

James Palmer in Chile, June 2008

Oh dear. This is without doubt the latest ever update. Sorry. It's been one of those months... they happen all over the world. Anyway, it's now formally winter here (in southern hemisphere equivalency June is December).

Winter here is nothing like winter in the UK or the USA (at least the parts beyond the Mason Dixon line). The houses typically don't have central heating, though many people have an old-fashioned gas heater or a modern electric fan, but my flat has nothing. Actually that's not a problem so far as it is east-facing which means that I get sun until about lunch time, which heats the flat (and enables me to work on the terrace... very nice). The weather seems to go in mini-cycles: we get a week or so of sun and then 4 or so days of rain. The city gets colder during the rain cycles and so do the houses, and then the sun comes out again and everything heats up. I am working on techniques for winter sunbathing (which after 20 something years of British summers is not hard). After the rain cycles the Andes are covered with snow and it's rather stunning.

However, the Santiaguinos don't seem to agree with me that they have an amazingly mild winter and their health fears (which are never far from the surface) rocket in winter. Everything is *peligroso* (dangerous). It is dangerous to go out in the rain, or even shortly after it has been raining, letting air (of any kind) into the house is also dangerous, as is getting cold. People seriously appear not to understand you don't catch a cold from being cold, and that there is in fact a virus involved. It is really quite astounding, and I am talking about fit, healthy people of my age (obviously there are certain groups who do need to be bothered about some of these things!) I try not to cause public scandal by at least having a hat on when it drizzles.

I have been teaching Early Church, which has been from the first writings that are not in the New Testament up to the Council of Chalcedon in 451. It has been very interesting, and I have been reminded of how messy it all was: church politics and personality clashes are nothing new, and the main people involved were incredibly "contradictory"... amazing virtues mixed with equally amazing vices (my students and I especially like the "ninja monks" who make occasional appearances: these were groups of militant monks who sometimes featured in the power church politics of the day). I am not sure what I am teaching next term - it is under negotiation. I just hope that my students are getting as much out of it as I have been.

I have a pile of essays to get to, and have to sort out the coursework they have been doing for me so I had better send this or it won't arrive until September. You'll be getting July's letter soon! Pray for the students in the run-up to exams, for end of term tiredness (all of us) and wisdom for the staff team (we can always do with more). Oh. . and for me I'm having computer problems (internet mostly) which is surprisingly debilitating and partly explains why this is so late. Do pray the gremlins out of the system.

Blessings from the Deep South, James