# Tui Motu

InterIslands

*May 2007 Price $5*


small is beautiful

# Small is beautiful

## Contents



Cover: Dunedin Farmers' Market
(see article pp. 15-18)

Most Saturday mornings I like to go to the Farmers' Market. Apart from doing the weekend shopping I enjoy the atmosphere. I am reminded of that prophetic book *Small is Beautiful*, written in 1973 by economist E.F.Schumacher. The local market is featured on pp *15-18*.

Schumacher praises village economies, and attacks the contemporary cult of personal enrichment and over-consumption driven by human greed and envy. At a produce market, the grower or maker and the consumer meet. Their exchange is to mutual benefit. But more importantly, they enrich each other as human beings.

The Farmers' Market is one example of a groundswell against the global tyranny of the so-called 'market economy'. It is one of many currents of popular opinion rejecting the imposition of dubious or outright evil values from above. Another is the new, widespread hunger for spirituality. In our leading article (*pp 8-10*) theologian David Ranson reports on this phenomenon and urges the churches to respond by sharing the Gospel message.

Ranson goes further. He suggests that Christians become more politically active. It is incumbent on us, he suggests, to listen to the "often silent cry" of oppressed or faith-deprived people and respond with love. If this is indeed a Gospel imperative, we are certainly failing at it. The voice of the churches is scarcely a whisper in current public debates.

It is ironic that the burning question of the moment is whether a chaplain should be allowed to carry altar wine into prison! We in New Zealand could do worse than take a leaf out of the Scottish bishops' book. They are busily taking on the British Labour Government – and specifically Prime Minister elect Gordon Brown, himself a Scot. Blair and Brown have conveniently forgotten their pledge last year to pour aid into the ravaged economies of Africa, preferring to waste billions of pounds revamping the Trident missile system.

To heed the concerns of their people is a primary duty of all in authority. Cardinal Newman noted that the wisdom of the faithful is a well nigh infallible guide. *Securus iudicat orbis terrarum* was his favourite dictum: the judgment of the whole world cannot be mistaken.

In this regard we print two pieces which could be read as criticisms of church leadership. Mike Riddell addresses a ***letter to the bishops***, respectful yet compelling, concerning who should or should not be excluded from receiving communion at Mass.

Jim Neilan takes up the cause of the Jesuit Jon Sobrino, recently admonished by Rome. Is this another case of the heavy hand crushing a popular cause? In such cases, too, we look to our bishops, to heed such legitimate calls from their people and to respond with courage and wisdom.

*M.H.*


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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, Philip Casey, Tom Cloher, Robin Kearns, Chris Loughnan OP, Elizabeth Mackie OP, Katie O'Connor (Chair), Kathleen Rushton RSM

# An Easter homily

*Clay Nelson*

Kurt Vonnegut died last week, aged 84. He was an icon to my generation. He published 14 books in his lifetime, several of which became modern classics. What made him important to me, a child of the '60s, is that he was one voice that objected to the war in Vietnam. I liked him for his off-the-wall sense of humour that he used to tackle questions of human existence: "Why are we in this world? Is there a presiding god to make sense of all this, who in the end, despite making people suffer, wishes them well?"

As a soldier in World War II he was taken as a prisoner of war after the Battle of the Bulge. His POW camp was outside Dresden which put him in a front row seat to witness its fire bombing by the RAF. Afterwards he and his fellow prisoners were assigned to remove the dead. "The corpses, most of them in ordinary cellars, were so numerous and represented such a health hazard," he wrote "that they were cremated on huge funeral pyres, or by flamethrowers whose nozzles were thrust into the cellars, without being counted or identified."

He recounted his experiences in his cult classic ***Slaughterhouse Five.*** He concluded that novel with these words from the character serving as his alter-ego, "Robert Kennedy... was shot two nights ago. He died last night. *So it goes.* Martin Luther King was shot a month ago. He died, too. *So it goes.* And every day my Government gives me a count of corpses created by military science in Vietnam. *So it goes.*"

Vonnegut, like his hero, Mark Twain, was a pessimist. Reading the *New Zealand Herald* these days would seem to confirm Twain and Vonnegut's dark view that a culture of violence cannot be changed.

Dame Margaret Bazley's report on a culture of sexual misconduct and abuse of power in the NZ police force is both embarrassing and tragic. Even the police were apparently embarrassed as they tried to impede the work of her Commission. The most tragic indictment she made was not about what has happened, but her doubts that the police culture can change. *So it goes.*

Another news story that is unavoidable in New Zealand is the debate over what the press has deemed the *anti-smacking Bill* that is before Parliament. All the Bill does is remove from the criminal code the ability of child abusers to use the defence of reasonable force for their violent actions. What seems to me a rather sensible community decision not to condone violence against the smallest and weakest is, according to the polls, vehemently objected to by 80 percent of all New Zealanders.

As a new Kiwi I find this attitude very confusing. I have found most of my new countrymen and women respectful, gentle and kind. I admire our historic resistance to nuclear proliferation and refusal to build a military designed for aggression. How does a peace-loving nation reconcile that attitude with its resistance to changing the culture of violence surrounding our children? I am very curious to learn if our elected leaders will have the political will to take this admittedly small step towards change. Like Twain and Vonnegut, I'm not optimistic. *So it goes.*

Vonnegut, who in one of his books founded the *Church of God the Utterly Indifferent*, wrote in ***Slaughterhouse Five,*** "What the Gospels actually said was: don't kill anyone until you are absolutely sure they aren't well connected." ***So it goes***, he might have added.

Surprisingly, Jesus and Vonnegut may agree on this point. Let me tell an Easter story in a slightly different way. Jesus decides to make an Episcopal visit to the first church formed after his death. The membership isn't very large. There are only 11 of them and one only attends occasionally. However, they establish the tradition of locking the church doors out of fear that just anybody may come in. What if women or homosexuals should come check them out? Besides the world out there is violent and dangerous. Look what happened to their teacher! The doors were locked by unanimous consent at the Annual General Meeting.

Then, as if in reprimand, the Teacher just shows up in their midst anyway. He agrees with them that *yes*, the culture is violent. He carries the wounds to prove it. But you can't hide from the violence he says. "If you want the world to be a better place you must seek to change it. Not by physical force but with the love that connects us all. To do violence to anyone, no matter how worthy the cause, is to do violence to all. It is not an easy thing I ask of you. You are likely to suffer. But not to do it is not to live at all."

Vonnegut would've liked Jesus' sermon, even on one of his more despondent days. It was similar to the one he has repeatedly given us. His version is shorter and less reverent, "There's only one rule that I know of… 'God damn it, you've got to be kind.'"

***So it goes.***

*The Rev. Clay Nelson, an American by birth, is assistant priest in the Anglican parish of St-Matthew-in-the-City, Auckland*

## Better *Matthew* than *Luke*

Fr Kelly's reflection upon the Beatitudes from *Luke* (*TM March 07*) becomes a rather sombre experience for him and probably for readers. His traditional interpretation has the capacity to induce a sense of unworthiness and even mild depression. The ideals seem increasingly out of reach.

Perhaps the inclusion of presentation of the Beatitudes from *Matthew* would offer more hope for the struggling Christian. As the Good News Bible puts it "Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them!"

This list of Beatitudes exude hope and encouragement for those struggling with contemporary issues e.g. "Happy are those who are merciful to others, God will be merciful to them" and "Happy are those who work for peace, God will call them his children!"

It makes you grateful that there is more than one gospel.

*Charlie Brogan*, Titirangi

## An Aussie inspiration

I really enjoy *Tui Motu* – I find it thought provoking and consider it a glass of mental water. In the Aussie panorama by David Ranson (*TM April*), I was thrilled to find that Peter (not *David*) Garrett is rising in the Labor Party. He was frontman for *Midnight Oil* until it disbanded in 2002. This group was passionate about indigenous rights and the environment.

Their songs reflected this along with a Christian message. One of my favourite songs, from the album *Diesel and Dust* has the following lines; "we carry in our hearts the true country and that cannot be stolen, we follow in the steps of our ancestry and that cannot be broken".

His website www.petergarrett.com.au and read more about him. Very interesting is an edited transcript of his address to the *St. Thomas More's Forum* last October on "Peacemaking for Christians in the 21st Century".

*Jan McLeod*, Queenstown

*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

## Ecce Homo!

*Tui Motu* arrived in good time for me to read from cover to cover before Easter. I rejoice in so much material which reflects thoughts and beliefs that have been close to my heart for many years and need to be aired repeatedly: the persuasive prose and statistics of Mary Betz and Sean McDonagh beautifully balanced by the spiritual contributions of Daniel O'Leary's powerful metaphor and Paul Oestreicher's encounters at Epstein's rock.

On Good Friday afternoon I spent some time contemplating *Ecce Homo* illustrations, by default really. I had wanted to spend time in Jesus' company with Bach's passion music in the background. Instead I picked up *Tui Motu* .

Once I would have said that straight lines and angles, geometry in short, could never communicate emotion. But Don Moorhead (*TM cover*) does it. I soon gave up attempts at analysing his abstract symbolism and just lost myself in contemplation of the image. Lacking the narrative progression as background, my imagination got stuck in Gethsemane and left me badly shaken. Horrific stuff to identify with.

So too, I feel that Epstein's sculpture of *Ecce Homo* needs time to behold, and I can well understand the instinctive fear of passing tourists of becoming involved more than they have bargained for. The true artist can dispense with the literalism of a Gruenewald painting or a gory Passion film when he has the ability to convey the ultimate agony of soul and body so eloquently through a sense of stillness.

I was wondering if by choosing a hunk of unyielding rock from close to St. Francis' Benedictine refuge, he had the saint, himself no stranger to hard labour of love, at his shoulder.

*Frank Hoffmann*, Drury

## Promoters Corner

Our parishes are precious sources of grace and encouragement. Prayer and proclamation of the gospel reside there. No spiritual enterprise has much of a chance unless it enjoys a welcome there (at Sunday Mass especially).

This welcome has been extended to *Tui Motu* in parishes throughout the country by priests and parishioners. It has been life giving. It has provided visibility, consideration, affirmation, frequently leading to new readers, additional subscriptions – the lifeblood of any publication. *Tui Motu* places the highest value upon its links with parishes.

Such links can be fostered in various ways. Ideally, by agreement with parish priest and/or parish council, to enable a parishioner to speak each month (never more than two minutes, usually less) about the current issue and be available after Mass with copies for sale. Next best would to advertise the current issue in the parish newsletter and be available to sell copies after Mass. A third approach would be to ask parishioners you know to place an order for TM and deliver it to them at Mass.

Could you consider undertaking one of these initiatives for TM? To discuss it further phone Brian Rea (03-487 6903) or email him <brijo@clear.net.nz>; he would be delighted to help you get started.

In some circles the above might be classed as 'having some nerve' to approach people so directly but parishioners will recognise the typical parish expectation that people who care will help if they can. At least, I hope so!

*Tom Cloher*

# The case of Jon Sobrino

In November 1989 a Spanish-born Jesuit, Jon Sobrino, who had spent most of his working life in Latin America, was lecturing in Thailand. While there he received news that six Jesuit priests from his community at the *University of Central America* (UCA) in San Salvador had been brutally murdered. No one has ever been brought to trial, and there is little doubt that the killings had been authorised by the right-wing government.

That was 18 years ago. Now the name 'Sobrino' is back in the news because the Vatican, through the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* (CDF) has issued a 'Notification', warning that his writings "may cause harm to the faithful".

This brings back memories of the 1980s and '90s when many theologians from that part of the world had their books banned, were forbidden to teach and, in some cases, excommunicated. They were punished for advocating and teaching Liberation Theology.

These theologians claimed to be carrying out the spirit of the Vatican Council in presenting the Gospel in a way that lets local people feel that Christ understands them and their problems. They also felt that they had been supported by Pope Paul VI, who had agreed with their vision of the Church having an 'option for the poor'.

This seemed to have special importance at a time when the Pentecostal churches were making thousands of converts from Catholicism with their special type of spirituality. However, this theology met harsh opposition from Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger and the CDF, who claimed it was tinged with Marxism and incited hate and violence towards authority.

I talked with a Dunedin priest friend who attended Jon Sobrino's lectures and who met him frequently while studying at St Louis University in the United States. He remembers him as an "ordinary priest and kindly confessor", with no hint of being internationally famous as author and theologian.

Sobrino is a great example of a teacher whose theology is backed up by his personal experience. My friend was impressed that Fr Sobrino lectured for half the week and then spent the remaining days working in a parish where the people lived in poverty and oppression. So, his theology came from both directions – from the truths found in the Scriptures and Church teaching and also from the needs and experience of the people.

The Vatican 'Notification' is confusing. Its main concern is Sobrino's Christology. It admits that he does not deny the divinity of Christ, but suggests he is confused about how aware Jesus was of his divinity before the Resurrection. But who isn't confused? There has always been theological discussion about this mystery.

Could this document be more about power than theology? Is it saying, "Rome does not need these theologians putting ideas forward for discussion; Rome can supply the answers in its Catechism and its Vatican pronouncements; Rome will decide what the bishops of the world meant when they produced the documents of the Vatican Council?"

One can imagine how painful it has been for this man to be told that his work may be dangerous to the faithful. There have been widespread reactions and questions regarding the Vatican's 'Notification'. Six years have been spent by cardinals, archbishops, bishops and theologians sifting through Sobrino's writings, looking for something that doesn't agree with their theology.

What has been achieved? Is there nothing more positive and constructive that these clerics could have been doing? And it's fair to guess that the majority of these inquisitors have spent most of their priestly lives inside the Vatican with absolutely no idea of what it's like trying to strengthen the faith and hope of those whose lives are dominated by state-sponsored poverty and oppression, living perhaps in fear of torture and death.

Pope Benedict will visit Brazil this month to attend the Fifth General Conference of CELAM (Episcopal Conferences of Latin America). Some fear that the timing of this 'Notification' indicates that he will use the opportunity to put another nail in the coffin of Liberation Theology and discourage any theological discussion that is not approved by the Vatican. Benedict's two-year papacy has already produced a refreshing taste of positive and sensitive insights into the life of the Church.

Let's pray that his visit to Brazil will add to this achievement.

*Jim Neilan*

# Dear Bishops

You are our fathers in the faith. You have responsibility for guiding us and guarding us in our attempts to live for Christ in the world. This is a good and holy calling, and one which deserves respect and honour. In our sin and confusion we are often in need of your correction and encouragement.

I am a layman, and a poor one at that. With just ten years of life within Catholicism, I am still finding my way. My new home has proved to be welcoming and healing, and I trust I have not been overly brash or disruptive during this period of initiation. There is so much of the liturgy which I am deeply grateful for.

Forgive me then if I demonstrate my lack of understanding by raising an issue which perplexes me. Please regard it as the questioning of a child at the dinner table; one who might embarrass through innocent candour, but is tolerated because such curiosity is a way of learning.

It is the problem of who may receive communion. I know that I can easily be instructed on this by being directed to the relevant section of Canon Law. But I'm afraid that the written law is often as much a stumbling block to me as it was to those of the First Covenant. To truly comprehend, I need to hear the affirming whisper of the Spirit and that of my own conscience.

Two recent experiences might usefully highlight the difficulties I have with our current teaching on the matter. The first arose at an ecumenical Christian festival in the United Kingdom. Some 15,000 young people were present to celebrate and explore the faith. In the context of the worship programme a Catholic Mass was planned.

In keeping with the arts focus of the gathering, a stunning visual environment was created with the use of slides and video loops. This was supplemented with ambient music and original responsive prayers. The event attracted a large number of participants, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

But when the local priest arose to celebrate Communion, he started by explaining why it was that only the Catholics present could receive. In the midst of our worship, it seemed an act of violence and exclusion. I was shamed at a time when I wanted to be proud of our catholicity. Some people left in humiliation. I refused to partake, in solidarity with them.

Another time I attended Mass with some dear friends, a couple who were visiting from another city. The Protestant minister and his wife are people of deep and abiding faith. The woman was at a particularly vulnerable place in her life, and struggling with the whole concept of organised religion. Her attendance at Mass was an attempt to reach out to God.

Moved by the service of worship, she joined the queue for communion. But when she reached the front, she was refused, and offered a blessing instead. The sign of this was her devastated weeping when she returned to her seat. She had gone seeking bread, but was given the stone of rejection. Once again, I felt shamed by the practice of my church.

When I have discussed this issue with priests, they have reassured me that such events are an aberration: that almost never will a priest refuse anyone who comes with genuine and prayerful intention to Communion. But then, dear fathers, I must ask why it is that they so regularly contradict the teaching of the church?

My instinct is that they do it because they are ministers of grace rather than judgment. Their hearts tell them it is better to offer some form of healing to those that seek it than to be canonically correct. Perhaps they feel that the magisterium was made for humanity, rather than humanity for the magisterium.

I do understand the intention of the current teaching. It is to preserve the dignity and apostolic succession of the church, and to recognise the mystery and power of Holy Communion. But sometimes intentions become distorted by the tides of history, and can end up being lost or even contradicted by circumstances. The issue of circumcision is one that comes to mind, from our shared journey of faith.

My own view is that communion has its roots firmly in the life of Jesus. When he gathered his closest followers for what is commonly called the Last Supper, it was a continuation of the table fellowship which had been such a strong and central part of his ministry to that date. And the radical and defining characteristic of that fellowship was that sinners and outcasts were welcomed to his table.

It was his outrageous inclusion of those deemed not morally qualified that offended the guardians of religion in his day. But it seems that Jesus was

resolute in his insistence that the grace of God was available to whoever should seek it. Are we then to deny this fundamental welcome through our practice of the most regular of our sacraments? To do so seems a denial of what Our Lord lived and died for.

That Judas was present in the upper room is also significant. Not only was he included, but Jesus, knowing that this was the man who would betray him, broke bread and shared it with him. Not only sinners, then, but also those who would betray all that is holy and sacred, are invited to participate at the table of Jesus.

Salvation, surely, is offered through Christ to the whole human race, and not just to those who identify themselves as Catholic. And what greater sacrament of that salvation can there be than the real presence of Christ in the Mass? Dare we pretend to be gatekeepers to the vehicle of grace?

I have, I hope, a high view of Communion rather than a low one. It is the very mystery and power of this sacrament which demands that we offer it faithfully and truly in the spirit of Christ who is present in it. My favourite sentence of the liturgy is this: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you. But only say the word and I shall be healed." By this confession, we acknowledge that we all are sinners, and yet are made welcome through the transforming power of Jesus.

Can we be selective then about who is redeemed and who is not? Perhaps the unwelcome truth is that we are wanting to determine who is Catholic and who is not. That seems to me a rather tawdry reduction of Communion to a badge of belonging, rather than a eucharistic feast in anticipation of the kingdom.

None of us would want to cheapen or make a mockery of what is most precious to us. That which is sacred must be treated as such, and I have no desire to see communion made less beautiful than it now is. There are of course limits, and any priest worth his salt will exercise them to preclude mockery of the faith.

But surely it is preferable to exercise our presumption on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion. It is unrealistic to wait until we are in doctrinal agreement with our Protestant sisters and brothers before we break bread with them. There would be few among us brave enough to demand that only those without sin should take communion – for we would exclude ourselves.

It does seem to me in my state of misguided confusion that Communion is more an instrument of unity than a fruit of it. It is by physical participation in the broken body of Christ that we remember our togetherness in Him. We dare not wait until we have achieved unity before we share communion – I suspect Godot will come before doctrinal agreement.

We are not only Catholic, but declare ourselves in the Creed to be catholic – embracing of difference. It is a denial of this if genuine seekers after Christ find at the centre of our worship rejection and exclusion. Our vision of church is surely not so limited that we see their difference as a threat to our own hold on faith. I trust that we are not exhibiting some sub-Christian desire to have them submit before we can share our communion with them.

I'm painfully aware of the teaching of the church on this matter, and I'm half afraid that your response might be to reach for those familiar arguments and reiterate them. But I ask you, as men of faith, to search your hearts and ask if there is not some fundamental betrayal of the gospel embodied in this doctrine of exclusion.

Last year, my daughter was involved in a car crash which resulted in a broken neck, from which she might easily have died. She is not of the Catholic fold. Nevertheless, a priest who is a dear friend of ours brought her communion and prayed with her. She was deeply moved by his love, and by the grace she received through Communion. Should he have been disciplined for this?

You are good men and have a difficult job. I am sorry to trouble you with my questions. I ask them tentatively, having harboured them in my heart for many months. We must find our way together in this venture of faith, often failing to exemplify all that we believe.
May God have mercy on us all.

*Mike Riddell*

# *The often silent cry*

*During February, Australian theologian David Ranson gave a two day seminar to the bishops and congregational leaders of Aotearoa New Zealand.*

*In this digest of his talks David explores the connection between the spiritual hunger of our age and the church's mission to share its experience of Jesus Christ*

## The new spirituality

One of the 'signs of the times' today is a renewed sense of the need for prayer in the lives of ordinary people. This desire for a spiritual component in life seems to be growing all over the Western world. A recent Roman document speaks of "the often silent cry in people's hearts": it is clearly something the church needs to respond to. Practising Christians, therefore, should be happy to share their experience of Christ with others. Our personal prayer life should have a constant eye on the needs of people and not just be self-centred.

At the same time David Ranson warns us to be on our guard to the counterfeit forms of spirituality which are also rife:

*Spiritualism* – a fascination with the occult which especially flourishes where there is a climate of powerlessness.

*Pietism* – an amplification of religious practice which is really a form of defence mechanism. The people involved avoid engaging with the real world. Again, this may be a symptom of powerlessness.

*New Age Commercialism* or 'supermarket spirituality'. In place of a church wedding, for instance, people 'go shopping for a life-enhancing experience'.

None of these '-isms' will lead us closer to God.

The criterion of an authentic spirituality is: *does it take us away from the needs of the world – or does it lead us back into the world.* The Australian writer David Tacey has an image of a river in flood. In the Alice Springs area a dry riverbed can be transformed overnight into a turbulent torrent. This provides a beautiful image of the new spirituality which contains within it great potentiality.

But the flood bears with it a lot of dirt, froth and rubbish. The new spirituality may contain much which is infantile and needs to be filtered out. Nevertheless, formal religion needs to hold dialogue with these new movements. We should respond by being alert to this "silent cry", at the same time remaining firmly rooted in the basics of our own faith.

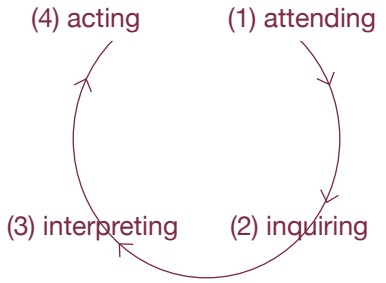
## What is spirituality?

The Greeks held a dualistic view of the universe. Spirit is immaterial and is quite distinct from matter. To be 'spiritual', therefore, means to become unworldly. This is a Platonic notion, and it has been very influential in the Christian prayer tradition.

The Hebrews, on the other hand, saw 'spirit' as that which is living, energetic, vitalising. It is simply that active principle which enlivens matter. If we follow the Hebrew insight we can define spirituality as that which *keep us awake* and alive and more aware of our relationships – with people and with God. Paul uses a different metaphor but is saying the same thing basically when he writes that we should be "children of the light". On this view, spirituality is a normal part of living in the world.

Events which awaken us and stir us into action are what Peter Berger calls "triggers of transcendence". Bernard Lonergan notes a cyclic rhythm in our lives. The first stage is *attending* ie. becoming alert to the signs of the times and to events which arouse us spiritually. The second is to *inquire,* using one's intellect and asking questions; thirdly, *to interpret* what is going on; finally *to act* on the information and impulse we have received.

The religious elements of this cycle are the second and third stages, when they happen in a framework of faith.




Lonergan calls this the *transcendental imperative*: he suggests that if any stage is absent we will 'fall asleep' spiritually.

## Bringing spirituality and politics together

David Ranson is insistent that the spiritually alert person needs to become involved in public life. Society as a whole requires external triggers to render it spiritually alert and awake. It is not difficult to fit the Cardijn methodology of *see/judge/act* into the above frame. First we must *listen*, which means being alert to the signs of the times. If Christian action is to be a spiritual experience, then we must be motivated to act – to act with love. The true Christian *listens with love*. It is that which triggers social action.

Often, however, humans cannot cope with too much reality. They prefer to hide behind their prejudices and be dulled into inaction. They become spiritually 'asleep', ceasing to be spiritually alive and active. Their love becomes stunted.

Johannes Metz suggests that what stirs us to action more than anything else are so-called "dangerous memories". These are memories of suffering which remind us where things have gone wrong in the past. In this way we do not close our eyes to the injustices of the world; indeed, we become more alert and see and hear more.

He calls it a "mysticism of open eyes". The questions we need to ask are how we feel about the sufferings of others. Do we acknowledge the plight of marginalised people? Are we awake to their sufferings? Will we be moved to act on their behalf? Then it is no longer merely a memory. It becomes present and drives us to action. It becomes an imperative of God. We receive a *mission*.

Leonardo Boff takes this one step further still and places the whole process in the context of the Blessed Trinity. The Trinity itself becomes our 'social strategy'. The Trinity is the eternal image of how we are created to live together, to depend on each other and relate to others. We are destined to live together simply because we exist. God is the God of eternal hospitality. Evils such as dominance, cruelty and exclusion cannot coexist with that divine value. Human life is made by God to be collaborative and relational.

## The Kingdom of Heaven

Unless we understand the Trinity we cannot understand what Jesus meant by the *Kingdom of Heaven*. The Kingdom is the incarnation of the Blessed Trinity in our earthly society. Yet the Kingdom is elusive: it doesn't enter through the front door; it comes in through the cracks. The Kingdom does not overwhelm us; it infiltrates into our lives.

Healing miracles are a good example in the Gospels. When Jesus heals someone, the Kingdom infiltrates. It transforms death into life, shame into dignity, fear into love, deafness into receptivity. In a word, Jesus is transforming the whole of society by his message and actions. He changes isolation into community and domination into mutual service. The Kingdom touches the predicaments of ordinary living. Even in the economic sphere, when sheer profit gives way to co-operation, the Kingdom is happening.

The most spectacular examples of this transformation happen with marginalised people. Their exclusion ceases when they are touched by the Kingdom, and once again they are brought to belong. They are acclaimed as "first" by Jesus. They are first in the Kingdom of Heaven.

To summarise the lesson we learn from this:

- *it is in the world especially that I meet God;*
- *ascent to God happens through descent into the world;*
- *prayer simply becomes for a Christian a new way of listening;*
- *all this transformation leads us to a sense of HOPE.*

## Our religious tradition in relation to spirituality

Bernard Lonergan showed above how the spiritual and religious aspects of our belief system form a single cycle. It is important, he asserts, that the religious moments of inquiring and interpreting do not happen too soon in the process, otherwise spiritual awareness becomes blocked. There can be a schism, so that the religious aspect becomes rigid and dogmatic, and the spiritual withdraws and becomes disdainful of the religious.

The two aspects need to remain distinct but not divided. They are like a tree. The canopy interacting with the environment represents the spiritual side. The religious side, the roots, provide spirituality with a solid anchor.

Religion exists to be a service to spirituality, not a dictator. Therefore religion should be in continuous conversation with spiritual experience. In that way the religious truth emerges. The encounter of Christ and the disciples on the road to Emmaus is a good illustration. The spiritual experience of the two disciples, their loss and their pain, is put into religious context by the Risen Christ. The conversation they have on the road helps the disciples to recognise the truth and their hope is restored. And they act at once to share their experience with the Apostles.

Those seeking religious meaning need to be aware of certain disciplines. Thus it is important for the critical mind to distinguish clearly what are the central questions and what is the baggage

inherited from the past needing to be discarded. The imagination sometimes needs to be allowed a free rein, so that the spirit can search below the surface of things. The spirit is like a midwife, seeing the divine within the human and bringing it to birth.

Poetic language and imagination is important in the expression of faith. Paul Ricoeur said that ethics need to be served by poetry. The poem doesn't dictate what has to be done, but suggests *how* something may happen. A religion which lacks poetry can become dead. Poetry allows for subtlety of meaning and for a sense of transformation.

Poetry is valuable not just because it is expressed in beautiful language. Beauty, as a value, can be dangerous if it does not allow for the paschal reality of suffering. There is no beauty in simply having to endure evil. An example of truly Christian 'beauty' is the fidelity of a spouse caring for a dementia patient.

## Spiritual leadership: the 'shepherd' image

Jesus Christ proposed *the shepherd* to us as a model. In a First Century context that would be truly shocking. Shepherds were poor, often dirty and were treated with contempt. They spent their summers out in the pastures. They came back to the village in the winter living in the meanest dwellings. When they returned, petty theft in the village went up.

Yet this is who Jesus chose – a marginal character without power or prestige in society. This model is clearly countercultural. It is not a charism of power, but of care and concern. The 'shepherd' is to be with us in our hurts and problems.

All spiritual leadership starts in a climate of *grief.* The religious leader comes to the people in their need. He/she resists the illusory images (like those in our media) which seduce us. The shepherd gives the people back their truth and invites them to a new form of humanity by articulating for them their grief.

The shepherd lives by *hope.* The whole gospel message that Jesus brings is that love will triumph in the end, that fear will be driven out and that we are commissioned to celebrate the Divine presence among people.

This leadership model demonstrates the sympathetic nature of God. *Mercy*, in Hebrew, means 'the womb'. It is more than pity; it is creative love of giving birth. Mercy is the pain endured to bring the dead back to life. Mercy rejoices in the light, but understands darkness.

There is nothing especially new in all this. It is founded on Jesus' own words in the Gospels. It was spelt out in detail hundreds of year ago by Meister Eckhart in his theology of the Trinity. And it is a vitally relevant answer to the spiritual hunger of our own age. ■

*Fr David Ranson teaches theology at Catholic Theological Union, Sydney*

Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Palmerston Nth

# A Symposium

## for people actively teaching or studying theology

### at DIOCESAN CENTRE, Palmerston North

Thursday 30 August (evening) to Sunday 2 September 2007 (lunchtime)

**Bishop Cullinane writes:**

The language we use to talk about truths of faith is often expressed in 'church speak' which does not engage our listeners. Do we need to re-invent some of our language while preserving intact our unchanging faith?

Participants in this Seminar are invited to submit a 100-word abstract on their chosen topic. They would be expected to speak to it (20 minutes max.) followed by discussion. The organisers reserve the right to select papers presented and limit the number of participants if necessary.

**Seminar costs will be borne by the diocese. Participants to pay for their travel and accommodation.**

***Expressions of interest and abstracts to be sent to Bishop Cullinane, Private Bag 11-012, Palmesrton North by 30 June***

# Writing: the inner journey

*Creative writing is like a journey of the human spirit, says author Joy Cowley. In both exercises we are reaching out into a world beyond our conscious awareness*

Creativity is about connection – connection with ourselves, with our past experience and our present yearnings, plus a connection with something beyond us that is deep mystery and yet universally known. Many artists liken the experience to meditation. We make a journey deep into the well of self until we come to that great underground river that feeds all life. At this stage we discover that we are not who we thought we were. Separation is an illusion.

Those of us on a spiritual journey will probably borrow religious terms to describe the creative process. But whether faith is involved or not, the experience tends to be the same. A creative act can take us to a place of sacred awe where our boundaries dissolve and we become part of all creation.

As a writer, I discovered that this development did not come quickly. There was a long apprenticeship during which I had to learn how to discipline thought and how to use the tools of language to serve thought. I can't remember who wrote these words: "True art comes from practice, not chance; as those who move most gracefully have first learned to dance." That person knew the process well.

For most of us, it is years before we have command of our craft. When the dance steps under our feet, the music notes under our hands, the words in our mind are so well trained that they instinctively serve the creator in us, then our art is on holy ground.

In *Writing Workshops*, I do meditation exercises with writers to help them increase their awareness of where their writing is coming from. There is always a risk in these exercises, that people will come unexpectedly upon sad memories that they've locked away; but that in itself is good. If the memory isn't named and owned it will come up in the author's work and life, in all manner of guises.

This is not to say that the person's life has been traumatic. Survival is our strongest instinct, and it has the loud voice of fear. This means that when we tap into memories, recollection of pain and loss will usually rise first, and eclipse happy events. If we look at the number of bleak books written for young adults, we see how many authors have projected the unhappiness of their teen years.

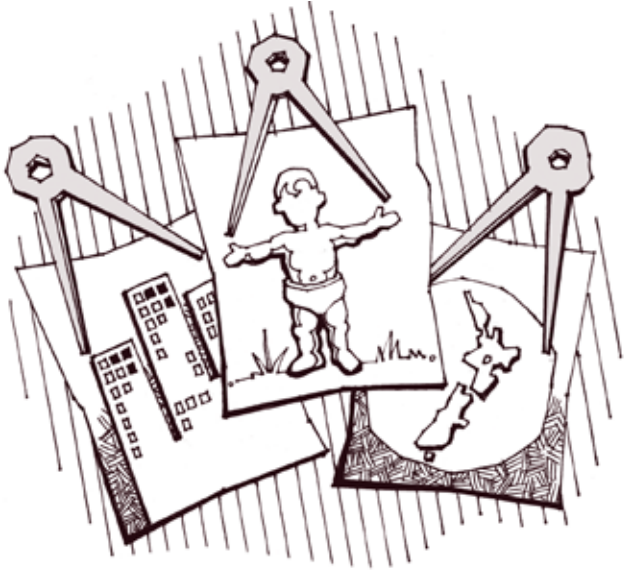
When I began writing, I didn't know anything about the process of projection and I'm now very glad that all my angst was poured into books for adults before I started writing for children. Actually, the same sort of thing happens when we start a routine of contemplative prayer. We can become quite alarmed at the darkness that surfaces. Historically, it was thought that the devil severely tempted people who began praying. It is a natural process associated with early inner journey. The negative stuff will come up first.

The next level, I often call the justice stage. This is a stage of healing, where we are resolving personal issues. These issues too, we tend to project in various ways: concern for our environment; anger at injustice; a desire for goodness. Writers can become crusaders, writing stories with strong messages, desiring to save the world. Again, it's a natural stage of the journey.

Further on, definitions blur and become softer. There develops a broader vision that understands more, forgives more. We have journeyed a long way down the well of self and are realising that in fact, the well has no bottom.

Our creativity, our very existence is coming from something beyond us. There is a lightness in that discovery, laughter, occasional bliss. Sometimes, we seem to enter a child-like dream state and then come out of it, wondering who wrote those words in front of us.

I don't know that anyone actually reaches the river this side of incarnation, but we sense its presence, and its dominant gift to the writer, is love. ■



# Loving Children:
## *a design problem*

*David Orr*

*Cities like ugly antheaps – a lifestyle which is inhuman. Is it any wonder our children often grow up alienated from the world we have made for them?*

The *Skymall* catalogue, conveniently available to bored aeroplane passengers, recently offered an item that spoke volumes about our approach to raising children. For a price of several hundred dollars, parents could order a device that could be attached to a TV set that would control access to the television. Each child would be given a kind of credit card, programmed to limit the hours he or she could watch TV.

The child so disciplined, would presumably benefit by imbibing fewer hours of mind-numbing junk. They might also benefit from the perverse challenge to discover the many exciting and ingenious ways to subvert the technology and the intention behind it, including a flank attack on parental rules and public decency via the internet.

My parents had a rather different approach to the problem. It was the judicious and authoritative use of the word ***no***. It cost nothing. My brother, sister and I knew what it meant and the consequences for ignoring it. Still, I sometimes acted otherwise. It was a way to test the boundaries of freedom and parental love and the relation between the two.

The device approach to parenting is symptomatic of a larger problem – a society absorbed with things, economic growth and self. It is driven by three factors new to parenting in the post-modern world:

- a commercial culture in which we've come to believe that high-tech gadgetry can fix human problems, including teaching discipline and self-control to children.
- parents absent from the home working all hours of the day and night to make ends meet.
- a society that does not love its children competently enough to teach them self-discipline. We have, sheep-like, acquiesced in the design of a society that dilutes the expression of genuine love. The result is a growing mistrust of our children that easily turns to fear and dislike.

Why are the very children that we profess to cherish becoming less than likeable and sometimes less than human? In a recent survey only one-third of adults believed that today's young people "will eventually make this country a better place".

Instead, we find them "rude" and "irresponsible." Often they are. We find them overly materialistic and unconcerned about politics, values, and improving society. Not infrequently they are verbally and physically violent, fully adapted to a society that is saturated with drugs and violence.

Some will argue that every generation believes that its children are going to hell. Eventually, however, things work out. Such views are, I think, fatuous because they ignore the sharp divide imposed between the hyper-consumerism of the post-modern world and the needs of children for extended nurturing, mentoring and imagining.

It is the economy that we love, not our children. The symptoms are all around us. We spend 40 percent less time with our children than we did in 1965. We spend, on average, six hours per week shopping but only 40 minutes playing with our children. Without intending to do so we have created a society that cannot love its children, indeed one in which the expression of real love is increasingly difficult.

### The environment we create

No society that loved its children would create places like the typical suburb or shopping mall. No society that loved its children would put them in front of television for four hours each day. No society that loved its children would lace their food, air, water, and soil with thousands of chemicals whose total effect cannot be known. No society that loved its children would build so many prisons and so few parks and schools.

No society that loved its children would divorce them so completely from contact with soils, forests, streams, and wildlife. No society that loved its children would casually destroy real neighbourhoods and communities in order to build even more highways. No society that loved its children would knowingly run even a small risk of future climatic disaster.

We do all of these things in the belief that they are the necessary price of creating a better world for children. But at some level I believe that our children understand that such arguments are phoney. I think this awareness explains what often appears to be their unfocussed anger. Our children often mirror the larger incivility and rudeness that we inflict on them.

## Building a world fit for children

What would it mean to make a society that did in fact love all of its children? How do we design a civilisation for children?

The starting point is the child itself and its need for joy, safety, parental love, play and the opportunity to safely explore the wider world. Our minds are rooted as much in the ecology in which our childhood is lived as in our animal instincts.

Paul Shepard once argued that mind and body are imprinted in the most fundamental ways by the "pattern of place" experienced in childhood. For Shepard the conclusion is that children must have the opportunity to "soak in a place" and to "return to that place to ponder the visible substrate of his own personality."

Conversely, the child's sense of connection to the world can be damaged by ecologically impoverished surroundings. And it can be damaged as well by exposure to violence, poverty and even by too much affluence – in other words, when ugliness, both human and ecological, becomes the norm. Ecological design begins with the creation of places in which imagination can flourish. These would be safe urban and rural places that included biological diversity, wildness, flowing water, trees, animals, open fields and room to roam – places in which beauty became the standard.

One consequence of a homogenised and utilitarian landscape is that most young people learn little about how they are provisioned and virtually nothing about better alternatives to meet real human needs. The things we used to do for ourselves as competent citizens and neighbours we now purchase from one corporation or another at a considerable mark-up. It should astonish no one that civility, neighbourliness and communities are in decline and that crime and lawlessness are on the rise. People do not need each other as they once did.

Many children grow up feeling useless. In landscapes organised for convenience, commerce, and crime and subsidised by cheap oil, we have little good work for them to do. Since we really do not need them to do real work, they learn few practical skills and little about responsibility. Their contacts with adults are frequently unsatisfactory.

*a child's need for joy, parental love, play – and the opportunity to safely explore the wider world*

Rarely do we work with our children. Rarely do we mentor them. We teach them few practical skills. At an early age they are deposited in front of mind-numbing television and later in front of computers. And we are astonished to learn that in large numbers they neither respect adults nor are they equipped with the basic skills and aptitudes necessary to live responsible and productive lives.

## What should we be doing?

Part of the solution, I believe, is to rejoin mind and habitat at the landscape level by reconnecting living with livelihood. This can only be done in places where a large part of our needs for shelter, warmth, energy, economic support, health, creativity, and conviviality are met locally in competently used and well-loved landscapes.

A landscape organised primarily for automobiles and trivial consumption tells young people more about our real values than anything taught in school. It is possible, however, to organise landscapes to teach usefulness, practical competence, social responsibility, ecological skill, the values of good work, and the higher possibilities of adulthood.

The farms, mines, wells, waste dumps and factories which provision us are mostly out of sight and so out of mind. We do not know the full costs of what we consume. Ignorant of the damage we do, we leap to the conclusion that we are much richer than we really are. Ecological poverty and poverty of mind and spirit are reverse sides of the same coin.

But when we get the design right, the manner in which we provision ourselves becomes a reminder of our larger relationships and obligations. The true aim of ecological design, then, is not merely to improve the various technologies and techniques by which we meet our physical needs, but to improve the integration of the human mind with its habitat and to fit in a larger order of things.

"To live," in Wendell Berry's words, "we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skilfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want."

## How we plan our cities

Compare the architecture of the modern world with earlier civilisations. The ancient cities of India, Greece and Rome, for example, were planned as "representations of microcosm and macrocosm, projections of the human body and distillations of the universe" (Peter Wilson: *The Domestication of the Human Species.* 1988 New Haven, Yale University Press).

The architecture of houses and public buildings were means to "portray to people their relation to one another as well as to important features of their environment". Buildings were not simply machines as Corbusier would have it, but a map showing "how the individual, the various orders of groups, and the cosmos are linked and related."

Compare this with sprawling cities of the 20th century that give no clue about any cosmology larger than the GNP. They have become wastelands, islands of sybaritic affluence surrounded by a sea of necrotic urban tissue. For the most part our buildings, in which we spend over 90 percent of our time, are poorly built.

They are often made of materials that are toxic. They are often oversized and use energy and materials inefficiently. They are mostly disconnected from any discernible sense of community or any larger ecological or spiritual pattern.

What do such cities and buildings teach us? They teach us in exquisite detail that we are alone and powerless in the world, that energy and materials are cheap and can be consumed with impunity, that the highest purpose of life is consumption and that the world is chaotic and dangerous.

## Conclusion

Good design should instruct us in what we need and the terms of our existence on Earth. In other words, the systems we devise to provision ourselves with food, energy, materials, shelter, and health need to constitute a larger form of education.

But if these systems are designed to educate they must work at a comprehensible scale. They must be devised in ways that create competence and practical understanding. They must be resonant with our deeper needs for meaning embedded in ritual and celebration. And this wisdom must be faithfully transferred from one generation to the next.

Designing ecologically begins in the belief that the world is not meaningless but coherent in ways that are often mysterious to us. Our task is to discern, as best we are able, the larger patterns and scales in which we live and act faithfully within those boundaries. Design, in this larger sense, is not simply making things but rather a striving for wholeness. At its best, ecological design is the ultimate manifestation of love – a gift of life, harmony and beauty to our children. ■

*David Orr is Professor and Chair of the Environmental Studies Programme at Oberlin College, Ohio USA*

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# Farmers' market

*There's an air of excitement and purpose about the much-photographed Dunedin Railway Station on Saturday mornings.*

*Hundreds of people armed with boxes and carry bags converge on the platform and station yard to fossick and browse and compare prices – and carry away the freshest produce a foodie could wish for. The old hands arrive early – but not as early as the stallholders who have been setting up since six a.m.*

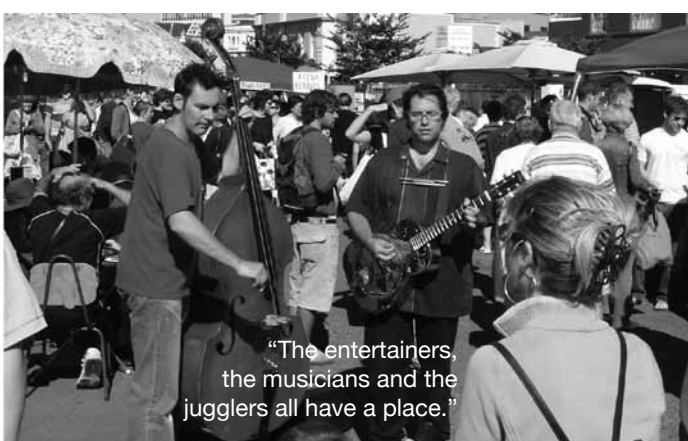
*The Dunedin Farmers' Market has become a social occasion which makes good economic sense, a place to take visitors, to meet the growers, to have the first coffee of the day with a freshly-baked goodie, to revel in the bounty on offer.*

It all started," says manager Lesley Cox, "with a group of people who wanted to do something to rejuvenate the southern end of town and thought a market would be a good idea. The original plan was to hold it in the Exchange area and develop but that wasn't possible. Then someone suggested the Railway station – it was the right idea at the right time. Farmers markets around the world are gathering momentum. We are under the auspices of The Otago Farmers' Market Trust, a charitable trust with the assistance of staff and volunteers.

"I started here four years ago selling. I had a small nursery, but in winter my plants went underground and you can't sell what you can't see! When the previous manager resigned I thought I could do that job, so I applied for the position – and here I am.

"On an average Saturday we have between 60 and 65 stalls. There are 110 sellers registered but a lot are seasonal. A good core of them are here every week right throughout the year. What the sellers appreciate is getting a very large public in a short time.

"It's the fresh produce which attracts me. . ."



"The entertainers, the musicians and the jugglers all have a place."

A cheerful grower: Maia at the market with her organic produce, helped by a visiting English friend

"The first benefit to growers and sellers is financial. Orchardists would sell their fruit to a wholesaler or a supermarket and receive a pittance. One seller told me he was getting 30 to 40 cents a kg for his apples. The supermarket might sell them for $3 to $4 kg. He sells them here for $1.50 – and he gets the lot.

"One of our vendors was told if he 'went to this market thing', he would be blacklisted. He came here and has done well. We are not so big, and we open only one morning a week. I think the supermarkets have learned to live with us. But every time there is a new product here at the Market I think: that's something else I don't have to buy at the supermarket!

"Whoever is selling a product here has grown it, or raised it, pickled, preserved, baked, smoked or caught it themselves. It is not permitted to buy in someone else's product and sell it. So the public can talk to the seller and learn how a particular produce is grown; what sprays have been used; what the animals have been fed on. People like to know that.

"You shop according to what's in season and plan your menu once you're here. Appearances can be deceiving: that strange shaped cucumber might just be the result of fewer sprays.

"The market fosters a sense of curiosity in the buyer: *so what is celeriac and how do you cook it?* You get to taste something you've never tried before. You might even discover how to tell the gender of an aubergine!"

Pat Harrison has been a regular at the market since the very first day. "Three things particularly appeal to me," Pat says. "First, the busy atmosphere of people who come regularly and who relate so well to the sellers. It's an atmosphere of happy relationship between buyer and seller.

"Secondly, the produce is so colourful. And there are some quite colourful personalities too among the stall holders! Thirdly, it provides the opportunity to buy fresh fish, vegetables, meat and fruit. The food has been grown and nurtured by the seller.

"I also enjoy seeing young people shopping there – the students arriving on their bikes to shop. I like the fact that it has not allowed itself to grow and lose its intimacy. You find arts and crafts shops in adjoining streets. It's a true farmers' market.

"Modern society has tended to concentrate too much on the individual. Whereas at the market you see a true community in operation and you feel its spirit. It takes you back to the days when shopping was largely a person to person encounter.

"The supermarkets have largely destroyed that atmosphere: they negate any sense of intimacy. They're totally impersonal. Sometimes they are built close to each other to encourage people to 'graze' for the specials – as if we were nothing better than sheep! The Farmer's Market helps to restore a sense of humanness.

"The entertainers, the musicians and the jugglers all have a place especially when the weather is good. I just like it. That's why I go"

Another market regular, Mary Young, agrees: "It's the fresh produce which attracts me. If I buy courgettes at the market I know where they come from. But in the supermarket – God knows where they come from. They may be flown in from Australia. They're fresh here – and they are grown by the seller. I was really angry when I heard that one of the local supermarkets was buying all their produce from Christchurch, squeezing out the local growers.


Chutneys galore being offered by this young helper – and a variety of nuts *(above right)*

"I can get organic produce here – meat, vegetables and eggs. You don't see that in the supermarket. At first I fully expected to pay more. But in fact you pay less. Apples, for instance – all varieties, are much cheaper.

"I love shopping here. It's a people place. In the supermarket you never stop and talk – you spend your time dodging other people's trolleys. But here you stop

and chat with complete strangers. One day I met someone from Tauranga, who had visited lots of markets. But he liked the Dunedin one because it wasn't just boutique type stalls. It was selling genuine local produce.

"Some stalls are quite different, like the man who sells English porkpies. And you find special chocolate, tea, wine, olive oil – specialist goods. Once again, the person selling to you is the producer.

"I buy different cuts of meat from the organic meat producer, and he will sometimes give me hints how best to cook it. He often has smaller cuts for people who live on their own. I bought some native grasses one day, and the woman told me exactly where to plant them. I enjoy chatting to Olivier who grinds and blends his own coffee: he always has a joke.

"And I like to shop around and select something from the small growers. You are very conscious of the seasons here. So I stock up on the apricots and nectarines from Central Otago when they're in season. I bottle them so they last me the whole year.

"Another interesting thing – the market attracts as many men as women. They seem to know what they're buying and they obviously can cook. And children wander around without being a nuisance. I like hearing the buskers and the instrumentalists."

Stan Randall (*photo right*) is an organic orchardist. He comes down every Saturday morning from Alexandra to sell his fruit and other produce. "We just about break even," he says. "What we are largely selling is our export 'overrun'. Organics is a niche market. We don't make a fortune coming here.

"But I come because I enjoy coming. I don't come for the money. It's a real social event. And I've met some amazing people. The girls who help me sell just came along one day and volunteered. Then there was a German couple living in Dunedin who offered me a bed, so now I can come down on Friday evening.

"I think the market is an outstanding concept. It's run by an incorporated society, so any money they make is reinvested in the community.

"After Christmas when the fruit is at its peak we are flat out all morning. Price is a big driver for what people buy. Where we are in Central Otago many of the conventional growers have pulled out because they can no longer compete on the export market with Chile and China


Facts of life lesson! Mary finding out the sex of an aubergine – to the delight of the growers

for pip fruits. They now concentrate solely on apricots, cherries and nectarines.

"Organics, however, are controlled by very strict international protocols. Every time there is an outbreak of mad cow disease or bird flu our exports shoot up! And these local markets are growing all the time.

"Organics is a philosophical thing. When I first started on a small block the *Apple and Pear Board* provided me with a fixed regime for spraying by the calendar. My budget for sprays was over $10,000 a year. I said to myself: *there's got to be a better way of doing it than this*. You spray and spray. You are killing everything off with chemicals. Of course, there's a cost. We've lost our crop to fungal infection twice. It's so easy to control fungal infections with sprays.

"In organics we use a strategy of 'competitive exclusion'. If you populate the orchard enough with benign species, you exclude the nasties. Of course, they're always there. One morning I saw a forest of spider webs covered with dew glistening in the sun, tens of thousands of spiders eating all the nasties! I wish I'd had a camera. It rejoiced my heart". ■

# *Caught red-handed*
## The many forms of theft

*What starts out to be a whimsical piece on petty theft, suddenly becomes for* Bro. David Steindl-Rast *a deadly serious, abiding issue of justice*

In 1984, the editor of Parabola magazine, Philip Zaleski, wrote to Bro. David Steindl-Rast O.S.B., soliciting an article on theft. Zaleski pointed out that theft, although outlawed by the Ten Commandments, is lauded by Picasso: *Bad artists imitate, good artists steal.* And one translation of Mt. 11:12 is *Violent men rob the kingdom.* Unfortunately, Parabola did not receive satisfactory responses and cancelled the project. But Bro. David has granted permission to publish his meditationson different types of theft: heartbreaking, humorous, harmless, and heinous.

Well, I confess, I got caught. And now I stand convicted. At first, that invitation seemed harmless enough: *Parabola* is planning an issue on *theft*. "We are inviting a dozen writers such as yourself to meditate upon something they have stolen and upon the motives and consequences of this act, and to share their insights with our readers." Fair enough. I glanced at the deadline, glanced at my calendar, carefully avoided glancing at stacks of unanswered mail, and decided to accept the invitation.

Writing about myself does not normally attract me. It feels a bit too much like a psychological strip-tease. Yet, as one monk who has never yet been pilloried in a 'thieves gallery' I found the challenge appealing. Memories began to rise. Childhood memories at first. The hazel bushes on the hill. The oath I had to swear to my mystagogue, barely a year ahead of my five, only to look and never, never to touch.

### The robin's egg

And then that nest. One egg. Never has there been a more mesmerizing blue than the blue of that single robin's egg. It still electrifies my memory. By going there again, I broke another solemn oath, never to visit the secret spot by myself. At dusk I stole back. I never intended to steal the magic object. But I was spellbound. At the slightest touch the egg-shell caved in between my forefinger and my thumb. In that very instant the mother bird darted through the branches. Her shriek still pierces my bones and I want to wipe my sticky fingers again and again.

Stealing in wartime was a far more pragmatic matter. Motives and consequences were plain. You stole because you were hungry. If you were lucky you got away with it; if not they shot you dead. It was clear-cut, yet, not without humour at times. Looking back, it is easier than it was then to laugh about that one hundred pound sack my brother and I stole from a warehouse.

### Bags of flour

What visions we had as we lugged our booty home through the deserted streets. We could almost smell the loaves and loaves of bread which one hundred pounds of flour would yield. What space flights of culinary inventiveness we engaged in when our flour turned out to be laundry starch! But broiled or braised, boiled, roasted, or fried, the starch remained starch.

Stealing the book was different. It sprang from different motives, had different consequences. This, too, is a wartime memory. Bombs had devastated Vienna. After checking on a friend's apartment and finding it destroyed, I walked through a hole in the wall to explore the neighbouring ruins.

Bombs had split the house in half. What had once been a music teacher's treasured library lay in shambles. Plaster and shattered glass half-buried the bookshelves. A brick had landed in the belly of a mandolin. I started dusting off spines, reading titles. The book I liked best, I took. I do not know if the owner survived the bombing of that house. But 38 years later this book is still with me, now in a hermit's cell seven thousand miles from where I stole it.

In all these years I've learned, I hope, "not to take what is not given." But what do you do with stolen goods which you cannot return? It's a song book. And just the other night I sang from it. And

when I sing, I remember, remember. I had not caused that horror, but I took advantage of it. My love of beauty and music merely underscores that fact. Thus, I know myself to be brother to that superintendent of a concentration camp who used to sit at his grand piano playing Beethoven sonatas at night after his job was finished.

Well, these memories of my thefts would make suitable copy, I was sure. And I felt at ease because all this was safely distant in the past. Or so I thought, up to the moment when I had sealed my letter of acceptance to *Parabola*. That's when I got caught, and by my own device.

## Monks for Maine

To explain what happened, I must mention that I have come to be intrigued by rubber stamps. People with cars are voicing their convictions via bumper stickers these days – anything from *Jesus saves* to *I'd rather be skinny-dipping*.

In fact, when our monastic community was trying to get settled in Maine, we stole a slogan from a candidate for Congress. After Mr Monks was defeated, and only then, we used his bumper stickers that read appropriately, *Monks for Maine*.


Since then I have found that a rubber stamp will do for the unmotorised among us. Citizens on wheels won't steal a march on us pedestrians. Slogans stamped on envelopes will turn the US Mail into a public forum, just as bumper stickers turned the US highway system into one. Besides, rubber stamps are cheaper than automobiles.


And so, having licked my letter to *Parabola*, I pressed my $3.50 rubber stamps on it, as I do with all outgoing mail. But, attuned to the topic of thievery as I was, I suddenly read the two-line slogan as if I had never seen it before:

MONEY SPENT ON ARMS
IS STOLEN FROM THE POOR

And there they were, rising up in my memory. Children with bloated bellies and spindly limbs, their eyes burning with the dark fire of hunger. Thousands of pairs of eyes. Half forgotten statistics came to mind. 41,000 persons starve to death every single day.

More than a dozen of our State capitals have populations far smaller than that. As if day after day a city larger than Annapolis, Maryland or Helena, Montana or Jefferson City, Missouri were wiped off the map by starvation.


And yet, two weeks of the world's military expenditure would suffice to adequately feed every man, woman, and child on our planet for a whole year. Only for two out of 52 weeks we'd have to suspend our arms race madness. The slogan on my rubber stamp is a quote from Pope Paul VI. President Eisenhower had said it decades earlier: "Every warship launched, every missile fired is, in the last analysis, a theft from the poor."

Most of those who starve to death are children. The cries of their mothers are more piercing than a mother bird's cries. I have experienced how gladly one braves death for stealing if the alternative is death from starvation. Whole nations ravaged by hunger may experience the same. Their exploiters know that.

This is why we live in a world in which rich nations arm themselves against the poor ones. We may not have caused this horror, but we are all taking advantage of it here in the northern hemisphere. Aren't we?


Forgive me. If this *Thieves Gallery* was meant to be a gently amusing affair, my self-searching may end up spoiling the fun. I apologise. But watch out! Your own bumper sticker may get to you one day and wake you up. Maybe that is where new hope begins. If enough of us wake up, we'll face the problem together and together find creative ways to do more than treat symptoms.

We must tackle causes. The whole system needs an overhaul. For a start, we might even try to make our democracies democratic. Structures we take for granted may need to be changed. Again I apologise. But I cannot hide from the eyes of those children whose food I am stealing. I stand convicted. ■

Br David Steindl-Rast is a Benedictine monk who has criss-crossed the world spreading his message of prayer and gratefulness through writings and workshops. He has been to New Zealand more than once.

Henri Nouwen wrote: "*Br David is my ideal of a teacher... he speaks of the spiritual life with the authority of a monk who lives it. His lively gestures, his open, always surprised eyes, his attentiveness to every question, his concise responses, his sparkling humour and most of all his obvious love for his students, allow him to open all hearts.*"

Br David's teachings are accessible via his website: <gratefulness.org>. The site is interactive. Those visiting it can share a prayer or even light a 'cyber candle for peace' which flickers online for 48 hours!

## God calls us

*God calls us.*
*God calls me in my capabilities.*
*In my strengths God calls me.*
*It makes sense that I am called to use my gifts for God's purpose.*
*I will be an able servant,*
*A willing and generous worker for God.*

*God calls us.*
*God calls me in my lack of ability.*
*In my weaknesses God calls me.*
*It makes no sense that I am called to bring my faults, my mistakes for God's purpose.*
*I will be an unskilled servant,*
*a reluctant and restrained worker for God.*

*God calls us.*
*God calls me and my capabilities deflate.*
*I hesitate, unwilling to respond.*
*I doubt my strengths are strong enough for God's purpose.*
*Fear of failing to be the able servant*
*Turns me from the calling.*

*God calls us.*
*God calls me and my weaknesses awaken.*
*My faults, mistakes stand tall and strong.*
*Reluctance and restraint break free to listen*
*And doubt is set aside.*

*Nicky Lee*

## Green Earth

Who is the green man standing in the shade
of the oak tree at midsummer?
Is it Pan, Puck, the eternally young?
The green regenerates in the woodlands.
Year after year the berries and the nuts
are nurtured from the life force.
It has been named, it has been recognised.
It is the green fuse, the red blood,
complementary colours on the colour wheel.
Red blood, green shoots, eternal life.
Christ's green red blood flows through
the legend and the perceived reality.

*Gillion Dowling*

## In Search of Belief

A few years ago a community of Mercy Sisters met over a few weeks and reflected together on Sr Joan Chittister's book on the Creed, ***In Search of Belief***.

The fruit of their discussions was published in *Tui Motu* as a series, and later printed in a slim booklet under the same title: ***In Search of Belief***.

*Tui Motu* still has some of these available at $5 inclusive of postage. If you would like to prepare for Sr Joan's visit to New Zealand by reading this booklet, please write to *Tui Motu, P.P.Box 6404, Dunedin North* and enclose $5 with your address. We will be pleased to send you a copy.

# ADULT EDUCATION TRUST

Spirituality, Personal Formation, Social and Environmental Concern
www.aet.net.nz

## Sr Joan Chittister OSB

### NZ Visit July 2007

### "Spirituality & Culture: Sacred Challenges to a Secular World"

Joan is a significant visionary spiritual voice in the world today – a Benedictine sister from Eire, Pennsylvania USA, social psychologist, author of over 30 books, and a regular columnist for the National Catholic Reporter. Joan has an MA in communication arts, and has received a number of honorary degrees and awards in recognition of her outstanding work in justice, peace and equality in the church and society. She is Executive Director of Benetvision, a resource & research site for contemporary spirituality: www.benetvision.org

**Christchurch:** Friday 6th July – Evening Lecture ($10) 7.30 - 9.00pm: St Margaret's College Chapel
Saturday 7th July – Day Event ($45) 10am - 4pm: St Margaret's College Chapel
Enquiries/bookings: www.aet.net.nz or adulteducationtrust@xtra.co.nz

**Wellington:** Tuesday 10th July – Evening Lecture ($10) 7.30 - 9.00pm: St Mary's College Hall
Wednesday 11th July – Day Event ($45) 9.30am - 3.30pm: St Joseph's Church, Mt Victoria
Enquiries/bookings: marcellinrsm@xtra.co.nz

**Auckland:** Saturday 14th July – Day Event ($45) 9.30am - 3.30pm: Cecilia Maher Hall, St Mary's College, Ponsonby.
Enquiries/bookings: mercycentreauckland@xtra.co.nz – Ph 09 638 6238

**Sunday 15th July** – 10.00am St-Mathew-in-the-City

# HIV positive Christ

*Christian Brother Shane Coleman describes an incident when he was caring for an African child with AIDS.*

*It taught him a living lesson on the sacramentality of the Blood of Christ*

Shane Coleman working with orphans of HIV/AIDS

As part of my time as a Christian Brothers novice in Cape Town I work with children who are HIV positive. South Africa has the fastest growing rate of HIV infection in the world, and what has become apparent is that the AIDS issue is more about justice than health care. It is the poor, especially women, who are being infected. Poverty does not cause AIDS but it escalates it. All the children I work with are there because their families live in poverty and they cannot afford care for them, or simply that they have no family left.

One morning the rain was pouring down. It was cold and the children were not able to play outside. One little toddler, "***T***", was 'extra' excited and as he was running around the room, he fell and bit his lip. Blood came pouring from his mouth. I went over to comfort him and then looked down and found my hand covered in blood.

***T*** is HIV positive. I knew that there was no risk in getting infected though I was a little shocked by what had happened. ***T*** was cleaned up by the nursing staff. I washed my hand and continued to do my work and did not think much about it till later on that weekend.

It suddenly struck me at Mass on Sunday. My thoughts had wandered from the confines of the church, and I was thinking back to the experience of Friday. The experience of T's blood on my hand caused me to stop and think. This is a child who will not have long on this earth due to no fault of his own. He is like any other child I know: he runs, he plays, he cries and he laughs. Yet at the same time he lives in a world unknown to most people. He lives in a world where he will be confined to hospital wards – a world of routine, of medication and nutrition; and the final stage will be that he will die in this institution.

Mass moved on, and it was at this stage I looked up and the priest had elevated the chalice at the consecration. This particular Sunday I was sitting quite close to the altar and I could see the congregation's reflection in the shiny golden chalice. We were the sacrifice of human hands which was to become the blood of Christ. It struck me, then and there, that the blood of Christ has HIV.

The blood of Christ is not only the memorial of Jesus the Nazarene but humanity's memorial as well. Modern theology teaches us to see God in each human person. To see God in ***T*** was to see the God who has HIV. That chalice which reflected the congregation's faces became a symbol of remembrance not only for the blood poured out at Calvary but the new Calvary of today; those who suffer from the disease of HIV/AIDS.

The Dominican theologian Timothy Radcliffe writes: *For us, as members of the body of Christ the suffering people in remote parts should not just be a statistic; they are flesh of our flesh.* ***T*** and the children I knew could be simply written off as another statistic of the AIDS epidemic which is sweeping across South Africa. But for me those statistics have names, smiles and laughs. They are the children of humanity. Like all children across the planet they are due the respect and dignity of all.

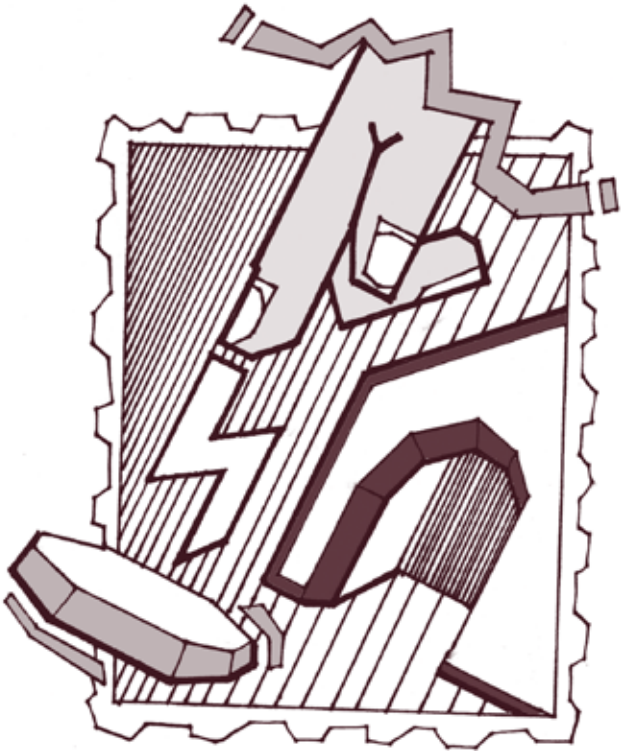
I come from a generation raised on media portrayals: a society that listens for the sound bite and is constantly fed a plethora of images – children starving in Ethiopia, a plane crash in Russia, riots in Jakarta, wars here, floods there. These images should be powerful but in many ways the power has been lost. The image on television happens somewhere else, to someone else, to people whose names I do not know.

That morning I felt the power of that image, looking down and seeing the blood that was going to kill this child, on my hands – on all our hands. The blood is on our hands if we do not see the need for humanity to respond to a humanitarian call. I feel more deeply the need to challenge poverty, to seek justice, to see the dignity of people and above all else to simply love.

Why did Jesus the Nazarene die on the cross? Because, Jesus who is the Christ was prepared to speak out for the poor and to touch the lepers of his time. Who are the lepers we are called to touch today? I am left pondering these simple words …

*For I have no hands but yours.* ■

# Be Afraid of the God of Easter



*Glynn Cardy*

Last month was the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire. Every year for 18 years William Wilberforce brought a motion to the House of Commons seeking the end of slavery. And every year, save one, he lost. He railed against a trade seen as fundamental to the British economy. Wilberforce defied the silent consent of bishops, the Church, the common interpretation of the Bible, and of course the polls, in order to be faithful to the simple truth that all were created equal and deserved to be treated the same.

The story of Wilberforce's life, coming soon in the movie *Amazing Grace*, is one of choosing between Gods. Choosing between the God of his upbringing – a God of convention, comfort, and civility – and between the God who gripped and drove him – a God of justice and change. Wilberforce followed a God who led him into the desert of unpopularity and vilification.

'Convention, comfort, and civility' is a description of the grave. The grave is a solid tomb, with solid boundaries, and a solid door. It's thinking is found in churches, clubs, pubs, and parliaments. The grave protects the insider. The clothes the grave provides are secure, warm, and comforting. The décor might be plain, but it's predictable. The outside world is repulsed. Inside certainty is assured. The grave is safe.

Resurrection is not primarily a past event that happened once upon a time in a Jerusalem cemetery. Resurrection is a present event, a way of talking about the challenge to leave the deadly mummified structures and thinking of the past and to live in the spirit of Jesus. It is about breaking free. It is about justice and change. And it is not safe.

We live in a time in the history of the Church when a great deal of entombed thinking, and its accompanying solidified structures, are being broken open by people who want to be free.

A photograph taken of the Auckland Anglican Synod in the 1950s, compared with a photograph of that body today, is remarkable for two things – the number of ties and the total absence of women. Those were the days when old white men were in charge. Autocracy was the norm, paternalism was expected, and accountability was negligible. In many parts of Anglicanism, let alone other denominations or religions, this pattern continues. It is a pattern of oppression.

Since the 1970s in Aotearoa New Zealand we have been trying to exhibit a form of leadership where women and men, laity and clergy, form partnerships; where power is both transparent and accountable; and where those without power have avenues of redress. This is a journey. It doesn't happen overnight. Mistakes are made. Systems can easily turn sour. But we have travelled a significant distance from the oppressive structures and thinking of the past.

I once told my children that it wasn't so long ago that teachers caned pupils. They looked at me incredulously. 'Oh Dad you're making up stories again!' My children have no experience of the violence that was endemic in New Zealand high schools. Similarly when we come into contact with the hierarchies of the English or Central African Anglican churches we are incredulous. We can't believe that ecclesiastical feudalism is still alive.

The walls of the tomb are solid rock. They have been there for generations and have the word 'immovable' scrawled upon them.

Of course the political and social structures affect, for better or for worse, the theology. Where the male is God, God is male. Where the hierarchy is God, God is hierarchical. 'Convention, comfort and civility' disguise autocracy, sexism, and oppression.

On the other hand however where God is more below than above, more feminine than masculine, more dirty than clean, more uncontained and surprising than restrained and boring… there is hope, change, and justice to be found. The tomb-breaking God chooses the foolish, the weak, the rebels, and outsiders. Truth is not the sole preserve of powerful men, nor the wisdom of what's always been.

Are our prayers, worship, preaching, and theology entombing us in yesteryear or inviting us to break free? Is worship emancipating? Or are we slowly being seduced by the formulas of old, pickled and placed with the other preserves on the shelf, there to collect dust and wait? Are we confirming convention or stimulating change?

The seduction of living in the tomb is that the conventional God is there too. You can sit in your comfortable grave chair and talk to the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. You can sing "Our God reigns", soak up the acoustics, and feel all holy. You can memorise verses that affirm your God as the way, the truth and the life. It's all very nice in the tomb.

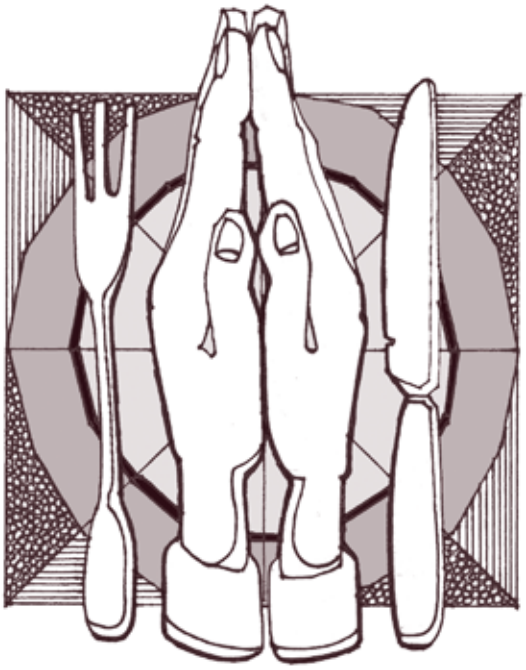
Out of the tomb however it is not nice. The God of liberation is not a pleasant puppet you can sing to and feel all holy with. God, like truth, is bigger than our experiences and projections. Even our convictions are tempered by the disturbing thought that maybe God isn't on our side. Out of the tomb we discover that people are complex, life is complex, and God, like love, manifests itself in a variety of forms and relationships.

Trapped in the grave, the churches have invented all sorts of theological nonsense. In the desire to keep God small, predictable and safe, a plethora of so-called miracles have been manufactured to suit the pre-modernism of the entombed mind. There's a windup literal devil, there's a literal seven-day creation… supernatural miracles abound. Even the dead literally come back to life. When churches only talk to themselves, those who agree with them, and their marionette God, it's not long before tomb reality becomes the only reality.

The God of the Risen Jesus however is very different. This is a God of whom we need to be afraid. This God breaks open our tombs. This God disturbs our thinking. This God allows niggly questions to visit us in the small hours of the night. This God drives prayer from our lips and peace from our soul. Like the God of Wilberforce it blows us into the furnace of unrest, change, and freedom. This God compels us to shred the trappings of death and break free of the grave. Heaven help us. ■

# What we pass on

*Paul Andrews*



Eileen sat, a curious matriarch, amid three generations of her offspring. Her children and their spouses, and their children and grandchildren, happened to be near home in such numbers that they arranged a Sunday lunch in a hospitable pub. Eileen looked, and listened, and wished that her lovely husband, killed by a hospital bug ten years ago, were here to share it all. They had given such thought and energy to each of their six children. They were a clever lot and a loving lot, like their parents, and they had reached adulthood in the turbulent sixties and seventies. Here was a rare opportunity to see how they had turned out.

'Turned out' may be the wrong word. Which of us can say we have finally turned out? We are still turning and changing until *rigor mortis* sets in. But when your children are themselves starting to be parents, you feel some sort of stage has been reached that deserves reflection.

Not one but many mothers (fathers too but less often) ask this question: how is it that the children we reared in the faith do not bother to get their children baptised? Religion was our lifeline; why is it either irrelevant or an optional devotion for many of them? Eileen was past the illusion of blaming herself or her husband. They had done the best job they could. They had kept the love flowing in the family, and saw the futility of the question: *What did I do wrong?* Ireland itself is different.

They can remember a time when on most mornings the front page of the *Irish Independent* reverently featured a bishop or priest making a speech or opening a school. That has changed; now almost any newspaper feels free to attack the majority religion and its representatives. Journalists are no longer safe targetting Jews, but they can feel comfortable bashing the church and its clergy As Yale professor Peter Viereck commented, *Catholic-baiting is the anti-Semitism of the liberals.*

That public hostility may impact on adults. A bigger influence on adolescents is the pressure of some peers who see Mass-going as something to be left behind in childhood. Moreover religion and church are so absent from the most popular TV programmes that you can understand a girl or boy feeling that a godless life is normal. But that is not the whole picture.

In the Ireland of our times, our faith has had to depend more and more on inner strengths. We have seen religious values slowly eliminated from our laws. Society has become increasingly secular and multi-cultural. Good Christians maintain their faith without the props of an externally Christian society. We are pushed back to the smaller community of our parish or faith group; and also to our interior life, to the movements of our hearts. The same is true of our children.

When teenagers are asked *when they pray* (clearly different from the question about attending church), it emerges that few of them - or of adults - have given up praying. I had a dear friend, a clever and deeply spiritual Donegal woman, whose fate it was to attend a lot of formal dinners - her husband was an ambassador. Roisin would find herself sitting beside people of every religion and none. In such mixed and international company, the conversation tended to be about politics or the boring trivia of shopping and travel.

In such a conversation Roisin would sometimes break a pause by turning to her neighbour and asking: *Tell me, how do you pray?* There would be a shocked silence. It was not considered a proper question for a diplomatic dinner table. But Roisin's interest was so real and lively that her question would generally lead to a real answer. Praying was so important to her, she assumed it was important to most human beings; and she found that was the case. Whether her partner was agnostic, Buddhist, Moslem, post-Christian or whatever, she found that nearly all of them turned to God at times. Roisin told me that the question led to some of the best and most personal exchanges.

It is a question we have to be ready to hear from our children. What is our honest answer? There is no right answer except the truth of our experience, and that will change as we grow older and our prayer reaches new depths, especially in times of crisis and distress. It is then that the compassionate heart of Christ, and the meaning that he gives to redemptive suffering, can strengthen us. It was from moments like these that the prayer became popular: *O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in thee.*

What we hand on to our children is not so much doctrine or practices, as the capacity to love. In a culture dominated by the philosophy of unrestricted choice (*go for anything you want, as long as you have the money for it*), the family is a stark exception. It exists because father, mother and children have restricted their choice, and commit themselves to one another for life. Without that model of unearned and faithful love, it makes little sense to talk of the love of God. We have no experience to give content to the words.

We have probably overdone the stress on practice in our religion. You cannot read far into the Gospels without seeing the different emphasis of Jesus. He was constantly telling the Pharisees and scribes that they worried too much about regulations and practices, such as the washing of dishes and the detailed observance of the Sabbath. Instead he stressed: Look into your hearts. It is there that goodness or evil come into the world.

We do not want to sit in judgment on our children or grandchildren. But if we even start to worry about them, let us use the criteria that Jesus gives us: the love of God (shown in prayer), and the love of others. Let us look to their hearts. ■

*Paul Andrews is a Jesuit priest and psychotherapist, semi-retired in Dublin*

# A Mother's Journal... Cameos from Holy Week

An old man of the mountains breathes hard in and out. He has lived at least 80 years in this small Himachali village. Last week he pulled out the tubes down in the hospital in the town. Said he needed to come home. He knows his days are ending.

Now he sits surrounded by son, daughters, grandchildren and wife. He asks for snow. A motorcycle is sent up the hill and a bucket full is brought to his bedside. Sitting up, he squeezes a handful. Lets the cold run through hot fingers. Then throws it into his mouth. Gasping he lies back again.

A day later we hear the trumpets, horns and oboes of the procession going to the funeral pyre. The smoke carries his spirit up to the Snows. His family takes his ashes to the Ganges.

Around a plastic bucket we sit. Sara from Kerala and Canada, Robin from Nepal, Tej Ram from Himachal and our family of five. We read the ancient verses. Of bread and wine shared. Of feet washed by a master as servant. We wash each other's feet. Rohan giggles at the soapy fingers over his toes. Shanti gently dries Sara's feet. Tej Ram says this is the first time he's heard of Easter, Jesus dying or foot washing.

A swag of patients come to see the doctor on Good Friday. I feel irritated that even this day there is no space, no rest. To me, most of them aren't even very sick. When I finally get to listen to some Bach and to pause, I think maybe it was OK. Last night I sang "Brother, sister, let me serve you." I got the chance to, after all.

I sit with our children on a rainy Holy Saturday. I'd planned to plant seeds deep in the dark earth today. Could be a good symbol even if they take weeks, not hours, to 'rise again.' Kids don't want to go out. I follow the line of least resistance. We watch a Hindi version of *Babe*, the pig who turned sheep dog. Rohan cries when the puppies are taken from their Mother and Father. But I wonder if we should be doing something more holy.

Waves of green – bright, intent and sharp wash up the sides of our valley. Green pushes, nearly fries, and a fast, pointy spring has arrived. Spears of iris, sharp buds on apple trees, razor-green wheat, bristling barley and the siren yawp of red red rhododendrons. Such an abrupt and exuberant spring I don't remember ever. It's perfect for this holy month. A resurrection dance.

Kaaren Mathias

*Kaaren Mathias is a mother of three living and working with her husband, Jeph, in a village in Hijmachal Pradesh. She is focussed on keeping her kids happy, improving public health and enjoying the beautiful surroundings*


# Reflecting on John

## Nicodemus, the slow believer

*John 3:1-21*

*Susan Smith*

Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night. Once again we see the Johannine author using the language of darkness and night to symbolize the realm of ignorance, untruth and evil. Nicodemus is taking his first tentative steps in moving from darkness toward the Light of the world. In *John 3:1*, he is described as a leader of the Jews, presumably a member of the Sanhedrin, the legal assembly of around seventy prominent Jewish leaders, but more importantly, he intuits that there is something greater than the Law that he so rigorously observes, and he is searching for answers. He and Jesus engage in dialogue but Jesus' teachings do not appear to have sunk in for Nicodemus asks: "How can these thing be?" (*3:9*). He is not rejecting or refusing Jesus, but he is finding it difficult to move beyond the legal categories into the realm of the Spirit who blows where she wills.

Nicodemus appears again in *7:50*. Earlier in this chapter, we learn that Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Booths (temporary shelters), a feast that commemorated the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness. Angered by Jesus' preaching and its effect on the crowds, the chief priests and Pharisees want to arrest Jesus. When the leaders meet, Nicodemus does not exactly leap to Jesus' defence, but he does ask if it is right to judge Jesus without giving him a proper hearing as the law demanded. His legalistic approach to life is apparent.

Later in *19:38*, Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy Jew who was a disciple of Jesus although a secret one "for fear of the Jews," and Nicodemus approach Pilate so that they can take the body of Jesus away for burial before the Sabbath in accordance with Jewish law. This was the action of fundamentally good men who faithfully observe the Mosaic Law.

Neither Nicodemus nor Joseph comes from the lower classes of Palestinian society as both of them seem to have enjoyed some political and religious prominence. I suspect that they are like many of us, sticklers for observing the law in all its minutiae.

It is easy enough for Catholics to criticise the Pharisees with their multitude of laws. After all Jesus taught: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (*Matt 22:36*, cf. *Deut 6:4*; *Lev 19:18*). So what are we to make of the fact that in its Code of Canon Law, the Church has 1752 laws? ■

# Colonisation by corporation

*The Last Resort – God Defend our Free Land ...*
Film Review: Paul Sorrell

*The Last Resort* is a home-grown documentary which shows in compelling detail the ways in which ordinary New Zealanders are becoming strangers in their own country, priced out of the market for land and housing by aggressive developers and wealthy foreign investors. The picture painted is a grim one, but the film shows that the seeds of hope lie in the strength and independence of the Kiwi spirit and our capacity to work together for the common good.

Producers Errol Wright and Abi King-Jones weave interviews, old footage, sound bites and home-grown music into a coherent, if complex, tale of 'colonisation by corporation' and the ongoing dispossession of the small people of this country by wealth and power. Commentary is provided by a line-up of the usual suspects on both sides of the battle-lines: Murray Horton, Roger Kerr, John Minto, Moana Jackson and the late Rod Donald, to name a few.

But the real stars are the everyday people who act out their real-life roles in the story around which the film is built – the tale of a long-established family camping ground at Mahia Beach in northern Hawkes Bay and its sale by a venal local council to developers who plan to turn it into a luxury subdivision.

Under the leadership of a group of strong women the local Maori community launch a campaign against the development, based on a claim over the land involved under the Treaty, culminating in a seven-week occupation of the site. Sadly, the battle is lost as the developers outmanoeuvre the protesters with the aid of compliant council officials. Original footage taken on-site and at public meetings adds to the immediacy and tension of this part of the film.

The issues raised so pointedly at Mahia Beach are further teased out as one disturbing question after another is raised. We are given an insight into the workings of the Overseas Investment Commission – a body which facilitates the damaging investment it is charged with regulating – and the Overseas Investment Act, passed in 2005. The film points out the cost to locals of development and speculation, such as higher rates and unaffordable housing. The argument is widened to include the sale of high-country properties to wealthy foreigners, the implications of recent seabed and foreshore legislation and the environmental degradation caused by industrial pollution and planned ironsands and oil prospecting.

While this broad-brush approach creates a comprehensive context for the Mahia debacle at the heart of The Last Resort, it also threatens to overwhelm us with the enormity and complexity of the issues raised. But, as indigenous rights lawyer Moana Jackson reminds us at the end of the film, while power and privilege will not weaken their grip without a struggle, neither will they last forever. ■

# Polkinghorne for the rest of us

*Quarks, Chaos & Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion*
John Polkinghorne
Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005
Price: $35.50
**Review: Richard Dowden**

This book covers some of the material of theoretical physicist turned Anglican priest, John Polkinghorne's book, *Exploring Reality: the intertwining of science of religion*, reviewed in *Tui Motu* in May, 2006. That subtitle would have been well suited to this book under review.

While *Exploring Reality* required reading three times and much recourse to Google to find the meaning of theological, philosophical and physics terms, *Quarks, Chaos & Christianity* is easy to read and holds one's attention for reading the whole book at a single sitting. It is almost as if, after writing *Exploring Reality*, Polkinghorne realised it was too difficult to read so decided to write *Quarks* … for the rest of us; however the copyright dates, 2005 and 1994, show this book was written a decade earlier.

In this book, Polkinghorne takes a softer approach on religion, which is unlikely to offend any but the fundamentalists of the Abrahamic faiths. His gentle – rather than in your face – scriptural quotations from the RSV are introduced more as examples of similar thinking rather than "proofs". He quotes Fred Hoyle, Paul Davies and even Stephen Hawking in the same way.

Fred Hoyle was a "devout atheist" who fought for a Universe which had no beginning or ending. He dismissed the discovery (by a Catholic priest!) of the origin of the Universe from a single point as "this big bang idea" during a BBC broadcast, thereby inadvertently coining the term *Big Bang* - reminiscent of Lord Haw-Haw derisively referring to the Australian troops as the "Rats of Tobruk" in World War II. Eventually, overwhelming evidence for the Big Bang and evidence (ironically, provided by Fred himself) that the Universe appeared designed for us, led Fred to consider the existence of a Designer.

The concept of God just to start the Big Bang, and leave the Universe to grow itself, does not satisfy Polkinghorne or any theist. Polkinghorne explains how God can be continuously involved without any conflict with physics. He argues that "God does not yet know the unformed future" - a claim also made in *Tui Motu*. He points out that "We make the future: it is not up there waiting for us to arrive". This is in his chapter: "Can a scientist pray?" I'll say no more - it would be like telling you the butler did it! ■

# Gorbachev calls for a change in the human spirit

*Manifesto for the Earth*
Mikhail Gorbachev.
Clairview Books, U.K. 2006 (147 pp)
**Review: Jim Elliston**

Mikhail Gorbachev's basic contention is that concerning himself with ecology in the widest sense enables him to reach a kind of synthesis of his life as a farmer, intellectual, economic functionary and politician.

This book begins with an outline of Gorbachev's life history and tells how, when he was eventually being confronted with the truth about conditions in the USSR, it had a profound effect on his belief systems. It gave him a broader perspective, stressing the need to deal with underlying causes, not just symptoms. He emerged as a statesman with ethical concerns.

There is a fundamental connection between environmental matters and the three major challenges of today – security, poverty and development. An understanding of the mechanisms of globalisation is vital. He, then, outlines some structural factors inhibiting the transition to sustainable development. These can be summarised as:

- *Political*: military intervention before other means have been tried.
- *Economic*: uncontrolled markets promoted by international financial institutions that often create artificial needs. They provide major benefits to many at the expense of the majority,
- *Social*: short term electioneering considerations on the part of politicians combined with the consumerism of the population at large which push aside even an elementary sense of justice.
- *Ecological*: the growing ecological crisis showing that a liberal economy which functions mainly according to the criteria of profitability and a return on capital is not capable of coping with the ecological challenge.

In summary, governments need to establish principles-based, objective policies. These include creating some kind of world-wide steering system to control globalisation, by reforming, strengthening and making more effective use of existing authorities such as the UN, IMF, World Bank. There needs also to be a 'Council of Elders' to act as sounding board.

International economic decisions must not be divorced from ecological and social factors; environmental damage costs must be built into goods and services.

Gorbachev's conclusion is that a turnaround will not be possible unless states, communities and individuals are willing to reverse currently prevalent behavioural patterns. It must begin with changes in the human spirit, a reprioritisation of our value system, including relations between people and the interrelationship between humanity and nature.

This clearly written work is an excellent introduction to a complex subject presented in easily understood terms. It ends with the *Earth Charter* containing five sections and 16 clauses containing clear principles. The *Earth Charter* shows, incidentally, a high degree of compatibility with the 35 paragraphs on environmental matters in the *Compendium on Social Matters,* published by the Vatican in 2004. ■

# Attractive 'harmony' of the four gospels

*The Bravest Man: The bravest, most charismatic – and dangerous – man who ever lived*
The four gospels in one narrative by Jenefer Haig
**Review: Mike Crowl**

Back in my childhood I imagine almost every Catholic home had a copy of the *Knox-Cox Gospel Story*. Fr Cox had taken Monsignor Knox's rather quirky translation of the Gospels, put the passages in chronological order, and added some commentary to keep readers informed. It was a huge success, and gave many people access to the Scriptures in a way they'd never imagined possible.

Two or three years ago Jenifer Haig walked into *OC Books* and asked me if I'd stock a book she'd written. It turned out to be a similar venture to the Knox-Cox. At the time I apparently said it was too expensive for the average person to be interested in, and perhaps had too much detail.

Mrs Haig took this to heart (how a bookseller can influence authors!) and came back recently with a much revised and more economically-priced version of the book. It's now called *The Bravest Man,* and it takes a fairly speedy trip through the Gospels, with the stories and parables as near in sequence as anyone can make them. Only scattered sections of the Scriptural text are included; the author's aim isn't to make this an alternative to reading the Gospels themselves.

I enjoyed it, especially the author's running commentary and background. It would certainly be of great use to someone starting out reading the Gospels.

I only have a couple of quibbles. Haig occasionally uses her own translation of the Gospels, but more often sticks to the King James. For me the KJV language is now quite off-putting, and I feel it might also be off-putting for someone new to the Bible. And there are a number of typos. The problem with spellcheckers is that they just don't have a clue which word you intend! ■

# Witness to strong faith and indomitable hope

*In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*
Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006.
**Review: Kevin Toomey**

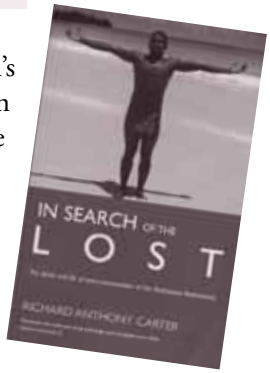
This is a remarkable book. It is the story of the seven local brothers of the *Anglican Melanesian Brotherhood* who gave their lives attempting to seek peace with Harold Keke. This man, now safely imprisoned for life, was the crazed leader of one of the rebel groups that terrorised the people of the Weathercoast, on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands during the tensions of 2001. They had sequestered a Melanesian brother as a bargaining chip in possible negotiations with the government.

By sheer coincidence I arrived in the Solomon Islands to begin my work as a formator of young Dominican friars on the day in October 2003 that the maimed, tortured bodies of the seven brothers were finally able to be brought back to Honiara. It was my privilege to take part in the memorial service and blessing that took place in St. Barnabas Anglican Cathedral, Honiara. Then, with thousands of people lining the road, the Solomon Islands Police Force transported their bodies with full civilian honours to the Brothers' motherhouse at Visale, some 30 km. from Honiara. There they were laid to rest. It was a searing reminder of the risk of the evangelical way of life I had professed as a Dominican 30 years before and that these young men, in their sadly shortened lives, had lived to the point of martyrdom.

The author, Richard Carter, is an English Anglican priest who came to the Solomons to be a chaplain to the Melanesian Brotherhood. The major part of the book takes the form of extracts from his diary turned into a moving narrative of the lead-up to the brothers' going to meet Keke and the aftermath of their death. As bookends to this narrative, Fr Carter begins with a short history of the Anglican mission in the Solomons, highlighting the pivotal place of the martyred Bishop John Patteson. The book ends with a homily that Carter gave at the 2005 clothing of novices.

It is worth the price of the book just to read this address, the last six pages of the book. Here he taps into universal truths that touch us all. This book works on many levels. In putting us into the picture of the previous history of the Anglican Church, it prepares us to see how a new religious Order, firmly rooted in the classical models of religious life, has implanted itself into the life of the Solomon Islands. This is inculturation, as we know it, at its best.

Moreover, we see how the brothers' ministry, founded deeply on the Beatitudes, is interwoven with people and politicians in an attempt to bring peace at this crucial time in the Solomon Island's history. The seven brothers' desire to meet with Keke is only one such effort. Their initiative in collecting a great many of the guns, held by local people but stolen from government armouries during the tensions, is a model and moving tribute to the way in which a religious group, seen by the people to be neutral, can work for the good of the whole country.




*In search of the Lost* bears strong witness to simple faith and indomitable hope. As Pacific peoples ourselves, it reminds us how closely we New Zealanders were tied in with this tragedy, and the flowering of courage it embodied. May our common bonds of humanity and hope keep New Zealand and the Solomons close in fact and faith. ■

# Lament for a more innocent age

*Crosscurrents*
John Honoré

A recent family gathering of grandparents, in order to celebrate yet another birthday, brought into focus how fortunate our generation has been, meaning those who brought up their families in the years before the turn of this century. There was general agreement that we had experienced the best of times: a relatively peaceful world scene, an education without the student debt, social equality, job security and a simplicity of life manifested in family values – all of which seem to be disappearing. From these observations came the question, what are we bequeathing to our grandchildren? Will they thank us, or will they ask how did we get it so wrong?

Perhaps we did not foresee a deterioration of things, the failure of our generation to pass its norms and values along to its children. The loss of spirituality, the ubiquitous use of drugs, the extreme sexual relaxation, the rising crime rate among teenagers: all have added their freight of disquiet and disconcert to the mood of our times. We agreed, with a startled awareness, that the quality of our surroundings, of 'life', is worsening.

Not since the times of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the Roaring Twenties described in *The Great Gatsby,* have the rich been so much richer than everyone else. The economic gains have been grossly distorted. They have created an underpaid work force together with a middle class whose jobs are threatened by technological advances and the practice of farming out or sacking whole sections of middle management. Some examples of senior management with deteriorating business ethics are *Telecom*, *Air New Zealand* and *TVNZ*. Poverty and inequality will haunt the next generation.

Environmental deterioration, allied to population growth and the declining supply of potable water in the face of dwindling resources, will bring international tensions continuing for the foreseeable future. The risk of wars over natural resources could be as devastating as the infamous 'war against terrorism'. Our grandchildren have inherited a troubled world, arguably of our making. The planet will survive these upheavals, but will our grandchildren enjoy our experience on this earth?

## The UN undermined

The Preamble to the *Charter of the United Nations* reads "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". Like the League of Nations before it, the UN has not prevented wars and appears now to be just a mouthpiece for the world's great powers. George W. Bush demanded that the UN back his war in Iraq or become as 'irrelevant' as the League of Nations. The UN is once again being manipulated to authorise another intrusion into the sovereignty of a nation state.

The pressure for 'regime change' in Iran is being condoned and assisted by the UN Security Council which threatens and imposes sanctions at the request of the Bush Administration. It has aided and abetted US aggression by passing resolutions which affirm that Iran's nuclear programme is a threat to international peace and security. In other words, only the US and its allies may possess nuclear weapons. Iran may seek nuclear energy for peaceful purposes only if and when the US, through its control of the UN, approves. The UN should be reining in the threats of another war, not condoning one.

Iran is a signatory to the *Non-Proliferation Treaty*, unlike Israel which remains outside. The US not only ignores its obligations towards the NPT but also waives the promise never to use nuclear weapons against adversaries. The US has systematically scorned the UN, overridden the interests of allies, and dismissed negotiations with potential enemies.

The disaster of American policy in the Middle East has highlighted the importance of empowering the UN as the legitimate force and influence in global politics. No single nation can make such a claim. The UN must remain independent. If the US administration finds it cannot control the United Nations and the Security Council, this could guarantee the survival of the organisation and protect the next generation against the scourge of war.

## US gun culture

The mass killing of students at Virginia Tech university highlights once again the infatuation with guns, war and killing which sadly permeates the history of the United States. The media coverage seemed strangely routine, even formulaic. There were the candlelit gatherings, flags at half mast and the rituals of mourning blanketing the media. But there was no questioning of the inviolate *Second Amendment* of the Constitution nor of the power of the lobby groups which support it.

"The right of the people to keep and bear arms" was defended by supporters of the *National Rifle Association* thus: if all the students had had guns they could have shot the assassin, which suggests a sort of *Gunfight at OK Corral* on campus. The glamour of guns in the whole culture of America seems unassailable.

Under the influence of the NRA, pro-gun groups donate millions of dollars to both the main political parties. As a result, not one politician has been willing to campaign against the gun laws. The Virginia Tech massacre is cited to support students arming themselves. The violence will continue. ■

# Is God real?

The weekend paper I read recently splashed a question across a full page, "Is God real?" It then devoted four further pages to reporting a variety of responses.

The question is a widely asked one. Even the devout have their niggling reasons for doubting the existence of God. For some, the worry is how can a loving and all-powerful God permit the innocent to suffer? For others, it is the mystery that some of the professed followers of a caring God inflict all manner of abuse and injustice on others.

Again, the overwhelming victory of Jesus reported in the New Testament seems in no way adequately reflected in the limited success Christianity has had putting right the wrongs of the world. Questions like these are quite real. Any of us who are honest with ourselves will have faced them. Belief does not exclude questioning.

Some believers have a simple and valid answer to any questioning. They can appeal to their experience of God. They meet him in the warmth of prayer or in the depths of mystical contemplation. I would love to be able to report that answer. Yes, I do pray and I do, in my own fashion, contemplate. But it all takes place in a fairly workman-like manner. I would not expect that an account of my prayer life would provide the non-believer with compelling evidence of the existence of God.

My own questioning of the existence of God arises from a source different from those cited above. My problems are cosmic. Knowledge of the heavens has grown exponentially since the days when Galileo was put on trial for doubting that the world was the centre of the Universe.

We now know that humans inhabit a smallish satellite of one of the billion or so of stars in our galaxy, a galaxy that itself is one of billions spread across space. Can we really believe that the divine Creator of this vast array waited more than 13 billion years before coming, an eyelid's blink ago, to reside on this insignificant speck in the cosmos? No wonder I find it easier to pose the question than find an adequate answer.

But let me share something of where I stand and of why I remain a believer. I come at this problem on two levels.

Modern cosmological positions are often highly supportive of the notion of a God who intended to create human beings. The Big Bang indeed calls for the existence of a Creator. The Anthropic Principle shows that the seemingly arbitrary and unrelated physical constants of the universe are 'just right' to support life – the universe appears designed to support life. For instance the so-called 'nuclear weak' force is 1028 times the strength of gravity. Had the weak force been slightly weaker, all the hydrogen in the universe would have been turned to helium, which would prevent the creation of water, an indispensable for human life, from hydrogen and oxygen. Limited may be the area we humans occupy in the cosmos. But there is scientific reason to believe that the entire cosmos was designed with beings like ourselves in mind. Modern cosmological discoveries are not necessarily destructive of faith.

At a more basic level, there is the question of faith. Why do I have faith, while other at least equally worthy human beings do not have faith? That mystery has been around for 2000 years. I would not pretend to be able to solve it. All I can do is humbly thank our God for the gift of faith and do my best to live a life that accords with that faith. ■

*Humphrey O'Leary*

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

# Christians in a Muslim country

*Ron O'Grady (left) describes a Christian celebration in the heart of Muslim Indonesia*

Fifty years ago missionary leaders in Europe and America began to realise the need to have Asian churches working together, and in 1957 they convened one of the first representative pan-Asian gatherings ever held. At that conference the *Christian Conference of Asia* was formed. Asian leader D.T. Niles stated with prophetic insight: "Australia and New Zealand may have had a colonial past but their destiny is in Asia"; so New Zealand and Australia were included.

For the meeting, the Europeans chose – not Hong Kong or Tokyo or Delhi – but the town of Parapat, and I can hear you rushing to find your atlas. You will find that Parapat is an isolated little place in the middle of Sumatra, the largest island of Indonesia. It was, and still is, a small village beside the beautiful Lake Toba and 50 years ago could only be reached by boat, following a long and tiring bus journey into the Indonesian heartland.

This March, around 300 people returned to Parapat to celebrate the founding of the CCA. The town has not changed much in 50 years. The importance of Parapat is that it is the headquarters of one of the largest churches in Asia. In the days of Dutch colonialism, the central region of Sumatra was a popular mission field for Europeans from the Netherlands and Germany. So successful were they that most of the people in the region – the powerful Batak people – converted to Christianity.

We normally refer to Indonesia as the largest Muslim country in the world with more than 150 million Sunni Muslims. But within this huge country there are large pockets of Christianity and Hinduism. In central Sumatra, where we met, the Christians are believed to number between 80 and 90 percent of the population.

The Parapat jubilee celebration this year was an amazing event. Some Muslims joined Christians in the mass celebrations held in the cities of Siantar and Medan. On March 6, more than 65,000 people crowded into a football field in Sumatra's second city, Siantar. The following night the largest stadium in the city of Medan was packed with an attendance of at least 125,000 people.

The celebration in Medan began at 2.30 in the afternoon and concluded at 9.30. Pentecostal and evangelical churches began the worship with music and dance presented by several hundred young people. Seven different church choirs took part in the service. A Catholic Cardinal led prayers and community leaders gave speeches and sermons. The Minister of Religious Affairs, a Muslim, represented the Indonesian President. The President's message spoke with appreciation of the Christian contribution to Indonesian society, especially in the area of health and education.

In the private sessions there was much talk about the unfinished Christian mission in Asia. While the tone was largely celebratory there were some blunt words spoken. A senior Indonesian leader used the occasion to speak strongly against Australian involvement in East Timor. I heard their great unease about the growing tension in East Timor, where chaos threatens the stability of the young country. Independence has made the situation of the local people much worse, and there were many tragic stories of human suffering.

For many Indonesians, Australia's growing militarism is seen as a threat. More than one Indonesian compared Australia's role in East Timor with the Americans in Iraq and saw similarities in the way both USA and Australia were using military means to capture and retain the oil reserves of Iraq and the Timor Sea. My Indonesian friends wanted to know why the Australian churches were not speaking out about these issues.

Beyond these local issues, the broad question of interfaith relations is always close to the surface in the Asian context. The experience in Sumatra was a positive example of the way religions can co-operate for the common good of society. As countries like ours struggle to come to grips with the reality of a multi-religious society we have much to learn. The example of Christians in Indonesia shows that respect, tolerance and love can overcome even the deepest of divisions. ■

*Rev. Ron O'Grady was one of two New Zealanders attending the Parapat celebrations*