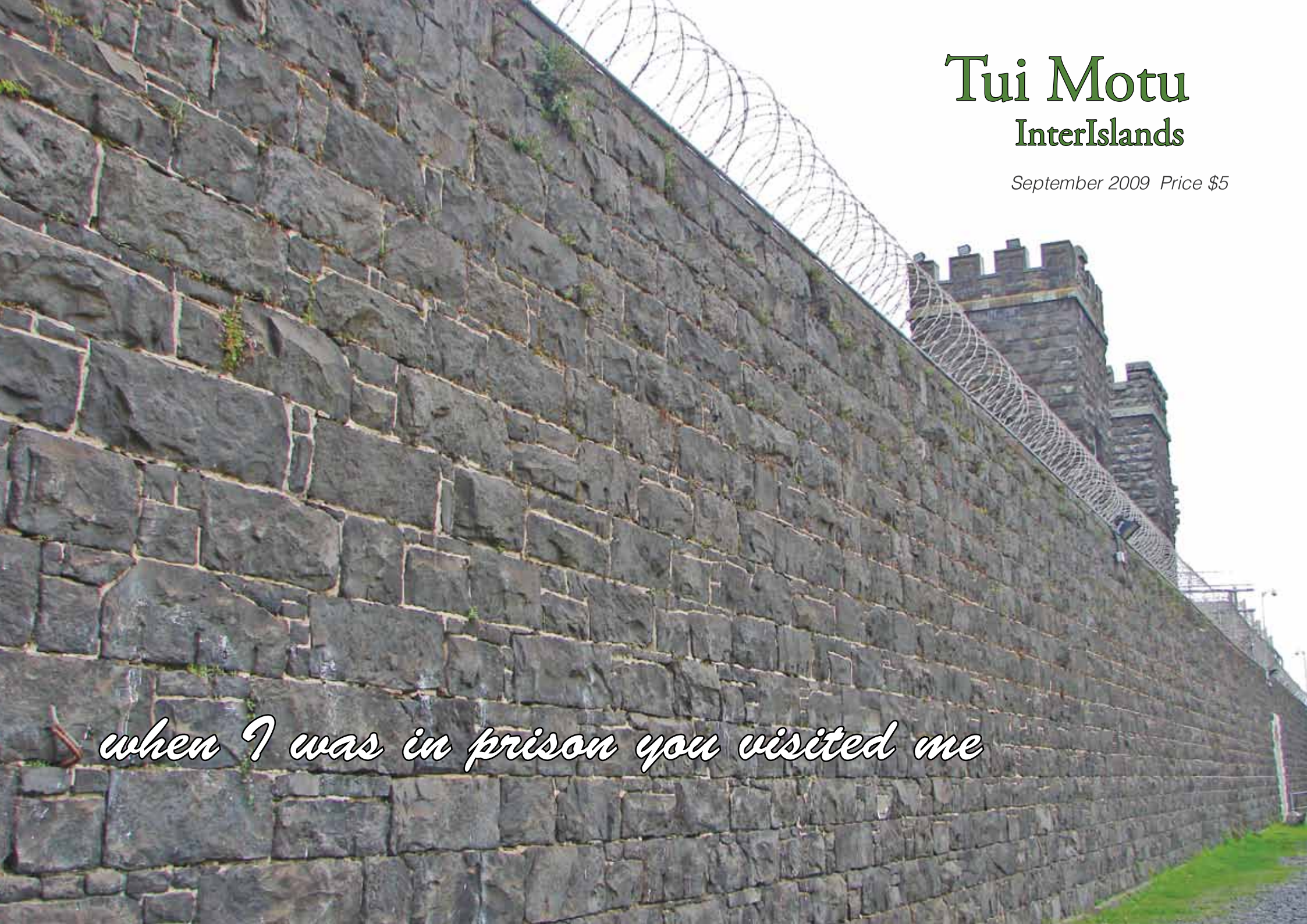

Tui Motu
InterIslands

September 2009 Price $5

when I was in prison you visited me

Contents

Cover photo: Paul Freedman

Apology. . .

to Sr Teresa Hanratty, Dunedin Director for Pastoral Ministry, for inadvertently rechistening her 'Maureen' (*August TM p 11*).

in prison you visited me

Kenny McCaskill, Justice Secretary for Scotland, has stirred up a hornet's nest by releasing the Lockerbie bomber to return to Libya. He said: "He did not show his victims any comfort or compassion. But that alone is not a reason for us to deny compassion to him and his family in his final days. Our beliefs dictate that justice be served, but mercy be shown."

McCaskill's action has been widely condemned especially in the United States. Media pundits sneered that the move was motivated by the British Government wanting to cosy up to Gadaffi because of Libya's abundant oil reserves.

Compassion is not part of the vocabulary of today's Western secular society. Once it was, because there is no other word that more comprehensively described the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christian values which once penetrated even the inner sanctum of government are now largely ignored in favour of political realism.

Caritas Aotearoa has chosen to focus on prisons for *Social Justice Week*; therefore, we have interviewed (*pp 5-10*) prison chaplains and visitors. Jesus singled out visiting prisoners as one of the corporal works of mercy. It was good to discover that no less than 180 people from the various Christian churches are involved in some sort of ministry at the new prison, at Milton in Otago.

However, our survey also reveals some alarming facts:

- The rate of imprisonment in New Zealand is now second only to the US among Western countries. Yet the rate of offending has been in decline for some years. Our society has simply become more vindictive.
- Although the new prison has a good programme for rehabilitating prisoners before release, New Zealand has hardly any separate facilities for rehab, compared with a country like Canada. It is a proven fact that a more humane regime reduces the rate of re-offending for all but the most recalcitrant.
- Very many inmates come from fractured families, have dropped out of school early and may be illiterate. Some have hardly ever lived a normal life.
- The government is proposing to double bunk prisoners. Prime Minister John Key says: "We should do it because it reduces the demand on the NZ taxpayer". Create for yourself a space nine feet by seven. That is the size of a modern prison cell. It contains a bunk and furniture. Imagine two people locked up there for up to 18 hours a day. It is a recipe for increased tension and violence.

We need to monitor carefully the attitudes and proposals of our new government, not only regarding its penal policy. Policies and legislation based on principles of social justice are being compromised or threatened with amendment. We are on the way to creating a less caring, more divided society. Our prison inmates are victims of precisely that.

M.H.

ISSM 1174 – 8931

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

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tui motu twelve years on

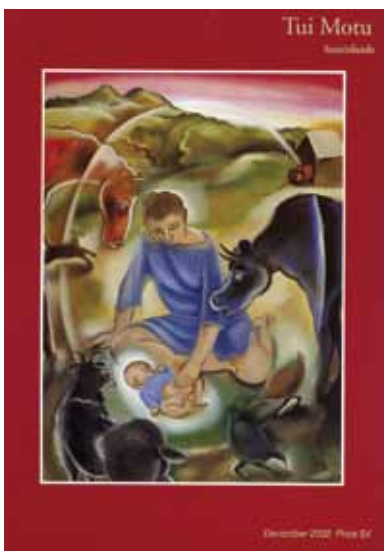
Tui Motu magazine has just completed 12 years of publication. Twelve is a Biblical number of completeness. Twelve tribes; 12 Apostles; 12 baskets of fragments. Therefore, it's a good time for us to look back with a sense of satisfaction and thanksgiving.

The magazine has inevitably evolved during that time, yet it hasn't changed radically. We use the same basic page design, the same fonts. The editorial team is the same. We are still in the Dominican house in Union Street. The front has had a coat of paint. The roof no longer leaks. We have an HRV heating system, so it is not quite so icy cold in the winter.

Even our merry band of helpers, without which we would certainly go broke, has not changed greatly. Suzanne Hannagan and Jim Neilan have been with us from the start. The three religious, Sr Moya, Sr Hazel and Br Henry, have all gone to God, so they have become auxiliaries in another sense. Their places have been taken by Shirley Curran and Brian Rea. And John Vincent makes sure our accounts balance.

We chose from the start not to be an explicitly ecumenical magazine, but to be a Catholic publication looking outwards. That sense is implied in our name. We have, however, received huge support from the other Christian denominations, and some of our most faithful contributors have been of other faiths.

The strength of any monthly magazine is in the quality of its regular writers, and in that respect we have been singularly blessed. Many are priests and religious, but most are lay – and of all denominations. They are, in my opinion, as good as New Zealand produces. It would be invidious to single out writers among the living; the three I shall mention as outstanding are now meeting deadlines in another universe.



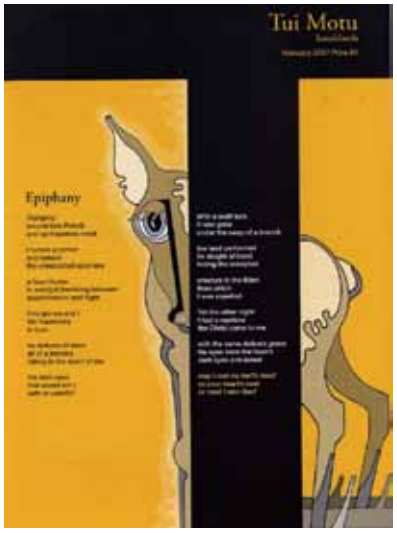
Selwyn Dawson, the doughty Methodist evangelist, wrote frequently in the early editions: how wonderfully he had preserved his skills as a communicator until well into his 80s. Albert Moore, Presbyterian minister and retired Professor of Religious Studies, wrote from the amazing breadth of his knowledge and interest. Specially memorable were his brief, pithy commentaries on religious art.

Finally, our most recent loss (only four days ago as I write) was John Honoré. Onto John's shoulders fell the mantle of the famous *Veritas*, of the New Zealand *Tablet*. His social and political commentaries came to us monthly from *December 1999* until his final piece in the *July* issue. Always relevant, never dull, usually provocative, John was either loved by readers – or hated by a few. He perfectly fulfilled the role of afflicting the comfortable as well as comforting the afflicted. God rest him.

From the beginning we have tried to be a reader's magazine – in the sense that not only is the text 'easy on the eye', but we aim at a style which is accessible to the non-specialist, interested lay reader. You may wish to comment on whether we achieve this.

We take pride also in the illustrations which help enhance the text. Ideas are imparted in a variety of ways, through verse as well as prose – by means of a good illustration and even by choice of colour. Our regular illustrator, Donald Moorhead, came with us from the *Tablet*, and his style has added a certain character to our magazine, for which we are grateful.

From very early in the piece we chose to follow themes, clustering articles which complemented each other. A good recent example would be the Franciscan theme in the *July* issue. We have learned to be careful not to have too many articles on the one general theme, because a good variety of spiritual, theological, scriptural or social justice articles helps to complement the main theme.



Tom Cloher who has done more than anyone to promote *Tui Motu* through the country, likes to use the world smorgasbord to describe the typical contents of each publication. That is our aim – to inform, to delight, to challenge, even to provoke. We would welcome your comment as we start our 13th year. And the number 13 has another connotation!

M.H

the restriction of rite 3 of reconciliation

. . . further to discussions in TM April (p4) and May (p5)

When I was a student in fourth form our wise R.E. teacher incorporated one of the best known techniques for learning a topic – he asked us to teach one topic each to our fellow classmates. Some 40 plus years later I can still recall the topic I had to learn and teach – ***scandal***.

According to the *Catholic Catechism* we used in class, scandal was caused whenever anything came between a person and their relationship with God. Anything that stopped a person from growing closer to God and having access to God's grace was a scandal. It appears, therefore, that forbidding parishioners access to *Rite 3 of Reconciliation* is such a scandal.

Celebrations of *Rite 3* in recent years have seen full community involvement. It is clearly apparent that the Holy Spirit has been at work, guiding many people back to God's grace in this wonderful sacrament. When upwards of 600 people have gathered together as a community in the one Reconciliation celebration it is clear that people are hungering for the close intimate relationship with God which is at the core of our lifelong journey.

To see that number drop by over 75 percent because of a ruling that does not recognise the *sensus fidelium* is surely a cause of scandal. A hierarchical ruling has prevented hundreds of people (and that is just locally) improving their relationship with God. *Rite 3* has been a far more uplifting and heartening experience than any individual confession ever was, and after again experiencing *Rite 2* before Easter we were left with an empty shell of a feeling – totally dissimilar to the hopefulness of the Empty Tomb. The community dimension in *Rite 3* had given a far deeper meaning to the Sacrament than the individual rites (*1 and 2*) ever provided.

According to Pope John XXIII, Vatican II was to open the windows of the church to let in some fresh air, to breathe a new Pentecost. After the Council the spirit of renewal blew through this church that we love. Unfortunately, for many in positions of power within the hierarchy, this spirit of renewal became too threatening. There seemed to be an organisational fear and insecurity, leading to fierce restrictions and rigid rites and rubrics. This exercise of authority has actually undermined the confidence of so many Catholics when it fails to take the voice of the laity into account.

It is as though the reforms of the Council have been sidelined in order for the hierarchy to maintain control. Sadly, by implementing a return to pre-Vatican II rites and rubrics, the effect is to drive people away from the church. As Fr. Daniel O'Leary wrote recently in the London *Tablet* (*24 January, 2009*): "People have not given up on God, or in the spiritual reality of their own lives. What people are giving up on is going to church. It is in the institution, not God, that they are losing faith. They wait for a call. The call is to transcendence, to a new birth, to people's own deepest and most original potentialities."

There can be no clearer example of this than what happened when *Rite 3* was refused to parishioners in New Plymouth. From a constantly increasing number of people attending *Rite 3* (600 to 700 prior to Christmas), the numbers fell to 150 – 170 attending *Rite 2* prior to Easter.

From what I have been able to discern, one of the main reasons why *Rite 3* has become restricted is that Vatican theologians see a crisis concerning the declining practice of individual confessions, and that the laity are suffering from a weakening of their sense of sin.

I wonder how these curial officials got this perception, because there has been no hint of having consulted the laity about their sense of sin. I also wonder how the Vatican officials can equate the need for individual confession with the early church – confession, then, was only a once-in-a-lifetime event.

It seems to me that the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives and drives of the laity, drawing us into a closer relationship with God through community celebration. I pray that our hierarchy is also able to see the Holy Spirit active and holy in God's people and allows our bishops to have a proper sense of Episcopal authority and give recognition to the *sensus fidelium*. *Rite 3* is a holy and wholesome means of drawing us closer to God.

Let there be no more curial scandal – let the people continue to deepen their loving relationship with God by having access to *Rite 3*.

Peter Costello (New Plymouth)

ministry in nz prisons

By joining the Sisters of the Presentation Veronica Casey found a new way of life and an inspiring job

My first contact with prisons was in Auckland when I was doing a psychiatric nursing course many years ago. One of our visits was to Mount Eden prison, and that made a huge impact on me – seeing the conditions the prisoners lived under. I still have an image of a man curled up in a foetal position at a table at 4 o'clock in the afternoon with a plate of food by him untouched. I thought to myself: they come in with very low self-esteem and are locked up for up to 18 hours a day in a cell with three others, which reinforces their status in life. They will go from this back into the outside world, reoffend and be straightaway back in here.

I also visited the Maximum Security facility at Paremoremo and met a nurse who was running a new unit focusing on basic life skills. When she got started she realised just how basic it had to be – teaching the inmates how to say 'good morning', how to hold a conversation, how to sit down at a table. They were *very* basic skills indeed. And many of them had been in prison for years.

Later on, I worked as a restorative justice facilitator in the Court-Referred Pilot. While it didn't take me into prisons it kept alive my interest in the plight of offenders and of victims, and highlighted how dealing with relationships is so vital to healing and reconciliation.

When I was doing my training in the Presentation Order I came across the *Get on the Bus* programme in California, which once a year takes children to visit their mothers in prison on Mothers' Day. It was often the only time in the year when the children saw their mothers or even that families came together. There were reports of some families who met for the very first time at the prison. It taught me how disruptive a prison sentence is to normal human relations.

In Dublin a little later, I became a prison visitor at the Wheatfield Men's Prison and I ran a meditation group there. There was not very much going on for the inmates. One of the things I became very aware of was the lack of sensory stimulation for them. They would simply lie on their beds all day with the constant background noise of jangling keys and prison doors clanging shut. I remember one man in the group spent the whole meditation hour simply handling and smelling an autumn leaf I had given him. The men never saw the natural world outside; they never saw a flower or a sunrise. The music I used had birds singing, water running and waves crashing. I could never change it as those were the sounds they never got to hear. Some of the men put on *Othello* while I was there. I saw those inmates acting out their own lives: it was very poignant.

becoming a prison chaplain

Shortly after I returned to New Zealand, Bishop Colin Campbell approached the Presentation Sisters and invited applications for the Catholic chaplaincy at the newly opened Otago Corrections Facility at Milton, 55 km south of Dunedin. After discernment with the Congregation we accepted that this ministry is in line with our charism. When I arrived, the first thing I had to do was to get myself known around the place. Chaplaincy is all about being present for, and available to, the men. It is about being real, human and compassionate – and about listening.

In the course of time I have started a weekly meditation group, I'm involved

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> "No one truly knows a nation until he/she has been inside its jails. A nation should be judged not on how it treats its highest citizens, but how it treats its lowest ones".
>
> *Nelson Mandela*

▷▷

in taking classes, and inviting church volunteers to run classes. We have had the Myers Briggs and a Dreams Workshop, both of which have been very popular and help the men get to know themselves. I also look for opportunities for the men to develop confidence, team building and self-belief and have helped them to prepare pageants.

The first of these was at Christmas; we were able to invite outsiders and some 120 or more visitors came. There is a *whare/spiritual centre* on the complex, a beautiful building, more comfortable and less institutional than other parts of the prison, which we use. It has a much more relaxed atmosphere and feels less like a prison. It was wonderful to see the men grow in confidence, learn to work as a team and really show their talents. We had another show at Easter, and now we are working on a third.

There's plenty of talent and creativity. There are also carving groups. Some paint and others write poetry; there are other activities such as craft work (*see below*). Some of our artists have participated in a recent International art competition run by the International Catholic Prison Chaplaincy Association. The top five entries from New Zealand prisons went on to Geneva to be judged. Last time it was run, it was won by a New Zealander. By participating in these activities, the men acquire self-belief and realise that others also have some belief in them.

earning the right to freedom

When the prisoners first arrive at OCF after they are sentenced, they go into the high security area for assessment and after a couple of weeks are given a security rating. The plan is for them to move from high security to low security, but they have to earn it.

When they get work it may be in the Unit to start with doing serving, laundry or cleaning. Then there is work in the kitchen, site laundry, engineering, internal grounds. From there they may get to the dairy farm, external grounds or forestry.

There are five self-care cottages, where some go when they are preparing for release. Some of them may go on *work-to-release*, which means they are in paid employment outside the prison. In these cottages they do their own cooking and budgeting and cleaning, and learn to look after themselves. But if they offend, they could lose it all and go back to square one.

The huge danger within any prison is institutionalisation. After the men have been inside for a time they seem to move into a state of passivity. They become emotionally numb. For instance, if a family member were to die, they will tell you they keep their emotions on hold until they get out. They daren't show their real feelings among their fellows.

When they come into prison they are put into prison uniform. However, in the self-care stage they can wear their own clothes again, and that is one of the hardest transitions. Life in prison is hard. There is intimidation and stand-over tactics – we often know little of what really goes on in the cells. 'Narking' – informing on their mates – is the worst possible crime in prison.

Indeed, if they have been inside for a long time they come to a point of being really scared of getting out. They have been behind walls too long. It may be the only life they have ever known.

Those on life sentences who have been inside for 18 or 19 years really don't know anything different. We take all life's changes as we go and don't think about them, but when you haven't experienced those and have to face them all together after 10, 15 or 20 years it's overwhelming. Just think for example of all the changes in communication, the money changes etc.

The self-care men go down to Balclutha once a week to shop for groceries. The first thing they notice is how fast everything is moving. They've forgotten what traffic is like. One 24-year-old told me he had never in his life been inside a supermarket!

Opportunites for reintegration are extremely limited, and there is no halfway house for prisoners down in the south to help the transition to life outside. They leave prison and are thrown into a bewilderingly strange world. They may be used to lying down on their beds at four o'clock in the afternoon, and they know no other way. Yet they have to learn to survive outside; it's very difficult for them.

At first, they feel as if they have *criminal* tattooed across their foreheads and that everyone is looking at them. Society doesn't easily accept them. If they have succeeded in turning their lives around in prison, they go out a different person from when they came in – but they don't know where they fit and they desperately need support.

If they don't get the support, when the going gets tough they go back to where they are accepted and end up back in prison.

The value system of the men in prison is like that of adolescents, or even little boys. Mostly, the concepts of love and trust are unknown to them, having had lives of constantly being let down, abandoned, abused. They may have been kicked out of home when they were very young, so when have they ever learnt to trust another human being?

As chaplains, we get a lot of referrals and often the men just want someone to talk to. The advantage we have is that they can talk to us in confidence, and we have the time to sit and talk. We are not part of the Corrections 'system'. We can be their advocates or we can be a go-between with their family. When they first arrive we may need to help them establish family contacts.

the good news in prison

In this sort of work we look for small miracles. When I first started at Milton a man called out to me one day: "Who are you, Miss?" I told him, and he asked to come and see me. He was a man about 45. He said to me: "I've had enough. I am morally, spiritually and emotionally bankrupt. I am despicable."

The man's basic problem was alcohol. In my mind I always try to help the men separate themselves as persons from what they have done. I told him that whatever he had done, he was still a child of God. He started an amazing spiritual journey from that point.

The Elim Church send food parcels in at Christmas. We distribute them. I arranged that if anyone wanted to write a note of thanks I would pass it on. We received many notes of thanks. At Easter, Knox Church Social Justice Group provided Easter eggs and gifts. This time I didn't ask, but the Knox people received a number of thank you letters. These gestures are really appreciated, and the men experience in some way that they are remembered.

One man said, almost in tears: "I've been in prison for ten years, and no one has ever thought of me before at Christmas. We didn't think we mattered".

Recently, Fr Chris Skinner came in for a sing-a-long with the men and they loved it. It happened to be the birthday of one of the men, so Chris led the others in singing *Happy Birthday* to him. The man told me that had never had 'happy birthday' sung to him before in his life: 37 years. They are all very simple things really.

religious activities

There is a church service for each of the units each week. About eight different church groups come in – there are about 180 volunteers altogether. The service and commitment they provide is invaluable. The church services are good opportunities for socialisation. The men meet and chat together with the visitors, and that teaches them social skills. They also feel accepted for ▷▷

ADOPT-A-CELL

In this country, we are constantly being told that we must lock up those who break the law for longer and longer periods and, preferably, "throw away the key". Huge numbers of people are housed in more and more prisons at immense cost.

We are all familiar with *Matthew 25*, where Jesus says unequivocally: *I was in prison and you visited me.* But Jesus also said: *I was in prison and you did NOT visit me… As long as you did it not to one of these least…*

So what can we do about it?

Most of us are not able to 'visit' a prison. But we can pray. In conjunction with the Caritas Social Justice Week focus, an ***Adopt-a-Cell*** project is being launched. We invite you to focus prayer on a particular cell in a specified unit in one of our prisons.

Miracles will happen if we pray without doubting – Jesus has promised this. And prayer is stronger than chains and prison bars. Let's do it. Let's reform our prison population by prayer.

A prayer card with the allocated cell is available from:
The Senior Catholic Prison Chaplain, P O Box 9, Wellington 6140.
E-mail: kilian@pcsanz.org
Phone: 04-381-3340. Mobile: 021-848-800.

who they are and do not feel like they are being judged.

As Catholic chaplain I take communion to those who request it, but for various reasons we have not had a Mass in the prison – yet.

Illiteracy is a huge problem among the offenders. There are courses in foundational learning. Some men also have one-to-one help with literacy. Some won't admit their illiteracy. They've been ridiculed at school and have dropped out. They don't want to repeat that experience in a group.

One programme which has been very successful in prisons including Milton has been the *Sycamore Tree*, based on the Zacchaeus story. Six men meet over eight two-hour sessions with six people who have been victims of crimes (not theirs). The men have to admit guilt and show remorse. The sessions are intense and challenging, but they have proved very popular.

Some who have completed this course would like to go on to a full restorative justice process, but there is no funding for that – so it is not happening. There is a public perception, brought about by the reporting of high profile cases, that all those in prison are dangerous and must be locked up. If restorative justice were more freely available I'm sure that this public attitude would change.

Mount Eden prison pics: *Paul Freedman*

drugs and alcohol

A high proportion of crimes ending up with imprisonment are the result of drugs or alcohol. Unfortunately drugs still get into prisons, and there is no drugs treatment unit in Otago, although I understand there is to be a drug treatment unit early next year when we go to double bunking.

why is the prison population going up when the crime rate is going down?

Nevertheless there is a shortage of treatment, and we know that drugs are an underlying factor in much offending. And when you have a drug habit you need money so you have to commit crimes to get it. We notice the difference when the men are drug free in the prison. Often they think they can wean themselves on their own, but in fact they need help. It may take multiple convictions before they learn that. There are weekly *Alcoholics Anonymous* meetings. Those who attend seem to respect the confidentiality aspect, and that's good.

some general thoughts

Constantly I hear of offenders who have had abusive childhoods: parents on drugs, violence – I could almost write the script before they tell their story. One man was taught to steal when he was just two years old; he never learnt any feeling of self-worth, never received either love or stability from his home, so he knows no other life. The focus of prevention needs to be at the very beginning. It's very difficult for a young person to move away voluntarily from the only environment he has ever known.

I ask myself why are we having such an increase in the prison population when the crime rate has been going down, not up. New Zealand is now number two in the world in the rate of imprisonment, second only to the United States. Yet in some European countries the rate of imprisonment has come down – and with it, the crime rate!

Our philosophy here is to make good neighbours of the men, because they are all going to be released eventually and may come and live next-door to you or me. The men are given the opportunity to learn to use their liberty responsibly. OCF is a clean, decent environment, and they can see the hills and there are open spaces around them. It's not Mount Eden – but it's not the garden of Eden either!

the value of religious faith

Planting seeds is what we do, and those who find God find hope – something that is missing in their lives. This helps them to make a change. Once they discover there is a God and that they are loved and cared for, they *will* change. We try to provide support for those who desire to do so because following a Christian path in the prison can be very difficult.

In the meditation group I run there are usually between six and ten, which is big enough for one group. They say that coming regularly to it makes a difference. Some drift in and out, but most keep on coming. As long as they aren't disruptive, I am happy to keep them even if their motives for coming are a bit mixed.

For me, this work is a part of my religious vocation. Our foundress, Nano Nagle, would pass the local prison in Cork every morning and see the heads of prisoners stuck on the spikes. She visited prisons, sometimes paid for the release of prisoners and left money for prisoners in her will. Prisoners are the ultimate outcasts in our society, and our charism calls us to be with the marginalised. I often think that if Jesus were on earth today, he would be alongside me in the prison. Indeed he is already there. ■

when I was in prison you visited me – 1

Jan Adams is a regular prison visitor at the Otago Corrections Facility. She and her husband Howard have been encouraged to get involved there by the Catholic chaplain, Sr Veronica Casey

My husband, Howard, and I have been involved with justice issues for many years – and continue to, as Presentation Associates. I've always had an interest in prisoners. I feel sure that no one is ever totally bad. Sr Veronica Casey had encouraged Howard and myself to go to Milton to a *Volunteers Training Day*. We were happy to go. Afterwards, I offered to be a regular visitor to a prisoner, on-to-one. I wanted to be a friend to someone who had no friends outside.

The Training Day was overseen by the Prison authorities and dealt with Health and Safety and security issues. We were told all the rules. I was already quite nervous knowing we were on the threshold of the prison. We were also warned against being 'conned' by a prisoner, but to date that has never been my experience.

Veronica then arranged for me to start seeing a prisoner who had been in for many years and up to that time had never had a visitor. I shall call him Jack (not his real name). My first reaction, I admit, was fear. But I knew that this was what I wanted to do.

Before you actually go in, you have to apply by phone and be questioned. When I went down the first time I still felt a lot of fear – but I was also quite excited. I was prepared *not* to be shocked. I knew Jack must have committed a serious crime, but I was not interested in finding out what he had done.

I started going once a fortnight to see him, and the meeting can last for as long as two hours. Within reason, you can stay as long as you like. You are searched when you go in as if you were going on an international flight. It's quite a daunting experience.

The time there always passes quickly. I found Jack to be a similar age to some of my own family. We became at ease with each other quite quickly. One thing I learnt – which was astonishing – was that for all those years he had never heard the sound of children's voices, laughing and playing.

At first we used to sit together at the dining table. There would be other men milling around. They would come by and look at you, but they never interfered with us. But usually now we meet in an interview room.

I have never felt frightened of Jack. There was never anything in his body language which was unwelcoming. I always feel a bit sad – especially when I leave. It's a bit like visiting a very sick person and wishing you could make them well.

I discovered in fact that I liked him straight away. I have never pressed him about himself. To begin with I told him a lot about myself and my family. And then I felt able to ask him where he came from and a bit about his own family life. We talked about that at some length, but we have never talked directly about his crime. Veronica has been very helpful, because I'm not always sure how far I should go.

I want to keep Jack's trust. I feel it would be counterproductive ever to go too hard at him. After a visit I worry in case I have said the wrong thing. Recently he wrote to me for the first time, and it was a very touching letter.

You learn that when a person has been shut away for years, there is huge apprehension at the possibility of being allowed out. And Howard and I may be allowed to take him out sometime. I could see the fear in his eyes when we talked about that, even though he truly wants it.

On one occasion he didn't want to see me, even though I had travelled down. Someone said to me: "you shouldn't be bothered with him". But I felt quite differently. I knew in my heart it was because he was afraid of something, and felt he had let me down.

I'm determined to stick by him. At one stage earlier, I did discover what crime he had committed, and for a second I thought to myself: "Am I going to go back?" But when I got there I felt just the same about him.

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A major factor in causing youth offending is truancy, and often this results from the fact that the young person is dyslexic or illiterate. One study found 56 percent of offenders were dyslexic. Learning disabilities predispose young people into antisocial behaviour.

The 'route to offending' starts with difficulties in the classroom, moves through low self-esteem, poor behaviour, school exclusion, and graduates into offending.

Judge Becroft. Principal youth court judge

Howard and I also meet him at the church services. We get to know all the regulars who go. They're all different – unique human beings. Sometimes I ask myself what good is it doing – them being in prison at all, especially some of the younger ones. They have done something quite stupid, but I feel there should be another way of dealing with it – for some, at least.

Often they've been rejected, adopted out – sometimes abused. There is a lot of anger in the way they look back on their childhood. It only requires a moment of madness – and then they are locked away for years.

I often feel very emotional after visiting the prison, on the drive back to town. I think: *There but for the grace of God go I!* Things have gone wrong for them because society has been 'wrong'. The problem is more with us than with them.

I have to be careful who among my friends I tell about my prison visiting. They might think me mad – or simply wasting my time. My sons, of course, know that I'm a bit mad! Some of my friends are very encouraging. Howard and I see what Sr Veronica does, and we are delighted to be part of her work. Howard has also recently committed himself to visiting an OCF prisoner.

If Jack were to leave prison or if he didn't want to go on, then I would be waiting for Veronica to find someone else. I feel it is a privilege to do this work. It has increased my sadness and compassion for people on the edges of society. I simply feel pain when I meet someone who is so broken. ■

. . . you visited me – 2

Another who responded to the appeal to help is Eileen McRae, of Forbury parish

I like to help people. When Sr Veronica came to St Bernadette's and spoke to us about working in the prison I came out of church, looked at my friend Margaret McTear, and said: "can we help? I'll go if you go."

We didn't want to go and talk with the prisoners on a one-to-one basis. So Margaret suggested that we might try craft work. She's very gifted in that sphere, and I went as her assistant. That's how it began.

We also go down to the Catholic liturgy service – on a Monday evening every six weeks or so. And we go down to run a craft work group every fourth Monday. We started off with the training day, and then about a year ago the craft group got started.

We often meet in the cultural centre (*whare*) or we meet in a classroom. There are between five and eight prisoners, and that's as many as we could easily cope with. They're a mixed group – in age and in the length of time they have been imprisoned. Some are very artistic and others have just come to learn.

At first they were very shy – eyes cast down. But the ice was soon broken. We like to introduce Christian themes – but we avoid being too preachy. They're now quite comfortable with us; they would want us to come down more frequently, but that's not so easy because of our other commitments. They really enjoy it and show it.

At Christmas we proposed that they might construct a Nativity scene, and they agreed. They dressed the figures of the kings and the holy family. Margaret had provided stand up figures, and they did all the decoration. The scene was on display when they had their Christmas production, which we were all invited to. They were very proud of what they had done, and they enjoyed the others admiring it.

Many of them have learned to make cards to send home. They always have the option on what they will do. For instance, some are going to make cards for Fathers' Day next month. It helps them keep in touch with family.

We did something similar for Easter – providing props for their Easter tableau. I saw the Christmas one, but missed the Easter tableau because I was away. Last month we constructed a banner on the theme *Fishers of Men*. I learnt that we could not splash around the colour red, because its one of the 'mob' colours.

The men are very polite and have become very relaxed with us. Sometimes we talk about religious themes, but they mostly like to talk about their families. It's all very sociable, which is another reason they would wish us to come more frequently. I hope that what we do will sow a few seeds of faith.

I was very apprehensive at first – but not now! The prisoners and staff treat us well. We have to ask permission for any materials we take in. No knives! One day we asked what they would like to work on as a project. One of the smart guys said: "a ladder – a big tall one!" We have plenty of laughs.

You become quite attached to the men, and worry how they will cope when they are released. Will they go back into the drug scene in order to find friendship?

The ones who come to liturgy are often very deep thinking. Sometimes they will give a testimony which shows them coming to terms with what they have done. I think the craft group also gives us signs of hope in the way they progress. They seem to appreciate working with religious themes. It's a good work, and I am really happy to be able to do it. ■

is religion a cause of violence and war?

Canon Paul Oestreicher asks why it is that world religions which ostensibly seek the paths of peace and justice, often are guilty of promoting war and violence. He suggests that it is a lapse into tribalism.

Polly Toynbee, regular columnist of the British left-wing paper *The Guardian*, maintains that religion is a curse, and it needs to be eliminated from the civilised world if peace is ever to happen. What she suggests is that religion is one of the principal factors in international conflict, and that the world would, therefore, be better off without it.

Canon Paul Oestreicher, in a lecture delivered in New Zealand during May, admits that on the surface Toynbee appears to be right. And yet... and yet... equally, is there not an overriding consciousness of God who is the salvation of us all?

Paul cited his own childhood experience as a refugee coming to New Zealand from Nazi Germany. It was the Quakers particularly who made him and his parents welcome: their practical, welcoming pacifism impressed him in youth and has stayed with him ever since. So, when he returned to Europe as a young man, he chose to work as a 'bridge-builder' between East and West during the time of the Cold War.

judaism and the justification of war

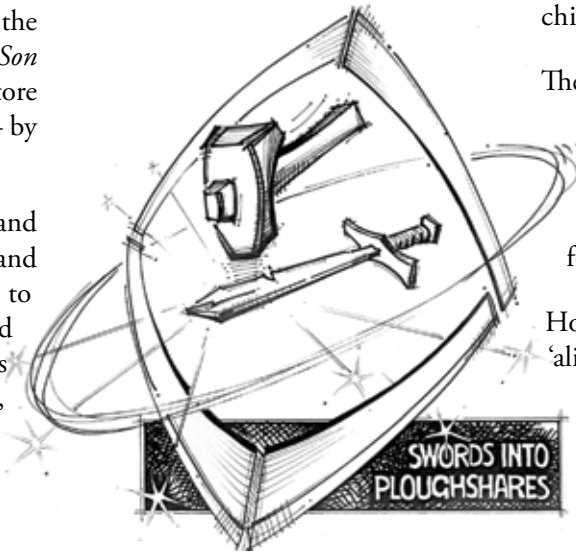
The 'orthodox' teaching during the long and turbulent period of the First Testament was that God fights on the side of Israel. God is hailed as the 'Lord of Hosts', standing at the head of Israel's armies. King David is portrayed as the princely ideal – the warrior king. And the *Messianic Son of David* who is to come will restore the power of the Jewish kingdom – by force if necessary.

However, there was also another strand to Judaic religion. The prophets and the psalms constantly urge Israel to do better than other nations – and not by conflict. Both the prophets Isaiah and Micah, for instance, bid the people to "change their swords into ploughshares". Likewise, the Psalmist calls for "justice and peace to embrace".

The final defeat of the Jewish nationalists at the hands of the Romans in 70 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem with its Temple meant that the Jews were dispersed among other peoples and lost all political power. Judaism survived 'outside power', and ceased to be militant from that time until the establishment of the state of Israel in the last century.

the gospel of jesus

Jesus is the last prophet of Judaism. His vision is countercultural. The new 'kingdom of God' which Jesus preaches is not a restoration of Jewish power in any sense. Its strength is in faith, not in temporal power. Jesus offers a challenge not merely to the Jewish establishment but to the whole Imperial system, then embodied in the empire of Rome.



Jesus proclaims God to be the *Father* of all humans, not just of the Jews. If all people equally can claim God as Father, then that makes them brothers and sisters. Love of neighbour is a universal gospel value. To "love one's enemies" is truly to be a child of God.

The first Christians, like the Jews, were scattered throughout the Roman Empire and were equally powerless. They were often persecuted. They gave their lives for their beliefs as Jesus had done.

However, Jesus continued to be still 'alive and present' in their mutual love which was the basis of their communities. This value became so convincing that eventually even the Emperor himself was converted to this new faith.

The consequence of Constantine becoming Christian was peace and prosperity for the Christian Church. The down side was that Christianity itself took on a leadership role in European society. Its bishops became like Imperial authorities. The Pope

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grew to rival the secular powers of mediaeval Europe. This is a major factor in the history of the Middle Ages. (The Pope continues to have a ceremonial army to protect him in the Swiss Guard.)

In a sense this transformation of Christianity into a secular power can be called a retreat into tribalism. The church began to have its own armies. To die for Christ in war was to ensure beatitude in heaven.

Christianity, then, proceeded to confront the other great religion of the Middle East, Islam. The Crusades were launched against these 'infidels' – or 'faithless ones'. The religious wars were proclaimed by the Pope and preached by his bishops. Islam of course responded in kind.

These great faiths worship the same God. Yet both had become infected by the same sort of militaristic spirit. The iconography of both can be seen to condone violence. There is a concept on both sides of the Holy War. The glorification of war continues even into our own age, and even influences our commemoration of Anzac day. Guns are fired and military salutes are taken.

pacifism and christianity

It was not only the Quakers who have reacted against this process of clothing religion with violence. There have been many non-violent Christian groups, like the Mennonites. The Franciscan spirit is essentially one of peace. Christian pacifists continue to flourish in all denominations.

The underlying pacifism of the Gospel is undeniable. Theologians since the Middle Ages struggled with this evident anomaly – the contrast between the tradition of the 'Lord of Hosts' and the peace-loving Jesus.

What they came up with was the theory of JUST WAR. The canon lawyers spelt out the conditions for this. In fact, the conditions they laid down are so stringent that no war in history has ever fully complied with them.

In 1945 a nuclear weapon was used for the first time. Since it seemed to be effective in ending the Japanese War, protagonists proclaimed the concept of a JUST NUCLEAR WAR. However, the horror of a nuclear holocaust is such that in the West the only answer has seemed to be total NON-VIOLENCE. There appears to have been no parallel development in Islam.

The idea that you have to use force to prevent force appears to be a humanist argument. The problem has always been that, even from a humanist viewpoint, once you start to justify the use of force – where do you stop?

zionism

Meanwhile, after 20 centuries of powerlessness, there has been a reappearance of Jewish militarism. In a stunning revival of tribalism, Israel since 1947 has become the most militarised state in the world. Israel today 'boxes well above its weight'.

Having been put down by Christianity for all those centuries, Israel now seeks international respect in its new-found power. Political power through military prowess has become a 'religious' imperative for the Israelis.

Israel has rekindled the dilemma of justifying the use of force as a way to attain justice. The warrior tradition has become contemporary. Even peace-loving Buddhists have justified the use of force against the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka.

conclusion

Canon Oestreicher closed with some consoling words. He calls himself a "hopeful pessimist". Intellectually, he admits that he has doubts regarding non-violence; but in faith he sees it to be the hope of the future. Thus, he can see justification for maintaining the ANZAC tradition here in New Zealand – but only if the subtext becomes the main text. The subtext is "..so that it may never happen again".

We New Zealanders, Oestreicher suggests, need to re-kindle our collective memories, not to spur us to conflict, but to abolish conflict. A good example is to be found among the young people of Germany: their memory of two World Wars has created for them a real sense of the futility of all war. That is the hope for all our futures. ■

This lecture was delivered by Canon Oestreicher to the University of Otago Theology department, May 2009

carnage in afghanistan

Every day they pray to be spared the 'visit'– two officers coming up the garden path.

The Afghanistan conflict is not the Falklands war, and the national mood is different. But under the surface, not entirely. The Falklands service held at the end of the conflict in St Paul's Cathedral in 1982 was a clash between the triumphalism of Margaret Thatcher and her press allies, and the more liberal mood of the Church of England. A sort of compromise was found – "God Save the Queen" was sung, but the loss of Argentine as well as British lives was remembered in prayer.

I covered the service as a journalist from *The Times*. The seats immediately behind the press, I became aware, were filled by soberly dressed middle-aged civilians, men and women, all looking mentally and physically crushed and dazed. The colour of the men's ties said it all – black. These were parents of servicemen killed in action. We have glimpsed more like them recently, as the coffins return from Helmand.

But for the grace of God, I was aware throughout the service, I could have been sitting one row back. My son had been a member of the crew of the Falklands flagship, the aircraft carrier *Hermes*. But it, and he, returned in one piece, on his 19th birthday.

After the service I went across the road for a pint, and got talking to a chief petty officer in uniform who had also attended the service. I admitted my double connection to the event, and he explained he was there on behalf of something called *Royal Naval Welfare*. He told me a sensational story on condition I never reported it – a promise that has surely lapsed after 27 years.

Another section of seating was reserved for a group of women and small children. At the start of the service the congregation stood for the entry of dignitaries, senior officers, politicians, and eventually Margaret Thatcher herself. The Queen was to take her place last. But this group refused to stand. A bemedalled and gold-braided army officer stormed up to my friend the chief petty officer, and demanded: "You there! Who are these people? Make them stand up!"

"They are Royal Navy widows and orphans, sir," he replied icily. "You make them." The officer retreated, mortified. The widows had decided that the loss of their menfolk was entirely Mrs Thatcher's fault, and no way would they rise to their feet for her. They would stand for the Queen only. This, too, was part of the national mood.

I did not lose a son. But I lost many nights' sleep over him. Our relations were probably average for fathers and their teenage offspring. Sparks flew occasionally, and sometimes we had fun. Beneath the surface, however, nothing had prepared me for how deep these things can go. I would rate it the most difficult emotional experience of my entire life, by a factor of ten. Regularly after three hours in bed I would return to the kitchen to twiddle the knobs on the radio, hoping for just one last bulletin from the Minister of Defence's lugubrious spokesman. It was more than obsessive. I was living in another world.

Driving back from the theatre in late May, we heard on the news that "two major units had been lost by enemy action". Neither my wife nor I spoke for 20 minutes, so excruciating was the pain. Part of me was in the South Atlantic, 18 years old myself, trapped below decks in a sinking ship. *May one pray*, someone asked a vicar towards the end of the Second World War, *that the approaching doodlebug falls somewhere else, killing people we don't know instead of people we do?* I prayed, God forgive me, that one of these ships at the bottom of the cold Atlantic wasn't the *Hermes*. (In fact they were HMS *Coventry* and the *Atlantic Conveyor*.)

That is an experience that is becoming familiar to countless service families in Britain as the Afghanistan death toll rises. Although they hear reports of "another death in action", they don't at first know who. Every day they pray to be spared the dreaded 'visit' – two officers in uniform coming up the garden path. "Next of kin have been informed." And someone else's world has fallen apart. Young men join the services knowing that death could be part of the deal. Indeed, it is in the culture that if you're not scared, you're a danger. The services know how to make frightened men fight.

Unfortunately they do not know how to make the vigil at home, with that constant dread in the pit of one's stomach, bearable. There is no defensive action available, no flak jacket that can protect the heart. It is those who wait – helpless – who pay the higher price.

Clifford Longley

(reprinted with thanks from the London Tablet*)*


Mother Aubert, taken in Rome in 1919

letters on the go

the correspondence of Suzanne Aubert

This splendid volume of the letters of Mother Aubert is a literary milestone for New Zealand and for New Zealand Catholics.

Maybe we can hope that it is another stage along her journey towards beatification.

Jessie Munro has performed yet an outstanding service to the Sisters of Compassion and to the wider public by producing this selection from the correspondence of Mother Aubert. It complements her splendid biography, *The Story of Suzanne Aubert*, Montana *Book of the Year* for 1997. Unlike most editors of such collections from famous people, Jessie Munro has wisely chosen to intersperse these letters with a narrative to provide context and to link up events. This, together with the lengthy introduction, enables the reader to imbibe the story of this remarkable and wonderful woman, even those who haven't read the earlier biography.

Suzanne Aubert lived to the age of 91 and retained her vigour of mind right up to her final days. Hence her surviving correspondence is huge. This selection represents about half the total – and yet it is sadly deficient. The majority of the letters by far come from her later life – especially from her time in Rome when she was battling for the official recognition of the Sisters of Compassion. Of the hundreds of letters she wrote to her family in her early days in New Zealand, practically none survive. All we have are a few letters to friends together with samples of their correspondence to her. Her letters only began to be regularly kept when she reached the status of a foundress and when her charitable work made a real public impact. By that time she was 50 years old. So the first half of her life is underrepresented because the letters no longer exist.

Fortunately, that does no stop us absorbing, from what we have got and from her later letters, a wonderful sense of her character, her vitality, her spirit of fun, her serious religious sense and her piety, especially in the correspondence with her Sisters. Her vibrancy of spirit comes through in every line. Only when dealing with clerical or secular authority does she resort to Victorian formalities, and then her character stays hidden behind the clichés of the period. For the rest, one can almost hear her voice and the force of her personality coming through. You feel that what she says is what she feels and what she means. There is never any pretence or diplomatic understatement.

The book's title *Letters on the Go* expresses her busy everyday existence. Like a good All Black captain Suzanne led from the front. Her letters are penned on the run, often late at night after a full day of nursing, visiting, gardening, negotiating or simply praying and conversing. Suzanne believed in having her hands in the tub or at the sink, a spirit she has bequeathed in abundance to her Congregation.

Sometimes, therefore, the letters can become catalogues of information and instructions, albeit spontaneous,

> Correspondence is mutual recognition and action, a way of loving and seeking love, of virtual touching and being touched, all crucial for human health and survival. For both writer and recipient, a letter is an extension of daily life. Even when there is dissent or hostility in a communication, identity is acknowledged.
>
> This was especially important in the 19th Century when for the first time people en masse learned to read and write; and when also they left their home towns and hamlets in waves for alien industrial cities or unknown dots on the surface of the globe.
>
> The gift of expanding literacy was well used; letters had real currency in people's lives, whether they were simply family epistles or beautifully crafted exchanges between kindred souls, each animating the heart and intellect of the other.
>
> The letter itself, with the writer's touch actually lingering on the page, is an artefact to be treasured, and the safe passage of mail became an almost religious duty and dedication. (*Introduction pp6-8*)

good-humoured and matter-of-fact. "I was glad to hear the patients are all right again," she writes to Sr Carmel in Hiruharama. "You must have received the braid for Father's coats. It was duly posted. We have received a new postulant from Ch-ch last Sunday, but she had to go straight to bed very ill. Now about the bugs. I will try to find something to wash everything with that might kill them... There is no need of troubling about blue veils for the novices. They will travel in cotton goods. We do not want bugs here.

"Love from all to all. Let us all try to pray hard and storm heaven. It is late and I do not feel very well. Goodbye. God bless you all. Your affectionate Mother in Christ..."(*pp 227-8*).

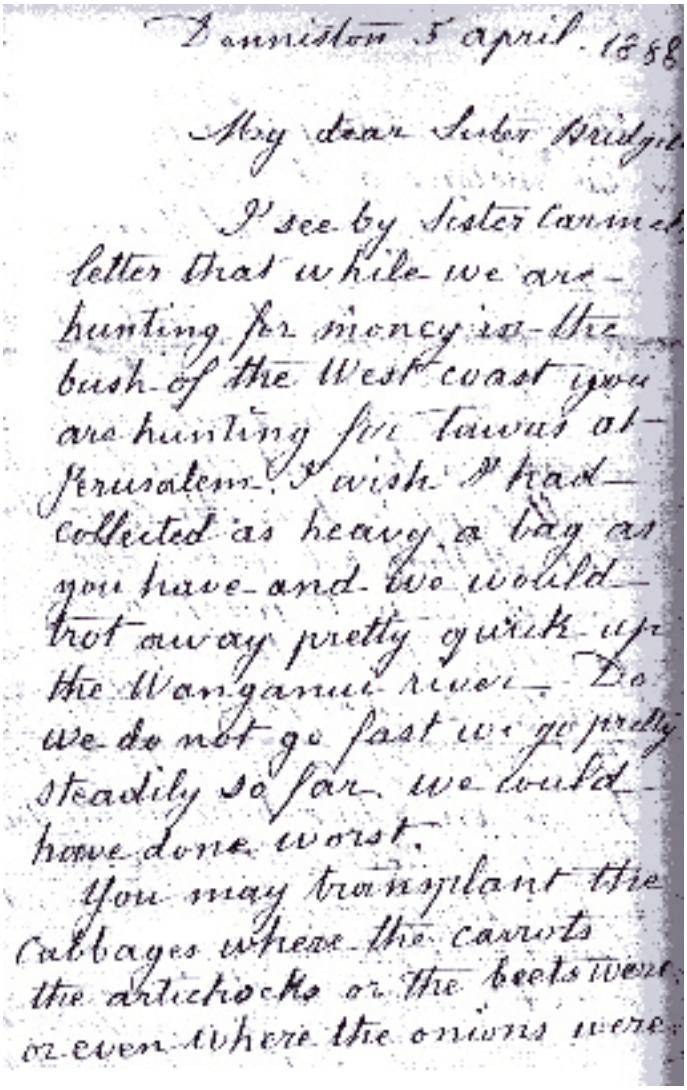
Her English was fluent and colloquial although there is the occasional quaintness of expression – and she never mastered the *..ght* at the end of words. She was equally fluent in Maori and composed highly practical phrase-books for English into Maori and French into Maori. Her handwriting was clear and bold – even into old age, as the sample will show. Copperplate without frills.

What we do not find – unusual in the letters of Religious Founders – is detailed spiritual direction. It is likely therefore that her instruction and guidance was largely by word of mouth. What we have, and this is specially precious, is an extended text written in 1915 when she was in Rome, entitled *Letter to the Novices.* It is composed in the form of a catechism of questions and answers. It is phrased in the piety of the uncomplicated Frenchwoman that Suzanne was. Nevertheless it also contains great wisdom and practicality, and it is no surprise that the Sisters have included the text in their Directory.

Her other letters from Rome constantly express her anxiety and love for the Sisters in New Zealand. But they also provide a diary, not only of her relentless and successful campaign to win Vatican approval for her Congregation in the face of opposition from two of the New Zealand bishops, but also of the way she spent her days there. There are illuminating descriptions of Italian devotions, of the poverty of Rome amid all the splendour of the Eternal City, of the way the local people treat animals – and countless other vignettes of observation.

She seemed to spend her spare time either helping to nurse victims of war or of a terrible earthquake. Or she went the rounds visiting the shrines and countless churches of the city. Her favourite was the church of the Ara Coeli, which has traditional devotions at Christmas to the child Jesus – the Bambino. This impressed Suzanne deeply.

Perhaps the scenes from Bethlehem and Nazareth reminded her of all the vulnerable and abandoned youngsters her Sisters were caring for back home. Children were always her special care. Her later letters are often laced with references to the childhood of Jesus.


Dannistown 5 april 1888

My dear Sister Bridget

I see by Sister Carmel's letter that while we are hunting for money in the bush of the West coast you are hunting for lambs at Jerusalem. I wish I had collected as heavy a bag as you have and we would trot away pretty quick up the Wanganui river. Do we do not go fast we go pretty steadily so far we could have done worst.

You may transplant the cabbages where the carrots the artichocks or the beets were or even where the onions were

Letter written by Mother Aubert to Sr Bridget at Hiruharama. Suzanne Aubert travelled extensively during 1889 collecting money to replace the first church, burnt down in 1888

Jessie Munro has once again offered us a banquet of delight. It is written with an eye to the general reading public. There will no doubt be complete volumes of Mother Aubert's writings including all her letters, compiled for the cause of her Beatification. But it is important that Catholics in particular – and New Zealanders in general – interest themselves in this process. Jessie Munro's latest offering should provide a stimulus.

In recent times a lot of energy has been spent on transporting relics and icons of other 19th Century French religious figures throughout New Zealand. That's fine.

I would venture to say, however, that Mother Aubert stands apart from the rest. She belongs to us. She embraced this country and lived the greater part of her life here. Her legacy to us is a practical, down-to-earth, compassionate Christianity that singularly reflects the national character. Her beatification would be a great affirmation of all that is best in the Christian and Catholic heritage of Aotearoa – and Jessie Munro's two volumes contribute abundantly towards it.

M.H.

***Letters on the go**: the correspondence of Suzanne Aubert*

– edited by Jessie Munro
Bridget Williams Books 2009
635 pp Price: $59.99

Engaging in the ceremony of Wati Ngintaka

a journey int

Trish McBride follows
Songlines in the 'red c
savours their

They call it the Red Centre. And red indeed it is! Red earth, red monoliths when they infrequently appear, red corrugated roads for as far as the eye can see. We were going as students to a very different learning space, as guests of a Pitjantjatjara clan of Aboriginal Australians. They call themselves Anangu. And they speak Pitjantjatjara which is one of the 250 or so surviving or so linguistically separate languages of indigenous people in Australia.

Endless spaces with a sparse covering of scrub, now and then a line of gums in a dry river bed, more frequent groves of young desert oaks, standing like fringed pencils a couple of metres high. The occasional dingo. Bands of wild camels, the equivalent of super-sized rabbits, but not enough resources or people to tackle the problem. Their forebears were once the only transport into this remote area but when road, rail and air travel arrived they were simply turned loose. And thrived.

We travelled by a four-wheel-drive mini-bus from Alice Springs, with a stop for a brief acquaintance with Uluru/Ayers Rock and a dramatic unexpected sunset on a grey day. Then headed over the border into South Australia and a few hundred kilometres west into the Homeland of our hosts.

We were briefed along the way with an introduction to Aboriginal thought and understanding of the earth. The exploits of the ancestors produced the landscape. Those stories as they are re-told, sung and celebrated are keeping the landscape in existence. Creation has to be continually re-vitalised by the spiritual attention of the people. The ancestors are not of the distant past, but of the now in a timeless way. This has echoes of the Jewish understanding of their stories: Exodus and Passover are a continuous present into which the community re-immerses itself each year.

And so we met Lee Bradey and his wife Leah, who took us digging for maku (witchetty grubs) which we ate when they'd been cooked on the fire. Tasted all right, almost like sweet corn. It's the idea that's still a bit of a problem! They live in the roots of a particular shrub, and have to be extricated with considerable effort for not a lot of food. But that was the story of the traditional women's lives. They were the gatherers and the men were the hunters. Their kitchen gear consisted of a digging stick, a wooden bowl and a grinding-stone. Witchetty grubs, high in protein, were what the babies were weaned onto. We heard the stories and engaged with the inma (ceremonies) of the Wati Ngintaka (Perentie Lizard Man) who created, and creates still, the landscape of the area. We were on a pilgrimage along their Songline, with stops at the places where the various incidents are still embedded and embodied in the rocks, caves and water-holes.

We were sleeping in canvas swags under the stars and, miles from any towns, they were scintillatingly awesome. And the very chilly desert dawns were spectacular. As was the morning display of pink underwings as the flock of galahs took off from the gums. It had been a relief to hear that because it was winter, all the snakes and scorpions were already hibernating! The flies weren't.

At the second camp-site we were introduced to Peter Nyaningu and his wife Mildred. He had already been described to us as a 'first contact' person, the term for those who can remember their first meeting with a white person. It seems he is about 75, and was probably seven or eight when his father guided whitefella photographer ethnologist Charles Mountford into the

o the interior

s the trail of Aboriginal
entre' of Australia – and
Biblical echoes

Peter and his wife Mildred with music sticks

area of the Mann Range around 1940. There's a great photo of Peter's dad in his traditional splendour. And we learned that if you don't wear clothes, you don't have pockets, so the traditional hunters carried their precious kangaroo sinews and other small possessions in their hair, in a type of chignon called pukuti.

Peter and Mildred sat with us round the camp-fire. It was something of a surprise to hear him begin speaking by preaching the Christian Gospel. He spoke of Jesus and of Moses. And told us how he'd run away from the mission school in Ernabella as a child, but returned as an adult, had studied theology and had been ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1984.

He pulled out of his case two red books. One was called Tjukurpa Palya, and featured a cross. We already knew 'palya' as a most useful word: 'hello', 'thank you', 'good', 'ok', 'right?'. And that 'Tjukurpa' is a most profound word which encompasses their creation story, the sacred foundation of spiritual law, lore and practice, and much more.

Genesis 1

The combination was new to us. The companion book's title was the familiar Good News. Peter's two bibles had helped him learn English as he worked from the Pitjantjatjara edition to the English one and back again.

There were several full page illustrations in colour. The depiction of Genesis 1 has a black Adam and Eve, koalas in a gum tree, a dingo, emu, kangaroo, and platypus. And, somewhat strangely, in this delightful piece of inculturation, a zebra and an antelope! Moses was mentioned again and again, and it was not hard to understand the appeal to Anangu of stories of a leader who led his people out of oppression and into freedom in the desert. The table of contents listed amongst the others Matthew-ku, Markaku, Luke-aku, John-ku, Paulalu. I was intrigued to know whether or how he fitted together their traditional Anangu stories with his Christian understanding, so asked "Peter, do you have two stories, then?" His response was to clasp his hands with fingers interlaced and said "They are like this!" and "God created the ancestors".

Another story was about the local section of the Seven Sisters Songline, which runs the length of the whole country. We saw the cave where, guided by the wise eldest sister, they had hidden from Wati Neru, a strangely endowed man who "only wanted to talk to them". They did not trust him, and eventually escaped to be stars in the sky where he pursues them still. They are our Matariki. We sat in stunned silence in this cave, and later in another, in the presence of paintings depicting this story and others, dating back 20,000 or more years. Very few artefacts anywhere in the world can claim this age.

For probably 60,000 years the Aboriginal people have lived on this sub-ontinent, in the ultimate of sustainable life-styles. They have been reliant totally on the slim pickings from the harsh land, with an appreciation of this dependence, and knowing the responsibility to live in tune with the creative Spirit of the earth. So much that western consumer society can learn from these people! And the knowledge is at risk of disappearing.

Before we parted, Peter drew their Songlines in the sand with his stick, then the state boundaries between Northern Territory, South Australia and West Australia. They cut across the

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yeast in the dough

There was a time, says Paul Andrews SJ, when the Irish Church needed the metaphor of the light of the world, for instance, in famine times when it gave us an identity to survive misery. Perhaps now it is time for another image: yeast in the dough, working for good even when unseen, is less attractive, but perhaps ultimately a more encouraging image for the church in Ireland today.

The church is sometimes seen as a force for stability in society. In the French Revolution and the Italian Risorgimento, the institutional church sided with established authority rather than wave the red flag. The revolutionaries were often hostile to the church but sometimes Catholics were heavily involved in the rebellions, as in Ireland and South America. The church believed it was better for people to live in peace in a stable society. The prospect of radical change in society pushes us all to the dilemma faced by Jesus.

He destabilised people, but was not a political rebel. He pulled people away from their trade, whether it was fishing, prostitution or tax-collecting. He pulled them from their families. But he did not want to be a king, nor to set up any new political system (as he told the sons of Zebedee). Rather he was and is dismantling our ego, rocking our comfortable sense of having an unshakable place in an unshakable society. Marriage at its best can do this, invading the other's ego. In marriage (and also when you are teaching children), you are regularly reminded of your shortcomings.

That sort of abrasion can be missing from the celibate life. There is no intimate Other to get under my skin, and emotional inertia can easily prevail. Small things can with respect and thankfulness, healing can follow. ■

Trish McBride is a spiritual director and thealogian in Wellington

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▷▷ Songlines. Peter said with real anguish "The whitefellas made new lines and they broke our Songlines. They stole our land". It is one thing to know about the history of our neighbour's indigenous people. Quite another to experience the pain now of a real person with a name, and his family! And the generosity of their teaching and sharing. It was good to hear that an increasing number of Australian secondary schools, notably Catholic girls' colleges, are making the pilgrimage to meet these Anangu and hear how it was before, how respect for the ancient way of life has something to offer to us white ones.

Later Lee and Leah shared their Christian faith too. Their travelling music in their van was a CD of the young people of the tribe singing gospel songs in Pitjantjatara. And Leah's Tjukurpa Palya, much thumbed, was on the dash-board.

In his book *The Songlines*, Bruce Chatwin writes "By spending his whole life walking and singing his Ancestor's Songline, a man eventually became the track, the Ancestor and the song." So close to the words of Jesus: 'I am the way, the truth and the life'.

The Government's apology to Australia's original people was given in 2008 for the centuries of theft oppression, and disregard. A more recent enquiry found that things have got worse for them, not better. The Anangu of the Pitjantjatjara lands are reaching out to the whitefellas to offer bridges to understanding that can help narrow the gap between white and black in Australia. When what they have to offer in their stories, customs and spiritual care for the earth is received

Lee teaching about the lizard songline

upset me: a strange bed, a blanket instead of a duvet, Little Chip instead of chunky marmalade, unexpected breaks in my routine, new work at which I do not shine, a new boss, losing the prospect of a holiday, being bad-mouthed. They break into my ego, destabilise me, show the limits of my inner freedom and the defences I erect to defend my way of being me. We can be grateful for these destabilisers.

The church too is experiencing its destabilisers. We live under the Chinese curse: *May you be born in an age of transition*. It was a fate familiar to the Psalmist and the Old Testament writers who saw the people of Israel through periods of adversity, exile, persecution, irrelevance. St Luke, by contrast, writing of the beginnings of the Christian Church, relished the signs of expansion.

Fifty years ago I lived in the USA, where the church was in an upbeat mood: 40 million Catholics, one of them running for President. Like the man in the Gospel with a rich harvest, they built bigger barns to house their riches, the young men with vocations. All across the country you saw massive noviciates, seminaries and houses of study. Few of them survive today.

In Ireland we have witnessed something similar. Our big houses were built to supply educational, health and other services that the state has now taken over. We have seen religious houses pass into other hands. We have handed over schools to other managers. We pass them on with sadness, with their legacy of prayer, companionship and high standards. We show our vitality to the extent that we develop real poverty of spirit and can travel light.

It is a grace to be born into an age of dispossessing ourselves, with fewer large establishments and greater readiness to share others' lives. In a society which changes rapidly, we still need monasteries to offer stability, religious centres that last; we treasure our Mellerays and Glenstals.

The rest of us, the light cavalry of the church, should be mobile and carry small packs. We live, as it were, on campsites. Let us pray for poverty of spirit to match our shedding of buildings and land.

it is a grace to be born into an age of dispossessing ourselves

It is 50 years since I was ordained a priest. I think about what those years have done: the new wine has become a mixed drink, bitter-sweet.

So many of the things I found objectionable in 1958 have changed for the better: for instance, control and power. The informal alliance of clergy and state was so pervasive that we did not see it. There was a respect for priests and a holding back from them as being powerful and different, a caste apart.

We have been gradually relinquishing non-priestly power. History had put it into our hands. We were educated, leaders in education and active in the national movement, useful in helping to build up an independent Ireland. We became used to exercising power in a way that was not always conscious. Police would be reluctant to bring an action against a priest even for a traffic offence. If people criticised us, we tended to write them off as enemies of the church.

the outcast caste

Light remains bright even if nobody is seeing it. There were times when the Irish Church needed the metaphor of the light of the world, the city on a hill, for instance in famine times, when it gave us an identity to survive misery; or in 1932 when we were establishing ourselves as a nation and seized the chance to show that we do exist and can run things (like the Eucharistic Congress) splendidly.

Now two things have changed: the culture of the country has grown more secular; and some bishops have been found to be covering up the crimes of priests. One result: we may be afraid to put our heads above the parapet, or even to preach the gospel, and when we do, we are liable to make fools of ourselves. Perhaps it is time for another image of the church: yeast in the dough, working for good even when unseen.

Yeast is a less attractive image than light. If there is anything of the exhibitionist in us, this image will discover it. Young priests and Religious can feel sad that their initial ambition to serve is rebuffed. Jesus showed the same disappointment over Jerusalem, over Nazareth and his own people, over the rich young man. His commitment did not waver, though he offered an option to his disciples: Will you also go away?

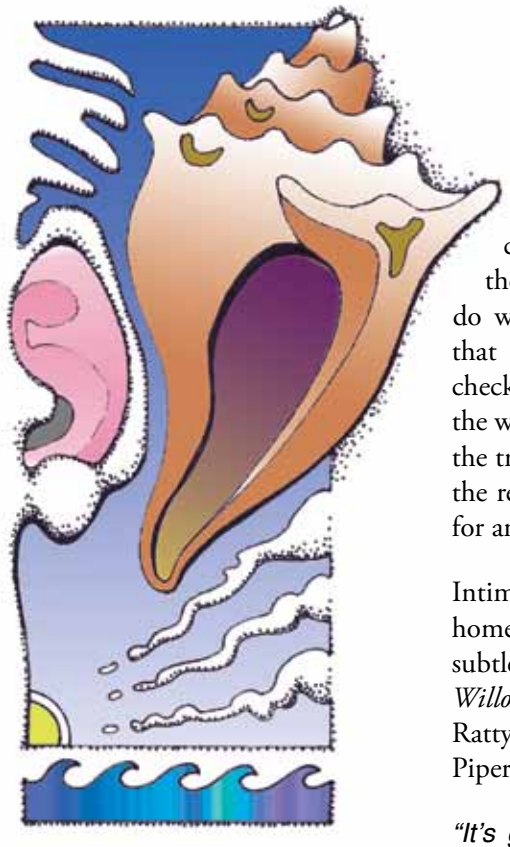
Few of us could have improved on Peter's reply: *Lord, to whom should we go? You have the message of eternal life.* ■

Paul Andrews is a priest/psychotherapist living in Dublin

Summer ...the season of dreams

Many of us have felt the pull of something deep down inside ourselves,and also outside of us, that we long for almost without knowing it, and that the world only lets us glimpse before it vanishes below the horizon

Daniel O'Leary



With the warmth of the sun, and the long evenings, the poets in us, the artists within, find their voice again. Summer is a time when we become more conscious of our mystery and its destiny.

Summer loosens the edges of our control. It awakens the deep and buried dreams that sleep in winter. There is a kind of ache for something that is always beyond, a restlessness that never goes away.

It is easy to stir that wistful desire. The first swallow can do it, or the smell of rain on the ground after a hot day, or the ring of church bells carried over the meadows, or down our streets, by the breezes of a summer evening.

Because our human condition is never complete, there is almost always within us a yearning for wholeness. We carry intimations of a finer destiny. We intuitively search for a lost paradise. We have blurred memories of a field of dreams on which we once played, we hear vague whispers of something yet to come, something for which we feel we were made in the first place.

Is there a subtle compulsion to transcendence in every heart? Is there an intuition of another existence somewhere in the soul of the millions who drive, walk, cycle to work each morning? Does the mother of a young family look out of the window of her comfortable home and sometimes dream of a brighter place? And to whom could she dare reveal her secret loneliness?

Does the successful businessman, at the height of his career, watch the morning fields fly by from his first-class seat, and wonder if that's all there is? In the evenings of summer do we all experience something like that – the nurse, the teacher, the check-out assistant? When enjoying the warm sun and a glass of wine does the traveller long for another horizon, the rebel for another cause, the priest for another god?

Intimations of a deeper joy in another homeland come only in scattered and subtle glimpses. In *The Wind in the Willows* Kenneth Grahame describes Ratty and Mole's meeting with the Piper at the Gates of Dawn.

"It's gone," sighed the Rat, sinking back in his seat again. "So beautiful and strange and new! Since it was to end so soon, I almost wish I had never heard it. For it has roused a longing in me that is pain, and nothing seems worth while but just to hear that sound once more and go on listening to it for ever.

No! There it is again!" he cried, alert once more. Entranced, he was silent for a long space, spellbound. "Now it passes on and I begin to lose it," he said presently. "O Mole! The beauty of it ..."

We are congenitally overcharged for this earth. We are infinite spirits in finite conditions. We carry a helpless attraction for the beauty that gave us birth. We are *capax mundi, capax Dei* (knowing Creation, knowing God) but trapped in the limit-conditions of time and space. Is it any wonder then that we have silent struggles with our existential emptiness and insatiability?

In *The Buried Life* Matthew Arnold wrote:

But often, in the world's most
crowded streets,
But often, in the din of strife
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge
of our buried life;
… A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart
which beats
So wild, so deep in us – to know
Whence our lives come
and where they go.

There is an undertow of unfulfilment that only union with our source and our destiny will heal and complete. To be tormented by restlessness is one of the many frustrating consequences of being both human and divine at the same time! There is no escape from the echoes of an infinite horizon. We live in the thin place where mysteries meet.

Even Jesus did not escape this innate desire for something more. "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled." (Luke 12:49) It was, in fact, because of the fleshing of the Word in the humanity of Jesus, that we Christians can make some sense of the ceaseless, human longing arising from our innate coding for possessing eternity.

In *The Holy Longing* Goethe writes of how God's excessive love for the world is mirrored and echoed in our own human hearts. At its root, all longing is a longing for home, all life a desire to return to the love from which we have come.

Do we accept the unavoidable truth that nothing except total union with the essence of life itself, an ultimate intimacy with the love that fires all living things, will ever bring the peace we spend our days searching for?

do we accept the truth
that nothing except total union
with the essence of life itself
will bring us the peace
we search for?

That is the distant but unrelenting voice that keeps calling to us like a far wave.The theologian Karl Rahner was well aware of the pathos of this apparently hopeless, sometimes unbearable, orientation of our human nature.

"In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable", he wrote, "we come to understand, that here in this life all symphonies remain unfinished." The dream, the music continue in heaven. But without the pain. Even though our tender imagination may be crushed in us as children by careless caretakers, the guardian angel of our desire will never abandon us to a dreamless place.

In *The Thread*, Denise Levertov wrote:

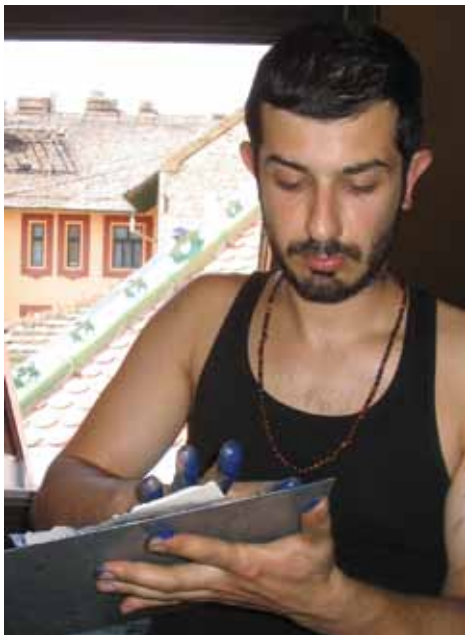
Something is very gently,
invisibly, silently
pulling at me – a thread
or net of threads
finer than cobweb and as
elastic … Not fear
but a stirring of wonder
makes mecatch my breath
when I feelthe tug of it
when I thoughtit had loosened
itself and gone.

Daniel O'Leary, is a priest of the Leeds Diocese, West Yorkshire

the art of Peter Landvai

A newcomer to New Zealand employs his talent for Socil Justice week

Lisa Beech



"If you haven't got a past, you haven't got a future." Drawing on study of European religious art, from his Hungarian graphic art training, and on more recent personal discovery of Pacific art traditions, Lower Hutt artist Peter Lendvai has created illustrations for this year's Caritas Social Justice Week booklet *A justice that reconciles*. The forms he uses are both traditional and new.

Social Justice Week this year considers Catholic teaching on criminal justice and reconciliation, and calls on Catholics and the wider community to revisit attitudes about people in prison in the light of Gospel reflection. Understanding scriptural messages of forgiveness and reconciliation in our current context in Aotearoa New Zealand is part of that work.

Peter was recommended to *Caritas* by artists at Petone's Pacific gallery *Lesa* as a skilled and experienced artist in the use of material from Pacific traditions. So it was a surprise to learn that he actually only arrived in New Zealand from Hungary less than two years ago.

In considering how to depict scriptural stories such as that of the Good Samaritan or the Forgiving Father, Peter says he drew on art history from both European and Pacific traditions. "These are my own drawings, but some elements are inspired by European religious painting, and some by Pacific patterns."

Since his arrival in New Zealand Peter has studied artifacts from the Pacific in museums and galleries. "Polynesian art is also art history. There are previous and valuable cultures here, which need to be known and given more popularity."

In looking for ways to use elements of Pacific art traditions, Peter is conscious of trying to give back something of what he has learned since he has been here. "I really try to understand and go beyond the patterns – these are not just interesting images."

Peter is shy talking about what his Catholic faith brings to this work. However, he is an active parishioner at *Our Lady of the Rosary* parish in Waiwhetu, Lower Hutt, and has worked with religious images in the many different art forms he employs – including drawing, printmaking, glass work, and sculpture.

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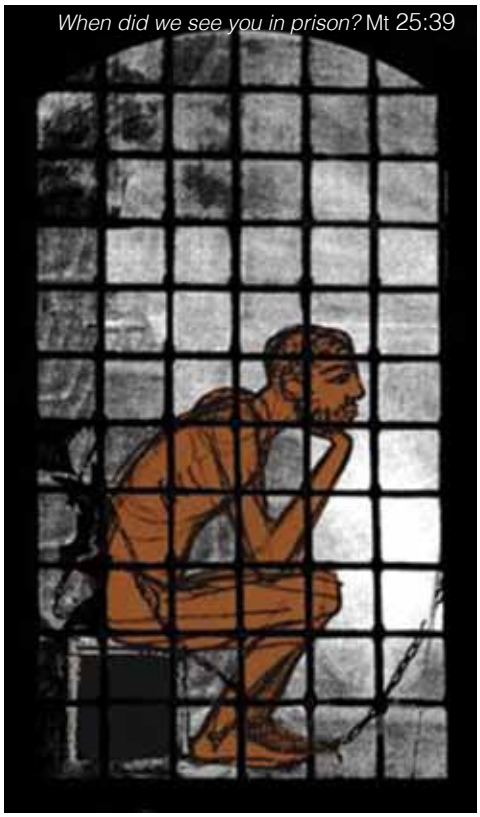

When did we see you in prison? Mt 25:39

Which of these proved himself a neighbour Lk 10:36

He was lost and is found Lk 15:32

The Ecumenical Council

Recently I walked around the Salvador Dali exhibition *Liquid Desire* held at The National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. Dali is perhaps the best known Surrealist artist and this exhibition has 200 of his works. I found the exhibition a roller coaster ride of artistic brilliance, imagination and provocation.

The final piece in the exhibition was the largest painting and was entitled *The Ecumenical Council*. Dali completed this work in 1960 and he was inspired by the election of Pope John XXIII. The painting takes its name from the historic conference in 1960 between John XXIII and Geoffrey F. Fisher the Archbishop of Canterbury. This was the first meeting of this kind in 426 years.

This work is a personal faith reflection by Dali. In the bottom left corner his signature is replaced with a visual self-image, Dali was not a shy man!

Dali's art is full of religious images not all of them complimentary to the institutional Church. His mother was a practicing Catholic but his father was an atheist and Salvador tended to follow his father's atheism in the first half of his life. In 1950 in his mid forties he returned to the practice of the Catholic faith and we see in this painting a man deeply concerned with faith in the modern world.

The coronation in 1958 of Pope John XXIII is represented three times in the centre of the painting and once in the upper right-hand corner. This suggests Dalí's enthusiasm for the new Pope and his forward-looking direction.

The Holy Trinity is depicted to show God the Son on the left holding the cross and God the Holy Spirit on the right with the dove. God the Father, painted in the style of Michelangelo is at the top as the central figure within St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The central figure of the woman is Dali's wife and muse Gala.

Dali once said of art: "Don't bother about being modern. Unfortunately it is the one thing that, whatever you do, you cannot avoid." For me this painting is optimism at its best. Here we have a great modern artist who has been highly inspired by spiritual leadership of a Church leader. John XXIII was not explicitly modern but he engaged with the world of the time because like Dali he saw it as something we cannot avoid.

Michael Dooley

▷▷ "It is really hard to describe forgiveness and reconciliation with images and drawings. I really tried to understand the (Scriptural) phrases, but it helped to try to understand the people (in the Bible stories) themselves. It's easy to do kitsch. But I'm always trying to give a higher message – that's not so easy to do."

Peter and his wife arrived in Lower Hutt in October 2007 with just two suitcases. "We didn't know anyone." His wife is working, but he describes his own time here as a "study in patience".

"At the moment I'm happy to focus on my own art works," he says. But he finds the isolation of New Zealand artists difficult – one reason why the friendly atmosphere of the *Lesa* gallery attracts him. "It's a heavy burden sometimes, but I'm also improving my essence as a human."

Lisa Beech is Research and Advocacy Coordinator at Caritas

the right way and the wrong way of 'doing' ecumenism

Glynn Cardy

One of the prevailing myths among mainline denominations is that we would all be better Christians and present a better message to the world if we could find a way to unify our churches. This sentiment is usually encapsulated in the prayer accredited to Jesus: *May they all be one that the world may believe*. Not that we ever were one.

In 1970s' New Zealand this led to the desire for church union between Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationists, and anyone else who was prepared to join. It was a big issue, with big divisions, and a merger almost came about.

On the one hand this union movement had much to commend it. Most of the theological, liturgical, and structural differences between denominations would have been totally foreign to Jesus and his early followers. The differences between denominations are also foreign to most New Zealanders today. It's only once you're in one of these clubs, immersed in club-think, that you start to defend the ways your club has 'always done things' and look for support from the Bible. Those outside the churches, and many inside, don't understand and don't want to understand the theological minutiae around the differences.

The reality of course is that there were no denominations in the Bible. There was a variety and fluidity in terms of theology, worship, and authority. New revelation was reshaping, changing or confirming old revelation as they went along. There was no right way to be ordained, to understand the Eucharist, to be baptised, or even to read the Holy Scripture. The common factor was Jesus. Although of course his followers' experiences of him differed.

On the other hand the union movement of the 1970s seems now like a modernist anachronism. The post-modern mind has little tolerance for a unity that might be uniformity in disguise. Postmodernism celebrates variety, pluralism, and choice. Our society does not want difference assimilated and theology homogenised. The notion of physically merging the denominations is as appealing as blending every type of ice-cream into the one and only, synodically approved, biblically based, canonical flavour.

Christians in Western society are now a minority. If we think our beliefs have any relevance to society then we need to look at multiple means of conveying the Jesus message. Rather than focusing on organising our club to join with the club down the road for a Good Friday service, isn't it better to prioritize transformative social, economic and political goals for the betterment of society? Certainly some of the best ecumenical work in the past has been around joint offshore and onshore development projects. Pooling our resources to build bigger churches is not necessarily where it's at. Pooling our resources to build interactive spaces with online and real time communities is where it's always at. We just need the vision.

The word 'ecumenical' is a visionary one. In Greek it refers to the whole inhabited world, not just some religious institutional bit. It links with words like ecology and economy. The desire for different Christian clubs to get together is just one part of it, just one interactive space among many possibilities.

The prejudice and intolerance of the past though is not to be underestimated. Within a small geographical community there could be a number of distinct religious groups walking past each other, talking past each other, and fomenting a toxic brew of bigotry. Insecurity, insulation, and identity are closely aligned. Occasionally violence erupts. Sometimes, like in Northern Ireland and Bosnia, hatred and violence lurked fairly near the surface.

When discussions occasionally occurred between such disparate Christian groups there was usually more than one agenda operating, and more than intellectual agreement at stake. Some might have thought, for example, they were talking about ordination whereas others would have heard it as a criticism of their culture. Those who worked as peacemakers in such situations had the patience of Job. For such groups to come together for say a Good Friday service was no small thing.

Thankfully I have never experienced such inter-Christian barriers of prejudice. As a teenager in the 70s I couldn't understand why having a bishop ordain you rather than say a group of clerical colleagues made much difference. Now

35 years later, having heard all the arguments, I still don't understand why it makes much difference. Would Jesus really worry about it? I don't think so.

Similarly with the words said during that great rite of God's hospitality, known variously as the Mass, the Eucharist, or the Communion. Would Jesus really worry about whether we do it similarly or correctly when most of the world hasn't seen or experienced self-giving Christian hospitality?

I think Christians need to be careful when they insist upon correct words to make a rite valid. It is all very well to continue traditions of the past but sometimes we are in danger of making historical language the equivalent of a magical incantation. The insistence that a valid baptism uses the formulaic words "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" is an example of this. Would Jesus have insisted upon this? I don't think so. I doubt whether he ever heard the phrase.

Recently Anglicans and Methodists signed a covenant that says in a roundabout way that we still like each other and it would be good to work more closely together on matters common. There was a nice service using both a Methodist and Anglican Church with the leaders signing up in a symbolically meaningful way.

Will it make any difference? Is the vision for more committee meetings to discuss points of difference and organise occasional gatherings? Is the vision for a common theology of ordination, communion, and baptism? Is the vision to be seen to be united? The bottom line for me is I don't really care how people interpret this covenant as long as they use it to more actively promote the message of Jesus in our society. Unity has to have a purpose.

My vision is for building alliances with other Christians and people of faith in order to combine our resources and develop interactive spaces. Such a space might be a campaign to change an unjust law or eradicate child poverty. Such a space might be a website like *Ekklesia* – a think-tank which examines the role of religion in public life and advocates transformative theological ideas and solutions. Such a space might be a youth centre, or even youth church, that supports and addresses the concerns of teenagers.

Alliances are needed because we Christians are few in number and resources are limited. Alliances are needed because the message of love and justice needs to be presented and lived out by people who can work together and enjoy each other without agreeing on everything.

The Jesus agenda is always bigger and more interesting than any one club's or combinations of clubs' understanding of it. Christianity doesn't have a monopoly on Jesus. At its best it simply seeks to share what it knows and learn from others what it doesn't. I'm all for any vision that focuses on transforming the world into a more loving, just, and hope-filled place. ■

an anglican perspective on our lady

Annunciation in Istanbul

The sweetest Angelus I've ever prayed
Was in the great and hallowed mosque
they know as Suleymaniye.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Mary
And she conceived by the Holy Spirit

Cool and tall, the shafts of light
In that transcendent place
Cried out for Incarnation.

And the Word was made flesh
And dwelt among us

Around me in the holy peace,
Muslims who honour 'Isa's virgin birth
Bowed down,
But did not know how blessed was Mary
Nor how to call on her.

Pray for us O Holy Mother of God
That we may be made worthy
of the promises of Christ

In me was joy in the gift of grace
Who came through Mary to us all,
Joy also in the finding
That God was in this place too
Awaiting.

Be it unto me
According to your word
In sha' Allah.

Peter Stuart

journey of redemption for a racist bigot

Gran Torino
Review: Peter Stuart

Gran Torino is set in a Detroit neighbourhood being taken over by yet another wave of immigration into the United States, this one from Asia: Hmongs from Indochina. The central character is Kowalski (Clint Eastwood), a grizzled, retired auto-worker, a veteran of the Korean War, a lapsed Catholic, a foul-mouthed racist who is alienated from his two sons and their families, unwilling to leave his home, and, as the film opens, a newly-bereaved widower growling his way through his wife's funeral and the wake that follows. The film ends with another funeral – Kowalski's own. In between these two events, there is a great deal of swearing, racist abuse, some violence, a lot of humour, and a journey of redemption.

Directed by Clint Eastwood, *Gran Torino* can be responded to and interpreted on a number of different levels. And indeed it has been. The mostly positive reviews (and the comments on the reviews) on the Web are varied and almost as interesting as the film itself, both for what they mention and for what they omit or fail to pick up. Such variety is a sign of a many-sided film worth taking seriously, for its strengths and perhaps also for its occasional flaws.

The R16 classification must be for its bad language and racist abuse. (It cannot be for the on-screen violence, which is relatively moderate by today's media standards, although the threat of violence pervades the film.) Some viewers prissily rejected *Gran Torino* on those grounds, yet missed the point: the language is integral to the character and the neighbourhood, and more importantly, the film itself subverted racism.

Other viewers and reviewers majored on precisely this theme of racism, seeing the film as a constructive exploration of the new multi-racial society emerging in the United States. It is indeed such an exploration, and the plot is outwardly dominated by the encounter between Kowalski and his Hmong neighbours, a complex encounter which offers him the opportunity to change. The 'gook-killer' veteran of the Korean conflict ends up sharing with his 'gook' neighbours a familial interaction at an emotional depth he is unable to have with his own flesh and blood.

Some commentators dug deeper, and debated the film's approach to masculinity, whether Asian or white American. What does it mean to be a man? In their new surroundings the Hmong find it difficult to know. "The women go to college and the men go to jail", the latter via street gangs like the one roving the neighbourhood.

Where will the young Hmong man next door to Kowalski find a male role model-in Kowalski? Is *he* what it means to be a man in the 'US of A'? The reverberations of *Dirty Harry* and all Eastwood's previous roles hang in the air. And where does fathering fit into that underfilm standing of masculinity? Kowalski cannot even properly father his own sons. As the baby-faced priest says to Kowalski, "you know more about death than I do, but do you know much about life?"

Linked with masculinity in the American psyche (and often elsewhere) is the myth of redemptive violence. If there is a problem, blast the bad guys off the face of the earth, whether it is the Wild West or Chicago or Iraq. "We're right, they're wrong, so kill them off and all will be well."

A thousand actors and rather too many presidents and politicians have acted out this myth; many of Eastwood's previous roles are based on it. Kowalski has lived it in Korea and starts living it again in defence of himself and his new Hmong family. Yet he pulls back from the usual solution of a final violent shoot-out after which the victor returns his guns to their holster, job well done. Instead, Kowalski himself intentionally dies, unarmed, in a very public hail of bullets, thereby solving three problems: his sense of guilt over an unnecessary killing in Korea, his own serious medical condition, and the toxic presence of the Hmong gang in the neighbourhood (they now go to jail). This is an explicit subversion of the myth of redemptive violence, yet I found no reviews addressing this. Why are we all so blindly in thrall to this myth?

At a deeper level still, *Gran Torino* is exploring religion and religious themes. The interaction between Kowalski and the baby-faced priest, which at first threatens to be a caricature, develops into something considerably more substantial – if not always convincing. A Hmong shaman adds an intriguing *frisson*. Salvation, confession, penitence, priestly responsibility, religious pluralism, and the spiritual dimensions of life and death are integral to the story and portrayed as such.

The final crucifixion pose of the gunned-down Kowalski is sufficiently heavy-handed to attract the attention of several critics and nudge them into using the word 'redemption'. Yet for them it is Kowalski who is redeemed, and what he is redeemed from is his own racism. True enough, but not the main truth.

The mode and purpose of redemption in the film – a willing sacrificial death, both delivering Kowalski's neighbours and also atoning for his killing in Korea many years ago – passed the critics by, as did its subversion of the myth of redemptive violence. The Cross of Christ subverted that myth once and for all, but the chattering ▷▷

looking back in sorrow after apocalypse happens

The Age of Stupid. "Why Didn't We Stop Climate Change When We Had the Chance?"
Review: Paul Sorrell

It's perhaps a sign that climate change has gone mainstream that I saw this film at my local multiplex. More than that, Hoyts was happy to have the producer, former Dunedin woman Lizzie Gillett, front a question-and-answer session after the screening I attended. While *The Age of Stupid* contains enough hard infomation to scare us into changing our prodigal ways, the film is structured around a series of interlocking stories of ordinary people caught up in the complexities of an issue that ultimately involves us all. The lecturing tone that characterised Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* – to which this is in many ways a sequel – is replaced by a series of glimpses into the lives of real people in all their complexities and contradictions.

These stories are drawn together in compelling fashion in the person of British character actor Pete Postlethwaite (*Brassed Off*, *In the Name of the Father*), who plays the role of a solitary archivist ensconced in a lofty castle-like structure in the now devastated Arctic – the year is 2055 – reviewing real-life footage of stories and events from the disintegrating world of 2007. He articulates the plaintive and inescapable question that lies at the heart of the film: "Why didn't we do something when we had the chance?"

Not surprisingly, oil is the villain of the piece, and Shell Oil the chief whipping boy. While, as Lizzie Gillett pointed out, other oil companies are also culpable, the focus on Shell helps link the personal narratives into a larger story. Thus we meet Alvin DuVernay, a Shell exploration scientist whose home in New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina and who, after rescuing dozens of his neighbours from the floodwaters, discovers that there's more to life than accumulating stuff.

Shell is notorious for its activities in Nigeria, and Layefa Malemi, a trainee doctor from the Niger Delata, tells of her ambitions for herself and her people amidst communal violence and the pollution of waterways brought about by oil extraction and the wealth it has delivered – to a tiny elite.

As these stories unfold, we realise the falsity of dividing people into heroes and villains, environmental goodies and baddies, however tempting such a simplistic apportioning of blame may be in the present scenario – climate change and global warming are such complex issues that they reveal the mixed motives in us all.

Developer Piers Guy is a passionate advocate for wind farms, but he drives a BMW and finds himself bogged down in a battle with locals who oppose his project to erect dozens of turbines on a Bedfordshire farm on environmental grounds – an irony not lost on southerners who have been following the fight to keep wind farms away from Central Otago's pristine tussock landscapes.

It is especially disheartening to see the third-world characters aspiring to Western levels of consumption, lauding America as their cultural model. Jeh Wadia, the go-getting boss of a new cut-price Indian airline, wants to take millions of his fellow citzens off the trains and fly them to work – at vast cost to the planet – and bawls out offending employees in language that would make Donald Trump blush. Even the socially aware Layefa reveals that becoming a doctor is only a stepping stone to a bright new life as a model and movie star.

While *The Age of Stupid* encourages us to think for ourselves about the issues it raises, and avoids bombarding us with masses of undigested technical details, the basic statistics it presents are grim indeed. It seems we have until 2015 for the resource graph to show a sufficient downturn in our use of fossil fuels to avoid boosting global temperatures by a further 2 degrees, thus precipitating runaway climate change.

Confronted with this seemingly impossible task, we may be tempted to despair. But by showing us a mirror of ourselves in all our human complexity, mixed motives and endless capacity for illusion, the film places the solution to the biggest challenge humanity will face in our time squarely in our own hands. ■

For further information on the film and the science behind global warming, see www.ageofstupid.net and www.notstupid.org

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▷▷ classes from whom most film critics are drawn remain religiously tone-deaf. Redemption in Kowalski's story is in fact deeply Christian, even if he himself is a most unlikely *alter Christus*.

Gran Torino is, technically, not a perfect film. The acting is uneven, several scenes fail, and the characterisation is incomplete. However, Eastwood's Kowalski is masterful and convincing and gives credibility to the whole production. His performance and the interlocking themes of the film itself make *Gran Torino* one of the most honest and thought-provoking films I have seen for quite some time. And it could have been entitled *Atonement* with considerably more justice than a more meretricious recent film trumpeting that title.

View *Gran Torino* in Holy Week next year (but don't show it in Sunday School). It would be interesting (if that is the right word) to view it with Black Power gang members and find out what they make of it. ■

Permission Art & Christianity

what happens when the income gap widens?

The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better
Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett
Allen Lane 265pp plus 65-page index
Review: Jim Elliston

This is a remarkable book. It outlines a social theory derived, not from a political or philosophical standpoint, but from the analysis of decades of peer reviewed research by hundreds of people. It reaches a startling conclusion that has only recently become possible.

That there are causal links between poverty and socially undesirable outcomes is not surprising. Some hold the poor are poor because they are lazy, and that various minorities falsely claim discrimination when their lot is really attributable to their own failings. This attitude is reinforced by the incidence of poor people neglecting necessities in favour of relative luxuries.

As affluent societies have grown richer there have been long term increases in anxiety, depression and many other social problems. Contrary to expectations, in more unequal societies there are greater negative factors among the wealthier as well as among the poorer. *The key factor is the income gap between the top and bottom 20 percent of a given population.*

The authors reduced the top 50 wealthiest countries to 23, eliminating those without sufficient data. New Zealand, which came sixth in inequality, does not fare well. They found that the statistics on health problems coincided with those for other negative social factors – levels of trust, mental illness/addictions, life expectancy/infant mortality, obesity, children's educational performance, teenage deaths, homicides, imprisonment rates, social mobility. The methodology is meticulously explained, along with easy-to-understand graphs and further information is available on their website (equalitytrust.org.uk).

Richer people tend on average to be healthier and happier than poorer people in the same society. So, when people in one rich society are almost twice as rich on average as people in another they should be much happier, right? Wrong. There is no difference. There are two plausible explanations. One is social mobility – healthier people tend to improve their status. Social mobility may partly explain why problems congregate at the bottom but not why more unequal societies have more problems overall. The other explanation is that we are affected by the average income differences within our own society. Regarding the tendency of the poor to spend on inessentials, the research evidence indicates that this arises because of shame and pride – the need to 'keep up with the Joneses'.

Because greater disparities in health and social problems reflect social status differences in culture and behaviour, it seems that material inequality is probably central to these differences. Disparities provide a skeleton or framework around which class and cultural differences are formed.

Statistics from Japan and Sweden show that greater equality can be gained either by using taxes and benefits to redistribute unequal incomes, or by greater equality in gross income before taxes and benefits. In the final part of this very readable book the authors outline practical ways to build a constituency for change. ■

great little read with powerful message

Passing Bells: wars, non-violence, common morality
W J Foote
The Glen Press
Price: $20
Review: Jim Consedine

Will Foote is well known in peace circles in New Zealand. As a conscientious objector in World War II, he spent four years in prison for his refusal to take up arms and fight and kill others in war. Ever since, he has been a reasoned voice on behalf of pacifism and the need to find ways to constructively engage with those who differ, without recourse to arms. Needless to say, in a world saturated by both images and the reality of violence and war and in a world economy which last year spent $1464 billion on weapons, his has been a minority voice.

But war hasn't gone away and neither has Will Foote. This genial 89-year-old retired teacher recently published his fifth book on issues relating to war and peace. *Passing Bells* is a great little read with a powerful message. Will succinctly traces the history of wars right through from those emanating from Europe in the 1800s past The Great War, 1914-18, through to those in the Gulf and Afghanistan and Bush's war on terror. Every line he writes underlies the futility of such wars and the human cost in terms of people killed, communities devastated and countryside ruined.

Will Foote can see no redeeming qualities associated with such mass destruction. In that he stands with Jesus, Te Whiti and Tohu, Gandhi and other great peacemakers of history; like them he makes a compelling argument for the outlawing of war. He traces the success of movements of non-violence, both within New Zealand and through 'people power' in other countries like the Philippines when twice in the last 25 years governments were toppled when mass rallies took to the streets and demanded change.

Will Foote shows in his short pithy ▷

the eucharist: a drama in three acts

Why go to Church?
By Timothy Radcliffe OP
Continuum 2008
Pbk. 214 pp. $NZ39.90
Review: Jim Neilan

One Sunday a mother shook her son awake, telling him it was time to go to church. No effect. Ten minutes later she was back: "Get out of bed immediately and go to church."

"Mother, I don't want to. It's so boring! Why should I bother?"

"For two reasons: you know you *mus*t go to church on a Sunday, and secondly, you are the bishop of the diocese."

This is how Timothy Radcliffe introduces his latest book. The title implies a challenge to all the common excuses for not going to church – it's boring, there's nothing in it for me, or John Wayne's, "I don't much like God when he gets under a roof".

But it's the subtitle, *The Drama of the Eucharist* that describes the theme of this book. We are taken on a journey through the celebration of Mass, not by way of a liturgical commentary or a theology lecture, but with each part being presented as a scene in a three-part drama.

Act One begins with the confession and forgiveness of our sinfulness, with a reminder that the Eucharist is the main sacrament for the forgiveness of sin. This is not an exercise in stirring up guilt but giving thanks for God's unfailing forgiveness. Our faith is strengthened by listening to the readings, the age-old story of God's friendship with humanity. This leads into expressing our belief (the Creed) and asking for what we need in the prayers of the faithful.

As a member of the 'Order of Preachers', the author has some excellent advice for those who, week after week, have the daunting responsibility of preaching the homily. Their main task, he says, is to help us discover cause for joy and hope from the readings.

In Act Two we are led from the preparation of the gifts to "lift up our hearts" and become part of Christ's prayer and actions on the night before he died.

Act Three begins with the great prayer of love and kinship with Our Father and carries the drama through the sign of peace and communion. The final scene – the reason why we go to church – is to be sent away from church to "love and serve the Lord".

Each chapter is animated by Fr Timothy's enthusiasm, his use of apt quotations (from Aquinas to Steinbeck) and his sense of humour. He is realistic about what can dampen enthusiasm about 'going to church' – it's cold, the sermon is irritating, the music trite, the pews hard. He tells the story about the Archbishop of Birmingham sitting beside the parish priest as a woman danced up the aisle with offertory gifts. He turned to the parish priest and said, "If she asks for your head on a platter, I shall give it".

We have papal encyclicals and bishops' pastoral letters about the importance of the Eucharist. Timothy is not constrained by the restrictions of the language these men find it necessary to use.

This would be a great book for use in discussion groups. Each scene in the three-act drama brings insights into what can so often be a routine liturgy.

Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, asked his friend Timothy to write this year's 'lenten book'. He has done a great service for all who wish to deepen their appreciation of the sacrament, which is at the very centre of Christian life. ■

▷ tracts as he traces the evolution of wars that there have always been alternatives through non-violent direct action which would have prevented much pain and anguish and brought healing to social division a lot quicker.

This slim volume is a catechism for beginners in peacemaking who are seeking to understand what has happened in the past century in particular, why we have such a violent world and what can be done so that a peaceful future can be built for all. It is clearly written, very easy to follow and contains a mixture of good graphics and photos. It would be wonderful if it graced the shelves of every school library in the country.

a man of the press who really made a difference

Walter Cronkite died last month. After many years as a reporter he became a news anchor in the early days of American TV where he established a reputation for impartiality and accuracy. In those days the accent was on information rather than entertainment, and he became one of the most trusted public figures in the US.

He visited Vietnam in 1968 to see for himself the state of the war. With his credibility enhanced by his experience as a World War 2 reporter, his report that the official line was grossly misleading had enormous impact. The ensuing change in public opinion forced President Lyndon Johnson to seek a negotiated settlement, and decide not to run for a second term.

sian elias and justice

There is a convention that judges do not speak publicly on political matters. Judges are not public servants; they hold an independent public office. So it is acceptable for a senior judge, on rare occasions, to draw attention to matters of major importance that fall within the experience of the judiciary, provided that it is done in a non-partisan manner. If these rules are not observed the comments would lack credibility.

Chief Justice Dame Sian Elias was meticulous in her observation of those rules when she recently outlined five areas that need new thinking. They should be subject to reasoned public examination. The dismissive response of Justice Minister Simon Power – that Government sets the laws and judges apply them – was an excellent example of talkback radio-land mentality, rather than the thoughtful response of someone with an important portfolio.

In recent years there has been a tendency in news reporting to personalise issues, especially with TV, to the detriment of

Crosscurrents
Jim Elliston

enlightenment. And in this instance a large part of the reaction has been to 'shoot the messenger'.

What Chief Justice said was that more than 20 years of increasingly punitive penal policy have not made communities any safer; so we need:

- early intervention for those at risk of anti-social and criminal influences;
- more resources and public support for probation officers;
- a comprehensive strategy to address mental health issues in crime.

Her other suggestion, that the focus on victims carries a real risk to justice, goes to the very core of our justice system – and, in a way, to the basis of our society. How? It unbalances the system. Society – the people of New Zealand as a whole – has a duty to all its members to maintain sufficient order to allow them legitimate freedom to live and act. That is the aim of criminal law – otherwise there would be no basis for the community to become involved.

As the NZ Catholic Bishops said in their recent submission, "The basis of our society's right to punish those who abuse the human rights of others is also the basis of our society's responsibility to protect the human rights of offenders."

Two pertinent issues: first, should help be given to victims? Yes, in a manner that will enable them to resume functioning as members of society. Second, is more than punishment of the perpetrators required from us? Yes. For its own protection the community needs to take reasonable steps to enable them to function as contributing members. As Benedict XVI puts it, a just society is concerned with integral human development for all.

In both cases the focus is on the common good, which also benefits both victim and criminal.

the glue of society

It would be unrealistic to expect a Walter Cronkite to wield similar influence today with the greatly increased number of media outlets. Moreover, the current emphasis is on items with high emotional impact.

'Guardian' columnist Madeleine Bunting recently asked: "Where is the new vision to unite us?" given that religion is outmoded, the magic of the market has proved illusory and society is becoming more fragmented. Our problems pale in comparison with the UK's, but the trend is in that direction.

On the other hand, New Zealanders as a whole are generous and strongly inclined to give people 'a fair go', with a large number of active volunteers still helping to glue our society together. We expect leadership from our politicians, but their survival depends on public acceptance.

The precondition for a new vision is a strong constituency to underpin it. That will occur only if Christians as a whole, rather than the relatively few, respond to their Baptismal call to work for the common good. Too often 'serving the church' is presented as the pinnacle of apostolic action.

But the seismic shift in pastoral formation implied by the change of emphasis in official church teaching over the past 45 years still has not penetrated some places. This includes working with non-Christians. In 2000 John Paul II called for pastoral plans to implement those changes. How many parishes have responded? ■

year of the priest

My celebration of the *Year for Priests* got off to a bad start. A letter to the editor of the London journal, *The Tablet,* made a case that St John Vianney, the Cure d'Ars, should not have been put forward as a model of how a parish priest should conduct himself. When lads of the village engaged in stealing apples from trees, Vianney's remedy was to have all the trees in the parish orchard cut down. He used his authority to have drinking and dancing ruled out in the village tavern, seeing them as being occasions of sin. The writer of the letter to the editor suggested that even at this late date the Church might well be advised to make a U-turn in the matter of having St John put forward as a model for the clergy.

My reading of this *Letter to the Editor* was followed closely by my attendance at a gathering for clergy, organised by the diocese in which I live. The priest conducting the seminar session put before us the other side of the Cure d'Ars. His prayerfulness, his openness to God's love, the priority he gave to his ministry as a parish priest, all got due presentation.

Reflecting on the two sides of the case, I could see the truth of what I had read elsewhere about the choice of an exemplar for the Year for Priests. The saints are always an inspiration for us. But they are not in every single aspect of their lives a model of how we should shape our own conduct.

Talking with Italian classmates in Rome 50 years ago, I told them that in such lands as Australia and New Zealand, one of the duties of a priest was to see to the fostering of a well attended weekly parish dance. Steeped in a mind-set similar to that of St John Vianney, my classmates could not understand how it could be the duty of a priest to promote such an event. Instead he should be condemning it.

The needs of our part of the Church were different to those of the village of Ars. The bringing together of the young people of the parish played an effective role in lessening the number of mixed marriages. Many of the readers of these lines could say, "My parents came to know each other through the parish dance (or at the parish tennis courts)". The clergy of today can certainly be inspired by the life of St John Vianney. But they need the good sense to choose which of the particulars of his ministry should be imitated and which should be left to be part of the historical record.

There is one peril of which we must be aware as we celebrate the *Year for Priests*. Ministerial priesthood is an aspect of Church life from which women are, at least for the foreseeable future, excluded. The fashion in which we celebrate this *Year of the Priest* must be one that does not feed alienation.

Priesthood in the ministerial sense may be a men-only matter. But it is founded on a deeper reality. This is the priesthood of Christ in which all members of the Church share. In that sense, women are as much a part of the priesthood as are men. It will be important to ensure that the *Year of the Priest* is a unifying event, not a divisive one. We must keep in mind at all times that priesthood is a quality shared by all believers, not just something enjoyed by a limited group of males. ■

Humphrey O'Leary

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

A mothers journal...

Kaaren Mathias

It's a still, subdued morning. I sit out on the verandah. High cloud arches over the hills. Soon I'll need to get up and make the Sunday morning pancakes, feed the cat, make the bed, wash the clothes. For now I dig out a new spirituality book and my journal and seek to plumb my heart. My little girl, nearly one, sits nearby stickily sucking a pear.

Macrina Wiederkehr's book, *Seasons of the Heart*, opens with the chapter 'Take off your shoes'. Feel the earth between your toes. Wake up. Like Moses and the burning bush. Like an autumn tree shedding its leaves.

Take off your shoes of distraction
Take off your shoes of hurry and worry
Take off anything that prevents you
From being a child of wonder

Take off your shoes
The ground you stand on is holy
The ground of your being is holy

I pick up a pen to write in my journal. Reflect on these words that ring so true. How and when do I need to take off my shoes. Baby Jalori mashes some soft pear into the rug covering us. I jump up. Find a bib and a cloth to clean the rug. Sit back down again. What are the distractions and worries that... Whoops, now she's crawling towards the cup of hot tea. Move tea. Move her. Pick up the pen again. I find it much easier to think about details and plan shopping trips than to sit still and notice holy ground… Oh dear, now the sticky hands are reaching for my hair and clothes. Where is that cloth? I put down the pen, put down the journal, put away the books. Pick up the baby.

It's a still, subdued morning. I sit out on the balcony. High cloud arches over the hills. My little girl is nestled on my lap, her downy brown hair soft under my chin. I watch our neighbours out working in the garden. A cow and a boy walk down the road. The cup of *Lady Grey* tea I sip is lemony and hot. Green smells of freshly cut grass float up to our balcony eyrie. Inside the house, the piano bangs out *Mary had a little lamb* to compete with *Ode to Joy* on the recorder. Morning is here. Jalori shares some of her sticky pear core. Mmm. Slightly furry. Sweet and grainy.

I look down. My feet are bare. The ground I sit on is holy. The ground of my being is holy.

Kaaren Mathias and her husband Jeph and their four children are living in a remote valley in the Himalayas – setting up a new community health programme and enjoying the company of the Lahuli subsistence farmers living fully present in each season