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## Letter to the Editor ...

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# Letter to the Editor . . .

## Letter from New Zealand

The great event of the year was the visit of the Pope to this country, the first ever by a reigning Pontiff. It was a notable success. The Holy Father took the country by storm and won all hearts. Although he was here for only 48 hours, he visited three cities and took part in seven official public meetings before huge crowds. How he stood up to the stress of such a program is a miracle. It was a tribute to his remarkable physique and to a lifetime of self-discipline.

What came through to everyone was his obvious sanctity. He did not speak out on any controversial issues but confined himself simply to the scriptures and the spiritual life. Most of all he showed us how to pray—with sincerity, with faith and with reverence.

The second notable event of the year, although perhaps not quite on the same Olympian level, was the visit of your spiritual advisor, Monsignor Dino Lorenzetti. He and a couple of Wild West friends fled the snows of Buffalo, NY to enjoy the sun and beauty of our country in summertime. It was an honor to be able to entertain them and to repay the generous hospitality we have always enjoyed in the United States.

It would be mistakenly optimistic to say that the Church is thriving. In the latest quinquennial census, the percentage of Roman Catholics fell from 15 to 14 percent. This fall in numbers, even though small, is of serious import. But the postconciliar hysteria seems to be subsiding; the defection of priests, religious and laity has slowed down; and there are slight indications that vocations are increasing. It is sad to have to admit that Catholics are as much involved in divorce, contraception, sterilization and abortion as are the members of other religions.

The average growth rate of the population is less than 0.5 percent per annum. If it were not for immigration, we would be suffering a demographic decline. The ratio of abortions to live births is 1:7. Only a few years ago it was 1:1000.

AIDS has arrived, the first deaths have occurred, and the frantic health authorities are advising every prophylactic technique they can think of—except giving up sodomy.

American visitors often ask us if we suffer from the litigation that afflicts medical colleagues in the United States. Fortunately, we do not. The Accident Compensation Corporation, which is supported by a levy on employers, works on a "no fault" basis and therefore legal action for alleged medical malpractice has virtually disappeared. But the scheme is absurdly expensive and this year the ACC has trebled its levy. A large section of the work force is permanently off work with "backache" and enjoying generous compensation. It is impossible to prove fraud. All sorts of minor fractures have full medical expenses paid and then the patient receives a large check to cover "pain and loss of enjoyment of life". The most ridiculous example of the "no fault" folly, which aroused the ire of the taxpayers and may finally lead to modification of the Act, concerned a convicted murderer who was serving a life sentence. He escaped from jail and fell from the top of the wall breaking both legs. He eventually received from the ACC a check for over \$20,000!

The other main complaint is that the drunken drivers who fill the orthopedic wards are receiving these great donations of cash (because they are accidents), while those incapacitated with coronaries or cancers get nothing.

On the other hand, it is difficult to accept the concept of "defensive medicine". The only basis for medicine must be doing the best thing for the patient on clinical grounds, even if this involves the physician in some risk from ungrateful recipients. I realize that in the United States this dilemma has resulted in Cesarean section rates of over 20 percent. In my last 4,632 private patients, the Cesarean rate was only 4.6 percent, a situation which must cause some envy among colleagues in other countries.

— H.P. Dunn M.D.  
Auckland