

Dean's Letter, 20 December 2020

Dear Cathedral family, Brothers and Sisters in Christ

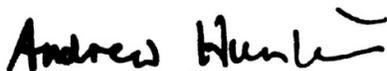
The 4th Sunday of Advent has as its focus the role of Mary, the mother of our Lord, in the coming of Jesus into the world. Today's Gospel reading, Luke 1:26-38, is the story of the Annunciation. It ends with the prayer of Mary that is the model of prayer and discipleship for us all: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your will." Mary is present throughout the gospels; she was at the crucifixion; she was amongst the early disciples; she ended her days at Ephesus as part of the church there, together with St John. As the mother of Jesus, she is the mother of the Church. It began in Nazareth, when this young girl hears the voice of God and responds in faith and trust. Uncertainty and the unknown, the unpredictability of 2021, of how things will unfold... we are invited to that place of trust, with Mary.

There has been much controversy over prayers and statements made recently by the Chief Justice, Moegeng Moegeng. Like any South African, he has freedom of speech – but even this crucial freedom is limited, if it does harm to others or if it is spreading falsehoods. He prayed: "If there be any vaccine that is the work of the devil, meant to infuse 666 in the lives of the people, meant to corrupt their DNA, any such vaccine, Lord God Almighty, may it be destroyed by fire in the name of Jesus." It seems that he is being influenced by the "anti-vaxxer"¹ movement, linked to conspiracy theories on vaccines, which have led some to deny vaccination to their children, and could result in the re-emergence of polio, measles, mumps and rubella. The Chief Justice has also, it appears, some strange religious beliefs. The reference to 666 or "the mark of the beast" is found in the Book of the Revelation. "Let him that has understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is 666" (Rev 13:18). Commentators suggest that, due to the extreme levels of persecution at the time the book was written, particularly under the Roman Emperor, Nero, parts of the book were written in code. Michael Worsnip writes: "Now, firstly, remember that the books of the Bible didn't just fall from the sky. They have been put together using whatever sources we have available. An older version [of the Book of Revelation] than the one which referenced the number 666, (Papyrus 115), has a different number, the number 616. And I'll give you an explanation. Remember, the author(s) is/are writing in code. They fear even more persecution than they are already getting. So they resort to code language. They say, if you want to know who this beast is - this antichrist, this persecutor, this evil incarnate? Then count up the number of his name.

"In ancient Greek the letter Alpha=1: Beta=2; Gamma=3 etc. So if you take the name "Neron Kaiser" and you add up those letters (guess what?) you will get the number 666! So Caesar Nero is the beast. But wait! There is more! The older Papyrus 115 doesn't put the final Nu on the name Neron. It's just Nero (which is perfectly acceptable) rather than the grammatically correct Neron. And there, if you add up the letters, you get 616. So it is quite clear who is being spoken about. Not the Pope. Not Hitler. Not Biden and (for pity sakes, not a vaccine!) None of these. In fact it was not going to be somebody in the future. It was nobody one needed to wait for. It was Nero..."²

Nero, of course, is not the only epitomy of evil, in history. There are many others. And the number 666 has come to represent total evil, Satan against the kingdom of God and the church. But we must beware of nonsensical mixtures of science, politics and religion, which somehow suggest that dark forces are using the covid vaccine to implant the mark of the beast into people.

My love to you all



1 <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/anti-vaxxer> accessed 14th December 2020

2 Worsnip, 13th December 2020