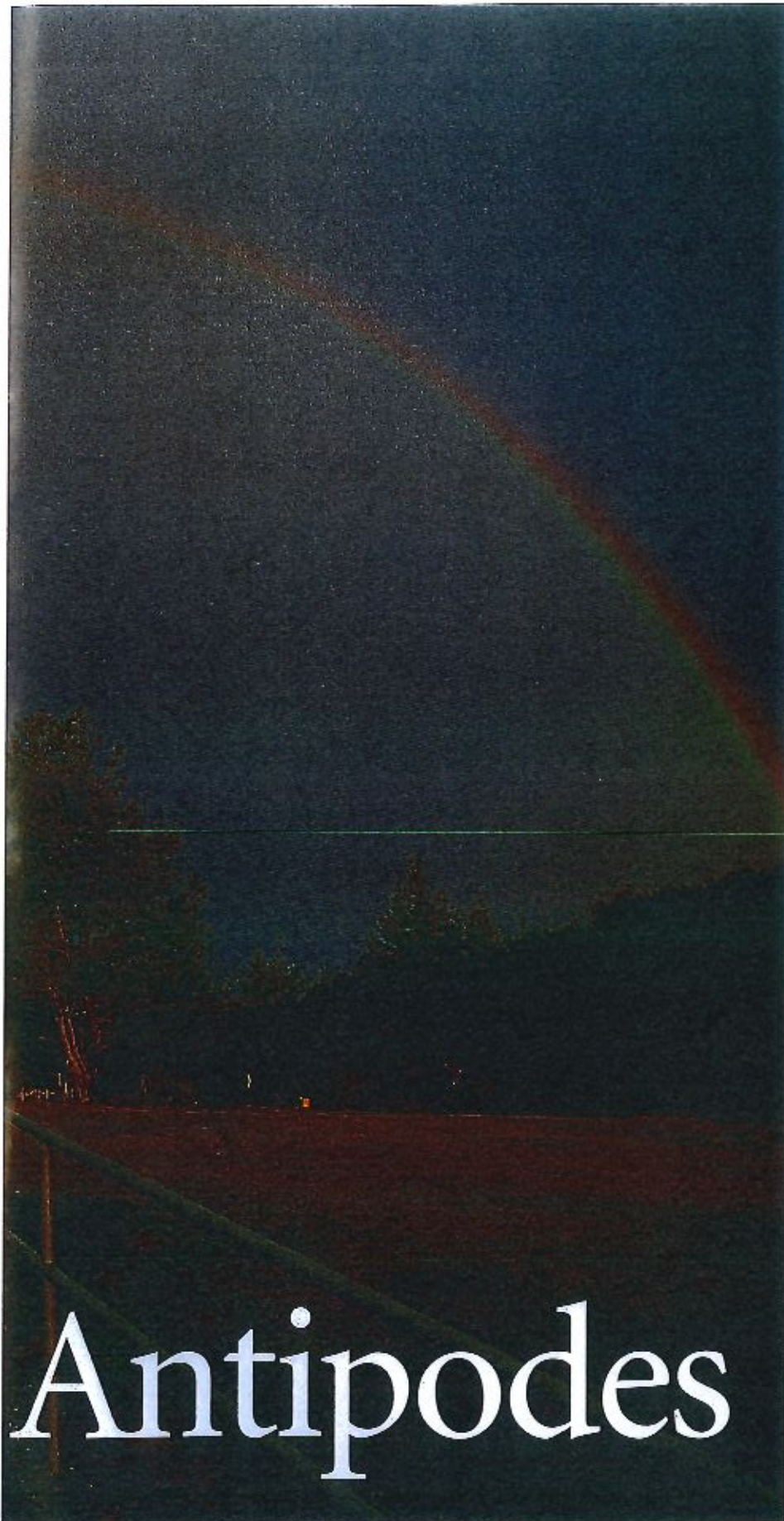


Our Lady of the



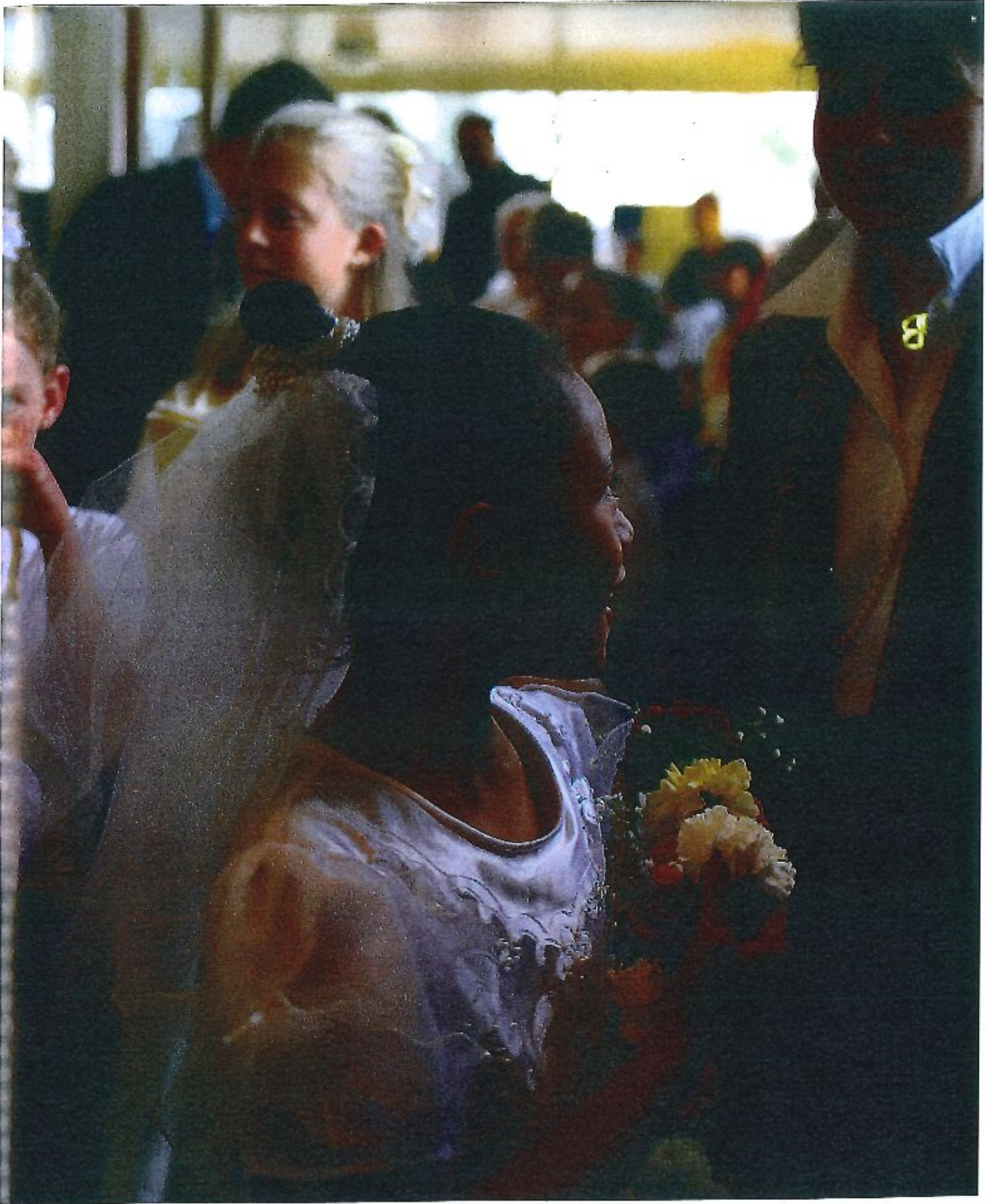
Antipodes

The rainbow—a traditional Christian emblem of hope—arches over a Catholic shrine to Mary in a roadside cemetery at Charleston, on the West Coast. Last century, hope of a better life drew many Irish, among them a strong contingent of Catholics, to New Zealand, and the religion they brought has taken root and flourished here, becoming a pillar of New Zealand society. Catholics are the second most numerous Christian group in this country, and if present trends continue, before long they will be the major group. Despite their abundance, Catholics have often been at odds with the establishment, and religious icons have not been the only aspect of Catholic belief and practice to perplex outsiders.

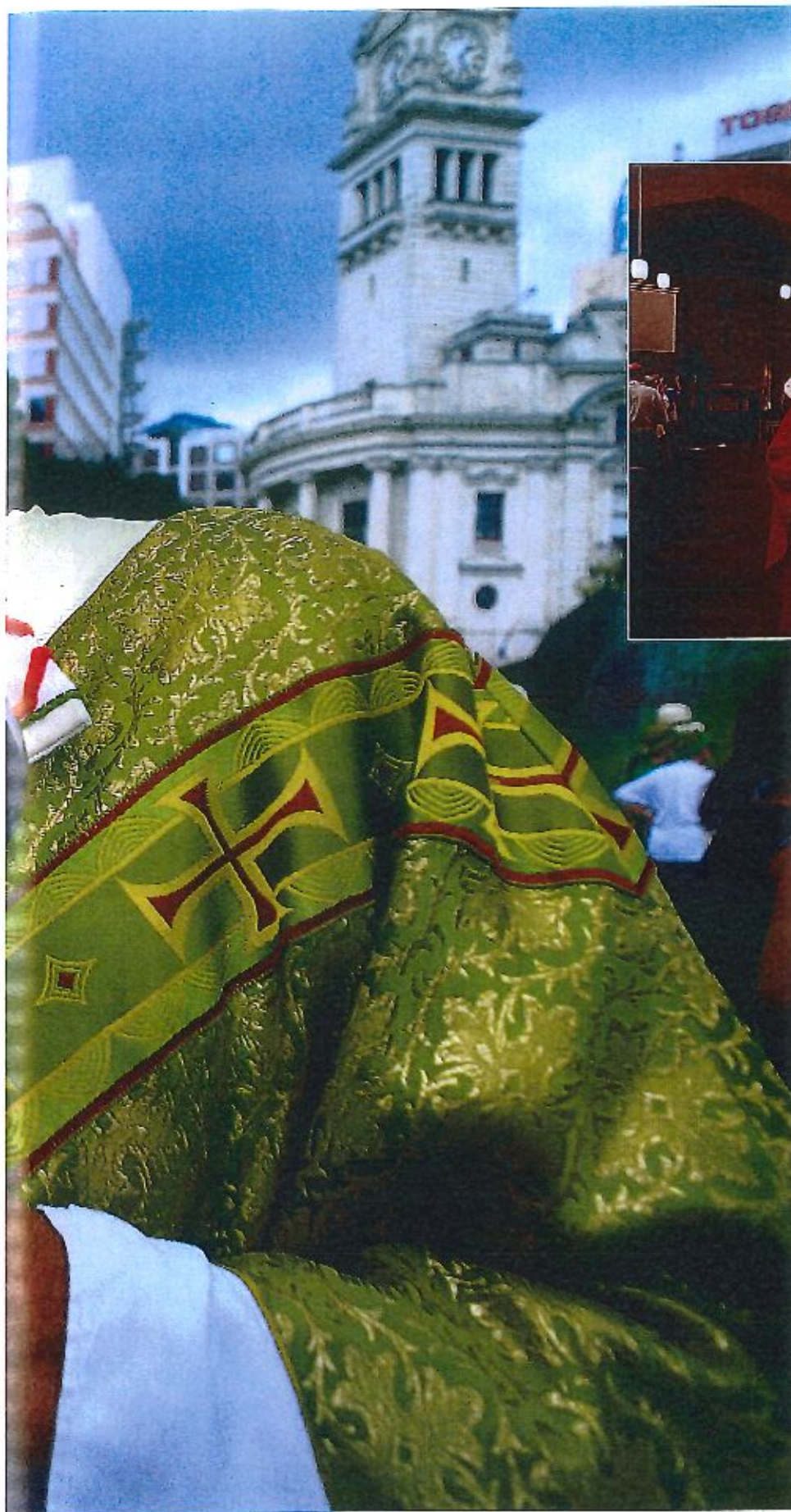
Photography by
PETER JAMES QUINN



"We don't see many christenings in a remote area like this," admits Father Chris Friel as he baptises Harry Foster in Sacred Heart Church, Ngahere (above). The lives of Catholic children are punctuated by a series of such ceremonies, including first communion (right), where the gorgeous dresses worn by these girls at St Mary's, Papakura, are frequently on display.







Easter week, which begins with Palm Sunday (above), here celebrated by Father Peter Head of the church of St Francis of Assisi, Thames, is the climax of the liturgical year. However, in many English-speaking countries, where things Irish have experienced a cultural revival in recent years, it is St Patrick's Day which dominates the secular celebratory year. In Aotea Square, Peter Morris—no priest, but once an altar boy—dispenses consolation and cheer as a latter-day St Pat.

Regular contributor Peter Quinn began work on this story during 2000, which by papal decree had been designated "The Year of Pilgrimage" for Catholics worldwide. Catholic and of Irish descent himself, Quinn saw this as a perfect opportunity to make a pilgrimage of his own to explore the roots of Catholicism in what one early missionary called "God's farthest outpost."



Once priests and nuns did most of the work of the church, and were readily identifiable by their dress. Today, a far greater range of people, including many laity, are active in social service, and even most of the religious orders are not garbed in habits. Francis Symmonds is a lay chaplain who works regularly with prisoners at Christchurch's Papanui Prison (above), while Sister Catherine Hannan, a social worker with the Sisters of Compassion, helps out at a soup kitchen the order has run in Wellington for 100 years (left).

Pompallier's legacy

A short history of the Catholic Church in New Zealand

By Rory Sweetman

ON JANUARY 10, 1838, three French missionaries sailed up the Hokianga River and began the institutional history of Catholicism in New Zealand. Late starters in the race to bring Christianity to the Maori—the Anglicans had arrived in 1814 and the Wesleyans some eight years later—they soon made rapid strides in evangelisation. They were well supplied with men, money and material by their religious order, the Society of Mary, which had been formed in Lyons two years earlier with the aim of converting Western Oceania to the Catholic faith.

The Marist leader was Bishop Jean-Baptiste Francois Pompallier, a handsome 34-year-old, tall, dark-haired, of brown complexion with

Bishop Jean-Baptiste Francois Pompallier, the first ordained Catholic to arrive in New Zealand, sailed into Hokianga Harbour 163 years ago. He made a deep impression on Maori, who have spearheaded efforts to repatriate his remains, which were recently exhumed in France (below right).

hazel eyes. His manner was gentlemanly, as befitted his aristocratic lineage, and he was possessed of great personal charm. As the first Bishop the Maori had ever met, Pompallier cut a dashing figure, especially when dressed in full ecclesiastical regalia.

While less impressive in appearance, the priests and brothers who accompanied him (36 of whom arrived in the first five years) were well suited to the rigours of their new life. As celibates they were free from family responsibilities and thus able to travel unencumbered and live in the villages of their intended converts. Nor did they need to barter for land in order to support a host of dependants, as did their Protestant counterparts.

A missionary's life in the new colony was a test of physical endurance as much as of spiritual faith. While Sunday Mass was celebrated at a central station, most other days were spent travelling on foot or horseback from village to village, instructing Maori and leading them in habits of prayer. The privations involved in the itinerant life brought many priests to an early

grave and crippled others with rheumatism. Elsdon Best recalled seeing Father Pezant struggling along Papamoa Beach in December 1842: "I never remember seeing a more miserable figure. Travel worn, unshaven and unwashed, he wore the tri-cornered hat of his order, his long coat and a kind of black petticoat were ticked up with the Skirts under his waistband and a pair of Old Wellington boots were drawn over his Trousers. From his neck hung a large crucifix and on his back was a kind of sack containing in every probability all he possessed in the world."

Part of the attraction of the new variety of Christian belief for some Maori tribes was the opportunity to distinguish themselves from their rivals who had embraced Anglicanism or Methodism. Pompallier was unusually sensitive in urging his priests to build Catholic belief around existing Maori tikanga, or custom, and to avoid seeing Maori ideas as anti-Christian simply because they were non-European.

Above all, the Catholics were able to feed an insatiable Maori appetite for literacy by teaching their acolytes



AUCKLAND CATHOLIC DIOCESEAN ARCHIVES (BOTH PHOTOGRAPHS)





ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

The Catholic Church established a strong rapport with Maori in its early years, but the New Zealand wars undermined the relationship to some extent. This photograph records Father James McDonald (1824-90), an early Catholic missionary, with his flock outside a church at Rua Kenana's pa, Maungapohatu, in the 1870s.

to read and write.

In early 1840, Pompallier distributed the first of the printed books of the mission, an eight-page work in Maori containing a brief statement of the Catholic faith, prayers, a simple hymn and a method of teaching reading. A year later there was a printing press up and running, imported from Europe along with a lay printer, Jean Yvert. It produced a large quantity of prayers, hymns and sections of the New Testament in Maori. The printery was the only one of the cluster of Catholic mission buildings in Kororaraka (now Russell) to survive, and has recently been restored to its former glory as "Pompallier House."

The Catholic mission's success in what became a "competition in conversion" alarmed several of its Protestant rivals, who believed that Maori were better off remaining pagans than becoming papists. Anglican priest William Williams (later first bishop of Waiapu) described Pompallier as "a shrewd, clever, active man who is hindered by no difficulties and who hesitates not in the use of any means, whether lying or the employment of profligate Europeans in order to accomplish his purpose." However, Pompallier's confident predictions of Maori converts in their thousands were unrealistic, as was his Micawber-like faith that the needs of the mission would somehow be supplied.

In the opinion of his latest biographer, Pompallier had all the attributes of a great missionary leader except prudent financial judgment and the ability to win the complete trust of his men. According to Father Ernest Simmons, "he was essentially a romantic whose vision of himself and his mission outstripped the mundane realities of the present." One of Pompallier's disillusioned confreres lamented, "We are like an army that has used up part of its ammunition in fireworks."

Constant arguments over finances and divided authority led to a split with the Society of Mary in 1850. Pompallier was then left to staff the Auckland diocese with whomever he could get, while all the Marist clergy departed for the newly-created diocese of Wellington.

Pompallier's fate was that of the Catholic mission, both victims of a twist of history. In 1840, New Zealand became a British colony and not, as once seemed possible, a French one. Auckland (until 1865, then Wellington) was to be the country's capital, and not Akaroa, the site of a hopeful handful of French emigrés.

Pompallier was present when the Treaty of Waitangi was first signed on February 6, 1840. He extracted a promise from Governor Hobson that all denominations would be given equal treatment and that the new administration would respect

religious freedom; unlike England, New Zealand was not to have an "established" Church.

Over the next few decades, as the country was steadily colonised by European settlers, what had originally been a mission to the indigenous people became largely a settler church. The discovery of gold in Otago in 1861 and on the West Coast in 1864 brought tens of thousands of eager Pakeha to the new frontier.

The intensive programmes of sponsored immigration pursued by provincial governments until their abolition in 1876, and afterwards by the central government, also helped to swell religious congregations and place enormous demands on the institutional churches.

This transformation of the Catholic mission was best illustrated during the intermittent armed struggles over land and sovereignty, particularly Hone Heke's war (1845-46) and the conflicts in Taranaki, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty during the 1860s. The Sunday congregation at Kororaraka's Catholic church was no longer a predominantly Maori one. Instead some 200 soldiers marched to Mass with a musical escort. The enlarged churches which opened in New Plymouth (1862) and Wanganui (1864) were built by and for the many Irish soldiers who made up the rank and file of the British army units stationed there. Despite Pompallier's valiant and repeated efforts to mediate between the warring forces, many Maori left the Catholic Church and its Protestant rivals, which they now viewed as Pakeha institutions. Pompallier left New Zealand in early 1868, a disappointed man, and died in Paris four years later.

The Vatican authorities soon recognised the altered nature of New



Jerusalem, on the Whanganui River, rose to prominence after Mother Suzanne Aubert established a mission there in 1883, and the Catholic poet and mystic James K. Baxter made the settlement his headquarters 90 years later. The mission focused originally on Maori health and education, but the local population and Catholic community have now dwindled. Two of the three remaining sisters, Laboure Butler (standing) and Anna Maria Shorttall (seated) delight in the visit of a girl who used to live in the settlement and has returned to show them her baby.





Historically, Catholic families tended to be larger than average—perhaps a reflection of the Church's pro-life teachings. Noel and Peta Karalus, of Hamilton, have nine children of their own, but at the time this photograph was taken, they were also looking after two Samoan exchange students. At St Canice's, in Westport (left), an altar girl kneels beside two boys, a piece of emancipation that would have seemed unthinkable even 25 years ago. "Food and flowers" were once the limit of female ministry in the Church, but lay women now preach from some pulpits.

Zealand Catholicism by selecting Irishmen to lead the mission. The years 1870-71 saw the arrival of bishops Patrick Moran (Dunedin) and Thomas Croke (Auckland).

The new men judged their French predecessors harshly. Croke told Rome: "I found this place in a shocking condition. The churches not frequented, sacraments neglected, faith grown cold, the Catholics ashamed of their religion."

The two bishops planned to divide up the country between them, leaving the Marists out in the cold—an island each would suit nicely—but Croke found Auckland too small for him and returned to Ireland in 1874, to ultimately achieve fame as the ultra-nationalist Archbishop of Cashel. (Croke Park, the home of Irish sport in Dublin, is named after him.)

By contrast, Patrick Moran's 26-year episcopate helped to shape the future of New Zealand Catholicism. On his arrival in 1871 he launched twin crusades against secular education and Freemasonry, which he saw as being locked in a life-and-death struggle with the Catholic Church. The belligerence of his counterattack in the newspaper he founded in May 1873, the *New Zealand Tablet*, helped to raise the sectarian temperature throughout the colony. Catholic-backed measures to allow state financial assistance to denominational schools were presented to Parliament almost biennially from 1878, accompanied by noisy agitation, petitions, and threats of a Catholic block vote against hostile candidates.

Moran's confrontational style was demonstrated by his candidature for the Otago Peninsula seat in a by-election in 1883. He came a distant third. From that year a headline appeared above every *Tablet* editorial: "The Catholics of New Zealand provide at their own expense an excellent education for their children. Yet, such is the sense of justice and policy in the New Zealand Legislature that it compels these Catholics, after having manfully provided for their own children, to contribute largely towards the free and godless education of other people's children!!! This is tyranny, oppression and plunder."

The *Tablet* was equally forthright over its other favourite issue: Irish nationalism. With the advent of Irish bishops, priests and religious, New Zealand became part of an Irish "Spiritual Empire," a product of the Irish diaspora which followed so closely the tide of British imperial expansion. In their cultural baggage the Irish immigrants—lay and cleric—brought firmly held views on politics and education and a tradition of agitating their grievances.

In 1868, a comic opera, *Fenian Riot*, on the West Coast showed how little tolerance was accorded to those colonists who placed their patriotism before loyalty to the British Empire. There were occasional skirmishes between Orange and Green, as in 1879, when Irish Catholics attacked Protestant gatherings in Timaru and Christchurch.

The violence of the Irish Land War (1879-82) aroused fear and suspicion in colonial breasts, as did the uncertain loyalty of Charles Stewart Parnell and his party. Long after colonial-born Catholics made up the bulk of the typical congregation, the Catholic Church in New Zealand was unable to escape its divisive Irish heritage.

Surprisingly, one of the most outspoken advocates of Irish nationalism was the English-born Francis Redwood, who was reputed to be the youngest Catholic prelate in the world when appointed Bishop of Wellington in 1874 (and the oldest one when he died in 1935). Redwood claimed to be the first Catholic bishop to appear publicly in support of the Irish Land League, speaking in its favour in both Ireland and New Zealand. He became a strong advocate of Home Rule for Ireland, and of Sinn Fein a generation later.

The Redwoods were among many prominent English Catholic families involved in the early history of Wellington and Christchurch dioceses, others being Petre, Weld, Vavasour and Clifford. (For a short time in 1864, Frederick Weld was premier of New Zealand. He was the first of four Catholic holders of that office, his successors being Sir Joseph Ward, Michael Joseph Savage and Jim Bolger.)

Redwood's appointment in 1887

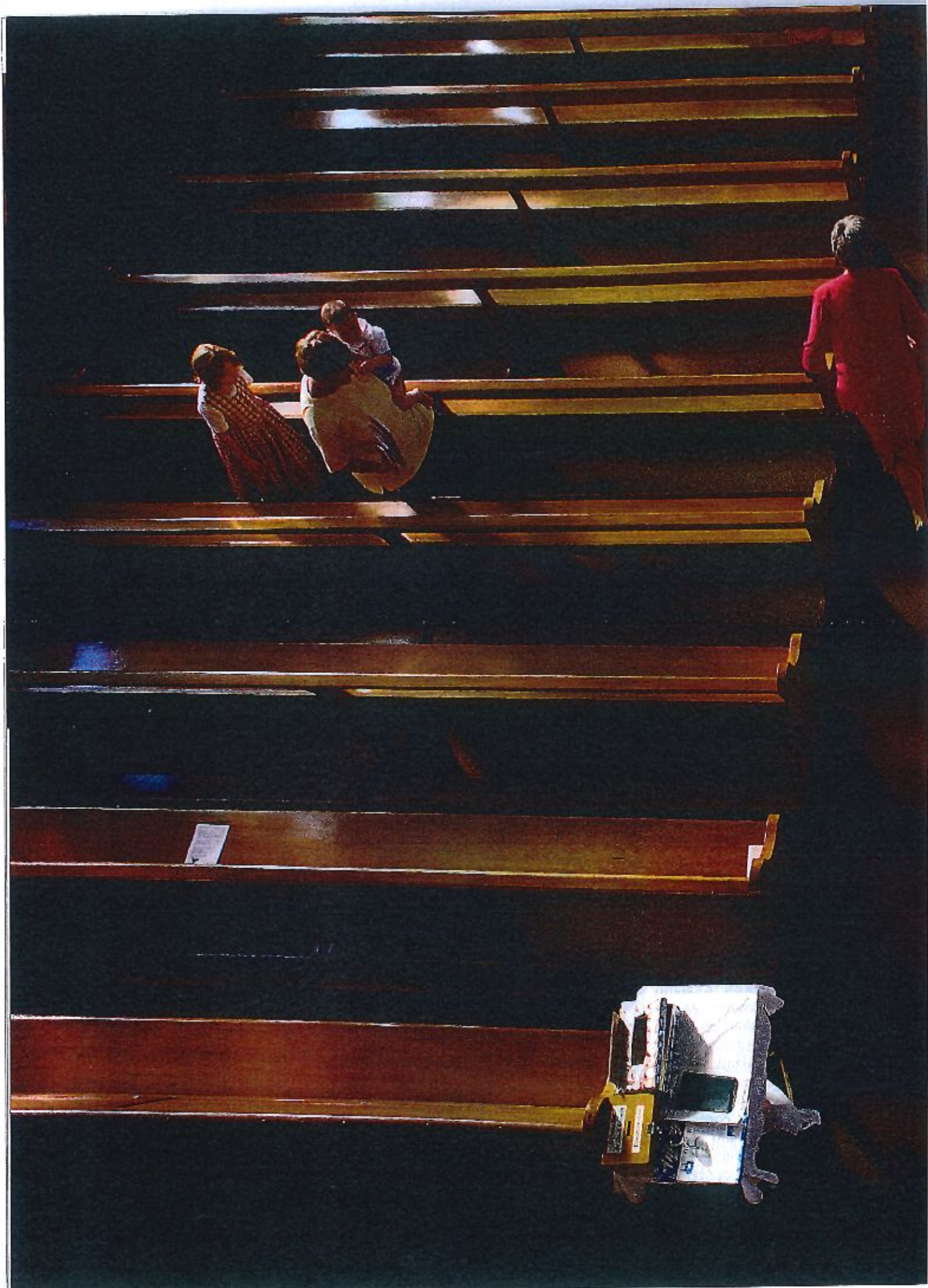
as metropolitan of the newly created ecclesiastical province of New Zealand was a recognition that Catholicism in this country was developing its own identity, separate from its Australian neighbour. Further proof came in 1899, when Rome ordered the holding of the first Provincial Council of New Zealand. It was there agreed to found a national seminary for secular clergy, and Holy Cross College, Mosgiel, duly commenced life in 1900. By then the Marist seminary in Hawkes Bay had been going for a decade. (Both are now located in Auckland.)

Following the passage of the 1877 Education Act, which introduced free, secular and compulsory primary education, most Catholic resources went into building up a rival network of schools. Separate education by Catholic teachers was deemed vital for the protection of the faith of Catholic youth. Their schools were staffed by a host of immigrant religious orders, largely but not exclusively Irish.

The battle to build, staff, and fund these schools gave the Catholic community a focus for its energies, as well as a burning political cause to win funding from the state. Failing in this, the pennies of the faithful and the virtually unpaid labour of hundreds of devoted men and women sustained the school system for over a century.

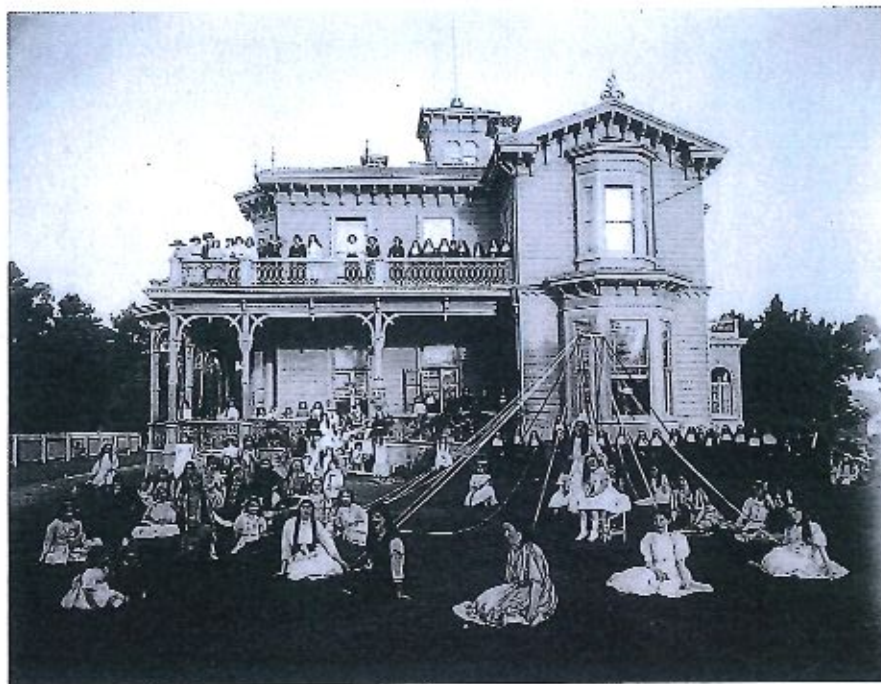
Other indications of vitality in the Catholic community were the large churches that dotted the countryside and dwarfed surrounding structures in many of the smaller towns. The most striking example of building big to affirm the Catholic presence in the land was the huge cathedral designed by Frank Petre in Christchurch. The opening of this magnificent structure in 1905 was a demonstration of the successful arrival of Catholics into New Zealand society.

Another sign that Catholics were clambering up the social and political ladders was the career of Sir Joseph Ward, prime minister from 1906-12 and 1928-30. Australian-born but of Irish parentage, Ward turned the identification of Catholicism with Imperialism into almost an art form. His political success was something of a talisman, proof that a Catholic



Filling the pews in a church as large as St Mary's Basilica, in Hokitika, is not getting any easier, especially as rural people drift to the cities. Although the number of professing Catholics has stayed more or less steady for a century, today's New Zealand Catholic is as likely to be a Filipino or a Pacific Islander as a Caucasian.





TESLA STUDIOS COLLECTION / ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

Catholics have always made education a high priority, although in provincial areas schools often did not offer much beyond the fourth form because economic pressures meant pupils had to leave school by their early to mid teens and find work. These pupils of Sacred Heart Convent in Wanganui in 1912 are gathered around a maypole.

could rise to the highest office in the land.

Ward was also the perfect lay spokesman for his Church on the Irish issue. Political events in Ireland had long raised fears of a threat to the unity of the Empire. Some suspected a papal conspiracy to ruin Protestantism; many more were afraid of the implications of Irish separatism for Britain's ability to defend her colonies. From the turn of the century, Irish Home Rule was promoted as a means of ensuring the unity of the Empire, and won widespread support in New Zealand on this score, although the fate of the Protestant minority in the north-eastern corner remained a concern.

Incipient civil war in Ireland was prevented only by the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914. William Massey, New Zealand's Ulster-born, Presbyterian prime minister, then voiced the sense of relief felt among the Irish abroad: "I am proud of being of Irish birth . . . a fortnight ago the two great sections of the Irish people were looking at each other along the barrels of their rifles, but today they are standing side by side and shoulder by shoulder ready to fight for their country and the Empire. (*Cheers.*)"

New Zealand Catholics went to war with gusto. Belgium and France were regarded as Catholic nations

brutally attacked by Protestant Germany. Archbishop Redwood described the conflict as a "fight for justice, truth and civilisation." There was pride in the high rate of Catholic volunteering for military service, and when conscription was introduced in 1916 it came with the Catholic hierarchy's blessing. The 60-year-old Bishop of Auckland, Henry Cleary, went off as a military chaplain to the trenches in Flanders, where his well-advertised exploits won him a mention in despatches.

Instead of being rewarded for its sacrifice, witnessed by the faces of its dead sons staring out of each *Tablet* issue, the Catholic body was shocked to find itself gradually being made a scapegoat by a war-weary community. Its leaders were accused of using the war crisis to push their sectional interests. There was growing criticism of papal neutrality and suspected pro-German sentiments. Worst of all, the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland, accomplished with the aid of "gallant allies in Europe"—Germany and Austro-Hungary—left the Catholics tarred with the brush of disloyalty.

From 1917, a newly formed Protestant Political Association canalised these discontents into a virulent anti-Catholic campaign, conducting a noisy agitation which provided a release for much pent-up tension.

The PPA saw Irish events as part of a deep plot hatched in Rome against Protestant Britain and its Empire. It found many willing adherents and managed to secure the passage through Parliament of a string of post-war measures penalising Catholic interests.

Why had things turned so sour for the Catholics? Part of the reason was a contagion of sectarianism from across the Tasman Sea. The decade 1912-22 in Australia witnessed a belligerent Irish Catholic challenge to the Protestant establishment, which claimed as its most stunning victory the defeat of conscription in successive wartime referenda. Daniel Mannix, the outspoken Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, became the most divisive figure in antipodean politics, with his allegedly disloyal speeches fully reported in New Zealand. At one in seven of the population, New Zealand Catholics were only half as numerous as their Australian co-religionists, and were the more vulnerable in consequence. The overspill of bitterness and suspicion from Australia posed an acute threat to Catholic interests.

The dilemma of minority status in an overwhelmingly British Protestant country was compounded as Sinn Fein separatism became the political orthodoxy in Ireland. The Irish issue now returned to haunt New Zealand Catholicism. Such a direct threat to the unity—even the existence—of the British Empire evoked an almost unanimous condemnation in Britain's farthest outpost. Any expression of support for Sinn Fein was fraught with danger, the more so after the outbreak of the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21).

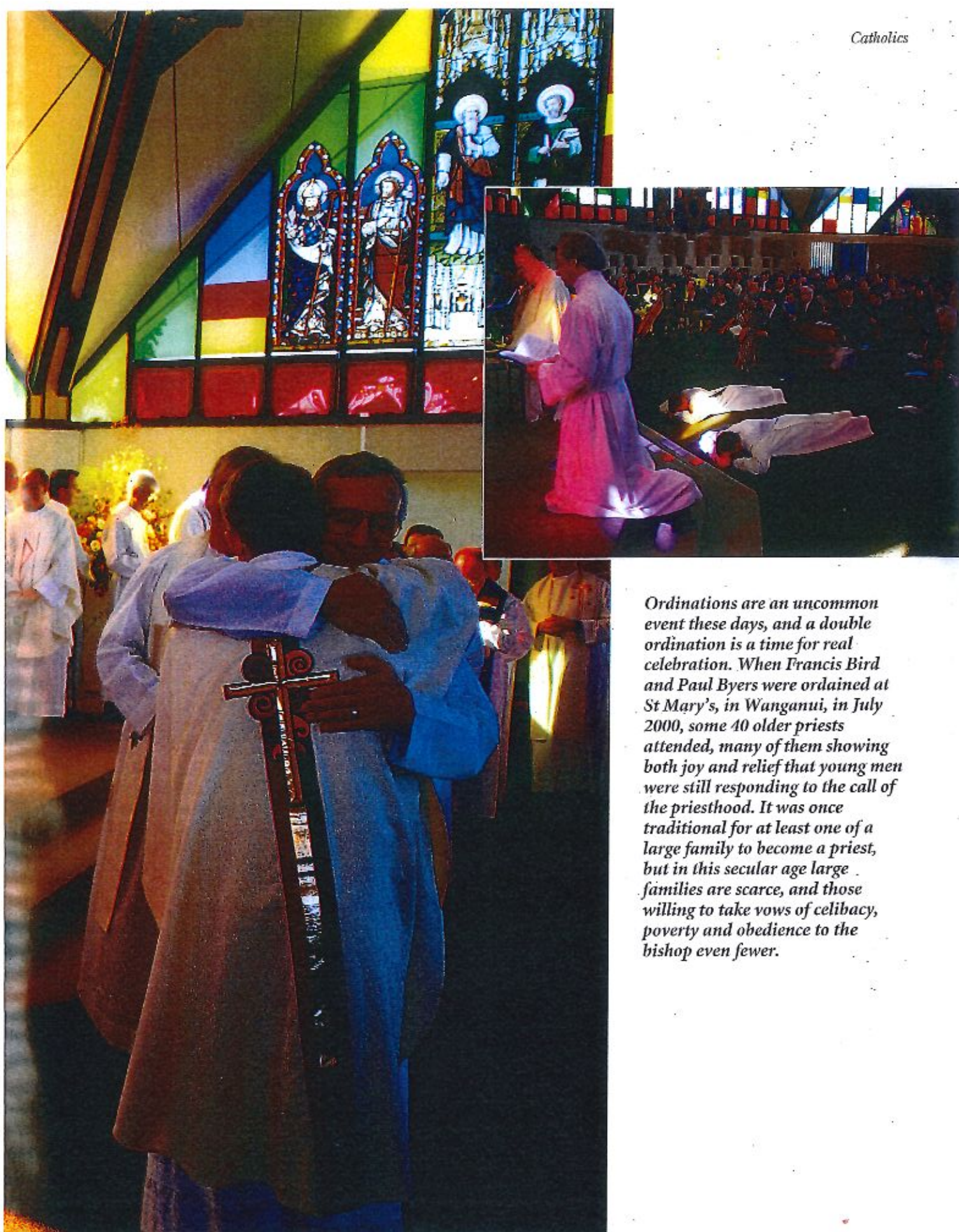
This made doubly unfortunate the



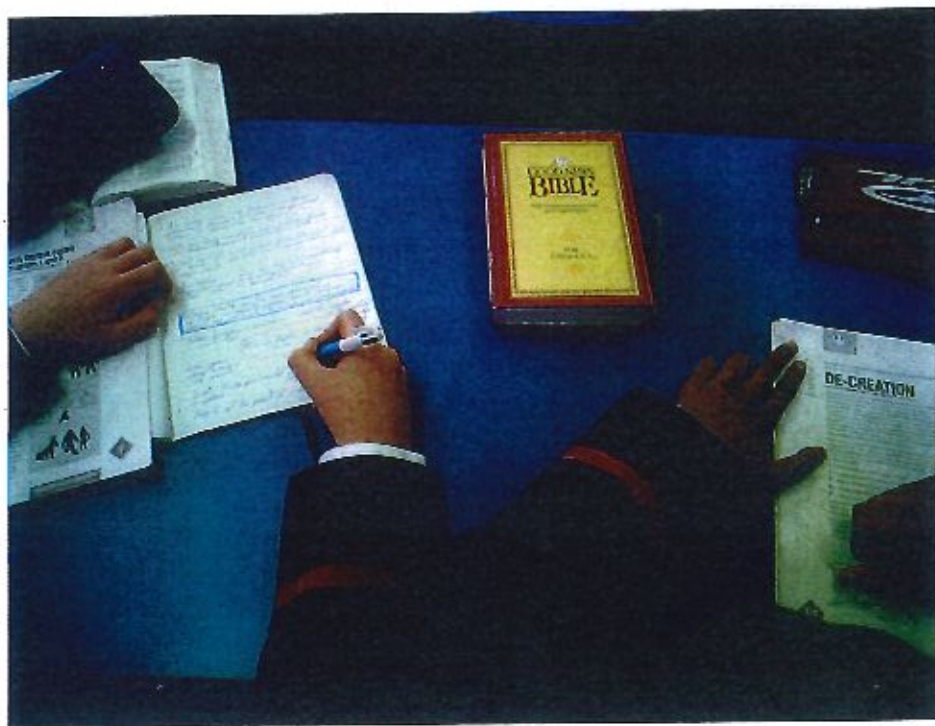
Although 10,000 pupils—among them this contingent from St Mary's, in Ponsonby—attended the annual Auckland Diocese Catholic Schools Day in 2000, a diminishing number of these young people will be found in pews on a Sunday morning—a major problem for all churches, not just Catholic. Reflecting an older-style commitment, Mary Drake (right) is one of eight volunteer "Guardians of the Cathedral" at Christchurch's Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. They clean the church and show tourists around, "because it is the house of God."







Ordinations are an uncommon event these days, and a double ordination is a time for real celebration. When Francis Bird and Paul Byers were ordained at St Mary's, in Wanganui, in July 2000, some 40 older priests attended, many of them showing both joy and relief that young men were still responding to the call of the priesthood. It was once traditional for at least one of a large family to become a priest, but in this secular age large families are scarce, and those willing to take vows of celibacy, poverty and obedience to the bishop even fewer.



Pupils at St Bede's, Christchurch, receive the morning benediction—not something they would encounter in a state school. When New Zealand's secular state education system was established in 1877, Catholics set up their own separate system so they could teach religious education (left). It has only been over the past 30 years that the two systems have been integrated. Under integration, the special character of non-state schools is recognised and retained. Today, 58,000 students attend the country's 240 Catholic schools, and demand for places is strong—even from non-Catholic families.

Four princes of the Australasian Church who did not always see eye to eye are (from right): Bishops James Liston (Auckland), John McCarthy (Sandhurst, Victoria), Daniel Mannix (Melbourne) and Henry Cleary (Auckland).



AUCKLAND CATHOLIC ARCHIVES

choice of James Kelly as the new *Tablet* editor in early 1917. Kelly was a recently arrived Irish priest for whom Irish constitutionalism was "a sham and a fraud" and the idea of conciliating the enemies of Ireland (and Catholicism) a heresy.

For the next five years, Kelly cheered every victory for Sinn Féin and exchanged insults with its enemies (culminating in his notorious editorial reference to Queen Victoria as "a certain fat old German woman"). After a mere nine *Tablet* issues from Kelly's pen, the solicitor-general formally urged his arrest and prosecution for sedition, a step which the government, a wartime coalition, was too timid to take.

In mid-1922, the Catholic Church felt the backlash of Kelly's weekly provocation when James Liston, the coadjutor bishop of Auckland, was obliged to endure the indignity of a two-day criminal trial for sedition. The charge stemmed from a St Patrick's Day speech in which he had allegedly referred to British troops as "foreign murderers." Liston's acquittal marked the end of the divisive Irish issue, but the scars of the conflict during these years were slow to fade. Over the next two decades, the Catholic Church seemed to turn in on itself, bruised by what it regarded as institutional sectarianism and bigotry. It was redeemed by the advent of the Labour Party, led by a Catholic, Michael Joseph Savage, which swept to power in 1935.

Catholics were strongly represented in the emergent Labour Party, which shared a repugnance for the PPA and was a keen supporter of Irish self-determination. In 1922, Liston had publicly rejoiced at Labour's electoral gains: "Thanks be to God, the Labour people, our friends, are coming into their own—a fair share in the Government of the country."

Labour's victory came in the same

year that death finally claimed Francis Redwood, that venerable link with the Church's Marist pioneers. Like the country, the Catholic Church was turning to the native-born for leadership, beginning with James Liston (Bishop of Auckland 1929-70) and Matthew Brodie (Bishop of Christchurch 1916-43). These new leaders insisted that Catholics were no strangers in the land of their birth, which they and their immigrant forbears had played no mean part in building up.

Liston's confidence of fair treatment by Labour (and by his fellow-countrymen) was soon rewarded, as there commenced a flow of minor concessions to private schools, which had become (in some eyes, at least) a flood by the 1960s.

More important than tangible gains was a sense that the era of exclusion was over, reinforced by enthusiastic Catholic participation in World War Two and the Korean War. Old ethnic and religious wounds were finally healing, a process greatly accelerated by the reforms inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

The new ecumenical climate encouraged joint action by the Christian churches to secure state funding for their schools, which were suffering under the weight of post-war population pressure and rising educational standards.

The long-term effect of these de-

velopments was to convince Norman Kirk and his third Labour Government (1972-75) to pass the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975), which allowed religious schools to join the state education system on terms that protected their "special character." By early 1983, all 249 Catholic primary and secondary schools had become "state integrated schools," a solution which saved many of them from almost certain financial collapse. By ending the Catholic Church's defining grievance, the Act marked the integration of Catholics into New Zealand life in a wider sense, as was demonstrated in 1986 when Pope John Paul II became the first pontiff to set foot on New Zealand soil.

Nor was the past entirely forgotten. The links with the original Catholic mission were acknowledged in 1988 with the appointment of a Maori bishop, Max Mariu, himself a Marist. In a more recent gesture towards history, it has been decided that the bones of Bishop Pompallier will be brought back to New Zealand and reinterred at Motuti, near the place in the Hokianga Harbour where he first landed 164 years before.

*Rory Sweetman is a Dunedin-based freelance historian who specialises in New Zealand ethnic and religious history. Among his recent books is *Bishop in the Dock*, an account of the sedition trial of James Liston.*

View from the pew

A personal reflection on what it means to be Catholic and Kiwi

By Paul F. Freedman

WHAT IS A typical Kiwi Catholic of the 21st century like? A definition ought to be possible—but probably isn't. Although we're a Christian communion with a more rigidly defined set of doctrines than any other, oddly, there isn't a uniform product.

We left-footers cover a surprising spectrum of belief. We vary in our acceptance of and obedience to the edicts from the central hierarchy. For some of us, Catholicity is primarily personal piety, devotion to saints (Jesus' mother among them), prayer and liturgy. For others, it's more a matter of social justice, a fair deal for all, concern for the needy. Plus prayer and liturgy.

What is it that allows us, from crusty conservatives to liberal lefties, to consider ourselves "Catholic"?

I've been one for 45 years—a convert, not Catholic born. I've journeyed across the spectrum from classically conservative to lightly liberal. Perhaps my own spiritual evolution and my impressions of Catholic friends can shed some light on Catholic belief.

Religion wasn't practised in the home where I grew up. My mother was a non-practising Anglican, my father an agnostic Jew. I hardly thought about religious faith until, at an Anglican boys' boarding school in Hamilton, the sessions of "chapel" brought God and me face to face.

Later, I was shifted to a school in Auckland, staffed by the Marist Brothers. The seeming certainty of their faith was very attractive. So was the chanting, the incense, the ambience. (The statues and art, though, I found simply awful!)

My main impression of the brothers was of love (the wholesome sort) and an affirmation of each individual's unique value. They devoted their lives to our "formation" as human beings. I never encountered the abuse often suspected today to

have been endemic in such institutions. Within a few months of arriving at St. Paul's College I was enthusiastically learning my Catechism—an aspirant Catholic.

Back then, the Catholic Church believed not only that it had the answers to life's Big Questions, but also that the process of internalising them could be short-circuited by memorising large chunks of text (much of it, if you were a choirboy, in Latin). Years later, I can still quote clods of catechism, and after decades of pondering, I recognise the deep formative influence it wrought.

There were negative aspects, too. I remember the infamous *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, a compendium of seditious prose deemed likely to undermine our attachment to God. (Authors included Graham Greene!)

Shortly after I joined the Church, the Second Vatican Council was convened. Pope John XXIII challenged Catholics to "open the windows" and let in some fresh air. It was a time of enthusiasm. Most ordinary Catholics, as the council progressed, believed that the age of centralised, bureaucratic control was drawing to a close. Mass in Latin was dropped. The Church was redefined as the pilgrim people of God—not a hierarchy of officials.

It was heady stuff. Responding to ideas "in the spirit of Vatican II," Catholics later sought a relaxation on the strictures against birth control. Many also wanted a less condemnatory tone on homosexuality and other moral/sexual issues.

Critics of such perceived laxity and dissidence began to coalesce into organised right-wing groups. Many deplored a loss of the sense of mystery, the other-worldliness of the Latin ceremonies. A breakaway church under right-wing French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre found followers even in faraway New Zealand. For some, the "fresh air" was

becoming a nasty gale.

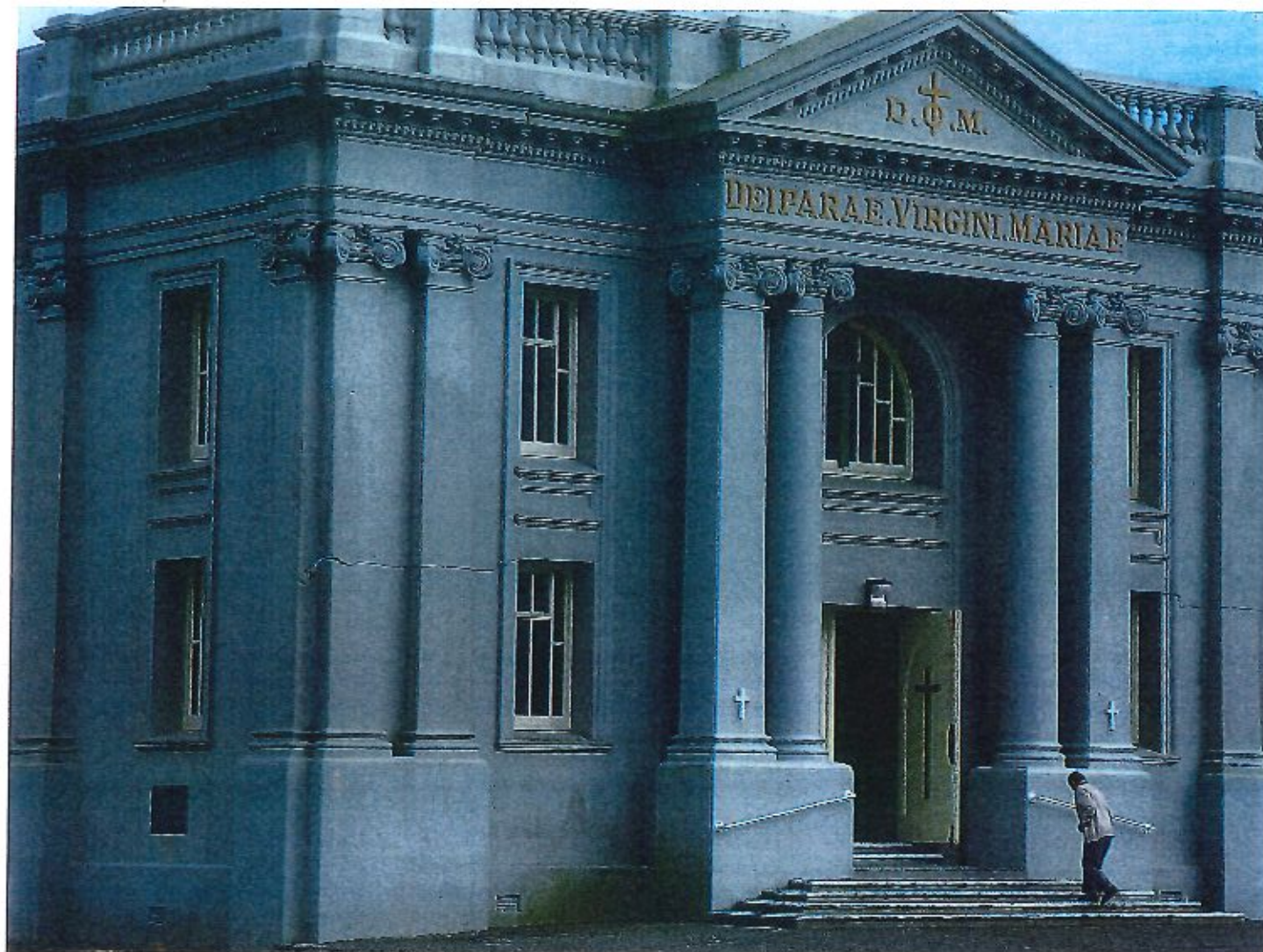
Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*—the famous statement reaffirming the ban on "artificial" birth control—made headlines here as everywhere. (Wags dubbed it "Paul's Epistle to the Fallopians.") This edict saw large numbers of Catholics deciding the issue was too personal, too hard. New Zealand Catholics, perhaps the furthest from Rome, were among the first to murmur.

For myself, now father of a young family, I found it a tough teaching. Certainly, the Church had advanced its views on sex within marriage a little. Previously, "the marital act" (as officials coyly put it) was taught to be primarily for the procreation of children. The strengthening of love between a husband and wife hardly registered. After Vatican II, married love got a better press.

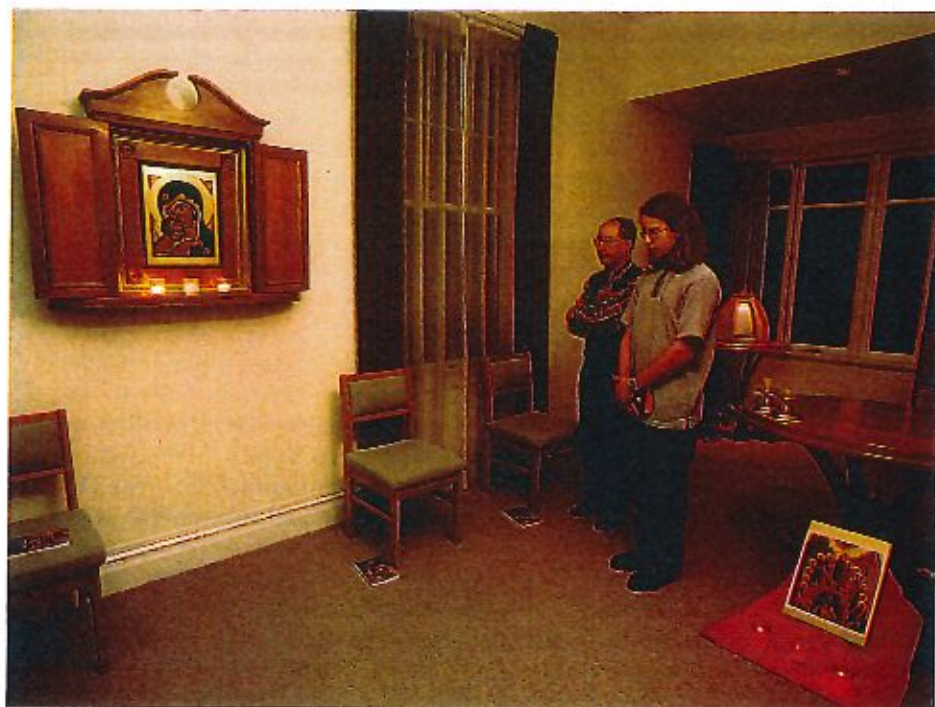
But—and here was the catch—every "marital act" had to be open to the possibility of pregnancy. The use of birth-control pills, IUDs and condoms was (and still is) forbidden. Only the "rhythm method" of periodic abstinence (later scientifically improved into the Ovulation Detection System) was permitted.

Why did married lay people acquiesce in such a restrictive regimen? The simple answer is that we were the inheritors of nearly 2000 years of tradition which held that the Pope, with his bishops, has a unique insight into what God requires. This heritage of fairly passive compliance had its roots in Europe (or, for many Kiwi Catholics of the 1900s to 1950s, Ireland). A new generation of Kiwis, articulate and independent, did not accept such constraint so passively.

Many, like me, obeyed the birth-control teaching, but with reluctance. If this was what God really wanted, well, we'd struggle to obey. Large Catholic families were the norm. But many found the philosophical



Although its buildings—such as impressive St Mary's Basilica, in Hokitika—still stand strong, a dearth of priests is forcing change upon the Church. Will female or married priests be admitted in another decade or two? At the Marist seminary in Ponsonby (right), there are only a handful of seminarians, one of whom is here saying evening prayers with his superior in front of an image of Mary, for whom the order is named. Preparation for the priesthood entails up to eight years of training and study.





As in Protestant denominations, many Catholics associate with the Church primarily at births and deaths, and maybe attend a Christmas Eve mass, but their commitment to the Church is fragile.

justifications for the restriction unconvincing. It was a scenario replayed later (with more trenchant criticism and greater reluctance to acquiesce) as Rome maintained a tough line on other contentious issues.

Not long after Vatican II, lay people realised that the expected democratisation hadn't really happened. True, we sat, for the first time, on parish councils. Lay fingers now tentatively brushed the rim of the helm—or did they? Just let that parish council opt for activities the parish priest opposed (never mind the bishop) and they'd be reminded in short, sharp fashion that the power to effect any substantial change resided much higher up.

As the 1960s and '70s progressed, major changes affected the New Zealand Church. Candidates for religious life (nuns and brothers) dwindled to almost nothing. Our schools had to adapt as they became staffed by ordinary teachers—many not even Catholics. Huge financial burdens drained diocesan funds, leading finally to integration within the State education system. (The nuns' and brothers' labour had been virtually free.)

Watershed changes affected New Zealand—women's liberation, the "sexual revolution," an erosion of the welfare state. All impacted on the lives of Catholics. We re-examined

the book all Christians revere, but which Catholicism had assembled and pronounced canonical, the Bible. Earlier ages had accepted it as God's own *Brief History of Time*. Now it was clear that a more analytical interpretation was needed. Scholars dissected the texts, assessing the circumstances of the many different communities for whom its books had been originally created.

What were its messages, we asked, for those people at that time? Theologians extrapolated from this a continuing relevance in the Bible's moral and ethical insights for our own age. However, a concurrent fundamentalism refused to budge from literal interpretation—a further bricking-in of conservatives.

In the 1970s, the charismatic movement—(miracles, healings, "tongues")—touched swathes of us. I remember gatherings in Auckland's St Patrick's Cathedral, where nightly crowds of 800 were common. Sadly, this movement has now subsided to an echo of its glory days, but its lasting legacy has been to help make a "personal relationship" with the Divine seem real and accessible to ordinary folk. It freshened up hymns, prayer and liturgy, and helped us feel closer to Christians of other persuasions.

Another development for Catholics here was the establishment of

tertiary institutes and pastoral centres offering formal education in spiritual matters to lay people. Some of these were created as our integrated schools sought a laity better versed in religious education to sustain their "Catholic character"—a distinctiveness permitted within state funding.

New Zealand's Catholic seminaries, too, were thrown open, reflecting a notable eagerness on the part of Catholics to deepen their religious ideas. For many attending such formation—certainly for me—a new understanding of the Bible's relevance to faith in the modern world was exhilarating.

Perhaps of greatest concern for us has been a sharp decline in the number of priests. Fewer young men are now prepared to accept the requirement of celibacy. A wide-spread disillusionment with the Vatican's rigid, centralised control has seen many priests leave their parishes, among them a few of our brightest stars. Some are friends of mine, who can no longer accept (and certainly no longer impose) the official line on issues such as birth control, homosexuality, the refusal of sacraments to those in "irregular" marriages (i.e. the divorced and remarried who have not undergone the Catholic process of marriage annulment). Others have left simply from loneliness.

Catholics here, as elsewhere, have been stunned by scandals of sexual infidelity among priests, religious and (though not in New Zealand) bishops. It was with numb horror (not unlike that with which we watched the bombing of New York) we heard revelations of clerics preying on women and boys; of bishops who believed promises of reform too easily, shifting malefactors to new and unsuspecting communities. Though rare here, these scandals deeply

undermined institutional Catholic credibility, within and without.

At the very moment when the bishops (the official teachers within Catholicism) most needed to be seen alongside their people, tuned in to popular opinion and reassuring us about the Church's solidarity with ordinary individuals, the tone of documents from the Vatican grew more austere.

Rome insists flatly it has no plans to open ordination to married men. Little empathy seems on offer for Catholics divorced and remarried. Equally unsympathetic was the way Rome delivered its verdict on the plea to ordain women. I suspect this worried even some quite high up in the New Zealand hierarchy.

As editor of the Catholic monthly *New Zealandia*, I vividly recall phoning around our principal teachers and scholars. Rome was pushing the pronouncement excluding women from priesthood as "infallible"—hence permanently irreformable. I needed a quote from someone authoritative who could unlock the reasoning behind this. Almost everyone ducked for cover. Fewer than half were prepared to comment, on the record, in support.

Why do the questioners stay, then? Can't they simply sign up with another Christian denomination—one with a more fluid approach to doctrine?

Many do, in fact, move away. Some join other communions, others drift into agnosticism. Interestingly, recent books and TV shows in this country have highlighted prominent former Kiwi "convent girls" (and their male equivalents). An astonishing proportion, though having abandoned religious practice, are still deeply committed to their ideals of social justice. This seems to be one of the most durable legacies of Catholic formation.

For conservatives, there is no problem with the Church. The malady lies with those who doubt and dissent (and bishops who are too "soft"). There is a tendency to label those on their left "cafeteria Catholics," who pick at the more palatable beliefs and leave the rest. Yet many who are not right-wingers—despite doubts and tension—still feel their

Catholicity deeply.

I believe it is the Eucharist that holds us together—the Mass, the heart of Catholic faith. We share with all Christians a belief in the saving power of Jesus Christ. It is well known that we Catholics believe the elements of bread and wine become quite truly his body and blood. Eucharist, thus, is where our spiritual vitality is nourished, not just a way of praying. It makes Catholicism irreplaceably "home."

Hence our deep concern about where tomorrow's priests will come from. Few ordinary Kiwis have an appetite for abstract theological debate. Most, I think, hope fervently that the bishops will accept candidates from a wider base—those we parishioners nominate—to train for ministry.

Already, we hear proposals to import priests from other countries (where candidates are still plentiful) and graft them on to Kiwi congregations—Asians, Africans, perhaps Fijians.

Some Catholics applaud this move; others are deeply skeptical. It is not racism on the part of the latter, but a worry that priests from these areas are likely to have a conservative theology, yet would administer liberal congregations—a recipe for tension, to say the least.

We're worried, too, that a situation may develop here like that in South America, where a dwindling core of aging priests celebrates Mass for enormous crowds in huge city churches.

But there are signs of hope. Many Kiwi Catholics now attend some kind of small community such as a prayer or Bible-study group. Some join enterprises such as the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, doing practical work to feed, clothe and house refugees or help anyone in need.

Where encouraged (or *permitted!*) lay people are taking a much fuller part in running their local parish. The "geographical parish" (the expectation that you should attend the church closest to your home) is being challenged. Increasingly, Catholics are moving across cities, seeking parishes where the celebratory style fits their ideas; where they feel comfortable.

Few, these days, attend worship as a matter of convention, as was once widespread. Numbers are down, but those still communicant have deep convictions.

New Zealand Catholicism has changed beyond measure in the past 50 years, and will surely change more. Pope John Paul II is now elderly and visibly failing. Some Catholics hope for a liberal new Pope—maybe another John XXIII; another lungful of fresh air.

In reality, it is extremely unlikely that the tough teachings will change any time soon. The proscription against women priests, though perhaps not "infallible," is weighty, with the Roman Magisterium behind it. Married male priests are slightly more likely. There is no doctrinal reason to preclude them. But that change won't happen overnight.

Nor is the Church likely to relax its moral teachings. However, New Zealand's Catholic bishops are caring, pastoral men. They encourage their flocks to think through hard issues carefully. They reaffirm something Catholicism has always held: to remain in good faith with God, a Catholic's duty is to have a fully informed conscience and to obey it (which is not the same thing as blindly following the rules.) But the bishops tread carefully. The heritage of an "inerrant teaching Church" is not to be treated lightly.

As Catholics, we have no clearer picture of what the future holds than anyone else has. What we *do* have is faith. However insecure the world of our immediate future, with skyscrapers crashing and terror rampant, we're convinced that, finally, justice will prevail.

Each of us, we believe, has a part to play to hasten that day. Assembling to share our Sunday sustenance unifies us in this belief and gives us focus. The superstructure may be shaky in places, but the foundation remains strong. ■

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Cathedrals were once the grandest buildings in our cities, dominating the skylines, but no longer. Auckland's St Patrick's Cathedral, a commanding presence 100 years ago (above), is now overshadowed by the Sky Tower and casino complex just a block away (right). But the Church is not rooted in such ephemera. It has survived 2000 years, and, by the grace of God, will continue to serve people and prick the conscience of society for a long time yet.

