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#### **FR RAMSEY**

An impeccable parson called Ramsey  
His bishop's pet little lambsey,  
Not inclined in the least  
To women as priest  
Was himself, though, more ewesey than ramsey.

#### **ON A BISHOP**

He gathers round him men so dim  
that even someone dull like him  
appears a beacon almost bright  
for shining from so dull a light

#### **ON ANOTHER BISHOP**

He gathers round him men so bright  
he shines in their reflected their light  
Their sparks fly out to him on loan  
Their wit and brains ignite his own.

#### **RUMBLING FROM THE RANKS**

In growing older as a priest,  
Of all my problems, not the least  
Is how, without the merest trace  
Of anger, to accept with grace  
The rise of men of little sense  
To eminence and prominence

The dullest dogs are made archdeacon,  
The dim of wit, the feeblest beacon,  
The egotist and own drum's drummer,  
Tweedle Dumb and Tweedle Dumber,  
The Venerable Father Clod,  
The execrable Father Plod

How hard to honour and defer  
To twerps whom Bishops much prefer  
To brilliant, wise, successful me!  
Could Jesus mean in his decree  
Of first as last and last as first,  
That worst be best and best be worst?

#### **TEN CENTS A SECOND! BLOODY HELL!**

With barefaced gall and practised ease,  
My dentist, for his expertise,  
At my last visit charged per second,  
(I've worked out, it's carefully reckoned)  
Ten cents! And with a smile as well.  
Ten cents a second! Bloody hell!

So just a minute's idle chat,  
To laugh with me at this and that  
Or sixty seconds idle patter

Or sixty seconds worth of chatter  
Mean I've bid goodbye, farewell  
To six good dollars! Bloody hell!

Meddling in an orifice  
Shouldn't cost as much as this,  
For filling teeth and fitting dentures  
Is hardly one of life's great ventures!  
Can scarcely cause a head to swell.  
Ten cents a second! Bloody hell!

#### **LINES OCCASIONED BY AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN**

Our awful Australian politicians  
Might turn out as fine as Mandela  
If we locked up the blackguards for 23 years  
In a bleak island's dungeon or cellar.

#### **GRACE FOR A FISH AND CHIP NIGHT**

To praise, Lord, open thou our lips  
As well as to these fish and chips.  
Helps us love the things that matter  
As well as fish fried crisp in batter.  
Let our hearts with love be filled.  
Not just our guts with fish well-grilled.

For we're not vulgar sorts and crude,  
We know there's more to life than food.  
If life's no more than well-greased lips,  
Then when we die... we've had our chips!

#### **CAT AND BIRD**

Relaxed, the cat sat still and idle  
On the back verandah seat,  
As plump and glossy blackbirds sidle  
Up to tantalise and eat  
Cat food from the cat's own plate,  
With beady eyes and scrabbling feet  
Risking, daring, tempting fate.

The cat, contented, simply purred,  
Wiser far than any bird.  
It watched unblinking, hardly stirred,  
Aware of how much she preferred  
Pet food that has been deferred  
Till ground in gizzard, juiced and blurred  
To feather, flesh and bone of bird.  
Processed into bird by bird!

## AN ANGLICAN CREDO

I believe belief to be than unbelief more odd,  
And God as likely not to be as likely to be God.  
But still to Church I weekly make my doubtful, hopeful way,  
To let the God who is or isn't, say or not to say  
His possibly impossible, uncomfortable word,  
Which might or might not, will or will not, leave my spirit stirred.

I go because I've always gone in ways now grown habitual  
To lose myself in ancient signs, in unobtrusive ritual,  
Restrained and Church of England cadence, polished, jewelled phrase,  
Unreasonable truths explained in reasonable ways.

But times, the world, the Church, the priest, are very different now.  
To search for God (who is or isn't) wondering why and how  
While sitting on a pew in church, brings less tranquillity.  
Newfangledness, increasing doubts, irascibility  
Begin to tempt me to attempt to find God on my own  
In Herbert's verse or Bach's cantatas listened to alone.

So far the tempter's strong attempt to tempt me hasn't worked,  
And Church and pew and boring priest, as yet I haven't shirked.  
Resolve's dissolving fast though. I've all but had enough  
Of literalistic preachers full of certitude and guff  
Who preach a mindless mish and mash of populist rot  
Expecting me to gobble up and swallow down the lot,  
Of cyclopean change-fanatics, restless, bored and fidgety,  
Who've vandalised the churches' chancels, language, hymns and liturgy.

Though quite as bad are those who with a driving sense of mission  
Attempt to force me to accept medieval superstition,  
To goggle mindlessly at shrines and squawk and gawk at "miracle",  
Excoriate the "heretic", at loopy "saints" wax lyrical!  
Who've never heard of Heisenberg, of Bohr and Stephen Hawking  
But still at poor Copernicus (and Newton too) are baulking.

I believe belief to be than unbelief more odd  
And God as likely not to be as likely to be God.  
But still to Church I weekly make my doubtful, hopeful way  
To let the God who is or isn't say or not to say  
His possibly impossible, uncomfortable word,  
Because, my God, O God, no God, without you life's absurd!

## I PRAY THEE HAVE ME EXCUSED

With hoity-toity, condescending, Grammar Schoolish snicker,  
Mrs Wortley-Montagu excuses to the vicar  
Unvaried non-attendance at the local parish church:  
"I'm awfully busy vicar, which is why you're in the lurch,  
But I'm as good as anyone, and God's among my roses.  
I worship him with aphid dust and water from my hoses."  
*Smile priest, grin priest, take it on the chin,  
Face creased, smile greased, smarm the woman in!*

The local high school teacher's got his piffling B.Sc.  
No one in a country town is quite as bright as he.  
"God's alright for dim-wits who need a little crutch  
To limp through life on. Not for me though, thank you very much.  
Opium for the hoi poloi is sometimes just the ticket,  
But intellects like mine can say to Church or Vicar, 'Stick it!'"  
*Smile priest, grin priest, take it on the chin,  
Face creased, smile greased, smarm the fellow in!*

The doctor in his surgery plays God to one and all,  
Gives health and life in capsule form to all who on him call.  
This tiny god would find it odd to bow his knee at all  
To any but the moneyed monkey mirrored in his hall!  
“The priest, the Church and God, of me can quietly despair,  
For I am God myself thank heavens, God and Medicare!”  
*Smile priest, grin priest, take it on the chin,  
Face creased, smile greased, smarm the fellow in!*

In clovered paddocks vast and rich there strides the local grazier  
To whom the thought of Sunday church appears a good deal crazier  
Than castigating other folk for falling shares and morals:  
“I take my hat off Vicar, sir! I give you all my laurels.  
How hard to preach of God and good in times as bad as these.  
The world (not me!) would better be if down upon its knees.”  
*Smile priest, grin priest, take it on the chin,  
Face creased, smile greased, smarm the fellow in!*

A parable advises priests to ease rejections pains  
By touting God and good along the highways, streets and lanes.  
To tattooed louts and yobboes then, the priest must preach his God,  
But they, as well, with one accord excuses make. How odd!  
In tongue refined or vulgar, then, excuses are the same!  
“Guzzle, slurp, slap tickle, burp! Life’s just a greedy game!”  
*Smile priest, grin priest, take it on the chin,  
Face creased, smile greased, smarm the people in!*

#### **WHEN SOURED TO ACID VINEGAR**

When soured to acid vinegar by stupid criticism,  
When partisan fanatics talk of heresy and schism,  
When ostracised for holding an unfashionable line,  
When those who lead the Church appear such mediocre swine,

When jealous colleagues mutter lies or stab me in the back,  
When philistines and puritans pursue me in a pack,  
When dills and dolts demand their dull, debilitating dreariness,  
When early rising, deadlines, duties, sap me into weariness,

When feminist new fangledness and fashion famished freaks  
Affront my common sense and all that’s solid shakes and creaks,  
When liturgies and bibles in banal and dull demotic,  
Curdle all my blood to clogging clots in veins sclerotic,

When people tut their tuts and take offence at me and mine,  
Discover me to be like them, a hypocrite and swine,  
When hedonistic cowards sell the pass and cease to search,  
Give up on goodness, spirit, God, and never come to church,

When personal inadequacies make me squirm and wriggle,  
When all my undone tasks my conscience start to niggle,  
When Christians live the Faith as if it’s stupid, dull and trite,  
Instead of lively, risky, sharp, exciting, dangerous, bright,

I’d throw the towel in, turn my back, collapse into a fever,  
Give the Christian game away, become a non-believer....  
If only it was just a light diversion, hobby, game.  
The fact that it’s so bloody true is such a bloody shame!

# The Walking Paradox

## Farewell St Augustine's Shepparton 2013

The priest who came ten years ago  
Must have seemed a so and so  
To gentlefolk, disturbed or riled  
By clergy who're not meek and mild,  
Refusing an approving nod  
To wild, irreverent priests of God.

Though full of vigour, sound of limb,  
Straight of back and figure trim,  
He dressed disturbingly off beat,  
In baggy shorts with sandalled feet,  
A tatty beard to compensate  
His mildly scabrous, balding pate.

An African-Australian-Brit  
Much given to jokes and risqué wit,  
Sesquipedalian, adjectival,  
A joy in words that few could rival;  
Provocative, a tad pugnacious  
In bishop-baiting, bold, audacious.

Though in his wives supremely blessed,  
His four bright kids had flown the nest,  
Depriving him of access to  
A sympathetic point of view  
To cultures popular or yob.  
No social, just a culture snob.

He came in all his rude vulgarity  
In part to test your Christian charity,  
Inviting love of down and outs,  
Beggars, ne'er do wells and louts,  
Those scorned by prissy folk and prim  
(As too are liberal priests like him).

Difficult to hedge or box,  
A friend of doubt and paradox,  
Embracing incongruity  
And preaching ambiguity.  
Thick skinned but also sensitive  
Impulsive and yet tentative.

A walking paradox indeed,  
Passionate for Church and creed,  
But also, too, a classic skeptic.  
Even tempered, yet dyspeptic,  
Distinctly trad liturgically,  
But liberal theologically.

A melancholic optimist,  
A happy, joyful pessimist,  
Hating happy clappy loons,  
Facile choruses and tunes,  
But prone at times to compromise,  
To his and everyone's surprise.

In grief and sorrow self-contained,  
Emotionally well restrained,  
Yet sharing of himself as well  
And telling all there is to tell  
Of what he thinks and reads and eats,  
In sermons, verse and strong pewsheets.

As time rolled on and years increased  
He knows you've grown to love this priest.  
You egg him on, affirm, support,  
Accept him, back him, rarely thwart  
Even his most crazy schemes,  
Wild fancies, hopeless dreams.

You've helped him through great tribulation,  
Have joined him too in celebration,  
He, among and one of you,  
Identifying through and through  
With all, save that judgmental lot  
Who say "I'm saved, but you are not!"

But as retirement looms at last  
He ruminates upon the past  
To find that faith and life and years  
Have lavished far more joys than tears,  
Upon this sixty seven year old.  
So drunk on blessings manifold.

What's more, of all those blessing lavish,  
Among the best has been this parish,  
Where priestly life and Christian creed  
Have granted much to him indeed.  
Not least tonight, just being here  
Among good folk who hold him dear.

And though this chapter now is told  
Don't think he's done for, finished, old.  
Bollocks! He'll have none of that!  
To prove it, here and learned off pat,  
A last brief sermon..... *"Life's no Bitch,  
Shot through with God, how rich, how rich!"*

## FANATICS

Be they bible-thumping brats,  
Or incense-reeking sanctuary rats,  
Fanatics ruin, wreck, besmirch  
Our quiet, temperate English Church.

Be they happy-clappy loons,  
Or charismatic, joy buffoons,  
Fanatics ruin, wreck, besmirch,  
Our languid, lovely English Church.

Healing freaks and rabble-rousers  
And kill-joy, puritanic wowsers,  
If fanatical, besmirch  
Our tasteful, gentle English Church.

The English Church, if it's authentic,  
Is dilly, daft, absurd, eccentric,  
But never ever mono-manic,  
The which engenders quiet panic.

The English Churchman's proper diet  
Is gentle, understated, quiet;  
Allows for compromise and doubt,  
Welcomes all, kicks no one out.

The English Church equivocates,  
In long debates deliberates,  
It tolerates and vacillates,  
Accommodates, procrastinates.

But crude, fanatic rabble rousers  
And manic, cyclopean wowsers,  
Deplore restraint, disdain sweet reason,  
Despise all compromise as treason,

And in their crude fanaticism  
Don't draw the line at even schism,  
And so invite in crude reaction,  
Partisanship, strife and faction.

For fools like me, with all we've got,  
Do battle, for our blood runs hot.  
We mock and fight and rant and roar,  
Which only brings them back for more.

Whereas the truly English way  
Lets fanatics have their say,  
Disdains to fight, with well bred hauteur,  
And drowns the fools in milk and water!

## ANDREW AND THE PRUNES

Andrew was a little lad  
whose parents were religious,  
Elders in the local kirk,  
well thought of, strict, prestigious.

Young Andrew was their heart's delight,  
the star of Sunday School,  
Loving, pious, thoughtful, kind,  
and never rude or cruel.

But one day, sadly, so it seems,  
(I fear it must be said)  
Upon the wrong and nasty side  
he clambered out of bed

To face his healthy breakfast prunes  
cantankerous and crabby:  
"I don't want prunes because," he snapped,  
"they're squashy, black and flabby."

"Andrew," said his angry mum,  
"Don't speak like that, my lad!  
God's command to little boys  
is 'Honour Mum and Dad'.

"Eat up or God will punish you  
for being so cross and crabby."  
"I won't, I won't! Those prunes," he cried.  
"are squashy, black and flabby!"

The pantry shelf received the prunes,  
and Andrew went to school  
Facing threatened wrath divine  
insouciantly cool!

Late that night with Andrew lying  
fast asleep in bed,  
His parents sat beside the fire,  
its embers glowing red.

A wild and violent storm blew up.  
Thunder cracked and roared.  
Lightning flashed, the wild winds lashed,  
And hail and rain down poured.

And then they heard with great delight  
and not a little wonder,  
Andrew heading for the pantry  
between the peals of thunder.

Perhaps he's learned his lesson then,  
and come back to himself!  
The God of thunder's sent him back  
To prunes upon the shelf!

Indeed! For from the pantry door  
a little voice balloons:  
"What a lot of bloody fuss  
about a bowl of prunes!"

## THE BISHOP AND ANN O'ROURKE

Dublin, though it's full of priests  
And has a certain charm  
Is very far from heaven on earth  
And peace, good-will and calm.

Archbishop Connor after Mass  
Devoured its Sunday papers,  
As usual full of murder, rape  
And kinky sexual capers.

A long and searching read was called for  
On the bishop's part  
To find good news to please, amuse  
And warm his holy heart.

But as he read the nineteenth page  
He gave a pious squawk.  
"A fourteenth child's been born," it said  
"To Mrs Ann O'Rourke."

Now there's a thing to make priests sing  
And feminists perplex:  
In Mother Church and married bliss  
Fecund, fruitful sex!

In Ann O'Rourke 'Humanae Vitae'  
Has found complete reception,  
Conception follows on conception  
Without the pill's deception.

He called at once his priestly dunce  
And chaplain, Mike O'Toole,  
"Get on your bike good Father Mike  
And pedal like a fool.

"Find Ann O'Rourke to give her this  
Ten pounds and bid her flourish  
For granting Mother Church a fourteenth  
Little soul to nourish!"

So Father Mike leapt on his bike  
And pedalled, cassock flying,  
Traffic lights, pedestrians' rights,  
Police and death defying.

And in a long and littered street  
He reached his destination:  
Dublin's best domestic nest!  
His Bishop's jubilation!

He knocked upon its shabby door  
And then stood back and waited.  
It opened to reveal the Mum  
His bishop celebrated.

Drawn and haggard, worn and ragged,  
Drab, dull-eyed, depressed.  
Of adverts for 'Humanae Vitae'  
Very far from best.

Undaunted Father Mike O'Toole  
Held out his Bishop's gift:

"Congratulations, Ann O'Rourke,  
May this your spirits lift!

"Ten pounds in admiration of you  
From Bishop Patrick Connor  
Who thinks your faith and fruitfulness  
All Catholic women honour!"

Ann O'Rourke, our heroine,  
The Bishop's heart's delight,  
Wedged the money in her bosom  
Very, very tight.

Then said securely and demurely:  
"The Bishop's very kind.  
Especially since I'm Methodist.  
How odd he doesn't mind!"

At this the Father, troubled rather,  
Seemed to change his views,  
And fecund fruitful motherhood  
Become despised bad news.

With grimace grim and rage enraged  
He snatched the money back,  
And snarled, "You shameless, protestant!  
You sex-crazed maniac!"

## CHRISTMAS IN JULY

Last year in windy, cold July  
I celebrated Christmas. Why?  
Because the southern hemisphere  
Still likes to ape the north, I fear.  
In winter and imagined snow  
To kiss beneath the mistletoe,  
To echo Santa's mad "Ho, Ho!"  
And fizz and burp by yule log glow.

To glut on turkey, goose and ham  
Instead of Western District lamb.  
On Christmas pudding, nuts and cake  
That make distended bellies ache.  
Nostalgic for another land,  
A northern land, a motherland,  
A land of woods coniferous  
Not gum trees odoriferous.

This southern hemispheric binge  
Exhibits, then, that cultural cringe  
Deplored by those who proudly think  
That European imports stink,  
Be they sparrows, starlings, rabbits,  
Pommie accents, pommie habits,  
Blackbirds, brambles, thistles, gorse,  
Or the monarchy of course!

Avoiding, in no small confusion,  
The sound and logical conclusion  
Of all such chauvinistic views:-  
That they themselves, by rights, should lose  
The right of tenure to this land  
Of arid soil and burning sand,  
Because like blackbirds, thistles, gorse  
They are imports too of course.

## **I'LL NEVER GO TO CHURCH AGAIN**

“When I, a little baby,  
Many years ago was Christened,  
Some very solemn vows were made,  
Though no one really listened.  
The purpose of the exercise  
Was photos and a party,  
The church, I'm told was lovely,  
The vicar bluff and hearty.  
The solemn vows meant nothing.  
They were merely instrumental  
In getting what my parents wanted,  
Purely incidental.

“When I, a twenty two year old,  
Was living with my lover,  
Back to church again I went,  
Persuaded by my mother  
To make some vows myself this time  
And doff my hat to God.  
That vows and God meant nothing to me  
No one saw as odd.  
If marriage in a church diverts  
A mother's constant flak,  
Hypocrisy, deceit and lies  
Should never hold you back.

“When children of my own appeared  
I had them Christened too,  
Dragging off to church my friends,  
A ribald, godless crew,  
Who shuffled, sniggered, fidgeted  
And wondered what to do,  
Unaccustomed, just like me,  
To sitting in a pew.  
Although the vicar told me  
What the vows of me require,  
I made them all without a qualm,  
By now a practised liar.

“My wife was buried from the church  
When nearly sixty four,  
The fifth time only in her life  
She'd crossed a church's door.  
Although this meant to God and priest  
She'd always been a stranger,  
That fact you wouldn't think, I'm sure,  
Would place her soul in danger.  
So when the bloody-minded vicar  
Less than certain sounded  
That she for heaven's gates was bound,  
It left me quite astounded.

“It caused my very blood to boil  
And gave me great offence,  
Convincing me that honesty  
And decency and sense

Abide far more with folk like me,  
Who've given Church away,  
Than with the hypocrites still there  
And all the wimps they pay  
To preach their wish-fulfilment dreams,  
Their pie up in the sky!  
I'll never go to church again  
Until the day I die!”

He might though,  
For he's never been,  
Except to tell a lie!

## **SITTING OPPOSITE THE BISHOP OF BALLARAT AT BISHOP IN COUNCIL LUNCHEON**

From living rich on food and wine  
that purple prelates' palates please,  
On pork terrine, poached salmon, truffles,  
caviar, foie gras, French cheese;  
Our bishop to reality returned  
last month from overseas!  
At Bishop's Council lunch he faced  
a pie, tomato sauce and peas!

He sat there facing me sad faced  
to face the sagging faceless pie.  
He rolled his eyes and pursed his lips  
and spooned on sauce, and gave a sigh.  
He poked the thing, which promptly spilled  
its gristly gravy guts, to die  
Surrounded by the saucy peas,  
to eat the which he had a try.

But memories of truffles, salmon,  
camembert and stilton cheese,  
Of Cambridge, Ely, London, Gloucester  
(Ballarat's antitheses)  
All caused him sadly to retire,  
with pie uneaten (and the peas),  
Regretting exile here to bitter  
Ballarat antipodes.

## **IRONY**

Church feminists become abusive  
At “man” generic, “man” inclusive.  
They ask us all to redefine  
“Man” to mean alone those swine  
Who're only half the human race,  
Despised, deplored and in disgrace.

Then having redefined the word,  
They're free to treat it like a turd  
For being not at all inclusive  
But as defined by them, exclusive.  
They throw it out of Holy Writ  
For being what they've made it, shit!

## THE PRODIGAL SON

A good and wealthy farming man  
From up the Mitta valley  
Had two quite different teenage sons  
Very far from pally.

Though both were brought up Anglican  
The older son had flirted  
For years with faiths fanatical  
Until he'd been converted.

From when, with unrelenting fervour,  
He rammed and preached and crammed.  
His brother's head with prayers and texts  
To show that he was damned,

Until the lad approached his dad,  
And said he'd had enough  
He couldn't any longer stand  
Such horrid, holy stuff.

He asked for his inheritance  
To set him up elsewhere  
Far away from holy Joes  
And unremitting prayer.

Although distressed, dad acquiesced,  
And hardly seemed surprised,  
In fact you'd almost swear that he  
Approved and sympathised.

Perhaps aware of how unfair  
And hard indeed to bear  
Can seem relentless, unremitting,  
Pharisaic prayer.

And so his second Son departed,  
On pleasure bent and smitten,  
Heading, courtesy of Quantas,  
For cool and swinging Britain.

Where not to culture, church or abbey,  
The young man had resort  
For he was bent upon a rather  
Different sort of sport.

He smoked his pot and drank a lot  
Of noxious British boozes,  
Chatting up and bedding down  
Pallid British floozies.

He greeted many, gloomy, grey  
Depressing British dawns  
With ghastly, garish, bright Australian  
Technicolour yawns.

With splitting head, in squalid bed  
He'd often wake alarmed  
To find his sleeping whore no more  
Attracted, pleased or charmed.

This country lad from up the Mitta  
Weaned on flies and grit

Into Pommie city life  
Didn't really fit.

Friendly Poms he found were hard  
To meet or come across.  
Unless he sponsored lavish parties  
No one cared a toss.

And so to keep despair at bay  
He was forever giving,  
Spending his inheritance  
On wild and riotous living.

Until at last without a friend  
And nothing left to spend  
The whores and pot and booze and parties  
Dribbled to an end.

Unemployed, depressed, dejected,  
Very much in need,  
Longing for Australia  
Desperate for a feed,

He answered an advertisement  
In the Telegraph,  
Was hired by Lord and Lady Derwent  
And joined their kitchen staff.

A job demanding lots of that  
Demeaning poppy cock  
Beloved of Pommie gentlefolk  
Like tugging at his forelock,

Paying homage, bowing, scraping,  
Smarming, creeping, crawling,  
Qualities Australians find  
Both galling and appalling.

It caused him to reflect and think  
Just what a price he'd paid,  
For leaving home and God and goodness,  
How very far he'd strayed.

How much he'd like to be again  
The lad that once he'd been,  
Basking in his father's favour,  
Upright, decent, clean.

And so at length to fly back home  
To where his dad resided  
And throw him self upon his mercy  
The younger son decided.

Garuda airlines flew him back,  
The cheapest he could find,  
Prodigality and Britain,  
Relieved, he left behind.

He disembarked at Melbourne airport  
A changed and chastened lad  
Trusting for some sort of welcome  
From a loving dad.



His hopes were fully realised!  
His father not annoyed  
Hugged him, kissed him, said he'd missed him  
Completely overjoyed!

He didn't ask for reparation,  
Pay-back or amends,  
But organised a joyous party  
Inviting all his friends

Both beer and hearts were light not heavy,  
Except of course for one,  
Who outside skulked and lurked and sulked  
The bitter elder son.

So holy had this young man grown,  
So strong in rectitude,  
So lost in God-Almightiness,  
So pious of attitude

He thought his Father's joy to be  
Misguided and misplaced  
Prodigals and sinners  
Immutably disgraced.

Good News for him not only lay  
In saving folk from hell  
Consigning them to Satan's care  
Pleased him just as well.

And yet the Father's loving arms  
Are opened wide to all,  
No one's sent to hell by him  
No one, none at all.

Converted, unconverted,  
It's all the same to him  
Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jew,  
All are welcomed in.

The father's far more prodigal  
Than was the younger son,  
Prodigal though not with cash,  
With love and joy and fun,

The only ones he leaves outside  
Are those who won't come in,  
Damning holy Joes commit  
The only damning sin!

### **ALL THE WORLD'S A CRICKET PITCH**

When cricket tests are being played  
Thoughtful listeners are dismayed  
To find their much loved ABC  
Displacing God with commentary  
On each and every stroke and ball  
Each near miss and wicket fall

How tedious when on Sunday night  
You're more disposed to take delight  
In David Busch's gentle art  
In probing matters of the heart  
Of God, religion, wrong and right,  
That cricket takes up all the night.

It shouldn't so dismay us though,  
For God in cricket too can show  
Truths that lead to quiet reflection,  
Fruitful thought and meditation.  
Cricket needn't be at all  
A vulgar xenophobic call  
To one-eyed patriotic pride  
In victory of one's country's side.

A morsel of imagination  
Can bring, instead, illumination.  
A very small example may  
Illustrate this: Let us say  
The cricket ground is planet earth,  
Both vale of tears and vale of mirth,  
That life is just a batsman's innings  
During which life's bowler flings  
Opportunities galore  
To make a duck or make a score.  
And note as well the game's divinity  
To be, most properly, a trinity:  
Umpires three, two white of coat,  
On field, appealed to, but remote,  
The third a camera's focussed eye  
That lets no peccadillo by.

And as in life, so too in cricket,  
It's how you play the sticky wicket  
that measures real and true success.  
It's courage, skill, fair play, finesse  
Far more than runs galore or winning  
Redeem the game and grant it meaning.

All the world's a cricket pitch,  
On which to tease from life, the bitch,  
Sense and meaning, virtue, duty,  
Purpose, love, delight and beauty.  
Unless we read life's meaning right  
We die perplexed, confused, in fright.  
Our pointless life before us flashes  
Then dust to dust and ash to ashes.

Cricket too is much the same.  
If wrongly played a pointless game,  
Which, when all's been said and done,  
Even if the test is won  
The truth, too soon, before us flashes,  
That all we earn's an urn of ashes.

**THE PARABLE  
OF THE GOOD SOCIAL WORKER**

A country man in Melbourne for the day  
Without his trusty 'Melways', lost his way  
And ventured down a seedy, evil street.  
(He should, by rights, have beat a fast retreat).

He passed a riotously evil pub,  
Of wicked wiles and ways the local hub,  
From which emerged a crowd of drunken louts  
Who knocked him to the ground with booze-blurred shouts.

They kicked his face to pulp with feral pleasure,  
Then stole his watch and wallet for good measure,  
Leaving him half dead and bleeding on the ground,  
Gurgling froth and blood, a ghastly sound.

By chance the local priest passed down that way.  
He looked in pious horror, paused to pray,  
Then hurried on in case he too was bashed,  
His halo bent, cherubic visage smashed.

A little later on there passed a nun,  
Not veiled or robed (a very modern one),  
She likewise made a fearful, fast escape.  
Afraid of brutal men intent on rape.

But then there happened by a social worker  
Who happily was not a pious shirker.  
He took a single, brief, yet searching look  
And bravely played compassion by the book.

His heart went out to "victims" far and wide  
And as he passed by on the other side,  
He gave the classic, socialistic yelp:  
"Whoever perpetrated this needs help!"

**THE TEARING OF SPINSTERISH HAIR**

Thomas the Tank Engine, Noddy and Big Ears,  
Arouse in our nannies all sorts of strange fears.  
They "reinforce stereotypes", strengthen tradition,  
Must be swept from our shelves and consigned to perdition.  
Their "hidden agenda" in nanny engenders  
The prospect of future foul SEXUAL OFFENDERS.

There is little in life that is worse to our nannies,  
To latter day feminist "Myrtles" and "Fannies",  
Than SEXUAL OFFENDERS, in fiction or factual,  
Imagined or real, potential or actual.  
And "Myrtle" and "Fanny" detect the word "fallacy"  
In most that's been written, though oddly spelt "phallusy"

So the masculine detritus from every book's sifted  
And metaphors, pronouns are changed or are lifted.  
Nothing's untouched and the Bible's unmanned,  
St Paul must be bowdlerised, queered or damned.  
And kids in the nursery, weep in despair  
For Noddy's been choked with torn spinsterish hair.

## IMPOTENCE

His Royal Highness, David, king of Israel,  
When his strength with age began to fail,  
His eyes with cataracts grow blurred and dim,  
Arthritic feebleness spread through every limb;  
Then felt the need for love, affection, care,  
A gentle hand to smooth his grizzled hair,  
A breast to lean upon and arm to hold,  
A bosom friend to keep at bay the cold,  
A mate to nuzzle close to in his bed,  
To soothe, to pat, to stroke his lordly head,  
To feed his toothless mouth soft baby food,  
To hold at bay insistent suppliants rude and crude.

And so a search was made both far and wide  
For someone to be constant by his side,  
And Abishag the Shunamite was found,  
Vivacious, sparkling, plumply curved and round.  
She loved and cared for David day and night,  
He never let her wander from his sight,  
Until, at last, to Sheol he made his way,  
The land of shadows drear, half night, half day.  
So leaving Abishag his little Shunamite,  
His comfort, darling dear and chief delight  
With more regret than all his warrior fame,  
His epic poems, lyric gifts or worthy name.  
For nothing hurts as much the human heart  
As being forced from love and kindness to depart,  
Especially love and kindness when you're old,  
A wreck that loving arms yet still enfold!

This moving tale of mighty David's end  
Could surely no one but a prude offend,  
For how its irony should please us,  
Its piquant, sharp reversal tease us.  
A virgin, safe in randy David's arms!  
The king, unmoved, unstirred, by virgin charms!  
The lusting, leching, uncontrolled wild fire  
That did to death the cuckold spouse Uriah,  
Quenched, died out, put out, burnt out and spent!  
There's something in this story heaven sent.

Yet prurient prudes of liberal bent and breeding,  
Have culled it from our daily bible reading.  
Thus making me as impotent with rage  
As David was made impotent with age.

## SHROVE TUESDAY GRACE

Lord, tonight, for all our sakes  
Bless us who eat these pan-cooked cakes  
Freckled, blistered disks of batter  
Whose egg and flour make fat folk fatter.

Thick or thin, of various shapes,  
They're called by fancy people "crepes",  
And maybe just for once that's right  
For cakes are fluffy things and light,  
Baked, not blistered, always sweet,  
Never stuffed with fish or meat!

What they are called though doesn't matter,  
It's tasty tucker, blistered batter,  
If with creamy fish replete  
Or stuffed with spiced and saucy meat,  
Then followed by a second round  
In lemon juice and sugar drowned  
And gobbled down with good intent  
To fuel and see us right through Lent!

So bless us Lord, indeed today.  
As in this old, time-honoured way,  
We eat and drink with joy and zest  
From motives that are of the best.  
It's in your honour, for your sake,  
That every freckled, pan-cooked cake  
Is eaten up and swallowed down!  
And so your angels needn't frown,  
We're not being gluttonous or bent,  
You'll see! We'll starve for all of Lent!

## IN PRAISE OF MANURE

Under a shearing shed shovelling muck,  
Crouching and grunting and down on his luck,  
An Anglican Rector discovered the way  
To keep cash-hungry bishop and diocese at bay.

The offertory plate each Sunday was light,  
But he didn't despair at the pitiful sight,  
Or rant and harangue his faithful few,  
He flopped to his knees, but not in a pew!

Under a shed he got down to his praying,  
In sweat and in effort, in action not saying;  
And so there were filled lots of offertory sacks,  
Piled up high, a great mountain of stacks.

This wasn't accomplished completely alone,  
He didn't perspire and beseech on his own.  
Parishioners too came to kneel in the dung,  
To pray with their muscle, not with their tongue.

In Carngham they did it without their Rector,  
Hundreds of sacks from this hard-working sector,  
And in Wallinduc's rain and in Wallinduc's mud,  
The hand of Sue Robertson split and poured blood,

But still she dug on, with the hard working Netta,  
Inspiring the men to do better and better!  
So Christ Church Skipton was solvent on dung  
And happy am I dung's praise to have sung.

The stuff has its merits is far from obscene,  
Its smell is not noxious, though pungent its clean,  
How well it dissolves a church's debts  
And eases a Rector's worries and frets.

All praise then for muck, it's most wonderful stuff,  
A church in the bush simply can't have enough.  
Like roses and lilies we need it to thrive  
And keep mother church fragrant, lovely and live!

**GRACE FOR THE FRIENDS  
OF WANGARATTA CATHEDRAL  
AND DEAN'S CONFERENCE DINNER 2002**

We thank you Lord, and so we should,  
For all that's lovely, true and good,  
For all you give from which to choose  
(Not least tonight's good food and booze).

We thank you Lord for all that matters,  
For even deans, like Wangaratta's,  
Grey-haired, golfing Ray McInnes,  
Redeemed, at least in part, by Glenys,

We thank you Lord for other deans  
From distant parts and different scenes  
Who've come (perhaps) to think and work  
As well as gobble, booze and shirk.

We thank you Lord for Mother Church  
And those who've reached the lofty perch  
Of Bishop, who're a dean's best friend,  
Especially at his tenure's end.

We thank you Lord for our Cathedral  
It's many friends, all lovely people,  
Keen, devoted, Christian folk  
Who love their Lord and love a joke

Thanks too for Christ the life enhancer  
Cosmic lover, partner, dancer.  
For him and all your gifts we raise  
Our hearts in gratitude and praise. Amen.

**GATHERING RECTORY WOOD IN MAY**

The April Rectory, pebble-dash grey,  
Stood stolid, stark and cold.  
The Rector, rugged-up, down-cast, long-johned,  
Looked bald and pinched and old.

And so one day in early May  
A group was got together  
To gather fuel as best it could  
In far from clement weather.

To chain-saw, split and load good wood  
In charitable frenzy  
Upon the lovely property  
Of Alistair McKenzie.

The Rector (clad in jeans and boots)  
Knew himself in luck  
When gung-ho Ewan Clugston brought  
His saw, panache and truck.

Moustached Chris Wells as well brought with him  
More than most or many:  
His trailer, splitter, roaring saw,  
And best of all his Jenny.

She swung her splitter looking fitter  
Than all the men about her.  
Far less wood we should or could  
Or would have got without her!

With calloused palms and mighty arms,  
Splitting, pulverising,  
David Harricks came as well,  
Tall, philosophising.

And Shane his son, a lanky one,  
With "Banjo", rabbit-drunk,  
Scrabbling, sniffing, panting, digging,  
Beneath each fallen trunk.

And Emma Harricks too was there  
And several younger girls,  
Less workers they than ornamental  
Decorative pearls!

Two strong Jacksons came from Warrack  
In their bashed-in ute.  
We piled it high, it gave a sigh,  
But made it home, the beaut!

Ear-muffled, goggled David Colley  
Proved the best of blokes  
Wielding well a wild saw  
And even wilder jokes.

Peter Neaum and David Neaum  
Also played their part  
And Margaret Neaum provided scones  
To please and give us heart.

Cooperative work and effort  
Yielded their reward.

The Rectory store has wood galore,  
Praise muscles (and the Lord!)

Appropriately we finished up  
Burning Rectory wood,  
And guzzling wine and Rectory olives,  
Both very, very good.

No more rugged-up, down-cast, long-johned,  
Nor longer pinched or cold  
The Rector now is warm and grateful  
(He's still, though, bald and old!)

**THOUGHTS BOTH MELANCHOLY  
AND HAPPY ON THE THRESHOLD  
OF MY FIFTY SECOND BIRTHDAY**

Six foot one and bald of head  
With streaks of grey in beard of red,  
Neaum's nearly fifty two  
So over half his life is through!

For now it cannot be denied  
He's crossed for sure life's Great Divide.  
Death-day's nearer now than birthday.  
It's down-hill, down-hill all the way.

No wonder that he relocated  
In 1995, migrated,  
To leave the healthy southern side  
Of great Victoria's Great Divide  
To age from nineteen ninety six  
Not upon the river Styx,  
Death's stinking creek & mankind's worry,  
But on its relative, the Murray.

It's here' he'll wrinkle, dessicate,  
Shrivel, superannuate,  
His gum-receding teeth grow longer  
In the border town, Wodonga.

And as relentless ticks the clock,  
It's time, he thinks, for taking stock.  
For thinking, searching-out and knowing  
Where he's got to, where he's going.

The sort of man and priest he is,  
His prospects, hopes, and fears to quiz....  
As self-exposure's unappealing,  
He'll not, of course, be too revealing.

He's pessimistic, worldly wise,  
Few things take him by surprise.  
He knows that priests cannot succeed  
Who've not in bishops' pockets peed!

Although much given to fun and frolic  
He's sometimes almost melancholic.  
The grievous "tearfulness of things"  
At times a numbing sadness brings.

Although in some ways grown in grace,  
He's miles still from God's dear face.  
Old certainties have crumbled rather,  
More distant now seems God his Father.

And yet to him this isn't serious,  
Is not to faith that deleterious.  
At fifty one he better copes  
With questions, doubt and flagging hopes.

Why this should be he's not that sure  
Except that certainty's allure  
Is felt most by the insecure  
For which the years provide a cure.

He doesn't like fanaticism,  
Intolerance, judgmentalism.  
Those who send the lost to hell  
Deserve consignment there as well.

Prudish, kill-joy Christianity  
Appears to him inanity.  
Faith must joy and freedom bring  
Or else it isn't worth a thing.

English born, but travelled wide,  
He's taken much within his stride.  
Among exotic domiciles,  
Zimbabwe and Atlantic isles,

Outspoken, prone to tell the truth  
More brazenly than in his youth  
He's laughed at priests in prose and verse,  
Has taunted bishops, and far worse

Has ridiculed their piddling pieties,  
Exposed them for the mediocrities  
That most of them most surely are,  
He's sometimes gone (perhaps) too far!

Too far at least for approbation  
From those such views bring perturbation.  
His colleagues sometimes paid him back  
With knives plunged deep into his back!

Promiscuously adjectival  
For purple prose he has no rival,  
In verse he's always metronomic  
And very often histrionic.

Because proficient verbally  
He's widely thought by some to be  
A clever, academic whizz,  
Much brighter than in fact he is.

Which he doesn't mind at all!  
Though pride like this precedes a fall.  
From arrogance's throne deposed  
His ignorance will be exposed.

But as this balding priest reflects,  
Surveys his faith, his life inspects,  
He finds that faith and life and years  
Have brought by far more joys than tears.

That God has blessed a hundredfold  
This all but fifty one year old,  
With favours numerous and lavish,  
Not least his present pleasing parish.

His priestly life and Christian creed  
Have granted much to him indeed.  
Not least just simply being here  
Among good folk he holds so dear!

Six foot one and bald of head  
With streaks of grey in beard of red,  
This Scottish dancing, versifier.  
In whose belly still burns fire,

This less than reverent priest of God,  
This far from pious parson odd,  
This man by words intoxicated  
By rhythm, rhyme and God elated

This all but fifty two year old  
With over half his life now told  
Can say, for him, life's been no bitch  
But rather full, delightful, rich.

## RETURNING THE COMPLIMENT

Unbelievers view believers  
with scornful eyes and critical.  
We do not practice what we preach  
and so are hypocritical.

Believers note in turn, however,  
and not without relief,  
How rare it is that unbelievers  
practice unbelief.

They live as though their lives have meaning,  
and love means more than hate,  
Though unbelief and atheism  
sense and love negate.

Thus unbelievers lack the courage  
of their own conviction.  
Impious unbelief, in fact  
is but a pious fiction

Believers unbelievers view  
with scornful eyes and critical  
They do not practice what they preach  
and so are hypocritical.

## INVERGOWRIE AND DUNDEE

A six foot one Australian,  
A bearded, bald Episcopalian,  
I've spent the last twelve weeks at least  
As All Souls' Invergowrie's priest.

Australia and Scotland share  
Far more than most would be aware.  
No wonder then, I've settled in  
As if among my kith and kin.

Invergowrie and Dundee  
Indeed have grown to mean to me  
As much as anywhere I've been,  
Lived in, visited or seen.

I voice my gratitude in verse,  
Well conscious that I can't do worse  
Than Dundee's own great versifier,  
Bill McGonegal the dire.

His "silvery Tay" is what defines  
Dundee's delights, for it confines  
The city to its northern side,  
Its estuary being by far too wide

To let Dundee's exuberant life  
Overspread the fields of Fife,  
Which, green and lovely to the gaze,  
In winter's cold and summer's haze

Remain there to remind us all  
That cities needn't always sprawl  
Forever outwards, covering beauty  
With concrete, tarmac, graft and duty.

It doesn't matter where you are  
(Held up by roadworks in your car,  
Or trying to cross a busy street  
In wild wind and bitter sleet)

A glimpse of fields and silver Tay  
Will change the outlook of your day,  
Will turn a curse to benediction,  
To joy your sense of dereliction.

And just as special as Dundee  
Has Invergowrie been to me,  
For though to Dundee closely linked  
It's yet contrived to be distinct,

Is very much an entity,  
Retains its own identity.  
Not quite by city planners nobbled,  
It's not been swallowed up and gobbled.

Its little school and bowling club,  
Two churches, village shops and pub  
All give the place a village feel,  
Contribute to its great appeal

The Crop Researchers' Institute  
Plants fields of grain and berry fruit  
That help preserve a country feel  
And make the sense of village real.

And what a lovely church, All Souls!  
For miles its spire attracts, cajoles  
Believing Christians in, to see  
How beautiful their faith can be.

The fairest church in all Dundee  
Or so it seems to biased me,  
For I, inside, beneath its steeple  
Have met my Lord in lovely people.

I've also visited the highlands,  
Lochs and lowlands, firths and islands,  
Glasgow, Edinburgh, Lochgair,  
Kilmarnock, Braemar, Perth and Ayr;

Forfar, Plockton, Achnasheen,  
Iona, Mull and Aberdeen;  
Inverness and Loch Aline;  
Scone, Dumfries and Gretna Green.

Stonehaven, Brechin, Crieff, Auchmithie,  
Forres, Findhorn, Nairn Drumlithie,  
Jedburgh, Fishnish, Corran, Keith,  
Pitlochry, Glamis and Monifieth

Comrie, Aviemore, Dalwhinnie,  
Carnoustie, Abernyte, Baldinnie.....  
But best, by far, have been to me  
Invergowrie and Dundee.

## **TOURISTS IN EDINBURGH**

What a downright shame and pity  
That Edinburgh, the lovely city,  
Should suffer such an awful fate  
As every year to pullulate  
With hordes of gibbering, tourist monkeys,  
Sight-seeing, mad enjoyment-junkies.

As summer heightens, more and more  
From trains and planes and coaches pour,  
Jostling, pushing, photographing  
Gawping, shouting, joking, laughing,  
They clog the pavements, streets and lanes,  
And drop their litter in the drains.

Determined spenders, over payers  
They pose with busking bag pipe players  
And round old churches chat and nod  
In search of history not of God.

Pleasure seeking brash invaders  
They tempt the local shops and traders  
Into greed and avarice  
For no one local likes to miss  
An easy profit or a killing  
Made from folk so keen and willing  
To purchase tatty memorabilia  
Like porcelain puffins, or even sillier  
Are fascinated and impressed  
By Loch Ness monsters tartan dressed,  
Or thistle brooches, pewter otters  
And thick lipped mugs from half baked potters,  
Or half filled disks of Scottish tunes  
And Celtic prayers in phoney runes,  
By tartan scarves, or heather dried  
And into brittle bunches tied.

All of which turns Scottish enterprise  
Away from projects good and wise  
To make and peddle junk and trash  
For therein lies such easy cash.

Thus tourists ruin all they see  
By simply going there, like me.

## **THE AUSTRALIAN MALE**

Pity please Australian males.  
Their dirty minds and finger nails,  
Their drooping bellies, beery grins,  
Paraded, flaunted sexual sins,  
Boasted muscle, vaunted badness,  
Gambling mania, football madness,  
Tattooed arms and boozy breath,  
Their fear of priest and fear of death,  
Ensure that when they're geriatric  
The devil's soon to make his hat trick,  
And take to hell (his stinking hole)  
Their body, mind and shrivelled soul!

## **HOLY SPORT**

When I, a little schoolboy, came  
The last in any race,  
My father never ever seemed  
To think it a disgrace.

If ever in a game of soccer  
I landed on my bum,  
My mother thought it very funny.  
Sport meant naught to Mum.

And this, perhaps, is why today  
I'm not involved in sport,  
And rarely watch unless I'm trapped  
By those who think I ought.

But now and then I catch a snatch,  
On the evening news,  
Of football games and goings on  
That grab me and amuse.

And make me think religion has  
More parallels to sport  
Than most of us suspect it to,  
Far more than you'd have thought.

At many football games, for instance,  
Seats are far from full,  
Football might be popular,  
But crowds are hard to pull.

I empathise with commentators  
Who talk the numbers up.  
For sometimes numbers in my pews  
Could do with talking up.

What's more, concern with bums on seats  
In Church or footy ground,  
When only fuelled by greed for cash  
Is dangerously unsound.

In both, you see, it's love that matters!  
It's love of God or game  
Authenticates concern for numbers,  
In this we're both the same.

While both, as well, a different story  
At times rejoice to tell.  
Our crowds at Christmas or for Finals  
Multiply and swell.

I also note that coaches find  
They're in a bind and mess,  
Unless for sponsors, fans and bosses  
They dish up sweet success.

That's much the same for parish priests,  
We too do well to bless  
Our bishop, people, councillors  
With manifest success,

For if we don't, or can't, or won't,  
We rouse antagonism

And though we're very rarely sacked,  
Are drowned in criticism.

And also both in Church and football  
Symbols play a part.  
For lions, tigers, cats or dogs  
Help loyal fans take heart.

And crosses, fishes, doves and lambs  
Are all in Churches noted,  
While both the faithful and the fan  
To "Saints" can be devoted.

We both use colours, banners, songs,  
And hold in some derision  
Those who live their faith or footy  
By way of television.

Rival football clubs experience  
Fraught and strained relations,  
Often echoed in the Church  
Between denominations.

And just as rival codes in football  
Fail to get on well,  
So fanatic Christians send  
Rival faiths to hell.

And if we're honest, Church and Football  
Are sometimes dull and boring.  
It's only now and then that either  
Set the spirits soaring.

Like, perhaps, a glorious mark,  
Defying gravity,  
A mighty punt, or jinxing run  
That thrills in suavity!

Then filled with awe the spirits soar,  
The stands erupt and thunder  
And all are charged, electrified  
With almost holy wonder.

No wonder that today's cathedrals,  
On which we lavish billions,  
Are sweeping, soaring stadiums,  
Accommodating millions.

It doesn't mean religion's died,  
Or faith's been brought to naught.  
But rather, simply, sport's religion,  
And religion's sport.

### **ICHABOD**

When Israel's wandering desert God  
Of Red Sea Crossing fame  
Pitched his tent awhile in Shiloh  
In the hills of Ephraim

The bloody-minded Philistines  
Had taken to the road,  
The Promised Land as much with blood  
As milk and honey flowed

God's resting place, his holy space,  
His shrine in Shiloh's hills  
Was cared for by a fat old priest  
Who suffered many ills,

Not least of which that life the bitch  
Had granted him, alas,  
Two priestly sons, unholy ones.  
Hophni and Phinheas

They with Dad the shrine were called  
To care for and to mind,  
Though sad old dad could not control them,  
Being old and fat and blind.

Dissolute, adulterous  
And with a taste for whores  
They laid the girls who served the shrine  
As keepers of its doors.

Unbridled in their appetites  
And mad on charcoaled meat  
They stole the faithfuls' offerings  
To barbecue and eat.

They laughed and chaffed old Eli when  
He tried to warn them off it,  
And merely yawned when also warned off  
By a passing prophet.

And so it seemed their just rewards  
Would have to come from God.  
Horrible, incorrigible,  
They didn't give a sod.

Now kept in Shiloh's holy shrine  
Indeed, its heart and essence  
Was Israel's Ark in holy dark  
The symbol of God's presence.

But when the Israelites in battle  
Were well and truly routed,  
God's presence with them as they fought  
As you'd expect, was doubted.

So why not take the Ark to battle  
For then with God beside them  
Victory, surely, would be theirs  
Could never be denied them.

And so the sons of Eli left  
Their feasting and their whores  
To take the Ark to make its mark  
In one of Israel's wars.

While blind and fat old Eli sat  
In anxious trepidation  
His shrine despoiled, objections foiled  
In fear and perturbation.

The Ark he knew was not a talisman,  
A shabby box of tricks,  
A magic charm to ward off harm  
A handy cure-all fix.



Indeed, the God of Israel lets  
Only deep repentance  
Turn him back from meting out  
A just and proper sentence.

The Ark could not! It symbolised  
A God unmanageable.  
To tout it round a battlefield  
Was daft and asked for trouble.

The sides engaged. The battle raged,  
Till Israel's men retreated,  
With thirty thousand soldiers dead  
Decisively defeated.

This dreadful news to waiting Shiloh  
A runner soon reported,  
Adding that the Ark was captured  
And Eli's sons both slaughtered.

Now Eli, heavy on his chair,  
A nonagenarian wreck,  
On hearing that the ark was lost  
Fell off and broke his neck.

And Phineas' pregnant wife  
Was brought to labour early  
And bore and named a son before  
Dying prematurely.

Because the Ark was lost she gave  
Her son a name that's odd:  
"The Glory has Departed" or  
In Hebrew, "Ichabod."

And so the sons of Eli's sins  
Reaped their cruel reward.  
Too cruel by far we think today  
To blame upon the Lord.

Theology today asserts,  
Post-New Testament,  
We're punished by, not for our sins,  
That God's benevolent.

How good indeed to thus be freed  
From God as fickle swine  
Supporting one day Israelite  
And next the Philistine!

How good indeed that Ichabod,  
The glory that departed  
Returned to Bethlehem not Shiloh  
As kindly tender-hearted.

### **EXCUSES EXCUSES**

Folk desert their church these days  
In easy, off hand, casual ways  
Their motives, rarely reasonable  
Are often all but treasonable.

And though a parson shrugs his shoulders,  
It's ten to one resentment smoulders,  
And sometimes worry, hurt, self-doubt  
All of which need letting out.

And so in this cathartic verse  
I'll now relieve myself, rehearse  
The footling, stupid, piddling reasons  
Folk offer for their petty treasons.

First among the folk who leave  
Are those like kids who still believe  
The Sunday School simplistic lie  
That God's just granddad in the sky.

God's raison d'être, function, task  
Being just to grant them all they ask.  
Should someone die for whom they've prayed,  
They lose their faith and leave dismayed.

Then others find our church to be  
By far too short of certainty,  
Too open minded and refined  
To suit their small and tight-closed mind.

They join the fundamentalists,  
Those who fume and shake their fists  
At evolution and at science  
In strident, fearful, fraught defiance.

But true faith asks an open mind,  
Leaves certainty and proof behind,  
Steps beyond what's known today  
And sometimes redefines its way.

Still others leave to shout "Hosanna"  
In madly Pentecostal manner.  
Restraint and taste they deem inferior  
To wild emotion and hysteria.

They take their bibles literally,  
Interpret them simplistically,  
They dream up miracles galore  
And most that we hold dear deplore.

At first they stay and try to make  
Our own church fit their mould and shake,  
But if, no matter how they try  
They fail, it's then 'Goodbye, goodbye!'"

Our rules on marriage some resent  
And when they break them don't repent,  
Pretend instead their Church talks nonsense,  
To spare or ease their guilty conscience.

Unless their Church will deem them blameless,  
And let them be completely shameless,  
They're high and mightily offended,  
Leave enraged, allegiance ended.

Those who graced the Church's schools  
When adults often turn to fools,  
Deserting Church because they say  
At school they had to go each day.

It's this they say that's put them off,  
They don't come now, they've had enough.  
But what a down right stupid reason  
For what's indeed a kind of treason!

At school they had to brush their hair,  
Clean teeth and change their underwear,

Were forced to swallow rude retorts,  
And play all sorts of stupid sports.

Do they now not brush their hair,  
Play sport or wear clean underwear?  
Of course they do! Their reasons' spurious,  
And incidentally leaves me furious.

But one of all these tired excuses  
Most fills my mouth with bilious juices,  
More than any other galls,  
Gets up my nose, disgusts, appals.

Many claim that those who never  
Go to church at all or ever  
Are Christians just as good as they  
Who go each Sunday, come what may.

One knows instinctively they never  
Say their prayers at all or ever,  
Are tight of fist and self obsessed  
Are unlike Christ, are cursed not blessed.

In fact are self-deceiving cheats,  
Residual Christian counterfeits,  
Mountebanks, poseurs and frauds,  
The devils minions not the Lord's.....

Enough! Catharsis is achieved.  
I'm purged of bile and much relieved.  
How therapeutic to immerse  
The self in turning bile to verse!

There's left, however, one excuse  
That's good and merits no abuse.  
A few give up our Church and leave  
Because they simply can't believe.

Now if, in honest ways and true,  
A person really thinks things through  
And then concludes he can't believe,  
It's only right that he should leave.

The search for Truth, if genuine  
Can lead folk out and then back in.  
For Truth is crowned with thorns they'll find,  
And has a loving face and kind.

### **THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD**

Am I a hero or a fool?  
For when at last I finished school  
While others started their careers  
I studied on for years and years.

Three years plus one for a degree,  
Three more to learn theology  
And in between some years teaching  
Until at last the priesthood reaching

I found my self as edified,  
Degreed, informed and qualified  
As any lawyer or physician,  
Engineer or politician.

Falling short of them, I'd say  
In only one distinctive way,

A lack of their renowned facility  
To over-value their ability,

And thus to charge for what they do  
So much it beggars me and you.  
Their years of work a guarantee  
Of wealth, respect and luxury.

Yet I have worked as hard as any  
Am better qualified than many  
For seven years am tertiary trained  
But what materially have I gained?

I'll die with little in the bank  
No home to boast, no car to swank,  
Mouldering in a rented flat  
A basket case. Pass round the hat!

All my study, effort, pains  
Result in very meagre gains  
Amount to hardly more than zero!  
I'm more a fool then, than a hero.

But fools have freedoms wise folk don't  
Are free to do what others won't.  
They're not obsessed by every second  
With every minute's value reckoned.

They'll waste their time on lunatics,  
Beggars, bludgers, geriatrics,  
On practices distinctly odd  
Like idly waiting on their God.

The wasted time's not Time you see  
Such wasted time's Eternity,  
And thus its one of Heaven's rules  
That fools are heroes, heroes fools.

### **WELCOME OF FR BRIAN GILL TO THE DEANERY**

Tallangatta's a lovely town  
In which to live and settle down.  
It's far away from city ills  
From louts and yobbos, dolts and dills.  
Beside the Hume, beneath the hills  
Its gardens flowered with daffodils.  
Where blackbirds sing from golden bills.  
And in its rectory now, the Gills.

This means that if its streets you wander  
You might encounter Brian and Ronda  
Revelling in the lovely scenery  
Of the Murray Valley Deanery  
That stretches many miles and long  
From Rutherglen to Corryong.

By their bishop ably led  
Its clergy: Bruce, two John's and Ed,  
Andrew, Alan, Simon, Ross,  
Philip (Rural Dean and boss),  
With Libby too and David Still  
Are glad to welcome Brian Gill  
With open hearts and open arms  
To all their deanery's great charms.  
So welcome Brian, welcome Ronda.  
Put down roots and never wander.

## THE MELANCHOLY BALLAD OF ST UNCUMBER

*[St Uncumber, or Wilgefortis, so the legend goes, was required by her father, the king of Portugal, to marry the king of Sicily. Unfortunately she had made a vow of virginity. Her prayers for help in this predicament were answered when a beard grew upon her face. The king of Sicily withdrew his suit and her indignant father had her crucified. She was accordingly represented as a bearded woman hanging on a cross. It is in England that she is known as Uncumber]*

A Sicillian king set sail due West  
To find himself a wife.  
Between the Pillars of Hercules  
His galley was a knife;

Then to the North he ventured forth,  
Atlantic waves were wild,  
And so was passion in his breast  
For a Portuguese king's child.

He'd set his heart on Uncumber,  
A maiden most devout,  
Who'd vowed to die a virgin maid,  
All men to do without.

Her father thought (naive old king)  
That girls their dads obey,  
And so virginity for him  
She'd gladly cast away.

But this proved not to be the case.  
Her swarthy Mafia king,  
For all his wealth and gifts and looks,  
To her meant not a thing.

And so she turned the man down flat,  
"And that," she said, "is that."  
Her father, thwarted, face distorted,  
Was madder than a cat.

Enraged, he roared, "You'll marry him,  
For if you don't you'll die.  
We'll nail you to two slabs of wood.  
By God, we'll crucify!"

Uncumber to the chapel fled,  
Her prayers with tears were mingled.  
Her eyes were red, her face was flushed,  
Her pretty chin, it tingled.

She stroked that chin. Her heart gave in!  
She thought, "Now here is trouble."  
Her sweet, her soft, her dimpled chin  
Was covered with coarse stubble!

For God had heard her fervent prayers  
And sent a beard to frighten  
Her mafia suitor out of love  
And so her prospects brighten!

A bearded Queen is rarely seen  
Except in a gay king's court!  
She stroked her beard, no more afeared,  
Her worries brought to nought.

She showed herself to her two kings  
And both were quite revolted.  
Her father gasped in disbelief,  
Her suitor simply bolted.

For a king with a heart even extra large  
Would never press his suit  
Upon a maid whose sweet visage  
Was frizzily hirsute!

And so her father raging mad  
Had her crucified.  
His will she'd thwarted, plans aborted,  
And so, poor girl, she died.

And even now, in Portugal,  
Can sometimes still be found  
Bearded, female Christ figures  
On crosses lying round.

To lift the feministic heart  
That longs for beards on girls  
And wants to Christine Christ as well  
And perm his hair to curls.

So what a patron saint she makes  
For feminist accusers  
Of men as brutes and beasts and boors  
And child and wife abusers!

## EARLY MORNING IN LATE WINTER IN HOLY TRINITY CHURCH ARARAT

On bitter cold and wintry mornings,  
Under Mary's eye,  
Black-becassocked, hunched and cloaked,  
A priest at prayer am I.

Outside the bluestone sweats cold rain,  
The wind through tiles sifts  
And inside, round the empty church,  
It coldly curls and drifts.

In a pool of bright bulb-light,  
Shocking in its starkness,  
I hunch befuddled, gloomy, black,  
In league with outer darkness.

The brightness in the little chapel  
Is challenged by my night.  
For I'm a fragment of the dark  
That's strayed into the light.

The light divine might shine, but surely  
Never light a soul  
Which in a chapel's universe  
Appears a dense black hole.

Outside though, in a dripping bush,  
With arrogant disdain,  
A sex-crazed blackbird bursts to song  
For all the wind and rain.

A rumour, hint at, hope of dawn,  
Beyond the distant hill,  
Is all that's been required to open  
Wide its golden bill.

Lovely, lovely, liquid notes  
Tremble on the air  
And shower, fall all over me  
Darkly sitting there.

They permeate and penetrate  
The blackness in my heart  
Which slowly warms, responds and melts.  
Sadness falls apart.

My lips begin to murmur praise,  
That's almost loving, fond,  
As God within me sings his love  
To God outside, beyond.

Behind me, through the great east windows,  
The dawn explodes its light,  
And floods the church in ambient red,  
To halo my delight.

The blackbird and black-cassocked priest  
Acknowledge God's good light!  
Perhaps two wrongs have made a right,  
Two blacks have made a white!

### **AN OLD CHESTNUT RE-ROASTED**

Henry Tudor, England's king,  
The one who split with Rome,  
Summoned once to Hampton Court,  
His Thames-side royal home,

Bishop Charles of Bangor, perhaps  
A papist in disguise  
And whom he wished therefore to test,  
To quiz and catechise.

The bishop, not a learned man,  
This ordeal faced with dread.  
Knowing that a feeble showing  
Would mean he'd lose his head.

So in despair he went to see  
His brilliant, learned brother,  
A monk for wit and learning matched  
In Europe by no other.

"We look so very much alike,"  
Remarked the Bishop's brother,  
"That King nor anyone can tell  
Either from the other."

"So I, not you, will see the king  
To face his catechism

And thus perhaps we'll foil the man  
Who's brought our Church to schism!"

And so to Hampton Court the monk  
Made his prayerful way,  
To face his vengeful, cruel monarch  
One dark and gloomy day

"I've three good questions for you, Bishop,"  
Said the King, directly,  
"You'll lose your head unless they're answered  
Promptly and correctly."

"First, how deep's the ocean, Bishop?  
Answer fast, don't stall!"

"Easy," said the Bishop's brother,  
"A stone's throw deep, that's all."

Grudgingly the king accepted  
This answer as correct.  
Surprised indeed to find a Bishop  
Of wit and intellect!

"Second, who's the greatest man  
Who's ever lived on earth?"

"Easy. Jesus Christ, of course,  
Whom Mary brought to birth!"

This question, Henry, eaten up  
With egotistic cancer,  
Had wanted to be given, of course,  
A sycophantic answer!

And so his third and final question  
He asked in wrath and rage  
"What's in my mind? What am I thinking?  
Bishop wise and sage?"

"That's easy," said the Bishop's brother  
"You think that I'm another!  
That I am Bishop Charles of Bangor  
But I am just his brother."

### **BETTING ON THE ARCHBISHOP**

In a snooty Melbourne Club  
Idly bored and yawning  
Sat two retired business men  
At ten one Monday morning.

The only other occupant  
Read the Melbourne "Age"  
Totally absorbed it seemed  
In every single page.

Said business man to business man,  
"That fellow over there  
I'm sure's the Anglican Archbishop,  
Though it doesn't do to stare!

"That he should be a fellow member  
Of this exclusive club  
Surprises me, for how can he  
Afford the mighty sub?"

“That’s not the Anglican Archbishop,”  
Said the other man,  
“He looks far more intelligent  
Than any bishop can!”

“It is, I tell you,” said the first,  
“I’ll bet you fifty dollars,  
For I can sniff the clergy out  
Without or with their collars!”

They argued fiercely for a while,  
Each stubbornly one-sided  
Until to ask the man himself  
They both of them decided.

They tossed a coin to settle who  
Should rise to go and ask.  
He who thought the man the bishop  
Won the dubious task.

And so he rose and made his way  
Across the room and said:  
“Aren’t you the Anglican Archbishop?”  
The stranger raised his head

And shouted in a vehement voice  
Both evil and malign,  
“Mind your own vile, bloody business  
You nosy, nasty swine!”

The business man returned, sat down,  
Amazed but not undone.  
He said, “The blighter wouldn’t tell me!”  
So neither of them won!

### **LIGHT LINES ON GEORGE LINES FOR HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY**

George, a deep but funny man  
Has reached mankind’s allotted span  
Achieved the years assigned to men  
The psalmist’s three score years and ten,

Which surely is the best of times  
To sing his praise in measured rhymes.  
Why wait until a good man dies  
To honour, praise and eulogise?

These lines for George, the best of Lines,  
Should sparkle like the best of wines  
But hint as well at depths profound  
If they’re to catch him in the round.

For thirteen years I’ve known the man,  
And grown to be his friend and fan,  
Relishing his conversation  
Learning, wit and cerebration

Both man of God and man of science  
He holds together in defiance  
Strange paradoxes of a kind  
That puzzle those of simpler mind.

He’s wise, he’s daft, he’s strong, he’s frail,  
Well esteemed, beyond the pale,  
His head in clouds, his feet on ground  
Madly sane, profoundly sound.

Of all Australians that I’ve met  
On none like him my eyes I’ve set.  
Distinguished looking, twinkling eyed,  
His sympathies and interests wide.

Full of facts most recondite,  
In conversation a delight,  
His wicked tongue controlled in part,  
By Robyn and his Christian heart.

He first to my attention drew  
As sermon fodder in my pew.  
Where if my sermon proved a dud  
He’d ruminare his own good cud.

Then after church and over sherry  
In the hall and waxing merry,  
Sizzling, witty jokes he’d trade  
Imported east from Adelaide.

And in his gracious home and fair  
We ate exotic foodstuffs rare,  
Boeuf Wellington so rare and red  
It palpitated as we fed.

The best of wines the best of foods,  
And George our host in best of moods  
Holding forth with gleeful grin  
His napkin tucked beneath his chin

The company was usually  
Selected most judiciously,  
Never dull, some rogues, no rotters,  
Bishops, potters, farmers, squatters,

Sculptors, writers, scientists  
Artists, priests and journalists,  
Only once a mountebank  
A failed priest, a fool and swank,

A man who raised both ire and gorge  
By out-pontificating George,  
But unlike George with little wit  
All bombast, belly ache and bull shit.

His mind so crammed with information  
Eased my children’s education.  
When stumped by queries we would sing  
Don’t ask us, give George a ring.

Unlike so many of his peers  
This man of action and ideas,  
Timidity repudiates  
He’ll risk a risk, and tempt the fates.

And so he’s made some bold decisions,  
Has dreamed his dreams and seen his visions  
His few mistakes we don’t despise,  
With pride can George eat humble pies.

For this I love this man of men  
Who's three score years now, and ten!  
So generous, kind, devoid of rancour,  
His Wife and Faith his strength and anchor

May he with learning, zest and dash  
Long continue with panache  
To bless our lives for years galore  
Till called at last through heaven's door. 1998

### **FR AMADEUS BEWARE**

In Mother Church, a much loved friend,  
Perhaps the hardest thing to comprehend  
Is how so many muddling mediocrities  
And tiresome, talentless nonentities  
Rise to "Venerable" dominance  
Or even "Very Reverend" prominence!

Who, insecure upon so high a perch,  
Can't cope with wilful talent in their Church,  
Are jealous of ability and flair,  
Applauding only those who never dare  
To question, query, challenge, answer back,  
Promoting none except the sycophantic hack!

Yet I suppose it's ever been the same,  
That nearly all professions play this game,  
Talent by the talentless aborted,  
Achievement and success demeaned or thwarted.  
Fr Amadeus, beware and wary  
Of envious Archdeacon Salieri!

### **SOZZLED DAFT ON NECTAR**

Five years a buzzing buzy bee  
Sozzled daft on nectar  
I've thrived, well hived, have stung, been stung  
At Ararat, your Rector.

Through God's good grace I've loved the place  
Have buzzed about with pleasure.  
Its bluestone church especially  
I hold most dear and treasure.

The Rectory's old and can be cold,  
It's worn, but also spacious.  
It stands substantial, solid, sound,  
A bit run down, but gracious.

And Ararat's a pleasing town,  
Its climate brisk and keen.  
Its atmosphere is bright and clear,  
Its streets well treed and clean.

All of this I'd sorely miss  
Were I to leave tomorrow,  
Its people more though I'd deplore  
To leave. I'd go in sorrow.

I'd miss its "clients", gaol-birds, slobs,  
Not just its brisk, keen cold,  
Its ratbags, yobs, its well-heeled snobs  
And also friends untold.

And Father John who soldiers on  
No matter who's his Rector,  
Ranting fundamentalist  
Or smoking genuflector!

And also Lil, John's marvellous spouse  
And partner archetypal  
His loyal wife, who all her life  
Has been God's true disciple.

My wardens three mean much to me  
Gavin, David, Howard.  
Their care, concern, support and help  
Have never flagged or soured.

Financial matters in the main  
I've held in great disdain,  
Driving Moira first, then Sybil,  
Our Treasurers, insane.

Joan Talbot, Secretary of Council  
Of kind and open mind.  
To all my faults and foibles  
Has been humanely blind.

Council members, past and present,  
Like Collins, Wiltshire, Crook  
Have many times my sins forgiven  
And let me off the hook.

And Harricks, Jackson, Milliar, Bullock  
Norman-Bail and Madley,  
Bonsacks, Newsomes, Croft and Wells,  
I'd leave them all most sadly.

My strong desire to start a choir  
When first as priest I came here  
I'm most surprised we've realised,  
I hold it very dear.

It challenges, brings lots of fun  
Giggles, belly laughs and groans  
Eustace, Gavin, George and Nick  
Jenny, Kris, two Joans,

Kristy, Cathy, Leila, Marg,  
Wendy, Jamie, Rod  
All lift our hearts to play their parts  
In worshipping our God.

Jean Crebbin's been an inspiration,  
Salty, cultured, witty,  
Progressively conservative,  
Determined, strong and gritty.

Elsie Beggs is more progressive  
Than many half her age  
Her active, kind, inquiring mind  
Is shrewd, judicious, sage.

Mrs Preece and Mrs Wigan  
Have sparkling fun-filled eyes  
The sunny sisters, Mrs Sherlock  
And Mrs Milliar, likewise.

Jean Rogers, Rita Roadknight too  
Are faithful as can be,  
Tom Lewis too has been true blue  
Full of bonhomie.

The servers under Tara's guidance  
The Youth Club under Rick  
Have faithfully fulfilled their tasks  
And rarely missed a trick.

Peg Moorfoot who's our sacristan  
Is another of my fancies  
Birds and kids and animals  
She loves, like good St Francis

Kelvin Turner's melancholic,  
Mordant, caustic wit,  
Reg Wiltshire's eccentricity  
Have pleased this Pommie twit.

Emma, Shane and Penny Harricks  
Have more than compensated  
For all the vandalising jobs  
I've chased, reviled and hated.

I cannot mention everyone  
Without going on all night  
Too many of my parish folk  
Have given me delight.

Which is why I'm on a high  
Sozzled daft on nectar  
Although a far too buzy bee  
At Ararat your rector.

The nectar that inebriates me  
Is love, support and care  
Of which you've given much to me  
More than you're aware.

It's this I'd miss above all else  
Were I to leave tomorrow  
For folk who've loved and cared for us  
We tend to leave in sorrow.

But now I'm sounding mawkish, trite,  
Down right sentimental  
Something I consider vile,  
Almost excremental!

So let me say, in no dismay,  
That though I've thrived, well hived,  
I've also stung, been stung, among  
You all since I arrived.

So thank you all for five good years  
At Ararat as Rector  
Of stinging well and being stung,  
While sozzled daft on nectar.

## **SPEECH AT MY OWN INDUCTION**

The Rector, just made, of this parish, Wodonga  
Is delighted at last to be here,  
And humbled to think he's been offered the place  
For he has many faults I fear.

For a start he's deficient in masculine beauty,  
His head is as bald as an egg!  
His beard's as tatty as the back-door mat.  
He's gangly and spindly of leg.

But worse, he's an arrogant pommie lad,  
Given to composing bad verse.  
And while heretically soft on the merry in sin  
The miserable sinner he'll curse!

Moaning and maudlin and miserable Christians  
Get up his bespectacled nose.  
If heaven's not ringing with laughter and singing  
Then it's hell that's for him, well he knows.

Never as yet has he filled a church  
By the power of his eloquent preaching,  
And most atheists taught have remained uncaught  
By the power of his elegant teaching.

Although he delights in his Mozart and Bach,  
In Telemann, Beethoven, Gibbons,  
His voice is as harsh as a frog's in the marsh,  
And shreds tender eardrums to ribbons.

His kids are as wild as a cage full of monkeys  
They bubble and fizz with life.  
He is only kept sane, on track, in lane,  
By his polished and well-spoken wife.

So what can be said in this duffer priest's favour?  
Well, his bark is much worse than his bite,  
And he loves his Lord and he says his prayers,  
Which is good in a priest, and right.

And he loves a beer and a chat and good cheer  
And to visit his parish flock.  
He's a sociable thing, with a thickish skin,  
So can take a critical knock.

And he brings with him Dad, whose a splendid old lad  
Full of wisdom, good sermons and charm,  
With him as his mentor, adviser and guide,  
Your Rector can come to no harm.

He's a passionate lover of Anglicanism,  
In spite of its crack-pot ways.  
Lambeth's his home, not Geneva, nor Rome.  
He'll be Canterbury's all of his days.

The parish priest's job he considers the best  
Of all jobs that the world has to give.  
He basks in its favour, variety, flavour,  
A rectory's the best place to live.

So in spite of his weaknesses, failings and faults,  
Your new Rector is usually contented

You'll have to be swine to persuade him to whine,  
Or to whinge, tear his beard, go demented.  
And thank you to all, from both near and far,  
Who have come to pray for us here.  
We're enchanted & charmed, put at ease, & disarmed,  
And hold you exceptionally dear.

And so after this service, these speeches, the supper,  
And what's worse this inadequate verse,  
There's a drink at the Rectory for all not averse,  
To champagne somewhat better than worse.

Do come along (if so you're inclined)  
To toast us all in effervescently,  
For now is the time for the bubble and sparkle  
The grind of hard work will come presently.

But enough of this verse from the man just inducted  
As Rector of lovely Wodonga,  
You'll sack him for sure as a long-winded bore,  
If he carries on very much longer.

### **THE LEAVEN IN THE DOUGH**

I grew up in Africa  
Not minding in the least  
My father being a poor nomadic  
Church of England priest.

We lived a life on mission stations  
Of sweet simplicity  
Without the blessing or the curse  
Of electricity.

The turtle doves all day, each day  
Declared God's Spirit near,  
The barbet's call and bush-shrike's whistle  
Rang out loud and clear.

Fire flies at night our eyes  
Delighted and entranced  
And drums across the river throbbed  
And village people danced.

As darkness fell and crickets sang  
Our tilley lamps each night  
Were filled and pumped, and then a dash  
Of meths was set alight.

When all but out from burning blue  
A little tap was turned  
And with a pop a golden light  
Beamed out and gently burned.

Flying beetles, bugs and moths  
By light attracted, fated,  
Whizzed and fluttered, buzzed and muttered  
Till singed they self-cremated.

In Mary's time in Nazareth  
As darkness fell each night  
The wicks of little lamps were trimmed  
And gently set alight,

And placed on high to light the room,  
A simple evening ritual.  
As too was ours in Africa,  
Comforting, habitual.

It's homely acts and simple lives  
Like these that rhyme and chime  
With Palestine and Nazareth  
Once upon a time.

By lamps on stands and mustard seeds  
Jesus was inspired  
Coins and salt and sparrows his  
Imagination fired.

So we in things quite ordinary,  
In bread, in birds in flowers,  
In memories of youth recalled  
Make his kingdom ours.

In memories of the homely food  
On which my family fed,  
For mother, just as Mary must have,  
Baked our daily bread.

Her warming leaven promised heaven,  
Indeed, though evil looking  
It animated dim, dull dough  
To bubbly bread in cooking.

The bread once baked was eaten hot  
With joy we couldn't utter  
Our mouths being stuffed with crumbly crust  
And dripping molten butter.

Our Lord must too such joys have known,  
For he in Mary's leaven  
Perceived God's kingdom secretly  
Bubbling earth with heaven.

Which means we shouldn't see his kingdom  
As fear, constraint, restriction  
As life-denying, joy-defying,  
In gloom or dereliction.

For in his homely parables  
Our Lord has roundly said  
His kingdom comes in joy, delight,  
The bubble in life's bread.

To bland, unsatisfactory lives  
It's saltiness and tang,  
To meaningless or dreary lives,  
Its whiz and flash and bang.

To sad, depressed and cheerless folk  
It's joy and life enhancing,  
A wedding banquet, mighty feast,  
Music, fun and dancing.

It's dark made light, a priceless pearl,  
The bounteous harvest's yield,  
It's chirping sparrows, wild flowers,  
Treasure in a field.



It's loving strangers, enemies,  
And letting go anxiety  
The end to self-congratulating,  
Pompous piety.

How lovely is this world of Jesus  
His parables reveal,  
It's close to that I knew when young  
So doubly, then, ideal.

As with Wordsworth, Vaughan, Traherne  
My youth seems bathed in glory,  
Looking back nostalgically  
How holy seems my story.

Though glory's only half the tale  
Of my departed youth,  
Another side must be acknowledged  
If I'm to tell the truth.

An arrogant and idle job,  
A self-obsessive swine  
I often at the time lost sight  
Of anything divine.

But that's my point! It's secretly  
And unobserved that leaven  
Brightens, lightens, dim, dull dough  
Or brutish boy with heaven!

Which is why we really can  
In bread, or birds, or flowers  
And memories of youth recalled  
Make his kingdom ours.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED**

The mustard seed's a tiny seed,  
A miniscule but fiery bead  
Which when you crush its scaly coat  
Between your teeth then burns the throat,  
Stimulates, excites, inflames,  
Irritates your mucous membranes.

The mustard seed's a tiny seed,  
A miniscule but fruitful bead  
The which, if placed in moistened earth,  
Bursts open, germinates, gives birth,  
Sends up a little baby shoot  
And down a fibrous baby root  
And which, if granted rain and sun,  
Becomes a shrub, a mighty one,  
In which the birds build nests and shelter  
From burning midday heat and swelter.

Thus little things give rise to big,  
Each mighty branch was one a twig,  
Each bushy shrub a mere sprig,  
Small beginnings, endings big.  
To those to nature's truths perceptive  
Appearances can be deceptive.

Our Lord from just a mustard seed  
Drew truths like these with which to feed  
Disciple, follower and friend  
With food that lasts and doesn't end.  
With truths we almost take for granted.

But more importantly he planted  
Seeds himself which had to wait  
Two thousand years to germinate,  
Develop fully, reach fruition,  
And so achieve due recognition.

He treated women with respect,  
A seed of such long-term effect  
It lay there dormant long in scripture  
Through centuries cold of celibate stricture.

This treating women as his equal  
Ensured at last its feminist sequel,  
For when two thousand years had passed  
The seeds he'd sown bore fruit at last.  
Thus today our "birds" take shelter  
From patriarchy's heat and swelter  
In feminism's deep cool shade,  
For years and years so long delayed.

But many birds who taste its fruit,  
Who crack a seed or gnaw a shoot  
Are hurt to find it quite so hot,  
That feminism isn't what  
They'd hoped, desired and fought for quite,  
Isn't unalloyed delight,  
Is but a part of all they need:  
The full-blown glorious Christian Creed.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS**

A highly principled school principal,  
typically precise,  
Called one day three students in  
to give them his advice.

On the verge of leaving school  
in search of a degree  
At some prestigious, well reputed  
university,

The students three he asked to see  
were destined to succeed,  
Were talented, industrious,  
the year's best indeed.

He sat them down and said to them:  
"You three, it seems to me,  
Have talents that we've fostered to  
a laudable degree.

"Tom, your T.E.R. is bound to be  
ninety eight or nine,  
Since first you came to this our school  
you've never ceased to shine,

“Don’t let us down! Bring some renown  
to this the school that first  
Your quite outstanding gifts and talents,  
developed, helped and nursed.

“To do so you must choose a course  
at university  
That guarantees on graduation  
wealth’s felicity.

“Make medicine, business studies, law,  
accounting, pharmacy,  
Engineering, dentistry  
your ultimate degree.

“All of these, if well achieved,  
bring riches and acclaim,  
Will honour both the school you leave  
and too your family’s name!”

Having dealt such sound advice  
to student number one,  
He now addressed the second too  
as father to a son:

“Dick,” he said, “You too are bright,  
a most accomplished linguist,  
As such, like Tom, you too should end up  
wealthy and distinguished.

“Good degrees in Japanese,  
with one perhaps in Chinese,  
I believe you can achieve  
with honour and with ease.

“The business world is desperate to  
acquire degrees like these,  
Paying through the nose for such  
linguistic expertise.

“Avoid then Anglo-Saxon, Greek,  
Latin, French or Dutch,  
They might bring pleasure in good measure,  
but will not pay you much.”

Having dealt this sound advice  
to student number two  
He now the third advised on what  
degree he should pursue:

“Harry, you’re a good all-rounder,  
though best of all at sport,  
You need to find a college where  
degrees in sport are taught.

“America’s the place for this,  
there sport can bring it seems  
Degrees and sponsorship beyond  
the wildest of our dreams.

“With talents such as you possess  
you’ll never, ever shame us.

You’ll much achieve, I do believe  
and end up rich and famous.”

The Principal stood up, his good  
advice all duly rendered,  
Their interview, and schooling too,  
had well and truly ended.

Tom, Dick and Harry years later  
were all of them invited  
Back to school to make a speech,  
all three were quite delighted.

Tom in his Mercedes Benz  
was well and truly feted,  
His principal’s sound principles  
it seems he’d vindicated.

The sporty Porsche of Dick as well  
his principal delighted,  
Signifying, so it seemed,  
talents used, not slighted.

But Harry turned up driving madly  
an ancient, noisy Ford.  
For neither wealth nor fame he’d found,  
but Jesus Christ as Lord!

Theology it seems had been  
his choice of a degree,  
Swinburne, Kung and Pannenburg  
his chosen company.

White his collar, black his shirt,  
and blond his straggly beard,  
Kind his heart and loud his laugh,  
his sense of humour weird,

The principal on principle  
approved of Tom and Dick,  
But Harry raised his ire and gorge,  
made him feel sick.

And so he cast him out and off  
refused to let him speak.  
For blessed are the rich and strong,  
and cursed the poor and weak.....

Though not, thank God, in Heaven’s Kingdom,  
there the poor are blessed,  
There those who mourn, the loving, kind,  
and down and out are best.

## THE SHEEP AND GOATS

Those who do not sin at all  
Or so at least they think  
Despise too often those who do  
And from their presence shrink.

When those to court for trial are brought,  
Of vile crimes accused,  
They're spat at by self-righteous folk  
Are jostled and abused.

We think the sheep is easily  
Distinguished from the goat.  
Convenient this for those who like  
To grab the latter's throat.

But in the eyes of Jesus wise  
It's far more complicated.  
Easy-judging pharisees  
He thoroughly berated.

In his lovely parables  
Good and evil blend  
And sheep from goats or wheat from tares  
Aren't pulled until the end.

And even at the end it seems  
The judging's far from easy  
Some who think they're sheep are not,  
We all should feel uneasy.

For those who feed the starving poor,  
The thirsty's thirst relieve,  
Who clothe the naked, visit prisoners,  
And comfort those who grieve,

Serve their Lord, who in such folk  
Is present, though disguised,  
While those who needy folk ignore  
Have God, their Lord, despised.

Thus goats who love aren't counted goats,  
And callous sheep aren't sheep  
It's all so very complicated  
It makes you want to weep.

But in God's kingdom none despair,  
Or weep for very long,  
Forgiveness rules there, overrules there,  
All evil and all wrong.

In a gloomy catacomb,  
In Rome, somewhere I've read,  
A simple drawing illustrates  
All that I've just said.

It pictures Shepherd Jesus Christ  
Returning from his bid  
To find the lamb that's lost... but on  
His shoulder there's a kid!

## THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Two men one day went up to pray  
To twist the arm and plead  
Their case before Australia's God,  
Both men in need, indeed.

In the foyer of the temple,  
The city's major bank,  
Queues of fervent, faithful folk  
Were lined up, rank on rank,

Handing electronic angels  
Prayers on cards of plastic.  
They'd press the keys and then with ease  
They'd cash in hand. Fantastic!

The two this day who went to pray  
Had bigger prayers to pray  
Than any electronic angel  
Would grant them yea or nay.

The Manager they had to see,  
A person rarely sighted,  
Enthroned as Bishop of Finance,  
By mighty Mammon mitred.

The first man was a well-off man,  
One like you and me,  
A middle-class and law-abiding,  
Thorough pharisee.

He wanted cash to build himself  
A home beside the sea.  
A comfy place in which to face  
Old age with grace and glee.

"You'll see," he said, "my record's clean,  
As all I've ever owed  
Was only planned to minimise  
The heavy tax-man's load."

"It seems to me a G.S.T.  
Is what this country needs.  
You can't deny, we're taxed too high,  
And all know where that leads."

"To grudging, idleness and bludging  
Among the unemployed,  
Who loaf and lounge at our expense  
No wonder I'm annoyed!"

"Thank God that unlike other folk  
I've led a decent life,  
Have never dealt a dirty trick  
Or pinched another's wife!"

"A hundred thousand dollar loan  
I argue for and plead  
Confident you won't refuse me  
All the cash I need."

“That I’m profoundly credit-worthy  
Is very, very clear,  
So I should have two lovely homes  
I hope, this time next year.”

The other man was unemployed,  
Humble, down and out.  
Commission-housed, with little joy  
To boast or shout about.

He asked for several thousand dollars  
To build a modest shed  
In which to do some carpentry,  
“To make ends meet,” he said.

“Although financially I’m strapped,  
And have some debts,” he said,  
“If you won’t lend me what I ask,  
I might as well be dead.”

I ask you then, of these two men,  
In the land of Mammon,  
Of scallops, truffles, cray-fish tails,  
And smoked Atlantic salmon,

The land where market forces rule,  
Where dunder-heads and dolts  
Must pay full price and sink or swim  
For all their stupid faults,

Who’s the one who gets the loan?  
The one who’s unemployed,  
Or is it just the pharisee  
Who’ll go home overjoyed?

In the land where Mammon rules  
The pharisee is king.  
The down and out just loses out,  
A poor pathetic thing.

In the land where Mammon rules  
The pharisee’s a god.  
He gets the lot, the other not,  
The poor, pathetic sod!

But in the land of Jesus Christ  
The rich man comes off worst  
For in the kingdom of the Lord  
It’s there the last are first.

### **Grace - Parish Dinner 1997**

For all your gifts upon us poured,  
We thank you good and gracious Lord;  
For wine, and talk and friendly folk  
Who laugh a lot and like a joke,  
Who’re filled with joy and cock-a-hoop  
At rich Scotch broth and pumpkin soup;  
For courses long and speeches brief,  
For crisp-skinned turkey, juicy beef,

For Geoffrey Fryer’s tuneful voice  
That thrills and helps the heart rejoice;

For roasted pumpkin and potatoes  
And cheesy, piping hot tomatoes;  
For freshly chived and buttered beans,  
And not a hint of watery greens;

For two harmonious sisters summoned  
Gladly here to sing, called Drummond;  
For frenchified and fruity flans,  
Beloved of high Church Anglicans  
And gooey chocolate saucy pudding,  
Solid fuel for kind do-gooding;

For tea and coffee, burps and snores;  
For lots of laughter and applause;  
For good St John’s, its congregation,  
Its friendly, caring reputation;  
For all who give with heart and mind  
In time and talents, cash and kind,  
And so their love of God endorse  
And help their parish stay on course;

For gifts and blessings by the score;  
For Jesus, Lord, whom we adore,  
For all of this, our hearts we raise  
In gratitude and joy and praise. Amen.

### **ADVICE TO MYSELF**

Don’t waste your time to shake your fist  
You arrogant polemicist  
At trendy bishop, modernist,  
Inclusivist, neologist,  
Tradition scorning liturgist,  
At bolshevist and anarchist,  
Fanatic foolish feminist,  
At socialist and nihilist,  
Empiricist, behaviourist,  
At Calvinist and literalist,  
At fearful fundamentalist,  
At ritualist and Romanist,  
At satanist and sodomist,  
Reductionist and dogmatist,  
At self-indulgent hedonist,  
And self-obsessive egotist!

You waste your time. Resist, desist,  
You paranoid polemicist.  
Become instead a lyricist,  
A melodist and rhapsodist.  
There’s one lie only needs the fist,  
The lie that God does not exist.  
A dangerous lie we should resist.  
And spread abroad, shout out, insist,  
He meets us in the Eucharist.

## RETURNING THE COMPLIMENT

It's very rarely in my work among the middle classes  
That ever I encounter anything at all that passes  
For wife abuse. But here and there and now and then  
I come across those hunted, haunted, hopeless looking men  
Who're henpecked, nagged, oppressed, belittled, tyrannised, demeaned,  
Downtrodden by a monstrous, marriage-metamorphosed fiend.

We need, therefore, to be discerning, thoughtful, quizzical.  
Abuse, like love, is more than what is crudely physical.  
That it's the male's failing is feministic propaganda.  
In truth, of course, the goose is no less guilty than the gander!  
The female, with her beak, can cut, emasculate, abuse,  
And wounded males, like feminists, can stand up to accuse!

## TYNDALE, WYCLIFFE, COVERDALE AND CO

The ancient scholars had it right, you know,  
Tyndale, Wycliffe, Coverdale and Co.,  
Revering every word that they translated  
As holy, sacrosanct, divinely stated.

And so, by them, an image crudely primitive,  
Obscurities, a flawed or faulty narrative  
With gaps in meaning, all, if they occurred,  
They pass on to us simply as God's word.

Which means that in their old despised translations  
We jump right back a hundred generations.  
By reverent authenticity we're hurled  
To a virile, vibrant, bright and actual world.

Today's translators have it wrong, of course.  
The text they tinker with, manipulate and force  
To fit the mould of current taste and fashion,  
The word of modern man, not God, their passion.

So out go all the crude anachronisms  
And also vivid patriarchal barbarisms.  
The male who proudly "pissed against the wall",  
Is hardly now allowed to be a man at all.

Who wants to travel back two thousand years  
To find that nineteen ninety two appears  
With God belonging to the bourgeoisie  
'Politically correct' and 'gender free'?

I don't! Because to me the real God is found  
In well mucked, well ploughed, real and dirty ground.  
In blood and guts, love, hate and slaughter,  
Not gutless twentieth century milk and water!

## LIBERALS AND FUNDAMENTALISTS A RECONCILIATION OF SORTS

Liberal scholars, one and all,  
Fundamentalists appal,  
By shooting down in flames with glee  
Every miracle they see.

It's not (as you perhaps perceive)  
Because in God they don't believe.  
There's something subtler going on  
Which I'll explain anon, anon.

Fundamentalists appal  
Liberal scholars one and all  
By claiming miracles to be  
Everywhere, for all to see.

It's not (as you perhaps believe)  
Because they're stupidly naive.  
There's something subtler going on  
Which I'll explain anon, anon.

Both fundamentalist and liberal  
Desire to walk in pathways scriptural.  
Thus both admit the need to be  
At home in 32 AD.

If the mind of Jesus is  
To chime with ours and ours with his,  
Then 1998 must be  
Designed like 32 AD.

Fundamentalists therefore  
Scatter miracles galore  
Over me and over you  
Today, in 1992.

Whereas the liberals disallow  
All miracles both then and now,  
So making now, our age, to chime  
With what was once upon a time.

Thus both, into the world of Jesus,  
Attempt, from different ends, to ease us.  
And both extremes are not contemptible,  
They simply try to make compatible  
Two very different worlds, to please us.

So both, at best, are friends of Jesus.  
And shouldn't be at loggerheads

At worst though they're fanatic fools,  
Who in mutual hatred break love's rules.

### THE GREAT MAY DAY HIJACK

*[Since the time of Pius XI, the first of May, May Day, has been designated "St Joseph the Worker's Day". This was an attempt to "baptize" a secular day to the Church's benefit, to jump on the May Day band wagon, to steal a march on the Communists, or from the Communists. Although the attempt manifestly failed,*

*May Day remains "St Joseph the Worker's Day" on the Calendar of the Church of Rome and on the Calendars of some parts of the Anglican Communion as well.]*

Plebeian Tom and Dick and Harry,  
And proletarianism,  
The working masses, hoi polloi,  
Egalitarianism,

Remain today, in certain circles,  
Very much in fashion!  
In parts of Mother Church they seem  
A veritable passion.

And so because by many workers  
She's very much derided.  
Mother Church, to hi-jack May Day,  
Some years ago decided.

To turn May Day, the "Workers' Day",  
To Holy Day she planned.  
And all she needed, she conceded,  
Was a saint with calloused hands!

One of stature and prestige,  
And biblical as well,  
Workers any footling saint  
Would send pell-mell to hell!

But workers wise employers all  
Emphatically declare  
To be unholy, by and large,  
So worker saints are rare.

The twelve disciples, to a man,  
Were from the bourgeoisie,  
Fish-boat owners, tax collectors,  
Men like you and me.

Not Labour men, not Working men,  
Not Union men at all!  
So where to find a worker Saint  
Who workers won't appall?

Easy! Dredge the Bible! Ditch all  
Scholarly restraint!  
And even if there isn't one,  
You'll find a worker saint!

After much debate and worry  
They settled on St Joe,  
A carpenter from Nazareth  
Whom no one doesn't know.

To bully bosses May Day's still  
A bloody Red Rag day.  
To workers its a Saint's Day now  
As well as Red Flag day

But this is nasty deviousness,  
A Churchy double-cross.  
For Joseph owned his wood-work shop!  
So Joseph was a boss!

## THE END OF TERM AT ARARAT WEST

No more Howman, no more White  
Forcing me to read and write.  
No more Whitehead or Gemmola  
To fizz and pop like Coca Cola.  
No more Hedgeland, no more Murray  
Forcing me to work and worry  
No more Shearer, no more Quick  
To grumble, rumble, growl or pick.  
No more teacher shouts and bellows,  
No more bilious greens and yellows.  
No more boys who're loud and stinky,  
No more stupid games like minkey.  
No more stuck-up gangly girls,  
Giggling as they toss their curls.  
No more insults, no more punches,  
No more lousy sandwich lunches.  
No more Adam, no more Beren,  
No more Laura, no more Erin.  
School is finished, school is done,  
The lazy holidays have come.  
Hurray hurray! hip hip hurray!  
I never thought I'd see the day!  
Thank you God for no more school,  
Because the holidays are cool!

### CAUSE AND EFFECT

Professor Serge Diaghilef  
(The Russian surname rhymes with Geoff),  
A widely famed and skilled logician,  
Taught his students with precision  
And startling visual-aids galore  
Which brought them flocking back for more.

One day, to help his students think  
And demonstrate the vital link  
Between effect and prior cause  
(Which no one but a fool ignores),  
He introduced for all to see  
A tiny, brown and shiny flea.

He put it down and shouted "Jump!"  
It gave its tiny limbs a pump  
And jump it did, a few feet high,  
As if to try to reach the sky.

He then cut off the creature's legs,  
Leaving useless little pegs  
Protruding from its shiny rump,  
And shouted loudly, once more, "Jump!"

The flea ignored the loud command  
And wouldn't jump upon demand!

The point was made for all to see!  
"You take the legs from off a flea,"  
Remarked, with pride, Diaghilef  
"And render it completely deaf."

## LIFE THE BITCH

Accept, good witch, along with me  
That life's a bitch. With me agree  
That hopes are rarely realised,  
That goals, though very highly prized,  
When once achieved bring little pleasure,  
Little joy to hold or treasure.

That lives of quiet desperation  
Are lived in every generation  
By nearly all. That even those  
Who're animated, you suppose,  
By joy and laughter, if you scratch  
Beneath the surface you'll soon catch  
A glimpse of sadness, hurt and sorrow  
Of fear and dread of what tomorrow  
Is bound to bring along with it.  
A B flat minor song with it.  
A dire dirge to drone and moan.  
Its only joy; "We're not alone,  
For misery we share with all."  
A joy like that's no joy at all!

Accept, good witch, along with me  
That life's a bitch, and with me be,  
Upon the mongrel bitch, a flea.  
There side by side with me agree  
To suck life's bright, red, bloody juice  
And so together we'll induce  
That itch, my witch, which will enrich  
A bit, with laughter, life the bitch.

## EASTER HOPE FOR POOR ARARAT

Ararat's a lovely town  
With streets that amble up and down,  
That wind and wander round about,  
Here and there and in and out.

It nestles on the southern side  
Of great Victoria's Great Divide  
Its hills abound with kangaroos  
And offer long and lovely views

But what a sad and sorry state  
Seems now its melancholy fate!  
Shrunken, shrivelled, down and out,  
Abandoned, lost and knocked about.

Houses everywhere for sale  
Including monstrous Aradale.  
Who would want to settle down  
In such a shrunken, down-cast town?

Its railway yards once hummed with life  
Until the economic knife  
That spoils and wrecks and penny pinches  
Cut those yards to piddling inches!

Aradale as well has closed  
But not as first we all supposed

Because so old an institution  
Required updated substitution,

But rather, most of us would say,  
Because it seemed the easy way,  
To wield that economic knife  
That bleeds away a city's life.

At least its sister institution,  
Achieved updated substitution!  
The old forensic centre closed  
But was replaced. We all supposed

Forever. And at hefty cost,  
So here at least all wasn't lost!  
But no, this too now's in its death throes.  
It's end has come. It has to close!

The churches too fight to survive  
Are far more dead than they're alive.  
Even Pentecostal churches  
In Ararat fall off their perches!

Whereas elsewhere it's said they grow,  
Or so their leaders like to crow.  
Here too then Ararat's unique,  
Sadly different, odd, a freak.

But lets not only weep and wail  
There's still at least a thriving gaol,  
That gives employment, brings in cash  
And strange dependents, drugs and hash.

And Chalambar, the gambling hole,  
Has sold its good-sport, fair-go soul  
To bring us pokie hope and madness  
To blow away dismay and sadness.

There's always hope! The tide can turn!  
Disaster can be left astern,  
For Ararat's a lovely town  
With streets that amble up and down.

Nestling on the southern side  
Of great Victoria's Great Divide  
It's ringed with eucalyptused hills,  
Its beauty hearts with pleasure fills.

And from its present dereliction  
Despair, dismay and crucifixion  
Hope can grow and restoration,  
Joy, redemption and elation.

For gaols and pokies, nails and cross  
Despair and population loss  
Dismay, depression, and dejection  
Faith holds, will lead to resurrection.

## **RECTOR'S REPORT 1995**

In July a Rector gives  
An "Annual Report"  
Of usually a dull, immodest  
Wordy, dreary sort.

Pretending that his parish grows  
And goes from strength to strength,  
A lie the which to propagate  
He'll go to any length.

In which himself he justifies  
Applauds, defends, excuses,  
Laying any blame that's due  
On others he accuses.

But he's a paragon of virtue,  
Called by God to come  
To be deferred to, preach and teach  
(And idle on his bum).

Reports like this are not my scene.  
Blunt truth I much prefer  
As anyone who reads my verse  
Will readily infer.

Here goes then! In the year that's past  
Our parish didn't grow.  
We're where we were this time last year.  
Or very nearly so.

This isn't any body's fault  
Unless of course it's mine,  
For I have been, an arrogant  
And less than fervent swine.

I rise each morning very early,  
My prayers to say contrive,  
Opening up our lovely church  
Just after half past five,

But there, at prayer, I often find  
I wallow in self-doubt,  
Or worse I scribble evil verse  
Instead of being devout.

The hours I spend perfecting sermons  
So elegant of phrase,  
Are spent as much for Neaum's glory  
As for his Maker's praise.

My pew sheets with their jokes and quotes  
Are made to make folk think  
Of God! But also that I'm clever,  
For which, of course, they stink.

My visits to the sick and dying  
Spring often from compassion.  
But sometimes of reluctant duty  
There's far too good a ration.

Teaching fools in schools is fun,  
But only as I do it.



In prospect and in preparation,  
 I hate the task and rue it.  
 Although I love my faithful flock  
 Value and admire them  
 Should they, lukewarm, desert their Church  
 I want to roast and fry them,  
 Strike them from the parish roll  
 For Laodiceanism.  
 Frustrated rage is very much  
 An Andrew Neaumism!  
 Very far from organised,  
 A great procrastinator,  
 I push aside essential tasks  
 To do, too late, much later.  
 That most of you can tolerate  
 So fallible a swine,  
 Indicates that all of you  
 Might share these sins of mine!  
 That I'm acceptable as priest  
 Because I'm one of you,  
 No haloed saint without a taint,  
 But just a sinner too.  
 A better priest I'm bound to be  
 If one both like and for you.  
 It means my sins and faults amount,  
 In their way, to virtue!

### DESPERATION

The Rector of a little parish  
 Its tiny congregation lavish  
 In word not deed, in praise not cash,  
 Was tempted once to something rash!  
 His verger, taciturn and dim,  
 He called inside to talk with him,  
 About a cunning little scheme  
 That made his eyes with mischief gleam.  
 "On Sunday next, my dear man,  
 We'll put in place this cunning plan.  
 That should my tight-pursed paltry flock  
 From stinginess disturb and rock.  
 "I'll preach a sermon full of fire  
 Threatening hell and brimstone dire,  
 And as I shout and punch the air,  
 Grimace, glower, groan and glare,  
 "You must in the belfry sit,  
 To wait for your important bit,  
 With by your side some oily rags  
 Made from cotton flour bags.  
 "As my voice I raise up higher  
 And like Elisha call down fire  
 To burn the sinful in the pew  
 Those words must be to you a cue

"To set on fire the oily rags  
 Made from cotton flour bags  
 And waft down clouds of evil smoke  
 To terrify my simple folk

"And make them think my threat's occurred  
 That God my fiery sermon's heard,  
 That flaming judgement's on its way,  
 God's wrath has come and come to stay!

"When such a wonder they have seen  
 They'll never evermore be mean!  
 They'll give their all in perturbation  
 Terrified of God's damnation!"

Next Sunday then, the plan is set!  
 The church is full (but still in debt).  
 The Rector's ranting rises higher,  
 Calling down from heaven fire.

He raves and rants, he sobs and chants,  
 He roars and shouts, he puffs and pants,  
 All to call forth and evoke  
 That cloud of black and evil smoke!

But naught transpires! The smoke won't come!  
 It's very, very worrisome!  
 No heavenly wrath or fire descends!  
 No thunder clap the silence rends!

He tries again. He gives them more,  
 Threats and shouts and roars galore.  
 Like Elisha, how he tries  
 To call down fire from the skies!

But still no heavenly fire descends!  
 No thunder clap the silence rends!  
 This is not damnation's hour!  
 Instead, the verger from the tower,

Is heard to groan by everyone  
 "It's no use Father, we're undone!  
 All our hopes the devil snatches!  
 "The cat has pissed upon my matches!"

### GRACE - FISH AND CHIP DINNER 1997

It is, dear Lord, our heart-felt wish  
 That you will bless our well-grilled fish.  
 For fish, we know, you've blessed before,  
 Charcoal-grilled upon the shore  
 Of lovely Gallilee, dear Lord.  
 Where, resurrected and adored,  
 You shared with friends, like us tonight,  
 Crisp-grilled fish with great delight.  
 And then, as well, some time before  
 Though in the hills, not by the shore,  
 You blessed some little fish and bread  
 So wonderfully that they fed  
 Five thousand hungry friends or more,  
 With second helpings by the score!

So grant today our heart-felt wish  
And bless our fellowship and fish  
Our Friendship Group and congregation,  
Our sunny city, state and nation,  
Our diocese with Paul its Bishop,  
As with joy we munch this fish up.

### AN UNLIKELY TRINITY

*(Written for an ABC Interview taped on 6.3.97  
Broadcast 9.3.97)*

Speaking economically  
That is, acronymically,  
The ABC and C of E  
Are very, very dear to me.  
For both, you see, it seems to me,  
Prefer by far integrity  
And excellence and quality  
To vulgar popularity.  
And so together, quite implausibly,  
They're linked, unlikely twins, in me.

But both are being urged, today  
To take a very different way,  
And join the hectic, frantic race  
Dictated by the market-place;  
To go with the commercial flow  
And let their great tradition go.  
To up the ratings, fill the pews,  
Pander, flatter and amuse  
The common herd, the milling mob,  
Sheila, yahoo, nerd and yob;  
On radio with soap or slime.  
In church with puerile nursery rhyme,  
Instead of sweetly edifying,  
Challenging, electrifying,  
With Occam's Razor, Science Shows,  
Or Gibbons hymns and Cranmer's prose  
Compass, Rumpole, Simulcasts,  
Ancient saints' days, feasts and fasts,  
The God Who Sings, The Bill, Frontline,  
Plainsong psalms, Communion wine,

May both my acronymic loves  
Linked in me like Lovey doves,  
Hold their co-inciding courses  
Resisting evil market forces,  
And so the two, with me as three  
Remain a loving trinity.

### FOR SUE YOUNG ON HER SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY

The age of certainties and fixities  
Ended with the glorious sixties.  
Then Suzie Young was young indeed  
Then all the young at heart were freed  
From old taboos and prohibitions,  
Constraints, controls and inhibitions.

Then how good to be alive,  
And dancing to the Dave Clarke Five,  
Jimmy Hendryx, Beatles, Stones  
On crackling groovy gramophones  
While flower-powered and gently stoned  
Free in love, testosteroned.  
Glorious days to dwell upon,  
But only in the mind, they're gone!

The sixties though, for Suzie Young,  
Haven't gone, they've just begun.  
But still they promise liberation,  
Freedom, joyful jubilation,  
Old restrictions disappearing  
And gloomy dark horizons clearing.

For teaching's stress and mess and ruckus  
She's left behind to younger suckers.  
From mewling, puking kids she's freed,  
There's sometimes time to think and read.

Her children now are all grown-ups  
Less pains in gut than minor hiccups  
So teenage tantrums, moods and rages  
Have not disturbed her ears for ages.

And love still dominates the life  
Of Suzie, happy sixties wife  
For husband Andrew loves her still,  
With heart and mind and soul and will,  
No beery, bulbous-bellied wreck,  
Is he, nor foolish pain-in-neck!  
As when he wed, so now the same,  
Young in heart and looks and name.

So Suzie dear, it seems to me  
Your sixties simply have to be,  
As shown by these my simple rhymes  
The dawning of the best-of-all-times.

## THE DEATH OF A TRUE-BLUE CATHOLIC

Two mates one windy night and cold  
Who long on beer had celebrated,  
Left their pub and homeward rolled,  
Plastered, bombed, intoxicated.

A bitter wind that promised trouble  
Blurs their eyes and chills their bones,  
With beads of moisture jewels their stubble,  
Round dingy buildings whines and groans.

They staggered down the sodden street  
When from behind them loomed a car  
Which side-swiped Gary off his feet  
To leave him bleeding on the tar.

He lay their gasping, stupefied  
As Blue, his mate, held up his head.  
He coughed and gurgled as he tried  
To speak, and then at last he said:

“I’ve had it Blue, for sure I’m dying.  
I’m heading for the other side.  
I’m finished mate. It’s no use lying.”  
Though Blue, his trusty cobber, tried:

“Oh don’t give up for God’s sake Gary,  
The ambulance is on its way.  
They’ll fix you up as quick as Larry,  
You’ll live to drink another day.”

“Bull-shit Blue,” replied his mate.  
“Call for me a man of prayer.  
St Peter’s waiting at the gate,  
I’m almost gone, I’m nearly there.”

So call for me the Salvo man,  
To pray my booze and sins away,  
He’ll come as quickly as he can,  
He loves a chance to have a pray.

“But Gary, you’re a bloody Catholic,  
Not a wowser Salvo man,  
So let me call for Father Patrick  
Seamus, Sean O’Halloran.”

“For God’s sake no! Not Father Patrick,  
Don’t be bloody ignorant!  
For though, for sure, I’m true-blue Catholic  
And not a bloody Protestant,

“That means, though dying filled with piss,  
An evil, whoring, wicked sod,  
I’d never on a night like this,  
Call out from bed a priest of God.”

## DIVES AND LAZARUS

A rich, retired, ex-socialist  
Australian head of state  
Abandoned left-wing principles  
And his wife to fate.

He metamorphosed overnight,  
Became entrepreneur,  
An arty weekend, dinner-party,  
La-di-da poseur.

The poor could get no nearer to him  
Than his mansion’s gate  
The workers he’d once backed and fought for  
Now he seemed to hate,

Because he’d signed up with the bosses,  
Joined the rich man’s club,  
Frequenting snobby cocktail bars  
In preference to the pub.

His former mates he never ever  
Let between his gates.  
Especially one called Lazarus,  
In grim and dire straits

Who’d twice attempted suicide,  
Unable now to cope,  
With losing his employment, health,  
And wife, and wits, and hope.

This man, a shaking, broken beggar,  
Short of breath and wheezy  
Dirty, smelly, lousy, scruffy,  
Scabrous, lame and sleazy,

Every day from dawn to dusk  
Begged and whined and pleaded  
By the rich man’s gate for food  
And any cash he needed.

The rich man looked the other way  
As chauffeur-driven fast  
Through the monstrous gates each day  
Poor Lazarus he passed

Far worse, he set his dogs upon him,  
Wild of eye, unmuzzled,  
Though puzzled when they didn’t bite,  
But whimpered, licked and nuzzled.

One gloomy day in early May  
Death opened wide its door  
To both the rich ex-socialist  
And Lazarus the poor.

And through death’s door they both found more  
Than they had bargained for,  
Roles reversed, the last as first,  
The rich folk now the poor.

Loved and valued Lazarus  
Had all that he desired

Was lauded, feted, loved, applauded  
And generally admired.

He blossomed in the company  
Of Abraham, Isaiah,  
St Francis, Mary Magdalene  
And poor old Jeremiah.

The rich man, known as Dives, though  
The turn-coat entrepreneur,  
The arty weekend dinner-party  
La-di-da poseur

Shrivelled in the company  
Of evil Jereboam,  
Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung  
And stupid Rehoboam.

The gulf called wealth divided them  
Before they both had died,  
The gulf called justice did the same  
When on the other side.

Across the which, the man once rich  
Now deigned to cast his eye  
And there he saw the man once poor  
Now blessed and set on high.

He called to him for some relief  
From hellish, burning heat,  
For just a nip, a tiny sip  
Of water cold and sweet.

Discovering though, that once you've died  
Then justice must be done,  
So Dives has to suffer  
And Lazarus have fun.

Whereupon there came to Dives  
A semi selfless thought,  
He'd have his brothers warned unless  
They too, like him, were caught.

To politicians far more vital  
Than service to their nation  
Are family, fortune, perquisites  
And superannuation,

A visit to his family then  
By someone resurrected  
From the dead, like Lazarus  
He hoped and half expected

Might teach his brothers to include  
In future plans and goals  
As well as mansions for their bodies  
Mansions for their souls.

But mansions on the other side  
Are built of love and grace,  
It's not the self, but other folk,  
Who there take pride of place.

So Abraham told Dives that  
His mammon loving brothers  
Would never heed or understand  
This talk of love for others.

Indeed, if God himself was cruelly  
Killed then resurrected  
By such as them the truth would go  
Completely undetected.

### **THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS**

Though few girls die as virgins now,  
And fewer still their wedding vow  
Will ever make devout, demure,  
Unbedded, chaste, naive and pure.  
And though the white that's worn with pride  
By nearly every modern bride  
More than likely signifies  
Cant, hypocrisy and lies.

I'd ask you all with joy, not stricture  
To call to mind, imagine, picture  
A bride who makes her stately way  
Upon her long-planned wedding day  
Resplendent in the whitest white,  
Along a path in sunshine bright  
Towards a little country church.

From a nearby gum-tree's perch  
The cockatoos appear to scream  
That brides in white aren't what they seem.,  
While crickets trill their descant shrill  
And as the bridal party fill  
The tiny porch with happy giggles,  
And flower girl and page boy wriggles.

A bride who'd rather not offend  
Must choose as bridesmaid every friend!  
Though this can mean she ends with more  
Than she, perhaps, had bargained for.  
Today, demure and blue of dress,  
No less than ten of them process  
Slowly in before the bride ,  
It's hard to get them all inside.  
The aisle's so short the church so small,  
There's little room to move at all.  
But all goes well, they all fit in  
The cockatoo's atrocious din  
Is blotted out, and all but drowned,  
By a wheezing, groaning sound.  
It's Wagner's wedding march perhaps,  
With here a pause and there a lapse.  
The old harmonium's badly played  
By the district's last old maid

In twenty minutes all is done  
The bride and groom are now made one,  
Confetti, kisses, petals, rice,  
A laugh or two, then in a trice

The happy bridal group's forsaken  
Is left to have some photos taken,  
As guests and family, one and all  
Cross a paddock to the hall.  
There a band and lots of booze  
Will lighten spirits and amuse,  
Until the bridal couple come.  
Whereupon things start to hum.  
For once the boring talks are done with  
Then the guests can have their fun with  
Anyone they can detach  
Disentangle, seize or snatch,  
Charm, entice away, allure  
From either spouse or paramour  
As the evening turns to morning  
And magpies herald daytime's dawning.

The bridesmaids, each and every one  
Join with gusto in this fun,  
For what a waste and what a pity  
If unattached and very pretty  
Girls so vital to proceedings  
Hearken to old-maidish pleadings,  
For caution, care, sobriety,  
Refinement or propriety!

Now five of them are worldly wise  
The other five are otherwise!  
The worldly wise, adopting tactics  
Involving rubber prophylactics.  
Can leave the wedding unalarmed  
If not intact, at least unharmed.

The foolish five who don't prepare  
In such a manner might well fare,  
When at last the party's done  
Rather worse from all the fun.  
There's just a chance they'll find, alas  
That pregnancies have come to pass!

And thus the wise, the ones who win  
Are those who're well prepared for sin  
Whereas the fools, the five who lose  
Are those naive, who quite refuse  
To be prepared and so perhaps  
Are left with babies in their laps!  
It all at first seems oddly wrong,  
But on reflection, not for long  
Because the unprepared, you see,  
The ones who foolish seemed to be  
They **were** prepared! Prepared to take  
The risk of making a mistake  
It's saying "No!", not prophylactics  
That constitute their risky tactics,  
And this, though far from worldly wise  
Just might be wise to heavenly eyes.  
The foolishness of God being wiser,  
(So says St Paul, a sure adviser)  
Than the wisdom of mere man

## TREASURE IN A FIELD

In the land of mountebanks  
Where the miser mammon rules,  
Our sacred buildings are the banks  
The faithful, money-maddened fools.

Salvation is a lotto win  
The Gospel teaches "take" not "give"  
Generosity's a sin  
To grab and keep is how to live.

Honour lies in what you've got,  
There's nothing worse to trouble you  
Than loss of ocean going yacht  
Or gleaming B.M.W.

Saints are twerps, devoid of honour,  
Wealthy, witless, glitterati,  
Blessed Mary's now "Madonna"  
Graceless, narcissistic, tarty.

Poverty and unemployment  
Constitute the worst of sins.  
It's only cash that brings enjoyment  
Wealth alone fulfilment wins.

And mammon rules the Church as well,  
The poor aren't now considered blessed.  
To have but little, that is hell,  
To have a lot's by far the best.

For churchmen nearly all, alas  
Live in double-incomed ease  
Are resolutely middle class  
And pray from fat and fleshy knees.

So when the churches take the lead  
In criticising poverty,  
Denouncing governments for greed  
For causing want and paucity,

The odour of hypocrisy  
Can seem particularly rank  
The bishop, like a pharisee,  
Has eye balls clogged and blocked with plank,

That blind should lead the blind defies  
The parable's advice you'll find.  
Like pulling specks from others' eyes  
When you yourself are more than blind.

With humps of wealth upon his back  
The comic camel's present too,  
Church leaders have the happy knack  
Of oozing, squeezing, twisting through

The needle's eye to heavenly leisure  
Thus so to Mammon Christians yield  
Mistaking parabolic treasure  
For muck of mammon in a field.

## THE VERY BEST OF JOBS ABOUT

Not unusual these days  
Are clergy who in different ways  
Are fed up, disillusioned, sad,  
Their joy in priesting lost, gone bad.

Some are shown by my researches,  
Depressed at all but empty churches.  
Yet what a challenge this presents,  
And pride in cheap success prevents!

Others claim they're underpaid.  
But why at this be so dismayed,  
For didn't Christ the Lord attest,  
Emphatically, the poor blessed?

It's change that other priests depresses,  
New liturgies and priests in dresses.  
But change is life, can signify  
A faith that doesn't ossify.

Other of my colleagues deem  
Too hard to take the lost esteem  
That's come, with justified hysterics,  
Roused by paedophilic clerics.

But lost esteem and lowliness,  
Constituents are of holiness,  
Or can if they're with courage faced  
With joy and love and faith embraced.

Bad priests exist in every age,  
Are found on history's every page.  
So things aren't worse, need not appal  
They have not really changed at all.

Others find the false god mammon,  
Porsches, caviar, smoked salmon,  
Double incomes, trips abroad,  
Divert too many from their Lord.

Provide so stiff a competition,  
They vitiate the Church's mission,  
But fortunes fall as well as rise.  
The tide will turn to our surprise.

Others are assailed by doubt  
Expecting scholars soon to rout  
From faith all credibility,  
Exposing Christians' gullibility.

All such qualms can be thrown out though.  
The opposite of faith's not doubt. No,  
It's certainty! A blight we find  
In those of a fanatic mind!

Fanatic fools their doubts deplore,  
But doughty priests their doubts ignore.  
For doubt's a sign of faith's legitimacy  
A token of its authenticity.

So, doubtless, priests without a doubt  
Have little faith to preach about,  
While doubters hold, without a doubt  
The very best of jobs about.

## THE MAKING OF A GOVERNOR GENERAL

"Come to me Billy, so heavily laden,"  
Whinnied the stallion Bob Hawke to Bill Haden.  
"Come to me Billy, we'll put you to grass,  
Paddock you where you can kiss the great arse  
Of the Monarch you don't believe in."

"Come to me Billy, you worthy old gee gee,  
Old pack horse, I'll make you Australia's G-G  
Then all your old mates will think you a dag  
As you frolic and prance with an old Windsor nag  
And in monarchy's face squirt a wee wee!"

## FRED NILE AGREES WITH THE POPE

The Reverend Fred Nile was musing one day,  
In his usual, emphatic and protestant way,  
About sexual perversion and sin and the pope  
Predictably finding small reason for hope.  
Yet his musing, this time, did reveal the emergence  
Of a single, unusual line of convergence:  
"Pope John Paul," he reflected, "though no friend of mine,  
With his crazy, deluded, infallible line,  
Perhaps, after all, on the pill was quite right,  
What a curse it has proved, what a terrible blight,  
Deflecting the whole of Australian society  
Away from restraint, self-control and propriety  
So that few go to church, or look after their soul,  
For everyone's right up the phallic pole,  
And Australian society's a pornicorium,  
A frantic, fanatical fornicorium!"