

Presidential Address

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2005

THE HERITAGE OF THE REFORMATION

Will we see an unusual work of God in our time?

On 16th October 1555, almost exactly 450 years ago, two bishops, a theologian and a preacher, were cruelly burned to death for the faith, in Oxford. We should remember them with thanksgiving; we are their spiritual descendants. They were Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer: Ridley the theologian, Latimer the preacher.

They did not seek martyrdom; nor did they flinch from it when the moment came. What held them on their course were the great doctrines of God's mercy which they found as they studied the scriptures as the unique, supremely authoritative, word of God: justification by faith alone, through Christ alone, by grace alone, to the glory of God alone. Latimer famously encouraged his friend Ridley with the words, 'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.'¹

We see, in the light which they gave us.

We are their descendants, because they played a major role in the recovery of the evangelical gospel in England. They did much in their lives and teaching; they did most through their deaths. Months later, the cause of the Reformation was further sealed with the death by burning of Thomas Cranmer. It was their evangelical Protestantism which has been the major shaping force in this Diocese. When we forget them, we forget who we are. Through them God did a major and unusual work, with consequences even now still apparent.

THE QUESTION FOR OUR DIOCESE

'Will we see an unusual work of God in *our* time?'

Bishop Reg Piper asked me that question about eighteen months ago, and he insisted that I answer it before a tough audience at the Wollongong Region Ministry Conference. Furthermore, he told me that I was to talk about the Reformation as an unusual work of God and what lessons we may draw from it.

I did not like his question. It is a threatening question; it asks for prophecy; it suggests that our only hope for evangelism is revival; and, anyhow, I did not know the answer.

And yet, when I started to think about it, I saw that it was an excellent question, and a very fair one for him to ask. In fact, although I have spoken about it at some ministry conferences, I plan to make it the backbone of the Address tonight.

Why? Exactly three years ago the Synod of our Diocese overwhelmingly endorsed our Diocesan ten-year Mission. The initial goal is, 'To see at least 10% of the population of the region of the Diocese in Bible-based churches in 10 years.'

As I explained last year, one way of looking at this is to say that such churches now account for 3.2% of the population. Assume that there were about 75,000 Anglicans regularly attending in 2002. For us all to achieve ten percent, we Sydney Anglicans would need to grow our numbers to about 250,000. At least.

In ten years? To me, that sounds like 'an unusual work of God'. Indeed, from the very beginning I have said that such a move forward would have to come from God, since, humanly speaking, in a society such as ours, it is impossible, quite impossible. We have never ventured into this Mission together on any other assumption than that progress must come from God.

¹ As given by Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 581.

The work may be 'impossible', or 'unusual', but that does not mean that it will be inexplicable. When God sees fit to bless us, whether in small or large matters, we can almost always see the means by which his blessing comes.

Once when I was a student, through no fault of my own I was short of about \$1,000. I prayed and left the matter with the Lord. In the necessary time, all but about \$3 arrived – I've often wondered about that \$3 – but in virtually every case, I knew where the money had come from. I was able both to thank God for his people, and to thank God's people for their generosity. This is how God works. He does not *need* our prayers in order to act; he does not *need* our labours in order to feed us; he does not *need* our sharing of the gospel in order to bring people to himself. But in the way he has arranged the world, by making us image-bearers, he graciously incorporates our activities into his work:

Your prayers are truly instrumental in public justice and good order;
your work is truly the means by which your family is fed;
your words are truly the way in which someone comes to know Christ.

As Paul says about missionary work, 'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.' (1 Corinthians 3:6,7).

THE STORY OF THE REFORMATION

Since God uses means, can we see how it was that the Reformation occurred when and how it did? Let me divide my answer in two: God's providential work and his gospel work.

First of all, God's providential work in the Reformation. As we study the big-picture history of the period, we can see signs of God's providence at work to bring about this mighty upheaval. Thus, for example, in the decades before the Reformation there was a flowering of new learning linked to a new piety in Europe, often called 'the Renaissance' (though I understand that this is an unfashionable term these days). The Reformers were able to call upon this learning to help them return to the original languages of the Bible and study it afresh.

Then there was the evident corruption of the Church, against which men and women were prepared to revolt, even if they only dimly comprehended the theological issues at stake. As well, the stirrings of reformation occurred at a time in European history when civil rulers were prepared to break with the papacy, for a variety of reasons, not all of them good.

Finally, there was the introduction of new technology, especially printing, which enabled the books and sermons of the Reformers to be spread widely and rapidly. Above all, of course, there was the translation and printing of the Bible, so the text of the Bible became embedded deep in the culture of nation after nation, people after people.

Now I am sure that contemporary historians would want to challenge me about the list and add to or subtract from it. My point is this: the Reformation did not occur suddenly in a historical vacuum. It had a context; it grew in a certain culture. If you believe, as I do, both that God is the sovereign Lord of history, and that the Reformation was a work of God, you will acknowledge that his providential hand was in this. The power of the gospel was like a spark to tinder already prepared.

And yet the gospel had to be there, to be the spark. If I call the great historical movements the *providential* work of God, I call the essential inner story, the *gospel* work of God. Thus the English Reformation would have been no more than a political turmoil around the marital and succession problems of Henry VIII and that monarch's twisted conscience, if it were not for the fact that men like William Tyndale, Thomas Bilney, Hugh Latimer and Thomas Cranmer had been won for the evangelical cause. That is, God had provided for himself witnesses to his gospel at the right time and in the right place.

There were four elements to this gospel work of God.

First, the power of the Scriptures. It is absolutely fundamental to Christianity that God speaks, and that he has spoken in and through the Bible. The speech of God is what distinguished him from the idols of the nations as the living and true God. The fact that Jesus fulfilled the promises of God expressed in the Old Testament is the demonstration that he is indeed the Messiah. Jesus is the word of God; the scriptures, too are the word of God, centred on Jesus and explained for us by Jesus.

In the sixteenth century at the cost of his own life, William Tyndale brought the scriptures in translation to the English-speaking peoples and so bequeathed one of the greatest of all possible gifts to us. The assumption

was that every person should have access to the Bible in their own language; the assumption was that men and women could be trusted with the Bible without the intervention of the priest or the church; the assumption was that the Bible is clear enough to be understood and believed and obeyed by ordinary people.

The consequence was a widespread habit of family bible reading and prayer; households becoming little churches, mothers and fathers becoming the spiritual elder brothers and sisters of their children as they read and pondered the word of God for themselves; the consequence was a new level of faith and determination to serve God; the consequence was a change in the nature, training and task of the ministry.

On March 7th 1815, the Bible Society became the first missionary society to be established in Australia. Its patron was Governor Macquarie who said that he was bound to support it, 'as a man and as a Christian'. The committee consisted of the leading members of the community in those days, including Thomas Moore after whom our College is named. At the first meeting they raised three hundred pounds and promptly sent half of this to England to help the world-wide work.

Its aim was to make the word of God available to all. They conducted a survey of all the people of Sydney to see who had a Bible and who could read, discovering that 'more than one-third of the dwellings and nearly three-fifths of the inhabitants who can read are without a Bible.' The next task was to supply the Bibles. The survey was carried out by, 'leading citizens, including officials in high places'.²

Second, the power of the gospel. Hugh Latimer was the great preacher of the English Reformation. He came to know Christ through Thomas Bilney, 'little Bilney' as he was known. Bilney targeted Latimer, and went to Latimer ostensibly to confess his sins. In doing so, he shared with him that which had grasped and cleansed his own soul: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1 Timothy 1:15). Through this encounter, Latimer was converted to the evangelical faith and became one of its greatest advocates. Bilney himself became one of the earliest martyrs.

That text sums up the gospel and the Bible. It speaks to us of the utter misery and hopelessness to which our sins have brought us; it speaks to us of the Son of God who purposed to come into our world and save us, undeserving as we are; it tells us his name, fairest of the fair, the name of Jesus; and it gives him his title Christ, the one who is God's appointed king and Lord, whose task was to die to bring us home.

It is this gospel which renewed the church, converted thousands to faith in Christ and brought forgiveness, joy and assurance in its train. It was based on a deep awareness of human sin and inability to save ourselves, matched only by the Spirit's work in assuring sinners of the fatherly love of God and the salvation which came through the cross of Christ. It said: grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, the glory of God alone, against every human attempt to find other mediators, other grounds for salvation.

It was this gospel which arrived on the first fleet with chaplain Richard Johnson, a gospel which he strove to preach in the unpromising soil of the colony in those early years. He and his wife Mary were often lonely, discouraged, dismayed. He wrote to a friend in England: 'I hope I have said enough to discourage you from ever emigrating to this part of the world'. He longed to return home. What kept him here was, 'the pity and concern I feel for these poor people with whom I am connected. Happy would I be to live on bread and water...did I but see some of these poor souls begin to think about their latter end.'

What was his gospel? 'The Gospel' he wrote, 'proposes a free and gracious pardon to the guilty, cleansing to the polluted, healing to the sick, happiness to the miserable and even life to the dead'. Elsewhere he said, 'I am not ashamed of the precious gospel of Jesus, having long since come to the Apostle's resolution' (to know nothing among you except Christ crucified) 'well knowing that whatever doctrine does not tend to humble the sinner, and to exalt the Saviour, is anti-christ'.³ How little could Johnson have imagined the mighty works which sprang from his first small efforts. Woe betide us if we now preach a different gospel!

Third, the power of preaching. By 'preaching' I mean rather the communication of God's word as God's word. This activity was as integral to the success of the Reformation as it must be for any spiritual work, especially evangelism. It was carried out by lay men and women as well as clergy. But the key to the success of the Reformation was with the learned and fearless leadership of those who like Latimer and Ridley studied deeply, prayed fervently and spoke boldly. Latimer in particular was famous for the way in which he applied the word of God to the social conditions of his day without fear.

Preaching, as we all know, is in itself a feeble and foolish enterprise; imagine the audacity of thinking that we may have the right to speak for God. There are few of us who cannot be embarrassed at such a claim

² Rev. A.T.Thompson, *Australia and the Bible*, British and Foreign Bible Society, London, 1935, 34-5. I owe this reference to Dr Peter Bolt.

³ Iain H.Murray, *Australian Christian Life From 1788*, Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1988., 3ff.

or feel the disjunction between what we say and who we are. Even more significant as Paul reminds us, the message we have been given sounds foolish to the cultured, and not-so-cultured world. Nonetheless, as it was in the apostolic age, so it was in the Reformation.

Indeed, the way in which God makes new Christians is through the word blessed by the Holy Spirit. That is his method; that is the method he has given us to pursue. There is no easier, or more mechanistic, or mystical path. We must let the word do it.

I called this the power of preaching. But of course preaching is futile if it is not the preaching of the word. It is not preaching which saves, but the word of God. We may preach from any part of the riches that make up the Bible, but in the end the central message remains that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; we will need to explain what sin is and describe it by using the law of God to define it and condemn it; we will need to say who Jesus is and why he came; we will need to preach his death on the cross; and we will need to summon men and women to repentance and faith in him in such a way that they will accept him as their lord and saviour.

In 1959, Billy Graham shook this city with convinced, biblical preaching. But the success of that preaching was premised in what preceded it. For over fifteen years there had been vigorous church planting in the Diocese. There had been biblical preaching. And there had been much prayer. God worked privately for years and publicly for a month. The Graham campaign itself was meticulously planned. It took the standards we expect of Christian work to new heights. It is perfectly clear that great Christian movements often involve much planning and hard work. Strategy, resourcing, thought, energy – all these things are used by God for his purposes. But the sharp end of the Christian mission remains the word, the Spirit and prayer. They are God's appointed special means.

Fourth, the power of blood. Would that there were no martyrs, and would that Protestants were without guilt in this bloody competition. I have no wish to raise old quarrels. Nonetheless, it is true to say that the determination of men like Bilney, Tyndale, Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer, together with many other men and women, confirmed and inspired the cause of the gospel in their generation. They were prepared to say 'no' to error, even at great risk to themselves.

Such martyrdom does not begin on the day on which you lose your life. It is an outgrowth of the determination to do what Jesus said, to take up the cross *daily* and follow him. It is the spirit of sacrifice for Jesus and his cause which should mark every Christian. At this level, we should all carry around within us the spirit of the martyr, self-denial and love for others; the great sacrifice of Christ for us, the assurance of the love of God by the power of the Holy Spirit; if it has truly reached our inner being, it will have transformed us into willing servants of the Lord and it will have put all our time, all our treasure, all our efforts at his disposal. This is the true worship he seeks.

If we look to the examples of those who have gone before us, we can see that this devotion to Christ included the sacrifice of time and energy in planning and human interaction. We must not despise such endeavours. The Reformation did not merely happen spontaneously. Involved at every level we see men and women who gave themselves to the work which was necessary for such a bold enterprise. They had to strategise about bringing a reformation to a whole nation: how to translate the Bible and distribute it; how to increase literacy; how to train the clergy. Their form of church planting involved a new, evangelical liturgy for every parish, new sermons for the clergy, new rules of association, new institutions of learning, new leadership chosen because of their evangelical commitments. Do not think for a moment that these things were instantly or easily done.

The Graham crusade capped years of planning; the English Reformation required deep and dangerous involvement in the politics of the nation, and much forethought; Johnson was sent to Australia because of the political intervention of William Wilberforce and John Newton. They may not have used the current jargon of vision and mission and goals and strategy, let alone church growth and 'the rock model': but they were very good at them. This, too, was worship.

It was the bringing together of the big-picture providential work of God, and the gospel work of God which caused the gracequake of the Reformation. He did it; but he used the obedience of his servants to bring it about. The gospel means are the means he has appointed to set forward his work in every age. We use them whether the ground is as hard as it was in the days of Jeremiah, or as fertile as it was when Jonah shook the city of Nineveh.

Scripture, gospel, preaching, sacrifice - these were the four powers of the Reformation, the gospel-means which God used to light a light which has not even yet gone out.

THE STORY IN SYDNEY DIOCESE

Now I can hear a still, small voice coming from the Illawarra; 'Yes, but will we see an unusual work of God in *our* time?' Another way of asking this is to say, 'Will we see an evident conjunction of God's providential work with his gospel work, resulting in the conversion of many thousands, the building up and planting of Bible-based loving missionary-minded churches, and ten percent of the population in such churches, in ten years?'

In one sense it does not matter. Our business is to keep on faithfully using the special means that God has appointed. We may be in an age like the age of Richard Johnson; he built an imposing church-building and the convicts burned it down. And yet, the gospel was planted here. God often works cumulatively rather than speedily.

Furthermore, we must recognise that it is absolutely normal for gospel work to be difficult. The Bible tells us that the human heart is very resistant to the message of Jesus. Recently I asked a group of our women pastors, teachers and evangelists how they were finding evangelism. I did not get the sense that they were discouraged; but I certainly was made aware that we live in a society resistant to the gospel. Here were some of the difficulties they mentioned.

First, the sheer busyness of life in the new utopia we now inhabit. Our prosperity has been purchased at a fearful price to relationships. The cost of living virtually demands two incomes in a family; work has become all-demanding; shopping has become a recreation instead of a mere necessity; sport and children's activities impact more and more on Sunday. Christian fellowship seems to be an optional extra, even for believers; Christian service has to be done on top of an already stressed life.

Recently I have been raising questions publicly about the government's IR revolution. What concerns me is the need for preserving shared time for children, families, relationships for all Australians.

Louise Dodson of the Sydney Morning Herald has suggested that, "Sunday is the new Monday". If this is a consequence of the new legislation there won't be time for relationships – and that's what life is about, not merely economy. Without shared time we may as well be robots. I wait anxiously to see what 'A New Workplace Relations System' will mean for our community.

The person most likely to come to join a church is the person actually brought by a friend or relative. When relationships suffer because of busyness, the more difficult it is to succeed evangelistically.

Second, ignorance of Jesus and the gospel. With every passing decade, the knowledge of the basic facts of the gospel, which could once be taken for granted, becomes more and more garbled. I wonder what we would find today if we took a survey of Bible ownership; I wonder if we would do that work today. It is certainly easier to reach the person who has some knowledge than the person who has none whatsoever.

Third, the bad name of the church Australia-wide. People want to disassociate the church from Jesus. I believe that there are several elements to this – a distrust of any authoritative institution; a recognition that church membership makes demands; bad experiences of boring and irrelevant church services; proven allegations of child abuse and cover-up, which tarnish the wonderful work done by so many over such a long period.

Fourth, the deep, deep unwillingness to commit. We live in a society which sets huge store on the individual and autonomy and on freedom of choice. Commitment of all sorts seems difficult. People recognise that a commitment to Jesus is an all-encompassing matter; they see it as an unacceptable loss of freedom. My informants especially mentioned the generation between say ten and thirty: for them accepting Christ would mean a totally unacceptable restriction on their moral freedom – unacceptable and unimaginable. But, then, those who worked among the aged could see no great move towards spiritual reflection there either – except, and this applies to all age groups, a spirituality which is itself individualistic, which does not make spiritual or moral demands.

That is a realistic list. It helps us analyse what the difficulties are and it reminds us that in the end all Christian work is spiritual. Scripture, prayer, preaching, sacrifice: these are still the means of advancing the kingdom; the difficulties are themselves fundamentally spiritual.

Thus, the list does nothing to weaken my resolve; it tells me that we must persevere and not be discouraged. It reminds me that it takes the power of God – his word and his Spirit - to bring people to himself. It commits me once again to the gospel means by which God does his great work, the means which I must continue to use, no matter how difficult the times or barren the soil. It commits me to

planning, to strategy, to working out how we can advance. It commits me to using such tools as the vision of at least ten percent in ten years; it commits me to sacrifice in the cause of Christ.

OUR DIOCESAN MISSION

Back in 2002, we thought about our society, and our churches, and our history. We asked:

given the gospel-means that God has appointed,
given the job we have to do,
given the times we are living in,
how should we do our work?

Knowing, too, that the synod represents, but cannot determine parish actions, we asked,
what's our *united* strategy?

These questions resulted in four concrete policies.
That is, we translated our gospel work into those four policies.
Here they are.

- 1 To call upon God for such an outpouring of his Spirit that his people will be assured of his love through his word, seek to please the Saviour in all things, manifest the godly life and be filled with prayerful and sacrificial compassion for the lost in all the world.
- 2 To enable the parish churches to expand numerically, equip and nurture their members, and become the mother-churches of as many congregations and fellowships as possible; and also to take further initiatives to create fellowships by penetrating structures of society beyond the reach of the parish church with the gospel.
- 3 To multiply the number of well-trained persons (ordained, lay, full time, voluntary) lovingly dedicated to the creation and development of such parishes, congregations and fellowships by proclaiming the gospel.
- 4 To reform the life of the Diocese (including our culture, ordinances, customs, use of resources, and deployment of ministry) to encourage and enable the fulfilment of the fundamental aim.

I summarize them by saying:

Prayer and Preaching,
Multiplying congregations,
Multiplying Persons,
Reform.

With what results? In my judgement, these policies have demonstrated themselves to be exactly right.

I can personally testify that they have proved extremely powerful and effective in:

- Creating new congregations, churches and fellowships
- winning new people to Christ
- uniting us in our common cause and in our operations
- forcing us to ask new questions and tackle new challenges
- stimulating new work and so increasing numbers
- linking us to the surrounding community anew
- guiding priorities
- providing a sense of accountability
- attracting new men and women workers
- giving permission for change
- enabling our organisations to be part of the Diocesan story
- changing work patterns for leaders

As far as diocesan structures are concerned, they have impacted strongly and excellently. The Diocese has changed fairly dramatically. The fundamental aim has been to help resource parishes in the fulfilment of these policies.

For example,

The Archbishop, Bishops and Archdeacons work by these policies;

We recruit and train our theological students in the light of the policies;

We deploy and resource people in accordance with these policies

We pray in line with the policies;

Our organizations align themselves to these policies;

Our budget is shaped by the policies;

We have begun to change ordinances in light of the policies;

We have revolutionized the ethos of the Secretariat in line with the policies;

We have begun the serious study of how parishes work, so that we can apply the policies.

The list could be much longer.

Two years ago I asked Bishop Piper to be responsible for encouraging us all to act in a concerted way on Policy 1. After all, there is no point in having the other policies if we are not a praying and preaching people. Let us ask Reg about the outworking of this policy.

Policy 1

Policy 2

You could call Policy 2 the *operative* part of the Mission. The policy calls on us to concentrate a lot of effort in starting new groups of all kinds; new churches, new congregations, new work amongst ethnic people and young people, groups in the work place. How has this policy been going?

In one sense, you know better than I do. You know your parish and can testify to the changes over the last two years. For some there has been a great change; for others the Mission has not been embraced at all; still others were in mission mode before the Synod decided to make its commitment to mission. What we see at Synod is the big picture, what is happening across the parishes as a whole.

Basically, a whole lot of new ministries and new initiatives have sprung up. For example, although the northern region had stalled for a long time in church planting and growth, it is exciting to see the churches in this comparatively well-resourced area starting again to create new Christian ministries. Of course, not all church plants have succeeded, and some parishes have not been planting, just growing and transforming what is already there. But I can count about seventeen attempts.

Here is Rev John Reid to tell us about one on the Northern Beaches.

But Policy 2 is not just about church plants. It is also about how to penetrate society. One of our traditional ways of doing this is through scripture in schools. We have over 100,000 children in scripture classes each week. I have been concerned that we are not more intentional in helping them to cross the bridge to church.

Here is Rev Barry Costello to tell us what he has been doing about this problem this year.

Not all church plants have flourished.

Here is Rev Michael Robinson to tell us about one that decided to move in a different direction.

I have also been wondering how our schools can help meet the spiritual needs of parents and children who do not go to our parish churches.

Rev Stephen Edwards is here to tell us about a new initiative at the Kings School.

Policy 3

Policy 3 is the dynamic of the Mission. God works through people, and policy three calls on us to recruit and train more and more people. I am told that of the three biggest Anglican Colleges in Australia, the Diocese has two. True or not, obviously Moore has many students, but Youthworks is growing at a tremendous rate. Thank God for this! In fact thank God for his great blessings in this whole area.

Let's hear from and about the Youthworks College.

I have been concerned that we do not offer enough intentional help to parishes and clergy who are looking for ways to get on with mission but need advice and help. I am trying to make sure that the resources of the Diocese are applied to help parishes to mission. Obviously Evangelism Ministries must continue to be a key player here.

Here is the newly appointed Director of Evangelism Ministries, Canon Jim Ramsay, to tell us how EM is going to continue its task of resourcing parishes.

Policy 4

In policy 4 we give ourselves permission to do everything necessary to make the first three policies work. This requires something which Anglicans resist by instinct: change! It must have been an Anglican old lady who asked when they brought in decimal currency, 'why don't they let all the old people die out first?' And yet it is evident that if we do not change we will wither.

I have been concerned that we are not more understanding of how parishes function and what lifecycle they have. If we do not know this, we will not know how to help the parish at each stage of its life. It is a recipe for death. I could take you around Sydney and show you the parishes that once flourished but then collapsed; we forget about them, but they are warning us that it could happen even where you are.

Here is a model of the parish life-cycle that we have developed and shared with most of the clergy. It is not perfect, and unfortunately some have regarded it as a threat rather than a tool. I hope that you have all seen it by now and that it has helped you work on the needs of your parish and your present opportunities for mission. If not, could you begin to use it, or some other tool of analysis?

Under the impact of the Mission some parishes have changed dramatically. They have been reinvented. I can think of Annandale, Ashbury, Arncliffe and Kogarah, for example. We are going to have to do far more of this if we wish parishes to survive and prosper. Simply doing nothing is no longer an option.

Here is the evidence of change in each case: the money available in each parish as it was in 2002 and as it was in 2004.

As an illustration let's see what has happened to the parish of Kogarah.

My question for you is, do you need to make changes? What are they? Have you started yet? What cherished things will you give up in order that others may hear the gospel? These are spiritual questions about our willingness to sacrifice. So often, good progress is stopped by our lethargy or even selfishness.

We have also to change our ways of doing things in order to help the Mission.

Here is Rev Zac Veron to tell us about how his parish was helped by the Synod actually doing something different.

So what has happened? We have applied the four policies in many areas of our life together. It is still only the beginning of a grand experiment. Can we see any fruit? Formal religion remains much the same, but here is what is evident.

- more paid workers,
- more congregations,
- more children's work,
- more money,
- more students in training, with our biggest ordination ever next February,
- more people attending our churches in one way or another.

The increase appears to be in the order of 3%. That is about double the rate of the increase we experienced in the quite good years 1991-2001. It is almost double the rate of population growth in Sydney itself.

This is a great beginning, and I have not told half the story. We give God thanks for it!

I want to thank those of you who have taken up the challenge to bring your parishes on board with the diocesan-wide Mission. Ours is a voluntary association. Nobody and no parish has to join in with this Mission. But by our joint efforts we will achieve far more than by individualism. I hope that you will keep refining and working on these policies, or, if you have not really begun you will join in, start work.

Think ten years: the first three years of the Mission are the shake-down years. We have discovered a great deal about ourselves and many weaknesses have become apparent. It is clear that many of our parishes are under-resourced; all areas of the Diocese are difficult; some are more difficult than others. Some of the hard work is yet to bear the fruit which I believe it will in due course. But everything is telling us that it is right to go on.

Will we see an unusual work of God in our time?

It is beyond our capacity to read God's mind from his providence and we need to be cautious in discussing such a question. But, as I consider the nature of our era, I would be prepared to say this at least: the signs are that we have begun at the right time.

It is the right time because we still have time. They say that faith is receding in much of the western world and not least in our own country. But owing to the good stewardship of the gospel in previous generations, this is one of the few places where we still have resources to meet this challenge. They will not last forever, and to bury them in the ground would be fatal. We must use them, or lose them.

It is the right time because we were moving in the right direction in any case. The Mission is not new; we have always been evangelistically minded and the steady growth in our churches over the last 15 years or more is an indication of that. The point is that we do not have to turn the ship around, a much harder task. I would say that we are already aligned to God's gospel work.

God has resourced us very well indeed, in terms of finance, the quantity and quality of personnel, our organisations, but especially with our long tradition of biblical theology and evangelism. Frankly, progress is being made where there are strong biblical convictions and people prepared to stand by them in the face of the inevitable opposition. Please do not be dismayed for a moment by slanders such as 'fundamentalist', 'religious right' and the like. These distortions are either an excuse for not thinking about issues, or are intended to bully us.

It is the right time because, as with printing in the Reformation, there is a communications revolution occurring. Extraordinary new ways of communicating the gospel are being developed and the secular elite are losing their monopoly on information through the media. Hang on for an interesting ride. (Happy first birthday and congratulations to our own very successful Anglican Media Web site! - sydneyanglicans.net)

It is the right time because our immigration policy has brought thousands of people to Australia from Africa and Asia as well as South America and Europe who need to hear the gospel. Of course, wonderfully, many of them have already been touched by God – think of the Koreans, Islanders and Chinese – and we can partner with them in sharing the gospel with others. The movement of peoples is a great work of God.

It is the right time because there is a change afoot in the culture. Keen observers have begun to announce the death of secularism. According to members of a Financial Review panel on power in Australia, 'religion is the "new black" and secular is totally ten minutes ago'; 'secularism is really on the nose.'⁴ They are not alone in saying this. I think there *are* many signs of a new interest in moral and spiritual matters, as the failure of secularism to feed the soul becomes more and more apparent.

Materialism and individualism are destroying family life and whether we like it or not families are the bedrock of a civilised society. We are proving unable to give young people a sense of meaning, community and the transcendent, but these are integral to the needs of growing children. People want something more than secularism; I think the drift towards church schools indicates this; all the more important that those who value public education insist that space for Scripture teaching be fully maintained. I believe that the gospel ministers to human need in precisely these areas, meaning, community and transcendence.

THE PUBLIC ARENA

I think that it is immensely heartening that Christians are far more prepared to speak about the faith in the public arena than even five years ago. For thirty years we have behaved as though we were cowed into silence by humanistic secularism. They seemed to have all the best lines. Now a contest has begun and I am glad of it.

It is interesting also to observe the greater willingness of some of our political leaders to declare their faith. This has been criticized but we must defend the right of citizens inspired by the teachings of Jesus Christ to enter politics and to seek, through entirely democratic means, the support of their fellow citizens for a set of values grounded in their faith.

Mind you, if our politics continues to be corroded by personal insult, by grudges and partisan tribalism going back decades, by a hatred of the man or woman opposite rather than a rigorous contest over the value of their ideas, how will we encourage the best in community to serve their community? Recent events both in New South Wales and in the Federal arena only serve to remind us of the need for such *gospel* qualities as civility, compassion and forgiveness in public life. We must all speak the truth in love. Thus, although times are not easy, there is some reason to say that we can see God providentially at work. He has not left himself without a witness. The stirrings of despair about secularism may be the beginnings of a spiritual renewal. For our part, we must persevere with the gospel means that he uses, and look to him for results. Remember that it will be the gospel-means which God uses to be the spark to light the fire. Our job is to keep serving the gospel, keep doing gospel-work with all our heart.

⁴ *The Australian Financial Review Magazine*, October, 2005, 30.

ASSESSMENT

Thus, how is my job going? As I look out on the Diocese, I am so grateful for what God has evidently done already. I am confident that we have chosen the right way for us at this time to fulfil our permanent special obligations. Our ambition must be to reach 100% of the population. The ten year Mission can only be the first step. Ten years stops me from being complacent; more, it forces me to be urgent in what I do.

I have to admit that in my naiveté I thought that progress in change would be quicker than it has been. And yet, change is like climbing the steep stairs near where I live. The top always seems a long way further until you look back and see how far you have come. Then I say, praise God, look at what his hand has wrought! I am trying to make the Diocese and its structures resourced, and focused on mission, and supportive of the parishes in mission. I am encouraged; I thank God. But I am impatient for still more.

I am impatient to see more people reached for Christ to the glory of God.

I am impatient to see a deep spiritual renewal in our Diocese;

I am impatient for improvement of the facilities at Moore College;

I am impatient that we have not yet sorted out teacher training in the Diocese;

I am impatient that the Mission Property Committee still does not have the necessary funds to purchase the property we need for new churches;

I am impatient that we have not developed what I may call a 'local missionary society';

I am impatient that the Mission Task Force has not hit its stride as yet;

I am impatient to see Anglicare greater use to and better supported by parishes;

I am impatient that we do not have a northern youth camp;

I am impatient that we have yet to raise up the numbers of ministers we need;

I am impatient to see more women studying at Moore and Mary Andrews;

I am impatient that we have not yet solved the problem of the large amount of money which could help the Mission;

I am impatient that we have only now begun to think about the nature of parishes and how best to help smaller ones.

I am impatient that we have not yet made more progress on linking scripture teaching to church.

I am impatient, but yet in all those areas I have seen change, development, improvement. Furthermore, we have goals, we have plans, we have strategies; we have determination to make things happen and to go on until we have accomplished what needs to be done.

We have begun, and in due time we will, God willing, see fruit in better parishes, better evangelism, better structures, better contact with the community. Let me tell you that I am committed to the Mission personally as never before, and I hope that you join me in your own sphere of service. The Mission remains crucially important for the state of Christian work in this part of God's world and far beyond.

That's me; what about you? Obviously, you are to hear what the Lord has been doing and you thank him for it. But there is something more important even than that.

I am hoping that you are going to draw great encouragement from what you have seen and heard;

I am hoping that you will renew your determination to continue with this Mission;

I am hoping that where you have begun you will continue with renewed zest and skill.

I am hoping that where you have been waiting to begin you will now get under way.

I am hoping that you and the people you represent may be prepared to make the painful changes necessary to win others for Christ in our day;

I am hoping that lay people will ask clergy how the Mission is going and what is now planned;

I am hoping that where there has been failure there may be renewed effort;

I am hoping that ministers will now be thinking of their mission plans for next year and the next five years. Even the least resourced parish can enter the Mission by committing to policy 1; that at least you can do and plan to do.

There is another thing which we can all do, and which must now enter our mission thinking. In the last year we have concentrated on policy 2 and looking at the parishes. Now we have to add to that the further operation of policy 3, preparation of people.

The Mission is not going to succeed without the active participation of lay people. Policy three needs to get to work! We need a trained laity; more than that, we need a trained and committed laity; we need an increasing number of Christian men and women who turn church attendance into church membership and church membership into church partnership. The key to this is alight for God, and training; and those in paid ministry are the main coaches.

In Christian service, training is not simply a matter of attending some course or other. Courses are important, but we chiefly learn by doing. I aim to encourage a strong training ethos in the churches of our Diocese as the next crucial factor in mission. But let me warn you that it will be one in which those who have the proven skills will need to coach those who are learning, and walk with them through the process. It will be slower but more effective.

I used to worry that some students coming into Moore College had no practical experience of evangelism, did not know how to go about it and had never actually had the joy of seeing someone come to Christ. This is less so now. But there are many in our churches who are nervous, ill-equipped or lack the practical experience to engage in ministry, although they have the gifts and talents to do so. The major dynamic for change and growth in parish life is training; the major impetus for finding and exploiting those new mission fields will be the same.

One of the suggestions which has been put before the Mission Task Force, is that we aim to use the year 2009 as a time of concerted Diocese-wide evangelistic effort, preferably in union with other churches and perhaps including some large-scale meetings. This may well be a good idea, to capitalise on our growth and especially to inspire and focus our training effort. I will keep you informed as to our thinking about this.

CONCLUSION

Now where is that question from Reg Piper, – ‘will we see an unusual work of God in our time?’ I don’t know, and there are many factors which seem to tell against it. On the other hand, let me say this: If we were to see such an unusual work, it may well begin something like this. And in any case, we are doing the right thing in giving ourselves energetically to the gospel works of God while trusting in him. For that is what we should do anyway.

I recognise that all this is hard work. I am aware of what is happening in parishes, some of the struggles and disappointments, some of the failures which have occurred as we have tried out strategies to do with the Mission. I am aware that sometimes we are tempted to think, this is just the latest good idea dreamed up by people in town: ‘it will fail, and it will pass, and we will be left to get on with what we normally do’. I am aware that some have tried really hard with little result; I am aware that some are blaming themselves and others are keenly sensitive to criticism and to the possibility that they are being judged on numbers and results. It is also possible for us to have the mentality which stands aside to await failure, without really contributing to possible success!

But dear brothers and sisters, this Mission has already proved itself in a thousand ways. It is aligned with God’s way of working. It comes at a time of great spiritual dryness, and was never going to be easy. But I am more convinced than ever that the decision of the Synod three years ago was of God; that we have been summoned to this path and have set ourselves on it rightly. The changes in our Diocese have already been profound, and they are just beginning. Mission thinking has given permission and impetus for good work in parish after parish and in all our organisations.

You have heard how committed I am to it, and how convinced I am that we are on the right path. But this is not my personal Mission. It is a proven and effective way of us uniting as a fellowship of churches in the mission which Jesus committed to his disciples. It belongs to us because we have been appointed by God as his instruments in mission.

I began by referring to Latimer and Ridley, martyrs for the gospel of God’s free grace. They came from a generation of men and women specially strengthened by God to put forward his word boldly and without compromise. The light they lit is the light by which we see. It is not surprising that we have experienced opposition and even defamation and abuse more frequently in these last years, even from some of our fellow Anglicans. If you are prepared to redouble your efforts for Christ, you must also expect rejection and misunderstanding. Mission is hard work. Why be involved?

In principle the answer is the same as that which steeled the martyrs in their day. Is there any more important thing which we can be doing than bearing testimony to Christ? Is there any greater need that our community has, than to hear the words of Jesus and so be saved from what the Bible calls, ‘the wrath to come’?

The spiritual problem of our community is unwillingness to commit. That is what above all else stands in the way of the gospel being received. There are many wonderful exceptions, but it is our problem as well. We are in danger of being 'half-way' Christians: making the gospel a leisure time activity; seeing the need for it, wanting our children to have it, but not being willing to reorder our time and our finances to promote it; not being willing to ask ourselves to use our imagination to see where we could start a new ministry for Christ; in fact not being willing to sacrifice, though we know that no great work for God was ever done by half-way Christians. We admire the martyrs, we are thankful for them, but we do not share their spirit.

The Mission gives us a chance and a motivation to join in gospel work fruitfully and together. It has proved to be exciting, challenging, rightly directed. It may be that through it God will do a truly unusual work. He may do; he may already have begun. But for us, it encapsulates the right work, the gospel work which we are all called upon to do in every generation. I urge us all to undertake it with renewed zeal and enthusiasm, so that in our day we may perhaps light such a candle as by God's grace shall never be put out.

Will we see an unusual work of God in our time? At one level, I do not know. At another level, I believe that this is what we are seeing: be part of it!

Peter F Jensen
Archbishop