Tui Motu
InterIslands

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Benedict . . .

mid-term report

fires of hell

Contents

The word 'hell' has been used freely to describe the appalling fires endured in recent weeks by the people of Victoria. The choice of description is apt. Bush fires on such a destructive scale must rank alongside major earthquakes and tsunamis as being the ultimate in natural calamities.

When you are basking in the embrace of a beautiful summer, it is difficult to imagine the terrible suffering and suffocating heat, the despair of the survivors – let alone the horrible fate of those who died. There are two fine pieces of writing in this issue, both written by Australians – one from the distance of snowbound Geneva (*p 4*), the other from our regular Lutheran friend and contributor Norm Habel (*pp 16-17*), who has a notion of what it is like having survived Victorian bush fires in his early life.

But, he says, nothing could prepare Victorians for a holocaust on this scale. It surely must be the ultimate wake-up call for people in denial over global warming. Indeed, the prolonged droughts, the catastrophic floods – and then, these fires, have given 'the lucky country' as a description of contemporary Australia a hollow ring.

People in their grief will sometimes seek a scapegoat, someone to blame like the power companies or some misguided simpleton who lit a match. In one way it is better to do what the Psalmist would have done and simply blame God. Where was God in this? Norman Habel attempts to answer that too. He reminds us – a salutary reminder at the beginning of Lent – that we need to look upon Christ. After Calvary came Easter.

The one redeeming note has been the great wave of compassion, sympathy and solidarity among ordinary Australians as they stretch out their hands to the victims. We share this. Our cousins across the Tasman have never been closer to us. Our fire-fighters stand alongside theirs. Our prayers are continually with them. A catastrophe on this scale brings folk together as nothing else does. Hopefully, when the wounds are healed, we may be better people for it.

lent

Every year the cycle of the seasons brings us up short with the arrival of Ash Wednesday. The challenge is to give something up, to fast and give alms – to somehow pull our spiritual socks up. Kaaren Mathias, with characteristic wit, describes this shock to our comfy, self-indulgent systems. Lent is the annual wake-up call. It is like a cold douche.

This year we offer a series of articles on *Reconciliation and Healing*, a vital process in the Christian life since it is all about change. Lent is the right time to think about it and act upon it.

Out of his pastoral experience, Alan Roberts poses the challenge (*pp 8-9*).

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

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The move towards more frequent Eucharist since Vatican II has been largely successful – in the face of a more secular and pagan world. But we have to be honest and say that the church's attempts to reform the Sacrament of Reconciliation have largely failed. Why? Alan notes where the new liturgies can succeed.

In a complementary piece theologian Neil Darragh (*pp 10-11*) investigates the fundamental ascetical process demanded of reconciliation. He sees it as a fine balance between the twin themes of compassion and discernment. He too notes the church's failure to reform the liturgical practice.

The Biblical component is provided by Sr Barbara Reid (*pp 12-13*) who looks especially at healing and forgiveness in the Gospel of Matthew. She goes on to examine the human process of inner healing and all it entails.

Rich fare for Lent. It also provides a challenge to church leadership to somehow renew and rekindle our contemporary enthusiasm for the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

accountability

Pope Benedict has been in the news quite a bit recently, and not always for the best reasons. A friend of mine thinks Benedict is the best Pope we have had since John XXIII. I asked him why. He said it was because Benedict works hard to reconcile dissident groups. He is a peacemaker.

There can be no doubt that the reason he was elected so readily by the Cardinals after the death of John Paul II was that they felt at ease with him. He had been at the centre of things for so long that they all knew him. And he knew each of them by name. When they gathered for the Conclave, they found it difficult to go past this humble, natural human being. They saw him as a friend. They knew him and they trusted him.

He does not move round the world like his predecessor. Yet when he does make overseas visits he almost invariably leaves a good impression. His visit last year to the United States was an amazing success. He may not have the flair with the young that his predecessor had, but on his two World Youth Days he has spoken to the young people simply and directly – and they have loved him for it.

So what has happened? Jim Neilan (*p 5*) reviews some of his recent actions and puts his finger on where things have gone seriously amiss. He puts it down to a lack of consultation, even with some of the Cardinals who should be his closest confidants. Whatever his kindly intentions in trying to reconcile the followers of Archbishop Lefebvre, he is treading on very thin ice, and it is the loyal 'centre' which is beginning to feel unhappy with his actions.

There is a more general concern here. A word that keeps cropping up throughout this issue of *Tui Motu* is *accountability*. The world expects leaders to be accountable for their actions. In practically every walk of life, if we hold a responsible position we will periodically be expected to "give an account of our stewardship". It may be the way we have exercised leadership, or the way we have managed money, or simply the way we behave publicly. Leaders are praised for being strong – but they are praised even more if they are wise and if they are accountable.

John Honoré looks at the recent scandal with the Otago District Health Board over the embezzlement of funds (*p31*). It is one thing for miscreants to be prosecuted. But someone failed to audit properly and millions of dollars were lost. Ultimately it is the person in charge where the buck stops.

And the same applies to the church. The rash of cases of sexual abuse by priests and religious has been a huge embarrassment. But cover-ups by religious superiors, failure to compensate victims, to deal adequately with the perpetrators and do everything possible to prevent it happening again: these omissions have been the greater scandal. Bishop Geoffrey Robinson wrote a stinging indictment of the way the church has handled these cases two years ago (*see TM Oct '07*). There has been no adequate answer.

We look to the Holy Father to set the ultimate example in accountability. He has committed some extraordinary gaffes, which have caused grave offence outside the church. It may be that his advisers have been at fault, or it may be that the Roman system has become so centralised and autocratic that the Pope becomes isolated from those to whom he is ultimately answerable, namely the faithful in the pews and the bishops out in distant lands.

Rome can do better than this. If the official voice of the church is known to be well considered and to speak with wisdom, then its authority will be respected, and its voice will be heard favourably far beyond the confines of Catholicism. That is true leadership.

M.H.

Reading *Tui Motu*

On that day – it was sunny.
There was no excuse for such sorrow – but suddenly, turning the pages of a monthly magazine, there were tears. As I said, why cannot I love as do these people?
And was it just my imagination, or wishful thinking. I seemed to hear someone saying: not to worry – love me as you do, even if there is no sun in your sky and the night of the soul is dark.

Phyllis Burland, Havelock

TM *February* issue

Scanning this issue Kaaren Mathias is good – last two paragraphs stunning.

letters to the editor

They made me laugh... "the bloke who walked on water for a laugh". That's great!
...and Daniel O'Leary. I'm glad what was chosen for the subheading was that sentence. The last half of the story held a precious key, and his mother's blessing brought tears to my eyes.
But my favourites in the issue are Jim Consedine and John Honoré.

Cecily Sheehy, Auckland

Thanks and suggestions

I enjoyed the article on Sr Barbara Reid in the *February* issue. Can we have more of this Scriptural interpretation in *Tui Motu*. I'm sad to hear that Sr Susan Smith is no longer doing her column.
I love the new use of colour.
It would be good to see an article on Fr Maciel and the *Legion of Christ*. Unfortunately the cover up goes all the way to the top. Someone needs to start demanding accountability from the boys in Rome – putting the interests of the victims and our children before covering for those in power.
Something on Wagner in Linz would be good too as an example of how lay action can return to the very ancient tradition of rank and file input into selecting bishops.

Chris Sullivan, Pakuranga

thoughts on the Victorian fires from faraway

I sit in my room in France and the distance between here and there has never seemed so great. On the day of the *National Apology* the emotion was palpable over the seas. Then I realised that there's something different about being there, standing on the same dirt as your fellow countrymen, facing the same national stage side by side. It cannot be replicated on the internet or television. It is the slow conversations that unravel during and after the event – the sharing in the kitchens, playgroups, work places and on the street – that make the tragedy and collective sorrow real and understood.

But that event was welcomed. This one is different.

My sister sent me an email on 8 February after coming back from our parents' place in the bush. She'd been crying for hours and said: "I drove back from Mum and Dad's this morning and this may sound weird but it was like everyone in all the cars in the traffic were all thinking the same things. We were all in shock and mourning together, and were connected. It was so quiet and calm."

My friend in Melbourne was in the supermarket and people commiserated down every aisle. My sister went to give blood, but couldn't get past the crowds of people thronging to donate. At moments like this an invisible connectedness arises in public spaces between neighbours and strangers. The sober act of focusing on someone else's suffering mixes in the air between strangers, until an unquantifiable, collective compassion helps the healing.

Naturally my French friends don't recognise that the father who lost his child sounds just like my brother, or the house razed looks like my parents' place, or have memories of that beautiful town in the hills which is now rubble. They don't have cousins at the Whittlesea Community Centre or know people living alone in the Yarra Valley. But they know the value of human life because regardless of nationality we all have families and loved ones we can't imagine losing.

I have lived in the bush where my father fought fires from the roof of our house. I have driven though decimated towns and know the combustible qualities of gums. So I connect via the internet and listen to fathers break down as their daughters are rescued by their brothers. I see women weeping on the roadside with nothing but the clothes on their back. I see red – and outside it's white. All I can do is hope, pray and give.

I have never been prouder of my people, nor as sad for what they are enduring, and it doesn't really matter whether I am here or there. What it's about is making sure that the connections built in the past few days sustain those who need them, and there are plenty of people on the ground to do that.

Other countries have civil wars, despotic governments and lethal levels of class difference as their Achilles' heel. Ours is a tough landscape that, when ignited, is unforgiving, riding over us as if we never existed. It's that revelation of smallness, that humility before such indiscriminate power, that binds us. We share the same dirt and know that 'there but for the grace of God go I'.

We all know this truth regardless of how far we travel from home.

Bronwyn Lay

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the Benedict report – part 2

In the March 2008 Tui Motu, *Jim Neilan gave an assessment how Vatican Council teachings were promoted during the first three years of the present Pope. One year on, he takes another look.*

I'm looking again at three areas of church life, which the popes and bishops of the Second Vatican Council considered in need of reform; the liturgy of the Eucharist, ecumenism and collegiality.

The ongoing encouragement of the 'Tridentine Mass' by Pope Benedict seems directly opposed to the Council's wishes and subverts one of its central initiatives. It surely cannot be squared with Pope Paul VI's words about the revised rite of the Mass – that we need to go back to the way the Eucharist was celebrated in the earliest days of the church, "a tradition that has been obscured in the course of centuries".

Pope Paul warned that people refusing to accept the reforms were making the Mass into a symbol of rebellion against the council itself. This is exactly what Archbishop Lefebvre did. He founded the *Society of Pope Pius X* in 1970 to carry on "true traditional Catholicism" and rejected crucial Council teachings. When he ordained priests and bishops without permission he, and they, were automatically excommunicated by Pope John Paul II in 1988. Four of these bishops have outlived Lefebvre, and now Pope Benedict as a "paternal act of mercy" has lifted their excommunication. One wonders what John Paul would think.

The world's press has highlighted a puzzling aspect of this decision, asking how one of these men, so extreme in his anti-Semitic views that he publicly denies the Jewish holocaust, can possibly be promoted to a senior position in the church? Catholics, including some cardinals and bishops, have other serious questions. How can men who have never retracted their 40 years' passionate rejection of key teachings of an ecumenical council be part of the church's hierarchy?

The setback to ecumenism because of this action of the Pope has also been well publicised over recent weeks. Archbishop Lefebvre and his followers have always been anti-Jewish. They have savagely rejected the Council's teaching about the Catholic Church's relationship with fellow Christians and those of other faiths and have denounced the document on freedom of religion. Have these 'new bishops' really had an about face? Their reinstatement is another setback to the Council's hope of closer relationships with other religions.

All of this ties in with a third important reform advocated by Vatican II – ***collegiality***. Perhaps this is where a lot of the trouble originates – the failure to balance the role of the Pope with that of the world's bishops and to acknowledge what the Council's *Constitution on the Church* says: that "bishops govern the particular churches entrusted to them as the vicars and ambassadors of Christ… each individual bishop represents his own church, but all of them, in union with the Pope, represent the entire church" (*Vat II: Constitution on the Church*).

In the light of what has happened recently, we have to ask just how committed Benedict is to working in union with his fellow bishops. Who did he consult before inviting the Lefebvrist bishops back into communion with the church? German, Austrian and French cardinals and bishops were aghast at the news, and churchmen all round the world have been trying to smooth the ecumenical waters.

More recently, against the advice of the local bishops, Father Gerhard Wagner was appointed auxiliary bishop of Linz, in Austria. This is a man who has stated publicly that Hurricane Katrina was God's judgment on the homosexuals and abortionists of New Orleans and that the Harry Potter books are "works of Satan"! Fortunately, the priest has since asked for the appointment to be withdrawn. Nevertheless, Pope Benedict had thought him suitable.

Immense harm has been done to the reputation of the Pope, the Vatican and the church as these recent events have made international headlines. "Once again the church has been made to look stupid. At a time when it should be dealing with the crucial worries that face people today, such as the financial crisis and unemployment, it is confronted with debates about a small group who refuse to recognise crucial parts of the Vatican Council. As well, we are faced with the uproar concerning the new bishop's appointment. This is all a bit much and can give rise to a feeling of hopelessness." These sombre words come from Cardinal Schönborn, the Archbishop of Vienna.

Big changes are needed if the church is to live out the hopes of the Vatican Council. We pray that Lent, the season for taking stock, rethinking and changing our ways, will find open hearts and minds in Rome.

faith and the financial crisis

Alan Rodgers-Smith

In the DecemberTui Motu Jim Consedine took issue with the decision makers of the world's economic system, accusing them of having a blind trust in "market forces", being obsessed by personal greed and ignoring the principle of the common good. Pope John Paul, he said, insisted any system based solely on avarice is contrary to the gospel. Here, a critic demands right of reply. Christians and Catholics from the Pope down are part of the 'economic system'. That system can only be healed from within, not by attacking it from an ivory tower outside.

the current crisis

There are probably no easy ways to write about the current financial crisis from the point of view of being Catholic. Unfortunately Jim Consedine doesn't deal with them in his article. I suspect a number of reasons for this failure.

Firstly, there is no coherent theology within Catholicism to deal with the financial system in general, let alone a major financial meltdown. There are few theologians or priests that have experience in the financial system. If there are some, it would be good to hear from them right now putting critical thoughts together.

Secondly, Catholicism does not have a coherent theology of the response of the citizen to the state. There are many edicts from the church over the last century to obey one's conscience, and to critique the worst of the system. But to be honest Christianity was never built to be revolutionary – at best it will ameliorate the worst of capitalism's excesses. If the revolution comes in any guise it will not be because of Catholicism. And that's okay.

Thirdly, there is of course the problem of the Pope's shoes. It is very difficult for the Catholic church to launch a full-frontal assault against the financial failings of the world when ours is the most ostentatious religion of them all, possibly the most gilt-laden institution outside the Brunei royal family. If we were honest, the gilt and the formality and sheer richness is one of Catholicism's main attractions. It has the bling. The Pope may not wear actual Prada, but they are mighty fine shoes.

Fourthly, the main problem is that Jesus never had a mortgage. Or raised kids. Or indeed had any debt at all so far as we know. So using the words of Jesus to critique the arrangement of these things in the world is problematic. Prophets are harder to trust in any guise now because of the speed of media amplification and distortion.

Despite the regular pronouncements of presidents and kings before they go to war, God does not vote socialist, Republican, National, Conservative or Labour. We should really get past presuming that Christianity can solve everything, particularly when political processes have been designed to do a better job.

what Fr Consedine says

He proposes that "we have created a global system built on usury". There is a problem with analysing the politics of the world with the accuracy of a house-painting brush. Firstly, debt has been used well by billions for many centuries. Including by the church. The church is one of New Zealand's savviest real estate players. So is the Anglican Church's *Melanesian Trust*. Property is not theft. Property is one of the main ways to personal autonomy.

You can fight the Power. Or you can be the Power. Choosing power means

choosing harder and harder moral choices, until you get to the point where it becomes very, very hard to get into the Kingdom of Heaven indeed. We are not on the earth to take the easy path into the Kingdom.

Father Consedine is clear that capitalism relies on "prevailing systems to work things out for the common good. All the evidence is – these systems can't and don't. They are social systems driven by avarice."

Any good Christian anarchist will tell you that it's not the wrong systems that ruin the world; it's something in the sinful will of people to control other people and generally screw things up. There are no systems that will fully reveal the Kingdom of God. All systems are fallen. But exactly what is the point of wallowing about in 'Christian Left melancholy' like low-church Calvinist pessimists?

Father Consedine says: "In the past 20 years we have generally reverted to being a devotional church, and social justice issues have largely been ignored."

If we took that as true – a fairly substantial insult to the millions who do social good for the church – it could be because neither the Catholic Church nor sufficient Catholics have felt that there was cause to really protest against capitalism. In the past 20 years, times have been up and down, but not enough to break Christianity out of its core religious function.

Father Consedine says that "the heart of capitalism lies in making money". Please don't tell me that the alternative is a kind of Christian Fabian socialism. If the Essenes were really having a good time in their caves, eventually they would have got cable, broadband and a coffee roaster. Let's face it: the Essenes were miserable. And those monasteries that practise voluntary poverty are closing down faster than car dealerships.

I would also encourage us all to re-read those parables of Jesus in which he condemns people for investing their money too safely and praising those who make a strong return, denigrating those who don't work their land productively enough, and in fact condemning to death trees and vines that did not produce well. Stop trying to turn them into metaphors for some mild spiritual guidance. It's about the money.

Father Consedine asks us "to imagine if one billion Catholics took a stand together for economic justice in their lives and society". Other than those based in the United Nations, most of the aid and development organisations are either actively Christian or have a very strong Christian origin already. It would perhaps be more interesting to see what the world would look like if all the Christian volunteers in the world walked off the job for a couple of months. Imagine that. Hundreds of millions of Christians take stands against economic injustice every day of the week. The rest of us have the energy to feed the kids and put our socks on when we get out of bed.

God bids us to struggle with the world, and use all we possess to will the Kingdom to come

conclusion

Money is hard. Power is hard. Responsibility is hard. Railing against the system with rhetoric and occasional symbolic protest is easy – and, I would suggest, weak. It is a recipe for the world to simply pass you by, like a firefighter who manages to keep a small circle of grass green and wet when an entire forest fire has long since turned the rest of the world to black cinder. Christianity for the fallen world could be summed up with a lot of training and the words *Crouch, touch, engage!*. The world is muscular and cruel. This is the spectrum of choices we

must all make between living the life of St Francis, and living the life of Bonhoeffer or Bultmann.

If you can feel your soul making compromises while you are at work, or with the investments you put money into, or the charities to volunteer in, then you are in the right game because good and evil are in contest. And you and the church will ensure that good wins. Just because I am compromised doesn't mean I live a less holy life. I would propose the opposite: God commands us to really struggle with the world, and to use everything we possess – and I mean *possess* – to will the Kingdom to come.

If we think that the current financial crisis illustrates the world as any more or less fallen than it has been since World War Two, then we are simply ignorant. A few Catholics have complained in a radical way about the unalloyed, petrol-driven, Barbie-doll, consumer fantasy that has existed in OECD countries for the six decades since World War Two, and they were generally ignored, silenced, or excommunicated. Come on, be honest!

For me the contemporary crisis tells us only that we are grossly under-theorised about structure, money, and the state, but that each of us has no choice but to work harder with everything we have for the good of us all. ■

Alan Rodgers-Smith is a parishioner at St Patrick's Cathedral, Auckland. He works for local government, finding funding for large scale infrastructure projects

confession – reconciliation . . .

the change that barely happened

Alan Roberts

I want to emphasize that what I have written here is based on my experience in pastoral work as a priest, by no means the experience of all. I have always taken a particular interest in this subject and have been through many stages in my own appreciation of this great gift.

Only in some respects do I regard the decline in the use of Confession as good. It is the lack of renewal which has barely taken place

Sacrament of Reconciliation

In the Catholic tradition the use of this sacrament has varied hugely throughout 2000 years. In the early church people did public penance for grievous public offences. It was reserved for very serious sins. In the Middle Ages this evolved into private confession to a priest.

Frequent private confession was encouraged by St Philip Neri in the 16th Century and by new religious congregations such as the Redemptorists and Passionists in the 18th. Regular private confession in a box with the priest hidden behind a grill was the norm for most practical Catholics up to the Second Vatican Council.

The Council prompted the revision of most sacramental rites. Later, Rome promulgated the use of three alternative rites of Reconciliation:

The ***First Rite*** revised the form of private confession, offering a face-to-face alternative to the grill, replacing the box by a reconciliation room and introducing the use of Scripture.

The ***Second Rite*** was intended for use by parish congregations: it has a service of the Word followed by the chance to come up to a priest for a brief face-to-face confession and absolution. The emphasis is on communal sins affecting everybody.

The ***Third Rite*** does away with the personal encounter and is centred on General Absolution of all those present. It is clearly to be preferred when there are insufficient priests available to have the Second Rite.

There was a ritual set out and used for many years. Then, for the most part, all of that stopped. When communal reconciliation came in, few attended if they were required to go to individual confession as they had done before... except, when a communal celebration of everyone writing their sins on paper and presenting this to the priest was introduced, or the penitents were encouraged to make a very simple confession standing before the priest. The numbers increased, and where the practice remained, continued to increase year by year, even to the extent of filling the church.

Going from memory the various stages was somewhat like this:

in the 1970s. . .

. . .an encouragement to approach the priest face to face and talk more freely about one's life, rather than just listing 'sins' we often half-heartedly confessed. Sitting face to face would assist the priest to better communication with the penitent. It would encourage dialogue and help turn the sacrament into an opportunity for Scripture based spiritual direction as well as confession.

The priest would need to be able to cope with this. He would need to be a good listener and know how to use Scripture to direct the penitent. The penitents would have to be open to this change. They ideally would have reflected before approaching the sacrament that was with good reason now called 'reconciliation'. *This was the essence of the renewal.*

what happened?

Unfortunately, we were so well grounded in the old approach the change for many could not take place. Many priests couldn't cope, and a majority saw the change only that the screen was no longer compulsory.

A few understood and were glad to talk openly and freely. Others baulked completely and found somewhere else to go, or just continued 'business as usual' behind the screen. This latter has continued to the present day in some parishes.

1980s-1990s

Crowds attended the communal celebrations, particularly when they were asked to write down their confession and present it to the priest. The comments from the people were always positive, some saying that for the first time they understood how a Christian community celebrating like this explains that that we are all sinners and we support one another. Others commented that by writing out their confession they realised the destructive force of their sins.

2000

Crowds still come to the communal celebration. We estimate that over half of our regular congregation attends. We use the Third Rite because the shortage of clergy makes it impossible to have Rite Two in this setting.

So why this preference? Is it that the people don't want to own up? Is it that they don't believe in confession? What can be said is that they no longer want to go through what had become for them a meaningless ritual. They have voted with their feet.

The above is not to say they don't believe in the importance of Confession. It is just that at this point they don't feel the need. Whatever the case, they certainly appreciate the opportunity of coming together as a community and renewing their appreciation of being forgiven.

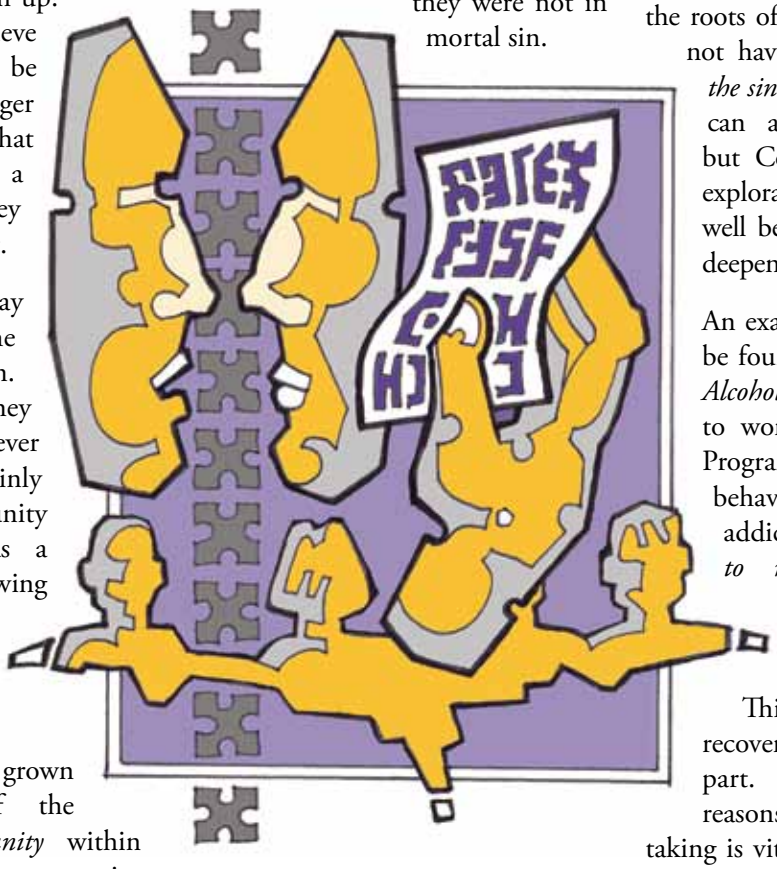
reflection

Over the years I have grown increasingly aware of the importance of *Community* within the church. Of this I am certain: communities are the best preachers of the gospel and by far the most effective evangelizers. When community exists, the RCIA thrives, hospitality is notable, spirituality and openness to justice become evident, and the liturgy is vibrant. The stranger will comment.

When therefore we have the Third Rite, the examen is always focused on the responsibility we have to our parish community, rather than on a personal and narrow approach to our Christian life. This responsibility is an aspect of repentance that has become so important to me, that even if there were a mass return to personal Confession, I would still advocate the Third Rite as an equally important liturgy in our Catholic lives.

Renewal of personal confession

The only people obliged by the church to go to personal Confession are those in mortal sin; that is, people who have committed some serious sin that can lead or has led to the death of their relationship with God. It would be a shallow person, however, who believed they didn't need confession because they were not in mortal sin.



If an unexamined life is not a human one, then surely we need to be alert, for even the smallest of faults has a habit of quietly growing into something more serious. What has been rejected is Confession being an exercise where there is little reconciliation and is carried out with some vague hope of gaining grace. We all know there is more to it than that.

If an unexamined life is not a human one, then we all need confession for spiritual growth. There is a problem though. *Is the Sacrament of Confession enough or even a good thing in the beginning when mortal sin is committed?* Mortal sins often imply something seriously wrong: excessive gambling, frequent drinking, sexual aberrations and deep resentment: these issues reveal a deep seated self centeredness because the heart is taken over with the illusion of a false god. I ask the above question because these 'sins' are really addictions. They need therapeutic treatment, at least to some extent.

To confess is certainly useful, but if one confesses simply to become free of guilt or shame and not to deal with the roots of the problem, then do we not have to ask: *are we enabling the sinner to carry on?* Spirituality can assist therapy immensely, but Confession without further exploration (therapy) could well be enabling the problem to deepen.

An example of what I mean can be found in persons who attend *Alcoholics/Addicts Anonymous* to work through the 12 Steps Programme. While much of their behaviour can be attributed to addiction, they are encouraged *to make a searching and fearless moral inventory of past behaviour and acknowledge it to another.* This is just part of the recovery, albeit an important part. Today, examining the reasons for drinking or drug taking is vital, and this needs to take place with competent people. The same can be said for pretty well all of our actions that can lead to the death of our spiritual life.

The moral inventory is, in fact, a confession. When completed, the individual often feels enormous relief. Their secrets are shared. For a Catholic, the bringing of all this together in prayer and receiving Absolution would complete the process. But this leads me to ponder how wonderful it would be if, when appropriate, a Christian counsellor or female spiritual director were to pronounce the words of Absolution after listening to a person humbly read their inventory. Has the time come for the church to widen the delegation of authority to pronounce forgiveness in the name of Christ and the church? ■

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reconciliation: a sacrament in search of a future

Neil Darragh

The sacrament of Reconciliation, like all the sacraments, expresses some of the deep beliefs of the Christian community. Our participation in it absorbs us into those beliefs so that they become part of our consciousness and shape our lifestyles. But, again like all sacraments, it may fail.

Historically, Reconciliation has dramatically changed its form from the Public Penance of the early church for those who had seriously betrayed the Christian community, to the medieval practice of Private Confession for all sins, and now the three different forms of the new Roman rite.

These forms of the official sacrament have also been supported, or challenged, or resourced by a large number of popular practices of religious reconciliation that include private prayer, unofficial liturgies of many kinds, penitential actions, pilgrimages, acts of charity, acts of self-discipline, spiritual direction, retreats, apologies and acts of compensation. These also have changed in style and popularity throughout the history of the church.

A sacramental liturgy expresses, even if sometimes inadequately, deep beliefs of the Christian community. Primarily these are beliefs about God. These beliefs about God, then, have strong implications for the life of the Christian community and for individual attitudes and behaviour. Although the liturgical forms of Reconciliation have changed over time, there is a central theme throughout that expresses a constant Christian belief. This is the double-stranded theme of *compassion and discernment*.

compassion

God is compassionate. God forgives. God's love definitely takes this particular form. This is the understanding of God portrayed in the life and ministry of Christ. And this understanding of God has the implication for the community of disciples that they also be compassionate not only towards one another but to all other people and all living beings.

It further implies a basic understanding of humanity, in that it sees being compassionate as transforming for human persons and communities. It sees being treated with compassion as also transforming. Compassion as a fundamental stance on the relationships among living things is a rejection of some alternative stances such as a belief in fatalism, in the unpredictability of life, in the non-existence of evil, in a strict accounting for every action, in the law of vengeance and in the righteousness of the upright.

discernment

God's stance towards human behaviour is not indifference, not just unconditional love whatever you do, but invitation, challenge, affirmation or disapproval. The implication for the Christian community is that discipleship includes a continuing search for those actions and attitudes that connect us into God's life and a turning away from those which do not. This is a search to discern good and evil. It implies too that the Christian community sets standards and boundaries for its behaviour and membership. Unless it does so the community loses its identity as Christian, its connections into the life of God, and its capacity to give witness to the wider society of a transformative life-style.

The key belief affirmed in the

sacrament of Reconciliation is that the two strands of the compassion-discernment theme are interwoven, and we are always trying to balance them. With compassion alone we would have no way of promoting good or combating evil. With discernment alone we would be judges without empowerment.

What is asked of the Christian community is not just forgiveness but also wise judgment; not just release from the past but also conversion to a new future; not just picking ourselves up out of the mud, but groping for firm ground ahead; not just doing good, but also avoiding evil. Reconciliation appears, then, as a continuing process.

This transformation will have occurred, and continue to occur, as the Christian community is able to embody within itself these twin principles of compassion and discernment. And in embodying these principles within itself, that community will also provide witness and acquire the skills to achieve compassion and discernment in the wider society.

While we find this double-stranded belief throughout the history of the sacrament of Reconciliation, we are also conscious that sacraments can fail. We have to assume, I think, that when the form of a sacrament changes, this is because the earlier form has failed in some serious way. The older form of Public Penance failed in the sense that people stopped participating in it. It was gradually replaced by the medieval form of Private Confession which continued through to the 20th century.

Following the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s the form of Reconciliation was again revised and we now have three alternative rites:

- the Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents,
- the Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution,
- the Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution.Even the names of these rites should already give us forewarning that all is not clarity and light here.

The form of the sacrament as *Private Confession* (and its new and very similar 20th-century replacement, the Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents) has now also failed in the sense that people have stopped participating in it. Most current members of the Catholic Church never participate in it nowadays.

The contemporary *Communal Rite* ('Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution') has been seen as the promising new form of Reconciliation, but it still struggles to gain popularity and again many current Catholics have never participated in it or participated only as children.

The contemporary *Third Rite* (Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution) also looked promising for a while, but is being discouraged from Rome. Only a few parishes in New Zealand have ever succeeded in making this form popular. The net result is that although faithful Christians can find other ways of dealing with and recovering from sin, that double-stranded message of compassion and discernment which should be absorbed into our consciousness and our lifestyles through sacramental practice, is not reaching the majority of otherwise faithful Catholics.

why do people not come?

Why are faithful church members voting with their feet in opposition to the current forms of this sacrament? Some church officials have suggested that this is because people have lost a sense of sin. This is unlikely in New Zealand at least where the pursuit of sin and sinners, the demand for accountability, the encouragement to report offences, and the requirement to 'fess up' is more popular in society and the news media than ever before.

A more likely reason is that our definitions of what is sin – and in that sense what is confession material – are changing. So too we are re-arranging our understandings of what is serious, minor or merely trivial. This means that people do not quite know what to say out loud about their sinfulness in Reconciliation. And when they do find words for it, they do not know whether they can trust the priest to understand them.

The experience of Reconciliation is intimate and vulnerable. The experience of being misunderstood, or the slightly abusive experience of being given unasked for advice by someone who has only known you for about 20 seconds, or the experience of foolish advice untouched by modern psychology or liturgy or wisdom, are experiences not to be repeated.

At this point the Communal Rite still looks the most promising form for the future. But for that to happen priests will first have to re-learn what sinfulness is and re-learn their role in accepting people's confessions. ■

Dominican Sr Barbara Reid conducted Scripture seminars in New Zealand during January. Here she examines aspects of **reconciliation**, *looking especially at the Gospel of Matthew. She sees it as a process of individual and social healing*

forgiveness, healing and reconciliation

In *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke* Jesus and the disciples carefully avoided passing through Samaria, because the Samaritans generally were hostile to the Jews and vice versa. But in *John* (*Ch 4*), Jesus deliberately engages with one of the 'hated' Samaritans.

He speaks to her in terms which she is able to identify with, and in a manner which chimes in with her experience. He speaks in her own language, and common ground is established between them.

Yu Jiade: *The Woman of Samaria*. From *Christ For All People*, ed Ron o'Grady. By kind favour.

The dialogue between them is 'real' and this allows an authentic, 'two way' revelation between them. Step by step the journey is taken from hostility or suspicion to mutual understanding.

The painting, by Chinese artist Yu Jiade, captures this beautifully. By offering her the water of eternal life, Jesus overcomes the woman's fear and prejudice. The encounter becomes a peak moment of mutual understanding and conversion.

forgiveness, healing and reconciliation

In *Matthew*'s Gospel forgiveness is a principal theme. In all the Gospels God is descibed in terms of all-encompassing love. We never find an image of a God needing to be appeased on account of human sin. Nor is the mission of Jesus shown primarily as one of rescue or atonement for human sin.

It's true that there are references in *Matthew* to human sinfulness and the need for forgiveness. But the accent is always on the God of Compassion, not the avenging judge. Jesus came to teach us how to let go of our own unforgivingness. As we let go, so we are better able to hear the gospel message and be changed ourselves into people of compassion.

The Gospel of *Matthew* gives this message of healing in a manner which is both personal and social – for each of us and for all of us.

personal healing – for each of us

Incarnation (*Mt.1-2*)

When Jesus was about to be born, an angel appeared to Joseph and reassured him that the child is of the Holy Spirit and is to be named Jesus, "... because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins."

However, the circumstances of Jesus's birth are messy: Jesus is born of an unwed mother, and from the start the powers-that-be are hostile and plot to kill the child. Moreover, right from its first chapters, this most Jewish of Gospel hints at the inclusion of Gentiles in the history of salvation. So, the Magi come from the East and represent races other than Jews.

The Sermon on the Mount (*Mt.5,38-48*)

In these opening verses of the Sermon Jesus cites moral teachings from the Old Testament. In one section he looks at retributive justice. "An eye for an eye" represents a plea for

equity. An offender should be punished, the Law suggests, in a manner equivalent to the offence. But Jesus takes this teaching to a much deeper level.

Don't repay the evildoer with further violence, he says. In repudiating the notion of 'an eye for an eye' Jesus is being realistic, since that way of retribution never really works. Tit for tat invites further retaliation and violence simply escalates.

So what does Jesus mean by 'turning the other cheek'? He is signalling that while it is futile to strike back, to walk away from an injury simply invites a repetition of the injustice. Neither way works. Turning the other cheek is a creative and unexpected way to signal that the original action is abusive.

The climax of this teaching is the command: *love your enemies*. Enmity is disarmed by such actions. A good example in our times is Samuel Ruiz Garcia, bishop of San Cristobal, Chiapas in Mexico, from 1959 to 1999. Bishop Ruiz worked tirelessly for the welfare of the poor native people, striving to become a conciliator in dealing with the Zapatistas, an armed revolutionary group. He earned himself much hostility. Yet he said: "I have no enemies – although there are some who wish to make themselves my enemy."

The highpoint of this teaching comes in the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". We accept the unconditional forgiveness of God for our own infaithfulness and pray that we likewise may become forgiving.

Reconciliation (*Mt.18,15-35*)
Here Jesus prescribes the process to be used in the church community. The point is we should seek to be reconciled with the offender rather than simply nursing a grievance. We start by talking one-to-one; if 'having it out' in private doesn't work, we should seek a mediator; if that doesn't work, the whole community must become involved. And if even that fails, then "treat (the person) like a gentile or a tax-collector" (*v.17*). cast him out – yet Jesus did not even reject those outside!

The process of forgiveness
The Gospels describe how forgiveness happens. At the Crucifixion jesus forgives his torturers: "... they do not know what they are doing (*Lk.23,34*)." Like Jesus, our prayer should be that God will forgive those who offend us – even if we can't just yet.The process of forgiveness takes time. If it happens too fast, it won't work: it doesn't allow time for an abuser to repent. In domestic violence, for instance, the remorse of the abuser may not yet signify true repentance. What the victim can do is initiate a process of reconciliation by showing forgiveness, but the abuser has to acknowledge it and show signs of real change.

The parable of the unforgiving servant (*Mt.18,23-35*) illustrates how necessary it is for us to become forgiving when we are receiving the forgiveness of God. By remaining adamant, we close ourselves off from an ever-loving and forgiving Father. This process is symbolised by Jesus's action at the Last Supper when he gives the disciples the cup of his Blood, "poured out for all, for the forgiveness of sins (*Mt.26,29*)." The cup is the symbol of suffering. The way of forgiving love is always costly for those who practise it. Yet in drinking the Blood of Christ we receive the life of God.

social healing – for all of us

Social healing is something communities, even nations, need to work at constantly. It is not a Utopian dream, but there is no magic formula – each situation needs its own process.
Here are some common factors:

Forbearance
When Jesus was arrested, he commanded his followers to put away their weapons, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword (*Mt.26,52*)." The first step in reconciliation is cease being violent.

Telling the Truth
In South Africa, Bishop Desmond Tutu's *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* enabled the truth about racist atrocities and terrorist activities to be publicly heard. Then reconciliation could begin. Imposing a 'just solution' unilaterally and exacting retribution seldom succeeds. In Iraq, the United States and Britain will have to accept that there simply were no 'weapons of mass destruction'. They must acknowledge the truth.
Thirty-two times in *Matthew* Jesus says *Amen Amen I say to you* – meaning 'Truly I say to you'. Jesus's whole teaching is based on a proclamation of truth.

Remembering
Forgive and forget! rarely works. It doesn't bring lasting peace. The remembering will need to follow a careful process. What is ugly has to be brought out into the open, to be disarmed. Both sides have to recognise the hurts of the other. After the Resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and showed them his wounds, repeating to them: "Peace be with you (*Jn.20,19-20*)." The wounds were not to be allowed to fester. They were exposed so they could be healed.

Empathy
Our 'enemy' must be seen by us as another human being, not as a monster. Every time we are convinced that we know best, we become blind and deaf to what the other is feeling. This is one reason why Jesus constantly calls on us in the gospels to *Listen!*

Commitment
The victim has to have a commitment to engaging with 'the other'. In *Mt 5,25,* Jesus bids his listeners to "come to terms with your opponent while still on the way to the court". Refusing to communicate with an offender prevents reconciliation even starting. There are two prerequisites: we should reflect prayerfully and we should work in the presence of the community, i.e. in public. ■

In January, Sr Barbara Reid OP conducted seminars in Wellington, Auckland and Dunedin.

Reflections for Waitangi Day 2009

Whangarei – 4 February 2009; Waitangi – 6 February 2009

Robert Consedine (*left*) with Hone Harawira MP, Waitangi Day 2009

Robert Consedine was invited to give an address at this year's Waitangi celebrations. Here are excerpts from his speech

It is ironic, in an age where well-researched information on New Zealand's colonial history and the Treaty of Waitangi is accessible, that there continues to be so much misinformation, cross-cultural misunderstanding, racism and ignorance. Why is this so? I suggest it is because most New Zealanders are forming their opinions on local and global issues based on constant misrepresentation by the corporate media.

They are the way in which the corporate media, despite a few exceptional journalists, destroy any constructive public debate about Treaty issues; the way Maori and crime are treated in the media; the consequences of colonisation; child poverty and the rich/poor gap in Aotearoa. The only bright area is the advent of more Maori media, particularly Maori television which reflects the dramatic changes in Aotearoa during the past 30 years.

flat earth news

We live in an age of what media insiders call *flat earth news*: if someone announced that the earth was flat the media would want another side of the story – it would not matter which version was true. The great blockbuster myth of modern journalism is *objectivity*; the idea that a good newspaper or broadcaster simply collects and reproduces the objective truth is a classic flat earth tale widely believed and devoid of reality. The primary goal of all media now is to cut costs and increase the flow of revenue.

If this is our media, how can we possibly have an informed discussion about any major issue in a democracy? Four companies, all overseas owned, dominate the New Zealand print media. Two of those overseas owned companies are responsible for 90 percent of our daily newspapers.

The history of the Treaty relationship is riddled with *flat earth news*. The police raids in the Urewera in October 2007 are a good example. New Zealand and international media were rife with stories linking Maori and terrorism. Media-generated conflict and fear were endemic. Politicians and several sections of the media then continued to use this terminology – even after it became evident that the terrorist label was wrong.

Professional historian Professor Judith Binney offered a background article on the raids to the *NZ Herald* and then the *Listener*. Both turned it down. The only newspaper willing to publish was the *Otago Daily Times* in Dunedin – which happens to be the one independent newspaper in New Zealand.

crime and the media

Another major example of *flat earth news* in New Zealand is the representation of crime and Maori. Crime sells. Linking Maori and crime in the media feeds moral panic, plays on emotion and drama – which equals higher ratings and profits.

We are all familiar with the crime statistics for Maori. There appears to be an almost universal unwillingness to look at their real causes. The elephant in the room is colonisation, dispossession and poverty.

Research completed by Craig Coxhead in 2005 discusses the way in which media have reported, and continue to report, on Maori in a predominantly negative manner. Combine this fact with the preoccupation of media with crime. Whilst crime may well be valid news, it is the media who then go on to define it.

One obvious association is through race-labelling – the unnecessary use of racial or ethnic references where such labelling adds no newsworthiness value or serves no public interest. Research shows that Maori are frequently portrayed by the media as privileged, as poor managers, financially incompetent and squabbling. Combine that with the fact that Maori are over-represented in nearly all negative social statistics, and it paints a poor picture. There is rarely any context. Colonisation and the dispossession of Maori are seldom mentioned.

The most vociferous proponents of more punishment and more jails appear to live in a narrow ethereal world which excludes any context of the history of the colonisation of Aotearoa. The original crime was the crime of colonisation, of dispossession, of a solemn agreement made by the Crown and then discarded.

colonisation

It is not hard to conclude that many major problems in New Zealand society go back to our failure to honour the Treaty and to colonisation. The question is why, in our public debates, is this such a threatening statement for some to acknowledge? In 1840 New Zealand became part of the British Empire – an empire built on slavery, the slave labour of the industrial revolution and the dispossession and subjugation of indigenous people throughout the world.

Consequently, as the late Michael King sums up, the present is "a complex outcome of acculturation, military defeat, land confiscations, contradictory legislation, population displacement, racism, personality conflicts and continuing cross-cultural misunderstandings."

The negative social statistics of Maori are the statistics of dispossessed peoples, and they are global. It is no accident that the 300 million indigenous people in the world, in 70 countries, "are nearly always disadvantaged relative to their non-indigenous counterparts. Their material standard of living is lower, their risk of early disease and early death is higher, their educational opportunities are more limited, their political participation and voice more constrained and the lifestyles and livelihoods they would choose are very often out of reach." Whilst poverty plays a strong part, it is enough to be simply indigenous to live with these outcomes.

Fifty-two percent of the men and 58 percent of the women in prison in New Zealand are Maori. Most prisoners in New Zealand jails are also poor. In a land of plenty, their poverty in itself is a crime. Since 1987 we have doubled our jail population. Are we safer? I don't think so. Our commitment to building more jails is based on the naïve belief that we will be safer.

the rich/poor gap

Another significant issue facing New Zealand today is the rich/poor gap. In 2006 the United Nations published a first ever survey of world distribution of household wealth (figures from 2000). This report reflects a terrifying global picture of the wealth/poverty gap. Two percent of adults own half the global wealth; half the world's population lives on one percent of the world's wealth.

New Zealand is not far behind in this. In the last decades of the 20th century, the *Child Poverty Action Group* revealed New Zealand had the fastest growth in income and wealth inequality in the OECD. New Zealand is near the bottom of the rich nations index: for infant mortality, children's health and safety, teenage pregnancy and immunisation. In 2004 there were 175,000 children living in severe hardship and being left behind. This is a damning picture.

New Zealand's widening income disparity is the predictable outcome of the economic upheavals of the 1980s and 1990s. Contributing factors include the deliberate strategy of reducing benefits relative to wage income. It makes no economic sense to keep people poor, and the social consequences are transparently predictable.

We are now faced with a global economic crisis created by the most educated and privileged people on the planet who cold-bloodedly used other people's money for their own gain. There will now be more human suffering on a huge scale. Will the media provide commentary about the causes of this economic crisis and therefore real, humane solutions? Or will it merely rely on opinion pieces from each corner of the market and fulfil its flat earth news role by viewing the truth as irrelevant?

a hope-filled future

While all the above makes difficult reading, there also grounds for hope. The gains for Maori in the last 30 years have been significant, although every gain has only been achieved through struggle. The words of the slave abolitionist, Frederick Douglas, remain as true as when he uttered them: *power cedes nothing without a demand – it never did and it never will.*

Just as men could not envision a world where women voted, slave-owners could not envision a world without slavery, and whites, a world where blacks had civil rights; so our society struggles to envision a world where power is successfully shared in the way anticipated in the Treaty. The Treaty is about relationships. Those who signed it envisaged Maori and Pakeha living peacefully together sharing power and resources. That vision has not changed.

In the recent election, the Maori Party has entered into an historic relationship with the National-led government. One aspect of the agreement is to establish, by no later than early 2010, a group to consider constitutional issues, including Maori representation. The Maori Party will be a member of the group, and be consulted on membership and choice of Chairperson.

Whether we should have a written constitution, a Treaty of Waitangi Court, or a constitutional commission and a parliamentary commissioner for the Treaty as proposed by the Maori Party, we need to move away from the paralysis which currently imprisons the Treaty relationship. In the end every New Zealander needs to carry the Treaty relationship in their hearts. Maori media is an excellent source of insightful and thoughtful analysis.

Everywhere I go in Aotearoa I meet Maori and Pakeha working together in a variety of creative ways. I am constantly inspired by the level of generosity and commitment of New Zealanders. My own tradition as an Irish Catholic Pakeha has also sustained me: that there is no such thing as life without struggle. Life forges us in struggle. If we give up in the midst of struggle we will never find out what the struggle would have given us in the end. Many of our ancestors knew this. Many in our own times know this.

There is beauty and the sacred in every life which transcends how people look, behave and respond to the world. It is especially in prisoners, in victims, the people who fail, the marginalised, the poor, the vulnerable. I am convinced the only way to live on this planet is to put *aroha* – love – at the centre of our lives; to see the divine spark in every single human being and to treat them accordingly. It is the only way humanity will survive. ■

Robert Consedine has for 20 years managed Waitangi Associates, *an organisation to provide education to New Zealanders regarding the Treaty of Waitangi*

black s

I was but a boy on Black Friday in 1939 when bushfires raced across the state of Victoria. I recall flames and clouds of smoke rising in all directions around our farm. A hot North wind swept the fires through the bush, the farms and many towns. We were enveloped in fear.

Seventy-one people burned to death in those fires. Thousands of homes were demolished. Thousands of sheep, horses and cattle were incinerated. Much of our farm property was rendered barren and black, but by some miracle our home was spared.

Now, 70 years later, we are faced with the fury of Black Saturday. There have been numerous notorious bushfires in the interim – Ash Wednesday in 1983 being a classic example. But with Black Saturday the paradigm has changed, the furore intensified and the classic bushfire scenario superseded.

Instead of a cluster of eucalyptus trees engulfed in flames, imagine a tsunami, a wall of fire crashing through towns and leaving nothing in its wake.

Instead of plumes of swirling smoke and burning leaves flying into the sky, imagine a tornado with massive balls of fire leaping over an entire valley and landing on houses on the opposite hillside.

Instead of ferocious flames fanned by a hot North wind, imagine a hurricane like Katrina, with temperatures of 110 degrees Fahrenheit, blasts of over 100 miles an hour and fierce fires, like open mouths, consuming all in their path.

Instead of watching the horizon a few miles away and preparing to defend your home within the hour, imagine that balls of flame fed by eucalyptus oil are suddenly landing on your house with virtually no time to escape.

Instead of packing your bags with a few precious belongings and driving to a safe place, imagine the panic as fleeing cars crash into each other, into fallen trees, into fire balls, into hell – with nothing left to do but turn the air conditioner on high and hope the burning leaves do not set the fuel tank on fire.

The bushfires of Black Friday, Ash Wednesday and the like were ferocious, but most of Victoria was prepared for similar days. Black Saturday was different. With climate change has come increased hot spells, decreased rainfalls and unfriendly weather patterns. The rise of $C0_2$ in the atmosphere has led to increased vegetation in the region, much of which was tinder dry on a day like Black Saturday.

The rainfall in all of Victoria from October 2001 to September 2008 has been well below average. In much of Victoria it has been the lowest on record. The State is tinder dry and learning to live in such a state in the coming Greenhouse Age will not be easy.

We are no longer prepared for disasters like these. More than 200 people have been burned alive. More than 7000 people are homeless. Graham Mills, from the *Centre for Australian Weather and Climate Research* is quoted in the *Australian* of Feb 10 as saying: "The conditions that lead to extreme fire weather are heat, low humidity, wind and drought. On Saturday the temperature set a new set of records. When you get these conditions, nobody has really had experience of them before."

Black Sabbath

How do we respond to this bushfire hell? In the past we would cite the promises of God that for the faithful there would always be the needed rain and attendant prosperity, but for the unfaithful God would send the curse of drought. (*Deut. 11.13-17*)

But we must move beyond a simplistic blessing-curse theology of the Old Testament law and move to the message of our Gospel. The God we know in Christ is not concerned with retribution. Our God suffers with us in such disasters and calls us to face the future as a resurrection.

Black Saturday is a Black Sabbath, a radical reversal of the day of divine rest and blessing. And such a reversal ought to shock us into asking what is happening. Black Saturday is a wake-up call.

Our greedy habits have led to climate changes. Our relentless exploitation of the planet has brought us to the beginning of a Greenhouse Age. We are still pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, gases that will survive there for thousands of years. There is no escape. We now need to ask how God wants us to live, love and share in this Greenhouse Age.

Will the churches take the lead and call for change – the lifestyle change needed in a Greenhouse Age? Imagine Black Saturday in your town! ■

abbath

Black Saturday

Amazing flames that scorch the sky,
Like hurricanes of fire,
Alive with eucalyptus oil,
Are soaring higher and higher.

These swirling balls of oil ablaze,
That leap o'er trees at will,
Descend on fields and flock and homes,
Explode and burn and kill.

Where's God in all this swirling ash?
Where's God in all this pain?
Awaiting somewhere in the sky
To one day send some rain?

The face of God is burnt and black;
The hands of God are red!
The God we know in Jesus Christ
Is bleeding with the dead.

Is this, O God, the shock we need
To face our life ahead,
Adjusting to a Greenhouse Age
When we must share our bread?

Christ, show us now your hands
and feet,
The burns across your side
To show you suffer with the Earth,
By fires crucified!

Tune: *Amazing Grace*

Norman Habel, 2009

On the streets of Calcutta

Originally from Southland, Joan Hough returns from working with the poor in Calcutta to Christchurch where a number of her adult children and grandchildren now live. **Tui Motu** *caught up with her on one of her trips back to New Zealand*

Joan Hough has spent some 13 years working in India, mostly in Calcutta. "I started first with Mother Teresa's nuns," she says, "at a home for the dying. I had had no formal training as a nurse, so I've had to learn as I went along. As I didn't speak Hindi, I was not allowed to go out with the nuns into the streets at first: however, they soon let me do so because there was no one else.

"We would bring people into the hospital to be treated even if there was not a bed available. However, that gave rise to reports that in spite of all the money donated, Mother Teresa would not provide the poor with beds. I realised that one thing I could do well was to go out and seek help and facilities for the hospital, which meant venturing out alone even though my fluency in the Bengali language was not all that good. I became a sort of roving advocate for the Sisters' work.

"Over these years a lot of my work has been with the tribal people, who are uneducated and live out on the fringes of Indian society. I sometimes go out to their villages and bring serious cases back to the hospital in Calcutta. It may be the first time they have ever been in a city. To ensure that they are genuine cases I have to observe whether they have mobile phones in their pockets or shoes on their feet: if they have, that indicates they have some means, so are not top priority.

"My main job has been to negotiate on behalf of these very needy people to get them medical treatment which they cannot themselves afford. I once took a child in for an umbilical hernia op. I found that the doctor had prescribed an MRI scan, which I knew that there were no funds for. It was not even necessary. So I had to challenge the doctor there and then whether such a procedure was necessary in this case.

"Sometimes, however, it works the opposite way. There was this gorgeous little 7-year-old boy who had been X-rayed following an accident, and had a fractured vertebra. The doctor was suspicious that there was too much damage to be simply the result of an accident. So he did an MRI scan, and discovered the bones were all eaten away with tuberculosis. The treatment was going to be hugely expensive. There was a volunteer working with me, who then offered to raise the money on her return to Portugal: she put together about $20,000 for this little boy to get the treatment he needed.

"There is an ethical difficulty sometimes, trying to decide whether to spend the limited funds on very expensive procedures. I had a young man come to me who needed a double heart valve replacement, a very expensive procedure. I knew he had a history of infection in the heart, and that he would almost certainly suffer further infection after surgery. I had to decide whether it was just too risky to invest that money in a case where there was so little hope. So we said 'no' – and shortly after the man died. Those are difficult decisions to make."

raising money

"The needs of this work are massive and the funds are meagre. I cannot afford to go public on TV, because if I received a high profile and it got back to India, I would probably not be able to get back in. I work quite a lot also with the Jesuits. One need I have is a place with a few beds in the city where I can keep people before and after treatment. I hope the Jesuits will be able to help me in this project.

"I receive a lot of help from doctors regarding supplies for the clinic. I have a friend who comes over once a year with a suitcase of medication and dressings. That goes a long way.

"As regards funding, I sometimes rely on priests who have sources of funds they can help me with. I don't

fund-raise myself, but people help me. Sometimes I receive funds for one thing, but there is a surplus I can devote to something else, like helping train other volunteers like myself.

"I may suggest to families that they could go back and raise some of the money themselves. I feel it helps their self-esteem if they can provide some small part. In India, if these poor people are not helped they will either have to live with their deformities – or they will die."

advocacy

"In New Zealand there will be a waiting list for operations on children. But in Calcutta we cannot afford to wait. The children are brought in from the jungle; they cannot sleep on the streets or they would die. I persuade the hospitals to take them, because they know that eventually I will pay them – I'm 'buttering their bread!'

"At present I work with the Sisters two days a week, but I spend much of the time negotiating with local hospitals on their behalf to get the patients specialist treatment. Getting enough money can be a worry, and sometimes I have to dig into my own pocket.

"There are also quite simple operations which I have learned to perform myself. Many of the doctors are volunteers who come to Calcutta to help boost the medical care, but they may not be too competent at minor surgery. So I find myself having to deal with, say, the removal of necrotic material from wounds or even a minor amputation."

a personal vocation

"*Why do I do it?* Well, I suppose we all have a part of us which wants to achieve something noble! When I was young I dreamt about helping animals in the jungle! I'm not a city person. I wanted the wide open spaces. One day I was with one of my daughters in Rakaia, and I said to her I was thinking of going out to do voluntary work for Mother Teresa. Now what need inside me would have made me say a thing like that? It sort of jumped out of my subconscious, while, on the surface, I would have preferred to go and work with animals far away from cities.

"I don't know whether it is part of my faith journey. I go to Mass everyday when I'm there. My prayer is that of a person going into battle. There is nothing of the classic, quiet contemplative stuff! I spend my time fighting the bureaucratic system. You could call me a 'warrior for God!'

"Every six months I have to renew my visa, which really annoys me. I go to Thailand, apply for it, and then go to the beach and wait. And last time I took Thomas Merton's Retreat notes with me, so I had material for ten days' prayer! That helps feed my spirituality.

"My faith is an important part of my life, and I don't think I could do what I do unless I had my faith. Sometimes I go into situations where the smell is absolutely nauseating, so I pray: 'God, if you want me to do this, please don't let me vomit in here!'

"Keeping fit oneself is not the easiest. Once I had a visitor and both of us went down with amoebic dysentery, because we had drunk water which the Indian people were drinking – apparently without harm! Parasites and sickness go with working in India!

"I see a lot of injustice there, yet I also know that if I were to become proactive about it I would be kicked out of the country, and that would be the end of my work. It gives me the greatest satisfaction to put a patient on the train or bus back home. I feel that I have completed the job. But sometimes we work away at a case, but it is hopeless. The only thing to do is to take the child home to die.

"What is needed primarily is to have a heart, to have compassion: to wish to do something for these most unfortunate people." ■

Travel writer and photographer, Ceridwyn Parr, reports on her experience of going to Mass in European churches.

It's different – yet it is comfortably familiar

rituals of inclusion

Santa Maria in Trastavere, Rome

Come with me to church. In the glow of 900 years-worth of gold mosaic and frescoes the priest is intoning the Rosary. *Santa Maria, Madre di Dio, prega per noi peccatori,…*

The words roll off his tongue like liquid chocolate, the response of the congregation is as mellifluous as a caramel filling. We are in the heart of Florence, in the curious pink, green and white Duomo, the *Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore*. No tourists are to be seen at this hour, only a few of us for the Mass which will follow. All in Italian, but we know the format and even join in the familiar 'common' parts.

Come next to the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. I have spent the last six days walking 115km on the Camino just to get here. All week I have conversed in my minimal Spanish.

Hola! Where is the toilet please?
Si, un espresso por favor.
Si, yo soy, solo peregrina, (I am a pilgrim walking alone),
Muchas gracias!

Will the Pilgrim's Mass in Spanish add to my awkward foreignness? Not at all. The opening greeting, the way we all cross ourselves, the sitting down and standing up, it is easy. The sermon, in Spanish, gives me time to breathe in the thousand years of history, to watch the returning pilgrims walking up behind the altar to embrace the statue of St James, erected over the presumed remains of the apostle, St James (Sant'Iago). I let myself relax into the atmosphere of prayer and hopefulness and fortitude which this place speaks of.

We could go next to *St Dominic*'s, in Lisbon, where you can buy a glass of the famous 62 percent proof cherry brandy, *ginhinha,* before going in – even at 9 am. Or we could go to *St Nikolai* church in Leipzig, only just rebuilt after the Allied bombing way back in World War 11. Mass said in German was not as verbally enchanting as Italian, but being in the church where Bach was organist and choirmaster adds a musical magic to the experience. *St Nikolai* was the only church where we were given the words to follow. We almost kept up with the Lord's Prayer.

Unser Vater in dem Himmel,
dein Name werde geheiligt.
dein Reich komme.
dein Wille geschehe,
auf Erden, wie im Himmel.

Around us fur-clad German Catholics, relegated to 5pm on a Sunday, in the now Lutheran church, exchanged the peace with us – we felt right at home.

Instead, come with me to a liturgy not only in Italian, but also in sign language. *Santa Maria in Trastavere* in Rome is a parish church overflowing with children, parents, older people, *L'Arche* groups and a significant number of deaf people. I do not know if Italian sign language is different from English signing, but it was a fascinating addition to the service to have an animated young woman smiling and signing alongside the cheery Italian priest. At two levels we understood nothing, but at another level we understood everything – everything about inclusion, participation in an ancient ritual which drew these hundreds of people week after week, where there has been a Christian church since 220AD. They were brought together in a wider community, all focused on that mystery which calls us, deeper than words.

travel – broadening the soul

Travel stories can be tedious, so I shall limit my tales of 'churches I have been to'. But I was intrigued with what it was that drew us to these churches in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany.

And what held us there, and what was so profound about the whole experience.

Being travellers we were daily confronted with the new, which is of course one of the main reasons for travel. Going to church each Sunday, into the predictable format of a Mass, gave a degree of familiarity and comfort, a space to touch base, to insert myself into the prayer of the church, to be with others where generations of Christians had been before. Surrounded by priceless art, sculpture and architecture, I read the history with our eyes while my ears followed the general process of the liturgy. I loved being there in those glorious churches, in Spain, or Portugal, Italy or Germany, even though I was a stranger in a strange land.

Was this a legitimate way of being at church? Was I just being a spiritual tourist? Perhaps. Who knows how liturgy involves and touches participants even ***in*** their native language and local setting. I wonder what really goes on in people's minds and hearts? God only knows.

Bishop Peter Cullinane wants liturgy "to be a profound experience of God… drawing close to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and of the difference this makes to everything." (*Memorandum* May 2008) My experience in churches on my European itinerary was precisely that, but in a non-verbal or pan-verbal manner. Bishop Cullinane describes a "strong sense of the liturgy being the worship of God taking place simultaneously on earth and in heaven", and I would add "in mother tongues, and other ways of understanding".

liturgy which includes us

It could be expected that not speaking Spanish or Portuguese or Italian language would be alienating, but to my surprise it was liberating. The words we use to speak of God and of spirituality have been of huge importance to me, and I have been in groups and even taken University papers to explore the topic. However, I find myself in foreign countries totally unconcerned about the spoken aspect of theology. Rather I saturate myself in the rhythms, the rituals, the occasional familiar ancient phrases which have endured beyond all linguistics.

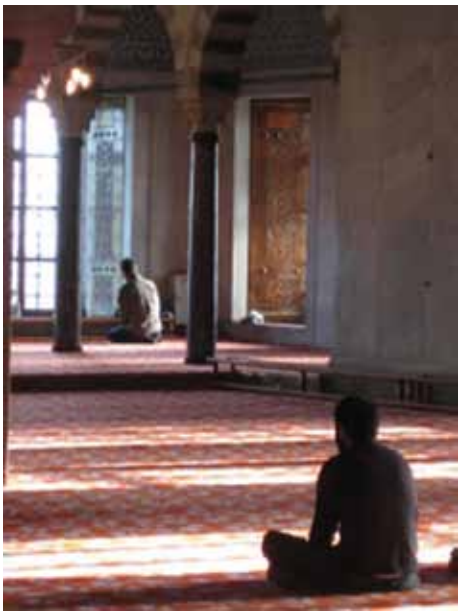
Is that a simplistic or reductionist view of liturgy to say that a little familiarity is more than enough, that letting the words flow over and around you is a legitimate way to worship?

For me as a traveller, a pilgrim, a spiritual tourist if you will, I was immensely grateful to be part of a tradition that has enough universality to allow me, coming from the ends of the earth, to walk in and feel right at home. I am not describing here a kind of post-modern, privatised, spiritual thrill-seeking – what Sandra Schneiders characterises as "an idiosyncratic, personally satisfying stance and practice that makes no doctrinal claims, imposes no moral authority outside one's own conscience, creates no necessary personal relationships or social responsibilities, and can be changed or abandoned whenever it seems not to work for the practitioner".

Nor am I advocating an unthinking acceptance of the evils and injustices of the Christian history on Europe: that by going to church I am somehow condoning what some might term a corrupt and outdated system. It is what Bosco Peters terms religion at its best, which "provides the authentic rooted heritage, the healthy guidelines, the sacred texts and rites that nourish our spirituality in a profound way and provide deep communion with a whole faith community, past, present, and future". (www.liturgy.co.nz)

So, taking that definition a little further, I invite you to come with me to my last religious building. Here you will see differences both in language and faith tradition.

We take our shoes off outside the *Sultanahmet Mosque* in Istanbul. Hanging down from the gate are symbolic chains that encourage everyone, even the sultan on horseback, to bow his or her head upon entering. Inside, the sunlight stretches right across the carpet. A gowned man drives the vacuum cleaner back and forth back and forth. The interior's high ceiling is lined with about 20,000 blue tiles – hence "Blue Mosque". It is silent in the vast domed space. People pose for photos, other read their guide books. Over by the long windows two men stand, bow, kneel, stand, bow, kneel. Behind us in the women's area, two head-scarfed women touch their foreheads to the carpet.



I stand by a pillar which has withstood earthquakes, wars, and now a secular government. As the men and the women pray in their tongues, I too can be touched by the mystery, the history and great unknowingness of what we all call God. ■

When we lift our packs and go,
when we seek another country
moving far from all we know,
when we long to journey free:
God is in the other place,
God is in another's face
In the faith we travel by,

defining moments

A Church is emerging that may yet answer the post-Vatican II hopes of spirituality, repentance, humanity and ecumenism. But the Holy Spirit will not be controlled, and blows where it wills

Daniel O'Leary

Jan's time was up. He was expected to die very soon. Fr Jim brought his wife to the hospital early one morning, expecting the worst. They stood at the foot of the bed, waiting, watching and worrying. Fr Jim parted the curtains slightly. With a small smile Jan gently opened his eyes to the new sun. "Oh!" he breathed. "The light, again."

In the wake of Barack Obama's election to the White House the world is still waking up to a new morning. Something stirred in millions of hearts when he asked us to "lay our hands on the arc of history and bend it once more into the hope of a new day". Something that springs eternal was touched around the world when he spoke like that. "Baby, I'm crying so much," said black Grandma Foster to her grandchild Raven, "because now I'm able to say to you, 'Yes, you can'."

People have a passion for the possible. After a time of deep disillusionment at the most significant levels of human transactions, what was re-emerging in the minds of many with Obama's election was the possibility of trusting, hoping and belonging once more. Anticipating a new and serious commitment to global climate change, for instance, *Tablet* columnist Michael McCarthy, asks in *The Independent*, "Can you hear it, the great unlocking sound? It is the sound of the door swinging open at last after long years of being bolted and barred …".

As we sense in our hearts this widespread surge of renewal our thoughts are bound to turn to the ailing state of our Church. Its outward face appears unchanged; but the hidden haemorrhaging of its health is unnoticed, denied or, most worryingly of all, a half-accepted reality. The last thing to collapse is the surface. In the Western Church there is a great emphasis on managing closure. Much of this is necessary. But is it the only way forward? The risen Christ of Calvary taught us other ways of growing by subtraction.

people long for a church that is more open and less certain; a church that creates a new vision for tomorrow from yesterday's triumphs

The first casualties of organisational fear are imagination and courage. Insecurity, understandable enough these days, leads to uniforms, rigid rites and rubrics. But one thing is sure. The Holy Spirit will not be controlled.

There is an untouchable part of all of us that senses this with a knowledge beyond knowing. It is a universal life-instinct. And it must be free.

The poet David Whyte puts it this way: "Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet confinement of your aloneness to learn anything or anyone that does not bring you alive is too small for you."

From where will an 'Obama moment' come for the Church? Since the Second Vatican Council, announced by Pope John XXIII 50 years ago this week, people are still waiting for signs of a more human, repentant, spiritual and ecumenical Church. They long for a Church that is more open and less certain. Above all, a Church that creates a new vision for tomorrow from the fragments of yesterday's triumphs. Is it time to proclaim a year of prophetic imagination? This will take much courage and contemplation. You cannot discover and explore new lands without losing sight of the familiar shoreline for a while. And the compass to negotiate these lands is already secure in the hearts of God's people. It is their spiritual instinct to be faithful to an inner truth. Theirs is a dogged loyalty.

This 'return to the laity' encouraged by the Council is long overdue – not as helpers but as true and powerful leaders at all levels. The gift of prophecy is alive in the priesthood of the baptised. The Holy Spirit in their hearts and minds is ready with undreamed-of possibility. People have not given up on God, or in the spiritual reality of their own lives. What people are giving up on is going to church. It is in the institution, not God, that they are losing faith. They wait for a call. The call is to transcendence, to a new birth, to people's own deepest

and most original potentialities. "This is our moment," proclaimed Mr Obama.

There is much talk today of the "emerging Church". It is claimed to be the beginning of a new kind of reformation. It is happening almost in spite of us, Richard Rohr OFM claims, which means the Holy Spirit must be guiding it. "Jesus was clearly concerned," he writes, "about the healing and transformation of real persons and human society on earth, and not just intellectual belief in doctrines and moral stances, which asks almost nothing of us in terms of real inner change." Among many other essential characteristics of this emergent Church, he names the following: a new global sense of Christianity that can re-assess denominational divisions, a deepening theology of non-violence, a radical critique of systems of power, a recognition of the new structures of the faith community, including recovery groups, study groups, contemplative groups, mission groups for the poor and alienated – most of these springing from lay commitment rather than from top-down ordination.

For hierarchy and laity alike, the transformation begins with the opening of each one's heart to personal conversion. "If things go wrong in the world," Carl Jung wrote, "this is because something is wrong with the individual, because something is wrong with me… This alone makes history, here alone do the great transformations take place. In our most private lives we are not only the passive witnesses of our age but also its makers. We make our own epoch."

In a letter to the new president of the United States, author Alice Walker wrote, "It is the soul that must be preserved if one is to remain a credible leader. All else might be lost; but when the soul dies, the connection to earth, to peoples, to animals, to mountain ranges, also dies. And your smile… can find an answering smile in all of us, lighting our way, and brightening the world. We ourselves are the ones we have been waiting for."

The emerging Church will only happen along the way of paradox. And this way must be negotiated in the light of compassion. Without those constants all efforts at a renaissance are doomed. We must first love what we critique.

"How much I must criticise you my Church, and yet, how much I love you!" wrote Carlo Carretto. "You have made me suffer more than anyone. I should like to see you destroyed and yet, I need your presence. You have given me much scandal, and yet, you alone have made me understand holiness. Never in this world have I seen anything more compromised, more false, yet never have I touched anything more generous or more beautiful. Countless times I have felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face and yet, every night I prayed that I might die in your sure arms."

Daniel O'Leary is a priest of the Leeds Diocese

lord, holy spirit

You blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks.
Inside and outside the fences,
You blow where you wish to blow.

Lord, Holy Spirit,
you are the sun who shines on the little plant.
You warm him gently, you give him life,
you raise him up to become a tree with many leaves.

Lord, Holy Spirit,
You are the mother eagle with her young,
Holding them in peace under your feathers.
On the highest mountain you have built your nest,
Above the valley, above the storms of the world,
Where no hunter ever comes.

Lord, Holy Spirit,
you are the bright cloud in whom we hide,
in whom we know already that the battle has been won.
You bring us to our Brother Jesus,
To rest our heads upon his shoulder.

Lord, Holy Spirit,
In the love of friends you are building a new house,
Heaven is with us when you are with us.
You are singing your song in the hearts of the poor.
Guide us, wound us, heal us. Bring us to God.

James Keir Baxter

comment

I was seven years old when, 70 years ago, I was terrified as the Jewish shops around us were demolished in the streets of Berlin. My mother and I ran for our lives. Six months later we arrived, a refugee family, in Dunedin. Among the first to befriend us were the Baxter family. Their younger son, whom I knew as Jimmy, was ten.

James K Baxter was to become the most eminent of New Zealand's poets. His last years were lived in self-imposed poverty at the aptly names Maori settlement Jerusalem on the Whanganui river.

Increasingly his New Zealand was the Maori land of *Aotearoa*. The prayer opposite is based on his reading of *Deuteronomy 32, 10-12*. The lyrical quality of language that caresses nature as this prayer does, owes a great deal to Maori spirituality that predates any Christian influence. Much of nature, to the Maori people, is *tapu*, sacred.

The racism that drove my family from Hitler's Germany was the racism present in every society – New Zealand's too – on which Baxter declared war by embracing the Maori people.

Paul Oestreicher

(*from an article published in the London* Church Times)

how to discover your soul

Glynn Cardy

Simon, Andrew, James and John were fishermen. Then one day, so the story goes, Jesus strolled into their lives and said: "Follow me and you will fish for people." And the foursome looked at their nets, looked at the catch, looked at him, and said, "You're on." Jesus turned their heads, their hearts said 'follow', and follow they did. But it actually was not enough.

I think the real conversion of Peter happened sometime after Golgotha. By real I mean when his head and heart came together, when he weighed up who he was [rooster et al] and who he wanted to be, when he made not an infantile decision to trust but an adult decision to commit. The discovery of your soul doesn't happen overnight. It takes time.

To be inspired by a great teacher, a Jesus, Gandhi, Obama..., to drop the 'nets' of our daily concerns in order to follow, to adopt the teacher's vision and preach it, is not enough. It is a good start but it's not enough because someone else is telling us what to do, what to dream, what to believe, and who we are.

When we were children we wanted the security of a world with boundaries, with rules, with protection, within which we could feel loved and return love. Such a world I hope one day every child will experience. It is a world predicated on trust. A strong adult controls that world, and the child trusts the adult.

Yet such a scenario for faith is not enough. It is infantile. Children we pray will grow up into adults with the resources to make wise decisions, and occasionally costly ones. Similarly with the pilgrim. Each of us will we pray grow up to bear the cost and experience the joys of creating environments of hope. We do it not because Jesus, God, our teachers, our parents, our therapist, our friends, or 'the rules' tell us to. We do it because we know who we are and what we want. We do it because we have discovered our soul.

Think about love for a moment. If an adult is 'in love' with another adult because his God, mother, or friends tell him to it is not love. If an adult is 'in love' because he/she wants security and wants to be loved, it is not love. Infatuation is not love. Mutual attraction is not love. Seeking to have one's needs met is not love. Rather, love is an adult other-centred commitment based on knowing who you are, what you believe, and what you want. Such love comes from knowing your own soul.

There is a movie currently in the theatres called *Yes Man*. Jim Carrey, he with the dexterous face of *The Mask* fame, is a lonely loser. Through a friend he attends a gathering of the 'Yes' religion. He makes a covenant to say 'Yes' to every request made of him. And his life is changed. The movie cleverly parodies every religion and 'think positive' type of spirituality.

Of course the 'Yes' approach works. He meets interesting people, does things he's only ever dared dream about, becomes attractive in his own right, and forever greets the world with a smile.

I have met many Christians who are very similar to Carrey's character. They smile at life and life smiles back. Morally difficult decisions are quickly fixed by reference to a Bible verse, the minister, or the teaching of the Church. There is right and wrong, yes and no, and nothing in-between. Painful experiences are often explained away as consequences of their lack of faith.

Carrey continues in this vain until he falls in love. When his beloved learns he's a 'yes man' she challenges him. "Do you love me because of 'yes'?" In other words, 'Do you love me because God or some other authority is telling you to?'

Saying 'yes' to everything, like relying on 'God' or 'the Bible' for everything, is morally vacuous. You have to make up your own mind, and to do that you have to know your own mind. You have to commit with your heart, and to do that you have to know your own heart. Faith, like love, can't just be a mental, think-positive, trust-and-obey type decision. It has to be from the heart. You can't love God with all your heart, mind and strength because the Bible tells you to, or the Church tells you to, or any external authority tells you to. Rather you love because you know and can speak from the authority within you. You love because you know your own soul.

Yes Man parodies religion that leaves no room for the soul. This form of religion requires assent to a set of precepts, group participation, and obedience to authority. Moral strength is determined by obedience to the group and its leaders. It's the spiritual equivalent to rote learning mathematical equations and their answers rather than working them out for oneself. ▷▷

cleansing temples

the gospel for the third sunday of lent

Mary Betz

Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the temple, … scattered the money-changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market... The Jewish leaders intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done? Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up.' (John 2:15-16)

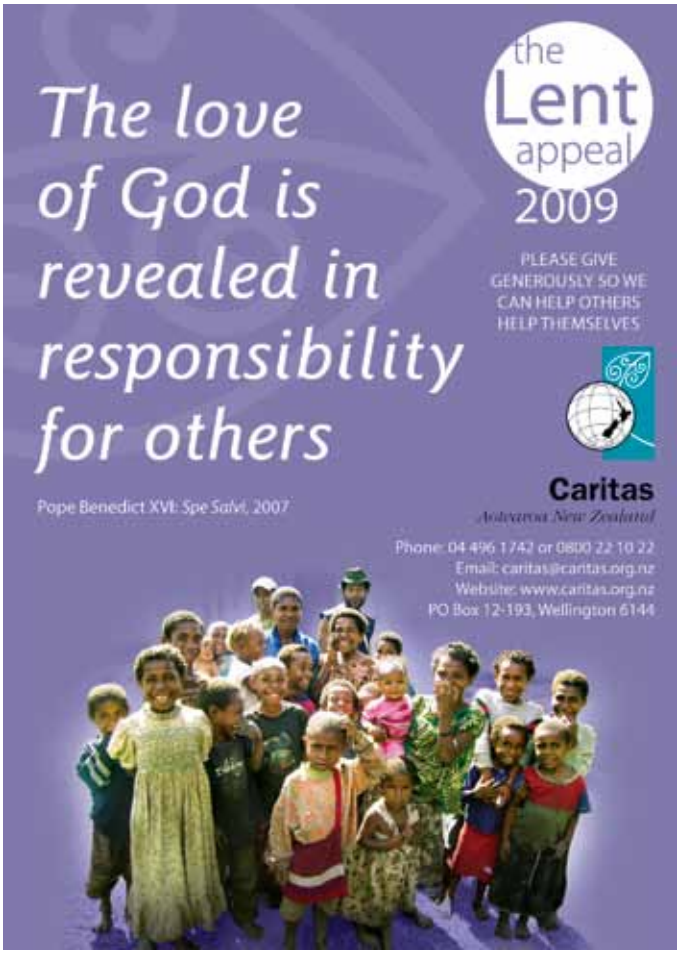
The temple in Jesus' time had become more than a place of worship – it was the centre for Jewish commerce. Purity laws required animal sacrifice to maintain ritual cleanliness, so a temple courtyard became a marketplace for animals. Money-changers were needed to exchange Greek or Roman money for Jewish currency – the only kind accepted for buying sacrificial animals. Jesus' startling symbolic action was aimed at the temple as a whole religious, political and economic system – but why?

The regulators of the temple economy ensured money poured into the temple coffers – much of it from the poor. Originally a central storehouse to redistribute wealth, the temple had become a place where surplus wealth was used on luxury goods or stored. The ruling and priestly classes had no means or motivation to channel it to those in need. Instead, sick people, women (after menstruation and childbirth) and those who worked with animals or blood (slaves, servants, farmers and shepherds) had to repeatedly buy sacrificial animals to keep the ritual cleanliness which allowed them to live in the community.

Jesus' disturbing action showed how troubled and angry he was by this transfer of money. In overturning the tables of the moneychangers, he symbolically overturned a religious and political economy which exploited the poor. Are our marketplaces today much different? Our global economic system has become a sanctuary for the rich with rules for trade, aid, taxation, debt and corporate incentives which benefit them, to the detriment of the poor.

Jesus' answer to people who accused him of destroying the sanctuary was that he would replace it with his own risen body. His vision called for overturning the tables of unjust economic systems to create a living dwelling place for God – the body of Christ which would continue Jesus' work to bring fullness of life to all. What temples might we cleanse this Lent? What would be our response if our own tables were overturned? ■

Mary is Auckland Regional Coordinator for Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand. Additional reflection on the Lenten Sunday readings is available at www.caritas.org.nz.



▷▷ When Jesus was gone the disciples worked it out for themselves. Sure, God was with and within them but God didn't do the work for them. They matched their dreams with their beliefs, and their actions with their faith. They found the resonance between heart and head, between their past and their hopes. They discovered their soul.

And with that discovery came the power to change the world. ■

Glynn Cardy is Vicar of St-Matthew-in-the-City and Archdeacon of the Anglican diocese of Auckland

gentleman, scholar and man of God

Albert Moore (1926-2009)

Tui Motu had hardly been born when there came a knock on the door one day, and in walked a tousle-haired, elderly academic with a shopping bag filled with papers and books which, he thought,"could be useful to us". He greeted the editorial staff with his characteristic infectious smile which, as a friend described it, "lit up the whole of his face and radiated the joy with which he celebrated being alive". A close and warm relationship was born which only came to an end with his death in January.

Albert Moore was founder of the department of Religious Studies at Otago University, its first Professor and one of the most eminent academics circulating around its campus. Yet he was also the humblest of men with the learning of an Einstein combined with a childlike curiosity in ideas old and new.

Tui Motu readers benefited with a regular supply of beautifully crafted, informative articles on an astonishing array of topics – and latterly with some beautiful vignette pieces whereby he illuminated with a concise commentary great works of art from many cultures and eras. When his health began to fail a year ago, the flow of writing slowed to a trickle, and we were all the poorer for it.

Albert was brought up in Wellington. His tertiary education was spent in Wellington and Otago, where he trained for the Presbyterian ministry. He also had prolonged periods of study overseas, in England where he attained a doctorate at Manchester, in Germany, in Japan and later, on sabbatical, in the United States.

Albert was truly a polymath, interested in the world's great religions alongside Christianity; fascinated by art and music of many cultures and ages; produced two lavishly illustrated books on Religious Art – respectively on the *Iconography of Religion* (1977) and *Art in the Religions of the Pacific* (1995). Yet nothing delighted him more than to share his enthusiasm for ideas with all manner of groups: his own weekly congregation at Opoho Presbyterian church; the U3A in Dunedin; academic audiences, as well as casual gatherings of former students and friends.

Below is a more intimate tribute from close friend and fellow academic Peter Stupples. The *Tui Motu* community mourns the passing of a great religious spirit; we offer our sincere sympathy and condolences to his wife, his son and daughter.

Albert Moore and I met for lunch most Thurdays over a period of about 20 years. Albert would have known exactly when we began to patronise either the café in the Dunedin Botanic Gardens, where he enjoyed the jazz they played softly in the background, or in the *Green Acorn* when we needed to be nearer the University Central Library. By contrast I am never quite clear about dates. We also differed in other, sometimes more profound respects.

Friendships are never totally explicable. They are the products of accident and chance, but when both sense some warmth and shared common interests, then the most unlikely pair can enjoy each other's company. I am a Russianist and art historian and Albie was a scholar of comparative religions. We both loved art and music – different art and different music. Our childhoods and years of early study were experienced on opposite sides of the world.

These differences turned out to be of no consequence as we got to know each other over time and worked to understand the world together. And 'worked' is the right word. When I wrote articles or chapters for a book Albie would take them away after lunch one week and the next I would have a summary of the notes he had made, recommendations for changes and new ideas to follow up. I would read his drafts for the U3A courses he was putting together, and I read the manuscript of every chapter of his frank and informative autobiography.

It was during these exchanges that Albie's strengths revealed themselves. He was always generous in ▷▷

the rich tradition of saint francis

The Franciscan Story: the Story of St Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan Movement
Maurice Carmody
Athena Press
Review: Joy Cowley

In the late 1980s, Fr Maurice Carmody studied for his doctorate in Church History at the Gregorian University in Rome. His thesis dealt with the history of the Franciscans in the 19th century and the reasons that led to the amalgamation of four Franciscan families into one – the Order of Friars Minor (OFM).

During his research he realised that most histories of the Order concentrated on the period from its origins in the 13th century until 1517 when the First Order of friars split into the Observants and the Conventuals. The rest of the amazingly rich and diverse history that contributed so much to church spirituality, theology, politics and art, was scattered through magazines, papers and specialist books. It was time for a general history of the Franciscan movement.

While Maurice Carmody was lecturing in Rome on Franciscan history, he gathered materials from various archives and libraries. A vast amount of material was found in scholarly magazines and books long forgotten. He entered the task of writing and research, as both author and scholar: *"As I wrote I became very involved with the personalities and characters… I tried to enter their world and see them as real people struggling with their faith and its practical implications, with their own ideals and deficiencies…"*

It is this depth of involvement that brings *The Franciscan Story* to life for the reader. It begins, of course, with the Bernadone family and the boy born in 1182 to Pica, the devout mother, and Peter Bernadone, cloth merchant, ambitious for his two sons. Francis, the younger, was a typical son of a prosperous family – until the age of 25 when he walked away from an affluent lifestyle to identify with the poorest of the poor. There would be few people in the world today who do not know the story of St Francis.

The initiative of a charismatic leader is lost if it is not institutionalised or legally bound in some way. Usually, there is some kind of ongoing tension between the original charism and what it must become. Tension is the stuff of growth, and of schism. It is also the stuff of intrigue and it is this, told with the story-teller's voice, that makes Maurice Carmody's book a page turner.

He says: "*I hope that* The Franciscan Story *will introduce readers to the rich and diverse contribution that Franciscan men and woman (religious and lay) have made to society, the church, spirituality, theology, academic studies, politics, etc; as well as the human weaknesses and foibles that have accompanied that contribution. It is a human story after all."*

The Franciscan Story is a historical event in itself. It will be without doubt an essential text in academic and religious libraries, but it has also a wider appeal. Those of us who feel absolutely at home in a church that is human as well as divine, will love it. ■

▷▷ praise. He was always acute in his observations. He had a sharp eye for the typo, the inappropriate word or phrase, offering alternatives, but always with a disarming modesty. His knowledge of his own subjects was encyclopaedic. He was always willing to share that knowledge, but not insistently so, only when prompted, when it was asked for.

Throughout most of those years Albie would arrive for lunch with a shoulder bag containing a book or two and some notes, relating to topics of previous meetings, treasures for me to savour, extending the boundaries of my interests and thinking.

I was always astonished by the accuracy and easy recall of his past, his childhood, student days, academic training, life as a teacher and writer. It was only when that precise memory began to fail last year that I understood for the first time that our many years together were not infinite.

Albie, as I and most of his friends, always called him, was a gentle, kind-hearted man, with only good words for others and for a life rich in friends and learning. I never heard him fail to be considerate or polite, or complain about the string of physical discomforts it was eventually his lot to bear. Perhaps the occasional click of the tongue hinted at the need to find further resources to cope with current problems.

Thursday lunch will not be the same without him.

Peter Stupples

was JFK assassinated by the CIA

JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died & Why It Matters
James W Douglass
Orbis books
Review: Mike Noonan

George W Bush's *War on Terror* was always doomed to failure. Terror has no existence outside our psyches. To declare war on terror is to declare war on ourselves. The world has been there before, when, in the 1960s, two great superpowers in possession of vast nuclear arsenals faced off against each other across the globe. The fact that the *MAD* doctrine (mutually assured destruction) took root as plausible in some minds is an illustration of the insanity of humanity declaring war on itself in a nuclear age.

Thomas Merton in his book *Raids on the Unspeakable* wrote in 1965 that "One of the awful facts of our age, is the evidence that [the world] is stricken indeed, stricken to the very core of its being by the presence of the Unspeakable – a depth of evil beyond the capacity of the world to describe."

James W Douglass traces an eruption of such evil in *JFK and the Unspeakable, Why He Died & Why It Matters* (Orbis Books, 2008). Douglass, a theologian, takes Thomas Merton with him, as a spiritual guide, as he recounts the story.

In a letter written early in the Kennedy presidency, Thomas Merton wrote "I have little confidence in Kennedy; I think he cannot fully measure up to the magnitude of his task, and lacks creative imagination and the deeper kind of sensitivity that's needed. Too much the *Time and Life* mentality,… What is needed is really not shrewdness or craft, but what the politicians don't have: depth, humanity and a certain totality of self-forgetfulness and compassion, not just for individuals but for man as a whole: a deeper kind of dedication. Maybe Kennedy will break through into that some day by miracle. But such people are long marked out for assassination."

Did that miracle breakthrough that Thomas Merton scarce dared hope for occur? Newly released papers from the time of Kennedy's assassination have meant that historians have the opportunity to re-assess his presidency, and also the events of that day in November 1963. From that new material and from all that was previously available, Douglass concludes that Kennedy was assassinated by his own security forces.

Exasperated by the undermining machinations of the CIA during the *Bay of Pigs* crisis, Kennedy said he wanted "to splinter the CIA in a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds". By meticulously comparing and contrasting the statements of witnesses to JFK's assassination, Jim Douglass builds a convincing case that Kennedy was instead himself smashed by a CIA aghast at the treachery of one who would do deals with the mortal enemies of the US.

Jim Douglass's book is a thoroughly researched, densely annotated tale. Told through the eyes of a sea of witnesses, it describes how, at the height of the Cold War, two men, John F Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, turned toward peace. Together they had risked committing the worst crime against humanity ever committed – a nuclear holocaust. The story told of their return from the brink of nuclear destruction is as gripping and taut as any political thriller.

In support of the argument that Kennedy was willing to befriend his enemies, a fascinating overview is given of the secret and confidential 'back channel' correspondence between Kennedy and Khrushchev. Given the public posturing at the time, I was astounded by the good-natured, friendly and life-affirming tone of the letters. "Dear Mr President," wrote Khrushchev, in 1961, "At present I am on the shore of the Black Sea… This is indeed a wonderful place. As a former Naval Officer you would surely appreciate the merits of these surroundings, the beauty of the sea and the grandeur of the Caucasian mountains. Under this bright southern sun, it is even somehow hard to believe that there still exist problems in the world which, due to lack of solutions, cast a sinister shadow on the peaceful life, on the future of millions of people."

The negotiations and the correspondence begun in the last three months of Kennedy's life with Fidel Castro are also detailed. Jean Daniel was Kennedy's unofficial envoy to Fidel Castro. Douglass quotes him as saying that Castro offered the following comment with a 'broad boyish grin': "Tell him that I'm willing to declare [Barry] Goldwater my friend if it will guarantee Kennedy's re-election!". This is the stuff indeed of engaging with the humanity of one's enemies!

Particularly interesting to me is that at approximately the same time as *L'Arche* (French for the Ark) was beginning to form in the heart of Jean Vanier, the two world leaders were using this same image in their secret correspondence: Khrushchev proposed the biblical image of the Noah's Ark as a symbol of their situation – as precarious as a boat on a sea of conflict – "where both the 'clean' and the 'unclean' find their sanctuary" and in which, of course, both the clean and the unclean (however that might be defined) have a vested interest in keeping the boat afloat.

I had not realised the prophetic role of John XXIII at this time. Before Pope John XXIII released his powerful encyclical *Pacem in Terris* to the world, he had it translated into Russian and delivered secretly to Khrushchev who

was greatly appreciative of it. It now appears that at a time of dire need, when the world stood poised on the brink of destruction, grace broke through and the three together became a triumvirate for world peace.

Kennedy was so displeased with the CIA and its machinations during the *Bay of Pigs* crisis, that he fired three top level CIA officials: Allen Dulles, the Head of CIA, Richard Bissell, the Head of Covert Action and General Charles Cabell, thus confirming their enmity.

Was Kennedy aware of what would happen to him as a result of crossing his security services? We are told by Douglass that Kennedy's biographer, Ralph Martin, noted an increasing tendency by Kennedy to speak about death. Like Barack Obama, Kennedy had enormous admiration for Abraham Lincoln. He carried with him a prayer/statement of Lincoln's. *"I know there is a God and I see a storm coming. If he has a place for me, I know I am ready."*

In re-telling the story of the afternoon the Cuban Missile crisis was resolved, Douglass affords us an intimate portrait of an exhausted JFK telling his brother Bobby, in an obvious reference to Lincoln's assassination and to the dangers of his situation: "This is the night I should go to the theatre."

We learn also that ever since courageously facing almost inevitable death after his U-boat sank during the Second World War, Kennedy had been particularly nourished by the words of a poem *I have a Rendezvous with Death* which was written by an American soldier serving in the French Foreign Legion during World War I. After returning from their honeymoon in 1953 John had taught the poem to Jackie. Jackie, in her turn, taught it to the young Caroline.

Douglass describes an extraordinary moment when the five-year-old Caroline interrupted her father, who was meeting with his National Security Council in the White House Rose Garden, in order to tell him something important. JFK resisted her interruption and tried to divert her, but Caroline persisted and eventually was allowed to say what she wanted to say. In full view and hearing of the Security Council who opposed his breakthrough to peace, Caroline recited *I have a Rendezvous with Death.* A moment pregnant with meaning when considered in the light of his assassination some seven weeks later.

Last year when Caroline Kennedy and her uncle Ted endorsed Barack Obama's bid for Presidency, they did so at the site where – in Khrushchev's estimation – the greatest speech ever made by an American President, was given. The *Commencement Speech* at the American University, set out JFK's vision of a disarmed future for our world. Douglass reproduces it in full. It proved as profoundly unpopular with the security forces as had Kennedy's 'weakness' in his responses to the Soviet threat during the *Bay of Pigs* and during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In 1963 the media paid scant attention to the speech, yet I believe that the fact that JFK's surviving child and his brother chose that same venue to endorse Obama is deeply symbolic and profoundly significant. Obama's presidency seeks to turn from the warmongering of the Bush years to a more conciliatory foreign policy.

In today's terms, trillions of dollars have been spent on the arms race. Livelihoods and whole economies have depended on it for survival. I have discovered, to my horror, that even the lap-top upon which I am tapping out this review is made by a major armaments manufacturer whose computer technology has been honed in the service of the military. The vested interests have been deep indeed and have far-reaching tentacles.

The book's title is worthy of repetition – *JFK and the Unspeakable, Why He Died & Why It Matters*. Similar vested interests swirl around Barack Obama as he takes up his Presidency. Jo Biden, his vice President, announced in the first major foreign policy speech of this administration that "it is time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should be working together with Russia."

The signals from Moscow about President Obama's new direction in foreign policy have careered back and forth from outright hostility to conciliatory messages. That is why, as Barak Obama plots his 'new' course and distances his administration from George Bush and Dick Cheney's wholehearted embrace of the American military machine, the truth of the events of 45 years ago still matters and it matters more than ever today. ■

These 2 books an be ordered from *Pleroma Christian Bookshop*, Otane

eat, drink and be merry . . .

Crosscurrents
John Honoré

I met my favourite little old lady again, mentioned in a previous column as having received bad news on the state of her health. This time it was in the supermarket and she asked, quite artlessly, "Why am I still alive?"

Most people most of the time want to live for ever. But like many a truth, this is a half-truth. When suffering, some people do not want to live for ever and yearn for release. Having no respite from pain nor the strength to go on, thinking of death becomes a meditation on the beyond, a place or a state of grace. The prime concern then becomes, not one of the quality of life, but of attempting to come to terms with Descartes' notion of the soul as a separate spiritual substance with a life of its own.

Why live on? Because one's life is precious and has a purpose. For this little old lady, the example she sets for others on how to cope with adversity is heroic and a lesson for us all. The question "Why?" means for what purpose and it is impossible to indicate any purpose. Affliction and the attendant absence of God recalls the "dark night of the soul" of St John of the Cross. Christ himself asked, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

It was time to recount my father's oft repeated words of wisdom that Christ's first miracle of changing water to wine had great significance, namely, that life was too short to drink cheap wine. I suggested to the little old lady to consider the beauty of life, the Hopkins' philosophy: "Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!" and when the time comes you will get what you need to cope with life. Then we each bought ourselves a bottle of expensive Chardonnay. *Santé, Madame!*

sorry about that

The extraordinary case of the Otago District Health Board being defrauded of $16.9 million over six years calls into question not only how Swann and Hartford were able to remain undetected but also who is accountable for the administration's dereliction of duty that made the crime possible. Richard Thomson, sacked as Chairman by Health Minister Tony Ryall, is still defiant and does not accept responsibility. He continues as a member of the Board. Board members, auditors and all involved have closed ranks around him. So much for the accountability of public funds.

If our District Health Boards are to survive in their present form, it is incumbent upon executives to exercise greater control and to accept moral responsibility for their actions (or inaction). Today's world of free market capitalism is creating an environment in which fewer businessmen honour traditional values. Responsibility is increasingly disassociated from the power and prestige of being a board member. Directors seek to evade moral and legal liability for the organisations they supposedly control by insulating themselves from the 'petty' details of running the organisation.

It is accepted that finance companies and banks, in their strange world of financial statements, reports and unsecured debenture stock, collapse; but this ODHB loss is public taxpayers' money for the benefit of all and ostensibly under government control. Health Board members often complain that overregulation by government inhibits their freedom and accomplishments, yet this gross deception is the very reason that has made regulation necessary.

So how can those in control of public funds walk away with a "sorry about that" and attend another board meeting in order to vote themselves an increase in directors' fees? Seemingly, they exercise the power of government without assuming any responsibility and without being subject to public scrutiny. It is shameful.

under the mattress

I don't want readers saying that they didn't see this coming, they were caught unawares, or why *Tui Motu* didn't warn us. So I am telling you right now: your global diversified non-liquid assets have melted and the marketability of your contingent liabilities is zero.

During the interval between the composition of this column and you reading it, another bank has probably gone *phut*! and the US Mint has run out of paper on which to print money. Bernard Madoff and Allen Standford are no longer laughing all the way to the bank. That bank is now an unsecured, debt-ridden pile of bricks. All government books, the world over, are of the same colour and size as Chairman Mao's little book – and of the same use.

Telephone numbers are no longer big enough to describe debt, bailouts, or government handouts. These figures are now described in millions, trillions or the distance between the earth and any known galaxy. You must adapt to the new maths. This is the age of funny money. Try not to weep when you finally have the courage to study your bank statement.

What to do? Restrict your lavish spending to necessities, sell the Porsche, the wide-screen TV, the yacht and the truffles. Put proceeds in a small bag (easy, because there won't be much), place under mattress and sit on it. Think about starting a finance company. Keep subscribing to *Tui Motu* and watch this space for further invaluable financial advice. ■

fallen from grace

Pope Benedict is currently coping with a debacle inherited from his predecessor. Fr Marcial Maciel founded in 1946 the *Legion of Christ* and the related lay group, *Regnum Christi*. Originating in Mexico, they now number some 850 priests, about 1,000 consecrated women and about 60,000 members of *Regnum*.

The movement received endorsement and support from the Holy See, notably from Pope John Paul II. It promoted his sort of church. Maciel himself enjoyed the favour of JP II and was commissioned to play several roles in Vatican-related bodies. He was three times invited to accompany the pontiff on papal visits to Mexico.

Over the years there were accusations of misconduct on the part of Maciel. These came to a head in 1997 when nine professional men alleged in a published article that Maciel had molested them when they were young men – as young as 12 – in Legion seminaries in Spain and Italy during the 1940s, '50s and '60s. The accusers maintained that Pope John Paul II had not responded to letters sent through church channels in 1978, and again in 1989, seeking an investigation. In fact, in 1994 the Pope had praised Maciel as an "efficacious guide to youth".

Maciel denied the accusations as "defamations and falsities with no foundation whatsoever". Defenders of the Legion's founder questioned the reliability and motivation of the accusers. Maciel continued to lead the Legion until January 2005.

The replacement of John Paul II by Benedict XVI put an end to an era of papal protection. The *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* moved ahead in investigating matters. It issued, in 2006, a communique stating that it had decided "bearing in mind Maciel's advanced age and his delicate health... to forgo a canonical hearing and to invite the Father to a reserved life of penitence and prayer, relinquishing any form of public ministry". Maciel died in January 2008. In February this year, the Legion acknowledged that its founder had had a mistress and fathered a child, who is now a woman of 22.

As well as the usual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, members of the Legion took a simple vow that included the obligation never to speak ill of the order, of "our father" or of other superiors, and to inform on those who did. Members of the Legion were called on to follow the ways of thinking and acting of the founder. Much of this now needs to be rethought. This includes a preference for ministering to the well-to-do and a heavy-handed fundraising among supporters, which has made it an exceptionally wealthy body within the church.

One former member of the Legion put his criticism of the Order in these words: "We need a healer to come to several dioceses in the American Midwest and undo the immense damage done (much of it secretively) by the *Regnum Christi* movement that came into parishes and manipulated and shamed good, ordinary folks into feeling that they were 'not good enough' Catholics unless they did children's programs their way, marriage enrichment their way, adult faith formation their way. They picked on priests and lay ministers and created a toxic atmosphere by reporting 'liturgical abuses' and 'doctrinal errors' – as if they were the Spanish Inquisition. Oh wait – they were!"

The revelations about the shortcomings of their founder have been devastating, of course, for the rank and file members of the Legion and the Regnum. The one who was so much the propounder of their spirit and way of acting has been revealed to have been a base hypocrite.

What is the future of the *Legionaries of Christ* and *Regnum Christi*? Is the remedy that the Legion and Regnum be revitalised? Will it be possible to find fresh leaders not tainted by the years of complicity, coverup and brain washing? Or would it be best for the Legion and the Regnum to be dissolved? Priest members could join other religious orders or find a place among the diocesan clergy. The laity could become involved in other areas of the life of the church.

Whatever may be the answers to such questions, the personal anguish that even the phrasing of such questions brings to the tens of thousands of committed members of the faithful belonging to the Legion or the Regnum cannot but evoke our sympathy and concern. These fellow Catholics need our support, not our condemnation.

A last thought. What does the whole saga say about the quality of Vatican administration of justice? The bishop of Toowoomba, Queensland, Bishop William Morris, recently made it known he has been under investigation by the Vatican for two years after discussing in a pastoral letter the prospect of women priests or married priests.

Vatican administration is highly selective as to what alleged misbehaviour it decides to follow up. ■

Humphrey O'Leary CSsR

Humphrey O'Leary is a canon lawyer and Rector of the Redemptorist community in Auckland

A Mothers Journal . . .

Lent starts already. It's such an un-21st-century concept, deliberately choosing to not have something, to be silent, to do without… Our friend Arthur is unfashionable and un-21st-century too. He collects and distributes food ditched by supermarkets after a *Use By* date passes or if a laundry powder packet splits open. He cycles around Christchurch with a laden bike trailer distributing his goodies at odd hours of the night.

His is a quiet but subversive act of redressing balance in our nonsensical world whose mantra seems to be 'More, Faster, Newer, Update, Discard, Consume!' He refuses to let good food go to the landfill – so this week sugar, yoghurt and bread rolls have all made their way to our shelves gratis – and welcome. I'd struggle to explain the bulging bins of edible food outside many NZ eateries to friends in India.

Part of Lent's challenge to me is that ideas of doing without (fasting), giving away my money and things frequently, and prayer are disciplines essential for the whole year – not just in the lead up to Easter. Lent provides an invitation to get them back to a more central place. I need to fast and do without – just to wake myself up from a daily existence often numbed by the surfeit of comfort, good food and ease of life.

Billboards urge me to pamper myself every day – with fine food, a weekend at a resort, or a day of bulging shopping bags. I'm a great fan of treats – but I don't think they're good for me every day. When I give up something I love, I may even get a small understanding of Jesus who gave up everything in his surrender to the cross.

A new pleasure this summer has been the *Baby Toe Rosary* during the first morning feed. When only Baby Jalori and I are floating in dawn's soft and hesitant light, I use her toes as a prayer rosary. The right foot has a toe for each of the five members of our family. Her five left toes are prompts to pray for friends, Gaza, India, others and myself. It's a time I savour, this holy and still half-hour before the busy-mother-of-four factory job starts…

So this Lent I'm remembering again (slow learner that I am) that the circular tasks of running a house require little brain power – and thus allow me to think and pray… that rosaries come in many shapes and sizes… that I can choose to go without some things. There are many good reasons to do this. I hope this is just getting things back into proper balance – that I see Lent break into my busy mother's life all the year round. ■

Kaaren Mathias