The spirituality of the young person

Contents

Tougher Sentencing

Don Brash's demand has been taken up by other leaders.

The ineptitude of this policy is shown up in articles by Helen Bowen and Matt Robson pages 4-5

A Child of our Time

Many people have enjoyed Professor Winston's TV series *A Child of our Time*, on early childhood. The series demonstrates how important it is for parents to give their children quality time – for play and communication skills, how the needs of each little boy and girl are unique, and how the self-esteem of a young person depends on constant affirmation by the significant adults in their lives.

However, one part of a child's life conspicuous by its absence in this programme is the religious aspect. We never see the families praying together. Yet children are spiritual beings from their first conscious moments, and this aspect of their lives needs nurturing like any other. Sadly, in today's secular world it is almost taken for granted that God is excluded. As a result, many if not most children in Western families grow up with one huge element of normal human experience missing. It is like growing up colour blind. A dimension of normal living is being sacrificed to the secular god.

This month's *Tui Motu* takes as its principal theme another equally important aspect of growing up: the spirituality of the teenager. Dr Finola Cunnane, a religious educator from Ireland, spoke to many Catholic teachers and parents during August. We are privileged to make her wisdom available to a wider audience.

She makes the point that this generation of teenagers in the Western world is like no other: the pressures and lifestyle they experience are totally different from what their parents or grandparents experienced. Therefore, the oft-heard lament that today's teenagers are simply rebellious, Godless pagans could not be more unfair. Dr Cunnane's article analyses their spirituality indicating clear guidlines for meeting the special needs of today's adolescent.

Far from being a time of spiritual barrenness, adolescence is often a time when the 'still, small voice' is heard most powerfully. Wrapped up in those times of agonising doubt which afflict many young people, are also moments of stunning clarity when the call of God is heard in such a compelling way that life is changed for ever. Therefore, the pressures which adults often bring on teenagers may actually be doing them a violence by preventing them hearing and heeding the very voice they need to hear more than any other.

In school, for instance, if the constant theme they have drummed into them is to pursue success – in studies, in sport, in their social life – then there is a real danger that a young person's affective and spiritual sensitivities are dulled to the things that really matter: what sort of person they are becoming and what God wants of them in life.

In an accompanying piece Br Kevin Wanden interviews Sr Siobhan Larking at the close of her 32 years' service to religious education in New Zealand. Sr Siobhan insists on the paramount importance of training and developing both Christian leadership and good catechetical skills in Catholic schools.

The need for sound, committed, well-trained teachers is paramount. And she, too, emphasises the centrality of spiritual formation. How sad it would be, she notes, if in their schooling "children passed all their assessment tasks but never experienced a sense of the awe and wonder of God".

Many schools, Catholic and other, receive *Tui Motu*. I hope that these two important articles are brought to the attention not only of teaching staff but also parents, board members – and especially principals. Nothing is more important than to nurture the spiritual development of the next generation.

M.H.

Be fair to the Americans

Of the September *Tui Motu*, Shakespeare would say; "How far that little candle throws its beams. So shines a good deed in a naughty world". It is sparkling with sheer goodness and Christian hope.

As for slating the United States in general, my personal experience is that Americans are the most hospitable, kind, generous, warm and friendly people on the face of the earth. Maybe we should distinguish between the people and some of their leaders.

How many Kiwis would like to be judged on the performance of our government. Certainly not His Eminence in Wellington!

Max Palmer, Kopua Abbey

Homosexuality revisited

Glynn Cardy's article "Who let the dogs in?" has made me feel the need to look carefully at the issue of gays and lesbians in the church setting.

I had always believed that the gay and lesbian lifestyle was of itself flawed and because of this, such people would not be able to take a full part in the life of the church.

However, I am now coming to the conclusion that homosexuality is not a choice, but simply the way some people are made. If this is indeed the case, surely they have as much right to the ministry and the sacraments of the church as I have.

Is the church going to wait until people 'catch up', or is she going to examine this matter in depth and come up with a solution which is fair and just to all?

Peg Cummins, Reporoa

Inclusive language

Re Anna Woods' letter in the September *Tui Motu*, it has often been remarked that we need an inclusive pronoun in the English language that would obviate the cumbersome use of 'he or she as the case may be' or the shorter but almost equally clumsy 'he/she' (or even the appalling 's/he'!).

letters

Alas! we have no such pronoun and nobody appears to be rushing to provide one. But, for addressing God who clearly incorporates all that is feminine as well as all that is masculine – and so much more besides, perhaps we could use 'they'?

After all, the Trinity is Three Persons, so 'they' would not seem out of place?

Tony Ryan, Wainuiomata

Cardinal's Condom

Fr O'Leary's argument to justify the use of condoms by appealing to the principle of double effect ignores an important proviso – that the means chosen must not be in and of themselves immoral.

Those with practical experience of condoms know that they can and do break and come off in use. At best, they are only a very fallible and partial protection from the spread of AIDS, something which their manufacturers readily admit. Knowing this, those infected with AIDS would not wish to take the risk of infecting their spouse by proceeding with the marital act, even if using condoms.

The argument against condoms is based on a profound reflection on the nature of love.

Chris Sullivan, Pakuranga

Remember the tortured ones

I remembered Mike Riddell's *July* article on sin last Sunday when *Hebrews 13* was being read in church. The unknown writer urges Jewish converts to serve their community. In its usual form, the third verse talks about identifying with the suffering of those who suffer.

To my astonishment the reading from the NRSV now translates the verse in this way: "Remember those who are being tortured as though you yourselves were being tortured". The legitimate but shocking introduction of the word "torture" into the text of the Bible brings a whole new dimension to our understanding of violence.

How many of us viewed the television coverage of Abu Graib and identified with the naked and abused prisoners? Even in that dramatic photo of a hooded figure standing as if on a crucifix, who among us could feel the shame and the agony of the anonymous Moslem?

Mike reminded us that sin calls us to search our own hearts rather than demonise others. The Bible now teaches us that searching our hearts includes identifying with the pain of those who are tortured.

Ron O'Grady, Auckland

Putting Vat ll into effect

The juxtaposition of two articles in your *August* issue clearly illustrated Colin Gibson's comment elsewhere in the same edition: "Sadly the Church's spokesmen often appear to be out of touch... The higher up in the church's hierarchy, the more remote they tend to become."

And the articles in question? Cardinal Williams said, on the subject of the Second Vatican Council: "Some feel we have moved beyond it and are ready for Vatican III. Other seem committed to a 'restoration' of what things were before the Council."

And on the very next page, Pauline O'Regan reflects on the difficulty of implementing Vatican II at community level: "There was a real attempt at parish level to implement the mandate of Vatican II. I think what prevented this happening among priests in general is fear... Meanwhile our bishops are looking two ways at once. They have one eye on the diocese and one on Rome. They too are afraid."

From where many of the laity sit, it is the hierarchy dragging us back to pre-Vatican II. We would simply be happy if Vatican II could be fully implemented.

Mike Marshall, Christchurch

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Tui Motu-InterIslands is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge and contribute to its discussion of spiritual and social issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed. The name *Tui Motu* was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means "stitching the islands together...", bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.
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Restorative Justice – making offenders accountable

Helen Bowen

In Auckland within the next few weeks, lawyers from all over the world will gather to discuss current legal thinking in an international context. There is a special forum for those interested in the innovations that have taken place in the New Zealand legal system in the area of criminal justice. Restorative Justice is on the agenda with New Zealand leading the way in terms of legislative reform.

The legislation passed in 2002 succeeds in fulfilling the broad purposes of restorative justice including:
- taking into account and providing of the interests of victims;
- holding offenders accountable for the harm done to their victims and to the wider community;
- addressing issues and problems that gave rise to the offending and putting measures in place to prevent re-offending.

This progressive legislation flies in the face of recent calls for harsher prison sentences as election year approaches.

So what does prison do? Offenders find friendship, favours and corruption in prisons. They build relationships based on threats, bribes and violence. They guarantee their allies protection against violence. They make promises to continue these allegiances upon their release. Together, they reject wholeheartedly the system that put them there.

Prison causes immeasurable harm. Fundamentally it preserves skewed relationships and makes eventual re-integration into family life difficult. If these caged relationships are based on promises that involve further offending, what does society gain from this short-term solution? I say, very little. There are a small number of recidivist offenders who will offend no matter what. But statistics consistently confirm that most offenders including petty offenders will be back behind bars within two years of their release.

Meeting the Victim

Most people will be affected by meeting the victim of their crime, in the presence of their families. This is what real accountability is all about. The accountability must be meaningful if it is to make a difference. Many think punishment holds offenders accountable. You do your time and you have paid your debt to society.

During that time, it is rare for offenders to understand what they did. True and real accountability means "understanding what you did and then taking responsibility for it; and taking responsibility for it means doing something to make it right, but also helping to be part of that process."

(Howard Zehr: ***Restorative Justice*** – 1994.)

The reason why we should look at restorative justice as a viable option is not only that it works better but that it educates offenders about their own humanity. It shows them that despite the harm and suffering they have caused, victims want offenders to have a better life. Offenders find facing this truth the hardest part. Victims routinely want the best for offenders.

Being exposed to a restorative environment can be life changing for offenders. Witnessing compassion, generosity, tolerance and forgiveness is unexpected and transformational. There is much to gain and very little against this innovative response. ■

Helen Bowen is an Auckland-based lawyer with a special interest in Restorative Justice

A more mature, educated laity

As the Church becomes more educated and its members take responsibility for their own faith development our need of an authoritarian hierarchical church diminishes.

When the laity chooses to make the Gospel of Jesus the foundation and centre of their life and all that they do, they no longer need a hierarchy to act in a parental role over them. What is needed is a community of equals led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

While the Church still has need of experts in the field of all areas affecting the spiritual and temporal life of the faith community, these experts are not always found in the hierarchy. As recent events show the hierarchy cannot even claim exclusively the high ground as leaders in moral behaviour.

When the lay members of the church actively develop a sound and correct conscience they become answerable to it and no longer require the hierarchy to be their conscience. Many lay people have developed Christ-centred principles out of their desire to live the life of Christ not because they are afraid of hell or the hierarchy, but because they believe in the Gospel and their responsibility to be the body of Christ in and for the world.

It is time for the church to encourage its members to become responsible teachers of faith and morals. This cannot happen while our church structures give power to the hierarchy for decision-making that excludes a real and honest process of consultation and collaboration with all its members. (***abridged***)

Teresa Homan, Upper Hutt

Rage is natural - but retribution is still wrong

Matt Robson's sister Joan was 17 when a drunk driver killed her. His parents never recovered, says Robson. "They lived, but something went out in their eyes." The driver was "a negligent, arrogant teenager", but the Robsons could see no point in sending him to jail. It wouldn't bring Joan back. They said his punishment would be "having to live with this for the rest of his life".

About 20 years later, Robson got a phone call. It was the driver who had killed his sister. Was he Matt Robson, the brother of Joan? Did he have a photo of her? Then he said: "You know, every day I've lived with this. Do you know what happened to my 17-year-old daughter? She was killed by a drunk driver. Now I'm not religious, I'm not superstitious. I don't think, 'There's God paying him back'. But I felt I was paying for it."

Robson knows what grief can do to the families of victims. When his 17-year-old son was assaulted with a blunt instrument near his school this year, Robson felt "extreme rage and anger... I wanted to kill the people who did it. That was my reaction. It was very good that it was a calm, sensible school, and I have a calm, sensible wife, a calm, sensible son," he says, laughing.

Among reasons for the current prison-overcrowding crisis, he suggests, is the policy of increasing sentences and tightening bail conditions. But he also thinks parole boards and judges are favouring the lock-up because they are spooked by the current cry to "get tough".

The present government is "at a crossroads," he says. It could go down the routes that have been proven to work: alternatives to prison, rehabilitation and early intervention to stop the young turning into criminals. Or it could become increasingly punitive.

The signs are not encouraging. National and Act are baying for blood, and the government looks wobbly. Will Justice Minister Phil Goff, always hawkish on justice matters, fly with the predators? According to Robson, Goff understands the need for more money to be spent on the alternatives to prison and so on, but he is a hostage to his "having to outbid the Sensible Sentencing Trust, who are anything but sensible".

In fact, politicians don't have to be hostage to the rednecks, insists Robson. The facts are: longer sentences don't deter, and that the alternatives actually work better. Finland made a decision to cut the prison muster. In 20 years, it reduced the imprisonment rate from 180 inmates per 100,000 of population to 40. While reported crime increased during this period, the report noted it increased less than in other Nordic countries, which were not reducing the use of imprisonment.

A Canadian study found that imprisonment, instead of a community sentence, did not reduce re-offending after release. "In fact, the opposite was found. Longer sentences were associated with a 3 percent increase in recidivism... This finding suggests some support to the theory that prison may serve as a "'school for crime' for some offenders".

Of the more than 6000 prisoners – New Zealand has the second-highest imprisonment rate in the Western world – Robson estimates that perhaps 300 need to be kept locked up simply because they would be an instant menace to the public if let out. Home detention, despite the 'chicanery' of politicians who denounce it, is quite successful and should be expanded. It allows, for instance, the proper treatment of drug abuse. Many criminals are dependent on drugs, and prison isn't the best place for them. "They need proper therapeutic communities and centres to work on their problems," he says.

Sex offender programmes Kia Marama, in Christchurch, and Te Piriti, at Paremoremo, have also been proven. These are tough programmes that challenge the child abuser to face up to his offence and learn to manage his behaviour.

"It's pretty brutal," says Robson. Child molesters, who are notoriously manipulative and deceitful, are forced to look into the flames. "They are told, 'Stop lying', don't fool yourself – you did this, you planned it and you are responsible'."

Then there is prevention. "You don't need to be a genius," says Robson, "to know where your prison recruits are going to come from". They come from poor and stressed communities and from dysfunctional families. The earlier the intervention, the cheaper it is and the more effective.

"What you need to do is grab the kid early, when they're five and they pick up scissors and stab someone in the class," says Robson. "Working with a five-year-old to change aggressive and defiant behaviour costs about $5000 and has a success rate of 70 percent. Dealing with the same behaviour at 20 costs $20,000 and has a success rate of only 20 percent." The ***About Time*** report, which Robson commissioned, recommended programmes both to help out young mothers from troubled backgrounds, and for disturbed young children and teenagers.

When we experience or hear about an outrageous criminal act, our first reactions, says Matt Robson, are horror and outrage and a desire to hit back, which is understandable. But after that, we need to sit down and think. ■

Matt Robson was Minister for Corrections in the first Clark government. This article appeared last month in the Sunday Star-Times. By kind permission.

The Spirituality of the Young Person

No adult has experienced growing up like today's young people, yet they too have a burgeoning spirituality needing to be nourished – as Dr Finola Cunnane, of Ferns in Ireland, urged teachers around New Zealand recently

The cultural and religious history in both Ireland and New Zealand has been characterized by economic, social and cultural change. The relationship between these changes shapes our experience of life and the manner in which we live. Sociologists have named these changes as the journey from pre-modernity to post-modernity.

Pre-modern society, for example, was more hierarchical in structure. Authority was respected, duties and obligations were agreed upon, while universals and absolutes governed the way of life. The established order was maintained and when it came to the education of the young, family, school, church and society all spoke the same language.

The landscape of contemporary society is rather different. Society is no longer hierarchical in structure. An indifference towards and suspicion of institutionalized religion has led to a rejection of universals and absolutes. Family, school, church and society no longer speak the same language. There is, however, a new and growing openness to the spiritual as people search for nourishment and meaning.

Youth Culture Today

The rapid change in contemporary culture means that the environment in which young people search for meaning and identity is not what it was heretofore. Noting some of these changes, David Elkind, in his book *All Grown Up and No Place To Go* speaks of the traditional ***markers***, that one experiences in the passage from childhood to adolescence, stating that the parents of today's young people had to be a certain age before they, in their day, could embrace each marker.

For example, the parents of today's young people had to be a certain age before they were privy to such ***information markers*** as the age of their parents, the state of the family finances, the skeletons in the family closet. They had to be a certain age before they could engage in ***entertainment markers*** like attend a disco, stay up late, go into town on one's own, spend the night at a friend's house.

The parents of today's young people had to be a certain age before they could embrace the ***purchasing markers*** of spending money at their own discretion. Similarly, they had to be a certain age before they could engage in such ***appearance markers*** as wearing certain clothes, make-up, tattoos or getting various parts of their bodies pierced. They also had to be a certain age before the ***social markers*** of dating and sitting with visiting adults for the duration of their visit could be embraced.

All these markers – information, entertainment, purchasing, appearance and social – were indications that one had entered into adolescence. Today, however, the age for accessing these markers is becoming lower and lower.

When young people see their pre-adolescent siblings and neighbours know, buy, wear, view and do the same things they do, they quickly abandon traditional adolescence and engage in adult markers or ways of entertainment, purchasing, employment, relationships, socialization and intoxication. The engagement of young people in these markers of adulthood when they lack the necessary experience, skills, and cognitive ability to address these issues, puts young people at risk.

There are other elements that were never part of childhood for previous generations. These include the Internet, email, mobile phones, music, TV, CD and DVD players, body piercing, tattoos, alcoholic lemonades, high-priced designer clothes, latch-key kids, STDs, AIDS, global warming to mention but a few.

This leads us to recognize that "we were never this age". No adult has had the type of childhood experienced by today's young people. This results in more and more young people being left to attend to their own spiritual growth

without the benefit of adult mentoring during an increasingly stressful experience called adolescence.

Michael Carotta in *Sometimes We Dance, Sometimes We Wrestle* maintains young people today face a *crisis of the spirit*. "*The adolescent crisis of the spirit leaves young people lacking hope and feeling powerless in the face of overwhelming challenges. The crisis of the spirit is a low level of moral courage and of joy. Spiritual growth increases hope, connects one to a higher power, generates fortitude, and opens one to joy.*" (p. 18).

Adolescent Spiritual Growth

The adolescent search for identity challenges them to make sense of things and to find meaning in the ironies of life they see around them. This results in a hunger and a desire for a spirituality that touches all aspects of the young person's life. These young people possess a spirituality that touches such activities as the playing field, preparing for exams, grieving over a tragic death, hanging out with friends, problem-solving, dealing with issues, dreaming dreams.

What is important for adults to remember is that God communicates with us through our ***lived experience***. Acknowledging that the lived experience of adolescents is different from that of adults, we must not expect our young people to mirror our adult image or experience of God. To do so would be to limit our ability to companion our young people on their journey.

Traits of Adolescent Spirituality

In exploring the issue of adolescent spirituality, Michael Carotta isolates five characteristics of adolescent spirituality that can help us understand and relate to the spirituality of the young person. These 'five fingers' include:

• *Friendship* is the key aspect of an adolescent's relationship to God. Indeed, relationship is key for young people. Relating to God as Creator, Father, Protector… each relationship includes the image of God as friend.

• *Prayer* plays a central role in the spirituality of adolescents in that it maintains the young person's relationship with God. Adolescents seek to know how to pray and welcome opportunities to enter into solitude. For example, meditation, Taizé Prayer, Lectio Divina are particularly welcomed and enjoyed by young people.

• *Mystery* is an inescapable constant within adolescent spirituality. The adolescents' natural desire to make sense of life, coupled with their increased ability to think abstractly, bring them face-to-face with their hunger for Mystery (God). It also brings them face-to-face with the mystery they encounter regarding creation and ecology, tragic events and why bad things happen to good people, the seasons of life, the existence of evil, and the world's struggle for justice and peace.

• *Doubt* plays a creative role within the adolescent spiritual journey. The journey through adolescence naturally moves young people to question, criticise and doubt certain teachings, concepts and traditions. Since religion is central to life, young people also question, criticize and doubt some aspects of their faith.

Since criticising is a characteristic trait of adolescence, it naturally moves young people to doubt certain religious teachings and concepts, even regarding some of the mysteries of their faith. Their quest for independence, together with their increased ability to think critically is what leads adolescents to doubt.

• *Gratitude* is another essential characteristic of adolescent spirituality. Young people are grateful to the God to whom they relate for life, for parents, friends, protection, opportunities that have come their way. However, the degree to which this operates varies from individual to individual.

Activities for Spiritual Growth

Michael Carotta then provides us with four activities that will enable us to help young people enter more fully and completely into their own spirituality.

1. Attending to Stories:

Used through the ages to deliver a message, reveal a truth or encourage particular behaviour, stories are important tools in helping young people to explore meanings, virtues, morals and spirituality. Stories are part of our daily experiences and are told when we share conversations, read newspapers and magazines, watch television and movies and read the Sacred Scriptures.

Each one of us is a storyteller and each has a unique life history – one that shapes our perception and experience of God. Taken a step further, stories help us recognize the transcendent present in our everyday experiences.

2. Building Skills:

Building skills are important for showing young people how to put religious knowledge into practice. In this regard, building skills for spiritual growth involve a strong and passionate sense of purpose. Their aim is to introduce young people to skills that promote spiritual growth and authentic relationships.

They also help adolescents to cope successfully with the challenges of contemporary life and to positively contribute to the common good within their local communities. Michael Carotta provides us with examples of skill-building programmes for religious, moral and emotional living skills.

Religious faith skills include:
how to recognize God's presence; how to pray; how to share faith experiences; how to apply the Bible to one's own life; how to use religious imagination; how to participate in communal worship

Moral living skills include:
how to handle sexual and social pressure; how to recognize and respond to others in need; how to build and maintain healthy relationships (and terminate unhealthy ones); how to obtain second chances; how to handle violence; how to analyze society's values and issues; how to distinguish between right and wrong.

Religious Education in Catholic schools

Kevin Wanden interviews Sr Siobhan Larkin SHF, just before her return to live permanently in Ireland. Siobhan taught for 32 years in New Zealand, was Director of Religious Education for Auckland diocese and co-ordinator for R.E. at CIT

Sr Siobhan Larkin SHF

What would you see as the main challenge facing religious education in Catholic schools today?

A major issue is providing the resources to enable teachers to obtain appropriate religious education qualifications. It is no longer acceptable to have teachers who have received no ongoing formation since they left school.

The document *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* states "an unprepared teacher can do a great deal of harm" (*#96*) and "everything must be done to ensure that Catholic schools have adequately trained religion teachers" (*#97*). When teachers who lack religious education qualifications are appointed, it should be a condition of their appointment that the work towards gaining qualifications.

Dioceses and Boards of Trustees need to provide the resources and support to allow teachers to obtain these qualifications. In some dioceses scholarships are awarded to enable teachers to gain qualifications.

Emotional Awareness skills include: how to stay hopeful; how to handle anger; how to handle fear; how to initiate and accept reconciliation; how to practice problem-solving; how to express affection; how to handle rejection.

3. Honouring the Senses:

Honouring the senses refers to the activity of paying attention to adolescent *emotionality* and *imagination.* Honouring the emotions of adolescents is crucial since our young people are probably the most emotional members of society. Failure to recognize that their emotions may hold the key to their spiritual life limits our ability to accompany them on their spiritual journey.

How, therefore, can we honour emotionality? Honouring emotionality may be accomplished by enabling young people to practice emotional awareness by inviting them to share their emotions and helping them to recognize the deeper moral and religious truths found at the root of the emotions they experience in their everyday lives. Underneath adolescent emotions lie the beliefs, ideals, principles and dreams held most sacred by young people.

Honouring emotionality is important for young people for a variety of reasons. It helps young people to avoid becoming victims of their emotions. It increases their ability to live the kind of moral and religious lives their hearts deeply desire.

Also, in recognizing the emotions being experienced by others, young people develop their facility for ***empathy and compassion***, tools that are crucial for moral living. Finally, honouring emotionality enables young people to become less impulsive, a factor that is important for the well-being of society.

The Role of Imagination:

Maria Harris talks about four kinds of religious imagination: contemplative, ascetic, creative, and sacramental.

- ***Contemplative imagination*** enables young people to slow down in the midst of a busy life-style in order to get in touch with their God.
- ***Ascetic imagination*** enables young people to stand back from emotionally charged situations, avoid impulsive reactions, and respect the dignity of others.
- ***Creative imagination*** enables young people to improve their ability to solve problems, attain goals, and nourish dreams.
- ***Sacramental imagination*** makes it easier for young people to recognize God in all that life offers.

According to David Loomis, imagination may be fostered in several ways: providing opportunities for young people to play, to be reflective, to be creative and to engage in story-telling. In this regard, it is important that adults seek the deeper truths expressed in all that is important to young people. It is not that young people suffer from a lack of spirituality but from a dearth of opportunities in which to reflect upon, explore and express their experiences of God that they obtain through their emotions and imagination.

4. Offering Solidarity:

Offering solidarity means being present to young people in certain ways – offering young people such attributes as personal humility, authenticity, a quality of presence, personal support, a reverence for people, and a comfortableness with questions and contradictions. In a word, it is saying to our young people: "I will be there for you".

These four activities for spiritual growth correspond to the cognitive, behavioural, affective and interpersonal domains of spiritual formation. Our challenge today is to approach the cultural world of the young person with reverence, conscious that God is there before us. ■

Generally, committed teachers are more than willing to undertake further study in order to gain appropriate qualifications. This is often in their own time, at nights, on weekends or in the term breaks. Over the last 15 years over 100 teachers studying through the Catholic Institute of Theology have been awarded either a Master of Religious Education or Graduate Diploma of Religious Education by the Australian Catholic University. This represents a huge personal commitment and a major resource for Catholic schools.

If a principal really believes that religious education is the Catholic school's *raison d'être*, then the principal will ensure that teachers have the same level of qualifications for teaching religious education as they do for their other subjects.

What about the role of the teacher?

For many young people the Catholic school is their only contact with the church. The enthusiasm, knowledge and faith of the teachers will have a lasting effect. Paul VI said that evangelisers, and you could say teachers, need to have "an interior enthusiasm"(*Evangelii Nuntiandi #80*).

Young people, who see the religious education teacher as dynamic, enthusiastic and knowledgeable, will come to understand the importance religion plays in life. On the contrary, if religious education is the first subject to suffer when other school events intervene, a clear message is sent about what is really important. There are many young teachers coming into the system who are enthusiastic, committed and qualified.

What are key issues in Catholic secondary schools?

With the introduction of NCEA and religious education as a subject that contributes towards this through Unit Standards and hopefully Achievement Standards, the need for well-qualified teachers will become even more of an issue. Teachers with a qualification of Level 3 or 4 on the Qualifications Framework will be teaching students working towards the same level of qualification. This is leading to specialist religious educators in secondary schools, which has many advantages, but it is important not to create the impression that religious educators are a group apart.

Can you say something about the balance between intellectual rigour and spiritual development.

Alongside the development of religious education as an academic subject as intellectually rigorous as any other in the secondary school curriculum, it is important that the spiritual development of students is not neglected. It would be a tragedy if students leave our schools with a solid foundation of the Catholic faith at an intellectual level, but with no commitment to Jesus Christ or the church.

Tagged positions are one of the key planks for maintaining the Catholic character of our schools. Catholic schools need to find ways to use the people in tagged positions to maintain and enhance the Catholic character of the school by being involved in such things as school prayer, liturgies and retreats. In order to do this teachers need to be trained and provided with opportunities to develop their own spiritual lives.

What are key issues in Catholic primary schools?

New Zealand has developed many fine religious education programmes over recent years coming from different philosophical and theoretical positions. The current primary curriculum focuses heavily on knowledge and assessment. Faith development theory would suggest that there is a need for children in their early years to be exposed to God's presence in their lives so that a personal relationship with God is developed. It would be a pity if children passed all their assessment tasks but never experienced a sense of the awe and wonder of God.

We need to see that religious education does not end up as just another subject in which children fail or succeed. It would be hard for children who have little success academically in religious education to view religion as a positive force in their lives.

Religious education should be about giving children a sense of self-worth. Every child and every person is made in the image and likeness of God, and God is good. If children were to leave our schools without this belief, then I believe we would have failed miserably.

How do we mentor leadership in Catholic schools?

Two initiatives in recent years – the Catholic Institute of Theology's Certificate in Leadership in a Catholic School and the Australian Catholic Universities' Master of Educational Leadership taught at the Wellington Catholic Education Centre – have focused on the development of present and future leaders in Catholic schools.

There are many wonderful examples of Catholic schools led by principals who understand that every dimension of school life will thrive when the central mission of the school is actively supported by every member of the school community – Boards of Trustees, principals, teachers, students and the parish.

When costs are rising, how can Catholic schools maintain their historic mission to the poor?

It is tempting for parents to send their children to Catholic schools because they are perceived to be 'semi-private'. As Catholic schools become more attractive and have waiting lists, the place of needy families may be marginalised. The document on ***The Catholic School*** reminds us that the church offers its educational services first and foremost "to the poor or those deprived of family help and affection or those who are far from the faith." (*#58*).

What do think about links with Maori spirituality?

The Mäori concept of Tapu, the sacredness of God, land and people has great resonance with the Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation and Sacramentality as well as a growing ecological awareness among young people. Students leaving a Catholic school should be strongly imbued with a sense of justice and a commitment to work for justice both within Aotearoa New Zealand and globally. ■

The interviewer, Br Kevin Wanden FMS works in Religious Education for the Auckland Catholic Schools Office and also lectures at CIT

The Catholic Church in the West, beset by sex abuse scandals and by plummeting vocations, appears to be in grave crisis. Yet, says Dominican Timothy Radcliffe, it was precisely in such a crisis that the church was born

A church born in crisis

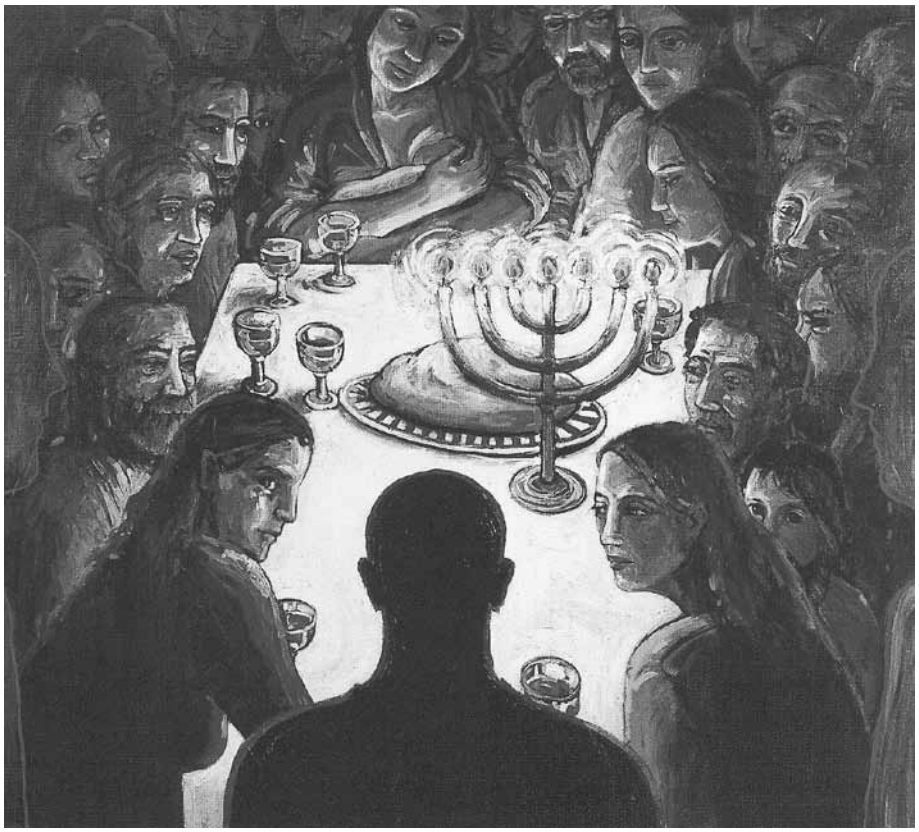
The Last Supper is our foundational story, the story of the new covenant of God with us and with all. The paradox is that it tells of a moment when the disciples lost any story to tell about the future. No doubt they came to Jerusalem bubbling with hope. Perhaps they believed that the Messiah would lead a rebellion against the Romans. But at the Last Supper every story crashed. Judas had sold Jesus. Peter was about to betray him. The rest of the disciples would run away.

So we have an odd paradox. Our Christian story is of a moment when there was no story to tell. Our community was founded at just the moment when it was in the process of breaking up. Our sacrament of hope tells of when hope was lost.

In fact the paradox is even deeper than that. The words with which we tell that story, the Gospels, were given during the next great crisis. As the church spread through the Roman Empire and Christians were imprisoned and persecuted, they quickly found another story to live by: 'it is okay, chaps. Jesus is coming soon, any moment now'.

But Peter and Paul died; Roman Christians betrayed each other; everything began to collapse. There wasn't even the hint of the tiniest Parousia. No Jesus! Instead, the Word became flesh in the Gospels. We would never have heard of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke* and *John* if the Gospels had not been distilled in that crisis.

So, as Christians we have no need to fear this present crisis of hope. Crises are our 'speciality of the house'. The church was born in one. The Gospel was born in another. Crises renew the church and make her young again.



Last Supper, by Margaret Ackland. (Australia 1993.) Reproduced with permission from *Christ for All People*, (ed. Ron O'Grady Asian Christian Art Assn 2001)

A Church born in crisis

How may this present crisis rejuvenate our beloved church? Scripture teaches us that the church has a future; it will endure until the end of time, but what that future is we do not know.

When the Second Vatican Council ended there was a certain euphoria. It looked as if we were on the way to a deeply renewed church. We hoped for the rebirth of a church which would be more open to the world, less clerical and authoritarian, that would be the pilgrim People of God. We hoped for a church more humble and Christ-like.

The church digests change very slowly. It lurches forward three steps and then goes back one. It is absolutely normal that after the massive changes of the Council, there is now a stage of attempting to recover the past. I am not a historian, but I would not be surprised if 40 years after most of the great Councils, it looked as if they had been failures. We rush forward, panic, retreat – and then go forward again.

Polarisation

Where, then, is the modern church going? The church at present is divided by deep mutual suspicion. We are

suffering from the party politics that Paul so hated in the Corinthian church. "I am for Peter"; "I am for Paul"; "I am for Cardinal Ratzinger"; "I am for Hans Küng." And this is more than just an intellectual disagreement. It is often a dirty power struggle.

Such polarisation is profoundly un-Catholic. Our hope lies in the fact that Jesus did not gather around him a chummy, cosy group of like-minded people. It was not a community that was founded on a shared vision. They were not of one heart and mind except for a brief moment.

A community of the like-minded would not be a sacrament of the kingdom but only of itself. We point to the kingdom precisely because our unity is not mental but sacramental. It is precisely our embrace of the stranger, even the enemy, that makes us a sign.

The closer we are together, the harder it is to embrace and belong to those who are different. Battles are always most explosive within families. We can tolerate a stranger being different but not one who is our flesh and blood or of our faith.

Here again we must look at the Last Supper. The Last Supper enacted the conflict of two sorts of power. There was the power of Jesus, which was the power of signs, and there were the approaching representatives of another sort of power, the soldiers who would arrest him. And they represent the power of brute force. Every Eucharist is the re-enactment of the clash of these two sorts of power. It is the sign of our faith that truth is not extinguished by violence. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

The parish – no longer a place of belonging

The church of today cannot flourish if people cannot feel at home in it. In recent centuries the usual 'home' for most Catholics has been their parish, but this is often not the natural community in which people can feel they belong. Parishes reflect a mediaeval church in which people belonged to villages and small market towns.

But if you live in a modern city you go to the place which offers you what you want. You are not bound to your nearest parish. And if the parish priest ceases to be to your taste, you shop around elsewhere. For a whole variety of reasons, fewer people find it easy to find a home in the church, or in any form of institutional religion. People look for spirituality without membership, for God but not for the church.

Yet belonging, in some sense, is intrinsic to the Christian religion. If the parish is not any longer the ideal, then let us look at others. One way is surely through belonging to multiple networks. Already the church largely functions through such networks. "In London", reports a chaplain, "students may plug into the local church, the Cathedral, a chaplaincy, a lively evangelical church, the Oratory, a new movement, or an ecumenical prayer group. Students are increasingly less contained by institutional frameworks."

Often, when we think of the Catholic Church we imagine it as one big hierarchy, like a pyramid. At the top you have the Pope and at the bottom, lay people. There is another, and I think more healthy way, of thinking of the church, which is as a community that is nourished by multiple institutions.

Each of these can be a way of belonging, which should give a voice to the wisdom and authority of every baptised Catholic. The role of the hierarchy is not to *be* the church. It should help to hold together all these multiple networks, so that they bond into the church and react with each other.

The place of the priest

A cause of demoralisation for many priests today is finding themselves caught between identification with the local community and the universal church. Most priests identify strongly with the local community. We find

The recovery of Christian hope

I have been asked to speak with you about how we may be the bearers of good news. And this implies we are ourselves touched by a certain joy. If you are grim and sad, then who is going to believe that the Gospel is good news?

"There are lots of reasons why we might be demoralised. The church is living through a crisis of hope. In the United States perhaps more than anywhere else that I know, there appears to be a deep polarisation between Catholics. Most dioceses and religious orders are suffering from a shortage of vocations. Many priests have left. There are the terrible scandals of sexual abuse and the scandal of how these have been handled.

"There is no inherent contradiction in having a demoralised taxi driver or lawyer. An accountant or a hairdresser may be habitually depressed and yet still excel. But a priest who is permanently demoralised is wounded in his capacity to fulfil the role.

"For most of my life, our Christian hope was propped up by its secularised child, a belief in progress. There were new inventions every year. Even food in English restaurants got better. But since the end of the Cold War that confidence in progress has gone.

"We Christians have no road map for humanity. We have no more idea than anyone else what will happen to humanity in the next hundred or thousand years. So, with the disappearance of confidence in progress, we have to recover a genuinely Christian hope. If we may do so, then humanity will discover in us something for which it longs and which is ours to give."

(*Timothy Radcliffe speaking to United States priests*)

the meaning of our priesthood in our shared life with the people of God. We share their struggles, rejoice in their victories, are with them in their failures and we are nourished by their faith.

But the priest also represents the universal church. When we preach, it is not just to flog our particular hobbyhorses and propagate our views. We are called to proclaim the Gospel and the teaching of the church. And yet we may find that much that we are supposed to teach, especially in the area of morality, may seem incomprehensible and unrealistic.

In my experience much of the church's moral teaching, especially its sexual teaching, simply makes little sense to many even committed and practising Catholics. In some parts of our society and in many parts of the world, most people do not live their sexuality in the context of marriage, open to the reproduction of children. Most of the young people that I know are either living with partners, practising contraception or are divorced and remarried, or are gay.

How can we make our priestly lives with people and build community when we are seen as the public representatives of a moral vision that so many people either do not accept or find almost impossible to live? I am not concerned at this point with the truth of this teaching, but just its incomprehensibility or apparent impossibility for many people.

How can we live in that space between this moral vision and what people actually live without demoralisation and even with joy? A priest writes: "It is... uncomfortable, occupying the space between the general and the particular, between the rock and the hard place. It is uncomfortable to belong to the world of orthodoxy and yet spend so much of my time and energy with the unorthodox, and indeed to belong to their world too. I would want to say to men preparing for diocesan priesthood that this divided heart is the characteristic pain of their vocation, and if they experience the pain, it is a sign that they will be good priests."

If we are to survive between this rock and the hard place, then we need each other, the support of our fellow priests. We belong to the universal church, and we represent it. We belong to the local community, and we share its life too. This double pull can tear us to pieces if we are not careful. We may either become ecclesiastical yes-men, the voice of the institution, or we may become permanent rebels against the magisterium. Both destroy us as mediators and midwives of the word.

Priests need to be sustained in bearing its tensions by a strong mutual solidarity. This also implies that we treat the bishop as a brother too. On his part the bishop is to regard the priests of his diocese as his brothers and his friends.

The scandals

I will conclude with a few brief words about the scandals that have so crucified the church these last years. How much pain this has produced: pain above all for the victims of abuse; humiliation for the whole priesthood; pain for the laity, who have been astonished at this betrayal of trust; anger at the way it has been handled by some bishops; shame at the grilling the church has got in the media. This is indeed a crisis.

Well, at least it was not as bad as the Last Supper! There, Jesus sits down to eat with Judas, who has betrayed him, and Peter, the rock upon which the church is built, who is about to deny him. He gathers around the disciples, who will almost to a man take to their feet and run away. And this is the crisis out of which the church was born and which we remember every day. Remember – we have no reason to fear crises; they renew us.

Jesus was handed over. And in the Eucharist we remember how he embraced that betrayal and made it a gift. He freely grasped this dark act and transformed it into a moment of grace. The passive victim acted creatively. You have grabbed my body and given it away, and made me a commodity worth 30 pieces of silver. But listen: *This is my body and I give it to you.* ■

Courage and humility

I believe that this truth-telling requires of priests two things: courage and humility. We need courage because telling the truth will not always be welcome. There is a fear of debate in the church and the suspicion that if we really air our disagreements, then the authority of the church will be undermined and we are being disloyal. But nothing undermines the authority of the church so much as the suspicion that we do not say what we believe. Where is the the bold speaking of the apostles?

This truth-telling also requires of us enormous humility, because we cannot speak as those who have the truth wrapped up, unlike our ignorant and bigoted opponents! We can only contribute to the debate, trusting that the truth will emerge, and we might not turn out to be right. We speak out not because we have the answers but so as to contribute to the discovery of the answers. And it is because we

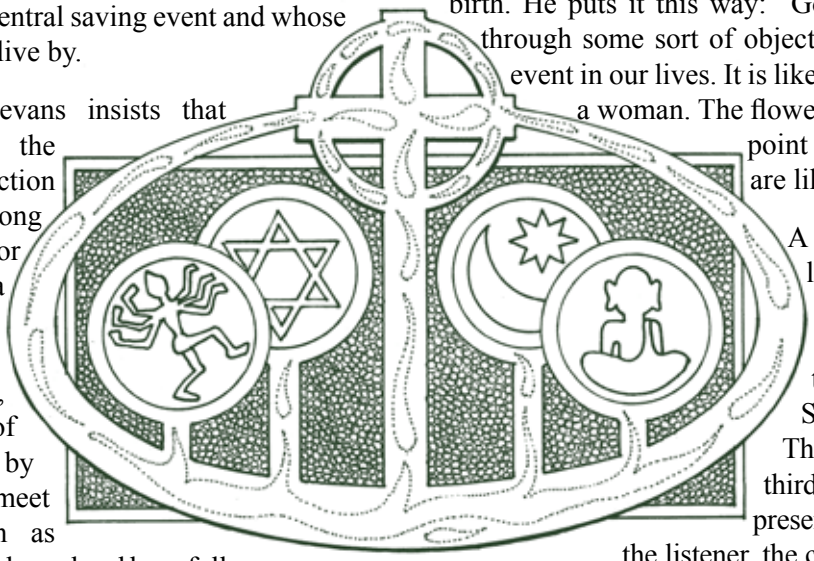
trust that the Holy Spirit has indeed been poured upon the church that we need not worry too much if we turn out to be wrong. The people of God will not easily be led astray.

Fr Timothy Radcliffe was Master General of the world Dominicans. This article is adapted from an article appearing recently in *Priests and People*.
Fr Timothy will visit New Zealand to be keynote presenter at the National Conference of Religious, Wellington, 20-23 January 2005

God Inside Out

Professor Stephen Bevans is Professor of Mission and Culture at the Catholic Theological Union (CTU), Chicago.
Recently he visited Otago University for lectures and seminars.
Tui Motu interviewed him.

A theme Professor Bevans constantly returns to in his lectures is how we understand the Holy Spirit. Once the Holy Spirit was the neglected member of the Trinity for Western Christians. Since Vatican II we have come to understand the mission of the Holy Spirit better, but may still see it as subordinate to and following on from the mission of the Word: Jesus whose life, death and Resurrection is the central saving event and whose message we preach and live by.



However, Professor Bevans insists that we should recognise the universality of the action of the Holy Spirit among all human beings. For instance, when a missionary preaches the word of Christ for the first time to someone, the deepest desires of that listener (prompted by the Spirit) arise and meet the particular tradition as expressed by the preached word and hopefully it articulates those desires.

"Whenever I teach", says Professor Bevans, "I first seek to find where Spirit lies in all the questions people have. People are constantly wanting to know what God is like. When you present them with Jesus, you hope they will recognise the human face of God. 'What is God like?' they ask.' This is who God is like', we say in response."

The action of the Spirit is universal. It can be discerned right throughout the Old Testament. In *Genesis* the 'Spirit' comes first. It is the Spirit that broods over the waters. Then God speaks, and the stages of Creation happen. Throughout the Scriptures it is the Spirit that first gives life, the Spirit that calls forth prophecy, that heals, that brings about new life.

This action of the Spirit during the long years of the history of Israel came to total fruition in the life of Jesus. Jesus does in concrete but limited ways what the Spirit has been doing all along. Finally, Jesus endows his community with this same Spirit and bids them to go forth and act as he did.

Stephen Bevans suggests that the Spirit is always present within human life and activity waiting to be brought to birth. He puts it this way: "God offers Godself to us through some sort of objectivity" – some action or event in our lives. It is like a man giving flowers to a woman. The flowers are not the point. The point is his heart. The flowers are like a sacrament.

A theologian today is like a person bringing a floral gift. The theologian must do more than simply reflect on Scripture and Tradition. Theology must appeal a third source, which is the present human experience of the listener, the context in which we live. Contextual theology is more than just 'classical' theology.

"The dogmas of the church," suggests Professor Bevans, "the example of the lives of saints also play a part in this: they speak to us and trigger the action of the Spirit within us. And the words of Sacred Scripture play a special role. We must never have a mechanical understanding of Scripture as revelation, falling out of heaven. The revelation takes place when, at a graced time in a person's life, the 'words' of Scripture become 'the Word of God'. The word of God acts between the lines of life.

"Scripture itself is simply the record of the experience of faith of a people. But it also has this uncanny power of becoming a revealing Word of God to us. And it has been our inspiration for generation after generation of believers. It becomes 'a tradition'"

This way of looking at revelation and the presence of the Spirit affects the way we look at the missionary thrust of

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Christianity, the way we look at classical theology, and it makes imperative that the way we do theology must always be contextual.

Missionary activity of the church

In a postcolonial era people will often judge missionary activity as being intrusive – if not downright destructive – within the context of the culture and beliefs of indigenous peoples. The fundamentalist preacher in the novel *The Poisonwood Bible*, by Barbara Kingsolver, is perhaps a caricature of this.

Nevertheless there have been numerous examples of missionary activity being found as hand in glove with the colonists, seeking to plunder and subdue native populations. However, the work and writings of the famous Spanish Dominican Bartolomé Las Casas (1474-1566) indicates that the church was often sensitive to this even at the height of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial conquests.

Revelation takes place when, at a graced time in a person's life, the words of Scripture become the Word of God

Clearly the Gospel has also been a liberating message for indigenous peoples and that is why it has often been welcomed with joy. Bevans maintains that at its best Christianity is radically missionary. It helps to manifest the true nature of God to people who may be ignorant of it.

Nevertheless, although the message of Jesus may be new, the Spirit within the hearers is present antecedently. Once again the 'mission' of the Spirit comes first. Just as the Risen Lord operates through the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the disciples into 'becoming Christ', so the Spirit precedes the coming of the Gospel within pagan peoples.

The missionary comes then, not to impose something alien, but to dialogue with cultures which already possess the truth through the indwelling Spirit of God. The Asian bishops recently spoke of a triple dialogue which the church must initiate: with the cultures of Asia; with the Asiatic religions – Buddhism, Hinduism etc.; and with the poor of Asia.

at its best Christianity is radically missionary. It helps to manifest the true nature of God to people who may be ignorant of it

This form of missionary activity also brings benefits to the mother church, for in meeting with other cultures the church 'focuses elsewhere'. It ceases to be simply self-regarding. It helps to illumine its own most sacred truths:

• The Incarnation: God became one of us. God embraces all that it means to be human. This means that all that is human is good.

• Sacraments: water, oil, bread, wine all help show forth the holiness of God. But in fact the whole world is 'sacrament'. A person, an event, a sunset: all can open up the transcendent in our lives. God is found to be active in all things. In dialogue with Scripture or Tradition we begin to see the holiness of events and people around us.

•. Revelation itself is seen in a new way. Revelation is not merely information: a list of things God has told us to believe. Vatican II saw revelation not only in the words of Scripture and in Tradition but in the actions and events of our ordinary lives. God is constantly offering Godself to us in friendship and relationship.

•. The Catholicity of the church. While we seek unity within the church, each culture can be kept in its integrity. It is not that everything should be the same everywhere, rather that these different cultural perspectives need to converse with one another. There is no reason therefore why a particular theology should not arise out of, say, a Maori or a Filipino experience. Catholicity simply enables these differing cultural insights to dialogue with each other.

• Even the Blessed Trinity itself, which is a communion of Persons expressing unity in diversity, a model therefore of what the church community should be. There will be difference between persons and cultures, yet constant dialogue between them seeking a higher truth.

Classical theology

Missionary activity reveals some interesting anomalies and challenges which impinge on our Western theological tradition.

In the Philippines, for instance, it has been the custom for Catholic missionaries for centuries to import both bread and wine to provide the species for eucharist. For the Filipinos these are not staple foods. The question arises: might there be another way of expressing Eucharist to suit Filipino culture?

Similarly, how can you talk about Jesus as the 'Good Shepherd' or as 'Lamb of God' to the people of Papua New Guinea who do not know what a sheep is? They have even started talking of Jesus as 'the pig of God'!

Even more arresting has been the discovery that classical theology can be – and is – oppressive, especially towards certain groups. It appears to uphold patriarchy, and therefore is oppressive to women. Also, Latin American theologians found classical theology tends to support the status quo, allowing the oppressor of the poor to continue to be oppressor.

With the collapse of colonialism, liberated peoples cease to look to the parent European culture to provide their

values or express their liturgy. Even native religions begin to be seen as of value. In Thailand, Buddhism is so bound up with Thai culture that it seems right for Thais to use Buddhist concepts to help express who they are as people of Christian faith.

People have begun to understand that there is no intrinsic superiority of one culture over another or over all others. Not everything in native cultures is good. But generally, every culture has its strengths and its concepts can be used to help express faith.

We need to ask ourselves, therefore, what do we mean by classical theology?

Over the last 30 years there has been a growing unease with 'classical' theology. Is it really helpful to use scholastic philosophy to help understand our faith today – or should we be couching it in terms of, say, existentialist philosophy? Should we, perhaps, be using a literary vehicle – such as 'narrative' – to help understand faith.

Theology 'in context'

We know now that each book in Scripture was born out of a particular context. That is why we have four gospels, not one. The Matthaean community was clearly Jewish (as compared with the other three). Great theologians of the past dialogued with their own world: Origen with Hellenism; Aquinas with the newly-rediscovered Aristotle. In other words there is no such thing as a completely objective 'theology' which has fallen out of the sky. Every theology, in its origins, is contextual.

Therefore, it is essential for every theology today tobe contextual. Doing theology 'in our own context' is the only way for us, just as it was for Aquinas. We have to pay attention to our experience, personal or cultural. All these are the stuff of theology, but have to be worked out in fidelity to the past but also in fidelity to the spirit which is present in our experience.

Te Karere

Sermons say read the Bible
To know God
Kneel and pray
To know God
Obey the Commandments
To know God
But yesterday
I saw a butterfly
Land on a withered leaf
Just before sunset
On a perfect cloudless day
And at that moment
I knew God

Bill Walters

And what do we mean by 'context? ...we mean:

- our personal experience: struggles, relationships, health, our joys which may be common or just peculiar to us;
- our cultural experience: the set of meanings which make us who we are;
- our social location: male or female, rich or poor – each a different lens;
- the social changes we undergo: globalisation, liberation movements.

In conclusion

All of us are called to be theologians, because the Holy Spirit is within each of us. All of us are seekers: all are people of faith 'seeking understanding' (St Anselm's definition of theology). Every homily, every religious education course, every Religious Education lesson is a way of 'doing theology'. Even prayer is a form of theology since it is the putting of faith into words.

Professor Bevans is seeking to bridge the gap between the academic theologian in his or her ivory tower and the ordinary Christian in search of enlightenment. He sees this bridge as being specially important in missiology, because the missionary must be sensitive and open to the movements of the spirit within the culture receiving the word.

But it is equally true for everyone else. Every Christian, he suggests, by virtue of his/her baptism is a theologian. Have you written any good 'summas' lately? ■

M.H.

Rogan McIndoe Ad

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Blessed are tho
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Blessed are the storytellers; they remind us that reality is more than one-dimensional

We live in a culture that can create a photograph of something that never happened, a movie where the characters have their body parts 'enhanced', and reality TV shows that bears little resemblance to anybody's reality. Truth is so evasive that some discourage us from even seeking it, telling us that the outward appearance is all there is.

I'm reminded of Margaret Mahy's The Man Whose Mother Was A Pirate. On his journey to the sea, that he'd never seen, the man encounters a philosopher. "Go back little man," the philosopher advises, "because the wonderful things are always less wonderful than you (think)… the sea is less warm, the joke less funny, the taste not as good as the smell." The man whose mother was a pirate responds: "I must go." And off he ran towards the sea.

He is true, not to his experience, but to the faint yearning of his heart. A yearning that grows stronger the closer he comes to fulfilling it. Truth, 'the truth that sets us free', is first believed in before it's seen.

Margaret Mahy is a storyteller. Her vocation is to stoke the fires of our imagination, as a stoker once fed the fires of an engine. It is in the imagination that dreams are developed. Imagination is the place where solutions beyond the realms of possibility are trialed. It is the place where love is believed in despite the lack of evidence.

Back in the days when I was a curate I was shocked to hear that my vicar had refused to pray for a lady. She had come to him to ask for a prayer, and he'd said no. It felt to me like he'd breached the bedrock of priestly care. My vicar had prayed with this woman many times in the past. He became convinced that this prayer was actually a barrier to her spiritual growth, and he now refuse to collude. It wasn't an eas decision for him.One of the tasks of a priest is to help people find their own way into the expanse of God. It is a journey The priest is simply a fellow-traveller, who has the job of pointing out things of beauty and interest along the way. The priest also has the job of encouraging people to get off their posteriors and keep moving.

Blessed are those who consider themselves blest

I tire of the ungrateful. I tire of those who think that everything they have has been earned. They fail to open their eyes to the world, their ears to the music, and their hearts to the notes of kindness reverberating around them.

Although I try to be understanding, I also tire of the miserable who can only see misery. The sunlight of hope shines on the happy and the sad. It is our choice whether hope will brighten our day, or whether we will go indoors and shut it out.

I have a little coffee coaster embossed with the words: 'Don't forget to pause a moment and thank God for everything'. Thanking God for everything is difficult.

Most of us want something different to have happened in the past. But thanking God is a way of accepting who we are. Acceptance is a pre-cursor to a change of heart. And a change in the heart can change everything.

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nemselves, their
and our world

It takes courage to work for change. We need to listen, to build trust, to be open to change within ourseolves, as well as helping others on that journey.

Change is a journey. and helping change come about is both an art and a prayer.

I'm reminded of the woman who had the difficult task of trying to get her dog to take a liquid medicine. The woman would gingerly approach with the spoonful of medicine as her husband held the dog. Inevitably there would be a struggle.

One day the dog escaped the hold and knocked the medicine and spoon over the kitchen floor. The woman was exasperated. Imagine her surprise when the dog then proceeded to lick up the spilt liquid from the floor. It wasn't the medicine the dog objected to, but the method.

Blessed are those who know an animal as a friend. They will have their humanity enriched

I heard a story recently of a fire officer entering a burning building in order to rescue a cat. Not once, but twice! The cat on being brought safely out showed her gratitude by heading straight back in. Her kittens were inside. The fire officer too headed back in, and this time re-emerged with both mum and the kids.

In helping an animal, or being helped by an animal, our human spirit is nurtured. The spirit is the part of us that dances with God. The human-animal relationship is not the same as other relationships. That cat did not only get lucky, it reminded the fire officer of the heart of his vocation, namely to save life. Likewise animals remind us all of our vocation to befriend life. In befriending life we befriend our own soul.

Blessed are cemeteries and those who linger in them

I've lived next door to a cemetery now for 11 years. It's a busy place. People come regularly to place flowers, read headstones, sit awhile, or just ponder. All sorts of people come, just as all sorts of people are buried.

The living treat the dead with some reverence. Cemeteries are holy places. The desecration of tombs, like in a Wellington Jewish cemetery recently, offends against our sense of what is holy. You don't mess with the dead.

How we define 'holy' changes over the years. At one time you needed to dress correctly to enter a cemetery. Laughter was frowned upon. Eating in a cemetery was prohibited. You didn't wander into cemeteries at night. Our Epsom rules are unwritten, change over time, and reveal the spirituality of the moment.Easter egg hunts are okay; rowdy 21st parties are not. Laughter, hide-'n'-seek, and the odd 'boo' are okay. Swearing and cigarette butts are not. To be faithful to the dead is to be faithful to life. To embrace and enjoy life is a holy act.

Time spent lingering in cemeteries can teach you these things. Blessed too are the gardeners, those who upkeep cemeteries, and those who teach their children to care.

Richard Walsh and Ben Scanlan (two kiwis) flanking newly professed Alfred Banda with his niece.

Penias Mwale... my brother

Christian Brother Richard Walsh meets a young Zambian man dying of AIDS. For Richard, the encounter brings the gospel to life.

Two months ago I had never heard of Penias Mwale. He is the son, from a previous marriage, of our cook, Robson. One day Robson asked me to take his 'boy' to the nearby clinic for some medicine, as he was unable to walk.

Penias lives about one kilometre away with his grandparents in a very small house, made of concrete blocks. It is without electricity and running water. Cooking is done on charcoal braziers.

Robson guides me through the streets to the house, from which eventually emerges a very thin and obviously sick young man. I had thought Robson told me he was 15, and when seeing the lad, quite believed him. Only later did I discover that he is 29. He is assisted into our minibus and to the clinic we go. Here he is given some yellow pills, presumably medicine for his ailment and we return him home.

Over the next few days I ask Robson whether there is any improvement. At first it seems there is. However one day when I ask, I am told that he is not getting any better and so I offer to take him to a private clinic. The offer is accepted. I discover Penias asleep on a reed mat on the ground outside his father's house. He is obviously very thin, very tired and very sick. We manhandle him into our minibus and off we go to the doctor.

The doctor seems less than enthusiastic about treating the patient, though of course does so and does so very professionally. I suspect he thinks Penias is a lost cause. A malaria test is done. He has malaria. An HIV test is done. He is HIV positive. He receives post-test counselling. He learns that if he begins the newly introduced treatment of anti-retrovirals, he must stick to the regime for the rest of his life. To get on to the scheme he must go to the main public hospital – UTH or University Teaching Hospital, in Kampala.

And so we go to UTH. As it happens there are mercifully few at the 'filter clinic' through which one must pass before getting into the hospital proper. After an examination by a doctor, who is very attentive and professional I must say, we are sent on our way for BP, temperature etc. and then to the admissions ward.

Upon reaching the admissions ward we are told that there are no free beds and that he has to stay in his wheelchair. Now this could mean not for minutes but for hours, even overnight. I might add that this saga has begun at 2 pm. Fortunately however we discover that there is an empty bed and since possession is ten-tenths of the law we possess it immediately, grotty sheets and all.

Penias is thirsty. He takes the water we have brought. He wants to urinate. We tell him where the toilet is, but the doctor who is at the next bed tells him that he will be out of breath if he goes there and she wants to examine him. In desperation he takes one of the three cups we brought and pees into it. His father takes it for emptying.

Penias is hungry. We also remember to give him the malaria tablets from our doctor. He drinks the soups and takes some pasta. Then he gesticulates for something. We don't know what it is. Next thing he grabs his jacket and vomits into it. Before the next throw, I provide him with the second cup. His father takes it for emptying and we carefully put the jacket into a plastic supermarket bag we happen to have.

Throughout it all are the sounds of people in agonising pain. There is the moving sight of family, friends and lovers at the side of their loved ones and ready to stay the night perched on the side of the bed. There are the doctors and nurses performing their duties professionally and serenely in such conditions.

We decide to leave. So ends a day that began with my giving a morning's input on spirituality to a group of religious preparing for final profession. The afternoon has taken a different twist and from two in the afternoon until 9.30 that night, the spirituality has been a practical expression of what in the morning had been a cosy discussion.

That night I do not sleep well. I have nightmares of hospitals and skeletons. The following day I was due to go to a meeting in Accra, Ghana, on the other side of the continent! By the time I return to Lusaka, after one week, I find that Penias has been discharged, has been home, has been bleeding incessantly and has been admitted to the local clinic.

The day after my return from Accra, Robson gets word that the local clinic is referring Penias to no other place than UTH. Yes, indeed, here we go again. I drive to the clinic hoping that we will be told that we can by-pass the filter clinic.

What I see next calls images of Auschwitz to mind. The image that appears in a wheelchair is all teeth and eyeballs. The emaciated body has a head thrown back with mouth open. There is no strength to hold it upright. The bag of skin and bones is loaded into the bus, and there along with this broken body is a father totally nonplussed. I cannot believe the deterioration that has occurred in one week. We manage to get Penias from the bus. In the moment that he is standing prior to sitting in the wheelchair his track pants fall down. Even the elastic waistband cannot hold them up. He has no waist, no hips, no bottom.

We take him to the clinic, by-passing the less sick. Fortunately there is one spare bed, with a clean plastic covered mattress. We waste no time putting Penias on that. Eventually his blood pressure is taken. His arms are so thin that the gadget cannot be wrapped tightly enough and the father must hold it against the arm.

Meanwhile the man in the next bed is soiling himself. The smell is overwhelming and the sight of the relatives taking off his pants and cleaning him up is more than enough. I leave for the next room.

That evening I decide to have my meal alone and replay the day's events. I find myself in tears at the enormity of the tragedy not only of this young man but of the other many thousands like him. I am grateful for the tears. I go to my room and 'weep for Jerusalem'. Four weeks ago I had never heard of this man. I did not know he existed. Yet today I know that he is my brother and there are thousands, no millions, like him. He has plunged me more profoundly into the depth of what it is to be a human person than I could imagine.

For many years I have heard that one is evangelised by the poor. What is it to be evangelised? I think now it is to become aware of the good news that we are all connected. That each of us is a brother/sister to the other. That we are not threats to each other, not enemies but gifts. That each of us has a responsibility for the other and that, in the realisation of this, the world can be different and the kingdom of God can emerge.

In Penias Mwale I see a man who is my brother. But his body is ravaged by AIDS. Penias is dying, not because he is HIV positive or has AIDS. He is dying because he is poor. He is dying because he has had poor nutrition. He is dying because until recently anti-retroviral drugs for HIV have been unavailable in so-called 'third world' countries because of their cost.

He is dying because those of us with more than we need choose to indulge ourselves rather than even think about the survival of our poor brothers and sisters. He is dying because so many of us put more emphasis on orthodoxy (so-called right doctrine/ideas in all its irrelevance) than orthopraxy (right actions).

Over the next few days I ask about Penias' welfare, to be told that he is still sick. Robson thinks he will get better. I tell him that I think he will die. One month after the first visit to the private clinic and UTH, I hear that Robson's son, Penias Mwale, aged 29, has died 12 days short of his 30th birthday.

This has been the story of one person whom I happened to encounter. Can you imagine the enormity of the situation where the equivalent of one jumbo jet full of people dies every hour from AIDS? This is the situation in Africa. The amount of human suffering is beyond description, yet there is an appreciation of life and a gratitude for the smallest of things that is astounding. Somehow, there is a great freedom which comes with an appreciation that life has boundaries. May we all pray that some way will be found to remove this dreadful scourge. ■

Deep brown eyes

Smiling up at me
Wide mouths, smiling too
Tiny bodies pressing into me
So small, so dark
feather-weight.

Two years old – or three,
No hair, a little fuzz across the scalp
Hello, hello, hello
Tiny hands seek mine
Tiny bodies seeking a touch, a hug
in return for the smiles.
Smooth skin, a baby's skin
not yet touched by age
or disease – not yet…

But it won't be long. They have HIV/AIDS. The newborns, the feather-weight three year-olds. All 78 of them. Some already AIDS orphans. Parents dead, older siblings dying, grandparents in charge. The babies, the toddlers need care, need nourishment need medicine.

… while war goes on
and millions of dollars
pound Afghanistan and Iraq to dust.
Whose millions prevent the AIDS war?
I ask the question…
A deep, rending hollow silence
is the answer.
Indifference. Denial.
So what?

War dominates
while babies with AIDS,
will smile until their bodies shrink
and surrender to the domain
of disease.
Their hair will never grow,
they will always be small and
feather-weight.

And the Reign of God is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour… until all of it was leavened.

A woman took yeast,
a woman saw the pain
behind the smiling eyes
A woman, the women can and do make
a difference.

Will the men and women in government want to make a difference?

Caroline Price

Written after visiting projects run by Good Shepherd Sisters in South Africa for children with HIV/AIDS

A faith to fit our cosmic worldview

How can the new cosmology deepen our Christian faith? Dennis Horton travelled to Oakland, California, to find out. Dennis attended on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy, Auckland

Dennis Horton extends a greeting from Aotearoa to participants at the Summer Institute, Sophia Centre,

It was South African theologian, Albert Nolan, who gave the clue to participants at this year's Summer Institute at the Sophia Center in California as to why context is crucial to faith's growth in any age.

Augustine's *City of God* was written in the fourth century as the Roman Empire collapsed, to contrast God's reign with the finiteness of all human systems; the challenge for Aquinas was to reconcile Christian faith with the prevailing wisdom of Aristotle. More recently black, feminist and liberation theologies have all sought to make sense of life within their own context.

The new cosmology – the view of an evolving universe offered by modern science - is no threat to Christian belief, said Fr Nolan, a keynote presenter at the three-day event that explored the theme *Cosmology: New Context for Spirituality.* Instead, it has the potential to nourish and deepen faith.

Fr Nolan, who declined the invitation to head his Dominican Order so that he could continue in the struggle at home to end apartheid, traces two parallel traditions in the Christian story – one centred on doctrines and dogmas, dominated mostly by men and aligned to the hierarchy; the other mystical and prophetic, exemplified by Jesus himself but often represented by women and frequently in conflict with church authority.

Common to all mystics and prophets is an experience of God in the here-and-now of everyday life, one that invariably unites them to the rest of creation, particularly to the poor and powerless. It's a gift of the prophet "to see history from the point of view of those who suffer." The mystic is also gifted with wonder – less a way of thinking than a profound form of consciousness which is of absolutely no practical use.

Wonder was a casualty of the old, Newtonian science which saw every object as no more than the sum of its parts. The new cosmology has the power to change that view, said Fr Nolan. While we now know that our whole universe is radically one in its beginnings, it continues to unfold with extraordinary diversity. It's a diversity that is creative but not hierarchic: the simplest forms of bacterial life continue, as more complex forms emerge.

The new cosmology knows no dualism: body-soul, male-female, mind-matter, all were there from the start. God, too, is revealed by creation, from within our universe. Jesus overcomes all dualisms, insisting on our oneness with God, our neighbour, our enemies, with the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

Existence finds its meaning in no other purpose than "the glory of God". Living without expectation of reward

or punishment has always been one of the mystics' great gifts, said Fr Nolan, quoting the advice of Meister Eckhart to do everything "without why or wherefore". The new cosmology helps us to develop a sense of wonder, revealing a creation that is endlessly mysterious where there is so much that we simply don't know.

Most children have the gift, Fr Nolan noted, and we teach them to grow out of it. In inviting us to become like little children, Jesus challenges us to recover our capacity to stand in awe at a world that reveals God's presence at every turn. The same challenge was issued by cosmologist Brian Swimme, inviting his listeners to move beyond a worldview that sees Earth simply as a hardware store stocked with resources for human use, to a way of knowing that involves a much deeper level of communication.

The moon, for instance, doesn't just shed light; it creates the photons that carry its light to us; its other, unseen gift is gravity – the massless particles that evoke a reverberation from Earth's oceans, causing its tides to ebb and flow. In the presence of this radiant universe our own response, said Brian Swimme, should be to harbour an energy that resists the user mentality, that finds joy in doing nothing and that nurtures a deep desire to display beauty wherever and however we can.

Responses to the reality of evil came from social psychologist Diarmuid O'Murchu, convinced that while the human species may encompass its own destruction as well as that of so many other life forms, the cosmos remains endlessly creative; and from feminist theologian Rosemary Reuther, citing grassroots movements among women in the Third World that contest the hegemony of the world's most powerful nation.

In a paper on *Globalisation and Eco-feminism*, Reuther blamed US aims of world domination for the World Bank's policy of "structural adjustment", forcing poorer nations to repay their debts at the expense of local development, through devaluation, rising interest rates, privatisation of public services and removal of minimum wage rates. This often means that health and education become more expensive, gains in literacy are lost and crime and drug abuse increase. In the process, women are disproportionately victims, displaced by mechanised farming methods, suffering domestic abuse from men's loss of status, and forced to pick up the pieces by redoubling their work in an 'informal economy' of subsistence gardening, even while they nurse the sick and dying.

Rosemary Reuther lauded women's ability to organise what she calls 'sites of resistance' – chicken-raising cooperatives, health clinics using natural medicines, micro-loan schemes for starting small businesses, sometimes helped by international NGOs. She also praised the World Social Forum in Brazil, which promotes alternative models of development, through devolving power by democratic process, recovering local farming methods and resisting unfair trade laws.

Her challenge to the world's great faith traditions is to find common ground, to avoid all religious language that endorses exclusion and domination, and to nurture the spiritual wisdom that fosters mutual empowerment and community. People of all faiths must "stand shoulder to shoulder, against the forces that threaten the life of our planet."

This year's Summer Institute ended with an outdoor cosmic Eucharist which began with a greeting in Maori, acknowledging humanity's debt to indigenous peoples everywhere. The four-day event also saw the launching of the Sophia Center's Ecozoic Council, a network of people from around the world who sense God's call in the ecological crises of our times and who are ready to work together for the sake of the planet and its people.

The challenge facing members of the Council is to pursue their part in what Sophia's director Fr Jim Conlon describes as the 'Great Work' of helping humans to see their interconnectedness with all life, a task in which mystics and prophets of every age have always shared.

Dennis Horeay, Director of Mission for Te Tairere Oranga, Auckland Srs of Mercy Services

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Missing Sunday Mass

Paul Andrews

There was a time when many young people would tell it in Confession: *I missed Mass without a reason.* No longer. The 16-to-25 age-group is not much in evidence at Sunday Masses, and it does not worry them, though it worries many who love them.

I talked this over with local parishioners, and the arguments could have continued all night. They shared intensely personal concerns. Anne lost her husband four years ago, and is struggling. Of her seven children – and they are generally good children to her – none, even the youngest who is 13, goes to Mass. They feel cheated by God in the loss of their father. Anne grows angry and discouraged. She keeps at them, and sometimes they give in grudgingly: *I'll go to please you, Mum, but that's the only reason. Mass is boring, irrelevant. It means nothing to me. The Gospel Choir Mass is different. That lifts me. It is a religious experience.*

Priests and worried parents ask: *Why do you miss Mass?* Perhaps a better question would be to ask ourselves: *Why do you go to Sunday Mass?* Some would say: *Because it is a mortal sin not to go.* Are you sure? We certainly grew up with that notion in Ireland, but it is not how the average Catholic thinks in many countries. Many of our own young people have no doubt that they are Catholics. They believe in God, and they pray. But once they are in their late teens, they drift away from Sunday Mass without feeling they are damned. They will attend a special Mass, for a jubilee or celebration or funeral, and they will relish a well-prepared Eucharist like the Gospel Choir Mass on Sunday evenings. The experience means a lot to them. But a sense of duty or sin hardly touches them.

Nearly a century ago Augustine Birrell, explaining Dublin to his successor as Chief Secretary for Ireland, commented: *In this city it is the Mass that matters.* It was the love of the Mass, the value people attached to it, that drew them in their thousands to daily Masses. No fear of sin or obligation, no Third Commandment, could explain the crowds in churches all over the country on weekday mornings. They did not have to be there, but they chose to because they wanted to pray in community as well as on their own. The gathering at Mass gave them a community of like-minded people. More than that, if they were in poor shape for personal prayer (this is especially true of sick people), the Mass was something objective that they could hook into, hang onto. Jesus was offering himself for us to the Father. We were part of that offering as he became part of us in Holy Communion.

For most of us who opt for daily Mass, it is a way of shaping our day and offering it to God. We thank him for the previous day, and say sorry for things we regret doing or omitting in the last twenty-four hours. We listen to the Word of God in the readings, and we are joined with the Lord in Communion. Many develop their own way of praying during the Mass, not necessarily in tune with the prayers said by the priest, but personal prayer, sometimes wordless. It does not matter what the book says, most people learn to use Mass, as they use the Rosary, in their own way. What draws them may be the sense of community, or it may be the opportunity to pray privately – just notice how many are in the church before and after Mass, talking to God in their own way. For most of us, priests as well as people, Mass is a treasure because no matter how godless we may feel, we know that in the Eucharist the whole People of God is part of Jesus' offering to his Father, and we can all hook into that.

As parents and teachers, it would not do to accept excuses at face value:
Mass is boring – have you ever watched the queues of teen-agers standing for hours in the cold outside the Point Depot in the hope of buying a ticket for a pop concert? Are they bored? For the sake of something they value, they will face drudgery and discomfort, as Mass-goers endured Latin in the old days because of the value they set on the Eucharist.

I can find God on my own – true, but you miss the experience of community, both in the church and outside it after Mass.

It is hypocritical to go to Mass on Sunday and act corruptly on the other six days – both sides of that explanation fall apart when you look hard. Only a handful of Mass-goers were corrupt; most were not hypocrites. And how do you know that those who miss Sunday Mass now are more upright on the other days of the week?

However arguments often miss the point. More important is to see what good things the young are seeking when they move away from Sunday Mass: possibly work for the deprived; possibly a personal relationship with Jesus, which they have learned in a charismatic or Methodist church, and miss in their own church (that reflects on us). And possibly they are simply giving in to laziness or a bad conscience.

Reflecting on Luke

Susan Smith

The 19th chapter of Luke's gospel describes Jesus' arrival in Jericho where Zachaeus, a tax collector, offers Jesus hospitality, and it concludes with Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. Luke relates that as Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it saying, "If you had only recognised on this day the things that make for peace".

I suspect Jesus might well weep if he were to approach most of the world's capital cities today. Certainly he would weep on the outskirts of Jerusalem where peace seems as elusive as ever, on the edges of Baghdad where the suffering of the ordinary Iraqi people almost defies belief despite the rhetoric of Bush, Blair, etc. who are convinced that what makes for peace is war.

And what would Jesus do if he were standing on the hills surrounding Wellington watching the Destiny church demonstrators whose uniform and gestures evoke memories of Hitler's Blackshirt brigades and youth corps? What should we make of such ritualised manifestations of 'belief'?

I suggest that the Destiny church presence on our streets points to the significant cultural shifts, tensions and clashes that are part and parcel of modern society. At present we live in a world that seems to be falling apart – a fertile ground indeed for fundamentalism to flourish. Often enough the appearance of such groups with their black-and-white judgmental attitudes, symbolised most fittingly by their uniform, points to the need rootless and culturally alienated peoples have to re-establish some kind of order in a disorderly, indeed chaotic world. The Destiny church members' need for order is gained through their simplistic, single-issue categorisations as to who is good and who is evil.

For Brian Tamaki's congregation, homosexuals are bad and heterosexuals are good. For increasing numbers of Westerners, Christians are good and Muslims are bad; for some New Zealanders, European is good and Maori is bad; while those Americans who do not agree with George Bush's policies are bad and those who agree are assuredly 'goodies.' To hold such ideological positions does not make for peace.

Social commentators tell us that the more developed our capacity to make thoughtful moral decisions, the less inclined we are to rush into condemnatory speech and actions regarding others. Perhaps the example of Jesus is helpful here. As I said above, Luke 19 begins with Jesus enjoying the hospitality that Zacchaeus offers him. Such actions, as opposed to the Pharisees' more rigid, black-and-white interpretation of the Mosaic law, fill the latter with horror and dismay. But fortunately Jesus was not a law-and-order man but rather one in whom justice and mercy embraced. Jesus' way of life provides a model for contemporary Christians too, to adopt a broader, richer outlook. ■

Alas, we have not succeeded in handing on our love of the Mass to all our children. It does not help to be cross with them about it. We may be cross with ourselves, especially we priests who have not prepared our liturgies carefully enough. When we prepare them well, and make active participation easier, as in the Gospel Choir Mass, we can see the good results. It becomes a truly religious experience, with mind and heart and body all raised to God. Nobody will force the young into Mass. They will go because they love the experience, or out of a sense of its value. It is our job to put words on why we treasure it. ■

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Slow down – you move too fast

Thomas Moore reflects on the beauty to be savoured along a country road

Not far from where I used to live in the Berkshire hills of western Massachusetts, at the start of a small road is a sign saying that it had won an award for being the most beautiful country road. The road as an art object. When I think of certain roads from my childhood, I realise that country roads can indeed be beautiful.

You might even imagine taking a drive on a Sunday afternoon for no other purpose than to be refreshed. In fact, one of the last memories I have of my mother, is of taking a ride on a long flat road in central Michigan, watching for deer and getting an ice cream. It's a precious memory, and I love to think of her taking so much pleasure in having her family with her while contemplating the beauty she could see from the narrow, reed-lined, blacktop road.

Like everything else, beautiful roads are threatened. People seem always to want them wider and straighter. But with such improvements comes further development, and the country is taken out of the road. Quickly the roads become ugly and purely functional, and they detract from the quality of life. I can't imagine a good memory of sitting next to my dear mother in a car cruising down a six-lane highway lined with factories and refineries.

Often we take the beauty out of roads to save time. But for what? Why the speed? Why focus on getting somewhere rather than enjoying the ride? The only answer I can come up with is that speed is an emotional complex related to the philosophy of modernism. Fast food is an obvious instance of the syndrome, and so are roads built for speed.

I'm not suggesting that all roads be country roads, but that driving can be a pleasure as well as a necessity. In transportation, beauty is as important as function. Speed could be part of the equation – I appreciate the fast train from Boston to New York – but so can the beautiful, and sometimes beauty may take primacy over function. It may be a facet of my romantic status as a visitor, but my warmest memories of England are of country roads that lacked considerably in speed and function. And I will never forget a trip to Iona on the slow, single-lane roads of Scotland.

I am from Detroit, where cars are made. My grandfather worked for Dodge Trucks most of his life, and my brother still works in the automobile steel industry. I appreciate a good automobile and enjoy a beautiful ride in the country. At the same time, I see the horrors the automobile has brought; how beautiful land has been carved up for too many roads; how road rage has eaten away at civility; how our cities are sacrificed to tunnels, overpasses, and highways.

I don't want to un-invent the wheel, but I do think we could build our roads and care for them in a way that would enhance human life rather than uglify it. Roads could be built for beauty, with people like my mother in mind, who can enjoy a road as a way of healing their spirit. The value of speed is usually an unconscious assumption that dominates our concern in making roads. We could consider nature, beauty, families, settlements, and peaceful living as well.

I suggest more awards for beautiful roads, humane input in the design

of automobiles and their fuel, art and photography educating us in the potential beauty of transportation, an effort to slow down the pace of life, and more inexpensive inventions that get us from place to place slowly and enjoyably.

There is something inherent in the modern car that is neurotic and demonic. A person driving a car is often more aggressive and self-centred than that same person sitting at dinner. The combination of isolation, power, and phallicism of the car turns drivers into maniacs. It doesn't have to be so.

I often turn to Greek mythology at a point like this to find inspiration. I'm reminded of the great technologist Hephaistos, who is related to all kinds of finger and digit-like beings, little phalluses, who are busy making things from metal. In traditional tales he was married to Aphrodite, goddess of the sexual and the beautiful, and was a close friend of Charis, who was in charge of the gracefulness of life. We need this marriage and this friendship restored. Hephaistos without his women becomes a runaway phallic finger who gets into plenty of mischief. He is hypermasculinised and too devoted to work.

we need a touch of Aphrodite to help slow us down

Atalanta is another figure of myth who is driven: she runs too fast. In a crucial race Aphrodite slows her down, forcing her to get married. That's what we need in our town planners and road and car builders: a touch of Aphrodite to help slow us down and appreciate the beauty around us. We need to be married to our world and not frenzied in our isolation. The soul is fed by beauty and not by speed.

I will continue to enjoy the country roads near where I live and where I visit. When possible, I will choose the slow road over the highway. I will continue to drive a car, but I will do it as much as possible for pleasure and beauty rather than for mere function and convenience. It will be part of my generally slow life.

Freud talked about a dream as being the royal road to the unconscious. I think we could reverse that notion and find dreams in the roads we drive. In the New Testament Jesus says, "I am the road (hodos), the truth, and the life." If we could think theologically for a moment about transportation, we might find in a small road the Buddha's path, the way of the Tao, and Jesus's route to the kingdom.

A car and a road convey not only bodies, but souls as well. Imagine a car made to satisfy the soul and a road designed to give the soul its pleasures. Imagine a civic department of soul transport and a road crew assigned to keeping the roadway slow and beautiful. Imagine going in a car not to get anywhere, but to be. ■

Thomas Moore is a former Catholic monk and author of *Care of the Soul*

Wairua Oranga

I sit by the shutters
Closed to defy the wind buffeting
My holiday retreat.
I sit in wonder of a view I cannot see
I know there is the ocean
I've heard it beckoning, calming, lulling
I know there is the bush
Dark and inviting
I've sensed its spiritual aroha
Having been sheltered by its ferns
And eaten its wild berries
And I have sung with the bellbird
I know there is a desert
I have travelled its loneliness
And have seen the beauty of its hidden life
I know there is night
I know there is a moon
And stars.
But it's all about faith isn't it?
Trusting the knner knowledge that there
Is something. Something beyond.
I sit in my chair as the day shadows
Change and I wonder
Why me in all this creation?
But it's all about faith isn't it?

Bill Walters

Bible Society Ad at Rogan McIndoe

This is the story about the remarkable initiative of two Christian women in Edinburgh. They were struck by the plight of many women who lived in countries which had been for half a century cut off behind the Iron Curtain. They called it Project Lydia. The editor came across it when visiting Edinburgh in 2003

Twelve Full Baskets

Fiona Hulbert is a gently spoken Canadian who has lived much of her life in Scotland. She is founder of the *Lydia Project* and is still its co-ordinator. The story of Lydia began in 1982 when Fiona was part of the ecumenical Forum of European Christian women. Right from the start, she says, there were a few women from Eastern Europe involved. They would say to us: "you have so much experience in small community projects and Christian outreach, and we have had none for 40 years or more. You are on the second floor – we are still in the basement. Could we have some training... "

It was a request we had to listen to, says Fiona. So we drafted a pilot scheme, giving it the title of the woman ***Lydia*** in the New Testament who showed a lot of enterprise (*Acts 16*). It took us some time to raise sufficient money to get the scheme off the ground. Our aim was to gather a group of about 15 participants. Some women in Prague offered to host the first gathering, and it was in Prague we had our first meeting for three weeks in 1995.

The first group were from Poland, Russia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Albania and Bulgaria. We were stepping out in faith having no notion at first what their real needs were. We started by giving them greater confidence in the use of English and giving them computer skills was basic. They met together for three weeks and then went home with drafts of possible projects to start.

After that first experience in Prague, we all came home on a high determined to continue. And then we tried to raise more money so as to bring them back together again the following year. And it is amazing just how many good things have grown from that first pilot project.

What we do now is use ecumenical networks to enable the participants to experience the work of women in as many fields as possible. Basically what they are learning by observing and participating is how to organise and run small community projects. It is a peer learning process: all the time they are learning from each other.

At home these women would be lucky to earn more than $30-50 per month, even though many are professionally qualified. In addition they often have to support elderly relatives whose pensions have remained fixed and now are practically worthless since prices have often tripled since the end of Communism. So their situation is pretty dire.

Travel is normally out of the question for them, so we have to raise money for that. They themselves are so immersed in the business of survival that for them to come away for a while and just share with others who face the same problems, is an invaluable experience. The participants will usually start new projects – for homeless children and so forth in their home countries. But regular contact through Lydia gives them continuity.

Then, a few years down the track (in 2000) some Polish women offered us the use of a broken-down chateau in Poland, so we brought together there women from four different programmes. At that gathering we were able to get an overview of all the work being done with children or with the elderly or with women in need. It was most inspiring.

When the participants first come together, each has her own personal needs. Our job is to try to empower them. Especially, they have to be able to effectively promote their project, even internationally. So we teach them communication skills.

An example is that when they first started coming here to Edinburgh they noticed there were lots of charity shops operating in the city. There are eleven in Morningside alone, ranging from Shelter to Cancer Research to St Columba's Hospice. But in the Socialist regimes they had grown up in, such things were not allowed. Officially,

'poverty didn't exist'! Even the idea of exchanging old clothes was a novelty to them.

One member of our team, Alex, is an English-as-a-second-language teacher who voluntarily gives her time to help them with their communication skills. She concentrates on showing them how best to use the skills they have, getting them to speak publicly and openly. It is a communications course, and involves many interactive skills.

She starts by getting them to give a prepared presentation to the whole group. Then they will go off singly and have to speak in churches or to groups roundabout. They will also visit three or four projects with their hosts. Their hosts have received their profiles and they try to match the projects they will see with the particular needs of each participant. They go out usually in pairs from different countries.

We also take them to visit projects in and around Edinburgh. For instance, they go to Charity shops to see how they run. One problem is that in Eastern Europe the education system is so much more theoretical than ours. These women will know all the theory. What we can show them, is the practice. We want them to see that if you want a project to work you have to get your arms in up to the elbows.

One of the things we find we have to do is fight the embassies both to let the people out to come here, and then fight our own embassy people to let them in! The crazy thing is we were getting a grant from the Foreign Office as part of the East-West cultural initiative – and then we had to fight an official somewhere else in the Office to get visas for the people to come! But by fighting officialdom we have succeeded in always getting those people here who wanted to come.

The success of Lydia can be measured by the offshoots which they succeed in initiating back home. For instance, one lady went back to northern Bulgaria and actually started a charity shop, using a Biblical name. She called it *Twelve Full Baskets*! It was such a success that she opened a second one within a year. When this lady went home I thought she was sceptical about it. I was wrong: that was her way of becoming self-sufficient. She is now quite capable of running a project like that without any further assistance from us.

Because a particularly ruthless form of capitalism was introduced into these post-Communist countries, the great beneficiaries of change have been the local 'mafia'. In such difficult circumstances marginal families get themselves into difficulties economically – and only place for the children to go is on the streets. Moscow, for example, now has a real problem with street children.

All the women who come to us are in some way connected to Christian churches in their home countries, mostly Orthodox. They come from situations where women have limited very restricted political rights. Here they will meet Scottish women MPs, and experience a situation where women make up nearly 50 percent of parliament.

The Scottish involvement has happened because Edinburgh is where both the treasurer and I live; but also it's because the networking which is so useful to us is highly developed here. Edinburgh has been a great centre to work from. Perhaps it has left the participants with a very rosy impression of Scottish altruism! Then at the end of each course we take them to the isle of Iona so they get an experience of a community which is engaged in renewing both worship and social outreach.

Some more examples. When we had our Balkan meeting there were two women from Bucharest who didn't know each other: one was a psychologist, the other an economist. When they went home they started an initiative run by Orthodox women to provide food for the street children.

Lighting the Fires

Women's Study Project

There is money available for women within Aotearoa New Zealand who are wanting to undertake a research study or project that fits within the following guidelines:

- empowering women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their country and their church;
- affirming women, through shared leadership and decision-making, theology and spirituality, in their decisive contributions to communities and church;
- giving visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation;
- enabling churches to free themselves from racism, sexism, and classism, from teachings and practices that discriminate against women;
- enabling the churches to take actions in solidarity with women.

Applicants need to provide:

- evidence of appropriate research skills and background experience
- a 500-word description of the research study or project
- names and contact information of two referees
- a proposed budget and timeline

To apply, or for further information, write to:

'Lighting the Fires' Women's Project, PO Box 173, OTEPOTI/DUNEDIN

A new vicar for St Matthew-in-the-city

Tui Motu was represented at Glynn Cardy's welcome to this historic Anglican parish in Auckland by board chairperson, Tom Cloher, who sent the following account:

"Glynn Cardy has been a regular columnist for *Tui Motu* in recent years; our editor, not given to careless praise, has said of him that 'he would find it difficult to write badly'.

"After a karanga and response, Bishop Paterson welcome Glynn, his family and Epsom parishioners who had accompanied them. The wardens of his old parish of St. Andrew's, Epsom, then present Glynn, who returns his cope to them. The Bishop invites Glynn's new parishioners to indicate their acceptance of him. They give their resounding assent.

"After appropriate Scripture readings the Assistant Bishop Richard Randerson gives a sermon that summarises the unique history of the parish. The Bishop then addresses a series of public questions to the Vicar-to-be. "Do you... in the presence of this congregation, commit yourself to this new trust and responsibility? etc."

"After the new Vicar gives his consent, the Bishop gives him his licence, the Archdeacon of Auckland welcomes him and leads him to his seat, and the symbols of ministry are laid upon two tables in the chancel – bread and wine, keys, a Bible, water, oil, a cell phone, the Vestry Minute Book, a NZ Prayer book. After final prayers and a hymn all retire to share supper.

"This Anglican installation ceremony compares favourably with the way Catholic priests transfer to a new parish, where there is rarely any formality. It seems an authentic and affirming exercise in community building. The involvement of the Bishop also seems appropriate.

"Any comments, Catholic readers?" ■

At first it was simply sandwiches and a thermos of coffee. They then found a tiny premises where the children could come to them, get a wash and a change of clothes. The workers were also able to check on their health.

These children often came very difficult home backgrounds, and if no one helped them they would simply drift into crime and prostitution. Eventually the two women got money from the Netherlands to establish better premises. Now they have a doctor and a clinic. They have accommodation for 12 boys and 12 girls to stay. The children receive some vocational training. The Bucharest centre will often feed 150 children each lunchtime, and provide showers for them. The Orthodox Church has provided a priest who has been very supportive.

So what Lydia did was to bring these two women together in the first place, and provide them with support and encourage them in their work. The background to this is that the state is effectively bankrupt and there has been no tradition of NGOs (non-government organisations) providing these social services.

A second example has happened in Albania. Two Albanian women – Savin and Fabiola – came to Lydia. They had a grant of about 2500 pounds for a craft project for unemployed women. But they found many of the women had no money for basic health care. So they provided for that too.

They then sought permission to establish a women's café. They were laughed at. But it has provided a centre, where they can feed malnourished children; it also provides training for the children as mechanics, or in computers and so forth. The scheme has spread so that now there are 17 such centres throughout Albania.

Lydia is a grass roots scheme. Fiona says: we don't aim to become big. We learn as much from the Eastern European women as they do from us. We are providing them ongoing support for the work they do. But in some cases – street children, for one – we know that the final solution is still a long way away. Most of the women who come to us are perfectly able to run these projects. What they lack are the funds to start them off, because there are no local trusts to draw on. We are oil for the engine.

We train them here in Edinburgh how to present their project so as to be able to sell it to their communities back home. We show them how to maintain the project, how to budget, how to evaluate its progress. But we also have what the theorists call an 'exit strategy': we are working to make these people self-sufficient – and ourselves redundant. ■

– M.H.

For an ecumenical perspective on the Seabed and Foreshore legislation visit :

www.socialjustice.org.nz

The dilemma of the Catholic Church today

Between the Rock and a Hard Place
By Paul Collins
ABC Books
Review: Patrick Maloney

Dear Paul

Thanks for your latest book. I must admit, having read something of your earlier gems thinking what could you say that was new in *Between the Rock and a Hard Place?* And sure enough, the question remained after reading the first chapter about the case for and against staying a Catholic.

The empty pews, the alienation of our young people and the polarising of views and attitudes within church are not exactly headline material. Not surprisingly, you bring up the church's 'dysfunctional' teaching on human sexuality, problems with the institutional church's misuse of power, your own rather more personal problems with Cardinal George Pell and his ilk, and the shabby way that you and other loyal Catholic writers and theologians have been treated by the *Congregation for the Defense of the Faith.* Fair enough, but it's not exactly new, not to anyone half in touch with what's going on in today's church.

Still, I guess you need this as a platform for the good stuff that follows. I feel sure you'll agree that your chapters on *Spirituality*, the *Catholic Imagination* and especially the one on *Conscience* are a kind of autobiography, a sort of *Apologia Pro Vita Mea.* Here you opened the door of your soul and allowed us the pleasure and privilege of seeing what makes you tick. Though forced out of ministerial priesthood, you are still very much a priest at heart.

Many would agree that you have every right to feel bitter over the way you and other good priests have been treated. Not too much of that crept in. What I like about your approach is the sense of optimism and good humour that lightens the pages. A person could go a long way to find a better exposition of what it means to follow one's conscience. You've had to walk that walk yourself, and it shows.

The concluding chapter on *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* is also a beauty. No doubt it voices my own feelings of apprehension about tightly regimented groups in the church acting as 'churches' within the church, characterized by rigid discipline, grimness, controls, ultra orthodoxy and a turning away from the openness and optimism of Vatican II. *Opus Dei* seems to be your pet target, but you did well to give the *Neo-Catechumenate* and the *Legionaries of Christ* a passing critique. I'm surprised you are unaware that the latter have a strong base in New Zealand. My gut feeling is that you're a bit tough on them. The comparisons you make between these and the impact new religious orders have had on the church historically are interesting and instructive.

So, thanks again Paul. Keep writing. You're a skilled communicator. You're an encouragement to me and the many who love the church, warts and all. ■

Fr Pat Maloney is Parish Priest at Motueka

Child in the womb

My Foetus – A TV1 Documentary
Review: Anna Holmes

It was fascinating that a young woman who had been brought up to believe that choice for the mother was all that mattered should make a film that so clearly showed the reality of the child.

Her film was full of ambivalence. On one hand she showed in great detail an early abortion where the details of the embryo were not shown. On the other she also showed the amazing three-dimensional images of infants that have persuaded many who support abortion to allow it only up to 12 weeks.

I found the discussion with a gynaecologist who both does abortions up to 24 weeks and enables fertility enhancement quite bizarre, since very premature infants are identical with 24 week foetuses. His comment that he was doing the right thing and it was better for the baby to be aborted made absolutely no sense.

The most hopeful aspect of this film was the presentation of the growing relationship between the film maker and her baby which was very well shown. This is the aspect of each pregnancy that is the most essential and long lasting. Mothers do remember each pregnancy, even if they have an abortion, and pregnancy after abortion causes them to reflect again on the abortion. ■

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Casualties of the 'war against terrorism'

Crosscurrents
John Honoré

The bloody end to the hostage crisis in Beslan in Russia's North Caucasus, which involved hundreds of school children, exposes the bankruptcy of Vladimir Putin's policy towards Chechnya. Putin has built his career and image on the promise to bring stability to the Russian people, but his refusal to negotiate a political resolution with the Chechens has led to a wave of terrorism in Russia.

By blaming "international terror against Russia", he finds justification for announcing that Russia will fight a pre-emptive war anywhere in the world. But this is Putin's war – not a global war. Terrorism is a means to an end. The Chechens, like the Palestinians, have suffered years of brutal suppression. Terrorist attacks are the manifestation of their fight for self-determination.

Following the destruction of the twin towers in 2001, the United States launched its war on terrorism. Its foreign policy was radically altered to one of absolute military supremacy in order to justify the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Almost immediately, other nations took their cue from the US and went to war. Palestinians stepped up their campaign of suicide bombings against Israel and Israel responded with brutal ferocity in Gaza and the West Bank. Russia will now intensify its war against 'terrorism' in Chechnya.

The reaction of world leaders to the atrocity in Beslan was to equate the massacre with the 9/11 attacks and with Islamic terrorism in general. This is to fudge the issue. The Chechens do not seek to destroy Russia and the Palestinians want only a separate state from Israel. However, Donald Rumsfeld invoked Beslan to defend the war in Iraq. The Israelis viewed it as "part of the global Islamic terror threat" and Russia vowed revenge.

America, Israel and Russia have claimed the right to set the rules of war anywhere and at any time. No doubt they will be followed by others who seek justification for their own war against dissidents (Indonesia?). Without a political solution, how many more innocent civilians will die in a spiralling cycle of resistance and terror?

Canberra Cowboy

John Howard has decided to commit Australia to a federal election one month before George W. Bush seeks a second four-year term in America. Howard's success, or otherwise, will have enormous implications for Australia and, as well, could impinge on Bush's chances of re-election.

What is so interesting, and politically hazardous, is Howard's decision to make Australia's alliance with George W. Bush an election issue. In a political and a practical sense, this calls the bluff on Latham, whom Howard charges as being "dangerous so far as the American alliance is concerned". But, ipso facto, the election becomes a referendum for all Australian voters on what they think of Howard's subservience to America and, by extension, Australia's commitment to the war in Iraq.

From a New Zealand perspective, one gets the impression that Australians would rather talk about health policies and the economy. They are not comfortable with their Prime Minister's invitation to the Texas ranch and being called a "man of steel". In every political sense of the word, Howard is a slippery customer. But he is no fool. He is playing for high stakes when he goes to the polls for what must be his last election.

His immediate aspirations are obvious. He wants to reinforce his image as an international leader with access to power and influence. The fear of losing Australian lives in a hopeless war in Iraq is the price he believes Australia must pay in the war against terrorism. Howard is Bush's Deputy Sheriff. Australian voters must decide whether they want a cowboy in Canberra.

Coat of Many Buttons

Hallelujah! Brian Tamaki, senior partner – oops! I mean senior pastor of the *Destiny Church* has hit the headlines and has upset the good citizens of New Zealand. His march on parliament to object to the Civil Union Bill had letter writers outdoing themselves in self-righteous indignation and moral outrage. Fundamentalism has arrived to shake up entrenched ideas about same-sex marriage and the right of freedom of expression. Pastor Brian Tamaki will see to that.

Lighten up everybody! Pastor Brian must be the coolest church leader to hit town. He dresses in impeccably cut pin-striped suits with matching ties and pure white shirts. The knee-length sky blue coat of many buttons that featured on the cover of a national magazine (not *Tui Motu*) was a joy to behold and had the matrons of Christchurch abuzz with excitement. The good pastor is accompanied by dark-suited heavies with shades and earphones.

Oh! the excitement of a Sunday, when the *Destiny Church* has a kapa haka or two, followed by some retro music. Then the collection – enough to buy the boss another gold bracelet and a drum of Brylcream for that splendid head of hair. I have some suggestions for my local parish priest, a make-over perhaps, and a couple of big men in shades to enforce – oops! – I mean to take up the collection. We have to get real here, because Pastor Brian Tamaki has ways!

Observing the upwardly mobile

There is nothing like a few days in hospital to help one ruminate on life in New Zealand. Provided of course one is not too desperately ill.

I had a few such days recently, fortunately not feeling too off-colour. I was struck by the composition of the hospital staff. Doctors – mostly caucasians though not without a sprinkling of ethnic Chinese. Nurses – again mostly caucasian, though quite a few Filipinos and Filipinas. Orderlies, cleaning staff and the like – all Polynesians and Asians – doing all the necessary but low-status things that kept the ward functioning. The members of the last category, I speculated, would have fairly recently arrived in New Zealand and would have possessed limited skills, at least skills recognised by our society. All of which made me think back to a hundred plus years and recall another group of arrivals in New Zealand who were deemed fit only for lowly occupations.

Pakeha New Zealand in the decades that followed the Treaty was composed of two main groups. The English and the Scots made up the larger element in late 19th century society. Then there were the Irish. Put another way, there was the Anglicans and Protestants and there were the Celtic Catholics. There were of course other groups. The Puhoi Bohemian Catholics along with such other Catholics as the Poles of Inglewood, the handful of English Catholic gentry on either side of Cook Strait, and rather later, the Stromboli Italians of Island Bay. The Scandanavian Lutherans of Dannevirke and Norsewood were a non-British Protestant element. But all such groups were fairly low in numbers. The basic picture was one of an English/Scots ascendancy and of an Irish helotry.

The poorest of the jobs were those available to the Irish. In great part, the men were labourers, the women were domestic servants. That is if there were jobs at all, for it was the days of *No Irish need apply* in the advertising of situations vacant.

Not that the picture was entirely black. Some did secure land and became farmers, though not on massive holdings. Not infrequently, managing a licensed house was a way of getting into business on their own. But by and large, in the 19th century and even well into the 20th, the Irish occupied in New Zealand society the place now taken by recent immigrants from Asia and the Pacific, the folk I saw doing the menial work in the hospital where I was being treated.

Over time the picture changed for the Catholic Irish. Aided by the stalwart efforts of the Catholic school system, they made their way into the civil service, the professions and, in a rather more limited way, into the business world. Whether many have lost contact with the Faith on the way, well, that is another story. But certainly the present-day descendants of the Gaels are no longer just hewers of wood and bearers of water.

The same will no doubt happen to the descendants of those I watched at work in the hospital. Their children and grandchildren will acquire education, saleable skills, a modicum of capital. Not all of these folk are Catholics or Christian believers. But many of them are. The story of the older Catholic stock in New Zealand, the Irish, will be repeated.

For the moment their ethnic identity and the ethnic community to which they belong safeguards their faith, as it once did that of the Irish. It is up to them and to ourselves that share this land with them, to see that their inevitable move into mainstream New Zealand society is a progression that is made with their contact with the Faith enhanced rather than diminished. ■

Fr Humphrey O'Leary is rector of the Redemptorist community in Glendowie,Auckland

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Religion looms large in Oz

It's been an odd sort of Federal election campaign in Australia, although those who are more hard-nosed about these things say it's just as predictable and boring as ever. In between a fresher-looking Labor Party under new man Mark Latham giving the impression that they may just win this time, a comeback by ultra-right-winger Pauline Hanson, one candidate falling dead, an apparent attempt to blow up an Australian embassy abroad and Greenie rock star Peter Garrett becoming a born-again Labor star, there has been one rather new aspect. The emergence of the big R word – *Religion*. It may yet be a vote-stealer on 9 October.

As one commentator observed, Australians are not accustomed to wearing their religious beliefs on their sleeve. But, one has to start to take notice when people with the profile of Treasurer Peter Costello turns up at a huge Pentecostal church in Sydney and wows the voters. The same church, which boasts a congregation of 15,000 on Sundays, has spawned a Liberal candidate for the local seat. What's more, polls say she is a likely winner of a seat Labor simply cannot afford to lose.

Another Howard Government head-kicker, Health Minister Tony Abbott, has also been more than a little outspoken about the need for higher values in Australian society, not least on the question of abortion, much to the chagrin of some of his party colleagues. He called on Catholics to campaign for a change in abortion laws. Deputy Prime Minister and Anglican John Anderson makes up the third member of what is an unusually heavy Christian leadership of Australia's coalition parties. And the Labor Party is showing interest in ensuring the Liberals don't steal a march in the high-ground stakes.

Labor's foreign affairs spokesman Kevin Rudd used the line that must surely make its way into the political history books: "There's a bit of a view being put around by the conservatives that God has become a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Liberal Party. Last time I looked, Jesus Christ was not the National Party member for Nazareth Central."

The Family First party, which boasts the first Aboriginal woman to lead an Australian political party, has confirmed it will field Senate candidates. Baptist minister and brother of the Treasurer, the Rev Tim Costello, perhaps sums it up when he says: "I'm pleased that the prevailing wisdom that was 'don't talk about your faith, they'll think you're a religious fanatic' is over."

It is doubtful that Australia is set to follow yet another American tradition and adopt the 'God is on my side' political thrust of some US righteously indignant politicians. But, it would be a brave pundit who simply discards the potential influence at the October election of those who are less afraid than before of expressing the values they stand for – even if they are unfashionably Christian. ■

Geoff Orchison

Geoff Orchison is editor of *The Catholic Voice,* Canberra

Pressure, poverty and politics

The need to substantially expand funding for organisations like the *Catholic Caring Foundation* over the next few years has been clearly evidenced in claims made in the current round of local body elections.

Up and down New Zealand candidates have expressed concerns over health, housing, migration, prostitution, job opportunities, transport and other issues affecting general living conditions.

Many of us may be tempted to dismiss their comments as 'mere politicking' but, if you stop to examine their concerns, you may find that some of these issues will seriously affect the quality of life for generations to come.

Issues like housing density can impact on family health. Poorly considered transport problems can increase living costs for lower-paid workers if they are forced to travel greater distances to work.

For many this might have been just another local body election if it wasn't for the fact

that, right in the middle of it all, some very interesting information was released on the other side of the world.

A report on "The State of the World's Cities" released by the UN's housing agency warned that spreading slums, violence and rising poverty are among the challenges facing major cities as the world's urban population rises to an estimated 5 billion by 2030.

"Many cities face... growing poverty, deepening inequality and polarisation, widespread corruption at the local level, high rates of urban crime and violence," UN Secretary General Kofi Annan wrote in a foreword to the report.

For New Zealand the problem might be far less acute when compared to many countries but in Auckland, because of increasing numbers of people, there is clear evidence a major change is taking place.

Housing pressures are rising, transport tensions are at breaking point and large numbers of people are becoming trapped in low incomes and long term debt.

For funding agencies like the *Catholic Caring Foundation*, the challenge is always to balance the immediate requirements with future needs. There is a grave need to make sound provision for future social service requirements. We are building up our reserves to help others build their own future. You can help us to help others by making a single donation or with small donations on a regular basis. Contact us at the number below if you would like to know more.

Catholic Caring Foundation

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