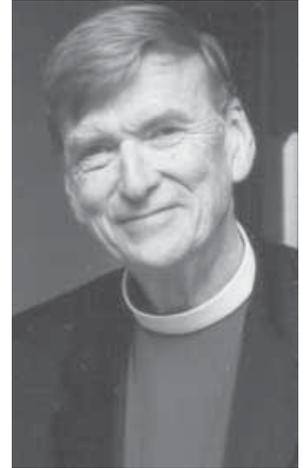


Theologians who have changed our lives



From the Director and Canon Theologian

Get to know anyone and you'll find a story. Get to know anyone with an interest in God and you'll frequently find part of their story involves a book. In this WIT Newsletter, we asked people to write about some of the theologians who touched their lives. What emerged was a rich diversity of writers spanning the centuries, from Augustine of Hippo through to CS Lewis, James K Baxter and Jack Spang. A fascinating collection – if you could get them all together in one room, it might turn out to be quite a dinner party! What strikes me is some of the similarities between them. All four thought about their faith, asked the hard questions and were not afraid to keep on digging until they found answers that satisfied them. All of them argued passionately for what they came to believe in and were not shy of debate. And, amongst the collection of writings that each of these men produced, all of them wrote some sort of memoir (in Baxter's case, in novel-form).

What does that last one say to me? Perhaps that thinking and writing about God helps us to begin to know ourselves better, and also to be willing to use our own story to speak to others about God. Perhaps coming to God with our questions and our laments and all the vulnerability which accompanies that process helps us to risk the sharing of our own lives with others. What this has left me pondering is the thought that if we want to touch someone else's life we can do that best not just with our thoughts (arguments marshalled, paragraphs rolling off the page or out of our mouths) but with the stuff of our own lives. But then 'word made flesh' is pretty powerful, isn't it?

Who are the theologians who have touched your life? Who are those who have led you into thinking in a new way, or pursuing a different course of action? I'd be really interested to find out, so drop me an email at debroome@paradise.net.nz.

Canon Deborah Broome

Revelation seminar kits

Late last year, a WIT seminar presented different perspectives on Revelation, the Bible's final and (some say) strangest book, for anyone who wants to explore the book further.

Each kit includes a DVD of the five presentations and a CD containing the texts of the papers and discussion questions. This resource would be ideal for a parish study group, or for individuals to watch

by themselves. The first copy for each parish is free (funded from the lay ministry budget). The cost to individuals (and for additional copies for parishes) is \$10.00 per kit.

Please order from the WIT Library in the Anglican Centre by contacting John on telephone 04 471 8599 or email WITLibrary@wn.ang.org.nz.

C. S. Lewis and John Spong

It seems an odd combination to say that both John Spong and C. S. Lewis have influenced my theological thought, but it is true.

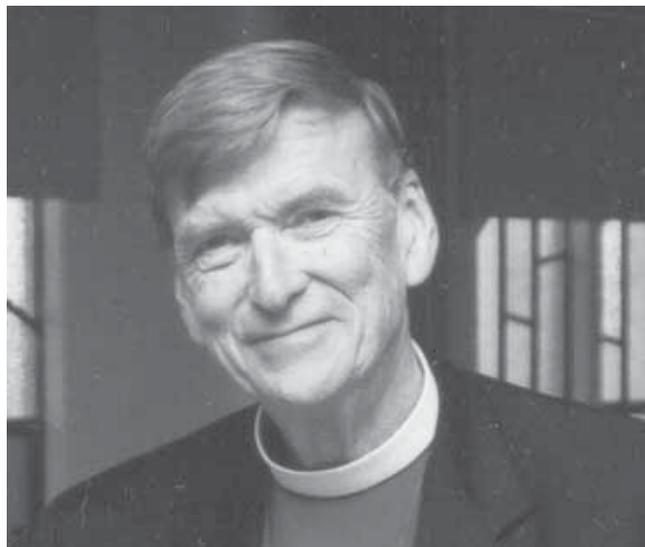
I was raised with very little exposure to Christianity of the Church so I was very ignorant of ordinary basic Christian things when I became a Christian in my early 20s. I was fortunate to become a Christian through the Navigators in my second year at university. The Navigators are really great at teaching the basics like how to pray, how to read the Bible, how to serve others and how to have some discipline around your spiritual life. But in New Zealand in the early 1970s they were not so good on the intellectual side of learning to think theologically. It was pretty much being told what to think.



C.S. Lewis

I discovered C. S. Lewis's writings soon after I became a Christian. Everything, from the Narnia books, the fantasy and science fiction, to the more obviously Christian books like *The Four Loves* was new to me. I loved his work straight away. I often thought, "That's what I think. I wish I had said that." I liked his logic. I liked the way he talked about real situations and showed his experience of life. I went through a stage of reading all that I could about him, and I loved it when in the 1980s people began to take him seriously enough to critique his work. I still like his work, but not so intensely now.

I know that C. S. Lewis is not a traditional systematic theologian, or someone who wrote about his deep study of the Bible, but he has still had a profound effect on my theological thinking. Not least, because he taught me that it is O.K. to be intellectual and a Christian.



Bishop Spong

John Spong influenced me in another way. I discovered him when he used to visit Wellington in the 1980s and 1990s and speak at St Andrew's on the Terrace. He was a somewhat controversial figure, and some Church leaders wanted to discourage people from going to hear him speak, so I went to see what he had to say.

I realised I liked his questions. I liked the way he was not afraid to look at the Bible and say "This isn't clear." Or, "There might be another way to look at this." Or, "This part contradicts that." I realised it was O.K. to question like that. I liked some of his answers, but not all of them, and I have increasingly moved away from liking any of his answers at all.

I read his autobiography, deliberately called *Here I Stand* to provoke controversy, and I realised I didn't like the way he liked to stir up trouble and behave like a martyr. But I also felt sorry for him because of some of the hardship he had experienced in his life. His book did have a permanent effect on my life though. When he left seminary and began life as a parish priest he realised it would be easy to not study any more. So he decided to study a book of the Bible with a commentary every year. I have been doing that for about 15 years now and it is amazing how much I have learnt from that and how it has influenced my theological thinking.

Barb Lash

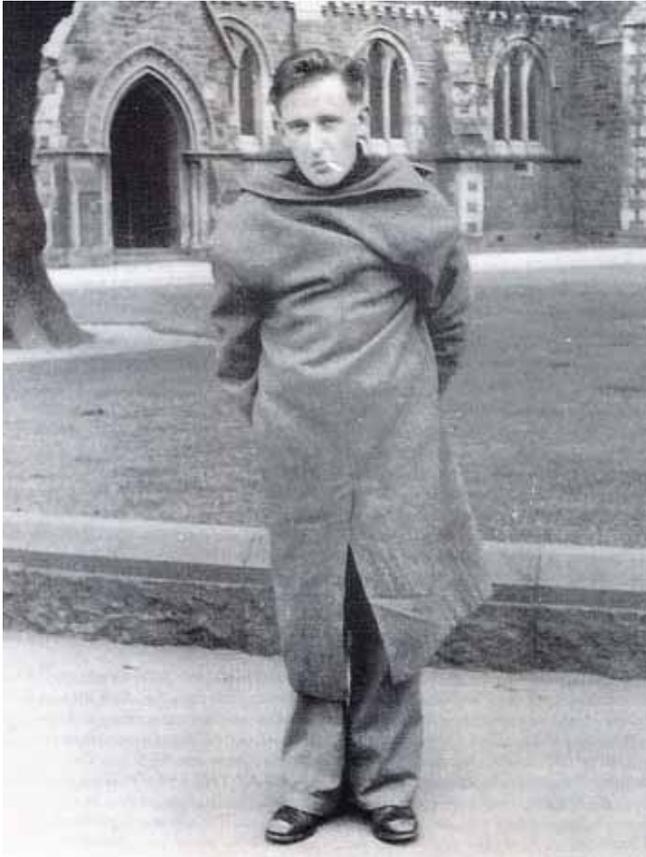
Advance notice: WIT roadshow on Job

Saturday 13 October	Carterton
Saturday 27 October	Feilding
Saturday 3 November	Wellington

Wellington Institute of Theology is now on Facebook! Go here and click 'like'.

www.facebook.com/pages/Wellington-Institute-of-Theology-WIT/120352341320496

James K. Baxter



James K. Baxter around the time of his baptism

James K. Baxter's poetry could be deeply spiritual, his religious essays were remarkably insightful and his work with the poor and the marginalised during his final years powerfully revealed Christ in word and action. However his spiritual journey is perhaps best described in *Horse*, a loosely autobiographical short novel. *Horse* is no literary masterpiece. Baxter himself said it was "unpublished and unpublishable". But it brilliantly captures the struggles of a hard drinking and disreputable young university dropout and poet trying to make sense of himself - and of God - in 1940s Dunedin.

The title character Horse is far from socially acceptable. His closest friend Tony is an older gay man, a fellow outsider and one of the few people who tolerate his behaviour. He perplexes Horse when he uses God as the starting point when explaining his sexual orientation. To begin with, "Horse had no clear idea of God, but he suspected that God and his mother were uncomfortably like each other. It seemed more than likely that God intended him to be a stirk [a steer or bullock]. He had made the frame for it so exactly. The grey-

green monotonous hills, the tombstone clouds, and the endless sad wash of waves on the Otago beaches. A dry book of Genesis where He wrote all the questions and answers. And Fern [his girlfriend] would never appear in that Book, except perhaps as Lilith, the demoness who tempted Adam". In his search for answers, he sets down the framework of a simple and experimental belief system, which he seals in a silver box.

At one point in the story, Horse wakes up feeling very remorseful. The night before, he had lost almost a fortnight's wages in a Crown and Anchor game. He remembers the advice of an Irish workmate. "But if you're ever looking for a Church, don't by-pass the one with the big stone steps and the line twenty yards long outside the confession box. It's the only one where they know that a man's a crocodile." Horse finds a Roman Catholic Church in which to pray. "Unbaptized, uninstructed, Horse's prayer to the Blessed Virgin was admirably simple. *Help me, I'm a bloody fool*, he prayed silently."

There are many misadventures to come, but the story ends with a dream, in which Horse sees an illuminated tile, flashing on and off, with the name of Jesus in bold black letters. He then finds something shocking and unexpected. I will not spoil the story by revealing it, other than to say that Horse realises that an innocent victim has bought him life and freedom. I still struggle with the ending of *Horse*, but I remind myself that even the most outrageous metaphor cannot fully capture the radical nature of God's incarnation in the world.

Of course, *Horse* takes some artistic licence. We know Baxter was baptised into the Anglican Church in 1948 and did not convert to Roman Catholicism until 1957. However, it is still a brutally honest portrayal of a troubled young man's struggle with God in post colonial Aotearoa New Zealand. I was 20 when *Horse* was published some 13 years after Baxter's death. Like Horse, I was a young university dropout and poet with far too much fondness for fermented beverages; and like Horse, I only had a very foggy awareness of God, and I could immediately relate to his journey, for in part, Horse had trudged the very same road that I would later follow.

Darryl Ward

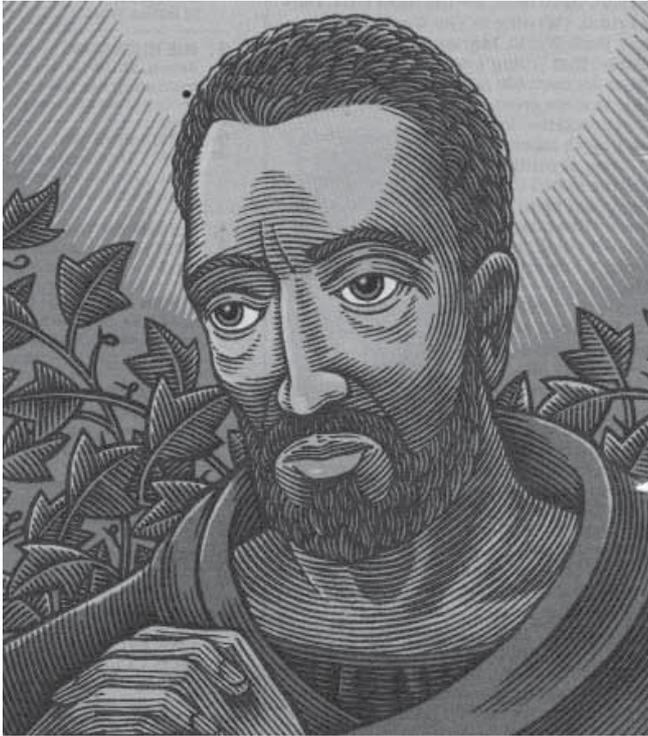
The one and the many: unity in diversity in the Church

A colloquium organised by the Wellington Theological Consortium

Saturday 18 August, 9.30 am (registration) – 5.00 pm, St. Johns in the City

Presenters include Mike Grimshaw, Andrew Butcher & Lisa Beech. More information to come.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE)



Augustine of Hippo

I can remember where I was when I first heard of Augustine: I was sitting in a classroom one lunchtime during my 4th form year, at a meeting of our Inter-School Christian Fellowship group, and the teacher who was leading us quoted “O God you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.” Many years and many readings of the *Confessions* later, it remains for me one of the most profound things ever written. It speaks of the love of God that will not let us go and the quest for purpose that we follow until we find, in God, our ultimate home.

The *Confessions* is an account of God’s grace in Augustine’s life, in the lives of others, in the Church and in the created world as a whole. Much of the work traces Augustine’s spiritual journey, from his earliest days through to his conversion to Christianity and his subsequent reflections, but this is more than an account of a young man finding faith. Calling it ‘autobiography’ presupposes that the subject of the *Confessions* is Augustine himself: it is not. We should read it as a journey of a soul towards God, a journey made possible only by the grace of God. Augustine himself would be the first to say that the subject of the book is not ‘Augustine’ but God’s grace.

Significantly, he begins each book of the *Confessions* with a prayer: the work is addressed to God in the first instance, and only then to the human reader. Augustine seeks through all that he says, about himself and about others, to praise and glorify the God of grace who was present in his life even before he was consciously aware of it. That he is able to do this is due to his faith, faith which is itself the gift of God.

Every time I read the *Confessions* I am struck again by the all-encompassing grace of God, and by the ways this grace comes to us: through other people, through Scripture and other books, and through our reflections on the events of our lives – for sometimes it is only with hindsight that we are able to discern God’s guidance and care. What stands out in the *Confessions* is the utter gratuity of grace, which gave Augustine the freedom to become himself, and to see himself within a graced community of ‘all who accompany me on this pilgrimage.’ Present pilgrims can learn much from him. I know, I have.

Deborah Broome

New WIT Librarian



The Wellington Institute of Theology (WIT) Council has with pleasure appointed the Reverend John McCaul as the new WIT Librarian. John has recently retired after 20 years as Chaplain at Hutt Hospital. He is also known to many in the Diocese through his roles as Bishop’s Chaplain, Clerical Secretary of Synod and Examining Chaplain. Prior to training for ordination John was a primary school teacher for some years, during which he ran a school library. He has a particular interest in New Zealand Church History and is a member of the Wellington Council of Christians and Jews, the Anglican Historical Society, and the Religious History Association of Aotearoa New Zealand.

John is keen for the WIT Library to be more widely known and used in the diocese. His hours in the WIT Library in Wellington are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 3.00pm to 5.30pm. He can be contacted by emailing WITLibrary@wn.ang.org.nz or by telephoning the WIT Library’s direct line 04 471 8599.

The Wellington Library is located based on the first floor of the Anglican Centre, 18 Eccleston Hill (off Hill Street), Thorndon, Wellington. Contact Director Deborah Broome at 04 475–9085 or debroome@paradise.net.nz. The Palmerston North Library is located at St Peter’s Church, 229 Ruahine St, Palmerston North. Correspondence should be addressed to the WIT Council c/o the Anglican Centre.