

in World War II. It is a pleasant and sensitive account of events from the perspective of those actively involved but unfortunately for a more specialist readership it contributes few new insights or analysis.

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James Michael Liston — A Life. By Nicholas Reid. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2006. 412 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 0-86473-536-7.

JAMES MICHAEL LISTON'S PRIVATE PAPERS were all destroyed by his own hand by the time he died in 1976 — unpromising circumstances for any biographer. Nicholas Reid suggests that this destruction took place following the 89-year-old Catholic archbishop's retirement in 1970; if so, it must have been quite a bonfire. Clerical tradition once had it that the sudden fall of France in World War II prompted Liston to burn all his personal correspondence. What is certain is that he shared the disinclination of his Melbourne contemporary, Daniel Mannix, to have 'posterity analysing my soul'.

How then does his biographer look beyond the official Liston, to paint him in the round, to capture more than the austere, autocratic churchman of legend? Reid had recourse to the riches of the Irish College Rome archives, extensive oral interviews with those who knew the prelate in his later years, and what he terms 'the imaginative folklore that Auckland Catholics developed around Liston'. He has skilfully deployed these sources to produce a lively biography of the Dunedin-born priest, a man who exercised authority over New Zealand Catholics for most of his adult life.

Although Reid recognizes that 'it is difficult to write New Zealand church history without considering its Australasian context' (p.20), this book's origin as a doctoral thesis has evidently precluded archival foraging in Australia. Such research would have provided several bishop-coadjutor battles to illuminate the Liston–Cleary conflict, and provided the key to divisions over prohibition among the New Zealand bishops. That said, chapter five is one of the best in the book, as Reid deals in a balanced and judicious manner with the bitter dispute between Liston and his Irish-born ecclesiastical superior, Henry William Cleary. After an uneasy couple of years following Liston's appointment in 1920, Cleary grew increasingly critical of his coadjutor's faults (administrative, economic and personal) and petitioned Rome for his removal. Reid is aware of hearing only Liston's side of the argument. Whether the latter emerges as 'completely vindicated' from the clash as Reid suggests will be revealed only when the relevant Roman files become accessible to researchers and someone tackles a full-length biography of Bishop Cleary.

There is surely more to be said about 'the Saddle Hill conspiracy' of 1918, when Liston's fellow priests colluded to reject him for the vacant see of Dunedin. In particular, Liston's critics deserve more attention than Reid gives them; a paltry three votes out of 20 was a devastating expression of no confidence in the aspirant bishop. Were the local clergy really terrified at the prospect of firm discipline after the laxity of Bishop Verdon's day, as claimed by the hierarchy? Reid is somewhat defensive of Liston's faults and critical of James Kelly (characterized as 'the indefatigable gossip', p.73) for his summing up of Liston as narrow, stubborn, unpopular and autocratic. Yet the rest of the book contains copious evidence of the accuracy of Kelly's charges, particularly in relation to the Campbell case and the Hibernian Society split. (As most of the major players have destroyed their private correspondence, the historian might well be grateful for Kelly's candid if acerbic letters to Rome.)

Reid tends to downplay Liston's role in the infamous sedition case of 1922, which saw him endure a two-day trial in Auckland's Supreme Court in defence of his political

opinions. His refusal to have a correction inserted in the press of his (misreported) remarks at the St Patrick's night concert and his subsequent stinging rebuke to Auckland Mayor James Gunson fuelled a popular outcry which influenced the government to proceed against him. I doubt very much whether Liston ever 'clearly advocated complete independence for Ireland' (p.151). Reid deals most sensitively with the older Liston, 'a man fighting yesterday's battles, and failing to connect with a generation whose priestly formation was very different from his own' (p.287).

The book contains an excellent range of photographs, though some are very poorly reproduced. A few minor corrections: the age at which students could enter the Irish College Rome was 16 years (p.42); Rome rather than the New Zealand bishops was reluctant to ignore the wishes of the diocesan clergy in the choice of Bishop Verdon's successor, especially given their selection of a regular rather than a secular candidate (p.82); Bishop Cleary's brother, Christopher, lived at Bagenalstown, County Carlow, Ireland (p.171); the drive for state aid for Catholic schools launched in 1956 by the Holy Name Society was conducted under the slogan 'Hear the Case' (p.259).

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Gathering for God: George Brown in Oceania. By Helen Bethea Gardner. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2006. 204 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-877372-18-8.

THIS IS NO NARROWLY CONCEIVED 'MISSION HISTORY' book. Although its focus is on a single person, the adventurous and resourceful George Brown, its scope extends far beyond his missionary career or the history of the mission he worked in. Readers will come away much better informed about Brown and his career in Methodist missions, but the book makes a major contribution to the broader concerns of Pacific history.

George Brown was a missionary in Samoa from 1860 to 1874 and led the first Methodist mission to New Britain in 1875. From 1887 until his retirement in 1908 he held the important appointment of General Secretary of the Australasian Methodist Overseas Mission, based in Sydney, and was responsible for the mission's activities in Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, the Solomon Islands and New Guinea. In these years of mission progress and imperial expansion, Brown travelled widely and exerted a significant influence in Methodist mission affairs, political developments in the South Pacific and the growing field of Oceanic anthropology. His wide-ranging activities as missionary, mission administrator, 'politically engaged' participant in Pacific affairs and amateur scientist/ethnologist/photographer/collector played a significant part in the fast-moving story of European contact with the Pacific, especially the western region. Helen Gardner's book is a contemporary 'revisiting' of Brown's life and his role in Pacific history.

Gardner is a New Zealander, holding a doctorate from La Trobe University. One of the strengths of *Gathering for God* is the author's self-awareness of where she is situated in this age of cultural relativism and widespread suspicion of Christianity and of missionaries, including their supposed role in imperialism. She acknowledges that she came to the study with a 'residual disdain for missionaries' and a dismissive view of Pacific Christianity. Her book could not therefore be at all hagiographical, as C.B. Fletcher's biography *The Black Knight of the Pacific* (published in 1944) tended to be. Instead, it emerges as part of the new willingness of anthropologists and historians to recognize the complexities of the relationship between mission and empire and to reach a deeper understanding, as she puts it, of 'the attraction and impact of Christianity in the Pacific Islands'. Writing from outside the field of mission history, she nevertheless distances herself from modern popular and academic misrepresentations of missionaries and Oceanic churches.