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A HAPPY ANNIVERSARY DITTY 28 August 2022



We head into our thirteenth year together,
At ease and peace with matrimony's tether.
There's so much good in prospect and behind us,
To keep us hopeful, happy and remind us
Of just how greatly blessed we've been thus far.
Hey ho, woop woop, ting-a-ling, hurrah!

May we, still full of life and health and fun,
Well before this thirteenth year is done,
Be snugly domiciled in ancient Wells,
Listening to its ten Cathedral bells.
Although retired, untired! Grandma! Grandpa!
Hey ho, woop woop, ting-a-ling, hurrah!

Ensnconced within our final residence,
We'll welcome one and all without pretence;
Such bounteous hospitality dispense,
As calls forth joyousness in recompense,
To make this thirteenth year the best by far!
Hey ho, woop woop, ting-a-ling, hurrah!

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.

HAND IN HAND AND WELL IN STEP

St John's and Pilley in July
Toe to toe and eye to eye,
Get together, have a date,
At the Church and Village Fete.
There with zest, perzzaz and pep,
Hand in hand and well in step,
We altogether work and play
Side by side throughout the day.

Sip Pimms together with good cheer,
Or like the Vicar guzzle beer
And relish well-charred burger meat
Until contented and replete,
We're made so generous and kind
We'll purchase anything we find
Upon the many well-stocked stalls,
Stuff that once we're home appals.

And so return to next year's fete
Where other fools will take the bait.
So backwards, forwards, there and back,
Year by year moves bric a brac.
But also there is much to please:
Jams and bottles, cakes and teas.
Plants, ice creams and books and games,
And pooches judged by Mr James

And William Gilpin children shine
As round the Maypole they entwine
Coloured ribbons as they prance
Frolic, caper, romp and dance.
Then an end that few ignore,
The calling of the monster Draw
Loads of prizes lost or won,
Whereupon the Fete is done.

And once again our church and village
Have happily conspired to pillage

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?

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!

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.

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.

As yet 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 Sunday school-like rot
Expecting me to gobble up and swallow down the lot;
Of cyclopean change-fanatics, restless, bored and fidgety,
Who've vandalised the Church's fabric, language, hymns and liturgy.

And just as bad are those who with a driving sense of mission
Attempt to force me to accept medieval superstition,
Inhale great gusts of incense 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!

MEG AT FOURTEEN

You're grandchild number one, dear Meg,
Born a tiny powder keg
Of blonde pizzaz and fizz and fun,
Enjoyed and loved by everyone.

Living proof that those who suffer
Are often braver, stronger, tougher
Than those whose lives are easy-peasy
Airey-fairy, brisk and breezy.

Now, at fourteen, on you go
For all your worries, pain and woe,
Still wide of smile when met on Skype
Plucky, brave, not one to gripe.

Well done Meg, we all admire you,
And when good health returns to fire you,
You'll turn the world (without a doubt),
Upside down and inside out!!

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!*

FOR DIANA AT SEVENTY SIX

You catch me up at seventy six
but only so it seems,
Clocks' inexorable ticks
only stop in dreams.

Love's language though, rejoice, rejoice,
most of all requires
An active and a passive voice,
to grant love's best desires,

Still laying bricks at seventy six
you've no desire to linger,
So to the clock's mesmeric ticks
you raise a scornful finger.

In real life and time it's me
who's catching up with you,
You forge ahead courageously,
I'm well behind, that's true.

To dole out peace, dispel foul rancour
and hold us close together,
If you're the speed boat, I'm its anchor
be fair or foul the weather.

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!

WILLIAM GILPIN PRIMARY SCHOOL FIRST CHRISTMAS SERVICE AFTER COVID

What a pleasant surprise to open your eyes
In Church and to find that the Preacher
Isn't the vicar (the oldest of guys)
But instead is the school's young head teacher!

A silent old Vicar means things might go quicker
For vicars can be so, so boring!
They mumble and bumble till eyes start to flicker
As listeners nod off and start snoring.

Children might fill this old church on the hill
If things were much faster and slicker
And its preachers were teachers with training and skill
And not just a creaky old vicar.

But don't get things wrong by supposing this song
Is a Vicar's sad song of dismay.

Instead ring the bells let them ding let them dong
He's a happy old Vicar today

For it's awesome and good, let it be understood
To have all of you children back here
This Vicar's so happy he would if he could
Crack open a bottle of beer,

And show you cartoons and sing merry tunes
Blow trumpets and stand on his head,
And hire tame baboons to blow up balloons
And paint his church shockingly red.

Because you are here and Christmas is near
And the holidays start up today
And a babe in a manger proves God is no stranger,
But loves us, so hip-hip, hooray!

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!"

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!

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 LUNCH

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.

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 & crammed
His brother's head with prayers and texts
convinced 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 tepid 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
Hoping for some sort of welcome
from a loving dad.

These 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
Prodigal and sinful offspring
forevermore 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,
but with love and joy and fun,

The only ones who're left outside
are those who won't come in,
Damning holy Joes commit
the only damning sin!

GRACE MEN'S BREAKFAST - WELLS

Dear Lord,

Bless those this morning who've forsaken
Their beds for sausage egg and bacon.

You once blessed bread and fish so well
They helped five thousand bellies swell,

So bless our fellowship and food
And grant us a convivial mood,

And bless this early autumn day
And what our speaker has to say.

Bless each and all and everyone
And thank you Lord for joy and fun. *Amen.*

**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.

**GRACE: FOR THE HARVEST SUPPER
BOLDRE MEMORIAL HALL
SEPTEMBER 2019**

Dear Lord, in this fine village Pilley
All harvest meals, willy-nilly,
Start with prayers of gratitude
For what's to come in drink and food.
For harvest bounty by the plateful
Leaves only slobs and jobs ungrateful.

So thank you Lord for harvest cheer,
For cider, wine and pints of beer,
For apples, plums, potatoes, beans,
Cauliflowers and aubergines,
For artichokes, all sorts of peas,
For eggs and milk and cream and cheese,
For marrows, damsons, nuts galore,
For fields of wheat and even more,
For friendship, fellowship and fun
And gifts and favours by the ton.

And thank you too for this Church parish,
For all the care and love you lavish
On its several congregations
Who worship you at two locations.
For harvest blessings by the score;
For faith, for hope and even more
For love that moves the heavenly spheres
Makes sense of life, non-sense of fears;
That lightens burdens, tempers loss,
Your love expressed upon the cross.

And last not least it's far from silly
To thank you too for lovely Pilley.
And not at all should we cold-shoulder
Lovely, verdant, leafy, Boldre.

For all of this our hearts we raise
In joyful gratitude and praise. Amen.

**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, p. c. leftist yelp:
"Whoever perpetrated this needs help!"

**DENNIS JONES
HIS NINETY NINTH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION**

Dennis Jones at ninety nine
Still booms and beams his views benign
And calls us all to wine and dine,
To sparkle, effervesce and shine,
And so subvert and undermine
All that's grim or saturnine.

In Dennis Jones at ninety nine,
Generous, kindly and benign,
Experience and wit combine
To overcome and far outshine
So much in life that's dull, bovine,
Small-minded, daft and asinine.

Dennis Jones, at ninety nine
We all admire and so incline
And love to hear him talk, opine,
Philosophise, his thoughts refine,
The human life-span redefine
By shoving old age down the line.

Dennis Jones now ninety nine
Is all but at the century touchline,
Which sends a tingle up the spine
As, proud to celebrate and dine,
We raise a glass of wine divine
Grateful that our lives entwine.

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!

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
both 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 too don't practice what they preach
are also hypocritical.

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 the 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,
Piles and piles, a great mountain of stacks.

This wasn't achieved by the Rector 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 52ND 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.

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, Abernethy, 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.

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 Phinneas

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 1998

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 ruminate 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.

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, Millear, 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 yobs
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

Growing up in Africa,
we minded not the least
Our father being a colourful
Church of England priest

We lived a life on mission stations
of sweet simplicity
Without the blessing and 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.

The fire flies at night our eyes
delighted and entranced
As 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 almost out, still burning blue,
a little tap was turned
And with a pop a golden light burst 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 small clay lamps were trimmed
and gently set alight,

Then placed on high to light the room,
a simple evening ritual.
As too with us 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.

We too in simple, common things
like bread, like birds like flowers,
and childhood fondly recollected
make his kingdom ours.

In memories too of homely food
on which the family fed.
My 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 bouyant bread in cooking.

That bread once baked was eaten hot
with joy we couldn't utter

Our mouths well stuffed with crispy crust
and golden, 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.

Suggesting that his kingdom isn't
fear, constraint, restriction.
Or life-denying, joy-defying,
gloom and 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,
it's 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
An end to self-congratulating,
pompous piety.

How lovely then the world of Jesus
his parables reveal,
Close to that I knew when young
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 yob,
a self-obsessive swine
I often at the time lost sight
of anything divine.

But that's the point. It's secretly
and unobserved that leaven
Brightens, lightens, dim, dull dough
or brutish boy with heaven!

And that is why it really is
in bread, in birds, in flowers
In simple, homely recollection
his kingdom comes, is 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.

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 waggon, 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 let's 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, acronymicly,
The ABC and C of E
Are very, very dear to me.
For both, you see, if 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, testosteroneed.
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 cobbler, 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 wowsler 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
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, bright eyed and blue of dress,

No less than ten of them process
Demurely 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
Far less happily might fare,
There's just a chance they'll find, alas
That pregnancies have come to pass!

If so 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!"