

A piece of trans-Tasman introspection makes worthwhile reading for Australians in the grip of their long-running identity crisis. For "New Zealand" read "Australia" or "Australian". The article appeared in the November 1993 issue of New Slant, newsletter of our partner organisation in New Zealand.

Agenda for Kiwis

New Zealanders may be quick to ask others what they think of us, rather less eager when it comes to listening to an honest response. A relatively recent arrival, David Kettle, the Anglican tertiary chaplain in Palmerston North, makes some bold suggestions about what New Zealand Christians need to be working on:

1. Build on concern for national identity, drawing momentum from this for a radical critique of modern Western secular society. This may involve drawing support from negative reactions to North American influence and also using American critiques of American culture by such people as Bloom, Postman, Sennet, Lasch. We should look to strengths in some mainland European cultures especially the Netherlands and Scandinavia, where analogies with New Zealand exist. There may be benefits if Pakeha are ready to acknowledge their own values have been distorted by post-enlightenment individualism and materialism.
2. Build upon the human values of many New Zealanders who are dismayed to see these values being eroded by mass culture and attacked by right-wing monetarism.

These values are vulnerable, and will continue to be eroded until they are given solid foundations ultimately found only in Christian faith.

These issues need to be debated in scholarly circles and in public. Not everyone will agree that what seem to be "humanist" values are most richly upheld by Christian faith. But since these values are vitally important and are under threat, Christians can argue

that their claim deserves serious attention.

The rhetoric which claims that monetarism is the only realistic option and that human values are romantic needs to be vigorously resisted. We need not only a sustainable environment and economy, we need above all sustainable relationships and values and communities. This is something Christianity understands and underpins, but which monetarism undermines. Christianity understands and affirms our most vital, primary, human intentions, strengths and weaknesses; modern ideology ignores and distorts them.

We need to do justice to the historic influence of Christianity on New Zealand culture, including its ambiguity. The lack of trust in our society will be addressed by our honesty, confessing failure and speaking realistically yet with hope, in our appraisal of society.

The analytic power of Christian faith to accommodate, integrate and critique all modern areas of knowledge needs to be demonstrated. It will be necessary to tackle the charge that Christians are trying to impose their viewpoint on others.

3. In the past Christianity may have emphasised obedience to revelation rather than autonomy based on reason. Today in New Zealand we need to emphasise Christianity is on the side of freedom, personal participation, pragmatism and rationality. Secular and self-interested ideas about these are too narrow and cannot ultimately preserve what is fundamental to them.

4. Christianity is as much about reconciliation and sustainable relationships as about liberation. While the rhetoric of oppressor and oppressed has its place, an alternative must be found to balance it lest it tear the world and the nations apart.

5. We must argue relentlessly for responsibility in the media, at the same time as developing and supporting in-depth "media literacy". To expose the underlying messages and effects of media is in itself an

invitation to a new sense of responsibility for ourselves and our value. Australia and Canada may have something to teach us here.

6. Celtic spirituality has a lot to commend it. It would help capture the positive insights of creation spirituality without some of its distortions. It would also demonstrate a strand within the Christian tradition which resonates with Maori spirituality, particularly in its respect for the environment. This would be common also in some measure to Anglicans, Irish Catholics and Protestants, and Presbyterians. It would point to other roots than Graeco-Roman ones and be a reminder that humankind should be seen as the crown of creation, rather than as a curse to the blessed earth as in the classical Greek view.

In all of these the gospel needs to be stated fundamentally in terms of contrast with what the world offers by way of hope or despair, meaning or futility, trustworthiness or deception.