Tui Motu

InterIslands

May 2001 Price $4

seeking

a new dawn

Contents

The religious art of Michael Smither

Our thanks are due to St Joseph's parish, New Plymouth for this special display of church art, to Gwen Wills for organising it, to Fr Craig Butler for photography and to the artist himself.

Anzac morning

Anzac services all over New Zealand attracted record numbers last month. In Dunedin over 5000 braved a clear frosty morning and stood in prayerful silence for nearly an hour for the prayers, an address, hymns and music. Only once was there a ripple of merriment when the firing of a field gun set off burglar alarms in a nearby office. Then, a swift return to reverential calm.

Although most of those there understandably belonged to the 'old brigade', there were lots of students and young families. And it was the same nationwide. Likewise, an increasing number of young Kiwis now include a mandatory visit to Gallipoli and Anzac cove on their OE itinerary.

Is it an exercise in mass nostalgia? Or patriotism? Or is it a genuine need within the hearts of people to express thanks to God for past blessings and present benefits? Whatever the reason, it comes as a providential illustration of what is the principal focus of our *May* number. We include the first leg of a double theme – two distinct, yet clearly linked questions. *What lies at the heart of this spiritual hunger so apparent in our times? And why are the mainline churches so singularly failing to meet it?*

Author and spiritual writer Mike Riddell mentioned both themes in a recent Radio NZ interview. So we bade him write us editorials on the twin topics in successive magazines, and Part 1 appears opposite. It is backed by three other articles which more or less cover the same ideas (*pages 6-11*).

One area where these questions are either not being debated at all, or quite inadequately, is in the popular media. Good Friday aroused only one pervasive comment: why were garden centres and similar commercial outlets not permitted to open? There could be wars and rumours of wars, physical disasters, droughts; but all we heard was the sad old gripe that freedom to shop – wherever and whenever – was being encroached upon.

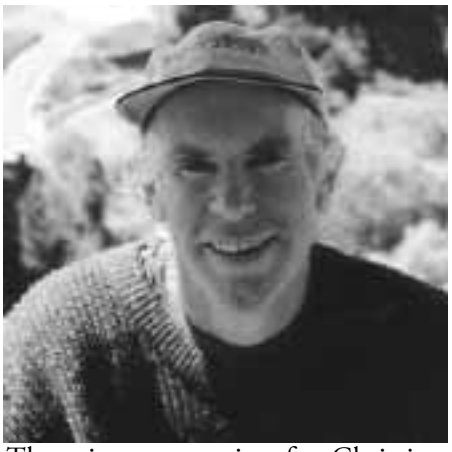
On the Kim Hill show, regular commentator Chris Trotter was politically incorrect enough to suggest that surely 361 days out of 365 are opportunity enough for business trading. A female lawyer, also part of the weekly wrap-up slot, rasped back: "I thought we'd moved on from there". Thoroughly modern Millie couldn't disguise the edge of scorn in her voice.

Who is out of step? On Anzac morning there could be no doubt. That is why films and plays with a message which touches the heart of meaning, are still so popular – and why people are sick and tired of the sort of pap currently clogging the TV channels. The relentless tide of secularism which has advanced steadily for generations, is on the turn. There is an aching hunger especially among the young for something more substantial to base their lives on – a quest for meaning. The media generally are failing to meet it – but sadly so are most of the traditional churches. And that, as the sage remarked, is another question. ■

We received a response from the Beer, Wine and Spirits Council to our Focus on Alcohol Abuse in the April issue (see p 5). It concentrates on one issue – the perceived failure of 'warning labels'. Is that enough? Is it adequate in the face of a monstrous social evil?

With it we have printed a report from the 'coalface' – from a policeman who's had enough of drunken youths. That is where the real problem lies. So what, Niki Stewart, is the answer? *M.H.*

Seeking a new dawn



Fifty years ago the consensus amongst sociologists was that the Western world was becoming increasingly secular. Religion was regarded as a primitive activity, to be dispensed with now that humanity had 'come of age'. Some theologians began to speak of the 'death of God'. Those views now seem quaint if misguided, and serve to demonstrate how risky the business of predicting the future can be.

Instead of the expected waning in religious activity, there has been an astonishing resurgence of interest in spirituality. Questions of meaning, significance and purpose crop up in magazines and around cafe tables. Recent surveys show that 80 percent of New Zealanders have a religious belief of some kind, with percent acknowledging faith in a personal God.

The scientific worldview which reduced human life to a collection of measurable processes has been adjudged inadequate to describe the mystery of existence. Increasingly Westerners are adopting a more holistic outlook, which balances the attention given to intellect with the insights of body, soul and emotion. Subjectivity and experience are valued above objectivity and analysis.

Today there is a bourgeoning interest not only in Eastern spirituality, but in phenomena as diverse as alien visitations, ley lines and water divining. Alternative therapies have found a place in conventional medicine, and tarot readers and psychics advertise on television. Business people and engineers take note of their dreams, check their bio-rhythms and keep journals.

While at first sight this turn to the spirit might seem like a boon for organised religion, nothing could be further from the truth. One of the unique aspects of current developments is the separation between spirituality and institutional religion. Contemporary pilgrims are not interested in giving allegiance to a body which they regard as hierarchical and authoritarian.

Instead people are assembling their own collection of spiritual practices and meanings from a huge variety of sources. Much as they might decorate a room in such a way as to express personality, so they select aspects of belief according to individual taste. Religious expression becomes a function of individuality rather than adherence to a denominational organisation.

So even though the West has not become secular, it is now widely seen as being 'Post-Christian'. This is a way of saying that the future of human spirituality lies in different directions than that traditionally offered by Christianity. The emerging culture, while in some senses deeply religious, is not looking to the church for inspiration or guidance. Indeed, the church is regarded with the same polite indiff-erence accorded the monarchy.

There is a temptation for Christian people to take the high ground in response to 'neo-pagans'. Many ecclesial reactions ridicule alternative beliefs or focus on their shortcomings and dangers. In so doing they overlook the very real enthusiasm and hunger for understanding which motivates current explorations. While some forms of 'new age' devotion may be extravagant and hedonistic, the mainstream consists of the age-old search for understanding.

Is there a way for Christian faith to begin dialogue with the rampant spirituality of the age? Perhaps a starting point is the acknowledgement that we are all travellers toward that which is ultimately beyond the reach of any of us. A fresh sense of humility and a willingness to learn from others may redress what is commonly seen as dogmatism and arrogance.

In a climate of fervent curiosity and experimentation, the followers of Christ may do well to consider the depth and authenticity of their own prayer and spirituality. If we claim to be bearers of the eternal light, there should be some glimmer of it in the way we live. It is this rather than any structure or programme which will engage our fellow seekers on the way.

Mike Riddell

Tui Motu-InterIslands

ISSN 1174-8931

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.

Independent Catholic Magazine Ltd P O Box 6404, Dunedin North, 9030
Phone: 03 477 1449 Fax: 03 477 8149 email: tuimotu@earthlight.co.nz
Editor: Michael Hill IC, **Assistant Editor**: Frances Skelton, **Illustrator**: Don Moorhead
Directors: Tom Cloher (**chair**), Rita Cahill RSJ, Margaret Darroch, Robin Kearns, Chris Loughnan OP, Elizabeth Mackie OP, Judith McGinley OP, Kathleen Rushton RSM, Julia Stuart

Printed by John McIndoe Ltd

The dignity of motherhood

It was with great sorrow I read that Jill Heenan (*Tui Motu*, April 2001) could misquote and totally misconstrue my letter on the dignity of motherhood.

In 42 years in the priesthood I have ever upheld the dignity and sanctity of motherhood, and my hope and prayer is that our church will do more in this regard. My sorrow at this lady's letter is offset by the golden words of Fr Jon Sobrino SJ *(Tui Motu*, March 2001): "In this primary decision to live and give life, is a primordial sanctity".

May I conclude with a favourite quote from the late Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty:

"The Most Important Person on earth is a mother.She cannot claim the honour of having built Notre Dame cathedral. She need not.

"She has built something more magnificent than any cathedral – a dwelling for an immortal soul, the tiny perfection of her baby's body... The angels have not been blessed with such a grace. They cannot share in God's creative miracle to bring new saints to Heaven. Only a human mother can. Mothers are closer to God the Creator than any other creature. God joins forces with mothers in performing this act of creation... What on God's good earth is more glorious than this: to be a mother?"

Fr Max Palmer, Kopua

letters ✍

Bible translations

With continuing study, I find the Scriptures ever more amazing. Indeed shocking. The customs! So different from ours. The interconnections! Only God could have made them.

Jenefer Haig's two examples (*Tui Motu*, February) concern customs differing from ours. Cultural context is always important – 'ours' and 'theirs'. To revisit her example studiously ignored by G. McCullough (*Tui Motu*, April) – in New Zealand today pregnancy outside marriage may result in embar-rassment. In the middle East back then, stoning was hardly a "functional equivalent". Rather more dramatic! G. McCullough does not do justice to "their" context.

Jenefer Haig has been engaged for some years in teaching Bible effectively to 10-year-olds. She doesn't use a modern version. Perhaps she sees that we can sell people short. Young people of all ages are transported by the Harry Potter books! When it comes to the Bible, do we refuse to let young people enter into that other 'world'? Is much current catechesis patronising and insulting?

Worst of all, could the dumbing-down of Scripture lead to the blanding-down of Christ?

David Hercus, Palmerston

Where everyone gets a bargain

First of all I would like to let you know how much my wife and I enjoy this magazine. We often find in it articles which make us think and give us inspiration. Of course there are times where we disagree with what is presented and, such being our perversity, this letter is occasioned by such a disagreement.

I refer to the item *A bargain for who?* (Crosscurrents, April) . I am sure that *The Warehouse* does not need my defence but I am impelled to comment on some inconsistencies in the attack.

Does this firm dominate the market? What about *Farmers, Briscoes, Ballantyne*s etc? What is so wrong with stocking Chinese? After all, they have to live. I have not noticed that *K Mart* or *Deka* have been averse to obtaining their stock from the cheapest markets. Honoré seems, in his prior comment about the People s Bank, to favour New Zealand ahead of foreign ownership. Both *K Mart* and *Deka* are overseas owned. The *Warehouse* is not.

It seems to me that the *Warehouse* pulls its weight in New Zealand commerce. Its innovatory practices in stocking and stock control, fostering consumer satisfaction with cash back for returned purchases with minimum inconvenience have been a shot in the arm for New Zealand retailing.

TomHall, Upper Hutt

Promoter's Corner

If you know of any school jubilees coming up would you please let us know. Jubilarians are usually highly motivated, interested and interesting folks who might well be likely TM readers/subscribers given the opportunity. Last year St Mary's College Auckland celebrated a significant Jubilee which I attended as the guest of a former pupil (my wife!), but I felt frustrated by the thought that many there would have taken a copy of TM home rejoicing if they'd been on display. We mustn't pass up opportunities like that. Given some notice we would make copies available at a discount even the *Warehouse* couldn't match.

On the weekend after Easter the administrator of the Cathedral in Hamilton graciously provided me with some space at each of the four weekend Masses to introduce TM. It was a very good experience on at least two counts.

From a promoter's viewpoint the level of interest was high and the response very positive – 111 people purchased a copy (at the discount price mentioned above). From a Mass-goers viewpoint the liturgy was alive and very well; even at a 7.30 a.m. Mass the singing was impressive and the readers uniformly good.

One celebrant emphasised the inquiring nature of St. Thomas and how the apostle did us a favour by asking for further clarification. This observation leads me to conclude, perhaps daringly, that were he alive to-day, St. Thomas would be a major subscriber to *Tui Motu*. He would like its spirit of inquiry.

Tom Cloher

Response – re alcohol abuse

from the Beer Wine & Spirits Council

Firstly: Your first point alludes to the advertising of alcoholic beverages.

It is important to realise that advertising of alcoholic beverages is strongly regulated under a code administered by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The code is regularly reviewed and is due to receive additional scrutiny in 2001/2002. Advertisers also have a system for previewing, called the Liquor Advertising Pre-Vetting System through which the content of advertise-ments are checked in terms of strict conformity with the code. In addition, if members of the public are unhappy with a liquor advertisement, they are entitled to lodge a complaint with the ASA.

It is true that advertisements convey brand information. However, despite a considerable amount of international research on the relationship between advertising and consumption patterns, there is little or no evidence of any impact on total alcohol consumption or abusive drinking. Indeed, recent independent ASA reviews in New Zealand noted global research indicating that alcohol advertisements induce consumers - of all age groups - to switch brands rather than to drink more.

Secondly: Member companies take their social responsibilities and community involvement very seriously. In response, the *Beer Wine and Spirits Council* has itself undertaken a number of moderation programmes and initiatives. These include:

- Nationwide alcohol education for Secondary Students, in which the Council is a financial partner, undertaken by Christchurch College of Education
- Support for the Wellington City Youth Council including 'alcohol laws' cards – credit card sized cards educating young people under the age of 17 on their drinking responsibilities within New Zealand law. These cards have since been issued throughout New Zealand.
- Support S.A.D.D (Students Against Driving Drunk)
- Support for the Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Trust of New Zealand
- Supporting national and inter-national research on Drink Driving
- Coordinate a Medical Advisory Committee who advises the Council and its members on current alcohol and health issues.

Thirdly: The Council does not support the placement of health warning labels on alcoholic beverages. This is because there is no reliable evidence that warning labels discourage heavy or abusive drinking.

The New Zealand Government's adviser on alcohol, the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand (ALAC) has opposed warning labels on beverages, noting that:

- Health messages are not the most effective means of achieving a well-informed populace. Labels which utilise a 'bumper sticker' approach, which are nebulous, inaccurate or which tell people not to do something they may enjoy, do not assist individuals in making informed choices. (ALAC 1996).

Research has shown that people who need health warnings the most – the minority of drinkers who abuse alcohol – tend not to heed the messages.

It is also important to realise that to label alcohol as universally harmful would be misleading. There is a wealth of international scientific research showing that moderate alcohol consumption has known health benefits, e.g. in the reduction of heart disease and stroke, especially for people in middle age and older.

As you rightly suggest in your comments, misuse or abuse of alcoholic beverage is a real problem for a minority of people in society. However, a better way to educate people about the sensible and safe use of alcohol is through education programmes rather than warning labels. As noted in point 2 above, the *Beer Wine and Spirits Council* is a partner in one such nationwide programme for secondary school students in New Zealand.

Nicki Stewart
Chief Executive

Town 'awash with drunks'

Police have slammed the behaviour of Queenstown Easter party-goers, claiming the resort was "awash with New Zealand drunks". The town was swamped with revellers over the Easter weekend, attracted by several events in the region and Queenstown's party reputation. While no major incidents were reported, there were numerous scuffles and acts of general disorder.

Police yesterday blamed the lowering of the drinking age and a lack of responsibility for the Easter problems. Sergeant Frank Wielemaker said the deterioration of behaviour on the town's streets was partially due to the liberalisation of licensing laws and that was frustrating police.

"There was a time when it was rare to see a woman drunk on the street. Now the combination of alcohol, stale perfume and obscene language has become all too familiar. Where are the parents who imparted respect for authority, property and morals to their children?"

Police faced further frustration when a police patrol attempted to apprehend a man for offensive behaviour. The man was chased through the streets of central Queenstown and despite police calling for the man to stop, no assistance was offered from either members of the public or from night-club bouncers.

"Where was the assistance? The streets were once again awash with New Zealand drunks, predominantly aged from 18 to 25. The police cannot do it alone; we need your help."

While police could usually expect some form of assistance if it was required during the day, at night it appeared there was no level of cooperation which could be depended on.

Sgt Wielemaker agreed that people appeared to be treating Queenstown like their own private party venue without any concern for others or those who chose to live there.

Courtesy *The Otago Daily Times*

The Empty Tomb, a mural by Michael Smither, once stood at the entrance of St Joseph's church, New Plymouth. It was destroyed during a restoration of the church. (*p 16-17*)

To a Christian the Empty Tomb of Easter is the ultimate sign of hope. Christ is alive – and among us still. But to so many in our world there is no such hope. They seek – but there is no spirituality to guide them. Yet their very searchings are a sign of hope.

We offer three very different articles which confront today's urgent search for meaning.

Spirituality and Social Change

Jim Consedine looks at the struggle between good and evil in contemporary society. He asks: is it the absence of an underlying spirituality which loads the dice against the good?

The Empty Tomb is the greatest sign of hope humanity has ever had. The power of the Risen Christ to transform our lives and our world is the great message of Easter. Too many, however, have lost contact with this source.

Mainstream Western culture has generally lost its rootedness in a spiritual dimension and the values that encompass it. The result has been massive social alienation and a growing dysfunction. Throw in an ideology founded on self-advancement, individualism, competition and the acquisition of material goods, with money as its litmus test of success – and you have the potpourri that constitutes modern society.

The question is: when are we going to recognise this spiritual bankruptcy, and place it alongside unemployment, institutionalised racism and poverty as being a principal cause of crime and alienation and a primary need to be addressed? Our society worships technological advance, the acquisition of power and wealth, and fiercely protects its class structure of *them* and *us*. This is spiritually barren territory.

Why aren't Christians saying more often that a solid foundation for building a fair and just society requires the pursuit of the common good? Why aren't we proposing practical structures which incorporate these essential elements and values? For too long we have had to put up with an ideology which would have us compete at every level creating a wasteland of losers and a shrinking élite of powerful winners.

The biggest issue we face these days is the relentless march towards corporate globalisation. Imposing the will of the most powerful corporate

and governmental interests is what globalisation is about. Built as it is on a materialist philosophy, it makes a god of profit. It also sacrifices all four characteristics that produce the common good – solidarity, subsidiarity, protection of human rights and protection of the the poor. It represents the new golden calf, the new idolatry. Enforcing its ways with violence compounds its sinfulness.

Yet that in essence is what this system now does. For example, that is what initiated the war on Iraq and has kept the sanctions in place. Iraq threatened access to oil. Iraq had to be tamed. We have failed to name these sins for what they are: a power of evil present and pervasive – and in need of redemption.

The official teaching of the church recognises the existence of finite, created powers of a personal kind, both good and evil. Karl Rahner observes that this teaching has been little developed since the time of St Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastics. It seems to be an important and somewhat neglected area of theology.

I have spent a lot of time reflecting and studying what happened in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia in the 1990s. I've been wondering what type of spirit was behind apartheid. What was it drove the Nazi machine? What was unleashed in Rwanda? Why were so many mindless atrocities committed by educated and seemingly reasonable people? Why did so many – even many good religious people – go bad and rape, torture, pillage and murder their country's best citizens? Was it a power unleashed? If so, does that power last forever? Is it redeemable?

I have a developing belief that a power of evil exists that is larger than the individual component parts of these systems. I have come to understand that each social unit has a spirit of either good or evil within, and unless the presence of such a spirit is addressed, then positive social change will be thwarted. In essence, each social grouping has its own spirit, distinct from its component parts. Many call this the *culture* of the institution or the movement.

I have watched good people enter the police, parliament, the military, various government institutions, the prison service, some corporations, even some religious institutions, and encounter a spirit, a culture, that is negative and life-destroying. They have found themselves under a type of negative power that is corrupting and eventually all-pervasive, one that leaves its corrosive mark clearly on them. And they have changed – and for the worse.

each social unit has a spirit of either good or evil within it

Similarly I have seen others enter positive and fair-minded organisations and movements who have been enhanced and grown through their involvement with them. Further, I have seen good people combine to turn the negative spirit of an institution or a movement around into something positive.

It seems these spiritual powers are redeemable. They have a beginning and an end. They need not last forever. But they have to be tackled with all the power, skills, prayer, commitment and courage one can muster. For example, in South Africa, in a thousand and one different ways people united to confront both the powers behind and the social structures of apartheid. For millions it was a spiritual journey as much as a social and political one. On another continent, Martin Luther King spear-headed a social revolution against racial prejudice built on an understanding that racism wasn't just a social manifestation of discrimination but had an evil power underpinning it.

The United States has no obvious enemies, yet now spends three times on its defence budget than it did at the height of the Cold War. No one understands this power better than the *Ploughshares* movement in confronting the evil of nuclear weapons. They clearly recognise and confront the power behind the missiles through prayer, fasting, symbolic action and non-violent resistance. My belief is that unless the presence of the spiritual side of an organisation is acknowledged and recognised, positive social change will be shortlived.

In order to pursue social equity and the common good people have to really care about one another. They have to want to see justice practised and everybody get a fair deal. To make and sustain such a choice is a function of the spirit. Everything we do in relation to one another, be it good or bad, is a function of the spirit.

But when there is no recognition by the dominant culture of the need to sustain, nurture and develop such spiritual dimensions to our lives, is it any wonder that a crippling of the spirit takes place? Where in the public arena does this discussion ever take place? When was the last time we saw television seriously explore the spiritual dimensions of life and people? We never do.

Why are we so shy of acknowledging spiritual matters when 90 percent of the world's peoples have religious traditions involving meditation, prayer, contemplation, quiet times, retreats and reflection? Dare I say it that the dominant culture in New Zealand belongs to the 10 percent that neglects these things? And we wonder why we get screwed up!

How do we change? Among other things, we need to revisit the best of the spiritual and religious traditions that have bound societies together for centuries and look again at the essentials. Of course it will mean that different people and groupings will continue to see things in slightly different ways.

Yet not every culture has lost its spiritual dimension. Many, including the diaspora Celts and Polynesians, to name two, are looking again at some ▷▷

for them. What it does mean is that all different cultures need to develop models whereby the spiritual dimension of life is integrated into their programmes. We need to acknowledge that some-thing bigger than ourselves – the Spirit of Life, *Io*, God, the Cosmic Christ – exists without and within and needs to be recognised if sustainable positive social change is to occur. I often talk about being guided by the angels or the Holy Spirit when something extraordinary has hap-pened. To many, such a statement simply confirms my eccentricity. But it makes sense to me.

of the deep-rooted dimensions of their spiritual traditions so that their better aspects can be integrated into a more meaningful life in this 21st century. Everything our grandparents taught us wasn't necessarily old hat!

This is where Maori and other Polynesian cultures have a real gift to offer the wider community. The recognition of the integration of spirituality and life which is, for example, found in Maori *kaupapa* programmes is a good model for the dominant culture. Note also the content of most hui. A hui is set in a spiritual setting linking all of creation to the *tupuna* and current events and lives. The land is acknowledged, the air and sky, the river, the dead, the living. All are linked to those present. Karakia is said for the meeting and grace is said before meals to acknowledge the food is a gift from the Creator. In all things, spiritual elements are acknowledged as integral to the struggles, debates and celebrations of everyday life.

This doesn't mean that non-Maori have to see Maori karakia and religious practices as being required

Many of us now know a little about restorative justice practices. One of the aims of this creative focus is to help change people's hearts, to bring about genuine apology, a desire to make reparation where possible and bring about healing. In essence this is a spiritual process. Some

as a garden needs watering, so our spirits need nurturing with life-affirming food

may not see it like that. But then some don't see that a meal properly shared can also be sacred. In the restorative justice conference, when appropriate, we encourage karakia, or a quiet time of reflection, or a meditative reading, to get the participants focused and respectful of what is about to happen. In such a setting real change can occur.

My point is that just as a garden needs watering, so our spirits need nurturing with positive life-affirming food. In order to do that we need to recognise that this is necessary. We also need to recognise that just as there are many ways to water a garden, so there are many forms of spirituality that can be followed.

What I believe makes for a holistic spirituality is the recognition that we are all interdependent, that we need to see the divine spark in one another and respect that, and that we need specifically to protect the most vulnerable, the poorest and the most powerless. These people are often initially unable to do it for themselves.

And let's not be shy about it. I acknowledge humbly that I stand in the embrace of the ultimate source of life, the Risen Christ. I know many understand that truth differently. So be it. I never eat a meal without acknowledging its source. I never go into a prison or difficult situation without asking God's guidance. I never make a speech or write a paper without seeking a blessing for it.

I recognise I am only a seed planter, one who scatters seed to the four winds and prays some of it finds fertile land. That's when the Spirit comes to the party and gets the growth going – or decides not to. These simple approaches are basic to good living and a holistic nurturing spirituality.

In so doing, I stand on the shoulders of my tupuna, my ancestors, who brought me to where I am today through their lives, their struggles, their love and their faith. As New Zealander Alan MacDiarmid said in Stockholm last year while receiving his Nobel Prize for chemistry: "in becoming who we are, we stand on the shoulders of giants".

Making lasting social change demands such spiritual awareness. It helps keep us humble, committed, focused and conscious of one another. It helps keep us refreshed and energised for the long haul. Without it we face early burn out. With it we can go on forever. ■

Jim Consedine is parish priest of Lyttelton and a prison chaplain in Christchurch

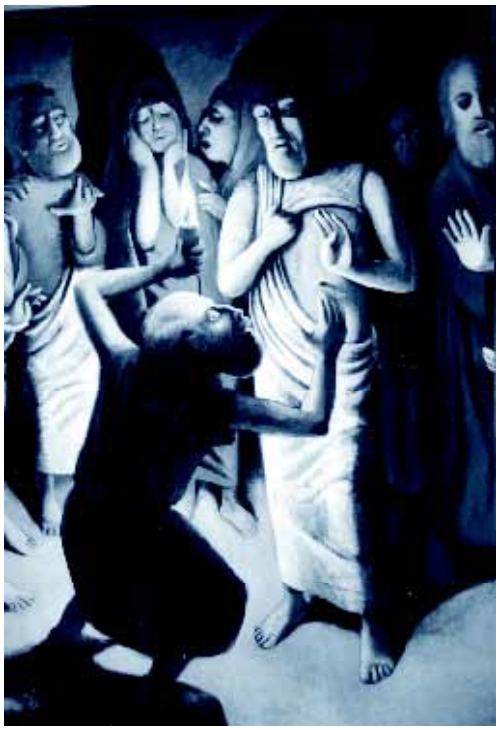
Letter to a Friend

Dear Friend,

You say that you and the church are parting company, and you ask me what I think. Well, I think my opinion doesn't matter. This is between you and God. But I can say that the reasons you give are the ones that have affected most of us at some time or other. Any tree that's been around for 2000 years will have a lot of dead wood and, like you, I find there are times when the dead wood is all I see. I guess there must be moments when even popes have wished they'd had simpler callings to medicine or building houses or the baking of good bread.

I would suggest that your restlessness and dissatisfaction have as much to do with you as with the church, and that it's all good news. It's God's growth within you, calling you to a larger place. I have found that larger place inside the church. You may have to leave. If you move in the spirit of prayer, you'll soon know if you've made the right decision.

Before you do, though, let's put the 'dead wood' in some kind of perspective. For a moment, let's imagine that there is no religion in the world. None whatsoever. Try to put aside all that you have learned of Christianity and other faiths.



Doubting Thomas: mural by Michael Smither
(see pages 16,17)

Now, ask yourself, where in your everyday life do you find the Divine? Where do you touch mystery? What fills your heart with holy awe? Your list will start with the obvious things like a starry night, a walk on a beach, poetry, music, the love of a partner, childbirth, children, and it will go on and on, becoming more detailed – shared meals, a perfect flower, the precision of mathematics, the design of a snowflake, a hug from a friend, a butterfly's wings.

Soon you will be aware that every experience of love and beauty takes you beyond itself into the presence of the Ineffable. Your heart brims with an emotion you can't name, and flows outwards to a knowledge that also evades words. What do you do with this feeling of holy awe? Where can you place it? Then you realise that this is why we have religion. Religion is the vehicle for the knowing beyond knowing. It is the map for our journey. It offers symbols that help us make sense of the deepest meaning of our lives, that we come from a greater reality and return to a greater reality, and that we are on this earth for spiritual growth.

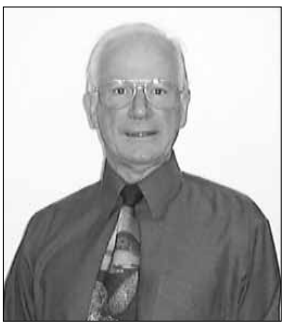
Sometimes we get it the wrong way around. We can think that religious observance makes us spiritual beings. But the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. We are born spiritual beings. When we are comfortable with that awareness, then we can be more understanding of the diversity and paradox in the religious institution. We can stop looking for perfection in our leaders. We can stop worshipping the signposts of words and ideas. We can gather in our embrace this marvellous mixture of dead wood and new growth, because it is ours and it is us, both human and divine. This is the meaning of the Incarnation.

Embracing the wholeness of the church doesn't mean being untrue to my own heart. Twice I have walked out on homilies, one homophobic, the other mysogynistic, but at the same time, I recognised where the words were coming from. Fear can make us all less than charitable, and we all have our growing spaces. But if someone else's fear is impinging on my growth, then I move sideways. In my experience, the church has room for us all, and every one's place and stage of journey is sacred.

Dear friend, value your doubt. Doubt is an excellent companion. It keeps us moving to new stages. Dialogue with the doubt and see where it is pointing. Your journey has taken an exciting new turn. God is leaning on your heart, asking you to move away from the past. Whether that movement is to be inside the church or outside it, is for you to discern. But I know this for certain: if you have the courage to walk boldly in the truth of your heart, God will give you the fulfilment you seek.

Joy Cowley

The Spirit blows where it wills



*Michael O'Hagen (*pictured left*) reflects on the variety of people going to Retreat centres seeking a spiritual conversion. Does it really change their lives for the good?*

How many movies and TV programmes are you aware of that have the theme of extraordinary experiences? Do you think people are attracted to them because they are pure fantasy, or do these tales touch some primal knowing that there are levels of reality beyond the world of seeming?

You may already know of the existence of *Tauhara Centre* in Taupo. It is a centre for spirituality and education. It promotes no particular dogma or practices. It was founded and is maintained by people who believe in the wholeness and interdependence of all creation by virtue of the indwelling presence of God. Their vision is that all aspects of our environment – natural, social, economic and political – will be shaped to enable each person to realise his or her individual purpose within the unity of all.

It was a blessing for me to live and work there for three years. It was like a tavern at a crossroads on a spiritual highway. People came from all walks of life and spiritual paths. As a result I am convinced that there are many in our country and beyond who have a spiritual hunger and are searching for – or already have – a living relationship with God, and as a result are actively committed to a cause greater than themselves.

It has been very inspiring and encouraging to meet so many people like this and to come to know of the work they are doing in their own sphere of influence to bring about a more just, compassionate and environmentally friendly society.

Tuahara is like a tavern at a crossroads on a spiritual highway

There is one group called *Heart Politics* which gathers twice a year for four days. The *Jobs Newsletter* they produce is received by many local and regional politicians and key people in business and in public service agencies. It presents essential information and challenges related to employment and the future of work. Others have their own projects in the area of politics, business, education and health. And that is just one group. And operating at only one centre.

Not long ago, Tauhara Centre was the only spirituality centre not associated with a traditional religion. There are now hundreds of retreat centres dotted around the country.

There is plenty of evidence that there is a significant number of people involved in business in this country and throughout the world who are 'mistresses/masters of both worlds' – they are familiar and at home both in the spiritual and secular worlds. They incarnate the marriage between mysticism (seeking union with the divine) and justice (seeking to be living expressions of Divine compassion.) They meditate daily, and actively align their behaviour and use their powers to bring about the *Realm of God*. They might not use those terms. Even so, they are carrying on the mission of Christ. I meet even more of them now than I did when I was ministering as an ordained priest.

It is encouraging also to read books like *Synchronicity*, by Joseph Jawoski, and *Corporate Rennaisance* by Rolf Osterburg. Jawoski, after a series of spiritual experiences, left the successful law firm he had founded. He energetically set about working to bring about a more just society instead of devoting his life to amassing more wealth, power and standing. Osterburg, who is CEO of a large media conglomerate and keynote speaker in demand internationally, proposes that the purpose of a business is not primarily to make money but to further the personal development of its members.

'I want to make a difference rather than just make money'

And on the home front I hear people in business saying: "I want to make a difference rather than just make money." One successful businessman I know does not actually need to work. He looks around for worthwhile projects and people who would benefit from having a stake in them. Then he mentors and finances them until they

become self-funding.

Business is one area that has enormous impact on the quality of our civilisation and has the greatest potential to change it for the better. Science is another. And today science too is a fertile field for signs of God. A group of people from the scientific community have formed an association called the *Institute for Noetic Studies.* Look out for it if you want inspiring reading that honours both the spiritual and the scientific.

A group of *IONS* members stayed at Tauhara Centre in early 1999. Among them was Hank Wesselman, a world renowned archeologist. As well as delving into the earth he delves into his own depths and has written books about his inner experiences. In one of them he quotes the findings of a sociological survey undertaken in the United States. It indicates that 24 million people fall into the category described as "socially concerned, environmentally aware, spiritually focused, creative people, whose lives are based on the assumption that there is a spiritual mystical power that pervades everything in the universe."

how big was the group that sparked off the fire of Christianity?

What do you think a similar survey in Aotearoa New Zealand would indicate? From the people I meet and the things I read I am convinced there are many people within and beyond the traditional religions who are very spiritually aware and seeking to bring themselves and our race into greater attunement with God.

Lest the reader might think that spiritual development is only for eggheads and high flyers, a young man turned up one day at the Centre recently released from prison. One day during his stay he urged me to accompany him into the bush. It seemed important so I left what

Tuahara Spirituality Centre,near Taupo

I was doing and went with him. He led me to a large rocky outcrop, and sat on a boulder as he described (and seemed to relive) a remarkable experience he had had a short while ago.

The 'vision' contained two doves, flying to perch on each of his outstretched hands. He brought them together and they made love, and then flew off to spread peace throughout the land. And the experience changed something in him. Instead of looking forward to more time on the dole and then another spell in prison he got a job on a fishing boat.

You might be tempted to be cynical because of the tele-evangelist type of religious people raving on that if you give your life over to Jesus you will make a lot of money for yourself. Or you may suspect some in big business use 'spirituality' to squeeze more out of employees and to make more money for shareholders. If you do, there is reason for you to feel that way.

At the same time you could consider also, couldn't you, the potential there is in people like the ones I have described and many others who share their values and commitment. The image of the skin graft comes to mind – pinpoints of healthy live skin spreading out to cover huge areas. How big was the group that sparked off the fire of Christianity? How much cause do we have to hope that the number of people seeking the reign of the Divine within and without will soon reach critical mass?

wise people today search the heavens to seek its creator

There's a wonderful translation of the Lord's Prayer directly from the original Aramaic, with commentary and suggested ways to meditate and pray the verses. It's the sort of language and approach that appeals to many at the present time.The author's translation of the very first verse gives the sense that the creator of all is always in the process of giving birth and the "whole of the cosmos is the word by which the creator makes him/herself knowable." Like the Magi in the infancy narratives, wise people of today search the heavens and the depths and are driven to seek the creator and artist of it all.

The challenge for traditional churches is to learn the language of modern people in order to assist those who need assistance on their quest for God and clarity about their mission on this planet. That would be a useful theme for another article, wouldn't it? ■

Michael would like to contact like-minded people – mohagan@reap.org.nz

Margaret Fell – a Quaker saint

Trish McBride discovers a feisty female who fought for equality with the religious powers-that-be in 17th century England

A woman sat writing a letter by a window. Her name was Margaret Fell and the year was 1666. It was no ordinary window: it was the grille of a stone-walled prison cell in Lancaster Castle in the north of England. It was no ordinary letter: it was a letter to King Charles II to ask for her own freedom and that of the many hundreds of her Quaker friends languishing in prison throughout the land.

She was no ordinary woman: intelligent, educated, articulate, strong-minded, a well-endowed land-owner, and deeply spiritual. By 1664, when she was first imprisoned at 52 years of age, she was the widow of a judge, a devoted mother of nine children, of whom eight were surviving into adulthood, and one of the most dedicated followers of George Fox, the founder of Quakerism. She had already made four trips to London to plead personally with the King for religious tolerance for Quakers and other dissenters from the Established Church.

She travelled the 400 kilometres to London ten times in all, on horse-back and later by coach, and the last of those occasions was when she was 83! By then there was legislation that gave tolerance of freedom for worship. This improvement in the situation was in no small part due to her and George Fox.

But the 1660s were an era when it was considered treasonable to be anything other than an attending, tithe-paying, card-carrying member of the Church of England. Religion and politics were as horribly intertwined as they still are in some parts of the world. All she and the other Quakers wanted was the freedom to worship their God in peace, to hold meetings for worship, the silent waiting on God that is still the norm for Quakers. And they campaigned for this freedom from a position of non-violent resistance. They did not desert their principles on the grounds that the end justified the means.

Margaret Fell was imprisoned four times in Lancaster Castle, the last time when she was 69. That first imprisonment lasted for four years. Her 'crimes' were twofold: refusing to promise that she would no longer hold meetings for worship in her home, and refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance to the King. This latter stance was based on Quaker belief that there should not be two qualities of truth to be told. They take seriously Jesus' words in *Matthew 5:34-37*: "Do not swear oaths … say 'Yes' if you mean yes, and 'No' if you mean no."

From their position has eventually come the opportunity to choose to affirm in a court of law, rather than swear on the Bible. For these two 'crimes', Margaret was sentenced to life imprisonment and the forfeiture of all her property.

The physical conditions in her cell in the castle were grim. As she wrote to the King: "It is so wet with rain and snow that in the winter time it is not fit for neither beasts nor dogs to lie in." It seems there was some leniency shown to this special prisoner and the other Quakers imprisoned with her. They were sometimes allowed to meet together for worship – the very 'crime' they'd been imprisoned for!

Margaret was allowed her family to visit, and on one occasion allowed a home visit. Most importantly, she was allowed to have her Bible and writing materials. She was a prolific writer, eventually producing 16 books on assorted topics, countless letters to her large family, to friends, and to various eminent people, and 27 Epistles to Quaker groups around England. One book which is of particular pertinence to our times was written in Lancaster Castle: *Women's speaking justified, proved and allowed for by the Scriptures, all such as speak by the spirit and power of the Lord.* Three hundred years ago she produced Scriptural arguments for the spiritual equality of men and women which have been rediscovered in the last 20 years and are familiar to many now. She wrote of the women prophets in the Hebrew ▷▷

Made in God's Image

In the late 80s the Commission of Justice, Peace and Development commissioned sociologist Christine Cheyne to investigate sexism in the Catholic church in New Zealand. The ensuing Made In God's Image *Report recommended various changes.* ***Ann Gilroy*** *looks at what has happened since?*

The MIGI Report met with mixed reactions when it was published. Some were delighted that sexism in the church's structures was uncovered and the invisible suffering of many women acknow-ledged; others denied its validity; others again saw it as a programme for change in the church and as an aid for gospel discipleship.

As a hierarchical, clerical institution, the Catholic church has reflected a gender discriminatory bias in its basic structure, its theology, spirituality and under-standing of ethics. The smallness of the New Zealand church and the informality of relationships between clergy and laity compared to those of the USA or even Australia, means this criticism of sexism is done 'within the family', as it were. This can lead to a critic feeling exposed by her criticisms.

The MIGI Report confirmed that many women felt alienated by the masculine, clerical bias perpetuated, often unconsciously, by men and women. Its 20 recommendations focused mainly on change to the balance of power in the church. They sought to decrease clerical and increase lay voices and participation. They targeted areas such as liturgy, pastoral leadership and care, decision making, leadership roles, communication, and input into the formation of seminarians for priesthood.

MIGI sought to decrease clerical bias and increase lay voices

A principle of *gender equality* was proposed as underlying any increase in lay participation. This included eradicating sexist language in liturgies, using translations of Scripture, prayers and songs which were inclusive of women, and sharing the finance available for seminarian's theological education with women as well as with men not seeking ordination.

The New Zealand Bishops' Theological Response to MIGI was disappointing since it seemed to me not to grasp the central issues. Other less public responses to the Report were more creative and showed that they had understood the women's concerns more. However, regardless of the official response, most dioceses have made some headway in meeting the Report's recommendations.

Participative Ministry

The main thrust of the proposals in MIGI are centred on women's criticism of the oppression of the laity, and especially women, by the perceived clericalism of the church. By clericalism I mean that church power, authority and decision-making is in the hands of ordained priests and bishops. In parish life clerical oppression can take such forms as autocratic decision-making and such behaviours as refusing to let women take part in the Maundy Thursday washing of feet ceremony on the grounds that Jesus washed only male disciples' feet.

One very practical resistance to clericalism is the opposition to the introduction of the diaconate in the New Zealand church. The diaconate was proposed as the answer to a pastoral problem to relieve the shortage of ordained priests in parishes. However, for as long as the diaconate is restricted to males, women and men continue to resist its introduction as the solution to this need. Resistance was registered ▷▷

▷▷ Scriptures, Jesus' respect for women, their faithfulness to him even to the Cross, and their first knowledge of the Resurrection. And she used St Paul's own words to mitigate some of his apparently anti-women statements. She pleaded with men not to try to limit the power of God by believing it exists only in their own sex. Spiritual equality between men and women has always been part of Quaker beliefs. George Fox himself wrote two books on the same topic.

Margaret married George Fox in 1669. They already had and continued in a deep spiritual union, but spent very little time together because of their various imprisonments and missionary journeys. He died in 1691 and she in 1702. They had both laboured to get a sound structure for the infant Quaker movement, and to get the principle of religious liberty enshrined in English law.

And still the principles they established for Quaker living remain: seeking guidance of the inner light, speaking the truth, the equality of all human beings, recognising 'that of God' in every person, simplicity, justice, non-violence, and active peace-making. With good reason is Margaret Fell known as the Mother of Quakerism. ■

Source: *Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakerism,* by Isobel Ross.
Trish McBride was born in Lancaster and visited the castle as a child.

strongly at the Wellington Archdiocesan Pastoral Council through a vote against its introduction in the Archdiocese. This kind of action against clericalism is especially heartening to women who are often already doing much diaconate ministry without official recognition.

The supposed pastoral problem created by insufficient priests is a problem only if we continue to narrow our idea of 'ministry' and 'ministers' to the role of the ordained. At a workshop during a recent theological conference, participants from all over New Zealand identified the range of ministries led by women in the church and in society.

Women were working in paid and voluntary capacities as chaplains at prisons, hospices for the dying, hospitals, rest homes, and schools; they distributed communion to the sick and those at home; they prepared couples for marriage, for baptism of their children; they prepared young people for the sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation; they planned and led liturgies of the Word and Eucharistic liturgies.

Women were also parish workers engaged in community building work, pastoral visitation and burying the dead. They were spiritual directors and retreat leaders, and frequently maintained ecumenical links through their ministries.

instead of the diaconate, the church should institute a 'ministry of the household of God', open to all

Many women had prepared for these ministries by professional and theological formation and study. If we take a lead from Vatican II's promotion of the mission of laity as a priority – and not just for maintenance when ordained ministers are unavailable – it seems lay ministry, particularly of women, should be supported and encouraged.

One suggestion from the Conference was that instead of reinstating the diaconate, the church should institute a 'ministry of the household of God', open to lay women and men. Rather than being an ordained/clerical ministry, women and men could be called forth in the community and officially commissioned for a specific time. This 'ministry of the household of God' could be a collaborative endeavour between priests and laity.

Gender Inclusive Language

Masculinisation of the English language and the way this has acted to mask women's subjectivity is only gradually being recognised in New Zealand. Many institutions – Government departments, Universities, businesses and the media – have adopted gender inclusive language policies.

In 1997, the New Zealand Bishops issued a very clear Guide for using inclusive language in liturgy and other public gatherings. This Guide goes a long way towards supporting changes in the public language of worship in parishes. However, it is only a guide, and parishes are not obliged to adopt it.

In it the Bishops were reserved in recommending the use of more inclusiveness in the naming of God. They more or less indicated that 'Father, Son and Spirit' is the only way of addressing God as Trinity in liturgical situations. Practically every prayer in the Catholic liturgy addresses God in terms of 'Lord God Almighty', 'God our Father', 'All Powerful God' or 'Almighty Father' and uses only masculine pronouns for God. Many women find this restrictive and theologically unimaginative. The majority of priests are either unaware of the problem or do not want to change.

Naming God in other than masculine terms seems to be the most contentious issue in the whole debate about gender inclusive language. In fact many women as well as men promote the status quo in the belief that to address God in female terms will diminish God. This persuasive attitude indicates an underlying feeling that women are less images of God than men.

Yet the daily Scripture readings already offer an alternative image of God. Just think how such titles as 'God of healing', 'Breath of Life', 'Keeper of Memories'– or even 'Searching Woman' – might refresh the liturgy and our understanding of ourselves and the mystery of God.

Participative Leadership

Many women in the MIGI Report said that clerical hierarchical decision-making contributed to their experiences of oppression. Women's Religious Orders particularly have taken the initiative to experiment with participative leadership as an alternative to hierarchical models. They have replaced the linear management model of Superior and subordinates with leadership teams and participative leadership.

a group of women and men gather with the priest to help shape the Sunday homily

New models of shared leadership are also practised in some parish communities and groups. For example, in some parishes a small group of women and men gather with the priest to reflect on the Sunday readings and help shape the Sunday homily. Other parishes invite women and lay men to preach on particular occasions. Sadly, when a new parish priest arrives he can dismantle the shared model without reference to those involved. The frequency with which this happens is discouraging.

Several 'alternative liturgical centres', where issues of language and shared leadership are dealt with in a creative way, have developed around this

country. One example is the Sunday evening Eucharist at St Benedict's in Auckland, which has grown from the research of Neil Darragh and Jo Ayers. Working in partnership, priests and people have developed a model of three distinct leadership roles within the Eucharistic liturgy.

..our spirits need nurturing with positive life-affirming food

The leader of hospitality welcomes everyone and leads the first part of the liturgy up until the readings. The leader of the Word introduces the readings and coordinates those things that happen in the Word ending the role after the prayers of the faithful. The leader of the Eucharist is the role specific to the ordained minister. He leads the Eucharistic prayer and the distribution of communion and ends his role after the communion prayer. The leader of hospitality then takes over again, communicates the notices and sends the congregation away with a blessing.

Other church centres have completely lay-led liturgies – frequently led by women – which incorporate principles of inclusivity and participation. Lay-led liturgies are most prevalent in rural areas, and are dependent on the formation and imagination of the leaders. They are most effective where the leaders have theological and scriptural formation for the leadership role.

Women expect their participation in liturgy to nourish their ordinary lives. They will tend to seek out liturgies which support their needs. There could be a trend developing where women avoid parish liturgies where the principles of participation and inclusiveness are absent. Unfortunately women in rural areas do not have the same choice but some find nourishment in ecumenical gatherings.

Resistance to Clericalised Theology

One of the recommendations of the MIGI report is promotion of theological education among laity. Again, women's Religious Orders have been proactive in educating their women to the doctoral level in theology, Scripture and pastoral ministry; also in bringing international theologians to New Zealand for lecture tours and workshops. The Catholic Institute of Theology (CIT), a venture of the Diocese of Auckland teaching theology in an ecumenical partnership at the University of Auckland, has made theological study available to all who have University Entrance. Meanwhile, Otago University is offering a theology degree by distance mode.

As a Jubilee Year initiative, the Bishop of Auckland set up a fund to provide bursaries for lay people to study theology at University level. The criteria for gaining a bursary are involvement in the mission of the church in the Diocese and financial need. Mature Maori and Pakeha women students were among those who received bursaries in the first distribution.

a concern is the separation of seminarians from other students

Of concern is the increasing separation of the seminarians from other students studying theology. Recently the New Zealand National Seminary moved to Auckland from Otago and joined with the Marists for studies They have now decided to move out of the Auckland Consortium for Theological Education and set up on their own. This decision of the New Zealand Bishops to keep seminarians separate does not augur well for the seminarians' formation in gender-inclusive attitudes for pastoral work, liturgy or shared leadership.

Promoting Women's Spirituality

Many of the women interviewed in the MIGI report referred to experiences where their decisions were trivialised by clergy, their suffering spiritualised, their voices silenced and their sexuality exploited. Feminism has made it clear that women experience fragmentation and diminishment when their identity is unrecognised in such cases. Catholic Women's networks in various dioceses have supported women's spirituality and study of theology.

One interesting lay movement is that of 'Associates' drawn to the charism of women's Religious Orders. These women and men are attracted to and identify with the charism and spirituality of the Sisters but live out the charism in their own lifestyle. Some see themselves in partnership with the Sisters and have begun new ministries as expressions of the charism.

Conclusion

At the time of MIGI there was a groundswell of support for the ordination of women in the Catholic church, but there is not the same interest now. Many women would rather have the ordained priesthood reconstructed than have women join its present form. Most changes represent an imaginative experimentation in 'being church' differently. Many women are increasingly finding church institutional practices irrelevant, but are hungry for gospel community and a spirituality that integrates and animates their lives.

women are hungry for gospel community and an integrating spirituality

The five particular trends outlined above represent shifts in the balance of power from clerical control to an increased lay – and particularly women's – participative voice in the New Zealand Catholic Church. These trends are towards participative leadership and ministry; towards gender-inclusive language in relationship to God in ritual and liturgy; towards doing theology from the experience of women; and towards a nurturing of women's spirituality. ■

Ann Gilroy rsj is Dean of the Catholic Institute of Theology, Auckland

Artist Michael Smither standing by his mural of the *Baptism of Christ*, one of a pair painted during the 70s for St. Joseph's Catholic church, New Plymouth

I grew up as a Catholic in New Plymouth, and probably the first influences for me were church art – the statues and holy pictures I grew up with. As far as I am concerned a picture is worth a thousand words, and those old pictures are burnt into my memory. I remember a statue of the Virgin Mary with her foot on a snake, standing on the world. The Stations of the Cross were powerful images which impressed me with their drama. I can remember at school being greatly struck by a guardian angel behind the figure of a child about to cross a rickety-looking bridge.

The Catholic symbols impressed me. The whole liturgy is surrounded by such powerful images. But in those days original works of art were practically non-existent. My father was an artist. The things I saw him create were certainly part of my youth. I gobbled up anything

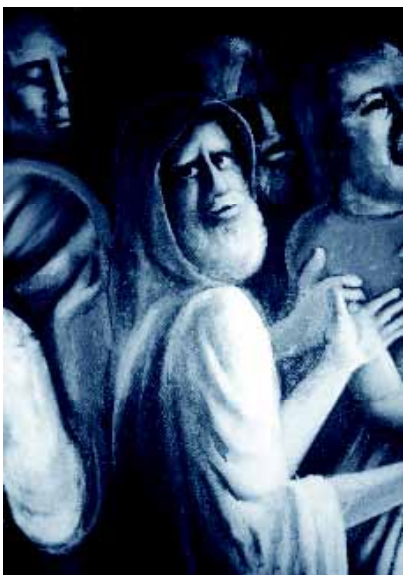
The religious art of

Tui Motu *interviews an artist whose*

During the 1970s I painted two murals for St Joseph's church, which had just been rebuilt in the centre of New Plymouth. They stand as a pair at the back of the church and are about 20 feet long and 12 feet high. They are painted in acrylics straight onto the wall. *Doubting Thomas* (*above*) was the first of the two. It wasn't actually a commission – I just went in and painted it on the walls at the back of the church. They were solid concrete walls covered with a horrible speckly paint. I had once seen a couple of Stanley Spencer paintings in the Wellington Art Gallery; they impressed me and set me reading. Spencer was interested more in form and space – not at all like the Impressionists. It gave his work a solidity, and that was what I wanted.

I learned how to create moulded shapes. I enjoyed painting the Taranaki coastal scenery, especially the rock shapes. You can't paint rocks in an impressionist style, giving them a sense of weight and shape. I added sharp, defined edges, and that became a hallmark of my work.

Like all mural painters I had a sort of 'vision' of it. I sketched it in charcoal first. I first drew the episode of Thomas and Christ. I had always thought it would make a great mural to surround that moment with the reactions of the various Apostles (*right*). I wanted to show how people might react to an event like that. There are women and children in the scene and even a little dog (*left*).



visual – including comics. The big event of the year was the arrival of the Columban calendar full of reproductions of Old Masters.

The desire to make things and to paint came to me early. I had quite a bit of training from my father, who had a silk screen printing workshop. Even such commercial enterprises have quite a bit of art content, so I learnt how to paint and do silk screen and make things out of cardboard and various media. I was able to play around in the studio and learn by copying.

At high school I had a good art teacher and he encouraged me. I was given a room to myself out the back of the art classroom. I remember reading the story of Van Gogh – *Lust for Life* by Irving Stone. Once I read that I was doomed! The impressionist paintings we had at school were all rather poor reproductions and I didn't get any feeling for them at all. They seemed to me a bit namby-pamby, compared with the church tradition with its strong 'blood and guts' imagery! I enjoyed paintings which told stories.

Later I became interested in Diego Rivera and the Mexican muralists. At art school my teacher was Lois White, and people have noted her influence in my work. At the time I disliked the way she painted, but something must have rubbed off.

At art school in the early 60s I painted some religious pictures, such as Crucifixions – and that was very much frowned on! It was what I wanted to do because the ideas were so powerful. I remember painting Christ walking on water and the miracle of the loaves and fishes. I also did lino cuts in the style of illustrations you find in the Catholic missals. Some of my earlier works are to be found in the New Plymouth Art Gallery.

Michael Smither

work graces the walls of a local church

The *Baptism of Christ* (*above*) came six or seven years later. By that time I had dropped out of the church, but the parish priest invited me to paint the other wall because just having the one mural was unbalanced. My ideas had moved on to the notion that Christ could have existed in Taranaki as much as anywhere else. So I set it in a local scene. The rocks are Taranaki rocks. The dove became a tui, and John the Baptist was a Maori friend. Christ was depicted wearing a sort of rubber suit, and some of the other figures were friends and acquaintances of that time.

People were a bit puzzled at first, but the public in New Plymouth have come to know me as their artist. Generally speaking my work is accepted especially after the passage of time. The two murals are both part of my life, and they reflect my personal journey and how my ideas have changed. For that reason I think they strike a chord with people. When an artist is known in an area the people know that the artist is attempting to speak for them personally. It isn't something which has been foisted on them from overseas.

The final painting was the *Empty Tomb*. I was greatly moved by Piero Della Francesca's *Resurrection*, and I always wanted to paint it. After *Doubting Thomas* I was sure no one had actually seen Christ rising from the dead. All they saw was the empty tomb. It was in the church entrance (*below)* – about 12 feet high on a solid concrete wall, facing the people as they came in. You can no longer see it because the wall was later taken away, which is rather sad!

One of the local priests at the time, Fr Carroll, was so deeply moved by the painting that he used to say his breviary there every day. He would walk up and down in front of it.

It was quite a symbolic painting. The rising sun, the new dawn, at the back. The cloth stretched out and weighed down by stones – which was my symbol. Down below at the right, the crown of thorns. For me it was a powerful work, and it's a pity to have lost the picture forever.

▷▷

It was in 1968 that I was commissioned to carve the *Stations of the Cross* for St Joseph's church in New Plymouth at the time the new church was being built. The stations are cast in cement fondue and I was influenced by the sculptures of Rodin, which I greatly admired. Each of the 14 stations would be about 18 inches high, and they were all the way round the church. Four have now been separated from the body of the church because of the later construction of a day chapel. There is a move at present to open the chapel up again so that the stations won't be interrupted.

Each station is mounted on a concrete mullion with windows between, so they are lit by natural light. The process of cement fondue consists of carving the image in clay, making a plaster cast and then pouring the concrete so that the plaster moulds the concrete. It was difficult technically since I hadn't done it before. The *Stations* took me about three years to complete. It was my biggest job up to that date, and is still in my opinion one of my best works. The reaction of the people was mixed: they were either for or against! I think people now are proud to have them because they are original art works.

***The First Station*:**
Jesus is condemned to die.
I used a photo from the Vietnam War of a prisoner on his knees, hands tied behind his back...
This is an ordinary event; here Jesus placed himself completely within the ordariness of life.

***The Sixth Station*:**
Simon is forced to help carry the Cross
*In many ways I feel like Simon. My life draws me away from what I really want to do. The T-shirt that says: "*I'd rather be doing something else*" was made for me.*

***The Twelfth Station*:**
Jesus is crucified on the Cross
Showing the crucifixion from behind the Cross leaves all detail to the imagination. The effect is to demystify the event... 'Man's inhumanity to man' must surely be enough to satisfy our desire for shame and humiliation.

Stations of the Cross: St Joseph's, New Plymouth, sculpted by Michael Smither

I once did a set of *Stations of the Cross* as a memorial for the celebrated New Zealand painter, Rita Angus. This took the theme away from its religious context and put it into the everyday, in memory of the artist who had recently died. It was a set of 14 crosses with landscapes painted inside them. They are in oils on crosses made of hardboard, each about two feet tall.

They were a statement of mine on the environment. In our culture we tend to impose straight lines on nature. The stations for a Catholic symbolise the trials of life and death. I thought Rita's life had been a atough one, so I symbolised it in that way.

At the present time I'm painting a picture of a man putting a ring on a girl's finger inside a cafe. Outside you can see a Combi van and a parking meter. Across the road is a man with a rubbish cart. It's 'vernacular stuff' – but it could well be my *Marriage Feast at Cana*.

The symbols are those of movement (the van) and time (the parking meter) and the transitory nature of things (the rubbish cart). There's a lonely woman sitting in an alcove across the road. In the foreground are these two intense young people exchanging their love. You stand back from it and make up your own mind. I actually saw this scene – and the painting picks up all the elements.

In my opinion religion is for people, so the artwork in a church should speak to the people. The Christian message is full of powerful symbols. Most of my art continues to be religious in the sense of expressing the depth of human consciousness. Not just surface things, but to go deep into people's hearts. It is the spirituality of people I try to portray.

I'm moved to paint this scene of the couple exchanging the ring. It is my inspiration. It's like a gap opening in the universe and my being able to see things in a way which is not ordinary. ■

Foot and Mouth disease

Professor Mary Grey and Rabbi Professor Dan Cohn Sherbok from the University of Wales in Lampeter believe that there are. Together they have made a carefully worded input into the debate in Britain. "The skies of the British Isles are ablaze with the carcasses of thousands of animals, animals infested with foot and mouth disease. On the European continent thousands are being slaughtered simply from the fear that they might become infected. The public assumes that the fate of these animals would be a painful death from this disease, and that humans, once infected, would suffer a similar fate.

"Yet, this is a complete misapprehension: foot and mouth disease kills neither animals nor humans. Most infected animals suffer only temporary lameness and loss of appetite. Recovery takes places after only two or three weeks and the disease is rarely passed on to humans. When this does occur, the symptoms are very mild. The truth is that 'foot and mouth' is an economic disease: animals which suffer from it will lose their appetite for a short time and suffer weight loss. The ensuing meat will not be so juicy or rich, and this not so lucrative on international markets".

They argue that the policies and procedures currently used to control foot and mouth disease were worked out in the 19th Century to overcome a very different animal plague. The government of the day introduced movement controls and slaughter. These policies worked and have become the prototype for all subsequent outbreaks of animal disease. Disease control, government regulations and perceived economic impacts have become interlocked in a simplistic and self perpetuating manner.

In the case of foot and mouth disease the economic risks, triggered by government policies, are far in excess of the physiological risks to sheep.

"For the sake of money we are slaughtering innocent animals whose lives are in no way threatened. Foot and mouth poses no danger to human beings – the danger is purely economic".

Mary Grey and Dan Cohn Sherbok ask the questions: "But where are the voices protesting against this slaughter? Is there no one in Britain who finds it immoral to kill the animal population for the sake of making more money on the global market?" Then as representatives of the Jewish and Christian traditions they make a carefully worded theological input:

"Through all periods of Jewish and Christian history, many voices have been raised against the cruel treatment of animals. Within Judaism, the Psalmists words: that *The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works* became a principle of humane compassion.

Judaism is radical in insisting that animals have certain basic rights which are revealed in a variety of prescriptions found in Scripture. Humans are to refrain from causing distress to any of Gods creatures". Underlying rabbinic concern is the concept of *tsaar baalei hayim* – " pain of living animals".

The well-being of animals is similarly part of Christian tradition: "in the stories of the early saints of the desert, the Celtic saints of the British isles and in medieval times, animal life is repeatedly celebrated. There is a foretaste of the reconciliation of creation in the way the hermit and the wild beast live simply together". The sensitivity of many saints, sages and poets to the treatment of animals is a reflection of their heightened sensitivity to suffering. To affirm the reality of Christ's redeeming love is believe that Christ suffers with the suffering of all vulnerable people and creatures of the world, including innocent animals.

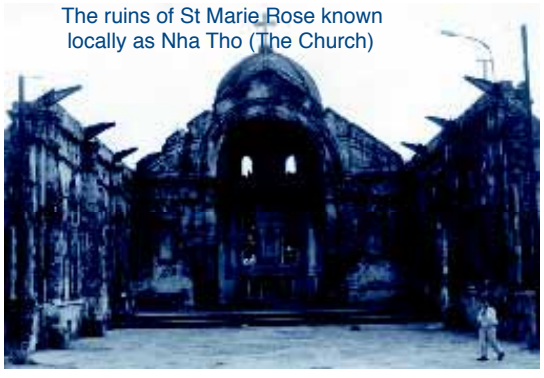
"Our traditions are thus united in the recognition of the intrinsic worth of all God's creation. We recognise the complexity of the issues around intensive farming and the globalisation of agri-business, but we ask if the current conflagration of innocent animals that has engulfed the countryside can recall us to the centrality of compassionate concern for all creatures at the heart of both our traditions".(*Church Times, London. March 9th, 2001*)

Has the world forgotten Vietnam?

John Livesey

Father Doan Thanh Vung's parish in northern Vietnam extends from Hon Gai to Mong Cai on the Chinese border. His parish church is St Marie Rose in Hon Gai, Halong Bay, and every two weeks he travels north to Mong Cai, a distance of about 150 kilometres, to say Mass.

Quang Ninh Province has some 13,000 parishioners and Father Vung is the only priest. The province is poor, but rich in resources of high grade coal, fishing and tourism. Little of their value trickles down. A monthly wage may be from US$40 to $200.



The ruins of St Marie Rose known locally as Nha Tho (The Church)

I first met Father Vung when exploring Hon Gai in 1991. I noticed a dome with a cross on the ridge line above Le Than Tong Street, and found that the dome and walls were all that remained of what would have been a substantial basilica. Mass is said in a small chapel and there about 500 families in the parish. Halong Bay, outside the tourist area, is addictive. It is a beautiful place. Each time I visit Vung, I learn a little more.

The church of St Marie Rose, known locally as Nha Tho (The Church), was built in 1909 during the French colonial period. It was destroyed on Christmas Eve 1967 during the American War.

Hon Gai claimed to be the most bombed town in Vietnam

When visiting in 1996, Vung told me about plans to rebuild Nha Tho. An American businessman, Alphonso DeMatteis, had offered to help. DeMatteis heads an established construction company in Hanoi with a head office in New York.

Knowing a little about the bureaucracy, which would have other priorities, I was sceptical. I was wrong. When

I next saw Vung in 1997, he told me that the plans and the rebuilding programme had been approved. The initial cost was estimated at US$250,000 and Mr DeMatteis had fronted up with a cheque for US$15,000, and an approved bank account had been opened in Hanoi.

Late last year I received a card from Father Vung. Knowing the difficulty in contacting him, I phoned the DeMatteis office in New York. I was told that the church had been rebuilt (*see above*) and, on requesting details, 16 pages arrived by fax, including details regarding fundraising, Mr DeMatteis' back-ground, and a photo of the restored church.

Rebuilding began in October 1998 and revised plans had cut building costs down to US$80,000. Parishioners had contributed US$20,000, the local People's Committee made a contribution, and US$20,000 was raised in New York. The rebuilding was completed in October 1999. It was built by the people.

So Nha Tho has been rebuilt and a lot of people have not forgotten Vietnam.

In a Church paper I received, it stated that "… some may find irony in US support for raising money to repair the results of US bombing". With due respect to the generosity and sincerity of those involved in the restoration, this is too dismissive and a dissembling of what was a huge tragedy.

The church in Hon Gai is the symbol for the greater shame, the bombing of North Vietnam from August 1964 to December 1974, the notorious Christmas bombing ordered by Nixon. Cam Pha to the north, Haiphong to the south, Hanoi, the dyke system on the Red River Delta and the killing, maiming, destruction, and huge war trauma (collateral damage) was the result of what has been described as a bombing campaign of maximum violence. Vietnam to many is a war, not a country. It haunts the American psyche.

Vietnam has a population of 79.4 million, 80 percent live in rural areas, and there is a 92 percent literacy rate (Asia Week). Included in most of the historical and social comment, the role of Catholicism is recorded, and not all of it complimentary. The arrival of missionaries led to French colonisation, the exploitation of resources, forced labour, through to contemporary times with the mass exodus of Catholics to the south in 1954. It is estimated that one million left, encouraged by American propaganda to boost the Diem regime in Saigon.

Vietnam is a graveyard of lost hopes, destroyed vanity, glib promises and good intentions

The Catholic population of Vietnam is estimated at 10 percent, the highest percentage in Asia outside the Philippines. Although Vietnam does not have the same restrictions as China, which insists on ordaining its own clergy, the exact nature of other restrictions is not clear, and could vary from province to province. It is the writer's experience that the cathedrals in Ho Chi Minh, Dalat, Hue and Hanoi do not lack big congregations, and in Hon Gai the doors of the chapel are opened and at least 200 people sit outside.

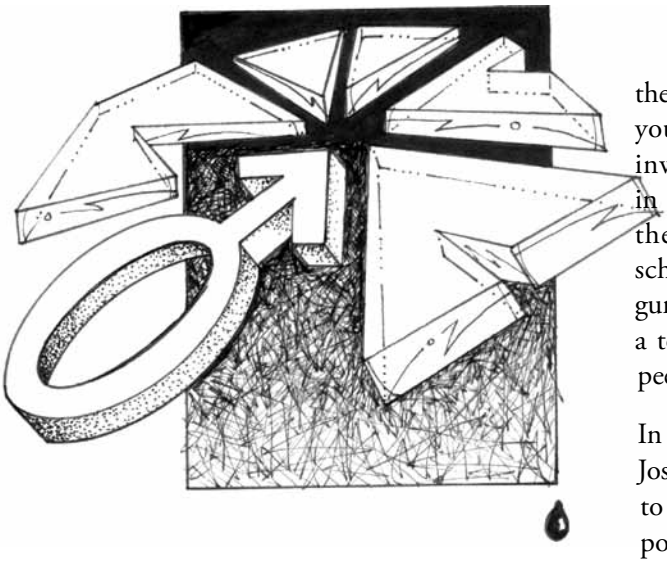
If you happen to be in Halong Bay, go to see Father Vung in Hon Gai. It is a ten-minute ferry ride across the inner harbour from Bai Chay (the tourist centre). The ferry costs 500 dong (NZ 16 cents). You may be asked to pay 10,000 dong. Don't panic, that's about NZ$1.30. Tell the man, with a smile, that you are not a blind chicken and give him 1000 dong. You will get a laugh if you can say it in Vietnamese. The foreigner is fair game here.

Find your way up to Nha Tho and say 'hi' to Father Vung for me, give him your chat, and before you leave offer a koha for the kids, or for the church, or just because you want to. Remember you are a seriously rich person here. ■

Author (right) with Fr Doan Thanh Vung, who has recently been made a bishop

Violence and Teenage Boys

Mary Eastham



Teenage boys are the most destructive group in any society. The reason? Testosterone – a powerful life force. Tribal societies responded to this biological fact by developing intricate initiation rituals to facilitate the transition from boyhood to manhood.

The purpose of initiation rituals/rites of passage is to channel powerful male energies into the service of the community by putting young men in touch with their masculinity – their physical strength, spiritual commitment and psychological endurance. To achieve this purpose, respected elders in the community – not older boys – removed young men from the company of women, scared them half to death, stood by their side and carefully monitored them as they endured an initiation ritual which often left physical scars for life.

Risk-taking, physical hardship and pain were involved, so that when young men emerged victorious – and they always emerged victorious – they could look back on this event with pride. They left the village as boys, but returned as men. These rituals were designed and perfected over generations to celebrate what it meant to be a man, not to humiliate anyone. No one ever lost. This point is crucial.

Rituals like this do not exist in modern societies; they are even considered barbaric. However, the high incidence of violent behaviour among teenage boys would suggest that something like initiation rituals is still needed. Consider the evidence. Gangs have become a way of life in Auckland and Christchurch as much as in Los Angeles. The 'rituals' youngsters concoct on their own to 'initiate' neophytes into their gangs are grotesque caricatures of the humane, purposeful events described above. Consider also the innumerable drink/driving incidents among teenage boys in which they risk their own lives and the lives of innocent others. And youth suicide – violence turned inwards – is a national tragedy in New Zealand. Look finally at the mayhem in American high schools, where young men turn guns on themselves after unleashing a torrent of violence against their peers.

In *The Power of Myth*, the late, great Joseph Campbell (who happened to be Catholic) suggested that the popularity of movies like *Star Wars* indicates that young men crave the kind of heroic journey Luke Skywalker endured. Why? Because they suffer from 'soul-loss'. Society no longer provides adequate answers to important questions, such as "What is the meaning and purpose of life?", much less meaningful rituals to enable young people to progress from one stage of life to another. Everyone is forced to make their own way. This is the nadir of individualism. It is catastrophic for adolescents who crave meaning, purpose and structure in order to chart their way through life.

In all tribal societies, respected elders preside over initiation ceremonies. Elders are not 'buddies', however close the biological relationship. Elders pass on the wisdom of the community which has to do with cherished values, standards of excellence, roles and responsibilities. Elders themselves embody these values. Perhaps the reason why so many young men today lack direction or guidance is simply because there are so few genuine elders around – mature men who wish to dedicate their lives to mentoring the next generation.

The very structure of modern life militates against this kind of mentoring relationship. The nuclear family is stressed to the limit. Both husband and wife work long hours away from home in order to pay mortgages and educate their children. Television has become a pseudo-moral authority for many young people. "See? Everybody's doing it." This is disastrous

because television is calculated to appeal to the most juvenile impulses of self-indulgence and irresponsibility.

What can be done? I grant the difficulties in prescribing solutions to such a delicate and heart-wrenching problem – yet, neither can we sit back and watch as so many young people are destroyed. Might I suggest the following? Would it be possible for members of community groups closest to the family – like churches and civic organisations – to see themselves as elders for the next generation and devise meaningful rites of passage, so that no one is lost for lack of guides or support from authoritative others? These rites must teach young people what it means to be a New Zealander, as well as what it means to be a healthy adult. Perhaps there is a bigger underlying problem here... Is New Zealand society healthy or is it suffering from 'soul-loss' as well?

Catholic communities possess the collective wisdom, sense of meaning and purpose, and commitment to the young to respond successfully to this challenge. Working with young people bears out the old truism that if you treat people greatly, they respond by showing their own greatness. Unfortunately, the converse is also true. If you treat people meanly, they respond with meanness. There is no truer reflection of ourselves than the one we see in the eyes of our young people. ■

Mary Eastham is a public theologian who lives in Feilding

The Meaning of Children

Priest-psychotherapist, Paul Andrews, lives in Dublin. He has been a regular visitor to New Zealand where his pastoral activity has included fly fishing

My first encounter with a new family is highly charged, with curiosity and expectation and nervousness. There was a time when I would want to gather every detail from the parents before meeting the child. I would try to get a sense of the family over three generations, from the grandparents to the child under scrutiny. I felt one could not know too much, not just about early history of the child, but about family myths, the financial ups and downs, employment of different members, health, conflicts within the family, skeletons in the cupboard in the shape of addicts or unwanted pregnancies or troubles with the law.

There is truth in that, but it can diffuse one's focus. Now I want above all to sense the *meaning* of the child to parents and to themselves. The children I have met stay in my mind with a distinct flavour. They leave an after-taste which is more revealing than any objective facts about them. This is seldom on the surface, and it is often obscure to the parents.

One child may become the conscientious one, who is felt by the others as representing conscience, perhaps in a reproachful way that is resented. I think of Michael, a large and terrifying adolescent, the eldest in a long line of sons. His exhausted mother left much of the 'rearing' of Alan the youngest, to Michael. In Alan's eyes Michael stood for mother (father was an absent alcoholic), for law, for religious observance, for getting homework done on time, for adding punishments at home if young Alan was punished at school for misbehaviour. Alan feared and hated his big brother, and was gently consoled at a later stage when Michael kicked over the traces.

The conscientious one often does tire of the role, and envies the younger ones who are allowed more rope, more expression of their instinctual energy, whether for pleasure or for anger.

What is dangerous in a family is the unconscious assigning of roles or meanings: where in mother's or father's mind Jane becomes the family's conscience, Danny the wild one, Deirdre the careful, calculating one, Matt the greedy one, Paul the jealous one, Louise the clown, Peter the cry-baby. Worst of all is when some child becomes the black sheep, carrying the role of scapegoat. This is never stated, so the child has no appeal against his rejection; it is implied by black looks and tone of voice. He becomes the one it is easy to blame, so he easily comes to live up to his reputation. In disturbed families, this sort of control is usually secret and hidden.

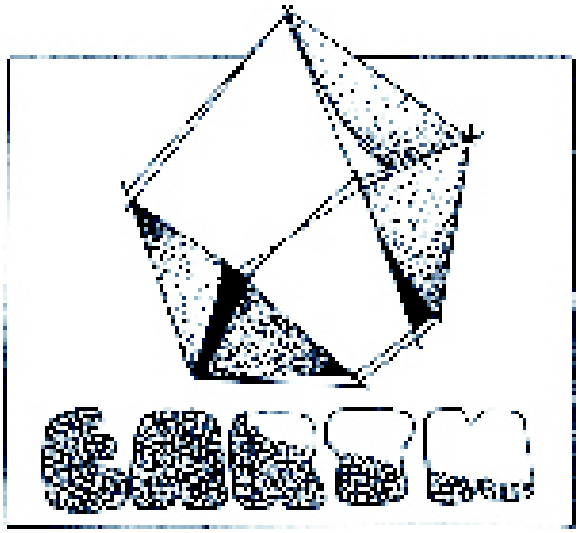
Where parents are aware of these meanings, they can control and alter them. There are times when the careful, calculating daughter longs to act uninhibitedly and spon-taneously; or when the wild, instinctual child wants to plan his life more carefully, or when the clown of the family wants to be taken seriously. Ideally all the children would have a balance of the conscientious, the controlled, the calculating and the instinctual.

Parents can sense the flavour of each of their children and that flavour can change with the years. Children can taste like a gift, a joy, a loan, a dead weight, a headache, a nuisance, a trophy, a prize bloom, a responsibility, an excitement, a possession, an insurance for old age, a worry, a nightmare. ■

Earth and Holy Spirit

In this second of four articles, Helen Bergin explores the relation of the Spirit with the element earth – and discovers no opposition

In very recent years, the amount of inner city subdividing within Aotearoa, and especially in the northern parts of the land, has increased greatly. Houses and apartments have been appearing in back sections causing residential land to be highly in demand. In outer regions of the cities, series of look-alike houses have been appearing on limited spaces of land where residents are being invited to live cheek by jowl in a new modern way of habitation. These ventures on the earth are utilising land to financial optimum. Recent incidents have been reported of agricultural and suburban land in both the South and North islands being classified as dangerous for animal, vegetable and human life because of humanly-dumped toxic wastes discovered beneath the earth. Do we hold responsibility for the way we regard our earth?



At face value, it might seem that the element 'earth' could not describe the Spirit of God since spirit and matter are often juxtaposed, even within the bible. Nonetheless, an eminent 20th Century theologian, Karl Rahner, has described the human being as 'embodied spirit' stressing that in the human being at least, matter and spirit are constitutively intertwined. I will suggest three connections between earth and the Spirit of God. For the moment, I am speaking of 'earth' as the ground or matter upon which we tread and in which many creatures dwell and grow.

• the fruits of the earth

In examining New Testament texts we hear these sorts of things about the relationship between earth and God's Spirit. Paul says to the *Galatians:* "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience." (5:22) A little later in the same letter, Paul says "If one's sowing is in the Spirit, then one's harvest from the Spirit will be eternal life."(6:8) The first link therefore, is that where God's Spirit is present, *certain everlasting fruits or harvests will co-exist.*

We note especially the verse in Luke's gospel referring to the Spirit's action upon Mary. Her cousin Elizabeth exclaims: "Of all women, you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."(1:42) In the Christian story, the fruit acknowledged here is the climax of earth's fruitfulness, the bringing forth of God in our midst. In the Christian experience, there is no story of liberation without the interrelationship of God's Spirit with God's earth. Yet, for all their interdependence, the Spirit and earth are also totally different.

Throughout the Christian tradition, the aspect of fruitfulness being a sign of the Spirit's presence is a recurring theme. Fruitfulness is related to the spirit-life of individuals and connected to the event of baptism. Basil of Caesarea in the 4th Century speaks of the two purposes of baptism as "First, the destruction of the body of sin to prevent it bearing fruit in death, second, life in the Spirit and the fruit borne in holiness."

'Fruits' may be one way of speaking but 5th century Cyril of Alexandria uses two other helpful images. He speaks of the Spirit becoming "woven into our being" so that "we are transformed . . . into another nature" *(Commentary on St John's Gospel Bk 11).*Those responding to God's Spirit are *a new weaving*. Cyril also speaks of the Spirit recreating "in a new pattern those among whom he is seen to dwell."Those responding to God's Spirit are involved in the making of *a new pattern* within the community. As with producing fruit, such images are tangible and visible.

• the earth giving birth

A second link between earth and Spirit appears in another Pauline letter where there is a 'groaning' of earth and human beings when imbued with the Spirit of God. *Romans* states: "We are well aware that the whole creation, until this time,

has been groaning in labour pains. And not only that: wetoo, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we are groaning inside ourselves, waiting with eagerness for our bodies to be set free." (8:22-3)

Earth and humanity experience *a common desire for freedom* when each is enlivened by the Spirit. Creation at present is partially aware but unable to know fully the gift of God's freedom. 20th century local poet Apirana Taylor in his poem *The Womb* conveys poignantly something of this ongoing surge and yearning of the earth:

> Your fires burnt my forests
> leaving only the charred bones
> of totara rimu and kahikatea . . .
>
> I am the land
> the womb of life and death
> Ruamoko the unborn god
> rumbles within me
> and the fires of Ruapehu still live

• the divine milieu

A third link is that the Spirit's role in the earth is that of causing the growing, the fertilising, the fruiting, the fulfilling. The Spirit is *the agent of livingness*. Another contemporary, local theologian Neil Darragh, captures this aspect when he writes:

> Creator Spirit within all being
> Spirit God beyond all dreaming
> Spirit holding each earth turning
> Stillness of the living Earth

At Home in the Earth

In a broader understanding of the word 'earth' - planet earth, or created universe - an image of God's Spirit as the enlivening power seems fully appropriate. 20th Century philosopher/ theologian Teilhard de Chardin says:

"Blessed be you, universal matter, immeasurable time, boundless ether, triple abyss of stars and atoms and generations: you who by overflowing and dissolving our narrow standards of measurement *reveal to us the dimensions of God...*

I acclaim you as the divine milieu, charged with creative power, as the ocean stirred by the Spirit, as the clay moulded and infused with life by the incarnate Word."

Hymn to Matter

Is this not a song to God working within the totality of earth's processes?

In offering analogies between the Spirit and any of the elements, we are speaking metaphorically, and this is especially so when we speak of Spirit linked with earth. Nonetheless, it seems especially important to reflect on earth and Spirit together in order to "ground" the activity of the Spirit. The Spirit affects earth's living here and now and not only in the hereafter. Poet Joy Cowley reminds us of this in lines from her poem, *A Song of Creation*. She writes:

> Way back, when this earth
> was a ball of fire in the void,
> the components of my being
> were as much there with you,
> as was my soul, oh God.
> Every atom of me that is now,
> was also then.

Perhaps the link between God's Spirit and God's earth needs to be further explored so that our sense of earth's mystery and

The First Disciple

The late, great ***Raymond Brown***, doyen of English-speaking Catholic Scripture scholars, in one of his last lectures describes an ecumenical study he took part in on Mary in the New Testament. Because of their differing traditions Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars tend to have different starting points in their approach to Mary. For this reason they found the only honest way to confront this variation was to study all the texts.

We worked chronologically, starting with the letters of Paul. In *Galatians* Paul speaks of Christ "born of a woman, born under the Law"(*Gal:4:4*). This means that Christ has solidarity with the human race and also with Judaism. "Born of a woman" is a Jewish idiom – a description of the common origins of all human beings. Catholics have sometimes used it as a basis for belief in the Virgin Birth. This is incorrect. Paul has no Marian emphasis, but then he tells us very little at all about the life of Jesus.

Evidently it was possible to preach the Gospel of Jesus in the earliest times, as Paul had done, without mentioning Mary at all. It is only in the gospels that Mary appears, apart from a reference in *Acts* to her presence in the community awaiting the coming of the Spirit (*Acts 1:14*).

Mark is the earliest Gospel. Mary is mentioned only once (*Mk 3:31-35*), and Jesus appears to be dismissive of her. When told his mother and brothers are outside, he says: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" He is asking who constitutes the true family of Jesus – and it appears that the disciples are his true family, not Mary and his blood relatives. His family are those who do the will of God. This is a principle he often returns to. It is from this text that many Protestants ask why Roman Catholics are so keen on Mary when Jesus himself asserts that believers are more important.

The context is Jesus' frantically busy ministry in Capernaum. Earlier, his family try to rescue him, saying "he is beside himself"(*3:21)*. Then the scribes come down from Jerusalem and say "he is possessed"(*3:22-27*). Finally the family arrive (*3.31*), it seems, to take him away and prevent his ministry continuing. Then, in chapter 6, Jesus returns to his home town Nazareth. The locals reject him, saying he is only a carpenter. Jesus retorts by saying "A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country and *among his own relatives* and in his own house".

As a Gospel *Mark* is only interested in Jesus, and no other character undergoes any development. No disciple emerges as a particularly noble believer. By

Virgin Mary as Tree of Jesse,
13th Century Berthold Missal

the starkness of his demands and his insistence on suffering, Jesus seems to bring out the worst in his hearers. Matthew's Gospel is different. He also is interested in the impact Jesus makes on the people who believe in him. But in *Matthew* we see a development of their characters, a development foreshadowing what was to happen later.

Where *Mark* totally ignores the origins of Jesus, both *Matthew* and *Luke* start with infancy narratives. Suddenly the family of Jesus becomes important. In Matthew's Gospel Mary is revealed in a dream to Joseph as being the vehicle of the Spirit in the conception of Jesus.

Since *Matthew* sees this positive role for Mary in God's plan, the passage (cited above in *Mark*) regarding the family of Jesus, is changed. *Matthew* omits the part about the family thinking Jesus is "beside himself". He still includes Jesus' greater emphasis on being a disciple than on being part of a family, but in the Nazareth scene (*Mt 13: 53-58*) Jesus is referred to as "the carpenter's *son*" and Jesus' reference to being without honour "among his own relatives" is left out.

The infancy narrative in *Luke* is not only very highly developed, but now Mary is the central figure. The good news is preached to Mary; she proclaims the *Magnificat*. She is always the main agent, and she is the only character from the infancy narrative, apart from Jesus himself, who emerges into the mainstream of the Gospel. She appears in the notorious scene taken from *Mark* and also before Pentecost, as referred to above. *Luke* depicts her as the most enduring figure among the disciples.

Luke retells the story of Mary and the brothers coming to Jesus (*Lk 8:19-21*), but in *Luke* there is no contrast drawn between the faithful companions inside and the interfering family outside, as *Mark* described it. Jesus simply says: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it". Here they are praised, not rebuked.

Luke carefully changes the context and places this passage after the parable of the sower and the seed. Jesus has said, as regards the seed falling in good soil, "they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience" (*8:15*). Then his mothers and brothers turn up, and they are clearly examples of this good seed. So by the time *Luke* is written, the attitude of believers towards Mary has changed, and she is held as the supremely faithful disciple – the first Christian, who

perseveres right through the story from the Annunciation to Pentecost.

At the Annunciation Mary was told she was to become mother of one, both son of David and Son of God. But this was in essence the Good News later proclaimed by Paul to the Romans: "the Gospel of God's Son, descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit.."(*Rom.1:3-4*). And Mary accepts, saying: "Be it done unto me according to your word"(*Lk.1:37*).

Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, who blesses her with an old Jewish blessing regarding the fruitfulness of the womb of one who does the will of God (*Lk.1:42*). She is blessed because she is mother of the Messiah. But Elizabeth goes on: "Blessed is she who believed.."(*v.45*). The blessing is twofold: who she is and what she does.

In response Mary blesses God with her *Magnificat*. God has humbled the proud and exalted the lowly. She foreshadows how Jesus is to interpret the Good News (see *Luke*'s Beatitudes, *6:20-26*). Mary hears the Gospel. She accepts it. And then she goes forth and proclaims it. This is the pattern of true discipleship.

Twice in this infancy narrative Mary "ponders in her heart" the events as they happen. She doesn't fully understand yet what it's all about. Simeon intimates that the Cross too will be part of the gospel. It includes bad news. She has to accept the 'offence' of the gospel as well as the glory. Every disciple is tested, and "a sword will pierce your soul also", says Simeon (*Lk. 2:35*).

So, during Jesus' ministry Mary is praised as truly being of God's family because she has heard the word of God and believed it. The other Gospels do not back away from *Mark*'s original emphasis on discipleship rather than 'family'. What they do is develop this teaching by recognising that Mary met the criteria of discipleship which establish her as belonging to the 'family of God'.

John has two scenes where Mary appears. They are quite different from what we have heard so far – yet their basic message echoes *Luke's*. At Cana the mother of Jesus is there with the brothers. She asks: 'Help our friends; they have no wine'. Jesus rebukes this purely family preoccupation – it is not his priority. Mary listens to her son, but goes on and tells the servants to proceed. And Jesus accedes to what she asks.

At the end of the Gospel, at the foot of the Cross, two figures stand who are unnamed. Jesus says: "Woman, behold your son... Behold your mother". The disciple whom Jesus loved becomes the son of Mary – and so, becomes the brother of Jesus. This brother Jesus truly embraces as family, because he is one who loves. And Mary is celebrated, not as Jesus' flesh and blood, but as the mother of the disciple. *Luke* depicted Mary as the first disciple. *John* acclaims her and the Beloved Disciple as the first members of the believing community which Jesus is about to leave behind.

What we are seeing, therefore, is a progression of belief in the early church. At first Mary is simply ignored. Then she is demeaned (*Mark*) because it is discipleship which constitutes the true family. Then she is acknowledged (*Matthew*) as belonging, because she meets the criteria of hearing the word of God and keeping it. Finally (*Luke* and *John*) she is acclaimed as pre-eminent among the disciples – the first disciple.

Such an ecumenical approach helps dispel the fears of many Protestants that Catholics have made Mary divine or given her privileges which belong to Christ alone. It keeps Mary on the human side of the human-God divide. She is a disciple. Pre-eminent if you like – but a disciple

Encouragement in mid-life

Sacred Journey: Spiritual Wisdom for Times of Transition
By Mike Riddell
Harper Collins
Price: $34.95
Review: Michael Hill ic

This is a really good book for a number of reasons. The first is it is very well written. It's a rich pleasure to be able to take up a book, open it practically anywhere and be lured into the text by an author who knows his craft. Mike Riddell has that skill in abundance.

He is also a vivid storyteller, and *Sacred Journey* is full of good ones which transform the monochrome of sound and sage spiritual counsel into full colour. A preacher could well use this book as a source of the sort of stories which bring sermons to life. Some are from Mike's own life, his inner journey, and even including tales of his family who are to be commended for their courage in allowing them to be retold. Other stories – parables – are recrafted from authors like Henri Nouwen or de Mello, but lose nothing in the retelling because they fit the theme and bring it to life.

Mike Riddell is a layman, a professional writer. Although he has spent much of his earlier life in pastoral work it is still a layman's book on spirituality. But the experience he draws on constantly is of one who has knocked about in the world, has made mistakes, who knows the joys and tragedies of married and family life from the inside, who has had to worry about money and having an income. Most spiritual books are written by clergy or religious, who for the most part are insulated from many of these daily concerns. This makes Mike's spiritual writing all the more real.

His theme is the midlife journey. Midlife can happen any time from 30 to 70. In essence it is about how to face change, to rejoice in it, to listen to God's voice whispering against a background of clamouring outside voices, to grow through it. Each chapter deals with a different topic. They are short and therefore the book can comfortably be taken up in those 'between times' in most people's lives when it's right to stop doing and just be for a short space. Each topic will yield nibbles of wisdom to chew over for the rest of the day.

There is also lots of humour. For instance, Mike has a spiritual director. It is Baxter, his dog. This faithful companion provides him with examples of the sort of simple wisdom self-important humans can learn much from. But they need to have time to pause and the humility to recognise that the whole world reflects the glory of God, not least the family dog.

Not all chapters spoke to me with equal force, but that probably says more about me than about the book. I found, however, I grew to like what I was reading more as the book progressed. In the second half there are (I found) most illuminating chapters on evil, on money, on mercy, on creativity.

There is a noticeable absence of God-speak. Scripture is occasionally quoted; the classic spiritual authors rarely. Indeed even God is alluded to specifically only a few times. Such frequent quoting and alluding, characteristic of so many spiritual works, seem unnecessary. Mike concentrates on the divine as he meets it in his own life and the common experience of humanity. One could say that in that sense God is lurking behind every comma.

This is a welcome addition to books I will want to go back to and therefore to keep by me. Do not miss it. ■

On living – For many years I longed to be a writer. I loved words and using them, but circumstance seemed to conspire against me. I had a marriage and children; I had paid work to perform; I had no time available to me. And yet still I dreamed of writing. The dream sometimes became a comfort blanket, and I would suck on its corners and feel sorry for myself that I was consigned to a life where I was unable to do that which I most wanted to. And then one day it came to me that if I wanted to be a writer, I had to choose to do so. It required me to begin writing (recipe for rabbit stew: first, catch a rabbit).

On money – We live in a culture which values commerce over faith, and regards it as self-evident that the pursuit of financial reward is a sufficient goal in itself. We also live in a culture in which people find themselves lonely, unsatisfied, empty and exhausted. It is worthy of consideration whether there might be some connection between these two conditions.

On facing change – I have a golden Labrador named Baxter, who serves as both companion and spiritual director. I watch him lift his nose to the breeze, sampling whatever mysteries are carried on the air. From time to time there is something so compelling that he will dart off into the distance, literally following his nose... I am trying to learn from Baxter the art of searching for that which is carried on the wind – the promise of adventures which lie beyond the horizon of the known.

Can a child be evil?

The Border Crossing
By Pat Barker
Pub. Viking
Price: $34.95
Review: Kathleen Doherty

The question of evil has long fascinated writers of fiction. The possibility that a child can be truly evil has held fascination since Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* gave it chilling expression. Now Pat Barker, who dealt with altered psychological states so convincingly in *Regeneration*, the first book of her trilogy set in World War 1, has given her attention to the horror of children who kill.

In *Border Crossing* her subject is a deeply disturbed young man who has been given a new name and a new identity as part of his rehabilitation following his killing of an elderly woman some 13 years earlier, when he was just ten. The publication of this novel in England a few months ago coincided with the debate about the imminent release of the killers of toddler Jamie Bulger under new identities and with a complete ban on public knowledge of their whereabouts and circumstances. Given Pat Barker's development of the theme of the nature of good and evil in many of her novels, however, the timing can been seen as coincidental rather than opportunistic, but possibly this novel is more relevant to more people than might otherwise have been the case.

The setting is the bleak northeast of England, in Newcastle, where the weather and the landscape cast a pall over the spirit. Psychiatrist Tom Seymour, who is at a critical stage in his own life, had 13 years earlier, decided that angelic-looking Danny Miller had a definite understanding of right and wrong when he battered his elderly neighbour to death. His evidence helped convict the child, now he is on parole and they meet again in very changed circumstances. It is an encounter which appears accidental but which has in fact been staged by Danny. Against all his better judgement the psychiatrist agrees to see him again in an attempt to help him work out what did in fact happen. But Danny, charming and apparently sincere, is dangerous and manipulative. His time at the reform school where he was first given the chance to turn his life around – the headmaster had no interest in what his troubled young charges had done, only in what they were going to do in the future – resulted in chaos in the lives of many who encountered him. His attempt, through psychotherapy, to reclaim his violent and abused childhood has the effect of making Tom doubt his professional competence and there is the ominous hint that all the talking in the world will not avert another tragedy in the future.

There are many borders crossed in this novel: between sanity and psychosis, between innocence and criminality, between illness and evil, between professional and personal relationships. In one particularly jarring crossing of the boundaries Ian offers Danny a whiskey before one of their sessions, a lapse in protocol which casts doubt on the whole integrity of the relationship. There is also the borderline personality disorder exhibited by the adult Danny which throws the psychiatrist into turmoil, his need to exhibit understanding and care conflicting with his known duty to do something about the danger which Danny poses.

Border Crossing is not a comfortable novel. The issues it addresses are too close and immediate for that. It does not provide the reader with the distance of years which allowed the *Regeneration* trilogy to be considered in a cerebral rather than an intensely topical way. But it is a rewarding read, and the prose is fittingly direct and unadorned. Pat Barker does not shirk from exploring aspects of humanity which we would rather did not exist. ■

A woeful slide into war

Crosscurrents
by John Honoré

And what rough beast,
its hour come round at last,
slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?
W.B.Yeats

Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Aqsa complex in Jerusalem last September ignited the new Palestinian intifada. He was accompanied by 1000 policemen who were supplied by Ehud Barak. Two days later Mohammed al-Durah, a twelve year old boy, was killed by a bullet from an Israeli position. Two days later again, two Israeli army reservists were lynched by a gang of Palestinians. These are the awful images that signal the end of the dreams of a greater Israel or a reunited Arab Palestine.

This new intifada seems adamant – Israel must choose between peace and settlements. The USA and the world must recognise the plight of the dispossessed Palestinians and admit that Israel is occupying Palestinian lands. three thousand years of Jewish history in Palestine are at stake.

Following the six-day war in 1967, which brought disaster and humiliation to the Arab world, The United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 242. This called for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from the territories and recognition of the Palestinians' right to political independence, free from threats or acts of force. Israel has not withdrawn from captured territory and the US refers to the territories as "disputed" rather than occupied. In response to this humiliation, Arab states decided on four guiding principles: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel and action to safeguard the right of the Palestinian people to their homeland. Since that time, Zionists abroad identify Israel with militancy and triumphalism and think of Arabs as a race of cowardly terrorists. As long as Israel also thinks like this, it will remain adamant in refusing the Palestinians equality and status as a national minority.

Peace and compromise have been shattered by Israeli intransigence, tacit US support and the worldwide unwillingness to criticise the Jews. The US supports the Israeli state with $US3 billion annually. It needs a buffer state in the Middle East to protect its oil interests. American Jews will have to stop thinking of Israel as the Lion of Judah and recognise the suffering of the Palestinians. Until this happens, Arab public opinion will always consider US mediation as suspect. Before his departure in January, Clinton maintained that the Palestinians were entitled to "a sovereign and viable" state as a matter of right. They share a common land with the Israelis. Does George W. Bush think the same?

The Palestinians have reached a point of despair. They live in fragmented settlements under harsh Israeli control where even their water supply is rationed. The election of Ariel Sharon, whom the Palestinians consider as the incarnation of evil, demonstrates the implicit Israeli objective of hegemony over the entire region. Over one million Palestinians live under Israeli occupation in Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza. They are not considered as full citizens but as foreigners in their own land. Under these conditions, violence and confrontation are inevitable.

Should there be a war and, pray God, not an extended war of religion, Israel would win. But even after a war, both sides would still have to discuss the same painful territorial issues and the Palestinian refugees' right to return. There is only one solution and that is the unilateral withdrawal by Israel from the territories and a declaration of Palestinian statehood in the West Bank and Gaza. This is now the 'sine qua non' of a peace in the Middle East. Without this, it is neither history's mandate nor God's will that Israel should continue to exist as a separate state.

In praise of wine

Easter is an end and a beginning. With the bright, warm and windless days over the holiday period in Canterbury this year, it was easy to forget the lack of rain and the ensuing problems. In celebration of this great Christian feast, I opened a bottle of St-Emilion '85, such wine that my father used to describe as "the baby Jesus going down the throat in velvet pants". I pondered on the imponderables of life, as one is inclined to do after a second glass, and renewed my vow not to visit a certain garden centre at any time during the next year. Why? Because it has become a metaphor for the materialism and the lack of spirituality so evident in a godless consumer society which seems unable, for even one day, to do without crass commercialism.

In order to balance my self-indulgence over the Easter period, I offered a bottle of Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc '90 to a friend, who prefers a white, in celebration for his life and the friendship that his whole family has given so generously and with such love over many years. The memory will outlast the fleeting taste of a good wine. I do not know when a life will end and a new one begin, but I remain grateful that there are moments which remind me of the joys of living and the precious gift of good friends. ■

Timothy McVeigh: breaking the cycle of anger

By the time you read this, barring some totally unlikely and unforeseen development, it may well all be over. Timothy McVeigh, a 33 year-old decorated veteran of the Gulf War, is to be executed by lethal injection on May 16 for the bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building in April 1995. It is the first federal execution in the United States for 38 years.

The bombing, the worst-ever act of terrorism on US soil, took the lives of 168 people, 19 of them children in a day-care centre in the complex. McVeigh admitted in an interview that had he known there was a child-care centre on site he might have switched targets. "That's a large amount of collateral damage", he said, ironically using the phrase which his military superiors used to describe the civilian damage caused in the Gulf War which had brought him military honours.

And now, piling killing upon killing, Timothy McVeigh is to die. He has been denied his wish to have a truly public execution, broadcast on television. Instead it will be viewed on closed-circuit TV to those of the victims who have chosen to see it, as well as those chosen by lot to be in the viewing room adjoining the execution room.

In the midst of the tasteless hoop-la surrounding the execution – the inflated hotel prices, the complex parking arrangements, the scramble for press accreditation, the souvenir buttons and T-shirts – there have been challenging words from Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein of Indianapolis. While not denying the enormity of McVeigh's crime or his concern for the victims and their loved ones, the Archbishop has stated that "the good of society requires that we rise to the challenge of a measured and larger vision".

One of the reasons that the church, he said, opposed the death penalty was because it could cause society more harm than good by feeding on the desire for revenge. "To kill people who have killed people, whether that's govern-ment sponsored or otherwise, is feeding a cycle of violence that I think is alarming."

And Cardinal Avery Dulles said that whereas in earlier eras governments could be seen to be acting symbolically on behalf of God as protectors of a transcendent order of justice, now they were seen to represent the popular will. The state was no longer seen as a superior institution but rather as an instrument of the people. "In this modern perspective the death penalty represents not the divine judgement on objective evil, but rather the collective anger of the group" he said.

Bud Welch, whose daughter was killed in the bombing, is determined to break the cycle of anger. When he became a spokesman for Murder Victim Families for Reconciliation he had no inkling that he would make the greatest move towards reconciliation that could ever be imagined – he sought out and met Timothy McVeigh's father. The two wept together for their children and have been in frequent telephone contact since the execution date was set. "We are in this together for the rest of our lives" Bud Welch said. "We cannot change the past, but we have a choice about the future."

Kathleen Doherty

The new broom in Sydney

Sydney is said to be the most godless city in the Australian Federation. Into this hedonists' paradise this month (10 May) strides George Pell, a conservative with clout well beyond the corridors of his Melbourne church bunker.

The newly-appointed Archbishop of Sydney, is, as people of strong viewpoints usually are, either much loved as the hero of the church as it should be, or roundly loathed as a man out of touch with the modern church (and Australian society). He is well known as a supporter of the Vatican's quashing of plans to open Australia's first medically supervised injecting room and for refusing Holy Communion to openly homosexual Catholics and their families.

The Vatican sees Archbishop Pell as the best man to stem what it believes is a decline in the Catholic church in Australia. He may prove to be the best man for the job, too, if he is able to take along with him in Australia's most prominent diocese enough Catholics who are deeply concerned about the erosion of their religion and the perceived wishy-washiness of church leadership.

One international commentator with long-time ties in Rome says Archbishop Pell was almost certainly hand-picked for the job by the Pope, not especially because he is conservative in doctrine and discipline, but more importantly because of his strength of personality. The Vatican wants leaders who will make their presence felt in and beyond their sees. In other words, you may disagree with what they say, but you will know they are there.

Unfortunately, the message that is being most loudly heard in the Australian church is that the Vatican is not interested in its views and opinions. Back in 1998, during the Synod of Oceania in Rome, the Vatican gave Australia's bishops a verbal rubber truncheoning because it perceived the church in Australia was allowing the faithful to deviate from the official line. Egalitarian might be a word Australians recognise, but the Curia doesn't. Many Australian Catholics believe Archbishop Pell was one of the local conservative Catholics who dobbed the church in.

As a result, when it came to deciding on the successor to Cardinal Clancy, the traditional and required consultation with the local church was scarce, almost non-existent. It is practically impossible to find an Australian bishop who was asked for his opinion.

And, herein lies the crunch. What price a strong, buoyant, focused regional office facing the new millennium with confidence when it knows it is basically not trusted back in head office and its foremost branch manager has been appointed with the main job of pulling it into line?

The body language around the table at the next meeting of the Australian bishops' conference should speak volumes. ■

R.O.O.