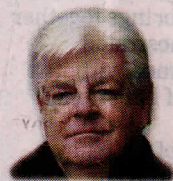


Gods of Conservation take their place in new pantheon



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WORLD OF SCIENCE

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

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.



THE 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 tongue-lashing. I heard one such ideological Greenie radio interviewer pour scorn on Danish conservation sceptic Bjorn Lomborg every time he opened his mouth.

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.



NOW, 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.