between God and human beings. It means rather giving glory to Christ in his one Body, whose family life, seen and unseen, is a manifestation of Christ's own life. Hence, in the East, there has never been the rigid distinction, apparent sometimes in the West, between praying to and praying for the saints and the departed. The sense of the one family prevents such rigid conceptions, and binds saints and sinners in one: for holiness belongs only to the one Body. In reverencing saints, people reverence the life of Christ in them, who is the life of them all. Hence also the Eastern cult of the Virgin **Mary**, the Mother of God, has meant the veneration, not of an isolated figure enthroned in heaven, but of one whose humanity is indwelt by God, herself the first-fruits of the Church, in whom is focused uniquely in history the truth about the whole Body of Christ."*

Rev'd Robert Wheeler. St Peter's, Cremorne 20 August 2006

Advent - The Coming of the Lord

The word Advent is from the Latin *adventus* for "coming". The Season of Advent is the four Sundays, beginning on the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, (November 30) and continuing until December 24. (Since the 900s Advent has been considered the beginning of the Church year.)

The liturgical theme of Advent is that of preparation for the Second and Final Coming of the Lord, - the Parousia, and the joyful theme of preparing for the Bethlehem event - the birth of Jesus - the Incarnation of God.

"In the beginning the Word already was. The Word was in God's presence, and what God was, the Word was. He was with God at the beginning. (John 1:1-2)

Advent I

"Your redemption is near at hand"

**Stand up and raise your heads;
your redemption is drawing near.**

Luke 21:28

Almighty God,
give us grace that we may cast
away the works of darkness and put
on the armour of light, now in the
time of the mortal life in which
your Son Jesus Christ came among
us in great humility; that on the
last day, when he comes again in
his glorious majesty to judge the
living and the dead, we may rise
to the life immortal; through him
who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit, now and for ever.
Amen

Advent III

" Rejoice! The Lord is near"

**Do not fear. The Lord, your God,
is in your midst, a warrior who
gives victory; he will rejoice
over you with gladness, he will
renew you in his love.**

Zephaniah,,
3.16-17

Almighty God,
you have made us and all things to
serve you;
come quickly to save us,
so that wars and violence shall
end
and your children may live in
peace,
honouring one another with justice
and love;
through Jesus Christ, your Son our
Lord,
who lives with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever Amen

Advent II

"The salvation of God"

**By the tender mercy of our God, the
dawn from on high will break upon
us, to give light to those who sit
in darkness and in the shadow of
death, to guide our feet into the
way of peace.**

Luke 1.78-79

Merciful God,
who sent your messenger John the
Baptist
to preach repentance and prepare
the way for our salvation;
give us grace to heed his warning
and forsake our sins, that we may
greet with joy the coming of our
Redeemer,
Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

Advent IV

"The promised Saviour"

**Blessed is she who believed that
there would be a fulfilment of what
was spoken to her by the Lord.**

Luke 1.45

Almighty God,
you make us glad with the yearly
expectation
of the birth of your Son Jesus
Christ;
grant that, as we joyfully receive
him for our Redeemer,
so we may with sure confidence
behold him
when he shall come to be our Judge;
who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit, one God, now and
for ever. Amen.