

We were not quite sure what to expect as we drove down to visit the Reverend Vernon Cohen and the 'Avalon Community' recently.

Was he an Anglican aping Catholic institutions?
- or an eccentric?
- or a form of escapism?

Instead, we found that Vernon, previously Anglican vicar of Mitcham, had had to rethink his personal spiritual life and adopt more 'Evangelical' traditions of worship because of the varied and changing backgrounds of his "community".

We found him sincere, saintly, yet practical and level-headed, with deep faith in God and his providence.

We found that at great personal discomfort to himself, his wife and their children, he is providing something that he sees as essential in this fast-moving secular age; he is not being complacent or running away, but acknowledging the problem

in the only way that he sees fit.

Vernon has acquired the old Avalon homestead opposite Seelong on Corio Bay, and has made it available to anyone, regardless of denomination, nationality, age or sex, to live in community. They can stay as long as they like, .. maybe a day or two, maybe a year. Their aim: to stop and draw closer to God.

They are lay people, not religious. There are some permanent members of the community (six at present) to ensure stability and to help those who feel 'lost'.

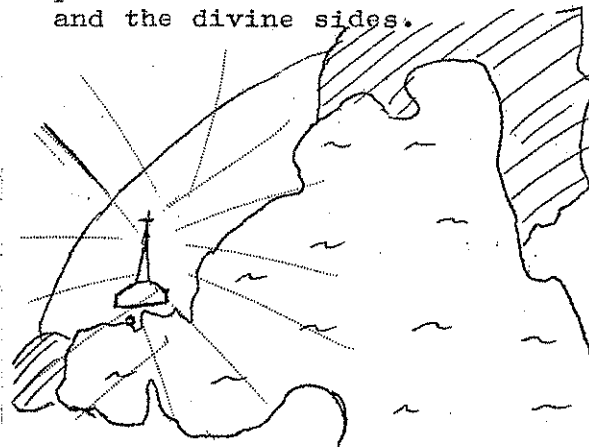
Vernon is convinced that most spiritual crises, at least among Protestants, are the result of a lack of a sacramental system. "It's too one-way;" he said, "the poor wife of a Salvation Army Officer singing 'Alleluia' and bashing a tambourine, Sunday after Sunday, can become fed up with religion.

The Avalon Community(cont.)

"She is deprived of God, giving his grace to her in his sacraments."

Emotional, nervous and psychic disorders often disappear when attacked by the grace of God in the sacraments of Penance and the anointing of the sick. "We Anglicans ignored them for too long."

Rather than see confession as the recital of sins, Vernon sees this as a counselling situation, a personal discussion, followed by sacramental absolution. In this, the penitent receives every help possible from both the human and the divine sides.



Vernon administers the Sacrament of the Sick much more freely than present Catholic legislation allows.

Sometimes he anoints with oil, at other times by a mere imposition of hands, while imploring the aid of the Holy Spirit. The person may be spiritually or physically ill, - if the former, then he would pray for a strengthening of faith. A notable feature was that these sacraments are administered always within the context of the community, all the members of the community are present praying for the ill person.

The Reverend Cohen frankly admits difficulties:

- the obligation to be loyal to his own church, especially in this time of change;
- his responsibilities to his wife and children; to live a fairly normal family life, while still being a real part of the community;
- his relationship with suspicious fellow-clergymen.

We left Avalon feeling that God had set this man to pioneer a special work ... to provide an opportunity for the people "to get away from it all" for a while, to think about and talk to their God, something ever so necessary in this jet-age.

We thank God for him, and ask Him to sustain his work.

I. Waters.