Tui Motu

InterIslands

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a church in crisis –

a church reborn

Contents

Minding the Threshold

We would like to thank the Irish theological magazine *The Furrow* for permission to reprint a long extract from an excellent article – *Minding the Threshold: a portrait of priesthood.*
And we are especially grateful to its author, John O'Donohue, a recent visitor to these shores.

A time for hope

Last month our focus was on the aching hunger for spirituality increasingly apparent in Western society. People are looking for the truth about God. They are hungry to experience God. Yet somehow the Christian churches seem to be failing to provide the nourishment.

Some years ago Professor Lloyd Geering alerted audiences round the country to the desertion of the pews in mainline churches. At the time he made an exception of Catholics, attributing this to the holding influence of church schools. Catholics today would be foolish to be comforted by this – because it is not true. Catholic congregations have shrunk throughout New Zealand, as in the whole Western world, since the 1960s. Here in Dunedin, for example, Sunday Mass attendance is barely a third of what it was 30 years ago.

A claim has been made that this decline doesn't apply to Pentecostal churches – and that perhaps an answer is to be found in Charismatic Renewal. However, Alan Jamieson's new book, (reviewed on page 28), notes that disillusion seems to happen equally among Pentecostal Christians. Indeed, the adult conversion that many Christians experience in Charismatic Renewal he interprets as simply a stage on a person's journey of faith – a stage, not a permanent state.

This issue focuses on the churches and their shrinking congregations. There are several articles from priests, who naturally enough concentrate on priesthood – yet not to defend the status quo. There are also wise and penetrating com-ments from lay members of the assembly: the guest editorial opposite and an interview with a married couple of differing denominations. We may be too late for the Consistory of Cardinals – but not for the Bishops' Synod, due later in the year!

No one I have read recently puts this whole issue in better perspective than the great Old Testament scholar, Walter Breuggeman. He points out that both for Israel and for the first Christians, catastrophic loss was the occasion for the greatest hope. The central canon of the Old Testament, the , was put in writing when the Jews returned chastened and depleted from the Exile. The psalms so often voice the lament of defeated people. And likewise the Gospels themselves were composed from the memories of those who had survived Good Friday.

Breuggeman notes that in the heart of these crises "a dominant memory is being recited – an active, determined, concrete, resilient memory"; that the cry from the heart of the furnace is, "God's faithfulness, God's fidelity, God's loyalty endure forever – even now, even in loss". Our cover depicts this sense of the Spirit of God as a flame burning and purging clean; yet – like an Australian bushfire – making way for new and abundant growth.

Catholics or Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians or Anglicans – our common Christian faith centres on the paschal mystery. Like Christ, we have to go through the agony of Friday to attain the glory of Easter and the inner conversion of Pentecost.

In search of belief

June also sees the start of something new and exciting in . Sr Pauline O'Regan and her Mercy community in Christchurch are putting together for readers a series based on the Creed. They start with faith itself. "It is time", they write, "to retrieve the faith that underpins the rituals and to revive the sense of mystery that underlies the answers." We welcome their wisdom and the long experience of Christian living on which these reflections are based.

M.H.

An Easter church – dying and being

I've just heard on the news that John Paul II has summoned his cardinals to Rome to consider the mission of the church in the third millennium. While I wish them well and hope they find insight, I must confess that I don't feel much optimism that the way ahead will be charted in that forum. It is often difficult for leaders of an organisation to implement reform which threatens their own position.

The prognosis for the church in Western society is not good. It has in many ways fallen to our generation to bear the consequences of centuries of ecclesiastical abuse. Even when we feel that responsibility falls unfairly on our shoulders, we find ourselves bearing the scandal of the church. The faults of the institution are all too obvious to an informed public, and we as participants are often mocked for our continued support of what is perceived to be a bankrupt enterprise.

Difficult to hear as it is, I think this is a sober appraisal. Honesty must be the starting point of any significant movement for change. Yet it need not plunge us into despair. It is at times of crisis that real opportunities arise for growth and change. The high points of creativity in the life of the people of God often spring from adversity. Some of the richest visionary theology we have came from the period of exile.

It is a time, certainly, for reappraisal. A time to allow some things to slip away even as new possibilities are being born. While we tend to imagine the church as lumbering unchanging through history, a closer reading reveals that it has always responded to the era in which it finds itself. In offering a few possibilities for such change, I intend to focus more on what may yet be born among us than that which must die.

As a relative newcomer to the Catholic faith, it is perhaps easier for me to see those aspects of the tradition which are rich treasures to be valued in the context of the culture in which we find ourselves. The first of these of course is Jesus himself. Our motivation for change should be not that we have become unpopular or marginalised, but so that we live more faithfully in the world as disciples of Jesus Christ. And there is a surprising receptivity to Jesus in contemporary society.

Novelist, theologian and spiritual writer Mike Riddell, caught in holiday mode, near his retreat at Hindon, Central Otago

Second, among the precious jewels of the church is the nourishment of spirituality. While I suggested in the first of these articles (*see* Tui Motu *editorial, May*) that ordinary people do not usually turn to the church in their own journey of the spirit, it is not the case that we have no tradition or understanding of the care of the soul. We have among us many spiritual guides, including priests, mystics, artists, religious and spiritual directors. Through retreat houses and places of contemplation, the church offers genuine oases of replenishment.

These are significant resources in an age of hunger for meaning. While at present the fascination is with Eastern and pagan religious practices, it is likely that there will be ▷▷

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

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▷▷ a significant rediscovery of Western spiritual traditions in the near future. Part of our vocation as church may be to make that which we have available to pilgrims who come from diverse starting points. Jesus, after all, was inclusive in those he invited to participate in his journey.

Thirdly, I suspect that our husbanding of mystery stands us in good stead. We live in an age which is weary of explanations and logic. There is a growing recognition that those who proffer easy or pragmatic solutions often do so at the cost of integrity. In human experiences such as suffering, which are common to all, it is not explanations which satisfy. The church's paradoxical message of grace in the midst of suffering has exactly the ingredients of paradox and reality that might speak to a jaded generation.

Closely related to this is the sacramental way of life. The central sacrament of the Mass is an integral part of an orientation to life which teaches us that the ordinary is charged with divine grandeur. The priestly function is fundamentally that of transforming that which is commonplace into something suffused with the glory of God. Such a vocation, while modelled for us by representative figures, is surely the responsibility of us all.

Catholic theology has traditionally accentuated the gift of grace. We recognise our status as sinful, and that any mercy or understanding which might come to us is not the result of our own effort but through the generosity of God. This being the case, there is room to develop the extent of our inclusion of others. That the Eucharistic meal, a ritual continuation of the table fellowship of Jesus, should become an occasion which excludes people, can only be acknowledged with shame.

The quality which makes us church at all is that we celebrate community. We should not underestimate how rare this is in these times, nor take for granted the genuine expression of unity in diversity. This characteristic might be more convincing were it not for the fragmented nature of Christianity. But in inclusive worship, we express the value of non-divisive uniqueness, and the hope of a deeper belonging.

There are few groups in the West these days that campaign in a non-partisan way for justice. Through our concern for those on the margins, the challenging of systemic oppression, the championing of human dignity and the constant struggle against prejudice, we express the good news of a God who defends the poor and the outcast. We might need to match our lives to our declarations for this to be credible.

And finally, we harbour the gift of our own precious and Christ-soaked humanity. We are told that love covers a multitude of sins, and it may be that if there is enough of it in our hearts it will atone for the sins of our church in the past and in the present.
No cardinals can provide that for us. ■

Mike Riddell is a theologian, lecturer and writer, presently living in Dunedin. He became a Catholic three years ago.

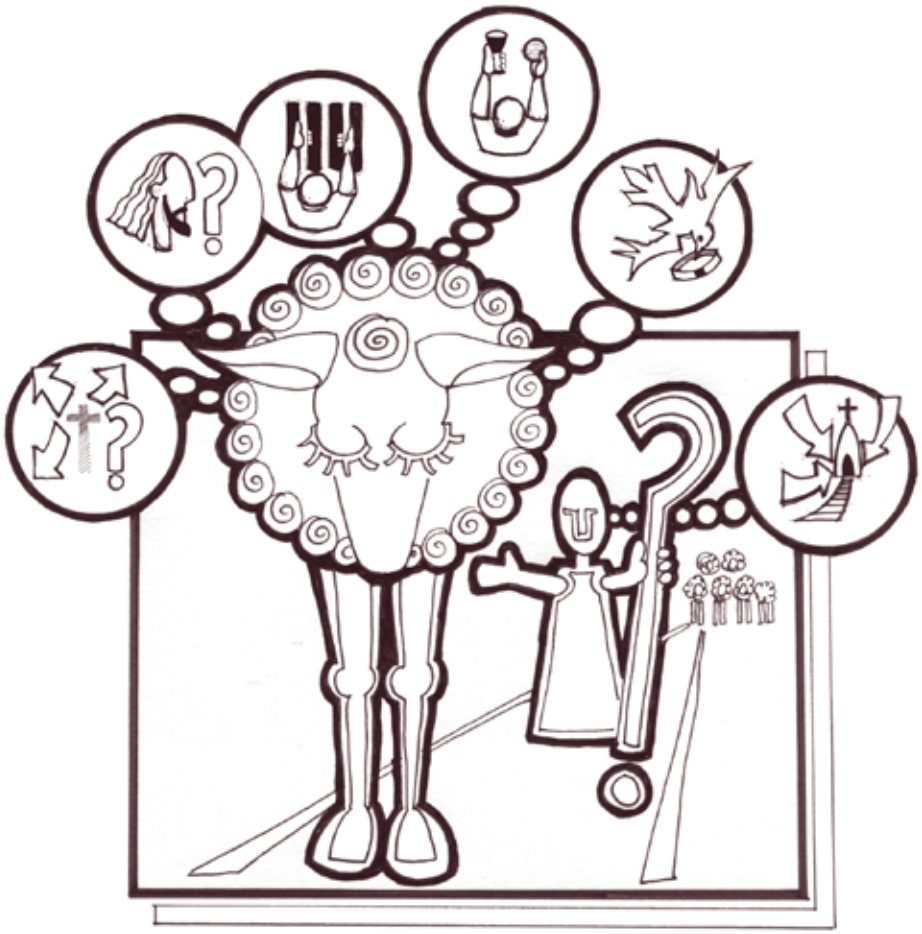
Promoter's Corner

Have you ever noticed that compact little group usually listed on page 3 of TM identified as directors? I'd like to introduce you to them briefly but not before noting that the editor and assistant editor are appropriately nominated **first** for without their productivity there would be nothing to direct.
Nonetheless the directors do contribute talent and energy to the life of TM and provide a link with you, the readers, as they, like you, are spread throughout Aotearoa NZ. They're very approachable people and only a phone call away if you ever wish information or have a suggestion that may help us.
On the 5 May last we had a day of reflection in Wellington to introduce four new members to the board – so you should meet them first:

- Kathleen Rushton rsm not long returned to Christchurch after completing a doctorate at Louvain University, is an accomplished writer and thinker;
- Julia Stuart, an Anglican, lives in Eastbourne, and is a widely experienced journalist and editorial specialist in the field of religious publications;
- Margaret Darroch lives in Havelock North, is a counsellor of many years experience with extensive knowledge of parish and family life;
- Robin Kearns is an associate professor of geography at the University of Auckland with a special interest in the relationship between the physical environment and spiritual life.

Having said this much I sense I may exhaust you as well as myself by mentioning each of the other five! Perhaps on another day : but I should add this: each director was requested in advance of the board meeting to phone at random five readers of TM: the combined results of this exercise will be reported in more detail in a forthcoming issue of TM but we found the responses enlightening, entertaining and encouraging.
It may never be missed! but this column will lapse for three months as I visit other climes – unless of course I miss you too much and resort to the internet.
In the meantime may we all 'go well'.

Tom Cloher



A church in crisis? It's all too easy to criticise Christian churches in the West in their time of tribulation.

This series of articles peeps below the surface, looking especially at priesthood in its narrow and broad senses – and discovers a few pointers towards a more promising future for the church's mission

Where have all the shepherds gone?

Alan Roberts

I heard a prayer the other day that went like this: *that the Holy Spirit continue to inspire young men and women to join the priesthood and religious life, that the church may continue its shepherding role in this world.* While some may rush to defend, the prayer does imply, I think, a belief that the church cannot shepherd if it does not have a steady flow of religious and priestly vocations.

The rapid decline in vocations in the Western church is a fact that we are all aware of. While there is a trickle of vocations to the priesthood, many religious orders know that the old joke – 'would the last one leaving please blow out the sanctuary lamp' – is beginning to sound like Canon Law! So where have all the shepherds gone? Why does it appear that there are no labourers for the vineyard? Has the Holy Spirit deserted us?

At a recent funeral in a former parish of mine, there was a space for those who wished to say something about the deceased. He had been a lecturer in counselling, and liked to work with those struggling with life, in an effort to motivate them, that they might come to believe in their potential as human beings. It was his philosophy that if you could help a person find and nourish that little seed within, then the rest would look after itself.

At least two of the speakers mentioned the enormous influence the deceased person had had on their lives. He had turned around their thinking, their negativity about life. A third speaker, a Maori woman, mentioned the gratitude her people felt towards this man for his contribution in their struggles. Is there not in all of this signs of the living Jesus: *I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly*' (John 10:10).

After the eulogies, the Requiem Mass that followed was a fitting complement to his life. Whether consciously or unconsciously, this man had endeavoured to give witness ▷▷

▷▷ to the kingdom every day of his life, and now he was the reason for this gathering, this vibrant liturgy; and somewhere in all of this we were realising that by sharing in the process of creation, we are partners with God, and hence comes the kingdom.

At the conclusion of the eulogies I felt one regret. While I was this person's parish priest, I knew little about his work. I only wished I had made more of an effort to encourage him, to help ensure that he be certain that the church valued what he was trying to do.

When I returned from the funeral, I began to reflect – so now I am thinking of those who provided the music for that Requiem. The musicians planned it so that all could join in, and participate they did. If a sacrament is an encounter with God, it was surely so at that funeral. I felt proud to be a Catholic, and proud to own this faith that knows how to celebrate a worthwhile life. It was as if someone who had tried to witness to God with his life was now doing so more powerfully than ever before.

This has moved me to think of those who prepare liturgies in my parish and the kingdom moments that result from their work. These people know that liturgy is not just a staged event, but a prayer experience, an encounter with Christ. These liturgies happen frequently. Could those who prepare them be motivated by anything other than the desire to share in the vision of Christ, who prayed: *Father, your kingdom come*. Are they not real shepherds?

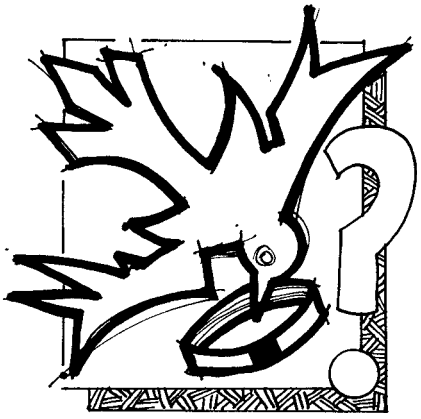
Lately I have been thinking of the sick in my parish. There is a man dying from cancer. Spiritually, he is, for the most part, looked after by a fellow parishioner and friend. He takes him communion, prays and chats with him. The other night I observed the tears on the dying man's face as his friend prayed and gave thanks to God for this life.

One has to be impressed, too, by those who tirelessly work to ensure the hungry are fed, the homeless sheltered. A letter arrives from the Refugee Commission, thanking me for all the parish has done in settling yet another family. I barely know about it. Then I hear how a parishioner helps out at a nearby school that aims to give a second chance at education.

There's no shortage of shepherds. They're there.. in the pews, others of no fixed religious abode. But they're there.

And my thoughts wander to the work of *Challenge 2000* in Johnsonville, where young people, many of them university graduates, dedicate themselves to work for justice. I think of the university student who, at my request, took me around the night shelters he voluntarily works at. He is there, in the thick of it, with the poor. I am speechless, and can only admire this person's love and longing to fulfil the words: *he sent me to bring good news to the poor.* But, I wonder, why don't we acknowledge this work and provide a place of support?

The other day I asked a parishioner to accompany a young woman through a programme of instruction in the Catholic faith. "Father, it would be a privilege," was the reply. The sincerity of her speech knocked me back a bit. The reflections of this kind can fill a book. It's so obvious when we look. There's no shortage of shepherds. They're there. Some are in the pews, others are of no fixed religious abode. But they're there. It seems to me that one of the most important things our church needs to do now is affirm our laity, that they might go out more consciously into the highways and byways of life, that they might go with an awareness that they are on a mission that is the heart of the church.



the Christian vocation is also a vocation to the apostolate..

Go back to the documents of Vatican II. Ever rich, these documents soon affirm our insights, so I offer this quote for starters:

"For this the church was founded: that by spreading the kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God the Father, she might bring all people to share in Christ's saving redemption; and that through them the whole world might in actual fact be brought into relationship with God.

All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment of this goal is called the apostolate, and the church carries it on in various ways through all her members. For by its very nature the Christian vocation is also a vocation to the apostolate. No part of the structure of a living body is merely passive, but each has a share in the functions as well as in the life of the body".

(Ch 1, *The Layperson's Call to the Apostolate, 2*).

So is there a future for vocations to religious life as we've known it? Perhaps, but I suspect that the role might principally be 'to shepherd the shepherds'. And that's another topic. ■

Alan Roberts is a priest of the Archdiocese of Wellington, and is presently parish priest of Plimmerton

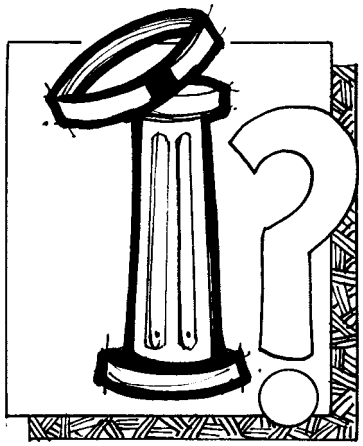
Minding the Threshold – a portrait of priesthood

Priests must come down off their pedestals, says ***John O'Donohue****, celebrated author of* Anam Cara. *This excerpt from an article in the* Furrow *(June1998) examines priesthood against the template of Jesus' own ministry*

Every individual is a sacrament – an active and visible sign of invisible grace. In our deeper nature each one of us is called to be priestess and priest ministering at this vital threshold where the eternal transfigures time and where the divine heals the human. The vocation and ministry of priesthood only makes sense against this implicit priesthood of every human person. The priest is not a lone minister exclusively chosen and gifted with something which most people do not have. Rather, the priest is the presence in whom the implicit priesthood of the human family is called to become explicit and active.

Priesthood has been burdened for too long with a false theological loneliness, a belief that a priest had exclusive and privileged access to the divine. Yet every priest encounters people who are infinitely more spiritual and have travelled further on the path of mystical transfiguration than himself. At the outer social level of image and projection, it seems to have suited society and church to sustain the mystique of the priest as being secretly more a divine than a human creature. Such theological mystification was crucial in the construction of the pedestal on which society and church placed the priest.

This religious elevation was suspect and unreal. And sure enough, in time the deeper truth-rhythm of the psyche swung against it. It is a difficult time now to be a priest. The image has become severely discredited and suspect. The old affection, respect and trust have given way to indifference, suspicion and hostility. The pernicious invasion and violation of innocence by some priests have reaped a bitter harvest of broken image for other priests. These violations shattered the trust in a way that the human failures of priesthood never did before.



Trust is a precious but fragile thing. When it is shattered, it takes a long time to rebuild, and never again can it be like it was before. Priesthood is in major crisis. Priests are confused and demoralised. Abruptly all has changed. An earthquake came in the night. When priests woke up they were negotiating a foreign landscape. Yet the psyche never acts in an isolated or singular fashion. Behind great difficulty and confusion there is inevitably some vital transfiguration going on. The ancient mind reflected this in that the Greek word for crisis is *krisis*, which also means 'to sift'. The question then is: in the current crisis in priesthood, what is dying and what is coming to birth?

The death of clericalism

Perhaps the current crisis offers priesthood a chance to free itself from the manacle of clericalism. An individual cannot be a priest on his own terms. If one feels a call to priesthood in the Catholic church, certain requirements have to be met. Firstly, one must be born a male and then one must be selected either by a diocese or a religious order. Then one must undergo six or seven years study and training within the seminary.

There is a great poignancy about the initial call to priesthood. One comes to priesthood with a certain innocence and idealism. There is a passionate desire to commit one's life to helping people. One longs to serve along the broken thresholds where suffering, power and poverty push people into torment and despair. There is a desire to bring the Good News of healing, shelter and love to those who are trapped in the cages of neglect. There is the desire to help people see beyond the daily round of worldly commitment and awaken in them a sense of their eternal origin and destiny. Seminary training works on this idealistic longing ▷▷

year after year until at the end a new priest emerges.

In negative terms, the seminary is an all-male, enclosed, hermetic world where the art of clericalism seeps into the mind until it practically becomes sub-consciously a mode of thinking, feeling and behaviour. A cleric is someone who endeavours to become a priest from the outside in – through adopting the clothes, behaviour and attitudes. The clerical mantle is adopted with little question or critique. One develops a facility with the repetition of a certain set of theological and spiritual clichés.

Often the local parish in its church and presbytery continues in a more miniature form the world of the seminary. One also comes in contact with this world at clerical gatherings. The interaction and conversation remain on a certain predictable level. Old themes are rehearsed and repeated. Because the real questions are never voiced or engaged, there is an eerie tone of forsakenness and loneliness audible at the edges of such gatherings.

In the aftermath of recent revelations and scandals, the world of clericalism has been discredited and destroyed in the minds of the people. The religious landscape is utterly changed. There is no going back to the unexamined, self-enclosed clerical world. Neither can the fragments be glued back together by some clever PR management. Doctoring the image is no good. What has been destroyed is irretrievable and the process itself is irreversible.

Priesthood liberated

Perhaps the death of clericalism could lead to the liberation of priesthood. In its true sense priesthood is one of the most beautiful and creative forms of life. A priest is a committed witness to the invisible world which secretly embraces, sustains and gathers all the outer events of experience and life. The priest can only give such witness if he is already attuned to these thresholds in his own heart and experience.

Rather than delivering a ready-made deposit of language and conviction in the clericalist mode, the true priest is one who has the courage to attend with graciousness and expectation at the thresholds where experience yields the crumbs of grace. There he gathers the bread of life. The priest is the nomad of the threshold where fact/possibility, body/soul, quest/question, light/dark, past/future, time/eternity,

letter in response to an article on the Roman Curia (*Tui Motu*, October 2000)

There is a very real tension between 'the church' and 'The Church' – but very few Catholics know how to express it. None of us (as individuals) can claim to be small 'c' church – church means 'assembly' and only exists as a collective term. Church with a capital 'C' is all about institution – *this* Church as opposed to that one, a corporate arrangement which can own property, create rules, establish a hierarchy, punish those who disagree with authority … you get the idea?

Big 'C' Church can be 'owned' by a relatively few people who occupy 'the places of honour at the table' (*Mt 23:6*). It is, in a very real way, 'their institution'. I'm sure that Bill Gates feels that Microsoft is his (even though millions of people own shares in the company). I'm sure that many cardinals see all or part of the Big C Church as theirs, even though millions may fill the pews and contribute.

People behave in a way consistent with the rewards on offer. If the young priests who fill Vatican offices behave in the approved (and conforming) fashion, then their prospects and status will improve. If bishops who run the offices continue the patronage business, then they create an environment where their egos get regularly stroked.

You have to ask the question: why would anyone ever want to change such a comfortable arrangement? It seems there are three possible outcomes: (1)we carry on with the status quo; (2)the people inside the system become uncomfortable; or(3) the people outside bring it down (revolution?).

The possible ways that discomfort could increase within the system include a new reforming Pope (coming from outside the Curia); sufficient complaint from the wider small 'c' church; or a supply problem – bishops having no priests to spare, and priests less willing to take up an 'office' career.

Even though the small 'c' church may express doubts about how the big C Church operates, Catholics are singularly lacking mechanisms for expressing dissension. We are all conditioned from an early age that 'father knows best' and deference to authority comes naturally. The clergy have, in turn, been more than content to tell us what to think and do – to act as the 'door keepers to heaven', shutting the dissenters out and visibly rewarding those who conform.

The obvious text here is from *James* – the story about the rich man coming into the synagogue (*come, sit over here, sir*) and the poor man entering later (*sit by my footstool*). Those who make such distinctions are called 'corrupt judges' – but that doesn't stop variations on the behaviour in question.

My guess is that the change, if ever, will come from discomfort within the system. The means of sustaining the Curia and the wider bureaucracy will fail in time, forcing change. A new Pope could. Otherwise, only the Second Coming will. ■

We are grateful to Kevin O'Kane and his father, Des, for permission to print this excerpt from their letters.

▷▷ memory/dream, visible/invisible meet. The nature of priesthood is to be sacramental.

To mind these vulnerable frontiers of Spirit demands great tenderness and compassion. If the priest endeavours to inhabit the integrity of his own inner conversation, then he will not be driven defensively to control his people through judgment, blame or power. In his work and presence he will remain a true doctor of the soul.

Priesthood is then a ministry of ***presence***. In liturgy, word and work the priest is one who attempts to open presence for people. All nature and human experience are ultimately grounded in the divine presence. They are both an expression and incarnation of the divine imagination. This is one of the central images of God in both Judaism and Christianity.

God is an artist, a creator who called everything out of nothingness into life and being. For too long our tradition has insisted on the cold autonomy of God and the sublime nature of the will of God. No reference was made to the divine imagination. Our God is an artist. We are made in the image and likeness of the divine imagination. All creation is suffused with the secret presence of God. The priest exercises, then, a ministry of recognition. Accompanying people, he endeavours to make the divine presence explicit in the variety of life situations. Sometimes the divine presence is bright, sheltering and healing. Other times it is dark, cruel and destructive. The priest is the poet of divine recognition.

Priesthood in this sense requires the awakening and development of imagination. But in our spiritual tradition the imagination has been grossly neglected. Our God is incarnate. Imagination is the natural sister of Incarnation. Imagination never seeks an abstract or one-sided unity. It always attempts to open thresholds of creativity where the best energies within a duality are maintained in a taut balance. We see this in the presence that a poem evokes or in the silence between the notes in music.

Priesthood which embraces imagination will be deeply enriching and creative. It will have a natural hospitality to all areas and kinds of experience. It will not set safe frontiers and merely indulge in the criss-cross monologues of the like-minded. Rather, it will risk conversation with the alienated, the post-religious and the indifferent. The beauty of the divine is that it is everywhere. It has no frontiers.

Jesus as Priest and Threshold

At the root of our tradition stands the priest Jesus, who is in himself the threshold where divinity and humanity interflow. He is also a threshold within Judaism itself. In him this ancient tradition crosses a frontier into a new world. This was a deep aspect of his loneliness; there is no mirror in his own tradition for him to image what was awakening in him.

A most fascinating book to read would be his autobiography. What really went on in his mind? What was the nature of his inner conversation? What happened in him on that day he discovered his true identity?

There is probably no other figure in the history of Western civilisation who has been so thoroughly domesticated as Jesus. The home of Nazareth is usually presented as a kind of ▷▷

Horses' rumps and the church's mission

Why, asks Anglican Bishop Richard Randerson, is the standard British rail gauge 4ft 8.5 inches? Because the first rail lines in England were constructed by the same builders who had been building pre-rail tramways to that gauge. They used the same jigs and tools designed for building road wagons, and chose that width to fit the centuries-old deeply-worn wheel ruts on older country roads. The wheel ruts had been worn into roads laid down by the Roman garrisons occupying Britain to ease the movement of their legions. Military chariots 2000 years ago created those first ruts. Britons have been travelling in them ever since. But do we not all travel in uncritical ruts?

Could we say the practice and structure of church ministry is seriously out of line with its theology of mission? The church operates as a discrete voluntary society on the edge of society, largely preoccupied with building people up in Christ (a central task), but with only occasional forays into the world at large.

To reverse this situation the church would need to:
- re-orientate its practice of mission;
- train its laity to be the primary agents of mission in the world, rather than tamed servants of the church;
- limit clergy time on home base to 50 percent, so as to be free to engage creatively with laity in mission to the rest of God's world;
- declare a moratorium on 75 percent of its parochial and diocesan committee work in order to redeploy for mission.

We will need a Copernican revolution if we are to switch from being a discrete voluntary society to a church with a sense of mission to and engagement with the world around us. Following such a Copernican revolution, the key ministers in the world would be vocational deacons and chaplains to schools, prisons, hospitals, police and the armed services. Above all else, the laity. The Copernican revolution I am proposing would call for the suspension of all normal church activities to enable a start from a wholly new perspective.

By the way, what did lead the Roman army engineers to determine the 4ft 8.5in wheel base for their chariots? It was just sufficient width to accommodate the rump ends of two sturdy warhorses. ■

The author has recently returned to Auckland after six years as Assistant Bishop of Canberra Goulburn

divine version of *The Little House on the Prairie*. Everyone was sweet and good and calm. However, when we consider the magnitude of what was quietly coming alive there, it must have been a home of fascinating creative tension.

The old man's wisdom and the young woman's imagination and intuition must have had an incredible depth and breadth to enable their son to own and inhabit such an infinite and fatal destiny. That he could carry that destiny to its absolute limits with such poise speaks for real parents who are far beyond the domestic and plastic images of perfection in which we have boxed them.

Jesus had a highly poetic sensibility. His mind was finely tuned to the intricacies and rhythms of nature. His language is fresh, original and alert. Without a refined and awakened imagination he could never have discovered that he was the Son of God. If Jesus had no imagi-nation we would know nothing of either the Incarnation or the Trinity. Too often we take these realities as fixed data of faith. We forget how they were sensed, nurtured and woven through the imagination of Jesus.

It seems clear that Jesus hated ***clericalism***. At that time much of the spirit of Judaism had atrophied into crippling legalism. Time and again Jesus unmasked Phari-sees, Priests and Sadducees as the inventors and enforcing agents of false burdens. Perhaps the greatest portrayal of this is in Dostoyevsky's legend of the Grand Inquisitor in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Jesus comes back to Seville during the Inquisition and is arrested and put in jail. The Grand Inquisitor, a cardinal, comes to interview him. The cardinal laments his return: he accuses Jesus of offering the people too much freedom, a burden too great for them. The church 'corrected' Jesus' work and offered the people instead 'miracle, mystery and authority'.

In reality Jesus seems to have practised a subversive art of ***presence***. He never subjected anyone to the dictates of law or system. He could speak to the 'immortal longings' in the human heart. Even in situations of aggression, attack or crisis, he could draw on a profound inner poise. He had no fear of the feminine. In a culture where women were often marginalised and under-valued, he opened his presence to the feminine with great hospitality and generosity. It is hugely significant that the testimony states that his women friends braved all dangers to stand with him on Calvary.

as a priest
Jesus sought out the
vital thresholds

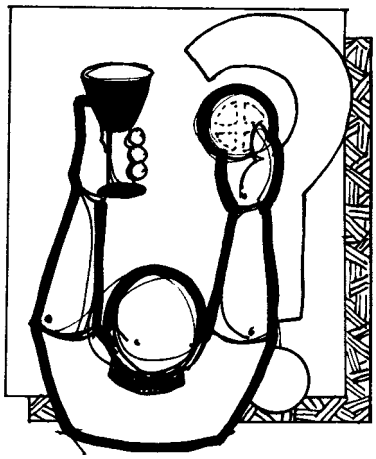
As a priest Jesus inevitably sought out the vital thresholds where the real energy of his culture was. These were the thresholds between law/spirit, repentance/blame, masculine/feminine, politics/kingdom of God and death/resurrection. Priesthood today has much to learn from the courage, dignity and danger of the priesthood of Jesus.

The challenge of priesthood

In the current atmosphere of disillusionment, it is too easy to forget the great work that priests do. There is a touching generosity in what they do. They are not in it for what they can get out of it themselves. Which other person in a parish is there with the one committed intention of serving the whole parish?

It is one of the great privileges of priesthood to be invited into the inner world of a person's soul. The spiritual side of a person's life is the arena of intimacy. People often share with the priest depths of their heart which no one else knows. These are the tender and painful thresholds where the priest attends. In the ministry of healing the priest travels with the ill and vulnerable into the frightening territories of physical and mental pain. In the sacrament of Reconciliation the kindness of God is brought to meet the tormented or numbed soul. At the time of death the priest accompanies the person to the threshold of the unknown and makes for them a raft of consolation to help bring them home.

To celebrate Eucharist is the greatest privilege of priesthood. Eucharist is not to be reduced to a mere act of commemoration or to the dynamics of psychological interactionism. It is an event that opens ultimate presence. It alters physical space and creates spiritual kinship and affinity which transfigures distance.



In Eucharistic space there is no distance. All time meets in the Eucharist. It is an ultimate threshold where the contemporary Calvary of suffering is continually turned towards the horizon of the Resurrection.

If a priest is in touch with his own inner self, this will enable him to minister to the fierce spiritual hunger of post-modern culture. This spiritual hunger is not a nostalgia for the old certainties of a vanished world; it is in fact a new and complex form of consciousness. It would be naïve to hope that pilgrimages to apparition sites or the fervour of novenas could meet this hunger. One must engage in a real conversation with post-modern consciousness in order to begin the difficult work of disclosing the shadowed traces of the divine presence.

The claim here is not that each priest should be an intellectual. However, because priestly work is essentially in the areas of meaning and perception, priests today have to be well resourced.

The day is gone when it was sufficient to be a sincere, well-meaning, nice fellow. A famous bank robber was once asked why he robbed banks. And he replied: "Because that is where the money is." Reading awakens, stretches and enriches the mind. An awakened and informed mind is in a wonderful position to help awaken, encourage and heal a congre-gation. Words that are alive carry immense power. When a sermon is loaded with dead language, it only numbs people and increases the distance from the divine.

When the priest is an active participant in his tradition, he has the opportunity to introduce people to the depth and variety of his tradition. Memory is to the individual what tradition is to the community. So often people's disillusionment with the institution derives from a sense of atrophication.

We have a mystical tradition that can hold its own with the most profound insights and enlightenment out of Tibet and India. Our times are ripe for the mystical. It could be a wonderful aspect of priestly ministry to introduce people to the depths of our mystical tradition. The mystical is the resource that is needed to create some spiritual shelter in a society where consumerism and technology are taking over ever larger territories of spirit. As witness to the mystical depth of life, the priest is a prophetic presence in contemporary society.

The fearful priest

Fear is a massive limiting and crippling force among priests. They feel so vulnerable because in a hierarchical system, their lives are controlled from above. Priests have many critical questions. Yet because they are committed to representing the church, many of them feel that they cannot give expression to the diverse and interesting bank of opinions which they hold. It is an immensely liberating human thing to be able to say who you are, what you feel and where you stand. The voice of truth brings its own liberation and authority. To be afraid to say what you really feel and believe damages your integrity and dulls your sensibility.

It would be great to hear priests, for instance, voice their objections to celibacy. Celibacy does not belong to the essence of priesthood. Once, it was not a requirement at all. Most priests realise quite clearly that forced celibacy has more to do with the politics of control and the question of church finance. They believe that it will eventually go.

Forced celibacy makes the whole atmosphere of the priest's relational world unreal and suspect. It casts a false shadow and suspicion over the priest's relationship to the feminine. One of the least trustworthy aspects of the church is

the way it relates to *eros*. Priests know this and they are in a powerful position to change a prohibition that does great damage to the natural beauty and sacredness of the sexual. The unnatural coercion of celibacy has made the sexual world of the priest unmentionable and unreal.

Priests have also walked too far on their own and neglected their sisters who feel called to become priests but are denied access to the ministry because of the accident of gender. Priests should join their sisters here and call for justice in this question. Women make up the heart of the church. There is a deep rooted fear of the feminine in the Catholic church. If the church loses the trust and support of the feminine, it will empty.

Afterthought

A priest told me this story. As a young deacon, he was sent to a parish in London to train for a summer. During his first week working in the parish, he found an old down-and-out man at the back of the church one evening. He was eating a burger and drinking a bottle of Guinness. The correct young priest-to-be went up to him and informed him that this was a church, not a restaurant, and asked him to leave. The old man took no notice of him and just continued to babble away to himself.

The deacon went later in exasperation to the parish priest. He smiled and said: "Ah, that's David." Years ago David had a great job and had the prospects for a wonderful future. One day a car hit him. He lost his memory totally and could never again remember who he was or recognise his family any more. He ended up on the street. He had made the back of the church his shelter during the day.

This story changed the young deacon's view of the old man. Over the summer he often watched him muttering away to himself at the back of the church. He had a very unusual way of praying. He would kneel in a pew and babble while milling the air with his outstretched hands. The deacon never heard him utter a clear word or a coherent sentence; yet the touching image of this haunted and forsaken man always at prayer at the back of the church began to move him.

On his last evening there, he went down and knelt beside David. He told him that tomorrow he would be returning to finish his study and become a priest. He asked the old man to say something to him about what a priest should be. For one moment the old man focused, looked at him and said: "The sympathy of God." It was the only sentence anyone had ever

Going to the margins

Aidan Cunningham

"Move to the margins. That's what Jesus did."
And that was the message by Anthony Gittins to the New Zealand Catholic bishops and religious at their March meeting

TV One's blurb for the first part of the BBC series on the life of Jesus, entitled *Son of God*, reads: ***From the games he may have played as a boy to the house he would have lived in, revealing why Jesus began his mission and chose the path he did.*** The byline asks "Is this the face of Jesus?" There will surely be much interest and discussion generated in Aotearoa/New Zealand by this TV series, but will it increase the number of people coming to church?

The London *Tablet* (Easter edition) contained reflections on both the impact of *Son of God* and the anomalous results of opinion polls and surveys about religious faith and commitment in Britain. The results showed the British considered themselves to be "spiritual" rather than "religious", drifting away from faith but with an alarming discrepancy between the opinions of the older generation and the younger. Such also would surely be the results here in our secularised Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The *Tablet* comments: "Whatever its faults, the BBC television series *Son of God* rescues Jesus as protagonist, thinking ahead, acting, confronting, planning, restlessly straining towards the kingdom, pushing out the limits, removing barriers. Jesus lived without possessions, which made him adaptable and mobile; and he had the energy that came from regular withdrawal into prayer. He also had the courage to challenge the powerful by including the outcast in his kingdom. The church must be willing to follow its Master."

Following the Master and *mission and evangelisation* were topics which were discussed during March in Wellington at the annual meeting of Catholic congregational leaders with the bishops. Keynote speaker was Dr Anthony Gittins CSSp, a social and cultural anthropologist, now Professor of Theological Anthropology at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. His experience of mission has been in West Africa, in Sierra Leone, from where he was able to gather the material for a doctorate at Edinburgh University.

The Conference theme was **Mission for Transformation**.

The social sciences and a model from cultural anthropology underlay Dr Gittins' presentation. A powerful and impressive speaker, with a gift for the pithy phrase and vivid imagery, he challenged bishops and congregational leaders to "move to the margins" and engage in "the disturbing ministry of Jesus" in a process of inculturation. This was a purely theological term, to do with the relationship of faith and culture - the radical transformation of people's lives - bringing the gospel to encounter people in their lives in this new millennium where we all now exist in a highly personalist culture.

Gittins defines culture/society as a meaning-making group, the form of social life. Yet every human culture creates boundaries that divide, classify, rank and dominate and create privilege. Whether the group is comprised of teenagers, glue-sniffers, people in hospital, prison, old-age care or members of a rugby club, there is an inherent process of discrimination which divides any community or culture into *us* and *them*. This division is always a challenge and a difficulty for a Christian.

Jesus in the Gospels identifies this social and cultural discrimination as sinful. His ministry or mission is to unite, include, heal and reconcile, to break boundaries and reach the rejected. The parable of the Good Samaritan; the talk with the Samaritan woman; healing a gentile woman's daughter; eating with sinners and tax collectors; coming to the house of Zacchaeus; the touching and healing of lepers: these are incidents of movement across the accepted boundaries in first century Palestine.

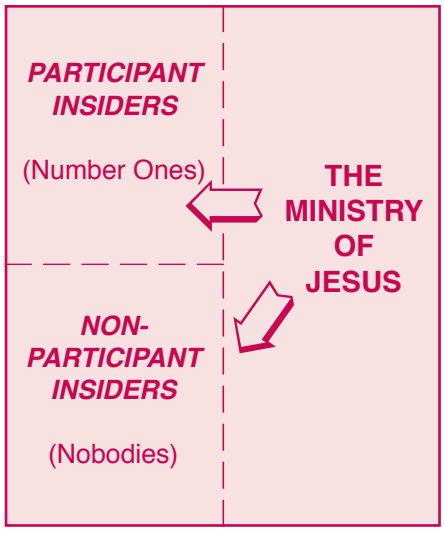
Christians too are thus called to expose the lie, the sin at the heart of culture, to unmask the cultural and religious flaws, and to be courageously counter-cultural and unorthodox, in the spirit of Jesus.

	INSIDERS (VIPs)	OUTSIDERS
PARTICIPANTS	**Adult Males / 'VIPs'** ***Significant Others*** • Heads of Households • Members of Professions • Elected Leaders ***Those with Power of Sanction***	**Resident Aliens / 'Strangers'** Opposed, tolerated or perhaps protected ***Disciples, Learners***
NON PARTICIPANTS	**NON-ADULT MALES 'NOBODIES'** Those without authority (ie social status) and with limited power (not *completely* powerless) ***The Immature*** ***The Deviant*** ***Women*** ***Non-Participating Males***	**INTERLOPERS 'TOURISTS'** ***Non-Contributors*** ***Passers-by*** ***Visitors*** ***Short-Termers***

The grid (above) enables us to clarify this concept and gain an understanding of the terminology which social scientists and anthropologists use to describe the realities of a "culture". It is not difficult to see how the Catholic church, as an institution, fits into this framework.

Participants and non-participants are the two horizontal components and the vertical components are the insiders and outsiders. Cultural, and even religious expectations encourage some people to strive to be "number one" (while discriminating against, or excluding others), and to be relevant, successful and important, placing themselves in the dominant top left square.

Jesus did not disregard anyone, nor did he cling to his own status, his equality with God (*Phil 2:6-11*). Dr Anthony Gittins would argue however that Jesus did challenge the insider participants to change, to be converted, to move, to encounter and serve others, whether non-participant insiders or outsiders. Jesus moved constantly, to the edges of both society and orthodoxy. He ministered to the abandoned, the forgotten and the hopeless. He left his comfort zone and became vulnerable and a stranger. As his disciples we are called to follow him.



Insider non-participants, and outsiders in general, are the poor, the *anawim,* for whom Jesus shows God's own preferential option. Jesus does not neglect the insider participants or "number ones" (in the top left of the grid). Indeed he challenges them to change, to repent, to reach out to others, and to be aware that the *anawim* will be first in the Kingdom.

But to become the stranger/outsider-participant is a life's work. The true disciple is required to go *down*, to practise downward mobility for the poor, for the Kingdom, and in imitation of Christ himself. This is the challenge of the Good News.

Missionary" is not a word found in Scripture. To be a Christian was essentially to be someone carrying out a mission. It required a missionary attitude. The Christian mission continues to offer hope and moral support, as Jesus did, and there is nothing greater than this love. But the Christian mission is essentially God's mission. It is impossible by human standards: it is truly revolutionary. It is a work of God's Spirit among us.

Much of the May issue of *Tui Motu* reflected upon this need for a new life, transformation and a new understanding of Christianity. Jim Consedine for one could have been a fly on the wall of Dr Gittins' presentation. In his article we read that "each social grouping has its own spirit, distinct from its component parts. Many call this the *culture* of the institution or movement.

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

Dr Gittins' approach to culture and to the Gospel may enable us to see that breaking through the cultural grid – following Jesus to the margins – represents the way ahead. ■

Aidan Cunningham ic is parish priest of North east Valley, Dunedin and is the Rosminians' regional Superior

Why are our churches missing the bus?

Tui Motu *talks with John and Anna Holmes – John an Anglican, Anna a Catholic – about some of the issues raised in the previous three articles*

Why aren't people going to church?

John: We've just been having a survey in our Anglican parish, which comprises two very different communities. What's evident is the gap between a largely grey-haired congregation and a small number of children regularly attending Sunday school. Between these two age groups attendance is sparse.

Our own children's age group will ask: is this meeting our needs, "are we prepared to get up early on a Sunday morning for this? When we've been working all week we want to sleep in at the weekends".

Anna: I think weariness is a real factor where both parents are working and there are small children. Sunday morning may well be the only time when they can lie in – and they do. So, maybe it's the time the service is held.

But I think it's also to do with there being something for the children. If a child feels welcomed by the priest and congregation, then the parents are more likely to come regularly. The young – including the adolescents – need to feel they have a place and a part to play.

To people 'on the edge' most churches feel inhospitable. Once I was in Cathedral Square in Christchurch collecting signatures for a petition about a church matter. I was struck by the number of people who were interested in spirituality but had no means of connecting with any church. They said they felt uncomfortable with the language and surroundings. Being welcoming is more than merely saying 'Come in': it's about making common ground.

The language used in church is vital. If it's rigid and authoritarian, then so will be the structures. The young these days have no feeling for authoritarian structures.

John: Many people are only comfortable with traditional wording, like the *1662 Prayer Book*. But others who are coming fresh are simply turned off by 'Dearly beloved' talk. So when you find a form of words which is relevant to those coming new to it, those who have been loyal to the old, feel let down.

But what about the celebrant's style – that which stands behind the words?

Anna: Engaging with people means speaking the gospel in ways that connect with their lives. Human nature does not change that much. People do struggle to be good and caring in their lives. A priest who relates well with all the ages and stages will not use rigid or authoritarian language, but will use words which include rather than exclude. Good relators employ 'family' language. And church *has* to be seen as inclusive – as opposed to the exclusiveness of this or that group.

On the other hand, Roman congregations and some members of the church hierarchy tend to use 'them' and 'us' language. To me, that's counter-Christian. The gospel clearly urges a continual stretching of the boundaries of the group. To act otherwise is not to follow Christ, but to consolidate your own little empire!

Jesus didn't preach *at* the people. He told them stories. And the best preachers do the same: they tell stories. The young especially listen to stories. If we tell our faith stories, we will be listened to – but not if we wrap them up in religious jargon.

People today are not turned off by spirituality – but they are turned off by 'churchy' language. Pastors need to sit in the 'market-place' and listen to the spiritual needs of human beings which have not changed over the centuries. The hunger is still there. The attraction of being with people is being *with* them – and as soon as churchy language is used people will feel rejected: they become 'outsiders' again.

But I think the church needs a change of heart as well as a change of language. There are individuals and small groups in the church who have successfully undergone such a change. The institutions haven't. Indeed in the Catholic church the central institutions have tended to retrench in recent times. They have gone back to ways of speaking which belonged to the first half of the 20th Century, and which are totally out of place today.

And clericalism? Is it an issue?

John: In the West the numbers entering the clergy are declining. Some churches are open to using lay people to lead services. Others are not. It's a duty of the ordained to encourage their congregations to be able to do this. 'Priestliness' has to be drawn out of the congregation.

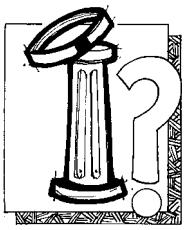
So, when the priest is away or not available, the people must be enabled to 'supply' themselves. A doctor who used to be a partner of mine, has since become ordained as a non-stipendiary priest. He's still a doctor but is also ordained. He's a worker-priest. Whether he becomes 'clericalised' or not will depend on him. In my experience these non-stipendiary clergy have helped stem

the decline in church attendance.

Anna: In the Catholic church my observation would be that many of those most theologically educated have actually left the church because they were so frustrated by the rigidity and lack of acceptance by the clergy.

Twenty years ago there were many such committed people around. They often felt they weren't accepted with the gifts they had developed. I think that's been a long tradition in the Catholic church – from Joan of Arc onwards! People who were saints in their own time were not only unappreciated by the church but were sometimes oppressed.

Vatican II ushered in an era when people started ministering to one another in a new way. But it didn't continue. I think it was the inability of the Roman structures to let go of power. This has transmitted itself downwards through the various layers of hierarchy. I think of people who wring their hands in sadness at the lack of freedom and responsibility in some parishes– where the priest 'has to do it all'. It's all about power and the inability of Catholics to work together as family.



The model of priest as servant, which started to emerge after the Vatican Council, has been almost brushed aside. The need in the church of tomorrow is for the priest to be a 'facilitator', someone who can bring forth the gifts in others. It is a maternal aspect of priesthood. It's a tragedy that it has been overlaid by the whole issue of power. The exclusion of women in the Catholic church has meant that the recognition of the gifts of women has not developed as it has, say, in the Anglican church.

So, it depends whether you see the model of church as 'family' or as 'organisation'. In a family, everyone is loved and has their place. And all contribute their gifts. In an organisation there are those in power and those who are not in power. For far too long Catholicism has been seduced into a sort of power game.

If I were a bishop I'd want to ask you: how can we start putting things right?

Anna: Bishops need to be affirming and encouraging of those who work at the edges; like those Sisters in Sydney who wanted to run a needle exchange programme and weren't allowed to. Most of our bishops are well meaning people. But they seem to be looking over their shoulders. I would say to them: *have courage, and remember we're a long way from Rome*!

The church in the beginning was not a uniform porridge. It was a collection of interesting and varied spices! Those in charge can no longer control. But that doesn't mean they can't guide or offer wise counsel.

I ask the bishops: have you looked at using the resources of people who have walked away from the institutional church in the last 20 years? Have you listened to them – or encouraged them to use their energy creatively within the church?

Inviting people back in has to happen on an individual basis. And then you have to be prepared to face a lot of anger and hurt. That is often why people walked away – perhaps because of hurts to their family members. Often over matters of marriage and divorce.

John: All professions including the church are very vulnerable to the power of the media. Professionals these days are really up against it, because no professional group is sacrosanct any more – except perhaps the journalists themselves!

For example, the cervical screening issue has meant that doctors are now seen as incompetent people – so everybody suffers because of the transgressions of one or two individuals.

Anna: When dealing with the press it's important to respond openly, without contravening privacy. When people are attacked it's a natural reaction to be defensive. And the more authoritarian you are, the more defensive you become. Our bishops are in an impossible position. They are being potted at from below and they are often not being affirmed from above.

But one thing I would say to our bishops is this. You have left it far too late to act with regard to our ageing priests and the lack of ministers and pastors. You need to act now and act comprehensively to ensure that in each congregation there are people who can lead and preach on priestless Sundays.

In the 1980s Fr John Coburn at the National Seminary sent a paper to the bishops on declining resources. But apart from a series of seminars in the Palmerston North diocese, nothing seems to have been done.

Do you see any signs of hope?

Anna: When the bishops walk among the people and listen to them. That was Pope John XXIII's way, walking with people in deprived situations. When the bishops are seen attempting to meet the spiritual needs of the people, that will change the face of the church. It should be done not with a fanfare – but in a way that the right hand doesn't know what the left is up to.

John: People who work with groups on the fringes are often insufficiently acknowledged – and they should be. Walking with the people on the edges is something for individuals. You have to go to them naked and unarmed or they will run away. You have to become defenceless.

Anna: On public issues the New Zealand Catholic bishops have spoken out frequently and well. Likewise the *hikoi* was an example of the Anglican church showing leadership in the social justice forum. The 1981 Springbok tour would be another case where the churches took the lead.

There are still lots of such issues.. such as restorative justice. Fr Jim Consedine's efforts have been fairly unsupported. He has been tolerated rather than encouraged by authority. These are some of the signs of hope. ■

John and Anna Holmes are both medical practiitioners, working in Dunedin

In the *May* issue we presented some of the religious art of New Zealand artist Michael Smither. The following piece, by retired Professor **Albert Moore**, complements it, especially as Smither himself acknowledges his debt to Stanley Spencer, his celebrated English predecessor

Heaven in

The Spirituality

Your kingdom come, your will be done. On earth as in heaven
(Matthew 6:10, JB)

The words are familiar to Christians through the Lord's Prayer. But some startling representations of them come through the paintings of Stanley Spencer, for whom the heavenly was to be seen in the everyday, the ordinary goings-on of life on earth.

Spencer himself was no ordinary artist. Born in the village of Cookham-on-Thames, west of London, in 1891, he won recognition in the 1920s for his paintings of religious themes and biblical stories depicted in the modern setting of Cookham. The following years brought trials and tribulations through his personal life and controversies over some of his paintings. Eventually in the last year of his life, 1959, he received a knighthood.

By the 1990s impressive studies of his work secured his place as one of the greatest British artists. Frances Spalding wrote of him in 1993 as an outstanding visionary artist with sustained powers of imagination and able to put the everyday world to the service of profound meaning. "From having been regarded as a somewhat embarrassing figure in British art, Spencer's reputation is fully repaired and could not be higher."

In London at present the Tate Gallery has a splendid comprehensive exhibition of Spencer's work (March-June 2001). Closer to home, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery is planning its own exhibition for late 2002.

In view of this current attention, we might be asking what is of continuing interest in Spencer's work in relation to religion and spirituality. I would point first to his sense of intimate belonging to a place, as in the 'sacred places' of many religions. In Spencer's work – and not only in his overtly biblical subjects – his home village of Cookham becomes transformed as a vision of heaven here and now. He felt like Moses seeing the burning bush: "I could see the richness that underlies the bible in Cookham in the hedges, in the yew trees." Then there is the experience of deep joy evoked by such memories and the religious joy in being personally involved in work and loving relationships.

In his paintings of the general resurrection, Spencer depicts people waking from their graves in Cookham churchyard to be reunited in the joys of life and friendship – in an intensified form of the everyday. Finally, Spencer is a visionary artist in the tradition of William Blake. From the local and ordinary setting of village life he takes us to a universal vision, one beyond our normal expectations.

Christ preaching at Cookham Regatta.
This is a detail of a vast canvas unfinished at Spencer's death. He was recalling happy holidays enjoyed at the local regatta on the river Thames.

Christ is seated on a barge wearing a summer straw hat, leaning forward to preach to the crowd. Spencer describes it: "The Christ talk is that their joy may be full".

the everyday

of Stanley Spencer

The artist offers some wonderful examples of these aspects of religion in his series of eight paintings on *Christ in the Wilderness* of 1939-42 (now in Perth, Western Australia). These were begun at a particularly low point in his career when Spencer was poor, isolated and homeless after the dramas of his private life. He felt deep affinity with the story of Christ's temptations alone and homeless in the desert and linked this with sayings of Jesus such as: "foxes have holes... but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (*Matt. 8:20*).

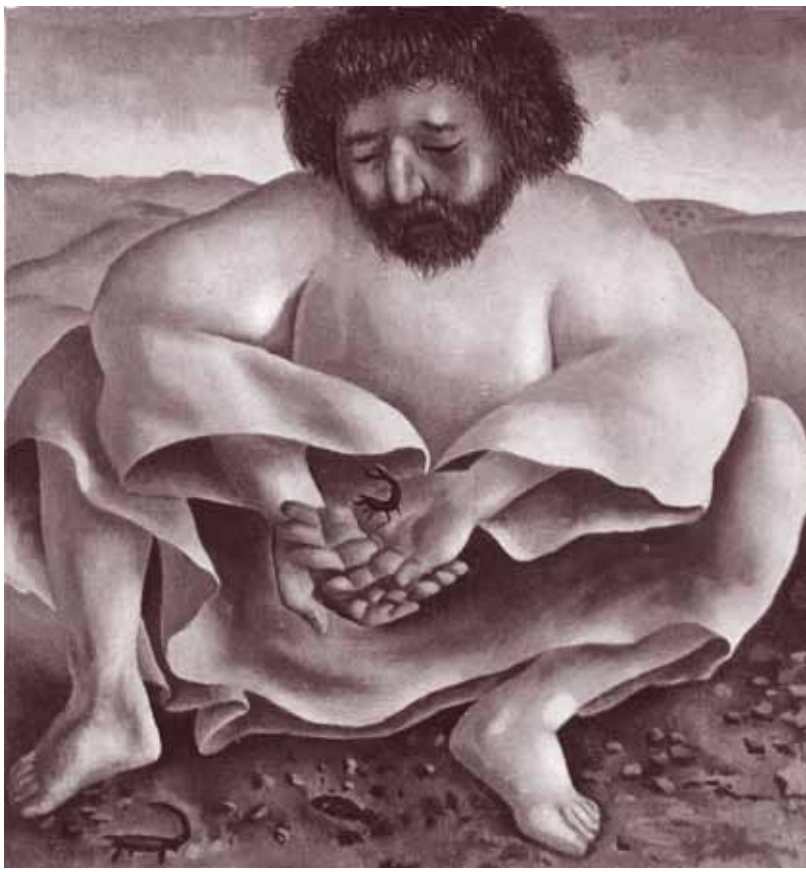
In "The Scorpion" (*illustrated right*) the earthy figure of the Jewish Jesus is given a visionary interpretation of oneness with nature. His form is echoed in the folds of the hills behind him. His great hands welcome with compassion a dangerous creature: "the neat, impish little scorpion and the massive unkempt head contemplate each other with complete understanding" (*Eric Newton*).

In this compelling picture Spencer conveys much of his own original vision of religion which he re-affirmed in mid-life: "Somehow religion was something to do with me, and I was to do with religion. It came into my vision quite naturally, like the sky and the rain".

Spencer was not a theologian nor biblical scholar, yet in this image he was expressing the earthly grace of Jesus accepting what others might dismiss as unworthy or fearful. This compassion is both specific and cosmic, in the Christ who comes to hallow and celebrate life, not to censure or destroy.

..religion was to do with me, and I with religion

It is evident also in the resurrection paintings, as in Spencer's Port Glasgow series of 1945 where the theme is not of warning and last judgment but of joyful reunion. Of these he said: "the world in which I am at present living is the world I have attempted to paint in these pictures". Resurrection means for him the sudden awakening in this life to the possibilities of finding heaven here and now. It is a state of mind, a new meaning found by letting the world be transfigured by joy and love and sensing the oneness of all life – which is possible even in the wilderness.



Christ in the Wilderness: the Scorpion. One of a series of panels painted by Stanley Spencer, 1939-42.

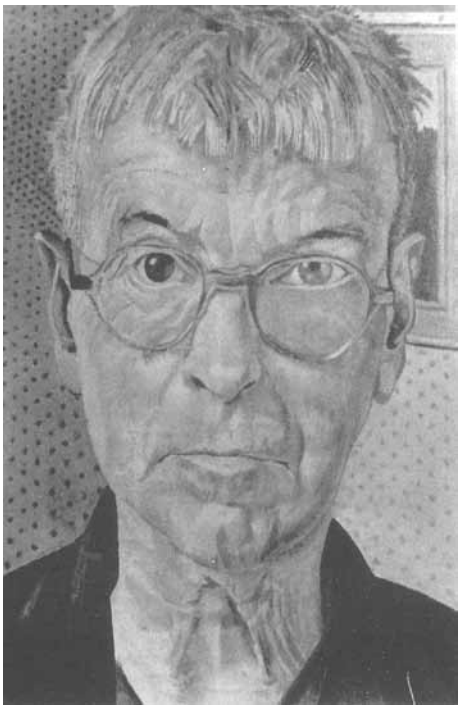
The picture also expresses the divine friendship with all creation. For Spencer the friendship of God was a reality in the familiar, 'cosy' world of Cookham village life and its friendly pursuits. God is not distant but present for young and old. Similar ideas are to be found in the recent writings of John O'Donohue whose *Anam Cara* ("soul-friend") expresses the Celtic understanding of friendship linking nature, humans and the divine. "A friend is a loved one who awakens your life in order to free the wild possibilities within you."

In these ways Spencer is expressing an element of creative play which features increasingly in modern religion and culture. Hugo Rahner has revived the ancient Greek term *eutrapelia* for that relaxed mobility of soul which can re-shape hardened attitudes. Instead of conflict and harsh judgments there is conversation, celebration and 'graceful playfulness'. In this spirit Spencer's angels are jolly and plump, never anorexic.

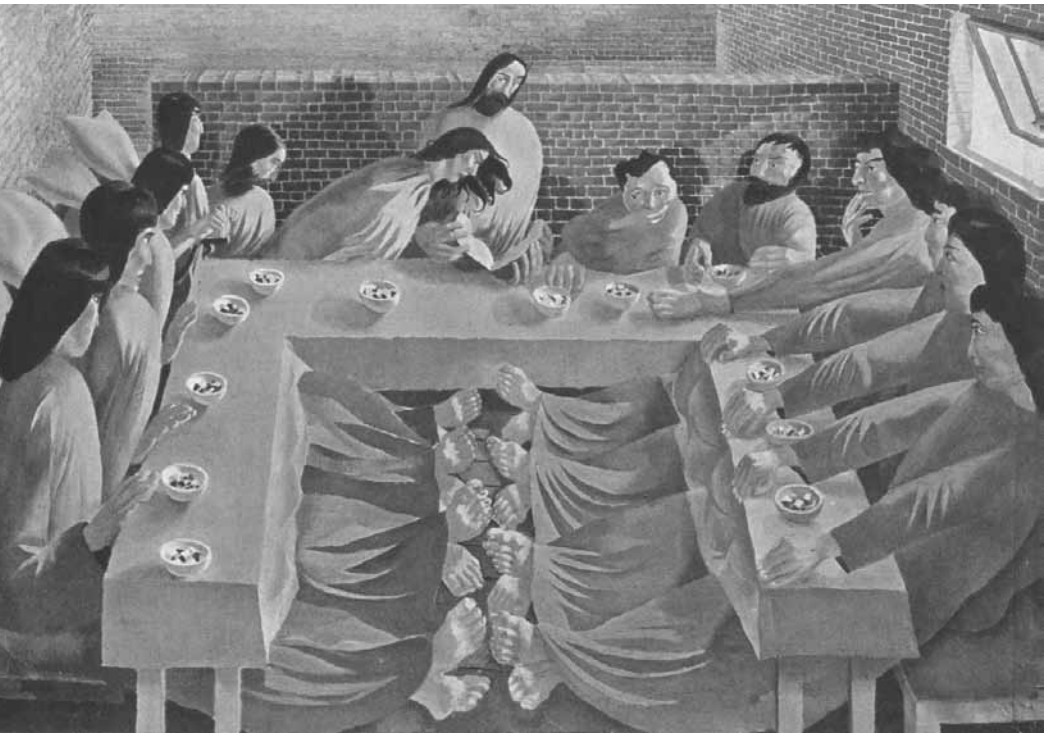
There are many things which remain odd and often puzzling in Spencer's paintings. But they are all the expressions of a lively individual personality, whether in art or religion. In this he foreshadows much in contemporary spiritual pilgrims who are "seeking a new dawn" as Mike Riddell puts it in his recent *Tui Motu* editorial (*May 2001*); people collect their own spiritual practices "as they might decorate a room to express ▷▷

▷▷ their personality". There are definite examples of this in Spencer's own projects for a "Church House" to celebrate the joys of the spirit experienced in life and love. But most important of all is Spencer's gift of imparting something of his own vision in his paintings. He makes us see new things that we also may have the opportunity to experience uniqueness and wonder in our own life and place, the extraordinary in the ordinary, the Kingdom of God in our midst.

In his final "self-portrait", 1959 (*illustrated left)* Spencer confronts himself and his imminent death with unsparing honesty. The biographer Kenneth Pople sums up well his quizzical gaze: "Now he knows what he sees. Do you too, he seems to ask, know what I see?" ■



***Stanley Spencer*: Self portrait**, painted in 1959 a few months before his death



***The Last Supper*:** Painted in oils in 1920 – based on earlier drawings in 1915 and 1919.

This is the great moment when Christ breaks the bread: "Take, eat; this is my body". John at his shoulder is leaning forward, and the eyes of the disciples are fixed intently on Christ (except for Judas, the betrayer, who looks away).

At the same time the event is set in the familiar surroundings of Cookham, near the Spencer family home. It happens in the oast house, with the brick wall of the grain bin behind. The disciples stretch their legs so that their big friendly feet meet and touch – the same feet Christ had washed beforehand. Their seating may be based on Spencer's memories of the mess-room at a military hospital during his service in World War 1.

It is among ordinary human lives that the extraordinary is happening. Religion becomes real, here and now.

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In Search of Belief

In a new series Pauline O'Regan and her Christchurch community reflect on the Apostles' Creed, the basis of our Christian faith. They do it through the lens of Joan Chittester's recent book

Our reading of Joan Chittister's book, *In Search of Belief*, took us back to the professions of faith we made in the Apostles' Creed on Easter night. She challenges us to ponder if we really believe what we are saying. She acknowledg-es that she no longer believes many of the things she believed readily in the past.

She used to believe, for instance, that the apostles wrote the Apostles' Creed. They didn't. That every statement in the Creed was historically provable. It isn't. That God was male. That is an imposs-ibility. This change in the understanding of our faith is true for all of us. So, if our belief has changed in some things, can we still say the Creed with integrity? ***Can we say that we really believe?***

The answer to that question is: ***of course we believe***. The essentials of our faith always remain unchangeable: there is a God; Jesus is the Way; the Holy Spirit lives in each of us. Nothing can shake our belief in these fundamental truths.

But the fact remains that we live in a world that is in a constant state of change - a flux that is so phenomenal that many people have lost all faith in faith itself. The rapidity of change in our modern world is confusing for all of us, but is especially so for the young. Is creed even possible in today's world?

Chittister poses the problem this way: when nothing looks as it did even as recently as 25 years ago, has belief become an old-fashioned concept? When the planet is not the white world's private paradise any more and life is not incontestably a male preserve alone, do old assumptions fail us? When in the face of a possible nuclear holocaust and the rape of the earth and the obscene poverty of whole peoples, can sin still be seen as simply a social checklist of personal peccadillos?

Surely it is time to reconsider what life is really all about and to ask ourselves again what it is we believe in. It is time to retrieve the faith that underpins the rituals and to revive the sense of mystery that underlies the answers - answers that no longer satisfy the modern questioner.

This is a dangerous time spiritually. It is solved by some only by dismissing everything that once they accepted unquestionably and now find incompatible with present reality. Conversely, others solve it by continuing to cling blindly to past explanations because present situations are more than they can absorb or integrate into an older world-view.

We are in the midst of an enormous explosion of knowledge with fresh information swamping us every day. We are awash in facts, but bereft of the clarity of mystery. We have all the knowledge we could possibly need, but we lack the time to reflect on it and discern its implications and value for humankind.

Science is presenting us with new discoveries almost daily. In the face of the dominance of science in our modern world, religion seems to take second place. But science and religion have two different functions: science tries to explain life, while religion attempts to understand it. Religion is not about equations. Its counterpart, spirituality, is not about knowledge. Rather, it seeks understanding about spiritual realities. Chittister puts it this way: religion seeks to bind the human to the divine, to bridge the gap between here and hereafter, to explain the unexplainable.

The fact remains, however, that science commands virtually all of people's attention. Take the case of cloning, for instance. In a recent public discussion amongst scientists on this subject, they were all agreed on one thing. The cloning of human beings will most certainly happen - next year, in five years' time, in 10 years.

Once scientists know how to do something, they will not be satisfied until they do it. This means that where once we saw the creative hand of God, we now see what appears to be the result of scientific experiment. If we are not asking questions about our faith in the face of such cataclysmic events, then religion has truly lost the battle.

Our community found itself in complete agreement with Chittister that those people who are asking questions of the church could be seen as its most faithful members. They are calling the church to be its truest self, to rouse itself to wrestle with the great issues of our time and not merely to condemn or evade.

Chittister makes a very important point when she says that men and women with new questions about old issues and old questions about new issues are calling the churches of our time to be more intent on spirituality and less intent on catechisms. These people do not question because they reject the church. They question the church because they love it.

What these people long for is a church that provides them with the deepest possible spirituality suited to our time, with which to grapple with a world that threatens to overwhelm their faith and destroy their sense of the mystery of God in their life. The first chapter of *In Search of Belief* concludes with the telling words: ***To say I believe is to say yes to the mystery of life.*** ■

Pauline O'Regan is a member of a small community of Mercy Sisters in N.E. Christchurch

"The wrath of justice, the milk of compassion"

Having worked in social justice areas in New Zealand for several years, Catherine Wood *wrote this piece as a summary of her beliefs and hopes for society*

This is a personal reflection as I prepare to leave New Zealand. It is a reflection on the spirituality that undergirds and upholds the work of social justice. Although it's a personal reflection I am conscious that we and others share much in common as to how we see ourselves in relationship with God, our communities and the world.

I have a trinity of fundamental beliefs from which flows everything that I believe in and am committed to. Firstly, that God is infinitely generous and compassionate, and passionately longs for abundance and fullness of life for everyone and everything. Secondly, that all life is sacred, has inherent worth and value, and that that sacredness makes the entire cosmos sacramental. And thirdly, that all beings on earth share a fundamental equality, in that life is a gift of God's graciousness.

We don't have to delve too far into the Hebrew Scriptures to recognise God's passion for justice. From the careful detail of the ethical codes to the thunderous tirades of the prophets, it's clear that what most deeply offends and angers God is the self-serving mean-spiritedness that enables exploitation and abuse to thrive. Such meanness of spirit is a gross affront to the abundance of God's generosity, which has provided overflowing plenty for all. There is no need for anyone to be hungry, for anyone to be without the essentials of food, shelter, health and education.

The problem has never been lack of resources, but rather lack of willingness to share. Whether as a result of fear, or greed, or both, we now live in a world where the inequities have become so bloated that a few enjoy obscene wealth while increasing millions slip ever deeper into poverty, debt and despair. Just a fraction of the world's military budget could end the abject poverty that kills thousands of children every day. Even an easing of the Western obsession with economic growth could give hope to thousands of endangered species that are losing their habitats as a result of human activity.

While some bask in their protective bubble of privilege, those pushed to the edge – people, animals and the environ-ment – are forced to compete for the leftovers for what is barely survival. God's love, as generosity and com-passion, calls powerfully to us to follow Jesus' example – to stand against the forces and structures of exploitation, and to live in a way that helps bring about healing, restoration and milk-and-honey for all (though some of us would prefer chocolate...)

The hard part, I find, is to be generous-spirited to those we most oppose. In this, one of the most helpful things I've ever read is in a Stephen Donaldson novel. There's an incident where thousands of trolls are desecrating the mountain home of the giants. As one giant comes over the pass and sees what is happening, he's filled with overwhelming rage and grief. He charges into the swarm of trolls, killing and maiming hundreds. Finally spent, he looks around at the carnage he's inflicted, and is deeply shocked and consumed with remorse.

What he learns as a result has stayed with me as a challenge for many years now – that unless you haved mercy on the thing that you hate, you become like it.

The sacredness of all life, and the immensity of God's gift of life compels silence rather than sermons, but alas, the reality is that life feeds on other life to exist. Still, it invites us to take the lives of others as sparingly, and with as much respect as possible, and to treat the earth and her creatures with gentleness and compassion.

My vegetarian fantasy has long been to have a personalised number plate saying NOMEAT. When it's tempting to end something's life just because it's an irritant, I suggest to myself as well as to others a bit of imagined role-reversal. If we were the ant or snail or any other oft-targeted small one, how would we want a human to treat us?

'Power over' issues extend far beyond people's treatment of one another. In the end, it's about the connectedness and relationship that is the glorious vision of *Eph. 1:9-10*: "for God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of the divine will, according to the purpose set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth".

A sacramental universe. All that is, a reflection of God's wondrous creativity and infinitely expansive heart, and therefore to be honoured and valued. ■

Catherine Wood has been a fieldworker for Christian World Service in the North Island

God Wears an Apron

Joy Cowley shares a golden memory of a frail old priest in the Islands who radiated God's love in his life

He was the happiest person I'd ever met. His face was radiant with good humour, yet by most standards he had little to laugh about. He was elderly and frail, living on a small South Pacific island remote from the medical treatment needed for a particularly painful cancer. His dwelling was spartan, his most personal possessions a collection of sea shells, a few books and a rug crocheted for him by a niece back in Holland.

Everything else was given away to the local people who came and went as though the house was a railway station. Children searched through his fridge for bread or cold drinks. Men from the village slept off their hangovers in his living room. Pigs and cats waited at the door, knowing he would find something for them to eat. He was as patient with them as he was with the children, and he saw beauty in everything.

He grew orchids in the yard, greeting each new blossom as though it had just been airmailed from God. Yet he was always pleased to give his precious flowers to the youngsters who drank his lemonade. Once when he was driving his old truck around the island, picking up parishioners for Mass, he braked suddenly and waved at a plantation of new coconut palms. "Look! Look! How beautiful the young trees are! See? Shining with light!" And for the first time I noticed that young coconut palms do indeed shine as though lit from within.

Eventually I put the question to him: "What makes you happy?"

He laughed as though I had made a joke, and then, more seriously, told me about a less happy time in his life. He came from an affluent family, and as a young man in pre-World War II Holland, he had everything he wanted – possessions, entertainment, a sports car, girlfriends – yet he was restless and sometimes miserable.

One day at Mass, when he was feeling quite depressed, he heard these words in a homily: "The secret of happiness is to make others happy." The statement hit him with a truth that he was ready to receive, and he knew he'd found the answer to his condition. Moreover, it seemed to him that the commitment 'to make others happy' involved a call to the priesthood.

So, more than 60 years later, there he was in a tiny island parish, possessing nothing and owning everything, passing the truth of that distant homily on to others in his life. Certainly, his example affected me and had me questioning my values.

The secret of happiness is to make others happy.

I sometimes think of the woman at Bethany who anointed Jesus' feet, and how much that meant to him. Scripture tells us he said: "Wherever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she did will be spoken of as her memorial." The ripple effect of that memorial beings us to Holy Thursday. Jesus, having received from the woman, wrapped a towel around his waist and washed the feet of his disciples, passing on the gift that is still with us.

That's the thing about real giving. It never dies. It multiplies itself over space and time, and no one can measure the extent of its benefits. The soul of that happy old priest has long since returned to God, but the happiness he spread is still being passed on – just like the action of the woman of Bethany.

In one way or another, God in an apron is among us, still washing dust from the feet of pilgrims, still teaching us all that the good news is caught rather than taught. ■

Nina's Blessing

Robert Allen

It was one of those days and I was one of those whales. The dumb-arsed type. Not the ones they record for New Age serenity-inducing CDs. I was the one who, after being rescued from a stranding on the shore of life, comes back for more, refusing to be saved.

It was one of those days. I refused to be happy. No one could help. My wife? All I could do was snap at her and leave the house like a petulant child. And as for prayer? My rebellious streak meant that the thought of praying and returning to the deep ocean calm of meditation just filled me with cynical loathing. When I'm in this black hole all I really want to do is fight and fuss with self and anybody else who comes my way, and I always like to add another beating on top of bruising. Put the boot in when I'm already down and bleeding. Futile, deadly, wallowing … but strangely and ultimately … satisfying behaviour.

What was wrong? Not a lot. Just a number of small things piling up. Stress? Tension? Probably, but then who doesn't have these things. The result? Shooting up through the back of my neck, and around the crown of my head was a vice-like tension headache.

Running into Patrick didn't help. I had met Patrick through Eddo when Patrick was a gutter drunk, swigging steam down in Aotea Square. I liked him better then. Now Patrick had become a soldier in the brave fight for souls, wore a red uniform, prayed at the Citadel and, much worse from my point of view, seemed very happy indeed. He had been a lost soul. Unlike me, he had found a simple solution, and while I resented this fact, there was no denying it was working.

Patrick was a fundamentalist. His answers were simple, rote, basic and very narrow. He would say things like … "Don't wear black. It's the devil's colour," and he would say it so smugly and without amplification that I never knew whether he was having a crack at the sky pilots and their dog collars, or the biker gangs and their black leathers. Or he would say …"Homosexuals are sinners and are all going to hell," and no matter how much I argued, he could never accept he could be wrong, and I resented it to the point where I tried to avoid Patrick for all I was worth.

But this day, when all seemed lost and the black bitch of depression was scratching and biting at me, I was walking head down and grumpy, and didn't spot Patrick until it was too late.

"God listens and answers my prayers when I pray to him with a pure and sincere heart," he stated, standing in front of me on the street.

I looked at Patrick and I too had a pure and sincere heart. My anger was pure and my desire to kill him was sincere.

"Not today, Patrick, or you'll be saying g'day to God quicker than you think, buddy boy," I responded hoping to shut him up.

"God listens and answers my prayer when I pray to him with a pure and sincere heart," he repeated undeterred.

"God save me from bloody fools," I whispered under my breath and, backing off, I said aloud, "later Patrick, I'm not up to arguing with you today."

I knew Nina solely because she had blue hair, but that's another story. She was a computer programmer, late 30s, gentle, and had an interesting philosophy of life that blended new-age mysticism and Zen with a pragmatic and down-to-earth Christianity. Nina was a searcher for truth. She was a friend. There she was in Albert Park, where I had stormed off to, rather than kill Patrick.

"Not so good?" she asked as she sat on the bench beside me. The short, spiky blue hair was shiny and clean, and the sun picked up its highlights, and it amazed me how the hair and the eyes were the same – blue and sparkling.

"What makes you ask?" I said.

"Oh, I don't know … you know … the grumpy face, the hunched shoulders, the vibes."

"Smart girl," I said sourly.

"Problems?" she asked.

"Nothing big. Same old, same old. Stress, I guess."

Nina said nothing. She stood up and walked around the bench and stood behind me.

"Lean forward," she said.

"Why?" I asked suspiciously.

"I just want to try this," and she started massaging my neck and shoulders, and it felt fantastic. She found every knot, every twist, every point of tension.

"Oh, Nina," I moaned in relief. It was that good. It hurt, but it was good anyway. "Oh God, that's so good."

"Just as well we're not taping this. Sounds like you're having sex," she laughed.

"Nina," I said, suddenly conscious that we were sitting in Albert Park in broad daylight, and she was a single woman with blue hair, and I was a Catholic

school principal, and people have strange minds and … and I began to tell her all this …

"For Pete's sake, Rob. No wonder you're so uptight. Every muscle in your back is cramped and hard, and all you have to worry about is someone getting the wrong idea. Relax, for God's sake. Anyway, I don't care what people think about my hair. I like it blue. It's playful."

And she was right. Soon I was lying on the bench and she was standing over me giving my back muscles a real going over, and the headache was subsiding. As she worked on me, she spoke of acupressure points, energy streams and memories of old wounds stored in the body, and although I tried to keep up, the luxury of what she was doing made it hard to concentrate, so I just enjoyed the sensation of being totally cared for.

"Where did you learn this?" I asked between groans.

"Here and there."

I no longer cared who saw me or that I was lying on a bench in Albert Park being massaged by a woman with blue hair who was not my wife. As if she could read my mind, Nina said, "Would your wife be OK with this?"

"I guess if she thought this helped. She suffers the most from my black moods."

"I wonder …" said Nina.

"Wonder what?"

"Whether she suffers most. What about you?"

And the words – *God save me from bloody fools* – returned to haunt me. My wife was not the one who suffered the most from these moods. Nina was right. It was me who hurt, and I did it to myself.

I told Nina about my meeting with Patrick.

"So Paddy boy was right," she said. "God answered your prayer. He saved you from a bloody fool. Yourself," she laughed.

"You're an angel," I said.

"Bless you," she smiled.

I had been already. God had blessed me with friends like Nina and people like Patrick and the love of my wife. God had blessed me even when I didn't have a pure and sincere heart. God knew my motives better than I did, knew they were often mixed, but he didn't hold it against me. God made me to be imperfect. To be human. Impure and insincere. Heresy? Perhaps. The words of St Francis came to me as I drowsed off, relaxed for the first time in weeks.

It is in giving we receive,
in forgiving we are forgiven …

Self-interest at best? Did anyone have pure motives? Was Patrick right about God needing us to be pure before he answered our prayers? I didn't think so.

God might answer Patrick's prayers when he prays with a sincere and pure heart, but he often listens to me when I'm far from this.

Later in the day I saw Patrick again and asked him, "Why do you do God's will, Patrick?"

"To have everlasting life," he confirmed.

"A pretty big payoff," I laughed.

A pure and sincere heart? Even Patrick was doing deals. ■

Signposts

A moment of understanding
lights up the present moment
like a bonfire in my mind.

At last! Here I stand
for a precious instant knowing
who and why I am.
Such special knowledge must not be lost.

Quickly, carefully, I inscribe a signpost.
But when I raise it up to fix it in place,
I see I am in a forest of signposts.

This way! Over here! Follow this path!
they cry,
urging, beckoning, directing me
to other moments –
half-remembered visions from the past
when it seemed that here at last was the
final answer
and there would be no more questions.

Can I step out from under these
sheltering signposts?
Can I move, free from their confusing arms?
Can I turn from them and step out
into the trackless now?

Lin

For the season of the Holy Spirit, Helen Bergin OP *has written a four-part series linking the Spirit's action with the elements: earth, air, fire, water.*
The third of the series explores the most familiar of the four metaphors: FIRE. It is especially apt, close to the feast of Pentecost

Fire and Holy Spirit

In mid 2000, White Island off the coast of the Bay of Plenty suddenly erupted with fiery rocks and ash hurling themselves into the air. We were reminded, as we are when walking through the geothermal region of the Central Plateau, that the earth holds a bubbling, seething life within it. Such life releases itself as heated energy and sometimes even as fire.

Not all of this energy is humanly tameable. I read a notice bordering a track in the Craters of the Moon walkway near Taupo. The description spoke of the "chain of fire" which was 30 miles wide and extended 150 miles from Tongariro National Park up to White Island. For many in this land, fire is a real but often hidden companion.

Fifteen billion light years ago at the creation of the universe there was a massive fireball eruption. Fire and heat signal the beginning of the cosmic and earth stories.

In the biblical story written billions of years later, despite plentiful references to fire, few connect fire with God's Spirit. *Matthew* says that Jesus will baptise "with the Holy Spirit and with fire," (*3:11*) suggesting that Jesus' ministry, through the Spirit, will usher in the end times of purification and judgement. The Pentecost event depicts Jesus' community being empowered by his Spirit and enlivened by tongues of fire to continue what he began.

Despite the scarcity of biblical references, the Tradition, especially in hymns and mystical writings, offers numerous links between fire and the Spirit. The Spirit is pictured in a four-fold way: as *warming*, *transforming, sending on mission, enabling love*. Let us reflect on these aspects.

• a warming presence

We note within the Tradition ongoing references. The 9th Century anonymous hymn *Veni, Creator* praises the Spirit as "living water, flame, charity" and implores the Spirit to "inflame the light of our senses." The 12th century hymn, *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* invites the Spirit to "Bend what is stiff / Warm what is cold."

Sixteenth Century Spaniard, Teresa of Avila, likens the early stages of the human's spiritual journey to a silkworm undergoing transformation. She says: "This silkworm, then, starts to live when by the heat of the Holy Spirit it begins to benefit through the general help given to us all by God . . ." *(The Interior Castle).* Fire is commonly used to indicate *the warming, strengthening power* of God's Spirit.

• inner transformation

This happens within one who is open to the Spirit. 10th century Simeon the New Theologian asks of the Spirit, in one of his hymns:

How can you be both a blazing hearth and a cool fountain
A burning, yet a sweetness that cleanses us?

How can you take the flame to our hearts and change the depths of our being?

Ten centuries later, Teilhard de Chardin prays:
"Blazing Spirit, Fire, . . . be pleased yet once again to come down and breathe a soul into the newly formed, fragile film of matter with which this day the world is to be freshly clothed" *(The Mass on the World).*

Most recently, poet Grace Brame reflects:

In quietness and trust,
. . . I yield myself this moment
To the Presence that gives life,
To the Reality that existed before the earth was made,
To the Spirit that came and *comes* as fire
To turn around our lives
And make them new.

Burn within me, God! Let me feel your fire!
Burn warm with love! Burn bright with joy! *(Pentecost)*

• The Spirit sending us on mission

The pivotal event for such association is, of course, that of Pentecost wherein many other aspects of the Spirit are also depicted - the Spirit as enlivening, strengthening and transforming. The connection with mission in particular is captured in J. K. Baxter's *Song to the Holy Spirit* when he states:

You are the kind fire who does not cease to burn,
Consuming us with flames of love and peace,
Drawing us out like sparks to set the world on fire.

• The Spirit as offering and enabling love

This aspect is expressed by 13th Century Meister Eckhart as the spark of the soul that "is hidden, something like the original outbreak of all goodness, something like a brilliant light which incessantly gleams, and something like a burning fire which burns incessantly. This fire is nothing other than the Holy Spirit" (*Sermon 6).* For Eckhart, this fire deep within us is divine love. Does this description not have resonances with the fire activating the life of the universe?

Six centuries later, Carmelite nun, Elizabeth of the Trinity reveals a similar understanding of the Spirit as the love-bringer and agent of love when she prays:

"O consuming, Fire, Spirit of Love, come upon me and create in my soul a kind of incarnation of the Word: that I may be another humanity for Him in which He can renew His whole mystery" *(Complete Works, Vol.1).*

Today, poet of Aotearoa Joy Cowley senses it in the following way:

I am a very small tree in a desert
and I am torched by the breath of God.
I don't ask for it. It just happens,
a suddenness inside me and then a
presence of wind and flame burning,
burning,
and I cover my eyes with my fears,
knowing that I am too small and too frail
to bear this firestorm of love.
(*The Burning Bush*)

The connection between love, Holy Spirit and the image of fire is especially strong in the Christian mystical and theological tradition. Although, as mentioned previously, it is less explicitly connected within the Scriptures, it nonetheless continues to convey powerfully to human beings vital aspects of the nature of the Holy Spirit.

In summarising the links between fire and God's Spirit, we note the Spirit's *warming*; *transforming*, *effecting love*. The Spirit causes recipients to shine and go forth, as Baxter says,"to set the world on fire." The primordial energy of fire at the heart of the universe and the hidden fiery presence within the Central plateau of this land, are transferred within the Tradition to the image of the fire of the Spirit working at the heart of the Christian community. But, beware: both can be dangerous! ■

Tete Kura broadcast

Readers will recall the very positive review given to *Tete Kura* when it was performed in Wellington in August last year.

Tete Kura attempts to integrate the spiritual values of the two cultures of Aotearoa New Zealand through music, mainly through young voices.

It will be broadcast on Concert FM on Sunday, 10 June at 8pm. The programme is called *Young New Zealand*.


Hans Kung

Poles apart

Can we ever imagine Hans Kung and Cardinal Ratzinger as colleagues and friends? Yet, writes Jim Neilan, *that is what they were during Vatican II. Their conflict today highlights the polarisation in Catholic theology*

Many Catholics today see their church as a divided church and point to the Vatican council, and how people responded to it, as the principal reason for this division. I have recently been looking at the lives of two prominent Catholic priests who, in a way, personify the two sides of the division.

It is difficult to imagine now that the names Hans Kung and Joseph Ratzinger could ever have been linked as sharing similar views on theology and the role of the church in the modern world. But in the 1960s they were. Both were members of a progressive group of theologians who contributed much to the contents of the Council documents – 'young Turks' of their time and personal friends for many years.

Now they are bitterly and openly opposed to one another and poles apart in their views on many basic issues regarding the church and its relationship with its own members and the 'outside world'.

In the years since Vatican II the 72-year-old Swiss theologian, Hans Kung, has become the public face of liberal Catholicism. Probably no one is more closely associated with the hopes and fears which the council instigated. Kung has advocated reform inside the church and stimulated involvement with other churches and religions, so that Catholicism may have a positive influence in the modern world.

In a Radio NZ interview earlier this year with Dr Peter Lineham, Kung summarised his criticisms of the "Roman bureaucracy" and his hopes for the future. He spoke of Pope John XXIII opening the windows but "in the Vatican many do not like fresh air."

The spirit of the Council was one of renewal, dialogue, collegiality and trust. But today Kung sees a moving back to pre-council attitudes imposed by a medieval structure still thinking in terms of Imperium Romanum, with a Roman pope replacing the Roman emperor.

The Council wished to get away from the closed, ghetto-like authoritarian style that rejected everything in the modern world – to open the church to what was valid and helpful. Much was made of collegiality – true collaboration between bishops and their priests, among bishops, and of bishops with the pope – collaboration, not just consultation.

But today, collegiality has become an empty word. Lip service may be paid to Vatican II but many, like Kung, see an almost systematic deconstruction of the great aims of the Council taking place. Even in dealing with its own members there is all too often an atmosphere of suspicion and intimidation, double talk and the words "I'm sorry" reserved only for mistakes committed in the distant past and never addressed to living persons.

The result is a large part of the Catholic population thinking in a different way to the Vatican (Kung uses the examples of birth control and attitudes to women).

In a publication *The World's Foremost Speakers and Celebrities* Hans Kung is described as "perhaps the world's best known living theologian". It praises him for applying his theological insights into the areas of politics, economics and international relations. He has a high profile on German television and has many connections on the world scene in his efforts to promote a 'Global Ethic'.

To Peter Lineham he said: "I still hold to what I was writing at the time I first visited New Zealand in 1971, but now there are broader horizons

and a larger approach as we adjust to world religions, world peace and a world ethic."

All of this he sees as part of his vocation as a "Christian theologian and a Catholic priest" endeavouring to make the true spirit of the Vatican council make some difference in the modern world.

In contrast we can look at Kung's one-time friend, Joseph Ratzinger. Also aged 72, he is now the cardinal heading the Roman *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* once known as the 'Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition', or Holy Office.

Ratzinger certainly has a remarkable power to polarise

Like Hans Kung he had a great influence on the Council. Now he has become the most powerful figure within the Roman Curia, taking up a whole series of positions seemingly in contradiction to the opinions of his younger days. It's difficult to know when exactly he opted for this going back to the 'good old days' but it appears to coincide with his rise in the hierarchical ladder of the church.

A biography of the Cardinal by John L. Allen was published last year, and gives a detailed and perceptive account of his life and career. For anyone interested in the issues that polarise the life of the Roman Catholic church today, this is an important, sensitive and well-written book.

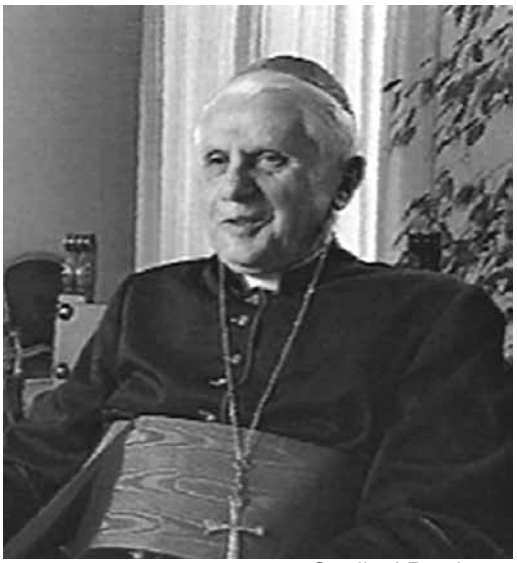
Ratzinger certainly has a remarkable power to polarise. He has blocked movements such as liberation theology and the efforts to affirm other religions. He has disciplined theologians in a high-handed manner (Kung included!). He has sought to override bishops' conferences and to expand the borders of infallibility to include issues such as the ban on women's ordination and the invalidity of Anglican orders.

These actions have inevitably brought charges of creating an atmosphere of fear in the theological community and that, by reducing the influence of bishops' conferences, he is boosting his own power and that of the Vatican Curia.

Perhaps even the Pope has some misgivings. When he called the "extraordinary consistory" of cardinals for May 21-24 he raised some eyebrows by asking for a frank discussion about ecclesiastical power. He has said that there is "certainly much more to be done" in reforming the Roman Curia and he challenged officials to take a hard look at "careerism, distrust and jealousy."

Like Kung and others Ratzinger saw a need for change at the time of the Council. But change for him meant a 'back to basics' approach – a return to the Scriptures and the writings of the early fathers of the church. He has always been greatly influenced by the works of St Augustine and distrustful of those of St Thomas Aquinas. To him, Thomists are like the promoters of liberation theology – they are too optimistic about human nature, and the church must draw a line in the sand about involvement in the modern world. And he has not hesitated to use the power of his office to reinforce this line, sometimes in language and by means that are difficult to reconcile with the spirit of the Council.

Kung, in contrast, sees the need for a here-and-now involvement in the world in order to achieve God's plan. He holds that dialogue and not confrontation with other churches, religions and people of good will has already started to bear fruit in a growing awareness of the need for spiritual and ethical values, standards and attitudes.



Cardinal Ratzinger

dialogue and not confrontation with other churches has started to bear fruit

The present division caused by these different outlooks is stifling the influence the church should be having in the new millennium. Another attempt is needed to open the windows in Rome. ■

Why people leave the church – and where they go

A Churchless Faith
by Alan Jamieson
Philip Garside Publishing 2000
Price: $29.95
Review: Mike Crowl

At present there's a widespread (and proper) emphasis on *Seeker Services*, services where everyday language is used and ritual is kept to a bare minimum. They're aimed at encouraging those unfamiliar with church to give it a try.

Alan Jamieson's book, however, talks about the opposite possibility: 'leaver services', get-togethers for those who find themselves slipping out the back door of churches. Jamieson's concern is with the increasing number of Christians who feel traditional church services no longer meet their needs. As Jamieson explains it, this isn't just a matter of back-sliding (losing one's faith, or becoming less interested in the Christian way), but of a stage of growth in the Christian life that many people go through without realising it.

Jamieson's book ought to be required reading for priests and ministers of all denominations. In the first half he lays out the results of a series of interviews he did with people who had left the church scene, but who (almost all) remained Christians. He divides these people into a variety of groups, according to the kind of experience and reflections they've had. Many of them subsequently found other 'leavers' and formed informal groups, where there's an acceptance of the need to ask deeper questions than the average church allows or has room for.

Jamieson focuses on the 'EPC' churches, the Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic, but his conclusions are equally applicable to mainstream churches.

In the second half of the book he discusses James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, and shows how many leavers fall into one particular stage: that of questioning their long-held faith. They do this as they discover life isn't simple, and deeper answers are needed. Finally he gives those who are 'left behind', particularly those in leadership, ways of being more aware of people who are on the verge of leaving, and ways to help them work through the process, so that hurts and anger don't result from the departures.

As someone who's had to leave a church in the past under less than ideal circumstances, I found this an excellent resource, particularly in so far as it is much more positive than first expectations might suggest. Jamieson isn't setting out to blame churches for losing people, but is aiming to give them a better understanding of why people go. The interview results, the 'stages of faith' discussion, and the suggestions for working with possible leavers are all excellently put together.

If you're in church leadership or if you're feeling as though your church home is starting to drive you crazy, please read this book. I recommend it highly. ■

A useful guide to restructuring parishes

Redefining the Church
Edited by Richard Lennan
Published by E. J. Dwyer
Price: $29.00 (139 pages)
Review: June MacMillan

The task of reviewing this book, packed with thought-provoking information, in 800 words, appeared an impossible one. Yet this book has to be one of the most valuable I have read as a guide for restructuring parishes. Seven authors with a common theme – the church since Vatican II and what needs to be addressed today if the local church community is to become well informed and motivated. In his introduction Richard Lennan says: "This book seeks to identify the contribution which all the members can make to the well-being of the church in its liturgical life; in its lived faith; and most particularly in building a supportive and nurturing community of faith."

Marie Farrell's article elaborates on the writings of Yves Conger, a theologian who had much to contribute in regard to the laity when *Lumen Gentium* was being debated during Vatican II. In his later reflection, Yves admits that "the clergy need to be defined in relation to the laity, who are quite simply members of the people of God animated by the spirit … Christians – clergy and lay – are a people who have been baptised. Conger's theology of the laity involved a 'vital return', not a regression to an earlier tradition." The call to tasks in the church, such as ordination or lay ministry, is an added responsibility to that which belongs to all Christians, through Baptism.

'Lay Liturgical Ministry – 30 years on': Greg Wilson considers the emergence of a transformed perception which has come to those who have embraced the liturgical reforms. His article considers aspects of the reforms both positive and anxiety-provoking for laity and priests, caught in the struggle of defining the differences in the callings which have emerged within church communities since the Council. There is a need to clarify these differences to safeguard the Sacrament of Ordination.

Patricia Egan suggests in her article 'Empowering God's People at Grassroots Level' that past attitudes called us to a hierarchical focus and prevented Catholics from being 'the Church', and as called, to be active in 'Christ's Mission in and to the world'. The process of pastoral planning for a diocese is laid out and commented upon in this article.

Teresa Pirola considers 'Church Professionalism – when does it become lay elitism?' The dangers of filling in the gaps left by the shortage of ordained priests through using paid employees or educated lay persons, without attending to the formation of a correct attitude, can cause the formation of a 'top down' position similar to past church patterning. Lay elitism is to be avoided in parish reconstruction because it blocks the production of a more 'imaginative leadership'.

Camille Paul's 'What Happened to the Vision?' is a call to take a long look at all that has transpired since Vatican II in order to select and redirect our energy to those aspects of Vatican II's vision which have either been neglected or distorted along the way: issues regard-ing the role of women, unresolved difficulties in regard to parish involvement, *Humanae Vitae* and the sense it had of negating expectations in regard to some Vatican documents, which caused many to leave the church or follow their own conscience. These and many other issues need to be urgently addressed if we are to recapture the spirit and enthusiasm of the Second Vatican Council.

Gerald Gleeson's 'A Living Catholic Conscience', to my mind, puts before one the interface of the spiritual life. For Cardinal Newman, whose thinking is basic to this work, conscience "is the connecting principle between the creature and his Creator".

The formation of conscience has a community dimension to it through the official teaching of the church. It is both a subjective and objective check on our moral actions in regard to God, and the other, with whom we are involved. To develop an informed conscience is therefore the duty of every baptised Catholic. It is the Holy Spirit who is the true and 'living' voice to which conscience ought to attend.

'Christian Morality – A Communal Project', by Neil Brown, is the final article in this book. It is the Gospel which makes demands upon one and it is the church, "the whole community, endowed with the Spirit of Christ", which in accord with the signs of the times, pays attention to what God's Word is calling us to. This background produces a framework out of which one can formulate what it means to have a living faith in Christ. As in the previous chapters, morality is considered within the context of the Magisterium in relation to the lived experience of the people of God. To deny anyone a voice within the 'moral decision-making process' is an act of oppression. ■

Sky Hawks winged

Historically, the Labour Party has always been innovative and daring in Government. Two obvious examples are the economic reforms of the '80's and the NZ Nuclear Free policy. Both were opposed at the time but enthusiastically adopted by National when returned to power.

Now the Labour Coalition is revamping our defence forces with a comprehensive strategy which includes dumping the ancient Sky Hawks and putting more emphasis on ground forces. The public debate outside parliament has been vociferous but constructive, with a feeling that Helen Clark is on the right track given the New Zealand situation. Inside parliament the debate has been pathetic and shows the weakness of the adversarial system of politics when the opposition lacks talent and a coherent policy. There can never be consensus under these circumstances and we are the poorer for it.

The National party reacted to the new defence strategy by arguing that New Zealand would be considered as a "bludger" and that business would suffer. The suggestion of business suffering was enough to upset the plutocratic ACT party, so the Opposition's answer is the promise to restore an air-strike force. Helen Clark maintains that one percent of GDP is enough for NZ to spend on defence; Jenny Shipley will increase this. The kinder-garten level of argument continues - *if you say yes, we say no*.

Then the personal denigration starts with the bizarre labelling of Helen Clark as a "Peacenik", which must have come straight from the think-tank of the "radical conservatives". I would hope that on such an important issue, the level of debate would rise to encompass the best interests of New Zealand and not the self-aggrandizement of petty-minded politicians. There should be a bipartisan view of vital issues such as defence and superannuation.

Radical change demands intelligent debate. Parliament has not provided that, because parliamentarians can see no further than the next election.

Italy's new Duce?

I have a fondness for Italy and the Italians that is quite out of proportion to what really goes on there.

Crosscurrents
by John Honoré

I remember being cajoled by an Italian in Biella, who pleaded poverty and the fact that he was a distant cousin of the Pope as good reasons for me to drop my price on a container of wool. The man had a tear in his eye when he told me "the family" would be very happy if I could. I was sure "the family" was the Mafia. We concluded the business (after a concession on my part) and retired for a superb lunch at a nearby restaurant which just happened to belong to "the family". The lunch cost a fortune but Giovanni paid the bill without a qualm.

Consider Silvio Berlusconi, founder of the *Forza Italia* party, the far-right National Alliance, and now leader of Italy. He is a man of huge ambition, with arcane influence, and apparently charming. Seven years ago he was the leader of a government which lasted just a few months and collapsed under corruption charges. He is a billionaire and owns three TV stations plus a newspaper or two and says he "will respect Italian democracy".

Every home in the country was sent his life story. I do not know whether that included details of the accusations of bribery and false accounting which he has yet to face, but I am sure he would be able to convince me that he was innocent. He controls the media. His election must raise monumental issues of conflicting interests as well as questions about his "family".

Yet, Italians will shrug their shoulders, get on with life and continue to look with a jaundiced eye on politicians. Italians are intriguing. How could Berlusconi be elected? Don't ask!

Sic transit gloria Toddy

Todd Blackadder told us all that New Zealand will not win the next World Cup and added "I will probably be crucified for saying it". Ten days later he was. The commercialisation of rugby emphasises aggression, success and a 'must win' attitude. And Toddy does not fit.

Big business has exploited the game of rugby to the maximum. The extended season, due to the Super 12 competition, is taking its toll of players in injuries and burn-out. Rapidly falling numbers at club level, and a fickle public disappointed at having no New Zealand team in the finals of the Super 12, are adding to the problems. John Graham, former All Black captain, really frightened the horses by saying that the competition should be scrapped! Shock! Horror! All that money invested in stadiums, corporate boxes and the expensive corporate structure, going down the gurgler.

Forget the players themselves, they are described as the "All Black Brand" and, like Toddy, considered expendable. Players are commodities to endorse or sell products. University students can no longer participate at this level because it would interfere with their studies.The corollary is a lack of intelligent players.The rugby union is hanging on to the macho rugby image associated inextricably with beer, the cult of a past decade. Surely we have moved on from there.

Synod of the People of God 2001

A "Synod of the People of God" organised by Catholic Reform Movements from all over the world will shadow the Bishop's Synod due to be held in Rome in October 2001. The Bishops' Synod will examine the role and work of the bishop, a key leadership position in the church of concern to the whole membership.

The Catholic reform movements realised that the Consistory, held 21-24 May 2001 in Rome, was a preparation for the Bishops' synod and have presented a set of objectives for the cardinals to consider. The Shadow Synod in October will be a process of Internet discussions, research and media promotions culminating in a gathering during the time the Bishops are engaged in their assembly in Rome. The intention is to involve as many individuals, groups and networks as possible throughout the world in discussion about the role and work of the diocesan bishop and a new balance between local churches and the Vatican.

Catholics committed to reform await proposals from the Consistory that not only take into consideration latest theological thinking but are also acceptable to the Protestant and Orthodox churches. Even the reform of the ministry of the papacy should be discussed, as the Pope himself called for in his 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*.

The worldwide reform movement within the Catholic church would like the Consistory to deal with the following in particular:

• Relationship between the universal church and local churches
We expect a clarification on the competences of local churches. The Catholic church is not a super church, and local churches are not provinces of the universal church. The universal church that is today identified with the Pope and the Roman Curia should not seek to impose uniformity on the variety of local churches.

• Collegiality of the bishops' ministry
We expect that bishops will practise their ministry collegially, because not only the Bishop of Rome but all bishops together are responsible for the apostolic work.

• Episcopal Conferences
We expect a substantial widening of the competence of regional Episcopal Conferences and, if need arise, to appoint new patriarchates as regional or continental metropolitans to reflect the growing complexity and diversity of the worldwide Catholic church.

• Election of Bishops
We expect a guaranteed participation of a local church in the appointment of its bishop.

• Reform of the Roman Curia and strengthening of the Synods of Bishops
A fundamental reform of the papal bureaucracy is needed. It is the papal curia's duty to **serve** the bishops of the world and not to **rule** them. The Synods of Bishops introduced by the Second Vatican council (1962-65) are largely ineffective in curbing the power of the Roman Curia; they perform a merely 'advisory' function and can be ignored.

• Restoration of the two-thirds majority vote required of the cardinals in a papal conclave
The requirement for a two-thirds majority has been in existence since 1179 and was only abolished in 1996 (by the present Pope).

• Theological freedom
Many would like to see a more open climate of theological debate within the Catholic church, as witnessed at the second Vatican Council. Such freedom of theological debate is both a product and a prerequisite of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it reads in the holy Bible. ■

Who possesses who?

Is that your dog?" It was a common question - the result of seldom using a lead. "No," I replied, only partly in jest, "I'm his human."

Who owned who? On the one hand we owned each other, and on the other we didn't. We were dependent upon each other, yet we weren't. Ownership was not really the right word to describe the relationship.

Ownership is also not the right word to describe our relationship with God. We don't own God and neither does the church, although sometimes it thinks it does. God doesn't own us either. We are not a piece of property to be owned by God or anyone else.

It was a piece of property that once brought a parish grief. Parishioners had saved long and hard, run raffles, housie, and cake stalls. Finally the day of fruition came and the results revealed: a piano. A magnificent piano. A piano that would bring considerable joy to the many parishioners and the pupils of the adjoining school.

Therein lay the seeds of grief, for the piano was to be shared. From an outsider's view there did not seem to be a problem. During the evenings and weekends various parish groups could make use of it. During the weekdays the school children could do likewise. A lovely sharing of a valuable asset. However, the outsider had at that stage no insight into the fiefdom of the school.

One night, one memorable night, parishioners arrived to find the piano locked! The school Principal, it was later discovered, had found a key and locked it. The parishioners, ever resourceful, found another key and unlocked it. Round one to the parish.

The next night though, parishioners arrived to find the piano gone! The magnificent piano had been uplifted. Inquiries were to reveal that the piano had undergone a mysterious journey from the parish hall to the school music room! Round two to the school.

In the days of thunder that followed it seemed to the now enlightened outsider that the Principal's rationale was a profound mistrust in the parish's ability to care for such an instrument and a pernicious trust in his 'divine' right to procure property for his school. From the Parish's viewpoint they owned the piano and had generously shared it. Ownership, however, was understood differently by the Principal. Needless to say, in time, the piano made the journey back.

Autocratic behaviour aside, we can be somewhat precious about possessions. Whether it's pieces of property or pieces of writing, whether it's schools, churches, or houses, or whether it's a prized piano... we seem to invest considerable time and energy into protecting what we believe is ours. Our society generally is ownership orientated. Ask a lawyer.

But ownership is a limited concept. Many of us mistakenly confuse it with security and wealth. We think that if we own things they will give us security. And the more we own, the more secure, the more wealthy we'll be. Ultimately it's a lie. Ask Job.

Our faith, however, promotes a concept more akin to trusteeship. We are trusted, by God's grace, to use and look after possessions for the benefit of the community as a whole. Possessions are gifts. Gifts to brighten the lives of others and ourselves. And beware, possessions are to be held to lightly, lest they begin to possess us. Ask a certain Principal.

When you think about it, all the great things in life: happiness, hope, joy, laughter, love, children, dogs... have little to do with anything we own. ■

Glynn Cardy