

## Openings to Renewal

Peter J Cullinane

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**W**hen *Openings to Renewal* was published Peter Cullinane was Bishop of Palmerston North, New Zealand. He retired in February 2012 after 32 years of Episcopal ministry. Dedicated to Pope Paul VI whom, according to Cullinane, “was entrusted the helm where river meets the sea” (v). *Openings to Renewal* is something of a metaphorical captain’s log of one who has navigated the turbulent waters and dangerous reefs common around these coastal regions.

Through the use of the literary form of a collection of letters Cullinane addresses a wide range of practical concerns. The twenty-three letters represent the mature reflection of a man who was thoughtfully engaged in the midst of pastoral ministry. Subjects covered include marriage and family life, the pastoral care of separated/remarried spouses, Christian unity, homilies, religious life and priesthood.

In a manner that perhaps a younger pastor might have judiciously avoided Bishop Cullinane tackles complex and controversial issues head on. There is a refreshing honesty in his reflections as illustrated in the following account of own experience of episcopal collegiality.

Bishops, too can fail to exercise collegial responsibility just by default or because of excessive obsequiousness. This was not the case, however, when following another disastrous episcopal appointment, the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna felt it necessary to say publicly: “Once again, we are confronted by occurrences that cause grief and indignation. They make us shake our heads, and seem incomprehensible. And once again the Church has been made to look stupid and so have we.” (44)

In one of the letters titled “More Catholic than the Pope” Cullinane addresses the pastorally urgent issue of condoms and preventing the spread of AIDS. In this letter he declares fidelity with the Catholic moral tradition and *Humae Vitae* but at the same time warns against the simplistic inflation of the meaning of Church teaching.

The Second Vatican Council serves as the touchstone and inspiration of Cullinane’s reflections and fifty years after the beginning of that momentous event the reader can discern in the text strains of both hope for a future yet to unfold and disappointment for an unrealised “what might have been.”

At its best the Catholic moral tradition is noted for subtly of nuanced thought as principles distilled from the Gospel are applied to real life issues in a manner that promotes human flourishing. *Openings to Renewal* is not a book of moral theology but many of the letters

that make up this book reflect an attitude that is consistent with the best the Catholic moral tradition has to offer.

Written in an open and engaging style *Openings to Renewal* is equally satisfying whether it read sequentially from start to finish or dipped into for inspiration on specific issues. In concluding I can do no better than quoting the endorsement given on the cover by Timothy Radcliffe OP

Here is a bishop who dares to face the real problems of his people and respond with compassion and truth. These are the words of a man of the gospel, who is unafraid to share his faith and his questions. This book is a breath of fresh air.

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**Reviewer:** *John Francis Collins has recently completed a PhD in the area of practical theology and theological method and is currently the vice president of the Association of Practical Theology in Oceania. His principle role is as Projects Manager at the National Office for Evangelisation-Catholic Enquiry Centre, agencies of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. He also teaches practical theology at Australian Catholic University.*

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