Tui Motu
InterIslands

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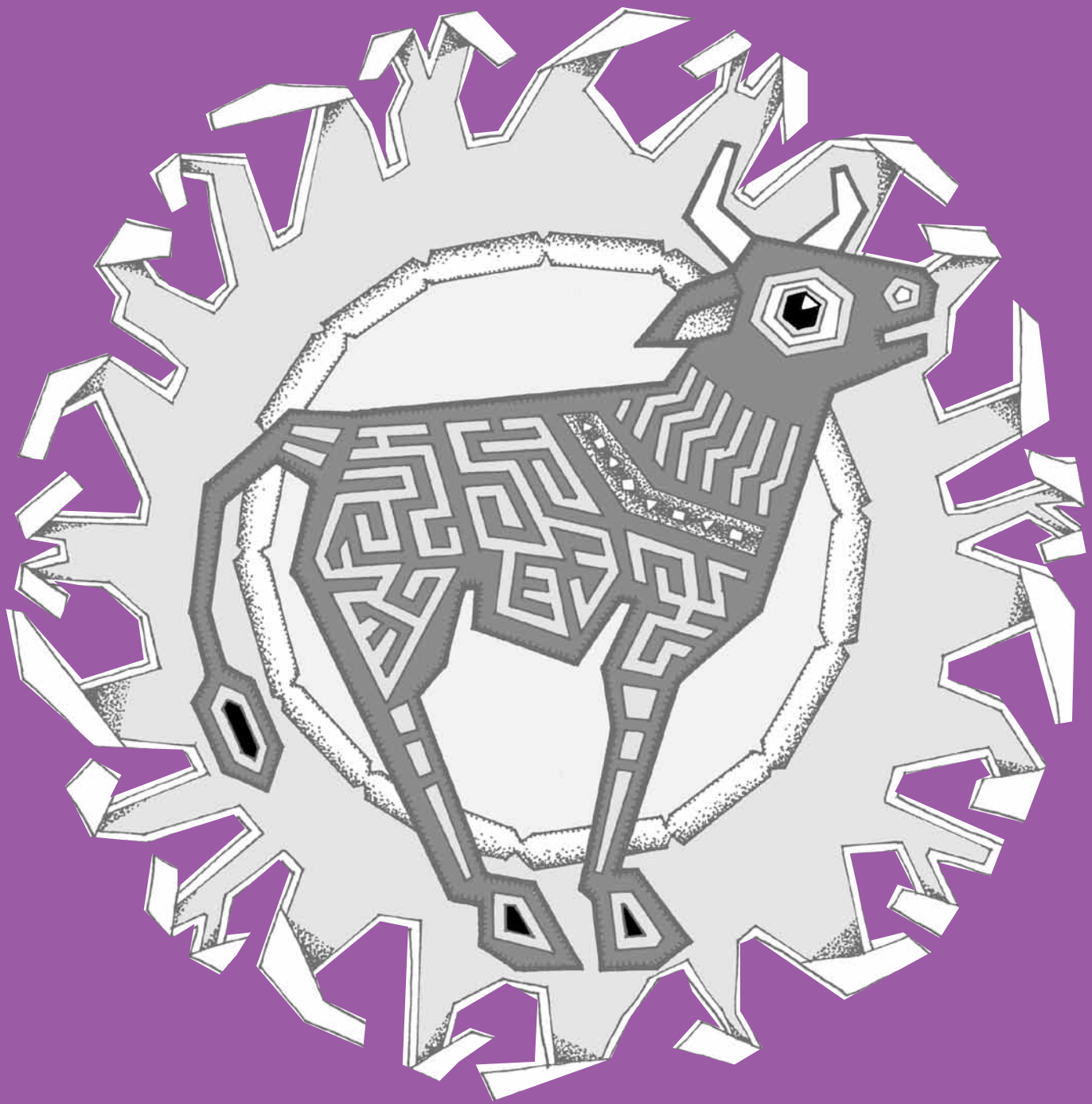

the golden calf

. . . what is your false god

Contents

False gods

Mike Riddell launches a new series of articles on the false gods of our age.

Season for change

Lent comes upon us unexpectedly in the Southern Hemisphere. We have hardly shaken off our holiday jandals and put away the suntan lotion when we are confronted by the prophet's clarion call: *Rend your hearts, not your garments*. Last Sunday I heard a preacher define Lent as a time for metamorphosis, "when grubs turn into butterflies" – meaning the occasion for spiritual change, for repentance, for 'spring cleaning'. It is unfortunate that for us it often arrives when we are still in relaxed summer attire and not in the mood for radical change.

However, it also coincides with the beginning of a new year, academic and social. People are making choices: what clubs to belong to, what courses to enrol in, what new directions to embark upon. It is actually quite a good time to put our spiritual houses in order. Indeed perhaps it is the very best time also to take a serious look at the state of our society, our church and our world.

The March *Tui Motu* contains some specifically Lenten pieces. Paul Andrews and Bernard Sabella describe the habit of regular daily prayer, common to Muslims and Jews as well as Christians. They suggest that praying to the same God should be a means for coming together rather than division. Diane Pendola writes from the depths of the northern winter, when her despair at world and national events becomes healed by the wondrous faith of a religious community celebrating the life of one of its beloved members. And Glynn Cardy boldly confronts the problem of Satan, who figures so prominently in Lenten readings. Satan is too readily used by Christians as a bogeyman to justify cruel and intolerant stances against those we may categorise as evil.

Spiritual renewal is the place where serious change must always begin. But, like Jeremiah, I would like to take a step deeper and look at the present predicament of church and world. Jeremiah is often seen as the forerunner of Christ in the way in which his tireless indictment of Israel, of his own Jewish world, brought upon himself savage persecution. The heart of the prophet is torn apart because he knows his people are doomed – and it is their own fault (*Jer.14,17*).

Hans Küng, speaking on the future of Judaism (Feb. *Tui Motu* pp 22-23), states that "like other religions Judaism sees itself confronted with the dilemma of fundamentalism or secularism". He would not deny that Islam and Christianity face precisely the same dilemma. Secularism is the enemy outside, fundamentalism is the enemy within. Scylla and Charybdis – between these two whirlpools the modern church charts an uneasy and unsteady course.

New Zealand is a profoundly secular society. Helen Clark, Michael Cullen, Don Brash are all secular in belief and attitude. It is true that their primary motivation is humanist. They strive for 'the greatest good of the greatest number'. Many of the present government's social goals and achievements are wholly admirable. Nevertheless, to anyone steeped in

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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.

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

the gospel imperative and in the rich tradition of Christianity, the Utopia offered by our politicians can appear bleak and ugly.

Not that the self-avowed Christian leaders, Bush and Blair, have any better goods to peddle. Their single-minded pursuit of self-interest and Western aggrandisement have scandalised their allies and roused a terrible backlash in the Islamic world. Church leaders, therefore, have a bounden duty to challenge the blatant injustices of the power-hungry politicians on the one hand, and to seek dialogue with those leaders who are well-intentioned but secularist. The Hikoi of Hope was a fine example of this.

Fundamentalism is an equally serious challenge. We are naive if we think it is a problem confined to evangelical churches. Anyone who believes that the word of God is divinely inspired – and that church authorities enjoy divine guidance – can easily fall into the trap of basing their conduct, even their belief systems, on single texts. We may affirm that the Bible is the inspired word of God, but that means the *whole* Bible, in context, authoritatively interpreted. We may claim the church to be infallible, but that certainly does not apply to every statement issued by a liturgical commission or Curial department, even by the Holy See.

Within the Catholic Church in New Zealand we appear at this time to be having a problem with some of our recently ordained priests. It surfaced at the recent gathering for religious in Wellington, (pp14-15 February *Tui Motu*). This report prompted two letters from lay people which we print below. The apparent fundamentalism of some of these priests may be a matter of faith development. Young people are more likely to be 'black and white' in their judgments. Only experience teaches them that prudence as well as wisdom will point towards a more nuanced viewpoint. Unfortunately, as our correspondents assert, that is scant consolation to those in the pews who have to put up with arrogance and immaturity.

People sometimes ask us why this magazine is not better known throughout the country, at least in Catholic parishes. Some priests support its sale, others don't. But we have had three separate instances – different parishes, different parts of the country – where recently ordained priests have blocked the promotion of *Tui Motu* in their parishes. In other words they put their own inexperienced judgment in the way of their parishioners being able to exercise their own choice to see a Catholic magazine and decide about it for themselves. These young men are into the politics of control.

Recently the *Health and Disability Commissioner*, referring to a Tauranga case, stated bluntly that the safety of the patients must always be paramount. Likewise with church discipline: such a lesson has been painfully learned by the churches in dealing with cases of sexual abuse by pastors. But the same must apply to the way priests teach and preach and exercise their authority. The best interests of their congregations must come first. I hope the Catholic bishops will put the question of the training and supervision of recently ordained priests high on the agenda of their post-Easter meeting, if it isn't already there.

Our church has a long and sometimes inglorious history. There have been times of corruption and times of intolerance and persecution. Its one boast – and I continue to see it as its glory – is that it is 'catholic'. Catholic means having an appeal which is universal. It encompasses many theologies, many spiritualities. It welcomes the sinner as well as encouraging its members in holiness. However, the antithesis of this is a fundamentalism which seeks to control and condemn. If this movement in Catholicism were to become dominant, then our church would cease to be a 'church'. It would become a sect, not a church. Which God forbid!

M.H.

Radcliffe & the young priests

I enjoyed reading Timothy Radcliffe's opinions ("Troubadour of God" TM February pp 14-15), but one comment left me wondering if he'd thought his answer through.

These "young people who are seeking their identity" are fully ordained priests. Within the Catholic Church they have more power and authority than an equally devoted woman, who not only knows who she is but also knows a great deal more about the world. Even though a religious may have lived longer, experienced diverse cultures, travelled, served the poor, or even gained a doctorate in theology, a young priest who may find it exciting to "don the habit for the first time" has greater authority.

You cannot "accompany with sympathy" someone who has more control than you and less idea of what should be done with it.

Zella Horrell, Riversdale

I thought Timothy Radcliffe's answer regarding young priests who want a sort of "fancy dress religion", was shallow, and missed what many people are concerned about. He said we should not be worried because these young clergy are just "seeking identity". It's not a question of whether they wish to seek their identity and whether they wear a collar and black. After all, that is 'age and stage' stuff.

What concerns me is the power given by the church, often to someone in their 20s with little life experience. If a young priest has extremely conservative views and applies absolutes and black-and-white rulings to a given situation, they may cause a great deal of harm. Misused, power can have a profoundly negative impact on another person's life.

The church has a major responsibility to ensure these young men have ongoing personal and spiritual development – and most importantly, that they are appropriately supervised.

Katie O'Connor, Gore

Timothy Radcliffe spoke primarily from his experience of young religious, whose development is strongly influenced by their communities – (ed.)

The Virgin Birth

The idea that the virgin birth (cf *Feb issue* letters p 4) represents a completely miraculous act of God is common to both *Matthew* and *Luke*. Its centre of interest is that the conception of Jesus by his virgin mother is a sign of divine choice and grace. Any truth about Mary is first of all a truth about Jesus.

The truth about Jesus is that his mysterious origin was in God as Son and Messiah from birth. No human power caused the Son of God to become human. What the teaching on the virgin birth safeguards is that Jesus Christ comes to us completely as God's gift, born not of human seed but of human need, not from human parentage but by God's creative initiative.

The starting point of any consideration of the virginal conception has to be God's action, then Jesus' identity as of divine origin. Nor should the scriptural texts be made to say more than they do. In the biological thinking of their time the male provided the complete seed; the woman was the seedbed that brought the seed to life. How recent is our own understanding of human reproduction, mitosis and meiosis, and DNA!

A biological starting point for the virginal conception and birth of Jesus will inevitably produce scepticism. It can also lead to a devaluing of the God-given process by which human life comes into the world, a sad reflection on some of the early Church Fathers as well as the invocations 'mother inviolate' and 'mother undefiled'!

It is the meaning and the message of the virgin birth that needs to be given first consideration. To put it bluntly, Mary's virginity cannot be understood or defined in terms of the physical realm alone. "Mary, as the great woman of faith, lays herself open to the mystery of God's plan for her unique womanly and motherly role" (*F. J. Moloney*). For *Luke*, she is the first person to risk everything for the sake of her Son, making her the first among all believers in a God who could bring life out of empty tombs and empty wombs. Virginity does not mean 'unspoiled' or 'undamaged'; rather it means 'open,' the fertile ground for something new.

Karl Rahner asserts that questions involved in the doctrine of the virgin birth must be thought afresh; Boff reminds us that "in a time when Marian dogmas are no longer accepted without question, so that they must be continually defended and justified, the need arises for a distinction between what belongs to the *essential* content of faith, and what belongs to a secondary level." (Leonardo Boff: *The Maternal Face of God.* p141)

Kieran Fenn, Wellington

letters to the editor

We welcome comment, discussion, argument, debate. But please keep letters under 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge, while not altering meaning.

Response articles (up to a page) are also welcome, but need to be by negotiation

Is it cm – or mm?

Is your math up to scratch? The tsunami diagram (*Feb. issue p 12*) shows 3000 cm and the text identifies the uplift as 3 metres? Something seems amiss.

Maurice McGreal, Auckland

Apologies for this error, which escaped the editorial eye. More recent satellite data suggests that the amplitude of the Boxing Day wave in mid-ocean was nearer half a metre, not 10 cm as we reported. - ed.

Space in life for God

What a clear and accurate article on taking possession of your own life Jacquie Lambert provided for *Tui Motu* (*Feb pp 20-21*). Her acknowledgment of the obligation we have, as members of the church, to listen to the institutional viewpoint was phrased in words of such happy choice.

It is now 40 years since the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* made it perfectly clear that the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong is one's own conscience. Naturally, as the author wrote, any decisions formulated must be preceded by a reasonable knowledge of relevant church statements.

Don't you just love the reference to the 'newly vacated space', which She may inhabit. My thanks to Jacquie for her words of insight.

Desmond Smith, Auckland

Küng and the Jews

I read with great interest Hans Küng's article on Judaism (*Feb. pp 22-23*) which made many excellent points. However, as seems to be often the case with Küng, mixed in with much that is true there seems to be a little that is not well grounded in history or in the gospel of peace.

• It isn't true that Pope Pius XII "kept quiet" on the Holocaust. He condemned German Fascism and did all he could to save Jews. Rightly or wrongly, he judged that he could save more lives by not being more publicly outspoken.

• The non-recognition of the state of Israel by the Vatican probably has more to do with its acute understanding of the political and anti-Palestinian elements within Zionism, than to any Vatican "anti-Semitism". Criticism of the political state of Israel is not the same as anti-Semitism. Kung appears to display a dangerous naiveity in describing Israel as a "democratic state".

• The Gospel of *John* does not make "the Jews" responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. The first responsibility is clearly placed on the Jewish political and religious elite in alliance with the Romans. But it would go too far to say, as Küng does, that "only" they were responsible, because, as sinners, we all share in the responsibility.

Interfaith dialogue nees to be firmly grounded on truth, not on distortions of history and the Gospel.

Chris Sullivan, Pakuranga

Stripped of human dignity

Lisa Beech

Mistreatment of prisoners in New Zealand prisons has recently been debated by the *Justice and Electoral Select Committee*. At the same time a row broke out over Christ being depicted naked in Christchurch Cathedral's *Stations of the Cross*. But is not Jesus clearly revealed in the face of every humiliated prisoner?

On Ash Wednesday, an appropriate day for discussing repentance and reconciliation, ***Caritas*** met the Select Committee to discuss the *Prisoners' and Victims' Claims* Bill. Against a backdrop of hardening attitudes towards prisoners, we followed the oral submissions by two families of murder victims. They were people who had suffered unbearable losses and were genuinely outraged that Courts had awarded compensation for considerably less harm than the offenders themselves had committed.

In the face of their grief, it was hard to point out to the Select Committee that compensation is one of the few ways to keep the State's treatment of prisoners in check. However, the reality is that the measures proposed in this Bill would only benefit victims if the State continues to mistreat prisoners.

Caritas staff told the Committee that both international obligations and New Zealand's own human rights standards obliges us to treat people in our prisons with humanity. We had been shocked to learn the extent of prison abuse, revealed by recent court cases, but also by the Ombudsman's reports for the past two years, the *Human Rights Commission* 2004 report, and a 2002 report of the *United Nations Committee on Human Rights*.

Some MPs pass off prison abuse as being excessively minor incidents such as the wrong voltage of a light bulb. However the mistreatment of prisoners has not been minor, and has included the excessive use of solitary confinement as a punishment; allegations of assault by prison staff (some resulting in permanent injury); and strip searches which, in the words of Justice Young, "typically lacked privacy and preservation of dignity".

One question put to ***Caritas*** was whether we felt compensation was justified when prisoners complained of hurt feelings. Our reply was that if "hurt feelings" meant the loss of dignity experienced by those stripped naked in public, then that was no more acceptable in New Zealand than it was in Iraq. I have met political prisoners in the Philippines who proudly showed me healed torture scars, but who still spoke with horror of attacks which combined physical pain with fear and humiliation, designed to break not the body but the mind.

The Taunoa decision, which awarded compensation to five prisoners last year, describes how feet are painted on the floor in a corridor of Auckland prison's D block – as public an area as could be found, in a section of the prison designed for solitary confinement – where prisoners are required to stand for routine strip searches. Justice Young accepted that prisoners were sometimes left naked in their cells for hours.

"There was an inappropriate casualness by Corrections Officers," he said, "in providing adequate cover for inmates. Inmates in such a situation are totally reliant upon guards to protect their modesty and avoid humiliation." Can the intimate body search of convicted murderers be compared to the publicly naked execution of Christ? It can if we genuinely believe that we are all diminished by the loss of dignity suffered by the least of us.

The only way the Government can morally escape the requirement to compensate mistreated prisoners is to end the abuse. If there is no prison abuse, there will be no compensation, and so nothing to distribute to victims. **Caritas** believes most victims will find this Bill a mirage – that possibilities of compensation will recede as they approach it. If victims of crime are to receive further support or compensation, this Bill will not achieve it.

In the meantime, prisoners who desperately need to make a new start in life, will be returned to society more alienated and angry than they left it. Treating prisoners violently will result in a more brutal society. Recognising their humanity is the only way to build a more humane society.

The Catholic Church recognises that prisoners can be deprived of their liberty, but never of their dignity. Nakedness can offend, but Christ's nakedness in the Christchurch Cathedral art is an important reminder that what is truly offensive is to discard human dignity, as is happening today in New Zealand prisons. ■

Caritas advocacy officer Lisa Beech was part of a Caritas delegation on the Prisoners' and Victims' Claims Bill.

new series

Worshipping false gods is not a folly confined to Old Testament times. It is alive and well today. Indeed, as human beings move away from believing in and serving God, the more easily they seem to fall into idolatry.
Tui Motu *has invited some of its regular writers to write about their 'favourite' idol of today.*

Mike Riddell *fires the series off with a reflection on false gods in general – and his own particular choice,*
fame

To be someone

Idolatry is popular, if recent television history is anything to go by. In 2004, one of the highest-rating shows in New Zealand was the glorified talent quest, *NZ Idol*. The holy grail of this series was instant fame – the promise of both stardom and a lucrative recording contract for a previous unknown. Copying the format from other equally popular contests around the Western world, the spectacle demonstrated both the universal hunger for recognition and the willingness of contestants to be humiliated in order to achieve it. Of course the show had nothing to do with religion. Or did it?

The business of idolatry has been the main game in town for many a millennium, and has attracted bad press in both Judaism and Christianity alike. Scripture wastes little time on providing arguments for the existence of God. True atheists are about as hard to find as unreconstructed Marxists, and as unlikely to be changed through argument. The focus of the Bible is on monotheism, that opening gambit of the Creed from which all other confessions of faith issue. We believe in one God – one amidst a cast of thousands. The question is not, and never has been, whether God exists; rather it is the question ***who God is***.

False Gods

A key attribute of Christian faith therefore is discernment. We must distinguish the One who is worthy of worship from the many false gods that claim our allegiance but are inadequate to receive it. Traditionally, idols have been thought of as 'little wooden gods'. There is certainly some of this allusion in the book of *Isaiah*, which roundly mocks the manufacturer of 'carved images' who uses half a block of wood to burn on the fire and the other half to kneel before. This accusation has at times in history been turned on Catholics with the claim that crucifixes and statuary represent a form of idolatry.

an idol is that which we mistakenly regard as ultimate. . . devoting ourselves to something less than we are made for

But the deeper intuition of both *Isaiah* and subsequent theologians is that the issue of false gods is a great deal more subtle than the presence or absence of visual aids. True idolatry is a matter of the heart. In consists of giving that which rightfully belongs with God to some other recipient. It is the spiritual equivalent of adultery, and frequently treated as such in Scripture. An idol is that which we mistakenly regard as ultimate. Whenever we devote ourselves to anything less than what we've been made for, we might legitimately be described as idolatrous.

Jesus tells us *where our treasure is to be found our hearts will be also*; which may be about as concise a definition of idolatry as it's possible to find. The question then becomes whether what we treasure is substantial enough to fulfil our hopes and sacrifices – or whether it is altogether too transitory and ultimately futile. Such icons of fealty may not be as readily identified as the golden calf of *Exodus*, but they are able to hold sway over masses of people in much the same way. The false gods of our age may be less obvious, but they are as prolific and influential as ever they have been.

Fame is the spur

One of the more pernicious is the culture of fame which burns like a fire in the heart of our culture. Andy Warhol memorably described our era as one in which "everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes". Later he changed his

prophesy to the ironic: "in 15 minutes everyone will be famous". There was a time, of course, when very few people were deemed worthy of fame. In such times, the great mass of humanity did not aspire to that which was so clearly beyond their reach. Respect and acknowledgement from a person's organic community was sufficient to maintain self-esteem and a strong sense of identity.

This has rapidly been eroded with the widespread collapse of such communities in the techno-industrial world. The rise of what Alain de Botton describes as 'status anxiety' is a complex development. (Alain de Botton, *Status Anxiety*, London: Penguin, 2004) But the symptoms are commonplace: a neurotic fear that our lives are worth nothing; a desperation to lift our heads above the mass of our peers; and a gnawing doubt about our reason for existence. The trivial manifestation of this social disease is that frantic waving for attention which takes place at sports grounds in the vicinity of television cameras. A more serious expression is the rise in suicides.

At root level, the malaise is driven by a hunger for recognition. We all want to be noticed and valued; to have our uniqueness affirmed. This is a legitimate human aspiration. In a society of mass consumption, however, such desires are largely futile. Paradoxically, as the need to be noticed escalates, the possibility declines. It becomes increasingly difficult to do something new or better than what has been done before, and those seem to be among the few grounds on which public attention can be attracted. Desperately unloved members of the community, the David Hinckleys of our world, sometimes resort to such extremes as murder in the attempt to win an audience. After all, to be visible is the essence of fame – '*I am seen, therefore I am*'.

This is a disorder which affects us all. The last decade has produced a flood of television programmes in which people are either treated cruelly, or volunteer to publicly humiliate themselves as a form of entertainment. Thousands clamour to be part of these ventures, willing to endure mockery or voyeurism in exchange for the tantalising dream of notoriety. To have one's name a household word,

to be known by the masses, to be recognised in the street; these are the rewards which seduce otherwise sensible people into a form of ritual demeaning. It seems that it is better to be famous and ridiculed than to live in anonymous dignity.

It is not possible to understand such behaviour without regard to the culture of fame which pervades society. Having given up for ourselves the possibility of living significant lives, we instead live vicariously through certain representative people – the famous. There is a massive industry in media and entertainment (as much as the two can be distinguished) fuelled by the public interest in such demigods as Princess Diana. The task of the media seems to be to anoint certain chosen ones with the oil of fame, consigning them to both stardom and scrutiny. It is no longer necessary to be great to be famous; fame needs no qualifications. Like winning lotto, it is potentially achievable for all.

Celebrities are only the visible manifestation of contemporary obsession; a product of the disorder which produces them. The devotion given to our 'media darlings' represents a familiar habit of the human heart – the tendency to idolatry. We manufacture our own gods, and then seek from them that which they are powerless to provide.

The driving force is a natural one – the need for respect and love – but it is misplaced when directed toward the savage realm of the media circus. In an irony true of all forms of idolatry, that which can only be given in relationship with God is squandered on futile imitations. As Augustine put it, '*Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee*'.

If the worth of our lives is dependent on public visibility, then the vast majority of us are destined to frustration and disappointment. There is some evidence that this is indeed the experience of many, who are dissatisfied with the ordinariness of their existence. We devalue the routine responsibilities which greet us each day, looking instead for something to break in and lift us above the realm of the commonplace, so that we too may be 'special'. As de Botton puts it: "The more humiliating, shallow, debased or ugly we take ordinary lives to be, the stronger will be our desire to set ourselves apart."(*op.cit p.258.*)

The Gospel and meaning

Christianity grew fastest among those who were on the bottom rung of social status, and with good reason. It provided an alternative evaluation of the worth of human life. The dignity of a person was guaranteed not by their wealth or standing, but by virtue of their birth and adoption into the family of God. The apostle Peter assured slaves and street people: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people" (*1 Peter, 2:10*). Through this great theological insight, significance ceased to be a contestable commodity and became instead a universal legacy of grace.

Jesus tell us that God numbers the hairs on our head – a metaphor for the great care with which we are cherished. The good news of the Gospel is that before we have done or achieved anything at all, we are loved. This is the substance of that great reversal by which the dictates of social standing are transcended by faith. Our hunger to be noticed is satisfied by a God on whose palm our name is engraved. The quest for significance is requited by the knowledge that we are created uniquely, each with infinite value. Dignity is given not because of our estimation in the eyes of our peers, but through the fact that each of us bears the inviolable image of our Creator.

When such worth is recognised as a gift bestowed rather than something to be achieved, it enables us to conduct our lives free from the burden of worldly accomplishment. It enables us to revaluate that which is 'ordinary' as being charged with the grandeur of God. A sense of *vocation* may grow, rather than that of *career*: the offering of that which is within for the sake of others and the service of God. Public perception may be considered, but it no longer needs to dominate self-estimation. For the first time perhaps, we are able to know ourselves as children of God, and so unplug from the addiction to a culture of fame.

our hunger to be noticed is satisfied by a God on whose palm our name is engraved

We have been in danger of losing the long perspective on life which is traditional to Christianity. The testimony of faith is that it is impossible to judge a person from the outside. The life we live is played out against the perspective of eternity. Fame is partial and ephemeral; as easily lost as gained. But our inclusion in Christ by which we are redeemed is unshakeable. That which we long for has already been given, even if we must wait for its fulfilment. When our desires find their home in the source of their longing, there is a peace and freedom which idolatry can never bring.

The life hidden in Christ does not need observation to bolster its significance. Our small acts of kindness and mercy can be performed out of faithfulness, without regard to recognition. At all times we know that they are seen and valued by the One who gives us life. As Paul puts it: "God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (*1 Corintians 1:28*). If the quest for our 15 minutes of fame leads inevitably to despair, these words are the beginning of eternal hope. ■

Mike Riddell is a Dunedin-based author, theologian and and play-wright, currently working on a film about Bishop Pompallier

Our Father

YESTERDAY
When first I said
Your Will Be Done,
I didn't know what
That will of yours would be.
What clouds would gather
Black across my sky,
What storms and desolations
Waited near.
I knew your love would give me
What was best,
And I'm glad I didn't
Know the whole.

BUT TODAY
When I said
Your Will Be Done
I discovered what you had in mind.
To ride the storm, to take the shock,
The shame, the desolation too.
I found it hard, it hurts
And penetrates the heart.

YET
I know I must give love,
For it is
Love alone that counts.
Being sad, I say, Lord make it right,
My heart is full of fear.
This peaceful day has changed
Into the mystery of the night.
One bit of courage for the
Darkening of the sky.
One ounce of faith
To brave the night ahead.
Your Will Be Done
Is still my prayer,
Lord, make it plain
That Love is always right.

Dolores Smith

Religious terrorism
Can Restorative Justice Help?

In the February issue Dr Chris Marshall examined Religious Terrorism. It is like an ever-spreading plague, provoking fear and retaliation. Its root causes need to be addressed by governments and remedied. In this second article he looks at a possible role for restorative justice – and sees grounds for hope

The characteristic features of religious terrorism seem so antithetical to restorative justice values, processes, and principles that at first sight it is hard to imagine any convergence between the two.

Take ***values***. Many of the values on which the restorative process depends are alien to the psychology of religious killers. They do not respect their victims. On the contrary, they explicitly repudiate the equal dignity of their opponents, whom they view as ontologically and spiritually inferior beings. Nor do they accept any duty of care towards them, or the existence of any communal bonds that unite them.

Restorative justice values restoration over retribution. Religious killers however extol ***retaliation*** as a moral duty. "Islam says an eye for an eye", says Abu Shanab, a Hamas leader. "We believe in retaliation." Yitzhak Ginzburg, a militant Jewish rabbi, describes revenge as a "purifying experience, something that accords with the essence of one's being".

Yet again, restorative justice values the opponent's ***right to life*** and rejects the death penalty. But dealing out death is the stock in trade of terrorism. A document captured in Afghanistan in 2002 included a written oath by an al Qaeda operative which states: "I, Abdul Maawia Siddiqi, son of Abdul Rahmen Siddiqi, state in the presence of God that I will slaughter infidels all the days of my life".

A similar incongruity exists with respect to ***process***. Restorative justice is a dialogical process. Genuine dialogue can only happen when there is a willingness to shift ground and to compromise. But religious violence represents a radical rejection of dialogue and compromise.

Likewise for ***practice***. Restorative justice conferences cannot proceed if an offender denies responsibility for the harm inflicted or refuses to see it as morally wrong. But religious killers refuse to see themselves as culpable offenders. They are not 'murderers'; they are soldiers fighting in a just cause. As one former Irish paramilitary puts it: "Within every terrorist is the conviction that he is a victim".

*I will employ '**restorative justice**' to designate restorative responses to specific episodes of interpersonal wrongdoing, and use the term '**conflict transformation**' or '**reconciliation**' for peacemaking initiatives that seek to bring about more comprehensive systemic changes in conflict settings.*

The attitudes and beliefs that induce people to take up terror are precisely the attitudes and beliefs that make restorative encounters difficult to achieve. Likewise, victims of terrorism view the perpetrators as unnatural monsters bereft of all human feeling and value, incapable of remorse and deserving only of extermination. Just prior to an American assault on Fallujah, US Colonel Gary Brandl told his troops: ***The enemy has got a face. He's called Satan. He's in Fallujah and we're going to destroy him.***

For all these reasons, then, religious terrorism is an extraordinarily difficult environment for collaborative, dialogical mechanisms to operate in. So... is restorative justice dead in the water as a viable response to terrorism?

Restorative justice: a community based process

One of the great virtues of restorative justice is that it is a community-centred process. Most discussions of counter-terrorism focus almost exclusively on what governments, armies, and political institutions must do. But non-governmental organisations and informal community groups also have a vital role to play.

Terror groups themselves are community associations gone bad, whose members are bound together by extremely strong relational bonds. The groups are so attractive to young men because they offer a sense of identity, power and self-respect to those who feel disempowered. Restorative justice offers an alternative, non-violent form of community empowerment that can help promote reconciliation between mutually hostile communities.

Peter Shirlow of the University of Ulster has said: "one of the main problems facing Northern Ireland is that everyone

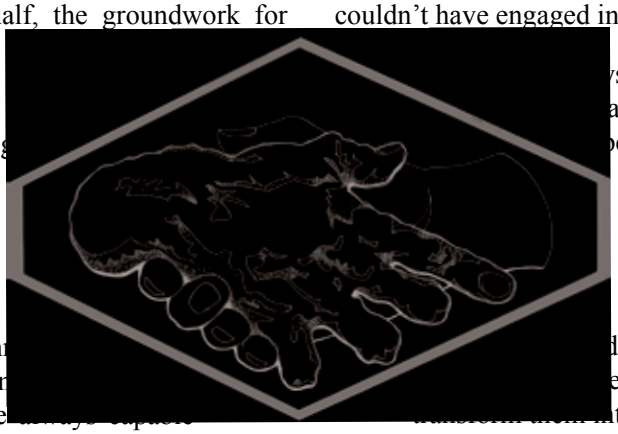
sees him or herself as a victim of the other side and is unable to recognize that self as a perpetrator of violence and intimidation". The challenge, he believes, is to help people on both sides to see they are both victims and perpetrators in the current conflict.

Typically, in restorative justice meetings, the roles of victim and offender are discrete. One party has suffered unjustly at the hands of the other, and the duty of repair runs only one way. But sometimes both parties have injured each other; both are victims and both are offenders. In these cases it is helpful for both parties to have the chance to speak as victims and for both to accept their role as offenders. Such an approach has real potential in settings where rival communities are victims of mutual terror attacks.

Even if individual perpetrators and their victims cannot or will not meet, the communities to which both belong, and which usually harbour bitter antagonism towards each other, can do so in their stead. If members of mutually hostile communities can meet to express the bitterness of victimisation they have personally experienced, and to accept some measure of collective responsibility for deeds of violence done on their behalf, the groundwork for reconciliation has been laid.

Faith in Shared Humanity

Religious terrorism is a sig
that we live in a world where people's controlling belief systems differ radically from one another. A restorative justice response to terror rests on a fundamental faith in our com
humanity. It makes the bold assu
whatever divides us, people are
of living together peacefully, that there is no difference that cannot be resolved with dialogue. It rejects the view widespread today that there are some people so evil that annihilation is the only option for dealing with them.



Ultimately, this confidence in shared humanity is a matter of faith or belief (just as trust in the saving power of violence is also a matter of belief). But it is not blind faith. There are examples of terrorists changing. One Christian terrorist in America abandoned his plans to blow up an abortion clinic when he was unexpectedly overcome with an awareness of the humanity of his potential victims, one of whom reminded him of his grandmother. A Kashmiri militant gave up his violent path after becoming aware of how crippling hatred is. "To hate is venom", he explains. "When you hate, you poison yourself… Hate begets hate. You cannot create freedom out of hatred."

IRA hit man Patrick Magee, the so-called "Brighton bomber", killed five people and injured 30 in a failed attempt 20 years ago to annihilate the British cabinet staying at the Grand Hotel in Brighton for a Conservative party conference. In sentencing Magee, the judge described him as "a man of exceptional cruelty and inhumanity", and to this day Magee stands by his actions as a justifiable act of war. But, now out of prison, Magee has become a strong supporter of the peace process.

What precipitated this change was a series of meetings with Jo Tuffnell, the daughter of one of his murder victims. The meetings began after Tuffnell was overcome by "an incredible feeling", as she prayed in a church one day, "for the strength to understand those who had done this, and not to stay a victim". She arranged to meet Magee, who says of their first meeting: "I had an overwhelming urge to talk to Jo alone. It felt like the presence of anyone else was intrusive and would stop me opening up and being as frank as I needed".

He added, however, "I wasn't prepared, and I felt totally inadequate with someone sitting there with all that pain, telling it to me, while at the same time trying to understand me. There was certainly guilt there, that I'd caused this woman's father's death. But that feeling only came to the forefront when we were coming out of the IRA struggle, because during the struggle there wasn't time and you couldn't have engaged in it if you'd had that mind".

s of that meeting: "Only Pat could
and how I felt – he was the only
erson who actually wanted to hear how I felt. When we first met he said: 'I want to hear your anger and feel your pain'. No one else had ever said that to me." She added: "I'm no longer scared of
darkest feelings, because I know,
egative and awful they are, I can
to a passion for change".

This remarkable story is not unique. Similar initiatives have been taken by other republican and loyalist ex-prisoners and dozens of victims groups have been formed, some of which have sought meetings with former terrorist perpetrators.

Flexibility of Practice

The moving story of Patrick Magee and Jo Tufnell is also significant from a practice perspective. The meetings between the two appear to have been unfacilitated, were spread over several years, and entailed "long and searching conversations dissecting their roles as victim and perpetrator". Most restorative justice conferences in New Zealand, by comparison, are facilitated by a neutral party, take a couple of hours at most to complete, and do not permit disputes about roles.

In the Magee case a preparedness to hear the victim's pain was evidently more important to the victim than the offender's full acceptance of culpability. Magee concedes that his unwillingness to call his actions wrong was hard for Tufnell to hear, and it has been "an impediment" in their

relationship. But that did not preclude them continuing to meet for dialogue. This underscores how pliable and open-ended practice needs to be to accommodate the exigencies of particular situations.

Of course, given the complexities surrounding religious violence and the degree of trauma involved, it stands to reason that any restorative intervention needs to be skilfully managed and thoroughly prepared. Victims in particular would need careful preparation. They must be at an appropriate stage in their recovery process before venturing to meet those responsible for their suffering. A conflict specialist explains, "It is difficult, if not impossible, to start a process of reconciliation when the pain of violence is visceral, recent and overwhelming. When people are traumatised through the loss of loved ones, through having observed many deaths, or having been terrified to the core of their beings, they are not ready to start a discourse or any process that involves their relationship with an enemy".

Demons are expelled when human beings meet in a state of common weakness

Perpetrators also need preparation. The minimal requirement is a willingness to listen and an agreement to speak truthfully about their own motivations and actions. Skilful management of their encounter is imperative. Because both sides will be hypersensitive to threatening signals from the other and will amplify the smallest hint of antagonism into a full blown physiological 'fight or flight' reaction, extraordinary effort must be taken to provide a safe place and safe process. This could include, as in the Magee case, a readiness to meet many times over an extended period.

Given that terrorists commonly view themselves as victims rather than victimisers, it would be important that some of these meetings focus the perpetrator's own prior experience of suffering and betrayal. This is not to excuse their later crimes. On the contrary, only when an offender's pain is acknowledged is their last refuge from responsibility removed. If it is flatly denied, they will continue to feel justified in their actions.

In October 2004, an Australian journalist, John Martinkus, was kidnapped by Sunni militants in Iraq. He was interrogated throughout the night, while a large screen TV tuned into al-Jazeera Television played in the background. The mood of his interrogators darkened every time stories of fighting in Iraq appeared. Martinkus spent much of the night contemplating the possibility of execution in the morning. He had seen the videotaped beheadings of other hostages, which he describes as "sickening".

He knew the "old trick of humanising yourself to your captors", and showed some of them a photograph of his girl friend which he carried in his wallet. One of his captors reciprocated, pulling out a picture of his three year-old daughter in Fallujah. "I held it and said 'she looks beautiful'. He replied: 'she is dead now in an American air strike', and his face became hard. My effort had backfired".

One further lesson from the Magee story is that while terrorists may initially lack the values and attitudes essential for involvement in restorative processes, the very act of meeting with their victims has the potential, over time, to evoke them. It is easy to vilify and dehumanise enemies in the abstract; it is much harder to do it to those whose individual identity one has now come face-to-face with. It is easy to rationalise one's violence at a distance; it is much harder to do so when one hears of its impact on actual human bodies and beings. Demons are expelled when human beings meet in a state of common weakness to confront the truth about one another and about themselves.

Conclusion

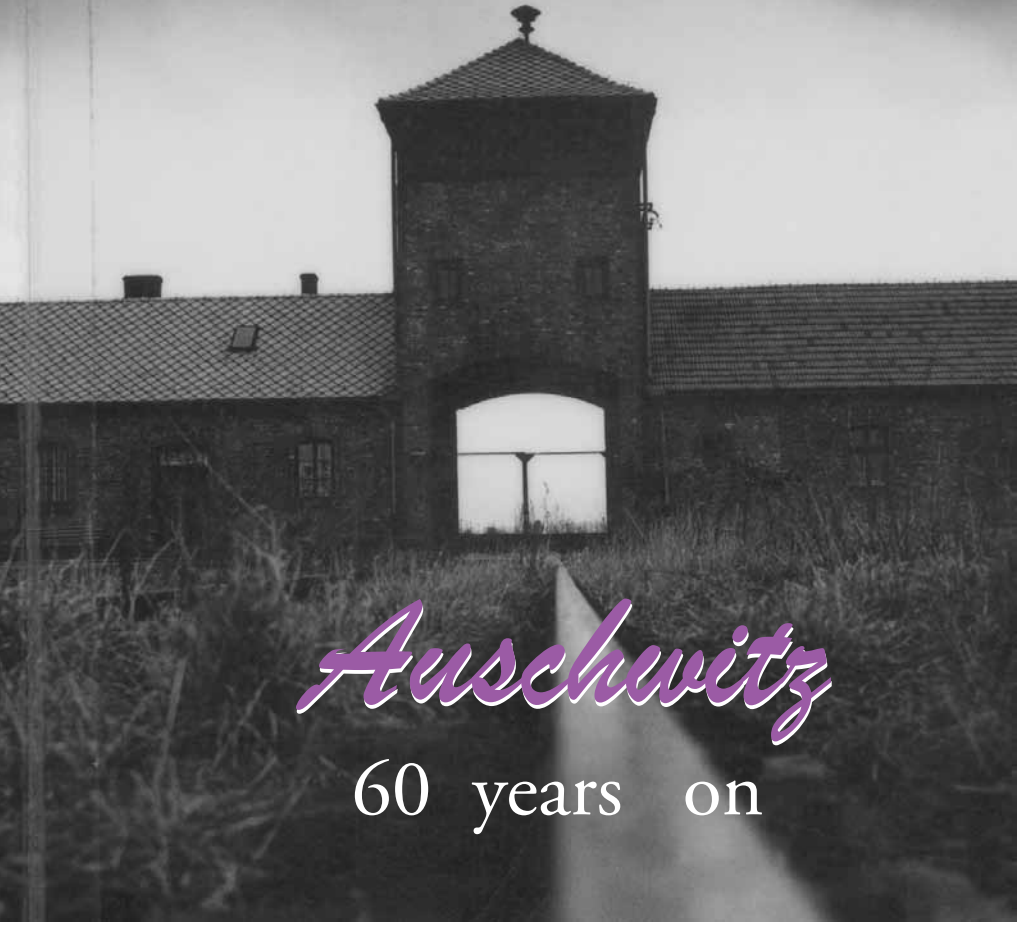
Restorative justice meetings between victims and perpetrators cannot, on their own, redress all the effects of terrorism. Without ongoing work at reconciliation and structural transformation, restorative encounters, however powerful in themselves, are inadequate to bring lasting peace. But even if it is only one tool in the box, restorative justice still has a contribution to make.

It can help those caught up in terrorist atrocities to address the inner realities bequeathed by the outer reality of violent acts – the profound emotional pain, the ongoing effects of traumatisation, and the deep-seated feelings of hatred, anger and revenge. It may also help those who have inflicted terror to begin to rethink their own identities, to break free from the structures of violence that hitherto have dictated their world view, and to learn to see reality differently, a world populated by the human children of God, not stalked by demons in disguise.

In a world racked with anxiety over security, in a world where we are daily commanded to "be afraid, very afraid," in a world where inflicting terror is commended as the only way to end terror, in a world of demonisation and counter-demonisation, restorative justice is a still, small voice of protest. As trivial as it may seem, terror is renounced not just in the refusal to endorse war, but in every act of human kindness and decency. Promoting peaceful modes of human engagement is the greatest antidote there is to religiously inspired violence, and restorative justice is all about peaceful forms of human engagement.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called the children of God.

Dr Chris Marshall was teaching in Auckland, where he served on the Academic Advisory Board of Good Shepherd College, Ponsonby. This year he has moved to Wellington as Senior Lecturer in Christian Theology in the Victoria University Religious Studies department.



Auschwitz
60 years on

The memory of Auschwitz has made many reflect on the terrible crimes committed against the Jewish people.

Jo Grayland insists that Christians too must acknowledge their complicity; and look again at the roots of their theology in the light of the Holocaust

The sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz rightly remembers a singular moment in the history of the Jewish people. Auschwitz is significant not only for the Jewish People but for many others, among them believing Christians and especially Christian theologians.

Auschwitz is an icon of the Holocaust. At one level it is one among many concentration camps, work camps and places of torture where significant minorities, like gays, gypsies and the intellectually and physically disabled were exterminated. As an icon it sums up the horror that human beings can, and do, kill each other for reasons other than self-preservation.

The very existence of Auschwitz raises the question for the Christian theologian, not only *how* could this happen, but *what* does Auschwitz mean for the existence of Christianity itself. This question is not an idle one, given the fact that ordinary Christian men and women worked in these places of extermination; they supported the existence of the camps or chose to ignore their existence to keep themselves safe. Believing Christians, lay and ordained, were members of the Nazi Party and at least two Catholic bishops were supporters. In the icon of Auschwitz the Jewish nation, together with all members of victimised minorities exterminated, tortured or degraded in camps, point the finger of accusation at the Christian community: *how could you do this to us? How could you let this happen and call yourselves 'other Christs'?*

Not all German Christians were complicit in the Holocaust. Holy men and women like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Fritz Meyer stood out against Nazism. Many, as in the case of Meyer, a Jesuit Priest, were not supported by church leaders or fellow Christians.

A theology of complicity: Johann-Baptist Metz

Following the Second World War German theologians and schools of theology began to explore the question of what Auschwitz and the Holocaust means for theology. Believing Christians, both Lutheran and Roman Catholic, Germans especially – indeed all those who had supported the Nazi regime – were compelled to explore the question of their complicity in the Holocaust. Among the leaders was one of the most famous German schools of theology, at the university of Münster. And a particular theologian-priest, Johann-Baptist Metz, became prominent in this exploration.

Metz's experience of war was short. As a teenage soldier he had been ordered to take a message from his forward post back to the central command. When he returned to his unit he found them all dead – young boys like himself. He asked himself *why?* This profound experience radically changed his whole way of thinking. *What happens to you when you suffer and die? What do I dare hope for you and, in the end, also for myself?*

His theological insight began to run counter to the prevailing piety of individual salvation, and he expressed it thus: "It is not *who saves me?* but *who saves you?*" Salvation is communitarian, it is the act of a people, and takes place within a people. This is a return to the fundamental Hebrew notion of salvation, which had been lost in the Christian tradition because of the influence of Greek philosophy. God saves a people.

At this stage, Metz turned to the question of Auschwitz and asked the question at the heart of many others

reflections: *As a Christian, complicit in the event of the Holocaust and heir to centuries of Christian hatred against the Jewish nation, how can I pray, how can I believe, how can I worship, how can I theologise after Auschwitz? In short, is there salvation after Auschwitz?*

Solidarity with those who suffer

Metz's question is highly significant. Answering it demands of the enquirer a deep concern for 'the other', their salvation and their eternal life. It exposes us, writes Metz, to the "irreducibility of the narrative of suffering", and forces Christians to explore the relationship between suffering and death, and the praxis and question of hope. This had been the basis of the solidarity he saw in the "lifeless faces" of his comrades.

Metz was given his answer by the then Chief Rabbi of New York: "***You can pray after Auschwitz only because we prayed in Auschwitz.***"

That answer revealed the long ignored Hebrew tradition as source of Christian theology and revealed *solidarity with the suffering* as authenticator of theological insight. Both of these had been obscured in the centuries of theology preceding the Holocaust. Their absence, at the theological level, made the Holocaust possible.

In 1935 Hitler passed the Nuremburg laws depriving German Jews of citizenship. Often they had a patch sewn on their clothing labelling them Jews

Study of the Hebrew Scriptures and Hebrew worship were revived in German theology. In order to fully understand the Christian tradition, these theologians argued that especially in the area of worship, the heart and soul of theology, it is first necessary to know and understand the Jewish tradition.

The church's guilt – then and now

Most significant since the Second World War and the Holocaust continues to be the church's silence. Pope Pius XII is an icon of this. This was first explored in Rolf Hochhuth's play, *Der Stellvertreter,* ("Representative", or "Ambassador", in some translations). In the play Pius's silence condemns both him and the politics of the hierarchical institution.

No one knows for certain whether the church agreed or disagreed with the Holocaust. Therefore, this leads to distrust of an institution which at the time failed to proclaim solidarity with the persecuted and dispossessed. Even the courageous words of the Bishop of Münster, Graf von Galen, in opposition to Nazi thinking, never mentioned the Jewish People. More recently the German Bishops' letter celebrating the canonisation of Edith Stein implied that the Dutch Bishops' denunciation of Nazism led to the deportation of Jews from the Netherlands among whom were Edith Stein and her sister. Yet the Dutch Bishops have never been accused of complicity. Even the choice of Edith Stein as a Catholic martyr of the Holocaust has seemed to many a distortion of the Catholic Church's real role.

For many contemporary Catholics in countries like Germany and Austria the painful question that lingers is: ***Can I believe in a church that may have been complicit through its silence in the event of the Holocaust?*** I believe that this deep and widespread lack of trust in the institutional church, especially among those of the immediate post-war generations, must find at least some of its origin in that terrible event. The key question is essentially one of truth. Trust can only exist where truth abounds and where truth is avoided, trust dies.

The situation now

When today we look back on the horror of the Holocaust and the complicity of the Christian churches in it, we have to ask ourselves: ***Are we any better today?*** Is the teaching church today at one with the faithful who have to live out their lives in a secular world? This is the solidarity of the teacher with his or her disciples. This is what we see in the Jesus of the Gospels. And this is what, I believe, many people are seeking and, I fear, few are finding in the church today.

Jewish boy wearing an armband with the star of David emblazoned

Metz's theology, coming as it does from the memory of Auschwitz, gives us today a valuable insight. It challenges us to address religion as it is now, not as it was 100 years ago. It teaches us to hold dear the memory of suffering in history and not avoid the painful questions of injustice; to value solidarity with the suffering and the dead, and see in the past our future; to reject the tenets of middle-class complacency and seek instead to live out the dangerous memory of the Passion, a memory which constantly looks for a better social and political world for all people.

This in the end will change also the way we pray. We will be able to pray both in adversity and in prosperity with the spiritual robustness of the Psalmist:

Had not the Lord been with us,
When men rose against us,
Then would they have swallowed us alive.
When their fury was inflamed against us,
then would the waters have overwhelmed us.
Blessed be the Lord who did not leave us a prey to their teeth. (*Psalm 124 NAB*)

Joe Grayland is a priest of the diocese of Palmerston North

Ahmed at prayer

Paul Andrews meets an Islamic computer technician and learns a lesson about the universality of prayer

The guy who came to fix my computer was black as the ace of spades, with a little fuzzy beard, and big lips that suggested sub-Saharan Africa. In fact he was from North Africa, a Muslim with a Muslim name – we'll call him Ahmed. If I am protecting his anonymity, it is not because I found anything wrong with him – quite the contrary. He has been seven years in Ireland and he is good on computers. In about one hour's work he not only fixed my problem, but gave me an understanding of what had gone wrong. He worked quietly and patiently, a warm smiling presence. I sat beside him watching, occasionally questioning him.

Half-way through the job he asked: "Would you mind if I say my prayers?" He stood facing the East, and for maybe ten minutes he prayed, first standing, then kneeling, then prostrate, then repeating the sequence, and repeating it again. When I see film of Muslims praying in large numbers in mosques or elsewhere, they look almost military in their serried all-male ranks. But Ahmed at prayer was more like the Irish people, young and old, whom we see saying the Angelus in those lovely snippets on RTE at noon and 6 pm. It was quiet and reverent, a way of punctuating work by smiling briefly at God.

Ahmed's prayer was quiet and reverent, a way of punctuating work by smiling briefly at God

When he turned back to the computer, I asked him about his prayers, and we compared notes. As a priest I say the Divine Office at different hours of the day, from the Office of Readings at dawn to Compline last thing at night. As I call on the Scriptures for that prayer, so Ahmed calls on the Koran. He knows about one quarter of it by heart, having learned it since primary school.

This was a meeting that set me thinking. I felt in touch with Ahmed when he prayed, and I have no doubt that God was in touch with him as well. A priest friend who worked in the Philippines once spent several months as a lodger with a poor Muslim family. His strongest memory was of the spiritual quality of the family because of their praying several times a day. The comparison with the Angelus fits.

There is a line of tradition from Abraham, through all the Jewish prophets, down to Mohammed, so that we as Christians can feel an affinity with Muslim prayer as we feel an affinity with Jews, who share so much of the Scriptures with us. Mohammed expected that the Jews would be his natural allies, since he saw himself as another prophet in a line with Isaiah and Jeremiah – and Jesus.

Like the Jews, Mohammed did not accept that Jesus was the Messiah. He saw him as just another prophet, but he revered both Jesus and Mary. Here are two verses from the Koran on Mary: ***Behold the angels said: O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you, above the women of all nations. And remember her who guarded her chastity; we breathed into her of our spirit, and we made her and her son a sign for all peoples.***

It is the day-by-day piety of Islam that can give us a feeling of kinship. If only we could know how God sees them! Muslims honour the one God – that was in contrast to the idolatry of many of Mohammed's contemporaries. Like the Irish blessings which survive – in Irish more than in English – Muslims have short, devout blessings for all sorts of occasions: greeting a stranger, before and after meals, going on a journey, entering a mosque, climbing a hill, going to the toilet, visiting a sick person, when someone sneezes (with a different blessing depending whether the sneezer is a Muslim or a non-Muslim).

Non-Christians looking at us must scratch their heads over the varieties of Christians: Catholics who make up two-thirds of Christians; Orthodox who make up one sixth; and the hundreds of varieties of Protestants who make up the final sixth of Christians across the world. We nearly all share the same basic Creed and the

Grace fall

A warm wind is worrying
the curtains
rattling flax
blowing grace
all over the place.

Grace
falling from the sky
healing the earth
lapping the shore
glowing in eyes
dawning Christ.

Anne Powell

Scriptures, but after that we differ in all sorts of ways.

As we look at Muslims, we see the same diversity. Muslims come in different shapes, and they often disagree fiercely among themselves. We have come to recognise the fierce rivalry in Iraq between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. There are Sufi Muslims whose mystical writings are similar to those of Christian mystics. There are peaceful Muslims who settle in to be citizens of democratic countries, and militant Muslims whose maxim is that Islam should dominate the world.

I am struggling to reconcile my warmth towards Ahmed, and my respect for his piety, with all that I find hard to take in Islam: the doctrine of spreading Islam by force; the acceptance of mutilation as punishment for crime; the constraints on women; the appalling crimes of kidnapping and murder that are done in the name of Islam; the Muslims' expectation of democratic rights in Western countries, coupled with their denial of such rights to Christians in Islamic countries; the belief that Islam is the only way to God, and that non-Muslims are 'unbelievers' or infidels.

And yet – there is much in our own history of which I am ashamed, as a betrayal of Christ. Though Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world, there was a time when the Catholic Church allied itself with civil powers to coerce people by force, whether in the Crusades or the inquisitions or by subtler pressures. Chesterton said that Christianity has not failed, because it has never been tried.

Jesus called his message 'good news', and so it is, a way of living that celebrates life and gives a meaning to suffering and death. If there is a better one, please let me know. The message is simple, but it is muddled by the multiplicity of religions and persuasions and churches. We echo Jesus' prayer, *That they may be one,* including Muslims, Jews and all varieties of Christians. It is a long, slow journey towards unity, but praying together, and banking on the things we have in common, such as reverence for Mary, will hasten that journey. ■

Speeding Prayer Books

Bernard Sabella

Only in Jerusalem can one see Jews, Christians and Muslims hurrying with their prayer books and carpets to perform their prayer obligations in their respective holy shrines. The other day, a Friday evening, I was walking in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem when I saw an elderly Jewish couple impeccably dressed hurrying with prayer book in hand to the Western Wall for the Sabbath services.

Each Friday, around noon, thousands of Muslims hurry through the Damascus Gate, the main entrance to the Old City, carrying their personal carpets heading towards the holy compound of Al Haram Ash-Sharif, housing one of the holiest mosques of Islam. Muslims need their carpet to perform their prayers facing Mecca, the holiest city of Islam.

On Sundays, I remember from my childhood in the alleys and narrow streets of Old Jerusalem, Franciscan friars and priests, together with other faithful, speeding to the church of the Holy Sepulchre with their prayer books and Bibles. They still do it even though the Latin prayer books have now changed into a variety of world languages including Arabic, the tongue of the indigenous Palestinian Arab Christian community.

What fascinates me in this scene of the Jewish couple, the Muslim crowds and the Christian few speeding along with their books and carpets is the power and hold of religion. The way we speed in Jerusalem towards our various places of worship makes me wonder where we all went wrong. We profess belief in the One God, and that is why our various religions are referred to as monotheistic (one God) religions. When we hurry to pray, each to her/his holy shrine, aren't we all turning to the same God?

And yet, sadly, what is supposed to unite us is precisely what divides us. It could be that the different experiences, contexts and environments have impacted on our understanding and knowledge of God in our various traditions and subsequently rendered our prayers more particular and exclusive. In one sense our hurrying with our books and carpets to the holy shrines to pray is an affirmation of community: it identifies one with one's group and makes for some emotional uplift as one rubs shoulders with co-religionists intent on nothing else but prayer.

But where is the power of prayer in our daily lives and in our relations with each other? And how can we reconcile our knowledge and understanding of Yahweh, God and Allah with unfair practices, judgments and injustices committed against each other? Isn't the person at prayer supposed to be at peace with herself or himself and with others? But is it possible that the more prayer becomes an affirmation of one's own community, the less it speaks to the all-loving God?

Maybe the greatest challenge to all of us, when we speed with our prayer books and carpets to our different holy shrines, is to include the others in our prayers. If we do this, then we are on the way to healing the wounds of history, peacemaking and eventual reconciliation in the One All-loving Yahweh God Allah.

Darkness

Dark Night... I have nothing to say this season. I've run out of words. The words I do have ring falsely. This shell I put up to my ear, where I imagine the sea singing, is only the sound of my own wish for meaning. Religion lies amputated and bleeding in Baghdad streets.

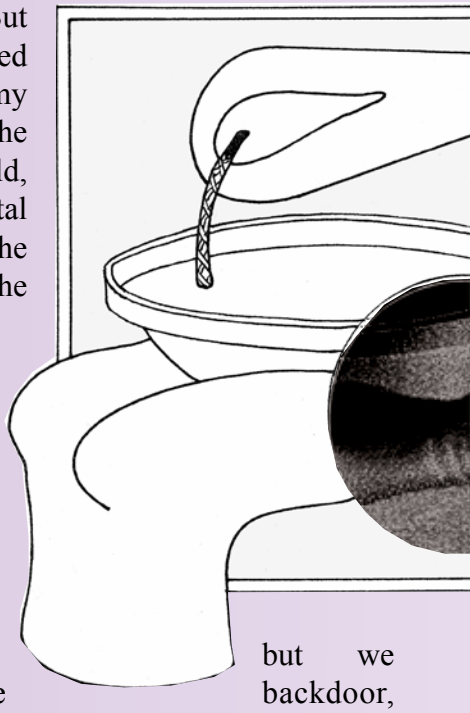
Yes, the magic is gone, when magic means denial of the evidence of our senses for the sake of a kingdom yet to come; denial that the polar ice-caps are melting; denial that the planet is warming; paid scientists slipping like oil through the hands and coffers of Exxon-Mobil.

Dark Night, indeed... Two thousand plus years of Christianity – and there are Christians who await the second coming as the destruction of the planet, the White House and Congress complicit players in the end-game gamble.

Dark Night... Forty million people staring into AIDS. Death staring back. Orphaned children staring back. Starvation and destabilisation and revolution staring back. Yes, terrorism staring back. Or, stare at genocide in the Sudan. Stare into dying rooms for abandoned girl babies in China. Stare into the eyes of women and children sold as sex-slaves in nearly every country. See their eyes stare back.

Dark Night... Darkness is at the door. Right outside the door the bomb has already dropped. The ravages of war, poverty, starvation, tyranny and greed have eaten up the land and the people. Now it is at our door – darkness, like black liquid, seeping beneath the threshold, around the cracks, through the keyhole. America thought it could keep it out. But it is not knocking, not asking. It is already in our homes and in our hearts. And no amount of magic or old time religion can chase it back.

Teresa and I drove to Reno for Sr Jean's funeral Mass. I went with the heaviness of dark night in my soul. The magic of Christmas had evaporated out from the cauldron of a world boiling with religious fundamentalisms of every ilk, each with its own eye towards apocalypse. Who could believe anything anymore? Driving across Donner Pass, the peaks were newly white and the snowy slopes embroidered by the sweep of wind. But the fog was banked so heavy against my spirit I barely saw the cleanly washed world, the startle of crystal sky brushed with the lingering cloud of the now-passed storm.



The Mass would be at 10.30 a.m. We arrived at the monastery at 9.00. Sr Jean was lying in state in the foyer at the entrance to the chapel upstairs, but we came through the backdoor, downstairs, into the kitchen. We were warmly welcomed, by Sr Ann first, and so through the morning by all we met, welcomed and embraced.

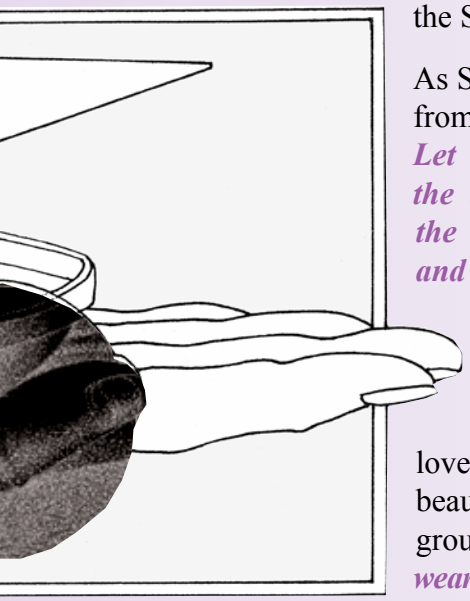
Eventually we made our way upstairs to find ourselves gazing on Sr Jean's cold body, so clearly a shell, so starkly the animating spirit gone. My own heart gave no stir or leap, the freeze in my own emotions only beginning to thaw in a climate where death was not the prevailing atmosphere. Looking through the window, past Jean's casket, the Nevada sky was a brilliant blue. Clouds were sculpted into

into Light

Diane Pendola

saucer shapes that lingered across the panoramic landscape to dissolve gently, imperceptibly into pure and open space.

Music moved me from the casket to the chapel. It was a relief to move away from that marble flesh to the reverberation of sound on invisible air. Harp and cello, keyboard and woodwind – sit; breathe; close your eyes; feel what you feel. Before the beginning of Mass the Sisters gathered in the foyer, sang the *Salve Regina* (a hymn to the Mother), and closed the casket. Then they escorted the body to the centre of our gathered circle and the Service began.



As Sr Mary stood to read from the prophet *Isaiah*: ***Let the wilderness and the dry lands exult, let the wasteland rejoice and bloom***, I knew that her crippled knees and bent back were the result of decades labour of love yielded up to the beauty of her monastery grounds. ***Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees*** – and as she was reading, the warmth I felt was not the warmth from the desert sky coming through the chapel windows.

And as the oldest in the community, Sr Rose, stood to read from the letter to the *Ephesians*: ***chosen… to live through Love..***, she was the dearest embodiment of the words she spoke. It was not any light from outside that made me feel that dawn was unveiling herself from my shrouded heart.

And as Sr Celeste lingered at the foot of the casket, it was not her confusion or the loss of her great creative fire, now flickering low through her dementia, that drew my tears, but the tenderness with which her hand was taken, in which she was guided back to her seat and enfolded.

People might look for miracles from the death of a Carmelite woman some might think holy. But those who lived with her for a lifetime knew her humanness, just as she knew theirs.

The now middle-aged priest, eulogising her, remembers standing at the monastery door, 18-years-old with no living mother, and having Jean open the door to him, open her heart to him, open a lifetime of love's possibility.

As he speaks of her sweetness, her kindness, it is the recognition that I see reflected on all her Sisters' faces that moves me beyond my mind's dark brooding. Theist, atheist, non-theist, whatever you believe, wherever your mind lands for meaning – there is something greater than that here.

Some might look for miracles from the passing of this woman whose whole life was lived in relative obscurity. Some might look for a voice or a vision, a favour, an intervention. But for me this was the miracle of her resurrection:

Love so tangible
my clamouring tongue fell silent
Night lost its hold
and the Light shone

Dedicated to Sr Jean Macy,
(May 12, 1917 – December 5, 2004),
and the Sisters of the Carmel of Reno
By kind permission of <medushiim@cs.com>

Is Satan real?

. . .or just a literary device

Satan features often in the Lenten readings.
Glynn Cardy challenges some of our traditional assumptions

I don't believe in Satan, the Devil, or demons. Horny little guys with pitchforks are a product of the imagination and always have been.

Sure I can understand the power and seemingly tangible presence of evil. I can also understand why some have moulded their feelings about evil into a supernatural being. But in any literal or ontological sense Satan doesn't exist.

In Holy Scripture Satan is a literary device. It's a way of saying that those feelings we have, those feelings that are in conflict with the goodness within us, are powerful enough to seem like an actual being. Satan is a religious personification of negative and destructive feelings.

Satan though has a history. It isn't just a harmless belief that can be left to the makers of horror movies. Satan has been used, and is still being used, to stigmatise those who for whatever reason are disliked. When a religious special in-group decides that they, and they only, have a monopoly on truth they tend to smear their opponents as "corrupted by Satan". It's the same phenomenon of building nationalistic spirit by creating an enemy.

Whenever I hear a religious leader using Satan language I wait to hear whom he's aiming at. Will it be solo mums? Will it be gays? Will it be Jews? Will it be Muslims? Or will it be, this time, me? Dividing the world into black and white, right and wrong, my God and heretics, is bad enough without demonising your opponents. For it is a short step between demonising the opposition and then making them less than human, 'freeing' the conscience to cage and mistreat them like laboratory rats. The odour of Auschwitz is never far away.

Satan hasn't always been about. He seems to have popped up around the 6th century BCE. In the *Book of Numbers* and *Job* Satan appears, not as an evil seducer, but as one of God's obedient servants – an angel who has an adversarial role. Note the Satan was a role, not a character.

As a literary device Satan's presence in a narrative could help account for unexpected obstacles or reversals of fortune. Take the story of Balaam – a man who had decided to go where God had ordered him not to. Balaam saddled his ass and set off, but in *Numbers 22, v.22* "God's anger was kindled... and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the road as his Satan" – i.e. as his adversary or obstructer. In the *Book of Job* Satan likewise has this adversarial role – with God authorizing Satan's testing of Job.

However, around the same time as *Job* was written (550 BCE), other Biblical writers began to use the concept of Satan to explain division in Israel. *1 Chronicles 21:1* suggests that a supernatural foe had managed to infiltrate the House of David and lead the King into sin. *Zechariah* depicted the Satan inciting factions among the people. These writers paint the Satan as sinister and the role begins to change: from Satan as God's agent to Satan as God's opponent.

Four centuries later, 168 BCE, internal conflicts within Israel are even more acute. The problem was how to accommodate the cultural and religious traditions of foreigners who now lived in Israel. Some promoted tolerance and integration, others the opposite. Following the Maccabean Revolt, when foreigners were expelled, the internal divisions remained. Extreme separatist groups emerged who used the concept of Satan to

demonise their Jewish opponents. Satan was not just the enemy without (foreigners) but also the enemy within (fellow Jews). These separatist groups also constructed stories of Satan's origin – one of the more common ones being that he was a princely angel who through lust or arrogance fell from grace.

Of course other Jewish writers tried to stem the tide of racist and religious xenophobia. *Daniel*, for example, while concerned about ethnic identity never uses Satan language to demonise his opponents.

The Gospels were undoubtedly affected by the views of the separatists. They, by and large, depicted Satan not as a servant of God but as a force subverting the will of God. *Mark* writes the devil into the opening scenes of his gospel and goes on to characterize Jesus' ministry as a continual struggle between God's spirit and Satan's demons.

In particular *Mark* downplays Roman responsibility for Jesus' execution and instead names Jesus' Jewish opponents, fired by Satan, as the real culprits. The deadly mix of blaming Jews for killing Jesus and characterising them as servants of Satan has continued down through the ages in anti-Semitic literature and acts of violence.

Matthew and *Luke* largely follow *Mark's* lead, escalating the conflict with Jesus' opponents to the level of cosmic war. These opponents are the enemy within, the Pharisees. This reaches a crescendo in *John's* Gospel. Satan is incarnated in Judas Iscariot, then in the Jewish authorities, and finally in those he simply calls "the Jews". The gospels reflect the increasing conflict between groups of Jesus' followers and their opponents from 68 to 120 CE.

The division of the divine sphere into goodies versus baddies has continued down to the present day. Christians first demonised Jews, then pagans, then dissident Christians (labelled 'heretics'), then independent women (labelled 'witches'), and so on, and on, and on… Currently it sounds like *Destiny Church* is doing the same to the gay community.

Theologically Jews and Christians are monotheists. There is only one God. There is not a good God and a bad God. There is no cosmic war with God and the angelic armies on one side and Satan and the demonic hordes on the other. Apocalyptic literature created such a war to fortify its own position. Nowadays such thinking should be left to Peter Jackson and Weta Workshop.

Within the Christian Scriptures, thank God, there are also more healthy ways of understanding one's opponents. Think of *Matthew's* text (*5:23-24*) about leaving your gift at the altar and going to reconcile yourself with your brother or sister; or the famous text (*5:43-44*) about loving your enemies. St Paul, too, was big on reconciliation.

Many Christians from the first century through Francis of Assisi in the 13th and Martin Luther King in the 20th have believed that they stood on God's side without having to demonise their opponents. Their religious vision inspired them to oppose policies and powers they regarded as evil while praying for the reconciliation – not the damnation – of those who opposed them. Sadly though, for the most part, over the centuries Christians have taught – and acted upon – the belief that their enemies are evil and beyond redemption. ■

The author is indebted to the work of Elaine Pagel's The Origin Of Satan.

All Ya Gotta Do

Big Malc was
rough and tough
as nails
and had the manner
of macho swagger
and drove a bus
as if he ruled the road
(you better believe it)
he did

And defined respect
as not frightening his girl
with 360 wheelies
in the other beast he drove
when not driving big reds

Big Malc wandered into
this seminar:
The Meaning of Christianity
"It's very simple" he said
"All ya gotta do,
is love the bastards".

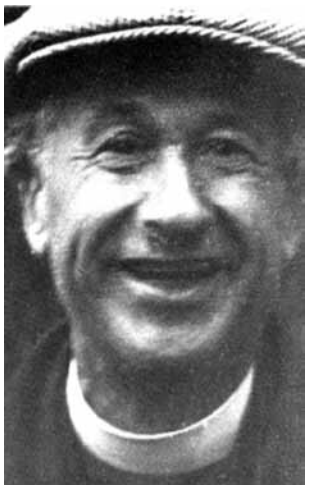
Peter Rawnsley

Quest for the Holy Grail

Trish McBride traces the story of one of the most significant women's groups in the Catholic Church – as seen through the eyes and experience of Pat Matheson, one of its most loyal members

The Holy Grail – so many images from our legends of King Arthur and his knights and their quest; of Joseph of Arimathea and Glastonbury; and, in recent days, from the novel *The Da Vinci Code*; the Holy Cup of the Last Supper, the container for the redemptive power of Jesus...

The New Zealand connection is not well known. *The Grail* is a chapter, not yet ended, in the herstory of Catholic lay-women in this country. It is an exciting story, to be cherished by all those who see the need for change in the church and work for it.



It was presaged by the arrival in Sydney in 1936 of five young Dutch lay-women, trained in *The Grail*, an organisation founded by Jesuit Fr Jacques van Ginneken *(see left)*. They came at the invitation of Bishop Dwyer of Wagga Wagga. The Bishop had encountered the movement at the *Eucharistic Congress* in Dublin in 1932, and had been deeply impressed. Van Ginneken was a visionary who saw a brighter future for women in the church and a role where they could use their talents to the fullest in the service of the gospel. He told a group of young women in 1932:

"I am convinced that until now Catholic women have been used by the Catholic Church in a totally inadequate manner… Woman's character has been completely misunderstood, and the church has been deprived of a valuable instrument for the spreading of the Kingdom."

He had chosen the image of *The Grail* to represent women's quest against all odds for the Kingdom of God through the development of their own potential and the dedication of their talents to working for the church. And he made a connection with the medieval times when Europe was kept functioning by the women, as most of the men were away at the Crusades.

There was a dramatic response to the organisation in Sydney and later Melbourne in the mid-1930s and early 1940s. Many educated Catholic lay-women were very ready for the concept of shaping their own lives and taking strong roles within the church and community. *The Grail* had a political, social and intellectual agenda – far from the traditional tea-making functions of parish women. It was ready to cooperate with, but not be subject to the hierarchy.

The first New Zealand women to receive the training offered went to Sydney in 1937-38, chosen and sponsored by Bishop Brodie of Christchurch. They were Pat Wall (later Matheson) and Marjory Short. They attended *The Grail* three weeks' long Summer School. It was a turning point in their lives.

Pat remembers best the "affirmation of the female psyche and efforts", the lectures by a variety of experts, and the presence of one of the original English suffragettes, Adela Pankhurst Walsh, one of whose roles it was to judge a speech competition amongst the participants. Pat won this with a speech about Mother Aubert! Political views, let alone action, were not then generally fostered in women by the Catholic Church in New Zealand.

Amongst other things these courses "aroused participants to the dynamic possibilities of religious rituals and ceremonies not limited to churches, or limited to the presence of and the definition by clerics" i.e. they were to take ownership of their own spiritual journeys by integrating prayer and daily activities, recognising God in everything. They were also encouraged to do some low-key evangelising – one of Pat's tasks was to take morning tea to some road-menders and introduce God into the conversation.

Pat recalls that the committed *Ladies of The Grail* they had met in Sydney spent six months of each year on retreat, and the other six months working on whatever they chose or were asked to do. They worked on university campuses, in hostels and seminaries, amongst others who were prepared 'to live the Gospel in their daily lives'.

Alex and Pat Matheson in the '40s

Pat and Marjory returned to Christchurch and gathered round them a group of about 50 young women. Then

they were ready for service to the New Zealand Church and community. While they were not officially established as a *Grail* foundation, they were still widely known as the *'Grail Girls'*. World War II limited the work that the Australian arm of *The Grail* could do to develop the organisation this side of the Tasman.

Bishop Brodie asked the group to do many specific tasks. They ran a Catholic hospitality centre for soldiers at Burnham Camp during World War II – and yes, some marriages did result! Bishop Brodie seems to have had a deep concern for the welfare of women. On one occasion he asked a *Grail* member to discuss the new rhythm method of birth control with women in a country parish to relieve family pressures. He also supported another *Grail* project: the founding and running of a mid-city Catholic library in the basement of Hallensteins. This was the initiative of Eileen Webster, a librarian, and was planned as a meeting place and education centre.

There were sports groups, a drama group which dramatised Biblical themes for radio, singing and folk-dancing groups. Another particular project was support work with the orphans who were being cared for by Nazareth House. Pat Matheson recalls that many of the Sisters, born to the English society class distinctions – an 'upstairs/downstairs' mentality – assumed their charges would be best served by being trained to go into domestic service. The *Grail Girls* challenged this assumption as being not appropriate to the more egalitarian NZ society. They coached the orphans in competitive sports and generally encouraged them to develop their full potential.

The Grail flourished in Christchurch. The women worked together, and trained others to respect their own gifts, independence and growth, but always maintaining non-confrontational relationships with the hierarchy – another of Fr van Ginneken's essential strategies! A tremendously strong bond was forged amongst the women which has endured through 60 years of faithful work and analysis within the Church. Since the 1980s until very recently up to 20 of the 'remnant' have met occasionally for Mass, lunch and community! At an age where most have put their feet up and handed over to a younger generation, Pat and others are still working for a just church and the well-being of women within it.

The Grail moulded the faith, lives and work of these young women – it was a major influence on who they have become. Pat paid tribute by name to many of the other women active in this group including subsequent presidents Cushla Cullen, Freda Khouri (Cameron) and Noeline Edwards (Hall). Pat sums up *The Grail* ethos: "the least – and the most – any of us could do was develop our gifts and use them in service". Many of the New Zealand *Grail Girls* have now gone to their reward. The group was formally disestablished in the mid 1940s – the war had

Pat Matheson at one of her six 90th birthday celebrations

prevented the presence here of any professed *Grail Ladies*. Nevertheless, the herstory of *The Grail* is one to be cherished by New Zealand women who are today engaged in similar struggles to establish a place for women in the Catholic Church which is defined by Gospel values of respect and inclusion. This story must be honoured and remembered!

Pat's Matheson's journey through the 68 years of service to the church since her *Grail* experience has included involvement in Justice, Peace and Development and education work, and she is currently, at 94, a long-time member of *Catholic Women Knowing Our Place*. She says that this is where "women are to be found who believe that membership of the church requires more than lip-service", and values being with others "who share in the ongoing struggle for women to be allowed to take their rightful place at all levels in the church." ■

The Grail still has a presence in Australia and a score of other countries. Its vision is still "of a world transformed in love and justice through women's commitment…" and the promotion of a women's spirituality based on personal development and service. A recent newsletter contains articles on initiatives to alert the Australian Government trafficking in women, Grail-run social services in Uganda, and an inter-faith study group. Father van Ginneken's vision is alive and well! Many women have responded to his invitation to serve God and the Catholic Church with the fullness of their potential. Has the Church valued this response? (grailsydney@ozemail.com.au)

Who do I mean by God?

Mary Betz

God images are at th
of who we are and h
interact with othe
our world. If we understand
as loving and caring, we will
normally aspire to be loving
and caring ourselves, and
expect others to be as well
If we understand God to b
demanding, only conditiona
loving, and waiting to pu
us, then we may find lo
and mutual adult relations
difficult to attain.

How, though, do our God
originate? Why, if we are Christians – many of us Catholic – do we seem to believe in different 'Gods'? Must we always have the God images we grow up with as children, or can they change and grow as we do? These are some of the questions I looked at in my recent doctoral studies, and this article highlights some of what I found.

Childhood

Can you wryly recall the God of your childhood as an ancient man with a flowing white beard seated on a throne among the clouds? Was he kindly and good, but also stern, distant yet all-seeing, bordering on authoritarian and threatening to punish?

While Jesus was shown as the Good Shepherd with children on his knee, and Mary was a refuge and 'Mediatrix', God seems to have gotten the raw end of the deal: he was Creator of us all, yet demanded perfect behaviour. He judged even our thoughts; threatened us with the wages of mortal sin; was awesome and even unapproachable; and required constant devotions, perpetual guilt, rosaries, adorations, benedictions, masses, and other attentions in return for fixing our everyday problems and redeeming us from our sins.

When asked how we came to understand God in this way, most Catholics remember art murals and statues, pictures from children's Bible stories, primary-school catechism, Sunday sermons, missions, family rosary, spiritual bouquets, songs, prohibitions against touching ciboria or chewing hosts, indulgences, and holy picture cards of Jesus, Mary and the saints given as school prizes. Most of us had guardian angels.

Most of us were instructed firmly about the dangers of sin, but not clearly enough to prevent us from having to make up sufficient sins to report in weekly or monthly confessions. Some us were taught night prayers whose es included: "I must die – I know t how nor when nor where – but if I die in mortal sin I am lost forever." In one school which will remain anonymous, there was a clock whose pendulum read "always damned and never saved."

These teachings and experiences deniably influenced our nascent derstandings of God. But far d away the most deep and lasting fluences on the formation of our od images were our parents and other se caregivers. *What they taught us* might have been important, but *who they were* and *how they were toward us* were what we took in unconsciously and applied liberally to our internal picture of God. It is parental traits (loving, distant, caring, punishing, gentle, judging, generous, demanding) which imprint themselves as the God images we will alternately attempt to live up to, take as norms, expect of others, struggle with and see evolved, developed, deepened or transformed at every stage of our lives.

Adolescence

As we grow out of childhood, our world begins to open outwards. We are increasingly influenced by teachers and other adults we come in contact with, new feelings and experiences, and especially our friends and peers. Adolescence usually sees a questioning of the values passed on from parents and institutions such as church, but the less consciously transmitted God images usually remain ingrained for longer.

In my study of a group of New Zealand Catholic women, most consciously or unconsciously declared a moratorium on matters relating to God at some point during adolescence. It was not so much a case of unbelief, rather a suspension of – and release from – some of what they had learned during childhood. God was not immediately evident in or relevant to the new wide world that they were exploring. 'God' was put on hold to be returned to at some unknown future time and place.

Early Adulthood

In their twenties and thirties, most people are finishing study, beginning careers, marrying and raising children. Adult affiliations with groups and organisations (including family of origin and church), as well as new relationships with partners and children begin. In this stage of life, the women in the study moved from not finding God relevant to actively seeking out a new relationship with God.

If they had not already, they began to find themselves in personal circumstances in which they wanted to call on God. In addition, the encouragement of questioning, openness and change in the Catholic church following Vatican II (most I interviewed were born in the 1940s) was a catalyst to their own questioning.

All the life experiences of the women to this point – including study,

all life experiences of the women led to an increased searching for God

marriage, pregnancy, responsibility for children, friendships, deaths of parents, serious illness, loss of babies, involvement in groups, volunteer and paid employment, and the vibrancy of the church in the years after the council – led to an increased searching for God, and for many, the beginning of an altered perception of who and what God was.

Some deepened the understandings of God they had learned as children, particularly the understandings of God as friend, loving, caring and giving. Others began to understand from their relationships with many and varied people that God was not necessarily like the God of their childhoods, and *could be* unconditionally loving, close, an all-encompassing presence, in people and relationships, in suffering and grief.

For most of the women, God began to be a much more wholly positive presence in their lives. Some of the childhood images of God as distant and punishing began to be replaced with images of God as close, comforting and understanding. Recent psychological studies have shown both that psychological maturity is associated with more benevolent God images, and that the continual reshaping of childhood God images is to be expected in response to new interactions and experience throughout life.

Middle Adulthood

By mid-life (the forties and fifties), nearly everyone in the study had experienced deep suffering due to mental and physical illnesses; deaths of parents, children and close friends; loss of jobs; many moves from overseas or within New Zealand; and relationship difficulties.

There were close friends and soulmates; mentors and role models; the challenge of new study or new jobs; the delight of growing children and grandchildren; the support of groups and communities; a deeper understanding of their faith; an enjoyment of nature; an appreciation of solitude; the stimulation of volunteer and paid work; and for many, an integration of feminism and feminist theology into their understandings of God, self and world.

But who was 'God' now ? Gone were nearly all traces of a demanding or controlling God. God was now deeply present, close, yet bigger than anyone could fathom. God was the painter of sunsets, the creator of opportunity, the eternal giver, in the midst of suffering, present in those working for justice, a compassionate friend, in the ever-changing light over the sea, indwelling in each person and in relationships, an ever-presence, a feminine presence, a well of love, nurturer, continually unfolding, empowering toward freedom, birthgiver, in stillness, vulnerable yet strong, a paradox, mystery, in the feeling of being in a desert place with no signposts, expressed by love in action, in sacrament, in the storm which stirs up the depths, calling us to growth.

All the people and events which make

by experiencing goodness, mercy and love we incorporate them into our images of God

up our life experience can shape us, our understandings of self and others – and also shape our understandings of God. Times of both precious joy and deep pain prompt us to reflect and continually rethink our God images. Adult life experiences can heal and transform the negative God images of childhood, can enable already positive images to develop more fully, and can cause new images to form.

We may have gone through life *being taught* that God is good, merciful and loving, but the intellectual learning on its own will not change who God is for us. It is only by *experiencing* goodness, mercy and love through those around us that we truly incorporate those traits into our images of God. For us to be God-bearers to others is to be ourselves incarnations of God's nurturing care, enabling presence, freeing acceptance, and steadfast love. ■

Teach your Children Well

Mike Marshall

At the beginning of a new academic year it is opportune to reflect on the eruption of media comment towards the end of 2004 activated by Prince Charles' statement that polarised opinion, both here and around the world, on the topic of educational culture and qualifications.

His memo, just to remind you, blamed a "child-centred culture which admits no failure" and it continued like this: "What is wrong with everyone nowadays? Why do they all seem to think they are qualified beyond their capabilities… the learning culture in schools tells people they can all be pop stars or High Court judges or brilliant TV personalities or even infinitely more competent heads of state… without putting in the necessary effort or having the natural abilities".

This, no doubt, reflects the education system in Britain that probably mirrors in some way our own NCEA achievement system, where there is an increased focus on acknowledging the student's aptitudes, and identifying the specific skills the student has attained. Students also get the chance to revisit the proficiencies they haven't yet mastered. For some reason this system has attracted widespread criticism from many sectors, including the teachers who have to administer it. Is it delivering what it is meant to deliver, and if not, why not?

Trying to put this into perspective, I recall my own children's encounter within the (Catholic) secondary education system pre-NCEA. While my son was able to work within an exam-focused system, my daughter certainly wasn't, and there was seemingly nothing at her school that was available to nurture her particular creative abilities or to develop basic competencies to survive in the real world. And yes, we did point out – to no avail – that 'playing the game' in the short term and scoring some recognised qualifications would be of benefit to her in the long term.

So what is the problem with the new system? Surely there is value in recognizing specific skills rather than a blanket 'pass/fail' designation? The importance of building self-worth in children and acknowledging their abilities can only have long-term benefits for society. As a (then) teacher and also a parent, I recall encounters with a number of secondary colleagues whose attitude was: "I am the sage on the stage; if the pupils don't absorb my wisdom it is their fault" – a far cry from my own primary-teaching environment of assessing and developing children's needs appropriately.

The mantras of the pro-exam lobby, that 'life isn't fair' and 'failure is part of the real world' only has validity as long as we are not condemning a percentage of our young people to fail just so the rest can feel the elation of success, and employers have a one-dimensional method of selecting staff.

But to look at the other side of the argument, we do live in a world where individual wants and so-called rights are put above everything else. "Because you're worth it" is the ubiquitous media message – just consider the recent and appalling Telecom ad using children to sell the next generation of mobile phones.

Have we lost the ability to give children something to aim for, and to explain that a qualification needs to mean something? I believe that paper-based one-off exams have a place, but what they tell us is limited, and should not be the only assessment methodology in

schools. Certainly the university papers I have recently undertaken towards a degree don't seem to compromise on standards, though I suspect there is a case for certain institutions to be questioned as to the value of the degrees they confer. Are some of our qualifications becoming diluted? Is this trend towards giving status to any training programme being driven by the business fixation only to hire new employees if they are some kind of graduate? Is it appropriate?

Talking to a friend in the motor trade recently, I was told that new and 'qualified' employees want to start pretty much at the top, and not feel they have to work their way up learning the trade, starting by sweeping the floor. We do not seem to be convinced yet of recognising the necessity for, or directing school-leavers into, much-needed apprenticeships to become builders, mechanics or plumbers. Surely education should be all about identifying and developing particular abilities, whatever they may be?

In the many areas of the government sector, both national and local, as well as the corporate environment, major restructuring is a current passion. There is some perception that the magic bullet of having graduates replace older staff will transform the organization into a lean, efficient success story. I wonder how many of these organizations have actually undertaken research to confirm if radical change is really what is required, and, if they have, how have they ascertained that whiz kids will provide all the answers? Surely a qualification is only a starting point – meaningful application of knowledge in the work environment only comes with experience.

So where does all this leave us?

I want to see us work towards a society where paper credentials aren't seen as the be-all and end-all of everything. But if you do have a qualification it should have real value and be well earned. I want to be part of a work force where age, experience and wisdom are still recognised. I want a society where our young people are given a sense of their own worth, but are comfortable in a job that is suitable to their skills – and not everyone should need a degree or a high-powered qualification. Alongside this we should aim to give everyone practical literacy and numeracy skills to manage life on a day-to-day basis.

To underpin this, every job should have a fair living wage. The suggested formula towards achieving this, as I recall, is that the top salary in an organization is no more than five times the lowest. But that is a debate for another day.

So Prince Charles' statement would seem to blend different aspects of the argument. Yes, I firmly believe we need a child-centred education system. Rather than a system that 'admits no failure', we need this child-centred system to set up our young people for a future role that neither brands them as successes or failures, nor gives them a false sense of significance, but prepares them realistically for a suitable and productive occupation, (or several occupations), armed with practical living skills.

But none of this will come about while we continue to simplistically judge things in terms of pass and fail, win and lose. It's about balance, encouraging young people to work towards realistic goals, acknowledging achievement and genuine effort, but not expecting success to materialise just 'because they're worth it'. It's about remembering there's also nothing wrong with having a dream of being a pop star, a High Court judge or a TV personality. And, at the risk of moving into fantasyland, it's about realizing the worth of everyone and recognising that all have a role to contribute. And it's about our education system, parents and society responding to this vision. ■

Since this article was completed, the reaction to Prince Charles' comments has been eclipsed in New Zealand by the uproar caused by the emerging NCEA shambles. It has become obvious that the NCEA is not delivering what it set out to do, though the underlying principles behind the concept should not be readily dismissed.

An informal survey of my nieces, as current clients, indicated that the system was introduced with major inconsistencies in the administration within and between schools; "we could manipulate the system 'cos we knew as much as the teachers"; it was rushed; they had to face teething troubles, as well as ongoing changes. It seems to be helpful, though, to those children who aren't good at exams.

The situation currently begs a number of questions:

- Was the system adequately planned and rigorously tested before being implemented, across a considered time frame?
- What consideration is being given to those pupils who have been disadvantaged as a result of being guinea-pigs under an inadequate system?

Of the inconsistencies highlighted, not all are bad. The need for adequate numeracy, literacy and study skills at scholarship level is a problem that has been faced by universities for some time. No matter how competent students are in their own field of interest, without these basics, they will not be able to function adequately at university and beyond.

Let us hope that in trying to resolve this, we never lose sight of the fact that, not only are we trying to meets the needs of society, but we want to get the best and most appropriate educational deal for our children. It is encouraging to see that already more searching and in-depth articles on the role of our education system are beginning to appear. ■

Warren Fowler, priest (1927-2005)

The story of a vocation is the Come and See invitation of Philip to Nathaniel in the Gospel of John (*Jn 1:46*). "Come and dip your toes into the sea of God's grace, Nathaniel, and see for yourself". Then, as though Jesus forgot himself and the Godhead slipped through: "Here is a man without guile". Notice the present tense, for God lives in the everlasting NOW.

For those without faith, life is circular. We dig the ditch to get some money to buy the food to get the strength to dig the ditch. But for those with faith, life is linear. There is a destination; a point in living; a reason. And while we think we are the instigators, it is always God's call. God sees those who are "incapable of deceit" not at the beginning of their lives, but in the manner that the partnership – 'you and Jesus' – can achieve together.

The carpenter uses the hammer, the surgeon the scalpel. For the priest the tools of his trade are the Mass and the sacraments, the actions of Jesus in our world. I have never seen anyone administer the sacraments as reverently as Fr Warren Fowler. The identity with Christ became palpable with Warren. He became someone else, still Warren of course, but speaking with a body language and a demeanour of the God who loved him, who he – Warren – loved in return.

In his role as hospital chaplain, a role he loved best of all, Warren had the gift of listening, of accepting, and then of enabling the other to move on. In the Hutt hospital Warren would take the night shift, while Sr Loyola Galvin DOLC would do the daytime. They worked as a great team. Together they were a great gift to the church and to the people of the Hutt Valley.

Warren loved stories, the stories of people's lives. He would listen to the sick for hours, and show no signs of boredom as he entered into their sacred places. His mission to the sick included the nurses and doctors. He often came back from the night shift with rather ribald jokes told, I suppose, to relieve the tensions of the night.

Retirement never entered his mind. He worked tirelessly right up to the end. His latest concern was for the Somalian refugees. He knew all their names, provided for them as best he could, and saw them through the problems of becoming acclimatised.

He was one of 40 priests vesting in Petone presbytery on Monday 17 January for the funeral of Mrs Eileen Cummings, mother of Fr Brian SM. Warren suddenly collapsed, and with more holy oil on his forehead than on Aaron's beard, he went to God. *May he rest in peace.*

(from the panegyric preached by Msgr John Carde at Warren's funeral, 20 January 2005)

Women in Matthew's Resurrection Narrative

Susan Smith

In Matthew's "Great Commission" (*Matt 28:19-20*), Jesus commands the Eleven to go and make disciples of all nations. In the Catholic tradition, this could be more properly called the 'Apostolic Commission'. Jesus' commission to the Eleven invests them with responsibility for baptising and for teaching, a mission which later devolved to the bishops, the successors of the apostles.

In effect, this meant that responsibility for mission is derived from ordination rather than from baptism. Such interpretations of *Matthew 28* have led to women and lay people in general being assigned a subordinate status in the church's mission. Women were regarded as loyal troops, not expected to reason why, but to render obedience to their clerical commanders.

However, *Matt 28:1-10*, the first part of *Matthew's* Resurrection narrative, can serve as a corrective to such approaches to mission. These verses affirm that the first people to be commissioned by the risen Jesus were the women who had remained faithful to Jesus in his hour of need. They contrast positively with the temple guards, who "shook and became like dead men" (*v.4*), and with the male disciples, some of whom doubted when they saw the Risen Jesus (*v.17*).

The women, who had been passive watchers at the Crucifixion (*Matt 27:55-56, 27:61*), become the active messengers of the good news, the authentic messengers of Jesus' Resurrection. *Matthew* tells us that the women go "to see the tomb." "To see" should be understood literally and metaphorically, and it suggests insight into, and understanding of God's purposes in human history.

Matthew's decision to use "to see" then suggests that the women are more than witnesses. Rather, they are blessed with insight and understand the true meaning of the events that have taken place. Because the women disciples have the capacity to remain faithful during times of darkness, they are called to be first witnesses to the light that overpowers the darkness.

In the Catholic tradition, the relationship between missionary activity and sacramental ministry meant that a patriarchal church saw the role of women missionaries as secondary to that of the ordained ministers. *Matthew's* resurrection narrative means that mission can take on very different meanings for contemporary Catholic women.

In the Markan, Lukan and Johannine resurrection accounts, Peter emerges as a key figure in the primitive Christian communities. *Matthew 28* makes no reference at all to Peter. He is not singled out as the privileged recipient of the good news. Responsibility for mission belongs to the community of faithful disciples, who include women, not just to the Eleven, not just to Peter. ■

Dr Susan Smith is a Mission Sister who teaches Biblical Studies at the School of Theology, University of Auckland

Joshua Catholic Men's Fellowship Retreats 2005

15-17 April: Living Springs, Christchurch
Contact Mark 03 313 5946
email: milnesfam@hotmail.com

15-17 July: Hato Paora, Feilding
Contact Jack 04 971 5379
email: pontings@paradise.net.nz

14-16 October: Willow Park, Auckland
Contact Stuart 07 349 3273
email: nickisplace@xtra.co.nz

Tales of character and compassion

The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series
by Alexander McCall Smith
Polygon $34.95ea
Abacus $26.95ea
Review: Mike Crowl

Just before Christmas I was given the fifth and last in this series of novels by McCall Smith. I was so delighted with it I hunted out the other four and read them before the end of January.

These stories concern a small group of characters who live in 'the fortunate land' of Botswana, which, after it gained independence, 'had been very lucky… because all three of her presidents had been good men, gentlemen, who were modest in their bearing, as a gentleman should be.' Botswana (which is itself a 'character' in the stories) is presented as a country where Christianity has taken such roots in the past that its effects are still strong in the present.

The stories revolve around Mma Ramotswe (a 'traditionally built woman' – in other words, she's large) who begins the first detective agency in Gaborone. It's essential she should have a secretary, and Mma Makutsi, who wears large glasses, and talks under her breath to her shoes when she's really troubled about anything, and who gained 97 percent at the Botswana College of Secretarial Skills, more than adequately fills this role.

Mma Ramotswe has a good friend, Mr J L B Matekoni, who runs a garage named the *Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors*. Mr J L B Matekoni (he's never called anything else) is a gentleman, kind and generous (too generous sometimes, as when he finds he's 'adopted' two orphans almost without noticing), and eventually he and Mma Ramoswe become engaged – and stay engaged for a good long time. Matekoni isn't a man who rushes anything.

The garage has two lazy apprentices who can be the bane of the other characters' lives – and yet even these two have their uses. And there is one other major character, Mma Potokwani, who runs the local orphanage with great efficiency, but also with compassion and humanity. Compassion and humanity underline everything that happens in these stories – along with wonderful humour, sometimes of the laugh-out-loud kind.

Even though there *are* cases for Mma Ramotswe to solve, they're never the whole story. The books are about relationships, how trust and kindness and love make up for a good deal that's wrong in society. They're about community: when you don't know a stranger who comes to your door, you make it your business to do so by being hospitable and asking plenty of questions. They're about treating people as individuals – just as Mr J L B Matekoni treats his cars as individuals. Treating them all the same (as the apprentices are always having to learn) only leads to trouble.

The detective work is about keeping your eyes and ears open and using the information you have to uncover the sins causing the problems, but always in a gentle way. Well, almost always. Sometimes Mma Ramoswe has to resort to a little underhandedness to solve her cases, in spite of qualms about greater and lesser evils. Sometimes she confronts the wrongdoer with what might be called righteous indignation, but for the most part she treats them as human beings who have fallen from grace.

Grace and graciousness play a large part in these stories – after all, that's what being a person who is privileged to live in Botswana *should* offer. McCall Smith has an engaging style and tells many quirky stories. He gives himself and his characters room to breathe, room to reflect, and when there are pages where nothing seems to happen, the wonderful breadth of Africa and its almost alien life continues to permeate the words.

The books in the series are:
The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency
Tears of the Giraffe
Morality for Beautiful Girls
The Kalahari Typing School for Men
The Full Cupboard of Life ■

"Fully human, fully alive" – the search for faith

Who are you really? A seeker's guide to faith
Bishop Peter Cullinane
Pleroma Christian Supplies
Price: $25.00
Review: Michael Hill ic

Bishop Peter Cullinane has presented us with a very handsome booklet – a neat, concise compendium of the process of coming to believe in God. It comes in an attractive format: thirty topics with two or three A4 pages devoted to each. It covers much the same ground a student would be faced with in Year One of the *Walk By Faith* course.

Bishop Peter has adopted an easy conversational style, and he carefully avoids theological or philosophical jargon. Someone exploring religious belief for the first time would not be put off. He focuses almost exclusively on basic relationships: how I encounter God, how I interpret God's gift of life, how I relate to others. His favourite word is 'gift'. Life, faith, love are gifts.

One of the most compelling chapters is the section on suffering, sin and death. It puts aside completely any notion of a punishing God. Indeed, misfortune is seen simply as a further opportunity for God's love. This section is impressively complemented by excerpts from letters of people sentenced to death under Hitler, each one revealing wonderful faith and composure.

I also much appreciated the appendix on the interpretation of Scripture. At a time when many Christians use and teach a naive literalism regarding the word of God, Bishop Peter's straightforward presentation of modern church teaching is refreshing.

The book tends to avoid sticky issues, which I think is unfortunate. Some people coming to faith have many unresolved traumas and problems, both with the world and the church, which they do not want to get in the way of establishing a healthy relationship with God. These are areas which Bishop Peter usually handles well, so it is a pity they are largely absent.

Personally I found simply reading this book quite hard going. Not that it is hard to follow – in some ways it is almost too easy. I found it difficult to 'read' with attention. There is no storytelling. Yet salvation history is very much an experience of story. It comes like a good nourishing dish, but without salt!

I came to the conclusion that the best way – for me at least – would be to *pray* it: take one chapter at a time and spend an hour or a day or a week and just reflect on that. It's a bit like a meaty meditation book. And there is good sustenance in the abundance of quotations from a rich variety of Christian authors – from David Steindl-Rast to John Henry Newman, to Pope John Paul and church documents. Plus lots of very apt Scripture passages, especially from the psalms.

How good would it be as a catechetical guide? Perhaps a bit abstract – for seekers like me! However, I think it would be an excellent resource for a priest or catechist to use with individuals or groups seeking to examine or deepen their personal faith. ■

The circling hawk

Crosscurrents
John Honoré

Condoleezza Rice, the first black female US Secretary of State in America's history, had as her first task a tour of Europe in order to repair relations with members of the EU and to familiarise herself with the Middle East. She is the handmaiden of George W. Bush, and speaks a language of aggression, while pretending to be a liberating force.

In addition to Syria and Iran, Rice places Muslims in general at the centre of the war on terrorism. She declares that "America and the free world are once again engaged in a long-term struggle against an ideology of terror. We must confront these challenges." Confrontation everywhere and possible war is her brief.

Of course she lavished praise on Tony Blair's government. At the same time she stated that "Iranian behaviour, internally and externally, is out of step with the international community". Inevitably and immediately, Teheran reacted with crowds chanting "Death to America!" and "Death to Israel." It is an open secret, that the US and Israel have plans for a first strike against Iran. No doubt Rice will justify this as the war against terrorism.

In Paris, her speech to the French government signalled the abandonment of Rumsfeld's idea of 'old' and 'new' Europe, conveniently forgetting her words to Bush in 2003 to "forgive Russia, ignore Germany and punish France". These countries have not forgotten. Condoleezza Rice is sufficiently determined to further the misguided aims of a war president. She is the circling hawk of the Bush administration. She has threatened Syria with "diplomatic isolation" and has warned North Korea of the same treatment.

In her first two months as Secretary of State she has shown an ice-cold disregard for the chaos in Iraq and has shown a willingness to continue the US military, economic and political domination of the planet. Like Colin Powell she is expendable, but handmaidens are dutiful and persistent. The consequences of her reign could be disastrous.

Brash 'in touch'

Don Brash kicked off this pivotal year in New Zealand politics at the Orewa Rotary Club and the ball went straight into touch on the full. Advantage lost, his disgruntled team is blindly heading back to the National Party of the 1980s, having learned nothing about the intricacies of MMP. What is the problem?

For a start, Maori are not in the team. After last year's Orewa speech, Brash decided to get rid of Georgina Te Heu Heu as Maori Affairs spokesperson. To add insult to injury, he then appointed Gerry Brownlee in her place, a man not noted for any special affinity with Maori. This year, he forced Katherine Rich to resign on a matter of principle. The National Party has re-established itself as a sort of political Old Boys Club in the style of a former leader, Keith Holyoake. The National Party is going backwards and Brash has succeeded in alienating a good half of the voting public.

This year, he suggests that excessive benefits are the problem. He points to the women who continue to have babies on the DPB. They should be out in the work force, earning money for the country. If they cannot get a job, after paying for child care, what happens then? Katherine Rich saw the problem. Although it has to be admitted that Helen Clark is now singing the same tune as Don Brash.

Brash is intensely conservative. He wants to govern alone without the nuisance of having to cope with minor parties. Privatisation, cutting costs (i.e. benefits), lower taxes and a referendum on anything that looks problematical like MMP, a new flag or republicanism are the policies of a conservative right-wing political party. Is New Zealand ready to change leaders for this? Have we not been there and done that?

So Brash's front row is now white, middle-class and male. It is slow to get to the ball, rucks well when it gets there, but by that time play has moved to the other end of the level playing field. His team looks overweight and grumpy, unaware that modern politics has moved on – like professional rugby.

Lament for the kiwi bach

The annual trip to Nelson, via Marlborough and then following the coast all the way to Golden Bay, has confirmed the unbelievable prices being paid for ocean view properties, from Christchurch to Collingwood. Gone forever is the make-do weekend Kiwi bach or crib – an icon of a past era. The coastline is golden real estate, with chateaux being built on "life-style" blocks. The last old baches on the beaches are being sold for a half million dollars minimum.

For that special weekend away, you now go to lodges and country estates for $1,000 a night. Well-situated motels cost over $100 a night and many are booked out two years ahead. Excessively rich foreigners with money to burn are buying everything in sight of the sea. Over two million tourists came last year. Many were looking to buy that "cute little seaside crib".

Rejoice now in those old camping grounds and caravan parks on the beach because their days seem numbered. Holidays are becoming a luxury for the rich. ■

Lumen Christi – Christ our Light

We like to think that major liturgical decisions are based on elevated scriptural and spiritual premisses. Often so. But at times they stem simply from the limitations of available technology. In a short time you will be taking part in the Easter Vigil. There are two ways in which you might find the opening part of this celebration conducted.

In one fashion you assemble outside the church. The Paschal Fire is lit and blessed, then carried into the church. You listen in semi-darkness to readings that relive the long years of waiting and yearning for the appearance of a Redeemer. Then the emphasis returns to the Paschal Flame, celebrating the coming of Christ to end forever the darkness that has from the time of creation enveloped the world.

The other fashion of celebration begins inside the church. You listen to the same readings but do so in a complete darkness that effectively re-enacts a gloom that continued through to the end of Old Testament times. Then, right then and there within the church, the Fire is lit, light spreads from candle to candle through the congregation signifying the end of the period of darkness and the coming of Christ, the Light of the world.

The first fashion dates from medieval times. It is the procedure prescribed in the liturgical books. It was dictated by the lighting technology of past times. For long centuries lamps or candles had first to be lit if the readers were to see the text of the Scriptures they were to pronounce. This required lighting the Fire before reading of the Scriptures.

Lighting technology has moved on. Edison's invention of the electric filament 150 years ago abolished the previous dictate. A reading light can be placed discreetly near the lectionary. The congregation sits in an otherwise fully-darkened church and relives the aeons of blackness and gloom as the prophecies of the coming of a future Redeemer are set forth. The lighting and spreading of the Paschal Fire follow, powerfully symbolising the fulfilment of those prophecies. Of course one does not have to modify the sequence of readings and fire lighting. But at least the replacement of candles and oil lamps with electric lighting now leaves a second option open.

This approach could in some parishes have been specifically permitted by your local bishop. He has authority in virtue of canon 85 to allow a departure of this kind from the liturgical prescriptions regarding the order of events in a ceremony. Or it might indeed have been considered by the parish priest and liturgical committee that such a variant of sequence was a relatively minor departure from the printed regulations that they may legitimately make even without formal permission.

In support of the traditional sequence it has been put forward that the symbolism of lighting the fire first is that Old Testament prophecies can then be read in the light of the Redeemer to come. When existing technology gave no option other than to light the Fire first, it was reasonable to search around for symbolic reasons to justify what had to be done anyway. But that time is past. If the technology of today offers us the possibility of a different order of events, let us weigh up whether to make use of that God-given opportunity.

For many it is powerful symbolism to listen to the readings of the Paschal Vigil in darkness, then follow this with the lighting of the fire that represents the coming of Christ. It is an option that today's technology makes possible. ■

Humphrey O'Leary

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

CFLE – an empowering experience

Barbara Simpson, who is Auckland and Hamilton co-ordinator for the *Christian Family Life Education* Course, was originally encouraged to do the programme by her parish priest. Some parish priests are supportive, she finds; others aren't. She had already been a voluntary worker for *Pregnancy Help*, but she felt that she could be more effective in the human relationships field as an educator.

People, however, don't just volunteer themselves for CFLE. They have to be sponsored by their parish or school, and that will cost the parish or school quite a bit of money. In the first year there is a four-day seminar at the start with two more Seminars of two days each. In the second year, there are three two-day seminars and each participant does a project with guidance from their tutor. Barbara's project was to manage sessions with the parish youth group (ages 12-16) as well as with their parents.

Her CFLE training has enabled her to help young people be more positive about their own sexuality. It is no good being preachy: "you have to meet them 'where they're at'. They have to be encouraged to see their sexuality in a wider spiritual context and be aware of consequences".

But she has serious reservations about some of the abstinence programmes coming from America, which are judgmental, negative and fear-based. They could be setting young people up to fail. They give a strong message that sex outside marriage is bad – but what many hear is, simply, that 'sex is bad'. The CFLE philosophy gives a more holistic view.

For Barbara, the experience of doing CFLE has been "life changing". She had previously worked in an office. CFLE gave her a taste for study which has led her into various aspects of adult education as well as theology courses. It was a stepping stone to becoming an adult educator.

Barbara acknowledges that becoming involved in such demanding work can put strains on the family. It's essential that one's partner is supportive, and this has been the case for Barbara even though her husband is not a Catholic. He has come to appreciate what she is doing, and it has enriched their relationship, enabling them to talk at a more intimate level.

Another CFLE graduate has recently become Director of Religious Studies in her school. Doing the Course clarified her choices – not to pursue career advancement but to move in a more apostolic direction. Most graduates tend to become more active in the church, because they have the confidence to accept a leadership role, running RCIA or sacramental programmes.

Doing CFLE has been a real "eye-opener" for Barbara and for many others. She thinks it would be wonderful for every parent to be able to do CFLE to help them in educating their children regarding sexuality and human relations. It is simply "a very empowering course". ■