

We Start With...

A two minute period of silence. Some people call that contemplation, others meditation, others call it prayer. Whatever you call it, it is a moment of peace.

From the ‘Chair’

I have recently revisited China after 13 years, staying in five cities in the south-east. The largest of these, Hangzhou, has a population of 25 million. I travelled with two friends. Bill whom I have known since my university days, has in the last ten years taught himself to speak Chinese and taught English for several years in the smallest city we visited, Huai’an. His second wife, Xia, now lives with Bill in Hamilton and has conversational English. They are currently in China visiting relatives, and in the three weeks I spent with them we visited members of Xia’s family, friends, and several of Bill’s former students.

My first impression was green – Fujian province is mainly steep low hills of trees in their spring green. The cities are full of public gardens, lakes, rivers and canals full of/lined with bright green, and the major roads and many roads in the new high-rise housing estates have superb plantings of red, yellow and green shrubs together with the taller green trees. There are rest, socialising, and gathering places. Many times I saw these used by individuals or groups singing, or for various sorts of dancing including western and Ceroc.

I spent most days being a tourist in fabulous, interesting and beautiful places – for Chinese tourists, that is, I saw fewer than twenty ‘Lao wai’ in the whole of my stay. Old Chinese houses, a canal trip, a two-hour ride in a canyon through high hills on a bamboo raft, a Song dynasty theme park with a fabulous show that

included an enormous (and real) waterfall the length and height of the back of the stage, and a beautiful jade museum with items back to 5000 BC.

I saw a number of Buddhist temples. They were going concerns, clearly respected, and open to all; most set in large or very large beautiful grounds. I saw two churches, both while travelling and from a distance. Each had a large cross high above the gable, and painted red. Clearly proclaiming themselves.

I received so much sensory input – people, noise, buildings, traffic, new sights and activities, new foods – that I am still processing my experience.

David Tombs

Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland

Thursday, 25th JUNE

Highgate Church buildings,
Maori Hill
Tea and Coffee will be available
between 5.00 and 5.40 pm

Food will be available
\$7 for as much as you want to eat plus rent
or
\$4 if you come for the meeting only

The programme will start at 6 pm

I was experiencing the rise of the middle-classes since my last visit. People come to a city, get jobs in the factories, at some stage afford an apartment in a high rise (they are very nice indeed to live in), afford an e-bike (ie with a battery) and then a car. I saw no vandalism and was never concerned for my safety – everyone was too busy doing, getting, going, being, to notice me. But the pace of existence really overwhelmed me.

Right to Die

The terminally ill Wellington lawyer Lecretia Seales was unsuccessful in seeking a landmark High Court ruling to allow her doctor to help her die without criminal prosecution. She was a senior legal and policy adviser at the Law Commission. She died a few days after the court ruling and her husband reported that she was quite broken by the decision.

It seems that our law makers do wish to protect life by making it illegal to harm oneself with drugs such as heroin or to drive whilst incapacitated with drugs or alcohol, but has less of a regard for the quality of life when it permits smoking and excessive drinking and allows people (especially children) to live in sub-standard housing and is happy enough to send troops in to the Middle East where many will emerge scarred either physically or mentally. Mentally unwell folk used to be cared for in Cherry Farm (maybe more people than necessary) but now some of those people are released into the community which is overwhelmed by their needs. Some get into trouble and end up in prison at \$95 000 per year and emerge not only with a mental health problem but also with a prison record. I'll not go into the abortion debate.

Somewhere we have lost the plot about caring for our vulnerable people in a dignified way. The right to die debate has been with us before and needs to be argued again. The private member's bill that would have seen it debated in Parliament earlier was withdrawn due to the proximity of

the election. We have time now to debate that issue without an election getting in the way.

We can conclude something about Parliamentarians' priorities when they voted to backdate their wage rise but made beneficiaries wait for theirs.

Ireland's Vote

The issue of same-sex marriage went to the vote in Ireland and was carried by 62% of those who voted. In New Zealand and other countries, the issue was settled by the Government (with a considerable amount of public lobbying) and Ireland is the only country to put the issue to a plebiscite. The Roman Catholic Church's commentators said that the church had become separated from the people. There have been problems about the abuse of children by priests and nuns and the subsequent cover-ups by the clerical establishment so that it is perhaps not surprising that the vote in favour of the same-sex marriage was so overwhelming. It was a vote for equality as well as love.

The Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, called the result of the referendum a "defeat for humanity", although earlier the Pope has said "A gay person who is seeking God, who is of good will – well, who am I to judge him?" (*Irish Times 8th June*)

Dublin's Catholic archbishop Diarmuid Martin went even further last year: "Anybody who doesn't show love towards gay and lesbian people is insulting God. They are not just homophobic if they do that—they are actually Godophobic because God loves every one of those people." (*Time Magazine 24th May*)

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