

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED IN 2024



Editorial: The Rev'd Dr. Nicholas Henderson

“If you do not expect the unexpected you will not find it, for it is not to be reached by search or trail.” *Heraclitus, Greek philosopher c.6th century BC*

Bethlehem closed down for Christmas, Ukraine brings the season forward from 7th January to 25th December and hardly anything left standing in Gaza. Political will to resolve what is becoming a very uncertain New Year appears to be weakening.

Christ was born in a time of autocratic rule, in an occupied country. According to the narrative his birth was followed by a massacre and a refugee flight into Egypt. It does seem a case of *plus ça change*. After all we have been appealing to God for generations in our prayers for peace, which have either been unanswered or more likely subjected to human fallibility and misuse of the freedom of will that we have failed to exercise responsibly.

The last editorial on this site appealed for a ceasefire in Gaza at a time when the idea was politically unpopular. Now, an overwhelming number of countries support the idea but it has been vetoed, largely by the United States. Should the coming end of year presidential election in that country produce a narrow win or a challenged result, the previous beacon of Western democracy could well descend into a dangerous fractious dispute exacerbated by the constitutional Second Amendment's 'right to bear arms' with a veritable arsenal of military grade weapons to hand. However, the concomitant March 'Presidential Election' in the Russian Federation has *de facto* already been decided in favour of Vladimir Putin and will be little more than a veneer.

Meanwhile, the now effectively proxy Ukraine war seems to have reached a stalemate and American resolve is weakening in its willingness to provide further arms and materiel. This is also the case in Europe. In both cases it is the hard right who for various reasons are retreating into isolationism and opposing further action. All of this with ongoing half-forgotten wars in places like Sudan and Yemen.

Whatever the New Year throws at us it now seems clear that the world will be in an even more precarious place in terms of the Christmas message of peace

and goodwill. We are likely to witness the consolidation of autocratic rule, and the further rise of extremism. These are hardly conducive to an absence of violence.

At the very time when a united front against the ultimate common enemy of climate change with so many alarming statistics indicating a careering rise of temperatures, the political will to do anything about it is also at best variable. The old fossil fuel vested interests still outweigh the extraordinary and unprecedented economic opportunities available with renewable energy.

This is an age of conflicting and alternative views and opinions fostered by a largely untrammelled internet that is both to be rejoiced in and horrifying. Should there be no constraints on free speech or should the world wide web be moderated and if so by whom? Perhaps the latest innovation of AI (artificial intelligence), which can render an algorithm indistinguishable from reality or a human creation, will overtake the world in a dystopian fantasy?

In the meantime the unexpected and unprecedented announcement of Pope Francis that authorises blessings for same-sex couplesⁱ albeit with caveats, has outpaced the Church of England's ponderous due synodical and episcopal process. This latter offers a bare minimalistic opportunity for prayers but only during principal services – presumably the logic behind this is to prevent anything that might look remotely like a wedding?ⁱⁱ

Strangely, the expected outburst of indignant opposition to these two developments hasn't yet materialised or coalesced into general opposition.

Still, there's another year ahead and plenty of time for the unexpected, we'd better resolve, hope and pray for the best.

Nicholas Henderson

Editor: Anglicanism.org

New Year's Eve 2023

ⁱ <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/18/europe/pope-francis-same-sex-couples-blessing-intl/index.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://apnews.com/article/church-of-england-same-sex-blessings-518f273db2a5c16cd44798b005f1ecca>