2001

The Australian Church Record 2001

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Deborah Russell

In many ways the gospel of Christ is at the crossroads in our society. Will our nation turn to Christ or continue to turn its back on him? Clearly it is important that we elect a Bishop for the Diocese of Sydney and the Province who will be the right leader at this critical time.

The Bishop of North Sydney, currently the administrator of the diocese until the new Archbishop takes over the reins, made these comments as part of an open letter to Synod members who will meet in early June (see part of the letter on page two).

The outgoing Archbishop, Harry Goodhew, is clear about the problems facing the Anglican Church. “The larger issue for the church is its ability to address Australia’s present ethicistic age,” he said in a recent Canberra Times article. “Unless we present the claims of Christ with clarity and graciousness, it’s likely to be subsumed as another club with a particular point of view.”

Bishop Forth, one of the potential candidates for Archbishop, noted in a recent paper the unprecedented level of economic and social change taking place and static levels of church membership in some parts of the Anglican church. “Australian society today is increasingly pluralistic, with growing material prosperity but not satisfaction,” he said. “The Anglican church continues to struggle with finding its identity...its place has been hollowed out.”

Some commentators have looked back to past archbishop’s elections to find inspiration and direction. The 1953 election of Archbishop Howard Mowll in particular is seen as offering valuable lessons for the present situation.

Mowll was elected at a time when debate over liberal theology was raging. Conflict between liberal and conservative wings of the church was rife, and modernism rose up to do damage to both sides. Mowll came to represent and embody the conservative face of Anglicanism in Australia, particularly Sydney; he and his wife, Dorothy, were active in mission work, social welfare reforms and thespread of the gospel.

Mowll placed key people in teaching and training positions early in his tenure as Archbishop. Foremost among them was T.C. Hammond as principal of Moore College. Mowll also saved the Church Missionary Society from an untimely death, refusing to support breakaway elements in England, he instead gave extra resources and leaders to the CMS in Sydney. The Mowlls were also active in aged care; Mowll Village in Castle Hill’s Anglican retirement complex bears his name in honour of their contribution. And they were supportive of international missions, particularly those to southeast Asia and China, which they visited in 1956.

Sydney is poised to elect “the right leader at this critical time”.

Perhaps most importantly of all, Mowll was the man who invited Billy Graham to Australia on behalf of the churches. The American’s visit spurred a spiritual revival and inspired gospel activity throughout the 1960s. The Billy Graham Crusade was the place where Philip, Peter Jensen, and Robert Forthyt, all possible candidates for Archbishop in this election, were converted.

By the time Harry Goodhew was elected Archbishop in 1993, the Anglican church was again struggling to deal with the ever-present conflict between the liberal and conservative evangelical elements in the church. The problem of falling or static church membership and a host of other social and spiritual questions confronted Sydney Anglians. Problems were acknowledged, it seems, but there was disagreement about the best solution.

Goodhew was elected in 1993 as an “unashamedly compromise candidate”, says Muriel Porter in The Age. “More radical contenders failed to win the synod vote,” she said. “Observers...fear Sydney was hellbent on a path of outright confrontation with wider Anglicanism.” While the Anglican church “breathed a sigh of relief when Goodhew was elected”, Porter predicts that the watershed may have arrived with this year’s synod, an echo of the 1933 showdown between modernism and orthodoxy.

Deborah Russell’s mother was the last person confirmed by Archbishop Mowll.

About this issue

When we relaunched Australian Church Record in October, 1998, we spoke of the need to “preserve” and “strengthen” the biblical evangelization of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. This issue brings us to a crucial moment in that mission. As we approach the election of a new Archbishop, we tend to look in two directions: back and forwards.

When we look back, we see a diocese that has experienced generous blessings from God—time of growth, conversion, fellowship, expansion and mission. But we also see the threats to our church which arose from the old combination: sin, the world, and the devil. At times, we have struggled to survive, which is why the instinct for planning and dreaming for better times, when the word of Christ rings out around the city, where our churches thrive and we experience real and lasting unity. We don’t get too utopian (our doctrine of sin is too well established to make that mistake), but we do imagine that things can get better. The urge arises to strengthen the things that remain.

But we often neglect to look into one other time zone: the present. Unless we can take hold of the present, the future may as well not exist. The past neither. We have to make the difference now.

We believe that, at the beginning of a new millennium, in a city whose growth is accelerating at an incredible rate, whose ministry training facilities are operating at capacity, and whose congregations contain some of the best-equipped lay people of any international church, we have a striking opportunity to bring honour to the name of Jesus. The city, in particular, has an immensely important decision ahead of them. For the city is the powerhouse of gospel work in Sydney. It is a time for gathering our courage and doing the best we can with what God has given us.

If this means a bit of re-thinking, moving out of our own comfort zones, spending some time in prayer and the Scriptures, seeking to understand God’s own will and priorities, then so be it. The present beckons; the opportunities are golden. We pray that this issue of ACR assists your reflections and has you asking God that he continue to show us mercy and grace.

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7).

The Editors

The Australian

April 29, 2001 Issue 1883

“There was a greater belief from the 1960s that laypeople were not the passive observers in a Church which was clergy-run and clergy-led, but were rather the lifespring of every Christian community, with great gifts and responsibility in every area of ministry.”


Inside this issue of ACR you will find:

- articles, tables, opinion pieces, biblical reflections and interviews
- gathered around the decision facing the Sydney synod in early June: the election of a new Archbishop.
- provides information for Anglican church members who are praying for this matter.

Just the highlights

John Chapman reminds us of the gospel message

Andrew Dircks from the Church Missionary Society highlights the importance of gospel mission for our church

Laurie Scandrett explains changes in the election procedure

Peter Hayward finds an Anglican world looking to Sydney’s lead

Joanna Warren provides helpful lists of questions to ask about candidates

Peter Bolt objects to the idea that we can never reverse the flow

ACR’s tribute to the late Bruce Smith

Barry Newman is interrogated on what makes (and unmakes) an archbishop

Joshua Ng ponders what true unity is meant to look like

Greg Clarke says vote for Superman

PLUS DETAILED INFORMATION ON THE CANDIDATES...
Sydney to the world

Peter Hayward

Peter Hayward is the minister of an Anglican church in Spokane, Washington, USA.

be March 2001 meeting of the 38 Primates of the Anglican Communion has come and gone, the final communication emerging from the meeting acknowledging that "this is a crucial time of testing for our communion." In this regard the test case that is at issue is the current state of the Episcopal church of USA (ECUSA).

Since Lambeth 1998’s resolution on human sexuality, a substantial body of evidence has been collected and circulated demonstrating that a large number of dioceses in ECUSA are in direct violation of Lambeth. Over 80% of the 99 dioceses have passed their own resolutions indicating a desire to ordain practicing homosexuals.

As important as this evidence is, it does not begin to demonstrate the current state of ECUSA. What has happened is the wholesale abandonment of biblical authority and the repudiation of the Anglican formulations and doctrine. There are, of course, a number of splendid exceptions to this drift at both a diocesan and parish level, but the number is relatively small.

It is here that there is a divergence of opinion about how to view the current state of play of the Anglican Church in the USA. Some, such as the American Anglican Council (AAC) believe that there is reason to be optimistic for the reform of ECUSA by staying within it. Others, such as Anglican Mission in America (AMiA) are extremely pessimistic and have already separated from ECUSA and are looking for support from like-minded Anglicans around the world.

Which approach is right?

Having interacted with ECUSA for the last four years it is apparent that both are right. I live in the northwest part of the United States and it is hard to understand how any Bible-believing Christian could in good conscience stay with ECUSA.

In other parts of the USA, such as some parts of Texas, evangelicals of various denominations have expressed a desire to ordain practicing homosexuals. This all means that when the Primates meet with the current state of ECUSA on the agenda, different groups are looking for different things. For the AAC, the establishment by the Primates of an interface with the Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission is seen as an opportunity. By contrast AMiA, given their experience with ECUSA over a long time in Bishop John Rodgers words “no confidence” in what it will achieve.

Further, John Rodgers is convinced that it is only an attempt to postpone the inevitable split of the Anglican Communion along the current constitutional fault line—the issue of biblical authority.

In all of this, what role can Sydney play and parcel of the desire for those in the diocese of Sydney to let the Bible rule its belief and ministry, so be it.

The preaching of a judgement to come is an integral part of the apostolic gospel. We are not at liberty to leave it out of our preaching. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one whom God has appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (Acts 10:38-43)

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God has appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (Acts 10:38-43)

These are the words of the Apostle Peter. They are addressed to the Roman Centurion, Cornelius, who is described as a righteous and God-fearing man who is addressed by all the Jewish people (Acts 10:22). Peter has been sent by the angel of the Lord to evangelize him. He is the first of the Gentiles to be converted in the new apostolic age. Let’s ponder what he said.

They hanged him on a tree

In line with the gospel stated in other parts of the Scriptures, Peter proceeds to tell us about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (see 1 Cor 15: 1-6). In saying that they hanged him on a tree, Peter would have immediately realized that the Lord Jesus, by this action, was under the curse of God (Deut 21:23). He concludes that all the prophets testify about him. Their minds would naturally focus on the suffering servant of God in Isaiah 53 who was wounded for transgressions of God’s people, and so they would receive forgiveness of sins by trusting in his name.

God raised him from the dead, to judge the living and the dead

In line with all the sermons in Acts, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is crucial. God did not allow his Holy One to see decay (see Ps 16:10). We are in no doubt that Jesus is God’s king and as such is the judge of all humankind. This aspect of the work of the Lord Jesus is crucial. Did you notice how emphatic the apostle is? He tells us that the Lord Jesus commanded the apostles, who witnessed his resurrection and who ate and drank with him after this event, that they were to preach to all the people, and that Jesus is appointed by God as the judge of the living and the dead.

The preaching of a judgement to come is an integral part of the apostolic gospel. We are not at liberty to leave it out or bypass it. The Apostles were commanded to do it by the Lord Jesus.

We would do well to take this to heart.
Editorial

T he robust and thorough nature of our synod’s behaviour has been well attested. In the 1930s the Labour Premier J.T. Lang commenced the study of our diocesan synod for a lesson in how to conduct politics seriously. That is, he commended our courtesy, honesty, intelligence and very high regard for the truth.

In our postmodern age, Lang’s observations have been taken out of context and quoted to mean the opposite. We are considered too seri - ous, too concerned with the capital ‘i’ Truth. That speaks volumes. It used to be a good thing to pursue the truth. Our age has given up on such an idea and is scathing in dismissing it as ‘idealist’. Now, a person who holds strong and well-argued positions on ‘ideas’ or ‘truth’ is liable to be dismissed as an ‘ideologue’, a ‘thought-police man’, and lacking in love. To affirm ‘truth’ these days is understood almost automatically to imply ‘without love’.

It is of course possible that truth people can be unloving (just as love people can be untruthful), for we are all fallen creatures. But in our age, and perhaps even among Christians, we seem to have lost the robustness of the New Testament idea of truth. Here, striving for truth means recognizing and distinguishing right from falsity, and repudiat ing what is false. To find consensus means agreeing on what is recognised as demonstrably the case—not making a compromise for the sake of avoiding conflict. The biblical approach to truth also includes local, public and international ways of avoiding conflict. The biblical approach to truth is the real path to intimate fellowship. The election of an archbishop touches us so deeply. We long for a leader who understands all of this, and holds it dearly in his heart. We know what is at stake. May God grant us to love more and more in knowledge and depth of insight” (Phil 1:9). We can only truly love when we truly know.

As we approach this exciting synod, we are pilgrims and foreigners in a strange and hostile land. We are so different from the world, down to the meanings of the words we use. Our ‘truth’ and ‘love’ are so very different to the world’s. Our notion of truth sometimes seems harsh or unfailing, but is in reality the way of love. Our love sometimes appears judgemental or divisive, but is in fact the real path to intimate fellowship.

The election of an archbishop touches us so deeply. We long for a leader who understands all of this, and holds it dearly in his heart. We know what is at stake. May God grant us to walk in the light, living by the truth and thereby sharing in true fellowship with one another (1 Jn 1:5-7).

Donations needed and welcome!

The table of comparisons is offered for your prayer - ful consideration of these four men.

What do we need to know?

Rob Doyle

The election of an archbishop is both a straightforward, and a daunting, task. At one level, we know from the Scriptures the qualities we seek in our archbishop. We find instructions from Paul to Timothy in the Pastoral Epistles, which emphasise issues of personal character, ability to preach and teach, temperance and family life. Joanna Warren, in her article on page five, has given us a series of questions to ponder which arise firstly from these biblical concerns.

But here in Sydney we are blessed with a number of candidates who are willing to be measured against the biblical criteria. We must consider to what degree they meet these criteria, and be serious-minded in our assessment. Having done this, we can look at a number of other ‘performance indicators’, as they are often described in the secular workplace, to see who is most likely to carry through the convictions of the synod. We don’t do this in the manner of secular decision-making, for we serve God and not the shareholders. However, we who are in the churches of the Anglican diocese of Sydney are the shareholders—we are affected for better or worse by the ministry of the man we choose as our archbishop.

With these ideas in mind, we have approached this issue of Australian Church Record with a view to providing the kind of historical, statistical and observational information that helps synod members to make a biblically-led, informed decision about who will best lead the diocese.

This issue is being produced before the closing date for nominations of candidates. However, Phillip Jensen, Peter Jensen, Robert Forsyth and Reg Piper appear the most likely candidates. Trevor Edwards and Geoff Huard may also be nominated, but at this stage we have decided to present information on the four candidates represented on the official Election Synod 2001 website at www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au at time of publication.

On pages 8-9, you will find a table of comparison, for the four candidates. The sources for this information have all been checked, often by phone call with the candidate himself. Other quotes and figures have been drawn from published material, interviews and observations. Some of this material is clearly fact; other parts reflect the opinions of a range of correspondents, as well as my own viewpoints.

The ACC committee thought about who could best report on and evaluate all of these candidates. It became obvious that I was best placed. Robert Forsyth and I were in the same class at Moore College, have been regular dinner companions over the last 28 years and at times near neighbours. I first got to know Peter Jensen as a fellow lecturer when I joined the Faculty of Moore College in 1982. With respect to Phillip, I joined the St Matthias group of congregations in 1985 and have been a member, and from time to time a co-worker, ever since. And although I was from time to time the recipient of Reg Piper’s public ministry before he left for Holy Trinity Adelaide, my first hand contact with him began on his appointment as Bishop of Wollongong in 1993.

The table of comparisons is offered for your prayerful consideration of these four men.
Andrew Dircks is Mission Education Secretary for CMS in NSW.

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And today, as I visit churches throughout the world, their conviction was that this task of taking Christ to the rest of the earth might be seriously addressed. From the Scriptures, they must show us the Saviour, and when we know Christ clearly, then we must also know that the whole world out there also needs to know him.

"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ is not yet known." (15:20). Why? because "Christ has become a servant… in order that the nations might glorify God for his mercy" (15:8-9). It was not only because of the Darnesians that Paul gave himself to missionary work. It was because the message of salvation for the world, in his Lord Jesus Christ, sent him out and sent him on.

Over the last few weeks, telephones have been ringing hot in the diocese: "Will you sign a nomination for so-and-so, even if you do not think he is a particularly serious candidate?"

A clear gospel focus was the springboard for St Paul’s missionary work. His journeys themselves are documented in Acts, but his most reflective writing about the motivation and purpose of those journeys is in Romans 15. The gospel focus is clear right from the first chapter of Romans: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (1:16).

A clear gospel focus that drove the founders of the Church Missionary Society in 1799. A group of gospel-focused people had been meeting regularly for some years, addressing themselves to such questions as: "What is the best method of planting and propagating the gospel in Botany Bay?" That conversation led them to persuade the British government to appoint a chaplain to the intended colony, and led them to put forward Richard Johnson to be that chaplain.

A clear gospel focus that caused the candidates to choose from and not just a good but an excellent Archbishop.

A different and fascinating synod lies ahead of us. 

Why this Archbishop’s Election Synod will be different

Laurie Scandrett

Dr Laurie Scandrett is a lay synod representative for Holy Trinity, Miller’s Point and was a member of the Committee of Review which met after the 1993 Election Synod.

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The Australian Church Record

A priority for mission Andrew Dircks

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But is it required to get missionary work off the ground? Obviously you need missionaries. And senders. And resources.

Most of all, however, you need a clear gospel focus.

To put it another way, when it comes to global mission, if you’re not clearly focused on spreading the message of salvation in Christ, you probably won’t come to global mission.

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But note Paul’s reflections in Romans 15. Much as he so obviously had a heart for the existing churches throughout Asia Minor—even churches that he had planted—he had a higher calling. "There is no more place for me in these regions" (15:23).

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ is not yet known. (15:20). Why? because “Christ has become a servant... in order that the nations might glorify God for his mercy” (15:8-9). It was not only because of the Darnesians that Paul gave himself to missionary work. It was because the message of salvation for the world, in his Lord Jesus Christ, sent him out and sent him on.

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Leadership is an exposed and lonely situation. More than ever before, personal strengths and weaknesses are on constant show. As the elected leader of the diocese of Sydney, decisions that the Archbishop makes will profoundly affect the direction and effectiveness of the diocese for years to come. The lives and ministries of real people will be marked for good or ill by his actions and policies. His attitudes and example will set the tone amongst office bearers and lay people throughout the diocese. Outside the diocese he will have opportunities to serve and encourage at both a national and international level.

In all of this, it is profoundly the whole person who is under the microscope. His character, convictions, manner, habits, strengths and weaknesses are pitilessly exposed every time an appointment is filled, a decision is made, a statement is published. The role of Archbishop carries with it an awesome personal responsibility that can only dare be undertaken by a man of exceptional integrity who is under the control of Christ in all aspects of his life—both public and private. Synod representatives are thus faced with an important and serious job in electing our new Archbishop. I don’t relish hard mental effort myself, yet I like every representative, am being called to be as careful, intelligent and godly as we can be in choosing the best man for the job. Before God, we are responsible to make the best decision we can amongst the candidates we are offered on the basis of the information in front of us. I suspect that it is one of the most important votes we will ever make as synod reps of our parishes. I need time to think, so I’m grateful for the five weeks we will have between the close of nominations and the actual synod. But of course I will need to sit down and pray and sift through information and talk to others so that I go into synod with a clearly thought-through opinion on who is the best one.

So how do we determine who the best one is?

It’s tempting to simply vote for a man whom you know and like, but there are some important issues at stake here that a lot more needs to be considered. No doubt there will be lots of opinions, comment, statements and stories about each nominee. Some will be biased one way or another; some will be official and more factual, some merely anecdotal. Faced with so much that will need to be considered I offer the following set of questions and concerns. I hope they might help in sifting and evaluating the information about each candidate.

Perhaps we really should start with some basic questions about things that we ought to be able to take for granted—but are so important they’re worth checking each time:

1) Is he a thoroughly converted biblical Christian trusting in the Lord Jesus alone for salvation?
2) Does he confidently believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God and does he live under its authority?
3) Does he fear and honour God, striving to a life of holiness and righteousness to please Him?
4) Is his relationship with God a vital and dynamic factor in his life, sustained by prayer and marked by an awareness of his need for God’s help every day?
5) Does his family life (if married) reflect Christian beliefs and practice?
6) If he has children, have they been brought up to know and honour the Lord?
7) Does his marry show the loving servant leadership of Christ?

The questions above could be applied to anyone who professes to be a Christian. But the demands of being Archbishop require other personal qualities, too:

1) Is he humble enough to accept ideas from others with gratitude?
2) Is he personally secure enough to take criticism?
3) Is he dignified and self-controlled even when severely provoked?
4) What is more important to him—impressing God or impressing those around him?
5) What is his most cherished ambition—to climb to the top or to serve and helping others to the best of his ability?
6) Is he a realist in his appraisal of his own strengths and weaknesses?
7) In the light of this, is he willing to ask for advice and help from others?
8) Can he teach clearly and well from the Bible and apply its teaching with insight and relevance to people in our society?

As the elected leader of a denomination that holds to the faith entrusted to us by the Lord Himself, the Archbishop must be able to proclaim and defend these truths in a society that increasingly rejects them. I offer the following questions to help us evaluate a candidate’s merits in this regard:

1) Is he firm on biblical truth when faced with wavering or compromise?
2) Is he persuasive and intelligent enough to see to the heart of an issue and be able to deal with it on that basis?
3) Is there ever a conflict between tradition and biblical truth, what is more important to him?
4) Is he flexible on non-gospel issues and willing to consider new ideas?
5) Where does he get his standards from? (In the light of issues like Modern corporate management practices?)
6) Where is the evidence of his trust in Jesus for salvation?
7) How important to him is the urgent evangelical location of the lost?
8) Can he model excellent Bible teaching to others in the diocese?

Finally the Archbishop must be a real leader and pastor able to inspire and relate to others appropriately and clearly, with warmth and vigour. These abilities will be needed on a day-to-day personal basis at every level within the diocese and beyond. My questions about these area are:

1) Is he easily put off or pressured by opposition to his views?
2) Can he handle pressure or is he easily rattled and swayed by those who seem to be powerful and influential?
3) Is he strong and unafraid enough to call a spade a spade and denote wrong, however many feathers are ruffled—Jesus did.
4) Is he able and willing to rebuke gently?
5) Is he compassionate as well as realistic?
6) Is he a realist when dealing with others? Is he realistic w hen dealing with those who are doing wrong?
7) Is he gracious and gentle in dealing with others? Is he approachable?
8) Does he value and encourage others’ gifts?
9) Is he an assessor of others’ strengths and weaknesses?
10) Is he a servant leader? What does SYNOD do for his preferred or being served?
11) Does he inspire loyalty to the cause of Christ amongst those with whom he works?
12) Is he known to himself to those around him?
13) Does he have a real care for those who pastor congregations?
14) Is he able to work with people with whom he disagrees?
15) Can he discern the genuine needs of the age and set the vision for the diocese of Sydney and the state (as Metropolitan)? And beyond the diocese: How will he conduct himself in relation to other community and government leaders?
16) Will he be forthright and gracious?
17) Will he be sensitive to others the opportunity to get a grip on reality, by not sharing with them the reality that God’s salvation has already appeared?

The world of television struggles to see any reality beyond “mankind gratifying the desires of our sinful nature and following the false desires and thoughts”, but it is barely heard on prime time television. The fact of the matter is that God is not pleased with and will not tolerate our rebellion. Paul reminds the Ephesians Christians that we are, by nature, “objects of his wrath”. Clearly, it’s in our interests to sharpen our senses to discern reality. Because of his great love for us, God in his mercy made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our sins. It is fact, not fantasy, that men and women can be put right with God, that we can know and experience forgiveness and the hope of eternal life. Truth in God, our Saviour, has indeed appeared and we are deeply fools to live otherwise.

Reality is more than we see on television. We need to keep reminding ourselves of this fact by regular study of God’s Word, our script for real life. Our children need to be taught and reminded that the Bible is the place where we discover what is important, what is real, what really counts in life. And it would be shameful to deny others the opportunity to get a grip on reality, by not sharing with them the reality that God’s salvation has already appeared.

The world of television struggles to see any reality beyond “mankind gratifying the desires of our sinful nature and following the false desires and thoughts”. But God’s Spirit, through His word, can renew and transform men and women’s thinking and living, revealing the ultimate reality of salvation through the death of Jesus. Living life in friendship with God, under the influence of the life of Jesus, is truly living in the real world. We are only “out of touch with reality” when we lose our grip on God’s reality. Perhaps it is also timely to run the reality meter of God’s Word over our own lifestyle, values, priorities and passions. Perhaps we need to assess whether the reality of our life is in line with “normal” and “reality” challenged. Glancing down a list of the top ten TV programs watched by women, I was close to the end of the list before I found a program that featured in my viewing habits. Does that make me eccentric? A bit ‘fringe’? Or just out of touch with reality?

Then I read that, love it or hate it, reality TV is here to stay. Reality TV is a mix of soapie, documentary and infotainment, in varying quantities. It’s a bit like those “what do you get if you cross...” jokes which primary school kids love to tell (What do you get if you cross a chicken with a cement mixer? A bricklayer!). They use the programs where someone does their friends’ neighbours’ ‘issues’ by removing them. A group of people are chosen to share a house, or desert island and, as the cameras roll and the world looks on, they live out their lives. So, what’s the appeal of this style of TV? Probably the opportunity to see things you wouldn’t normally be able to (permitted) to see. Then you can be “a bit like the others”. But how real is the reality portrayed by these programs? I’d suggest it is time for a reality check on reality TV. God, as Producer and Director of all things and all people, would seem to be a reliable source of wisdom on the matter of reality. As Lord and Servant He would seem prudent to listen to His people.


Paul, in the Romans passage, reminds us of a stark reality. Humanity turned its back on God, opposing His authority. By not sharing with the Creator the Creator, it w ould seem  prudent to listen to him .

Perhaps it is also timely to run the reality meter of God’s Word over our own lifestyle, values, priorities and passions. Perhaps we need to assess whether the reality of our life is in line with our own, or rather, the reality of our life is in line with ‘normal’ and ‘reality’ challenged.
MEETING THE

Peter Jensen

Hundreds of students who have passed through Moore Theological College will know the Rev Dr Peter Jensen firstly as their fellow student, then as a lecturer and Principal. Many others throughout the diocese will know him as a preacher, evangelist, teacher and author. Still more around the country and even the world will know him from his involvement in the broader Anglican Church.

But Robert Tong has known him since they were in third grade together at Bellevue Hill Public School, and he thinks that’s given him a better than average chance to get to know the man.

“In terms of the office of Archbishop, he will bring an element of seriousness and vision to the job,” said Mr Tong, who is supporting Dr Jensen as a candidate. “He is absolutely clear on evangelical theology, and that will inform and motivate him in gospel initiatives.” Whatever he does will be biblically informed, and I think that’s what Sydney is looking for. We need only see what have been achieved under him at Moore College.”

Peter Jensen believes that Sydney needs “growth and nurture” so as to be able to offer healthy churches that can evangelise and relate to the community, and care for members.

“The Archbishop must be prepared to speak strongly and publically on behalf of Christ in a way that gives leadership to the church and challenges the world,” he said. “He must seek to provide for ways in which the gospel can be heard in the community, for gospel works to be done, and for God’s people to be defended and encouraged.”

Mr Tong, a long standing member of both Sydney and General Synods, said Dr Jensen is highly regarded by his peers for his theological expertise (higher degrees from the Universities of Sydney and Oxford) and his smooth running of the college, as well as his contributions to the Doctrine Commission, Standing Committee and General Synod. He describes his performance in Sydney’s Synod as “persuasive and gracious”, having taken a leadership role on issues such as child abuse procedures and women’s ordination.

On the latter, Dr Jensen declares himself opposed—as is the synod—on the basis of the “authority of the Bible”, although he is keen to encourage the ministry of women in other ways. In fact, his views on most major issues over the last few years, such as lay presidency (pro), A Prayer Book for Australia (anti) and parishes without property (pro), are in line with synod voting patterns.

On the sensitive matter of archepiscopal veto, he said that synod can usually be relied upon to come to sound conclusions, but that an archbishop should consider exercising it in relation to “a great matter”, where the authority of God’s word is at stake.

Since being converted at the age of 16 at the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade, Dr Jensen said he has moved on with “an ever-deepening appreciation of and dependence on the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of his Spirit.” He hopes to continue to exercise those qualities in the service of the Diocese.

If you had one thing to say to the Sydney Diocese what would it be?

“Be faithful, he bold. Consider what God has done and what he is doing.

First, he has given us extraordinary spiritual resources. We have the open Bible. We have the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have prayerful congregations seeking to be loving and obedient. We have the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.

Second, he has set us in an extraordinary place. Within the boundaries of the Diocese we have a number of major urban centres and important rural areas. The city of Sydney is a world centre. The Diocese contains people from many different cultures. Our location is a continuance challenge for us to think beyond our borders to the wider world.

Third, he has set us in all extraordinary times. The secular assault is sharper than ever, but its weaknesses are also clearer. Our culture may have rejected the gospel. But it is also becoming aware of a spiritual vacuum. The Lord Jesus Christ remains the one hope of this world.

Be faithful, faithful to God’s word, faithful to the legacy of the past. Be faithful to one another.

Be bold: accept the challenge posed by this place and this time. Be ready to sacrifice. Take the initiatives needed to make Christ known and to build healthy churches.”

Reg Piper

With parish experience literally all over Sydney, as well as outside it (Holy Trinity, Adelaide, for 14 years), and eight years as the Bishop of Wollongong, the Rt Rev Reg Piper is perhaps uniquely positioned to bring a pastor’s heart and an empathy with clergy to the role of Archbishop.

If he has one key message, it concerns the importance of singling out Jesus to the world as the only way to God, a theme to “morn,” he said. In his goal in all these things would be to take people from where they are and move them further along in Christ.

“Be a man of integrity who understands parish life, has leadership capabilities and is not afraid to bite the bullet,” said Mr Livingstone. “He relates to people at every social strata and is constantly in the media in Wollongong.”

With regard to recent Synod issues, Bishop Piper spoke against lay presidency “on the basis of order” rather than theology. He said he would be prepared to look at it differently if it could be managed in a “decency” fashion, and in a way that would promote discussion with the wider Anglican Church, rather than prejudice.

During debate, he has spoken in favour of A Prayer Book for Australia, saying its doctrine had been improved by Sydney’s contribution, but is now more keen on the prayer book produced by Sydney itself.

He is supportive of parishes without property (as long as it is conducted “in fellowship” with other churches), and would not ordain women to be the heads of a congregation.

Bishop Piper has developed strong links with dioceses in South East Asia and Africa, and believes Sydney must throw its weight behind the region.

“In Sydney we have money, and a biblical theology second to none in the world. But I am staggered at the faith of these people in third world countries,” he said, adding that it was something Sydney could well imitate.

If you had one thing to say to the Sydney Diocese what would it be?

“Let us together, with fear and trembling, shake ourselves loose from the materialistic and aggressive culture of our city and give ourselves wholeheartedly to our Only and Unique Saviour, Jesus Christ. Let us devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching, to praying earnestly for the kingdom of God, to sharing the common life we have in Christ and to encouraging the rich diversity of ministry gifts that God has given us so that we may, in partnership with other Christians, employ them graciously and passionately for the growth of the church and for the salvation of the world. Let us especially share the biblical theology of our Moore College teachers and graduates, the wealth that we have inherited and the ministries of the many gifted people we have. At the same time let us humbly learn from others, especially the faith, hope and love that is so evidently displayed by some of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Let us together grow up into Christ, our Head.”

The Australian Church Record
Phillip Jensen

Phillip Jensen

The Rev Phillip Jensen probably needs no introduction. He is one of the best-known faces in the Diocese thanks to an extensive speaking role, a high-profile ministry at the University of New South Wales and St Matthias, Centennial Park, and a strong presence in the media.

However, supporter Rev John Gray, rector of St John’s Park Church, believes there are still a lot of misconceptions about the man. Proponents of other candidates used the word ‘radical’ in reference to him, but Rev Gray prefers the term ‘visionary leader’. “People have to unravel the myth from the reality. Whenever in public life a clear vision and direction are given, there are those who feel uncomfortable with it,” said Mr Gray, noting that Mr Jensen’s track record includes the development of the Katoomba Conventions, the Ministry Training Strategy, Club 5, and the largest Anglican Church in Australia. “Phillip is a visionary leader without peer in the generations either side of him, or in his own.”

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Mr Gray goes further, saying Mr Jensen be “the world-wide church building vision” to see “people won to Christ that they may enjoy all the blessings won by Christ.” Mr Jensen believes the Archbishop should lead by example and teaching, so that the work of the gospel can be carried out in the parish churches.

His role in the Diocese has included major contributions to debates at Synod (such as introducing parishes without property), Standing Committee and the Diocesan Executive Board. He is a member of General Synod, and has spoken in the UK, USA, Asia and Africa over the last 15 years.

He describes lay presidency as “a long overdue reformation of our practices in a way that is thoroughly consistent with the Bible”, and is also in line with Synod’s views on A Prayer Book for Australia.

Regarding women’s ordination, he believes the theological confusion over ordination and episcopacy in Anglicanism has undermined the biblical value of lay ministry and undervalued the important work of encouraging women into paid ministry.

Regarding archepiscopal veto, he believes it should be used rarely, never to further the views of the bishop, and only as a check against oversights in legislation.

Like his brother Peter, he made a decision for Christ at the Billy Graham Crusade of 1959, and was further nurtured by a local fellowship and then Moore College. Life now, he says, is characterised by “waiting for the son from heaven, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

If you had one thing to say to the Sydney Diocese what would it be? “Thank you. Thank you for your faithfulness to the word of God. By your perseverance in the truth of the gospel, I have been brought to faith in Christ Jesus, nourished in the truths of the word of God, trained for the ministry of the gospel, provided with wonderful opportunities to bring saving news of Jesus to others, in the fellowship of a people who love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. ‘Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.’”

Robert Forsyth

It was Robert Forsyth’s very sense of humour that first got me noticed by the wider community as he battled wins with the public across the road from St Barnabas’s, Broadway, keeping commuters amused with a long-running exchange of slogans out the front of their establishments.

But, according to supporter Peter Kell, it was his leadership ability and faithful defence of the gospel that led to his long and effective ministry through ‘Barney’s’ and Sydney University’s Evangelical Union, and to his present role as Bishop of South Sydney.

“H e is a conservative evangelical in the Sydney mood—he would describe himself as a passionate evangelical, where Scripture is supreme, the church is subject to God in Scripture and there is a personal saving faith,” said Mr Kell. “He also has a warmth about his personality... and would bring a new sense of love and graciousness to the tone of the diocese.”

Mr Kell describes him further as someone who can “admit when he is wrong, seek forgiveness and move on.”

Bishop Forsyth (who brings the number of candidates converted at the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade to three) grew up in the Methodist Church, but switched to the Anglicans for theological reasons when he realised “the gospel was even more true than I thought”. Since then, he has seen more and more that “justification by faith is at the very heart of the Christian life.”

He believes the Archbishop must be responsible for setting the basic spiritual environment of the diocese, lead in teaching and evangelism, oversee policy formation, represent the diocese and the Christian faith in the wider community, and select clergy and encourage laity well so as to build up the effectiveness of the ministry of the diocese. He must also not be a ‘Prince Bishop’ as in the past, but a strong team-builder.

Bishop Forsyth has had long experience in parish life, on Standing Committee, General Synod, the Doctrine Commission and the Liturgical Panel, and has been involved in the LifeWorks evangelism program, the Cursillo movement and Amsterdam 2000.

His view of recent issues accords largely with Synod’s, supporting parishes without property, agreeing that the ordination of women was not appropriate “on biblical grounds”, and describing Synod’s stance on A Prayer Book for Australia as a “thoughtful… no/yes”. He regards the use of veto as something that should not be connected to the Archbishop’s preferences and used sparingly.

He said that, although he sees no theological objection, he has reservations about lay presidency.

“We should press ahead without more thought,” he said. “It could be one of those cases where ‘All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful.’”

He maintains that he wasn’t a key player on recent Synod issues as they haven’t been close to his heart.

“The main issues are not always ones Synod directly deals with,” he said, naming staying faithful to Christ, being more flexible in our ministry to the wider world, and doing it in a community which is not fractured, as his major concerns.

If you had one thing to say to the Sydney Diocese what would it be? Nearly 30 years ago I chose to join the Anglican Church here in the Diocese of Sydney because of the quality of the people I saw there and because of the gospel clarity they showed. Despite all the changes in personnel and issues since that time, these two factors remain our great strengths.

If I had one thing to say to the Sydney Diocese it would not be about who we should elect as our next archbishop, but that we must at the same time, 1) hold ourselves as a cohesive, grace-filled and godly community, where loving relationships and bridges are built to each other, and 2) engage with the city and the world in new, dynamic ways and loving ways which build on our theological strengths, and ensure that the gospel holds a real and authentic place in public life, rather than be marginalised or our voice become irrelevant.

“We must ensure that the gospel holds a real and authentic place in public life.”

We are in a time of great social change when the wonderful task of sharing Christ with our city and nation will demand new levels of creativity, engagement and faithfulness. The task facing us is, how at the same time, to be more effective in mission, (which will mean many changes), to be faithful to Christ, the Scriptures and our Evangelical Anglican heritage as we change, and also to build a welcoming and inclusive Christian diocesan community.

The appointment of a new archbishop gives us a new opportunity to “start again” as a Christian community committed to effective mission.

All interviews by Michelle Haines Thomas.
**Facts, figures and opinions on the candidates**

**Compiled by Robert Doyle**

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**PHILIP JENSEN**

**Personal style**

Pragmatic, insightful, humorous, persuasive, comes deeply from the heart and has the same caustic reality of empathy, courtesy and advocacy which so recommended Henry Goodeve.

**Theological profile**

Evangelical; author of numerous books and articles across a range of media; Evangelising Christians in Conventions, 1983-90; Chairmanship, Katoomba Christian Arts; Fellowship of Medical Evangelism; Christians in the Media, Evangelising Commerce; Fellowship of Evangelising Education; the Ministry Training Strategy now has 32 training centres operating some 110 trainees with 150 full-time and 150 part-time workers; ministerial visits, cover such issues as marriage, divorce, abortion, rape, and drug treatment across Australia and overseas.

**Missions Focus**

Member CMS from 1986, serving in the membership of St. Matthias, 12 families and single women have served as missionaries in France, Argentina, Egypt, Japan, Sweden, Turkey, and others.

**Vocational performance**

Chairman of the United Evangelistic Convention since 1983, a body comprising some 600 trainers and staff with a membership of the United Evangelistic Convention, produces some 110 trainers and staff with a membership of the United Evangelistic Convention, produces some 110 titles, and has produced more than 100 titles, as well as an inquisitive interest in the works of others.

**Growth in local ministry**

Campus Bible Study, from 12 in 1975 to 6,000 in 2001, at St. Matthias College, and a similar college in the United States.

**Major ministerial initiatives**

- 1998 co-sponsored a major supreme council on the ordination of women in the United States.

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ACR: Barry, you have been in Anglican circles for at least three archbishops and 30 synods. Sorry to bring you up by age, but what have you learnt about archbishops during that time?

Whatever else an archbishop is, I think a good one should be a teacher and a model. He must be a teacher of the truth and a defender of the truth. It’s because he cares for the flock. He must genuinely care for the truth because he is accountable to God, the great shepherd, and the one who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

A good leader is one who gives clear direction for others to follow and who knows himself. He seeks to guide the misguided, gently when gentleness is called for, firmly when the godly way is stubbornly resisted. He will not be silent when those who claim the name of Christ denigrate that name and confuse others. He is courageous, because he is God’s servant, because he cares for God’s people and because he earnestly desires that all will know the truth. He will speak up, make clear, defend and rebuke.

A good Anglican archbishop will be down some wrong but fashionable, dogmatic path, though many others might not. He won’t join the worldly throng, take the easy path or allow gross error to go unchecked for the sake of the pleasantness and niceties of good company.

What kind of godly qualities do you think risk coming to the surface in an archbishop?

Arrogance is one that comes to mind. In the Bible, the proud person places himself in opposition to God, promises more than he is capable of delivering, blinds himself with his own smoke, and cares little for the will of God, and a quality of company leadership skills, so it has to be checked. If we do not display humility then we are arrogant. But humility isn’t weakness—we can’t construct ourselves without character with arrogance. So there are traps here.

God resists the arrogant, who dare to imagine that they operate as though they were God, but instead gives grace to the humble. So, whatever else we have, we must not have an arrogant archbishop.

ACR: There can be no escaping the executive responsibilities of such a position. What kind of administrative skills or training does an archbishop need?

Actually, a good archbishop will not allow administrative demands, committee obligations, public appearances and civic duties to distract him from his duty to care for his family, other clergy, the laity under their care, and from his duty to proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus wherever and whenever he can. As difficult as it might be, for his own sake and the sake of others he must not lose sight of the main game.

This might mean he needs to rethink and rearrange priorities dictated by others, question the appropriateness of some of his social-ended responsibilities, and seek the help of others all of which will be fulfilling him. He will need to be immersed in parish life. How else will he be able to continue to understand the needs and aspirations, the crises and the joys of the clergy and the laity as they seek to serve God in their society and beyond? Perhaps he could become an assistant minister somewhere. A good Christian, Anglican archbishop will sincerely endeavour to be at peace with all, to diligently keep the unity of the Spirit, where indeed such unity under one Lord exists. And with all humility, longsuffering and meekness, in losing others, he will earnestly seek the good of all.

ACR: What to extent does the archbishop need to retain a relationship with the lead of synod, or does he need to keep some distance and act on his own?

A good archbishop will never lord it over others, but will count such a thing as a disgrace. That does not mean he might sometimes have to act courageously, taking a firm but unpopular line, even being misjudged. There will be no self-discipline, no self-optimisation or so sure of himself as never to consider criticism. He is not the head of some gigantic hierarchy over which he presides, pontificated and stamps his authority and will not be acting contrary to the advice and determination of others. He will take no delight in having a different opinion from a synod which he presides. He will not be corrupted by a love of status or power.

ACR: What about social action? The church and state are fairly separate in Sydney, at least officially. But what kind of social role do you think the archbishop needs to encourage?

As with any godly Christian, a worthy archbishop must have a lived vision for evangelism and a heart-felt concern for the poor, suffering and oppressed of the world who are neglected for the other, but we want an archbishop who can see that the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ promotes deep concern and generosity towards the needy. These imperatives will drive him personally and influence the strategies and the programs he proposes for others. He will in no way be blind to the needs of the dissolute but his concerns will not be limited in some parochial manner. Since his Heavenly Father is the one who really cares for the fatherless and the widow and sent his son into the world that through him the world might be saved, the godly archbishop will be utterly constrained to mirror him whom he serves and to glorify the Lord whom the Father glorifies.

ACR: Finally, an almost impossible question: is there any particular advice you would give to a new archbishop in our archdiocese at this point in Sydney’s history?

There are many questions we will consider in our choice: attitude to God’s ordination of women to the priesthood; relationships with the national church; and involvement in worldwide social problems. However, important as these questions are, we need an archbishop who sticks to the basics. I’ve tried to outline them in this interview: holding firmly to the truths of the faith, teaching and defending this truth, caring for the parishes, the joys and the sins of the clergy and all their concerns; a man who believes in the basics, and carries them out unswervingly, we will have chosen well.
The Australian Church Record

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The view from Bangkok
Stephen and Marion Gabbott

As a regional Thai language newspaper, the English-language Bangkok Post had this to say on March 10: "Some government officials in charge of the investigation might not want the matter to escalate and therefore, try to prevent the investigation into the bombing, hoping that time will lessen the impact of the incident. This kind of thinking was prevalent in the past; unsolved problems were often swept under the rug for the sake of political expediency or other reasons. People never know who was behind some terrible events that took place in our country. But Mr Thaksin is not the kind of person who accepts half-baked solutions. After winning the general election in January, he has proved that his 'think anew, act anew' policy is not just empty rhetoric. Mr Thaksin wants to know the truth, but truth, as most Westerners think of it, poses problems for many who live in South Asia. It's not just a question of what the truth is. That can often be established quite quickly. Then the question becomes, 'What do we do with it?' Plato's famous question comes easily to mind: 'What is truth?'

One of the great paradoxes of contemporary missiology is the apparent failure of the gospel in Thailand. There are Christians, but statistically they are bordering on the irrelevant. The great South East Asian missiological success story is South Korea. Why has the gospel worked in South Korea but failed to win hearts and minds in Thailand? Here and there of course there are spectacular local stories of gospel success. But nationally, the vast gospel input that Thailand has received for the last century and a half has not seen commensurate results. The pastulate remains, and we are in no position to offer a solution. However, one of the things that strikes the relative success of Thailand to the institutionisation of ambiguity and the cultural condescension with which 'simplicity' is greeted. It is probably fair to say that Thailand's Christians have yet to grasp the importance of 'setting forth the truth plainly'—as individuals, as denominational structures, and as parachurch organisations. This is a culture that prides itself on its historic capacity to preserve its identity. It could be that the gospel will only make progress when Thai people see in God's people a culture that is worth forsaking them to gain. Perhaps this will only happen when Christ's local church in Thailand allow their Master to use them to bring grace and truth to their kingdom, just as he brought it to his own people 2,000 years ago.

All cultures develop ways of handling the truth. They must. It's such a dangerous commodity.

The national interest
Greg Clarke

It's a strange phrase. It's one that politicians can hide behind when making hard decisions. "We know some people won't be happy, but we had to do what was in the national interest." Sometimes they might even mean it. It's true sometimes the wider community is served by a decision which disregutes some of its members. Working for 'the national interest' is, then, a two-edged sword.

As a national church communion, it is a phrase which has application to us. Many of us have been raised to think of ourselves as 'Australian Anglicans', just 'Sydney Anglicans', although the latter is what we get called. However, our relationship with those in Anglican churches outside Sydney is pretty loose. We don't have many get-togethers—a convention here, a consultation there. We have a great variety of church practices and an even greater variety of beliefs, some large and significant, others matters of preference or tradition. Nevertheless, we still see ourselves as hanging together in some way. When we meet an Anglican from Perth, there is immediately something of a sense of family. We may not feel unified with all Australian Anglicans—for we know how different we are from one other—but there is some sort of recognition there. Anyone entering such a situation as archbishop will have to be learning over his diocesan back fence chanting to his national neighbours. It just goes with the job. But we can ask too much of our leader on this front. After all, he is elected to shepherd the flock within his own diocese. This may, by necessity, bring him into dialogue with his neighbouring dioceses, if the attitude to shepherding is somewhat different. If the neighbours are keeping their sheep in strangely shaped pens, and urging our archbishop to do the same with us, we must hope he can say: "Thanks for the tip, but shepherding looks different on this side of the fence".

We want the archbishop to have some degree of independence from the national church, all the while maintaining the regular over-the-fence chat. Knowing who you are and whom you are serving helps. A shepherd who knows his flock is more use than one who isn't sure exactly which flock he is supposed to be protecting. Similarly, a clear-minded archbishop who can 'reach out globally, shepherd locally' is going to do the best job. If he is always pursuing 'the national interest', won't we notice that the home pens become a little unkempt?

Stranger still, we are also part of an international communion. Our bishops, preachers, ministers and evangelists represent us around the Anglican world at major gatherings such as Lambeth and at other official events. In recent times, under Archbishop Goodhew's direction, we have made major contributions to Anglican debates on the world stage. Archbishop Goodhew's stance against homosexuality at the Lambeth 2000 conference stands out. Here, our biblical faithfulness was a major factor in the rejection of mixing same-sex unions and ordaining homosexuals to Anglican ministry. These matters seem to occasion 'out there', distant from our own church concerns. However, they are not.

The sheep don't seem to notice it when a shepherd risks his life to save them from some calamity. They tend just to graze on happily—which of course, is the shepherd's delight! Perhaps this is where the pastor/shepherd metaphor breaks down, for Christian people are different to sheep at this point. If a church leader makes good decisions, they are reflected in the life of the diocese and the parish, and it gets noticed. The strong stance taken by Archbishop Goodhew at Lambeth against ordaining homosexuals resonated throughout Sydney and other supportive dioceses. It spoke reams of our commitment to Scripture first, to appropriate pastoral care. It had held fast to what we believed to be God's will in the matter, and we are now reaping the benefits. Opposing wrong thinking did us good, and we have been grateful.

In this circumstance, our leaders did in fact act in the 'national interest', despite the voices of protest. But they didn't assent to requests that wouldn't best serve their flock back home. They didn't become sheep themselves, mindlessly serving the larger, national and international powers while neglecting the needs of their own constituency. Certainly, they were there at the international level and their presence was felt. But they were there to challenge, to exhort, to correct, even to rebuke and reject. They acted 'in the national interest', but it put them offside with many. But we are glad they did what they did, for it was truly in our interest.

Can we encourage our next archbishop to 'reach out globally, shepherd locally'? We have much to offer the national and international communion, but it must be done with a view to the welfare of the local flock.
The rhetoric of irreversibility

Peter Bolt

There are no reverse gears on a tank”, so the saying goes. I’m not even sure that it is true, but it is rhetoric we hear all the time in the media. So, observed Jay Belk, Professor of Psychology at the University of London, whose research interests include the effects of long-term childcare on children. His findings that long-term childcare is correlated with some negative features of behaviour in children, such as the inability to form attachments through the media. Experts were assembled, not to dispute the results, but to say they were interested in them. They are interested because they believe: “We can’t turn the clock back; it’s not useful to investigate [such things]”, said one. Another was cited as saying, “Childcare is here to stay”. The institution will stay, must stay, and at all costs. But, if the good professor has found something true, what will happen to the children? Since the world is our schoolhouse, it is no surprise that the same rhetoric surfaces in discussions within Christianity. The rhetoric of irreversibility appears in the New Testament: “What a reception of a child which you offer. And if any one in you makes it so, a child, a child of the Church is no longer relevant. It is time to join and to speak today, in a sense, as paradoxically true, a child is the Church. Synods around the world have made their decisions, so why should we try to unmake them? Returning to an earlier idea is characterized by the action of reversing, ‘out of date’, ‘out of date’, ‘out of date’... This is the same kind of rhetoric that says a certain change is “inexorable”, and orders the opposition to lie down and die. It is the kind that says “everybody is doing it, go with the flow”.... It is the kind that attempts to disempower individuals, blurring then demand that bad things need to change, even if we have come a long way too far.

This is a rhetoric of fatalism, by any other name. Time is more fluid than that. And it is our servant not our master. We are free to move around in it, or stand still, or even move backwards, if wisdom lies more in the past than in the present. The clock may not be stopped, but there is always time for human beings to change their minds and to change their lives for the better. You can go forwards by going backwards. It is extremely strange to hear Christians uttering the rhetoric of fatalism: “Everything has changed so much... we can’t return to where we used to be”. But isn’t the prefix “re” our bread and butter? Didn’t we once change the world by a thing known as the ‘reformation’, when there was an attempt to ‘re-turn’ to the Christianity of the Bible?

Haven’t we changed societies with our ‘revivals’, when we have returned to the gospel and lived better lives as a result? Don’t we serve a God who continually addresses all people with the good news of a man who reversed death itself, and, as a consequence, asks for all people everywhere to repent, and so to find regeneration, re-salvation, re-storation, ready for the Resurrection Day? The gospel has always “turned the world upside down”. It will always call individuals, societies and nations to come to their senses, to see what they have lost, and to return home from the pagans. Surrendering to the rhetoric of irreversibility makes a mockery of our main message: In the gospel of Jesus, there is always time to turn back to anything good we have left behind. Well, not quite always.
Vote for Superman

He’s Harrison Ford, Superman and Don Bradman rolled into one. He’s got the wisdom of Solomon, the faithfulness of Job, the passion of Peter and the tenacity of Paul. And yet, he has the sensitivity of St Francis and the diplomacy of Koffi Annan. He’s a reforming, conserving, radical, mainstream, exciting, comforting, dynamic, measured, revolutionary, status-quo-ist, statesmanlike, down-to-earth, powerful, humble, aggressive, peace-loving kind of guy. I’ve been trying to think of one justified sinner I know who has any chance of fitting the bill.

I keep forcing myself back to Scripture to think about church leadership, because otherwise all of these other influences take over: movie stars who work for me, historical figures I happen to like, sports legends, political activists who push my buttons.

I think I’m trying too hard.

I run the risk of expecting too much from our archbishop—of following society’s passion for the superstar. Worse, I can veer into expecting some kind of vicar figure who will be almost Christ on earth. Many died during the Reformation over that. Better not let their blood be wasted.

All the same, I don’t want a leader who can’t be looked up to as some sort of hero. I seem to be in agreement with Scripture here. Christ’s servants are good soldiers, fine athletes, hard-working farmers (2 Tim 2:3-6); they are morally great and exhibit courage (Titus 1:7-9); they are super dads and husbands (1 Tim 3:4-5); they adhere to the truths of the faith with clear consciences (1 Tim 3:3).

In short, they have chests.

The phrase ‘men without chests’ is from C. S. Lewis. The chest is between the mind (reason) and the belly (desire). It’s the part of the body which pulls reason and desire together and forms a resolve character: a good heart pumping inside a sturdy rib cage. Now, more than ever, leaders must have chests. They don’t have to be hairy; they just have to be strong.

Patrick White, the celebrated Australian novelist, once described himself as a “lapsed Anglican egotist, agnostic, pantheist, occultist, Anglican egotist, agnostic, pantheist, occultist, anthropologist, existentialist, would-be though failed Christian” (as described by Steve White, his son). Plenty of other Australians would fit into all or part of this description. White once said that he suspects he would have believed, except that when he was a child Christ was presented to him as “milk and mild, in sugar pink” for “pretty baby lamb to adore”. What he wanted was Jesus the Red Indian, like his infallible boyhood hero, Deerfoot, the great runner. Deerfoot had chest.

What a tragedy for White, because Christ is a Deerfoot. That’s what we need now. Jesus the Red Indian and a leader with a chest.

AN INSPIRING TEACHER AND FRIEND

On 7 March 2003, we celebrated the life of one of the most inspiring and talented minds of Sydney Anglicanism in the late 20th century, with a funeral in St Andrew’s Cathedral, Sydney. Bruce Smith died on 3 March, after an all-too-short battle with leukemia, at the age of 68. Bruce’s ministry stretched across four decades, in various places and roles, but it was everywhere characterised by an overwhelming love of Christ.

The younger generations remember Bruce as an outwardly alarming but inwardly charming man, an academic enthralled by the arts, someone who understood the casual observer seemed eccentric or even aloof, but to those who knew him even slightly was revealed to be an exceedingly generous and intimate friend. Bruce was loved as a teacher of theology who could communicate the force and feeling of the truth. His delivery style was eloquent and virtuosic with a deep appreciation of the fact that a lecture can also be a performance.

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Defiance

‘Bamboo,’ he said defiantly, ‘Bamboo.’

He stood in the kitchen by the door and fetched this word from his limited store to break our wills with his. He’s barely two years into life (and one of these was spent in Asia) and now he stood, bare-legged and nappy-clad, defying the adult world with all his verbal strength while we held back our laughter.

But if in later years he were to stand, like Luther, and say ‘Bamboo’ in the cause of what he knew was true, we would not laugh, indeed we would not laugh.

Poems from Bruce Smith’s collection, I’ll Not Pretend.

Demolition Work

Through meshed wire we see the rectangles of exposed foundations where small strong buildings once stood. Bare earth with traces of brick and tiled flooring open to the sky. A broken, partly plastered, rear wall still stands. People once worked here; they thought and talked and laughed here. They came here daily and stood where now the earth is scarred and birds alone employ themselves scavenging among the ruins.

It’s all so familiar. The demolishers have been. The future has brushed aside the past. On this site, in due time, some office block will rise and take its place in the crowded skyline of our city. It’s a commonplace. Our urban surgeons perform these cosmetic feats daily.

But, even so, I’m troubled. Troubled not by the absence of the familiar, for these buildings meant nothing to me; troubled by impermanence. This vacant block, this earthy blemish on the city’s proud face, plucks the mortar from my life and writes ‘condemned’ on every wall.

The exposed foundations are mine and I tremble.

Teacher and Friend

Someone who to the casual observer seemed eccentric or even aloof, but to those who knew him even slightly was revealed to be an exceedingly generous and intimate friend. He interwove his poetry (of which he published two well-received volumes) into his sermons and shared his own deep personal grief and exclamation as a part of the grieving creation that awaits its redemption.

Grief came to Bruce Smith through the breakdown of his marriage in the early 70s and his subsequent withdrawal from full-time theological lecturing. His public profile was greatly diminished from this point onwards, but his personal witness to Christ was unabated. Friends say that he grew as a model of God’s grace and mercy until his last day.

Bruce Smith was an unusual and outstanding Christian man, a preacher and teacher who never ceased to feel the weight of sin and the weight of glory. He leaves behind generations of Christian students and ministers who have enjoyed his theological passion and his appeal to Christ as the one who, in the end, satisfies all of our desires.