

Fr Hoyal Writes

Is Christianity Pro-Life?

All credit to the Archbishop of Canterbury who, albeit in his customary rather careful manner, has recently expressed misgivings about to-day's rather casual abortion culture.

His opinions in this area are known, but it is good to hear them reiterated publicly. One only regrets that his studious gentleness and his unerring gentlemanliness make it hard for him to be blunt.

Even Lord Steele, architect of the 1967 Act which legalized abortion in certain circumstance, has himself recently admitted that his Act has led to far more abortion than he ever envisaged – and frequently in situations he would not have regarded as permissible. He has become decidedly rueful.

As the campaigning young Liberal MP, David Steele, his main concern, very understandably, was to eradicate the horrors attaching to so-called backstreet abortions. For a sensitive study of the issues, it is well worth seeing the film *Vera Drake*, a backstreet practitioner portrayed with remarkable sympathy.

But it is likely that the UK rate of legal terminations to-day far exceeds the rate of illegal abortions in years past. Certainly some 6½ million legal abortions/terminations have been performed in the United Kingdom since the Act came into force. That is on average some 18 terminations every hour of every day – the current rate is a good deal higher, in fact. Most terminations, of course, do not involve a foetus with any serious health condition.

Meanwhile, since termination procedures are potentially painful there is discussion about the age at which the human

foetus/unborn child can feel pain. There is evidence that this is rather lower than has previously been supposed. Admittedly, the facts are contested.

There is also talk of lowering the abortion limit, which is currently still 24 weeks although children delivered at 24 weeks and lower can often survive to-day. We shall have to see what happens. At present the Government is resisting a change.

Any priest who opens his mouth about abortion is asking for trouble, and trouble I do not like. One does of course see there are many aspects to the matter, and I am not an absolutist. There must be many particular situations where a termination is the lesser evil.

But I really cannot believe that more than a very small fraction of the terminations carried out to-day can really be justified from an enlightened modern viewpoint, let alone a clearly Christian one.

Since I am not an absolutist, I have to say I find difficulties in the idea of any absolute right of a woman to choose, just as I do in any absolute right of a child to be born, or any absolute right of society to dictate to consciences. To my mind, any rights we have that matter are, literally, God-given rights.

Of course, I never want to see principled supporters of abortion demonized, any more than I want to see suffering women victimized who, for whatever reasons, have had a termination. People sometimes have terrifically tough choices, and they are not always well supported or wisely advised.

But for myself as a Christian, I feel impelled to ask always, is it likely to be God's will, in the particular circumstances of this

case, that termination should take place? Heaven knows, it is a question that begs questions; but I think it should be asked and prayed about nonetheless. Maybe far fewer abortions would then result.

I was impressed by the title the late Pope gave to a 1995 encyclical of his, by the way, tellingly issued on the Feast of the Annunciation (equally the Feast of Our Lord's Conception). I don't say I agree with all he said in it, though I certainly found much to applaud.

He called it, very simply, *Evangelium Vitae* – The Gospel of Life. In a way, for me that says it all. As do words of Jesus admittedly spoken in a very different context, but nonetheless thought-provoking in this one: Let the children come to me; don't hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Richard Hoag

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, CLIFTON

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An excerpt from the Vicar's (Canon Gillson's) Notes.

It was a real misfortune that torrents of rain kept so many people from coming to hear the Bishop of Northern Rhodesia in the Parish Hall. In point of fact just about 300 people were prevented; at least the hall would have held that number more. The Bishop was more than kind and gave us of his very best. He warned us of the great evil that threatens Central Africa through the British Government establishing "forced labour". Early in the [World] War [1] the government took the Bishop of Zanzibar's pamphlet, re-named it "The black slaves of Prussia" and scattered it broadcast without charge. Now they are themselves promoting forced labour, which the Bishop assured us is sometimes worse than slavery. Strong representations are being made to the Government and the Bishop of Zanzibar has published another pamphlet exposing the evil, which we ought to get and study. The Bishop went on to tell us of the native's great desire for education and his special joy in mathematics; he hails the approach of the missionary because he hopes he will establish schools, not because he has any interest in, or desire for, the Christian religion. He told us that the situation for the native tribes at the present moment is fraught with the greatest danger; owing to the mere presence of the white man the native is changing rapidly, and nothing can prevent it. The old institutions and foundations of the native life are breaking up, and unless we give them the sure foundation of the Catholic faith the natives will suffer in all ways by the white man's coming. The bishop described the methods of the work and some of its great difficulties: the size of the Diocese, as large as Germany before the war. The number of languages; the smallness of villages, sometimes only six huts; the difficulty of travelling owing to the want of roads. We broke up with the sense of having gained new material and openings for our prayers; a more urgent need for our work; and certain that a wet walk was but a small inconvenience for the privilege of having listened to

one who is such a noble example of a Catholic in deed as well as in word; we get rather tired of the latter.

We thank the people of All Saints for their lovely bouquet of flowers presented to us on our Golden Wedding anniversary, and also for their very generous response to the collection for Childrens Hospice South West, which realised over £100.

Thank you.

Chris and Diana Verity.

Ebbsfleet Lay Congress, Holy Gnat, 29 September 2007

+Andrew presided at the Mass of SS Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and all Angels, and preached on angels as part of the spiritual parallel world which we reach through the Mass. We then descended through the complicated catacombs of Holy Nativity's underworld to their parish room. I envied them the space, but not the multiplicity of corridors, staircases and doors.

The Lay Congress is seven years old, and +Andrew and the See of Ebbsfleet lead the way in this attention to lay involvement. Owing to its youth, it does not yet have a fossilised administrative system, and some time was spent on procedures and developments, notably the new system of having the Lay Congress elect the Lay Council members. There is clearly a fine line between flexible and inoperable/excessively informal. But we got there.

The Lay Chairman made several points. He spoke of the problems faced in Devon, where the relevant parishes of the Diocese of Exeter no longer look to Ebbsfleet but to the Diocese of Plymouth, which has led to divided loyalties and low clergy and lay morale. I

wondered (to myself) why Exeter representatives were present, but +Andrew later expanded on this. He is still an assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Exeter, and can if required deputise for the Bishop of Plymouth. The Lay Chairman then mentioned the responses of Pope Benedict to the question, how can a parish priest cope when he deals with many parishes and cannot know everybody? The Pope, and the See of Ebbsfleet, hope that parishes will get to know each other and work together, and that the laity will work alongside their parish priest, so that faith might grow by collaboration. The lay newsletter, *Ebbsfleet Extra*, has not proved successful. Two possible options are to have space in *Forward+*, the organ of Forward in Faith, or to join forces with the Bishop's Office. His three closing thoughts were, that things have been worse for Anglican Catholics – our clergy are no longer imprisoned for lighting candles; that the Catholic parishes have always operated as a network, and we can build up that network by getting to know each other; that whatever the Bishop of Manchester and his team propose, we must run with it and make it work.

+Andrew then took the floor. He said, 'I do not see myself as a campaigner against the ordination of women or against anything else. I see myself as the priest and pastor and teacher of those parishes which look to me.' And I thought, I am jolly glad that my parish looks to you, you are a Good Thing. Even if you persist in wearing purple and sitting on a scarlet chair, next to a fuchsia table cloth. He encouraged the ABC parishes not to think they were isolated, but that they were strategically placed so that lots of people had a chance to get to an ABC church. He spoke of the success of the Ebbsfleet Festival of Faith, and the success of the Parish Evangelism weekends and the limited success of Vigil X and the formation work when they tried to set up electronic networks. As a new bug I am confused about these. Sorry.

A real problem is that Ebbsfleet is moving from a clergy vacancy rate of 1 – 2% to a possible 20%. This is exacerbated by the fact that

we grow and nurture ordinands but he has no say in their disposal. Throughout, he emphasised his limited political power, and his emphasis on the pastoral role. As to Manchester, +Bishop Andrew wants provision to be made for his parishes. He will not wrest provision from the Church, because that would be to start a new church, and that he will not do, Our Lord prayed that we might all be one and to wrest provision would be to sin against unity. This is ‘a fragile time’, but the way forward for Ebbsfleet is to grow and flourish as a network of parishes.

Anne Bradley

Sermon preached by Fr Hoyal at Solemn Mass on Sunday 28 October – the Feast of SS Simon & Jude, Apostles

You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning (John 15.27)

I'll come on to Simon and Jude, Simon the Zealot as we call him, and Jude the Obscure. But, first, do you remember how the Holy Apostle Peter and his friends need to look for someone to replace another Jude, the ill-fated Judas Iscariot that is, to make the number of the Apostles back up to twelve following the resurrection? In the Acts of the Apostles we find Peter saying to the others: “We must choose someone who has been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was travelling round with us, someone who was with us right from the time when John was baptizing until the day when Jesus was taken up from us – and he can act as a witness to his resurrection.” Then they pray for the Lord to show them who it is that he has chosen.

Two important qualifications for an apostle then – to have been with the Lord and his friends from the beginning, and to be a reliable witness for his resurrection. These qualifications are repeatedly stressed in the New Testament, for example in our Lord's word's in to-day's gospel reading from John: “You can testify for me because you have been with me from the beginning.” More than that, of

course, the apostles are men specifically chosen and sent out by the Lord to be heralds, messengers, apostles of Christ and the Gospel. And so that they can do this work, they need to be people who have received the Holy Spirit specifically for this purpose. Again, all this is very clear from scripture.

True, at one level the twelve apostles as presented to us in the New Testament seem a very mixed bag, often coming in for criticism for getting things wrong and not cutting the spiritual mustard – but that has been true of the clergy ever since. At another level, though, it is clear that they have a very special place in God's work of salvation. They are men who have left everything to follow Jesus, we're told, men who have been with him in his trials - and, as the Lord's words in to-day's gospel warn, they can expect a lot more hardship on his account as they travel around and give their witness to the risen Christ. For many of them their ultimate witness will of course be the witness of their lives surrendered for Christ in martyrdom.

It is because Jesus chose, sent and empowered his special twelve that the faith spread so rapidly. The faith they shared so urgently carried conviction and power – so much so that even violent opponents like Paul could not hold out against Christ indefinitely. We have our faith and our gospel, our churches, our Christian history and traditions, our Christian hope, and the very Church itself, because of the Apostles. Their special place, their unique contribution, in the chain of amazing grace that binds us to the Lord Jesus Christ constitutes a major and indispensable link of faith and witness. If we are not an apostolic Church, I doubt whether we are any church at all.

The apostles are seriously important. No wonder that the Lord promises his twelve, amid all their sufferings on earth, that in fullness of the kingdom they shall sit on thrones of glory, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And whatever precisely that means, it certainly means a lot.

If the Lord so honours his twelve in heaven, they are certainly worth attentive respect from us on earth. That is why on feast-days of the

apostles we always provide an extra Mass here at All Saints. If Paris is worth a Mass, as they say, so are the Holy Twelve.

True, we don't have biographies of Simon and Jude, whom we honour to-day. But what I have said should indicate what a lot we know about them as men chosen, sent and empowered for very important work, men who were with Jesus from the beginning and were sound witnesses for this resurrection. Was Simon a Zealot in the sense of an ardent nationalist keen on self-rule for the Jews; or is he Simon Zelotes simply because of the zeal he showed for the Lord Jesus in his apostolic discipleship? I don't know. All we have for sure is his name in the New Testament lists of Apostles. In some ways then he is more obscure than Jude the Obscure, who at least has a small speaking part in St John's Gospel. As for Jude, or Judas, is he the same Jude who is elsewhere called Jude brother of James and the person who wrote the fascinating Letter of Jude? Perhaps, but we don't know. But I'm glad we have a statue of him at All Hallows. Traditionally he is the patron saint of lost causes, and I am always able to find him plenty of work –both at Easton and here!

But as I say, biographical scantness must in no way diminish our reverent gratitude for the indispensable work and witness of the Apostles, both in their time on earth, in their continuing example and prayers and in all they have bequeathed us so fruitfully. Let us show our thankfulness in apostolic lives to-day. And whether or not they are the words of S Jude the Apostle, in our celebration to-day let us take apostolic heart from those glorious words from the Letter of Jude which you will no doubt all hear when you are back for evensong to-night – in spirit they are certainly apostolic words: "Contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints ... and beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Yes, let's do it.

MCW's notes

29/9/7 To Holy Gnat for the Ebbsfleet Lay Congress, and Bishop +A in his less putrid purple. He reserves for ASC the virulent shade that suggests Episcopal Effluence, alive with amoeba. He's with us on 1 November, so watch out for the Socks.

30/9/7 9.30: Be warned, we have a very effective Infant Samuel; watch him as he scoops up the collection! We also have a new Assistant Organist, with whom we are on trial, so we must be very civil and sing very loudly.

11 am: Well I reached my own back row first this morning, turned to My Colleague, whispered 'Yeah!!!' and got an evil grin and the response, 'Well, they like my side better and they've all moved over so I took longer!' Would you believe it? Actually, it was because Back Pulpit was amazingly nippy at getting the children out. I have been given another box of matches. I'm not surprised. We'll be burning the pews soon – when I left Church it was so Hot outside. Thermals and fleeces!

2/10/7 Tuesday. PCC meeting. People showed signs of asking me searching questions, like, 'Can't we turn the heating back on?' Not with no insides to the heaters we can't. Later, in a darkened atrium, the two wardens and the Warden Emeritus found a box. A large cardboard box. Is it ticking? asked one of my brave brothers. You open it, said the other, as they backed away. New cups for the water bottle! Relieved giggles.

5/10/7 Put old sign boards in skip. Fr Boss said it was our skip, and I believed him, so I hope it is! Cannot account for the expanded polystyrene globules I found between them, looking like cottage cheese. Sandwich boards indeed!

6/10/7 To Winchester, for a wedding. The Wardens' wands were in place, identifying their pews, so naturally I checked them out. They are one up on us. Do you know what they have? Special big red kneelers with **WARDEN** on them in huge letters, and a picture of a mitre!!! Beat that. I am so jealous.

Tomorrow, for harvest, I have selected a huge apple from my unidentified tree. I suspect it is a weevil warren or bug tenement, but that proves it is organic, ethnic and all the other nix we cherish. One of you will probably have to exchange hard cash for it, so I shall say no more.

7/10/7 Well, as at 1 pm, none of you had purchased it; huh!

Today has been a day and three quarters. 8 am was graced with two sets of readings, so that Fr Boss could wrong foot us. No service was graced with the benign or otherwise presence of Fr Recorder, who was AWOL on the grounds of ill health. So Poor Fr Roger (PFR, OK?) had to lead the 9 30 *and* present. He was happy to do a presentation, but he needed dates and an orange. He needed grapes too, but they were already fetchingly draped across the altar (lovely juicy ones, too ...) Fr Boss said, dates no problem, the orange might have to be a banana. Banana not good enough, so Fr Boss meekly fetched dates and a miraculous orange. We could not understand why the normally flexible PFR was so adamant about his orange, until we realised that it was difficulty to spell – or pronounce – GBD. O dear, think about it!

Then PFR had to deliver the sermon, emailed in from Fr Recorder's bed of pain. Subsequently it was suggested to me that with today's technology he could jolly well have delivered it in person, on a Big Screen, and PFR could have watched with the rest of us.

The Infant Samuel, who adorns the 9 30, has been recommended to me – by his mother – as a future Churchwarden. He was certainly dishing out the instructions this morning. A rather larger offspring was not at his best today. Come the Offertory, the Crucifer was in

Cloud Cuckoo Land, and I had to get your gifts a belated blessing from FF in the atrium. But blessed they were.

10/10/7 I was admiring the bedding plants (*such* a silly name – Pillowcase trees and Duvet grasses?) today (Thank you, Andrew, they get better every week and they are now cascading across the courtyard; it's a stunning display.) when I noticed that one of their tenants was going for a walk. A lovely big snail was crawling diagonally across the glass; but it wasn't edible. Shame. No chips, neither. Lots more heaters have been disembowelled, so the next person to ask me, Can't we turn it back on while we're waiting? will get told What. Anyway, there's going to be an Indian Summer. Right?

14/10/7 I think the Indian Summer happened today, in that I removed both my shawl and my outer garment, but there's a lot of antiphonal sneezing going on. FF has had a fuchsia flavoured handkerchief (or Bandana) crafted for himself. I tried to type 'tailored', but there's not much tailoring in a foot square piece of pink hemmed cotton. And really, the problem is the buttons; 37 scarlet buttons and a pink cummerbund. Every sense revolts.

17/10/7 Daniel in the Lion's Den! I ambled about the plant chatting to the engineers, and realised that there were untoward sounds emanating from the choir stalls. There is a radiator grille set in below the tenors, and there was a light behind the grille. Nosy as ever, I bent down ... looking sombrely back at me was a poor soul clad in a gas mask, clearly doing something unspeakable to the fan heater's innards.

And since you ask, I believe all is going very well, and I was grateful for the support of Nehemiah last Sunday Evensnog. Do not try to distract me from the heating, for Nehemiah 6 3 says it all, 'I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?' So there.

18/10/7 Feast of St Luke, or Loki, or Lucifer: so appropriate that as I drove over the downs for the later service, the sky was in flames of sunset, bright orange streaks against egg shell blue, and black silhouettes of trees and a nail paring moon.

19/10/7 But this lyrical hymn to heating was not matched at the plant. The engineers were grappling with the fact that the Sacristy radiator was four foot lower than the rest, and there *must* be a separate drain spigot. They even tried to rationalise this by saying the heaters on the far side must work off of the kitchen boiler. I bet one of the engineers the 5p I found in the candle stand that they worked off Peter and Paul like the Church ones do. Make it a pound, he said, I'm sure I'm right. So I gave him the evidence. Fr Recorder would have been proud of my courtroom delivery. Having proved my point, I left the poor loves re-draining the system. They are working so hard I'm dreaming of a Mild Christmas, Just like the one we had last year...

20/10/7 Excellent string quartet at the 4 pm concert, marred only by a spiteful extract from Vivaldi's *Winter*, with the Big Six in the background looking exactly like icicles. More of you should come to these concerts: excellent cake and sausage rolls afterwards, and a Nice Hot cuppa.

21/10/7 A quiet day. There is a sunbeam (apart from all our two legged ones, of course) that enters through the blue Piper window and hits the ground in front of the eikon display. It reminds me of the story of S Bridget and her cloak, but is less robust – or conceivably I am less saintly. Between gawping at this, and singing the hymn, I had what was rudely termed a mystic moment. But honestly, I had remembered to take up the collection *before* I was attacked with a pink envelope.

22/10/7 Nearly all the heaters have their new insides. Things is moving! Meanwhile, Cuddle a Christian near you!

Host UK

'It was a pity. My flatmate had a wonderful first experience of Christmas, but there was no place for me.' (Chinese student at a West Country university)

For 20 years, HOST UK has been linking international students at British universities with volunteer hosts, for short, enjoyable and mutually beneficial visits. Last year, several hundred adults, from all over the world, enjoyed discovering Christmas in private homes across the UK. Sadly, several hundred more had to be disappointed.

If you think you might be able to offer an invitation this Christmas, please look at www.hostuk.org, or call HOST's voluntary regional organiser: Dorothy Steer 01647 252428

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BANK STANDING ORDERS

The process of changing bank accounts is still on going. Thank you to all who have so far arranged transfer of their standing order. There are still a number of payments going into Lloyds and until these are transferred the account cannot be closed and we continue to pay bank charges.

If you have not yet instructed your bank to make this change, I would be grateful if this could be completed as soon as possible. If you require a form please speak to me.

Also a word of warning to those who have transferred, check your bank statements as several people have discovered that their bank is paying into Lloyds and Co-op accounts.

Norman Drewett

ALL SAINTS-TIDE STEWARDSHIP RENEWAL

We sometimes refer to All Saints as being a ‘stewardship’ parish. What does that mean to us?

Christian Stewardship begins with the recognition that everything we have – our time, our talents and our wealth is a gift from God to be used and offered back to Him in thanksgiving for all that He has given us. We are asked to consider carefully what proportion of our time and talents should be offered to God and what proportion of our income we can commit for the work and up keep of All Saints, the Diocese and the wider Church.

All Saints is dependant upon our regular committed giving. It is difficult for the PCC to manage its affairs and budget for the expenditure involved without an assured income based on planned giving. At All Saints we have a fine building in which to worship but it is also costly to maintain and run. We have the Parish Share to meet. This contributes towards clergy salaries, pensions and of course the wider Church.

Despite these expenditures All Saints realises the importance not to be purely inward looking, and the PCC has committed 5% of our giving to nominated charities at home and abroad.

Each year at All Saints we are challenged to review our stewardship. This means making time to consider our giving in terms of time, talents and money.

This year Stewardship Sunday will be on November 4th when we all receive a stewardship response form which we are asked to complete and return over the coming Sundays, or to the parish office.

Understandably there are many reasons why it is difficult for some of us to increase our giving, indeed we may find ourselves in circumstances where we have to decrease it. Never the less it is still important that we allow ourselves the opportunity to offer to God whatever we are able and to give as generously as possible of our time, talents and money.

The decisions which we make about how we use the gifts, skills and wealth entrusted to us, is an important part of our witness and responsibility as 'servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God'.

Norman Drewett