## Gods of Conservation take their place in new pantheon



SCIENCE

ITH revered prophets. numberless devotees, crusades, martyrs. extremists, inquisitors, heretics and sacred doctrine. religion and conservation have many parallels. We could say conservation is the new religion.

The High Prophet of Conservation is, of course, Saint Rachel Carson, whose 1961 book Silent Spring achieved Old Testament status and heralded the Great Environmental Awakening.

New Zealand's conservation saint is "deep" ecologist and hierophant Geoffrey Park, whose book Nga Uruora (repeatedly read on National Radio) bemoans the sorry fate of our plants, animals and landscape. Geoff's book "aches with a sense of outrage and loss".

As religious devotion dwindles throughout the English-speaking world, Conservation Religion is filling the spiritual gap. Look at the growing army of crusaders devoting their lives to saving lakes, rivers, dolphins, black stilts and snails, killing rats and possums, weed busting, planting riverbanks, waste land and sand

dunes with natives, breeding monarch butterflies . . . These sacred activities give meaning and direction to millions of otherwise

Signs of the times are changing. I remember city roadsides once proclaimed "JESUS SAVES" or "THE END IS NIGH". But as the Christian messages fade they are over-graffitied with "SAVE DENNISTON PLATEAU" "WHALES ARE PEOPLE TOO" or, painted in white letters a metre high on the Otaki railway bridge, "SAVE WHIO" (blue ducks). Like martyrs of the church, conservation activists risk death by chaining themselves to trees or drilling platforms, boarding whaling ships or prostrating themselves in front of bulldozers.

If you're looking for a Crusade.

look no further than Manapouri.

HE CHURCH has long profited from donations and bequests but increasingly people are leaving their money to conservation. I can't find figures for New Zealand but even in the US Bible Belt more and more dollars are being bequeathed to conservation. According to the American Association of Fund-Raising Council, state-side citizens donated about US\$6 billion to environmental/animal-related organisations in 2010.

Conservationists even have their own inquisitors who give



heretics and apostates a tonguelashing. I heard one such ideological Greenie radio interviewer pour scorn on Danish conservation sceptic Bjorn Lomborg every time he opened his

Clearly, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost have been supplanted by The Ecosystem, Biodiversity and Sustainability. Atheists are rapt to see money spent on real worthwhile things instead of enriching televangelists. furthering religious fantasies or funding dudes togged out in fancy church regalia. Mind you, even saints of the Conservation Church are not without blemish. In banning DDT throughout the world, Rachel Carson condemned tens of millions of people to die of malaria in the tropics and Saint Geoffrey Parks has spawned a cadre of ecofascist purists who uproot beds of scented roses and colourful herbaceous borders to be replaced with drab indigenous vegetation.

OW, I must admit to a mistake in last week's column about Fukushima radioactivity. The radiation laboratory in Christchurch did not test muttonbirds returning from Japan, as I claimed, but tested their chicks. The lab found the chicks were free of radioactivity and safe to eat.