

## INTERVIEW

# Interview with Peter Jensen

**PETER A. LILLBACK**

(July 12, 2022)

**PETER A. LILLBACK:** *Let's pray together, Peter.*

*Father in heaven, we thank you that we are able to look to you as the source of every blessing. We thank you for your redeeming work for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for your anointing your people with your Spirit and with your gift of the word that dwells in your people richly. Bring in us the living Christ and his hope. We thank you that the opportunity has been granted us from different parts of the world to communicate and to share. We would ask that this interview bless your people and be for the advance of your kingdom around the world. Thank you for Reverend Jensen, for his fruitful ministry, for his leadership, and the joy of his as he has even shared his seventy-ninth birthday; thank you for the longevity and strength you have given to him. We pray now that you will bless our fellowship, continue to use him mightily for your kingdom, and we ask it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**PETER JENSEN:** Amen.

**PAL:** *As an introductory question, would you tell us how you came to faith in Christ and how your vocational ministry developed?*

**PJ:** I will indeed and am thrilled to do so. Testimony is always a wonderful thing, in my opinion. I grew up as a church-going child; my parents did not really go. They thought they were believers, but they did not go much—but they sent us. In my fifteenth year, Billy Graham came to Sydney, had a huge impact—the last crowd was about 150,000 people at the crusade. I was

taken on April 20, 1959, and Billy preached, if I remember correctly, on Noah and the Ark. He said, “The Lord shut the door of the ark; those who are on the outside are on the outside and those who are on the inside are inside.” When he gave the invitation, I left my seat and went forward. I then went back every night, much to the concern of my parents. On one evening, Mr. Graham said, “We need ministers in the churches.” It was that which sowed the seed for me going into ministry. When I left school at the age of seventeen, I enrolled at law school, failed the first year, and enrolled again, and failed the first year again. Then, I taught school for two or three years. I am afraid my failure in law was really just a sheer lack of interest. I needed to get to college in order to get into ministry, so I did. My parents were so glad I did something!

**PAL:** *Where did you do your theological studies?*

**PJ:** I studied in my hometown of Sydney at Moore Theological College in the diocese of Sydney.

**PAL:** *And at what age did you get ordained?*

**PJ:** The year of my ordination was 1969, and I had married Christine the year before, namely 1968. We went to the same church as children, but we connected in our twenties.

**PAL:** *Did you ever have the opportunity to meet Billy Graham later, since he had such a wonderful influence on your life?*

**PJ:** He came back to Sydney twice, once in 1968—and no, I did not meet him then—and in 1979. I would have met him because I would have been involved in Crusade planning at that stage, but I was in Oxford studying for my doctorate. In 2006, in a letter, I wrote and explained the impact he had in Sydney and understand the letter was well received.<sup>1</sup>

**PAL:** *That is wonderful.*

**PJ:** We owe him a huge debt. I will not say he led a revival, but he certainly had such an impact on our churches that it goes on even to this day.

**PAL:** *Well, that is amazing. That story can be duplicated in many ways. Theologians and pastors today find their roots going back to Graham’s evangelism ministry. So praise God. Well, more specifically, the Lord has called you to be in important*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tess Delbridge, interview with Peter Jensen, “Billy Graham Changed My Life,” *Eternity*, February 22, 2018, <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/peter-jensen-billy-graham-changed-my-life/>.



**PETER JENSEN**

*positions of leadership in the Anglican Church in Australia, but then globally. I would like to ask some questions. The first is this: What have been some of the special contributions of the Sydney Anglican movement to the Christian witness in Australia and beyond?*

**PJ:** The Anglican Church in Australia is made up of twenty-three different dioceses, spread throughout Australia. Naturally, the metropolitan cities are the biggest, but Sydney is about two or three times as big in terms of churchgoers as any of the others. This goes back to our history where evangelical witness has been there since the absolute beginning of the colony. You can trace that witness back to 1788. It went up and down a little bit. There were moments when it could have leapt into Anglo-Catholicism

or into liberalism. However, the Lord in his mercy spared us. A reason for the strength of the diocese of Sydney—well, there is never a single reason—is Moore College and the leadership’s understanding of how important Moore College is. We do not have to persuade them. The diocese, the bishops, and the lay people understand the importance of Moore College and that if things go wrong there, then things will go wrong in the parishes. And so there has been a very strong commitment, at least since the Second World War, to the training at Moore College and making it as good as possible. Someone has said that there are four reasons why different dioceses do well: the first is theological training; second is strong parishes that emerged from theological training; third is the parachurch organizations like mission movements or conventions; and fourth is having a good bishop. When you have all four together, then the diocese is strong, and we have consistently had all four together. Let me say, having a good bishop is the least important of the four.

**PAL:** *All church traditions grasp the function of a bishop. So what is the significant role of a bishop in the Anglican tradition? Could you please give a brief summation of why he would make a difference for the health of a parish?*

**PJ:** Yes, it depends on the bishop and on which branch of Anglicanism we are talking about. We belong to the Evangelical branch of Anglicanism. Australia was first set up as a convict colony, and in 1788, a whole group of convicts and soldiers was sent, and it included one chaplain sent. The two men who had most to do with the choice of that chaplain were John Newton and William Wilberforce. They ensured that the right person was there, and they said to him, “We want you to set up this whole thing as a missionary base for the South Pacific.” They were men of genius and vision. I thank God for their place at the beginning of this long tradition. In the Anglican tradition, the parish churches are the most important things, the congregations with the parishes. A parish is really a geographical area, and the church is responsible for that area and the pastoral ministry in that region. The bishop in our situation is elected by the Sydney Synod, which is made up of the clergy and laity of the diocese. The bishop has a number of roles, but the most important one is that he ordains clergy, which means that he has a particular responsibility for the quality and the choice of clergy. That is an immensely important facet of his ministry. You can make a mess of it—no doubt I did—but you have to be very careful as to who you ordain and in that way be a blessing to the churches. Now the bishop has other responsibilities: He must be a preacher, an evangelist, and stand for the truth of the gospel. He must provide leadership in that way, but in our tradition, the

bishop is simply a presbyter who has a special job. Whereas in other parts of the Anglican church, the bishop is sort of a step up from the presbytery, we tend to think he is a presbyter with a special job.

**PAL:** *That is excellent. What you have just shared is helpful because it puts things in a wonderful context, which brings me to my other question: What is the status of the biblically motivated Anglican ministry on the global stage today? How is the Evangelical branch of Anglicanism reaching around the globe and showing its presence?*

**PJ:** One of the great things that God did was to take the British Empire—which no doubt was built on capitalism, greed, and lust for power—and use it as part of his strategy for world evangelism. As a result, particularly from the eighteenth century onwards, where the British Empire went, there the gospel went in one form or another. Now, because of the great Evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, people began to think of mission and create missionary societies; then, missionaries started to go in big numbers. The Anglicans sent out missionaries as well. Some of them were high church Anglicans, leaning more toward Catholicism, particularly the Anglo-Catholics; and they sent missionaries to quite a number of places around the world, which to this very day are Anglo-Catholic. However, the majority of those who went out as missionaries, whether within the structures or independently, were Evangelical. The result is that in about 150 countries around the world there are Anglicans. And some of the biggest churches in the bigger African nations are Anglican churches. There are 20 million Anglicans in Nigeria, for example. Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania have large numbers. They are not the only denominations, but these are significant numbers. The truth of the matter is that the English and the Americans and the Australians are beginning to realize that in the context of world Anglicanism the most typical Anglican today is a Nigerian woman.<sup>2</sup> It is a result of the great work that was done by our ancestors in taking the gospel at considerable cost all around the world.

**PAL:** *What continuity or discontinuity do you see between the Anglican tradition and the Reformed theology that is distinctive to Westminster Theological Seminary?*

**PJ:** As I have thought about this, let me remind the readers that there are all sorts of Anglicans in the world, so we need to bear that in mind. Some of

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<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., Jeff Walton, “As Bishops Meet, Anglican Future Is Already Written,” *Anglican Ink*, August 2, 2022, <https://anglican.ink/2022/08/02/as-bishops-meet-anglican-future-is-already-written/>.

them would not like to go back to the Reformation as being particularly significant for them. Some go back to the seventeenth century instead of the sixteenth century—and particularly American Anglicans have a tendency to relate more to the seventeenth than the sixteenth century—though of course the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were connected. So let me speak for myself and our diocese and the sort of Evangelicals represented by John Stott, Jim Packer, and Philip Hughes, who was a distinguished member of your faculty at some point. Although people sometimes call me a Calvinist, I am not a Calvinist, though I greatly admire John Calvin; but I do not put myself into the Calvinistic camp. I do not know that I differ from him on anything, but I see myself as belonging to the Reformed Anglican tradition. We were impacted through Thomas Cranmer and the others in the Anglican tradition in the Church of England. This tradition was influenced by Heinrich Bullinger, Martin Bucer, Ulrich Zwingli, as well as Calvin. So it is not as though we are saying we are different, but we are in that Reformed Anglican tradition characterized by the Thirty-Nine Articles rather than the Westminster Confession. I do not see myself in the Puritan tradition, though I greatly admire and respect the Puritans. But no, it is not us; we are more linked to the sixteenth century than the seventeenth-century Puritans. We are not Anglo-Catholics, of course. That movement began in the Anglican Church in the 1840s, and we are definitely not that. We are not liberals; to come to the twentieth century, we are not charismatics. We are not Arminian; I think the charismatics tend to the Arminian side. So if you want to locate us, I would say that we owe our debt to the patristic period because, as you know, the Reformers were great scholars of the patristic period. So we belong to the patristic and the Reformation periods, particularly the sixteenth century, where the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles took shape, and the Evangelical movement of the eighteenth century shaped us too. In short, I would describe myself as an Evangelical in the Reformed tradition.

**PAL:** *As Westminster appreciates patristics and the Reformation, that brings a great deal of commonality, although we have some distinctions that flow from our confessional legacy.*

**PJ:** Before I go on, could I say a word or two about the impact of Westminster on the diocese of Sydney? I think it fits in with your previous question, because I want to say that Westminster has had a significant impact theologically and spiritually. Our college, Moore College, was started in 1856, so we are a bit older than Westminster. There are differences of course: We are Anglicans, not Presbyterians; we are Australians, not Americans. But

three quite distinguished graduates of Westminster are Australians and had an impact in our diocese: Glenn Davies, who was the Archbishop of Sydney; John McIntosh, who was at Westminster Seminary in the early 1960s and had a distinguished teaching career; and Noel Weeks. So those three men, having studied at Westminster, came back to Australia and had a significant influence among us. In terms of your faculty, I mentioned Hughes, of course, and I could go on and on. But here are some of the people who have personally impacted me. J. Gresham Machen: apart from his Greek textbook, which we had to learn and I did not like, his great book on *Christianity and Liberalism* is hugely significant still.<sup>3</sup> John Murray's little book *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* has meant so much to me.<sup>4</sup> It has formed part of who I am. I have to say that I have heard stories about Murray lecturing and praising the Lord in the midst of his lectures and things like that, although I never heard him or saw him. I can also mention Richard Gaffin and Ned Stonehouse. Bruce Waltke, who was on your faculty and came to give the Moore College Lectures—I have never forgotten some of his jokes. E. J. Young had a big influence on us. Was Geerhardus Vos ever a member of the faculty of Westminster?

**PAL:** *He never came to be with us, but he was very close to our founding faculty. He retired at Princeton Seminary but had really an impact on Westminster, and Westminster has revitalized his ministry and writings.*

**PJ:** Vos's writings on biblical theology<sup>5</sup> and others on your faculty who have written on biblical theology have had a huge and deep impact on us. And then through us many others have been influenced by biblical theology. I was once at a conference in Africa, and the archbishop of a large African country came up with a great smile on his face. He said, "Oh, I owe so much to Moore College and its correspondence course on biblical theology." He added, "It changed my life." Well, half an hour later, an Asian theological college principal came up to me and said, "I owe so much to Moore College; it changed my life." I took all the credit for this then, but let it go in part at least to Westminster.

In addition, I was impacted by your journal [the *Westminster Theological Journal*]. I remember reading it as a student and recognizing how academic theology is so vital because you guys took academic theology as a greatly significant contribution, and your journal, which was academic theology

<sup>3</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923).

<sup>4</sup> John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).

high level, taught me some things. That is my part of my tribute to you, if I may say so, and the way in which you have helped shape me and, I presume, some of the diocese of Sydney, not just Davies.

**PAL:** *Praise the Lord for that. I can say that those sorts of influences that have emanated from Westminster have certainly shaped me as a young student and that it is an honor to do my best to keep the legacy alive and growing.*

**PJ:** It is indeed so easy to lapse, as we know from the story of Princeton Seminary and many other places. So thank you for that.

**PAL:** *Contemporary Christians are looking at the world, and there is a sense in which we want to partner with other believers, and ecumenical witness is important. However, on all sides we are facing ideological challenges and redefinition of past moral standards. In this light, how do we partner together? Would you give us some guidance, as you have been a leader in ecumenical activities in the Anglican world, trying to bring the church together and maintain historic biblical principles?*

**PJ:** A couple of things: First, one of the things that we have always said—and it may come from John Stott, but I do not remember the source of this—is, “We are Evangelicals first and Anglican second.”<sup>6</sup> One of the features of our tradition in Sydney has been, since the 1960s, a form of congregationalism, if you like. Yes, we are a denomination; yes, we have bishops; but the emphasis on the local congregation has been one of the marked features of our life together, and we are able to do this because we are first of all Evangelical and only secondly Anglicans. Now I am proud to be an Anglican; I am glad to be an Anglican; and I was happy to be an Anglican bishop, not a covert Presbyterian. Though I went to a school called Scots College, I was never converted to Presbyterianism. I am happy to be Anglican—do not get me wrong. Nevertheless, if you think Anglican first, Evangelical second, you have got the order wrong because it is the gospel first.

Second, the next thing is our evangelistic work with students in the university. We learned that we work well with students and others from denominations such as the Baptists, the Congregationalists, and the

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<sup>6</sup> This approach coheres with J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett’s distinctions between “Christian consensus,” “evangelical essentials,” “denominational distinctives,” and “congregational commitments”; see J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 149–55; see also, John Bowen, “What Is an Anglican Evangelical?,” *The Wycliffe College, The Institute of Evangelism*, November 12, 2002, <https://institute.wycliffecollege.ca/2003/11/what-is-an-anglican-evangelical/>, and page 41 above.

Methodists, who were Evangelical and made the same choice to be Evangelical first, Methodist second. We were able to combine and work well together, even with differences. One of the great divides back then was between Arminianism and Calvinism or Reformed theology, and I was on the Reformed side, but we could work together. Yes, there were significant differences, and we must never say these differences do not matter, but they did not matter enough for us to not be able to preach the gospel together [cf. Phil 1:18]. That was the key: was it the same gospel we were proclaiming? I would say yes. As a young person, I found myself working in camps and ministries and missions with people from different denominations and was glad to do so.

**PAL:** *What is the status of GAFCON [the Global Anglican Future Conference]? Would you define what that is and its impact on global Anglicanism?*

**PJ:** That brings me to the third point. One of the points Machen makes in *Christianity and Liberalism*—and you may correct me here from your better knowledge of his position—is that you can say that Roman Catholicism is Christian, but you cannot say that liberalism is Christian. Roman Catholicism still believes in the Trinity, in the deity and manhood of Christ; there are sufficient roots there that a person can be saved, even in those circles, but liberalism is a different religion.<sup>7</sup> GAFCON was first a conference in 2008, but it is now a movement, and it arose from the determination of the American Anglicans—called technically the Episcopal Church—to ordain and then consecrate practicing homosexuals.<sup>8</sup> We regarded this as being a step too far—in fact, a leap too far—in disobedience to the Scriptures. It is a matter of salvation, and we therefore cut off our fellowship with them, asking them to repent and turn again and to receive our fellowship back, which they never have. At the same time, there were many other Anglicans around the world—not all Evangelicals by any means, Anglo-Catholics and others—who held the same beliefs, the same biblical beliefs, we did. In this matter, I was perfectly happy to work with them to stand for the truth of God’s word. So I found myself cooperating and working with and praying with lots of people with whom I had had big fights previously. Thus, we had to work out the charismatic ideas in the 1970s. We had to work out the Anglo-Catholic ideas in the previous period. We differ from these people, but not sufficiently as to make it impossible for us to work together at a certain level

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 8, 16.

<sup>8</sup> For more on GAFCON, see the articles of Emmanuel Egbunu and Mark Thompson in this issue.

to say no to the liberalism that destroys the gospel, which I believe its current embrace of the sexual revolution does.

**PAL:** *As we conclude, are there any thoughts you would like to share with those that are seeking ministry in the future?*

**PJ:** Well, that is an invitation to a preacher! Dear brother, as you know, I was the principal of Moore College for sixteen years and then the Archbishop of Sydney. I have described to you the importance of the episcopal role as having to do with ordination. Theological education is crucial as well. I would say the following.

The first question I would ask and would want to know the answer to is, Are you already in ministry? There is no point at all in attempting to enter into ministry if you are not already ministering and ministering the word at the appropriate level. What are you doing to exhibit that ministry? If you are not, then minister in some other way, but do not come here. So we would send people away from the College for a number of reasons, and that would be one of them. So the first question I have for any young person thinking of ministry is, Are you already in ministry? Are you doing it because that is what the Lord is giving you and motivating you to do?

Then, the next thing I would ask is, Where do you intend to go to receive your formation and training? And the key question there, in my opinion, is, Who is teaching? That is to say, if you are examining which seminary to go to, I would say, Who teaches in that seminary? Who are they? What are their aims and purposes? Go and find out. I might also add that I personally think that face-to-face is better. Going to a seminary is creating a fellowship of people with whom you are going to minister in years to come, and that is immensely important. My friend Dr. Graham Cole said to me once that the education in a seminary is “one part lectures, one part library, one part coffee,” and I think that is true. We learn from each other. I know sometimes it is impossible to learn other than on Zoom and over the Internet, but fellowship, to my mind, is immensely important. So look at what their standards are and what their theological commitment is, but most importantly look at who teaches there.

Finally, the other thing I would ask of a person thinking of this is, Are you prepared to take up the cross and follow Jesus [cf. Mark 8:34]? Because ministry, like marriage in that respect, is not to be entered into lightly and unadvisedly. Are you prepared to say no to the sins of ministry? The sins of ministry are a lust for power, a lust for sex, and a lust for money. They are the things that bring ministers undone. Are you prepared to take up the cross and say no to those instincts and humbly serve the people of God

[cf. 1 Pet 5:2–3]? Are you prepared to take up the cross and go against the increasing worldliness of this world and its secular ideologies and, therefore, be unpopular and indeed to be hated, scorned, ridiculed? And then, Are you prepared to take up the cross and deny the fragility of many modern people in this generation and be hard on yourself, be tough, and follow the Lord—yes, even into “the valley of the shadow of death” [cf. Ps 23:4] because you belong to him?

**PAL:** *Now that is challenging. I think we are going to use a transcription of those as standard admissions questions. Particularly the third point: we are recognizing that ministry is not a vocation in the sense of “I like to do this for a career”; it is a divine vocation, and that means bearing the cross as a very powerful component of it, so thank you. Any final thoughts you would want to share?*

**PJ:** I might add that when I say that I am not a Calvinist, I hope you can look behind me and see what is in pride of place on the bookcase.

**PAL:** *I think I see is Ford Lewis Battles’s edition of John Calvin’s Institutes [1559] right there too over your left shoulder.*

**PJ:** You realize that every student of Moore College has to read the whole of the *Institutes*. In other words, we are kind of Calvinists, of course.

**PAL:** *Well, I think that historically we are more than Calvin’s students, but Calvin has left an impact clearly, and if anyone has read the Institutes, Calvin is in their brain one way or the other, whether they like it or not.*

**PJ:** There is a marvelous moment in the *Institutes* where he says, you come to face and look and there you see God looking towards you, the Father looking towards you, from a distance, but he is smiling at you. It is just so moving that he would say such a thing (cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.2).

**PAL:** *Would you kindly give us a concluding prayer?*

**PJ:** I would be honored to do so.

Dear God and loving heavenly Father. We thank you that across the miles, Peter and I can have this fellowship in Christ. We thank you that we are united despite our different experiences in life and our different backgrounds in many ways; yet, nonetheless, we are one in him, and we thank you for the immense privilege that you have given us, unworthy as we are, to offer leadership in theological education. And I do pray, heavenly Father, for Peter in this particular moment of his life experience and walk, that you will continue to bless him, continue to open up opportunities of service. May he flourish, and may he continue to be a blessing to many people as he goes on serving you. And we pray,

heavenly Father, that you would bless Westminster and Moore College as well; we pray for both these institutions; we pray, heavenly Father, for great wisdom as we enter this new phase of online learning; and we pray that you would give us wisdom about how best to do this, how best to retain the face-to-face and the personal, relational learning, which is so important. We pray, heavenly Father, that you would keep us faithful. We remember, our gracious God, how many organizations and colleges and schools and denominations have drifted away. And we pray, our gracious God, that you would kindly keep us faithful so that we may bless the generations yet to come. So we commit ourselves into your gracious hands with thanksgiving once more for our fellowship in this way, and I pray these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

**PAL:** *Amen. Well, a very heartfelt thank you for the time, for staying up into your late evening on the other side of the globe and the continent of Australia.*