

TUI MOTU InterIslands

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**Hauora mo ngā whaea
me ngā pēpi**

**Health and Wellbeing
for Mothers and Children**

MARY THORNE and DIONNE NEALE on keeping children connected with their mothers in prison

ANNA HOLMES on her medical experience in developing countries

KATE KENNETT, TEANIBUAKA TABUNGA, MARETA TAKEIMO on reducing infant mortality

JIM MCALOON remembers Thomas Merton on the 50th anniversary of his death

YOUNG VINNIES share why they are volunteering this Christmas plus **CHILDREN'S THOUGHTS** and **MUCH MORE ...**



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EDITORIAL

Celebrating Love

Happy Christmas! As an aunt and great-aunt of multitudes I'm awed regularly by the miracle of love around me. It erupts when latte-sipping nibblings suddenly transform into parents with a newborn in their arms. The intensity of their love — a selfless, passionate devotion focused on understanding the infant — moves me. I've seen it as startlingly wonderful in the couple with everything planned and prepared, as in a young one on her own. That transformation, unlike a balloon in the sun, gathers energy, develops, differentiates and continues year after year, through thick and thin. And it's contagious. As an aunt I'm infected, inspired, uplifted and encouraged to be more loving.

I'm not surprised, then, that the birth of Jesus is such a significant feast for Christians. We see the transformation that a baby brings to our families. Equally, we know that, in the world, high infant mortality rates and maternal ill health mean that the birth of a baby can be followed by dreadful sadness and loss. We hear of this experience from health workers in Kiribati where a child's first birthday is celebrated like a national holiday — so precious is that life, coaxed through the early months. And that families are now celebrating more frequently is due to concerted efforts in that country to improve health outcomes for mothers and their babies. The third UN global goal of increasing health and wellbeing around the world has seen countries such as our neighbour Kiribati invest in partnership with NGOs to improve health, agriculture and education. It is work done for land and people, to build the common good of the world.

As Christians we can see the birth of every child as a little incarnation, a reminder that God is with us. And the accompanying injection of love strengthens our resolve to promote and support peace and wellbeing in our families, neighbourhoods and around the world.

This 233rd magazine is a bonus Christmas issue. It offers articles and stories homegrown and from overseas, of joy and pain, of faith and hope, from young children and experienced writers. To all who have contributed through reflection, story, research, review, art, craft and faith we are grateful. May your generosity influence our love this Christmas season.

You'll find our annual *Tui Motu* Christmas Gift subscription card with this magazine. Thank you for using it. We think our award-winning magazine is a gift that will bring enjoyment month-by-month throughout the year!

And, as is our custom, our last word is of happy Christmas blessings!

Ann Gilroy

HAPPY CHRISTMAS



Michael Hill

Founding Editor of *Tui Motu* magazine

Why do people go to Church at Christmas when often enough they may not darken the doors of a church for the rest of the year? Well, it's traditional, it's the family feast. But there is more to it than that. They are there to remember the birth of a child, whose message of peace and love was to change the world.

The story of Christmas, says the Anglican priest-author Michael Mayne, is a love story. God so loved the world that God gave us this precious work of art in the birth of Jesus. We see this truth in the simple, devoted smile of Mary and the caring touch of the carpenter Joseph. We hear it in the song of angels.

Many of the people in Church this Christmas may not be able to articulate the theology but they will feel the reality. They will listen to the traditional hymns. They will spend those golden moments of silence before the mystery. They will have seen the face of God.

Then, they will carry away with them a sweet memory to give added meaning to their family gatherings and barbecues and those precious days in the sun. The Word has become flesh in their lives. ★

Painting: *Cape Kidnappers with Pohutukawa* by Sam Lewry ©
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Kevin Toomey

Second Editor of *Tui Motu* magazine

Christmas is the season of hope, a wonderful family time when we celebrate the arrival into our world of a child — small, helpless, completely dependent upon his Mum and Dad to feed him and enfold him with love, but destined to change the cosmos and all we know for good.

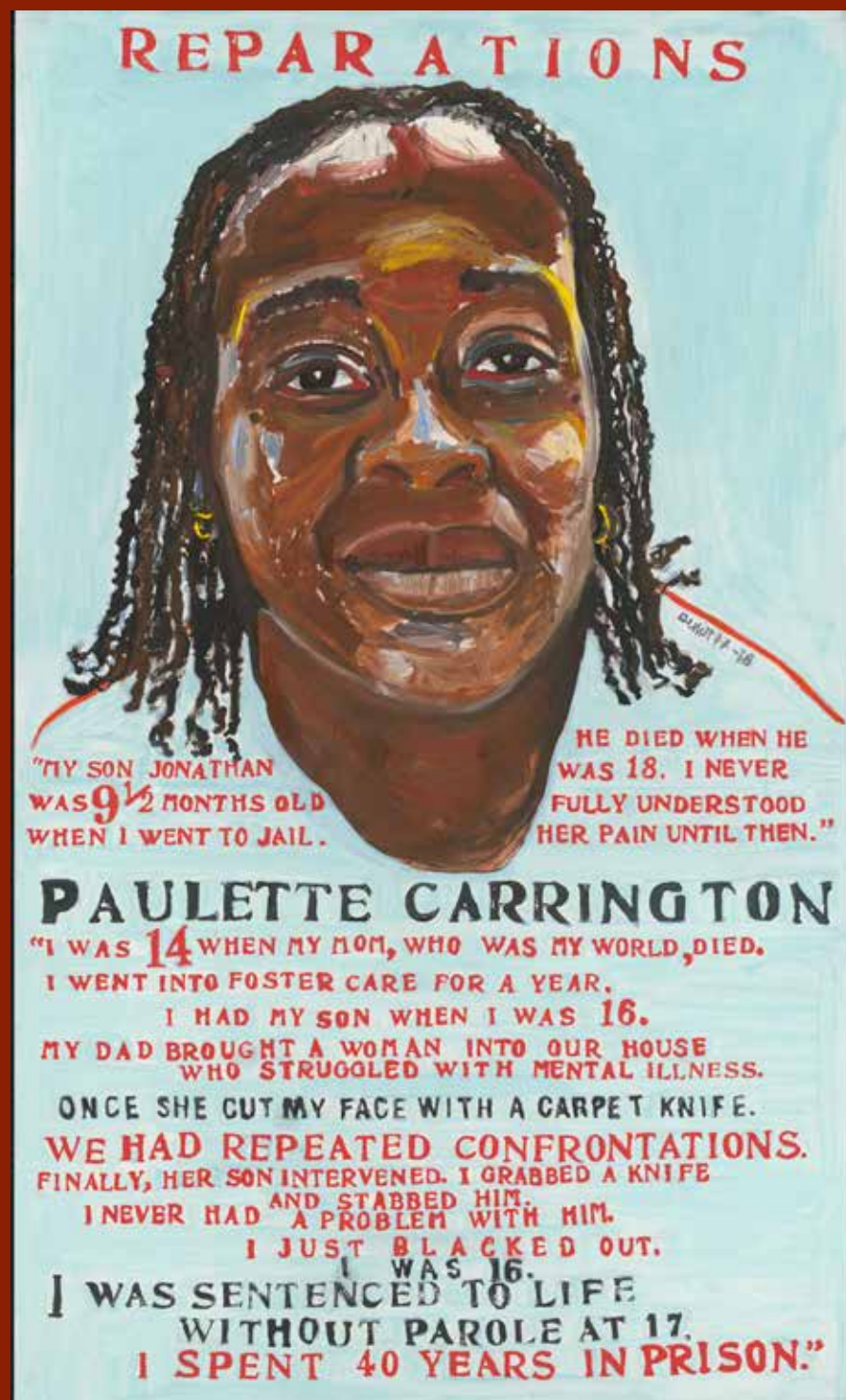
Christmas is the season of peace. Jesus, simply by being born, is a threat to the reigning monarch. He survives sure death by being dragged off to Egypt as exile and asylum seeker, but is destined to become the Prince of Peace.

We look back to the moment of his birth, as it holds the fullness of all we need for life and peace. Who but God could dream of the coming of salvation in a child? It seems absurd. The words of Michael Joncas's hymn float to mind:

*"I have loved you with an everlasting love,
I have called you and you are mine."*

Jesus at birth reflects the view of the world we Christians hold: institutions of power have a duty to work so that everyone, from child to ancient of days, is provided with an environment where all are loved, cherished and live in peace.

This is what we hope for and will celebrate this Christmas. Peace! ★



Protecting Mother and Children Bonds

MARY THORNE and DIONNE NEALE reflect on the necessity of recognising and supporting the relationship between mothers and children.

Lately, I have been thinking a great deal about the significance of the mother and child relationship and the potential for psychological and emotional harm when it is disrupted. This is because, for the first time in my life, I am experiencing the awesome wonder of becoming a grandparent. My eldest daughter is due to have a baby in a few weeks. I am so excited and together with this excitement is much thankfulness. I am so aware of the contrast between this long anticipated, painstakingly prepared for infant and the births and early years of so many other tiny lives.

The third UN Sustainable Development Goal of good health and wellbeing for all emphasises improving outcomes for vulnerable mothers and children. When I worked with women in prison, I saw how separation from their children and fractured relationships with their own mothers were massive causes of distress. This was most evident as Christmas approached.

Dee's Separation at Christmas

Dee, a mother of three children, spent a lengthy period in the Women's Prison in Auckland. These are some of her words when asked about separation from her children at Christmas time.

"The wire that surrounds the inside world, the prison you live in without a choice, is nothing compared to the pain that wraps around your heart and soul due to being apart from the ones you love most. the children that grew inside you, sharing every moment with you from conception to birth and beyond.

"I cried alone on Christmas Day. It is one of the toughest times to survive. Intense emotions range from guilt to sadness and hopelessness. The hopelessness you already feel as an incarcerated mother, physically and emotionally separated from your children, deepens. We are separated by the Justice of the Law.

"In my mind I relived past Christmases, my own childhood and later Christmases with my children. The memories are as vivid as though they were yesterday. I wondered what they

were doing without me on this day. It is almost too difficult to face that they will be feeling this pain too. Oh, how guilty I felt for being imprisoned, away from them. This was not their fault. Why are my children also punished by being without their Mum?

"How I hoped and prayed that one day soon I would be able to spend Christmas Day with my children. In my imagination, I allowed myself to plan how my first Christmas back with my children would be. The vision is of so much happiness.

"I had not thought that this time would be filled with shame. Has too much time passed between us? Can I mend the time that has been lost? Anxiety lingers... Can they forgive me? I am unable to rewind time. Am I expecting too much?

"Why am I so sad?"

Christmas Celebrations Can Miss the Point

Dee's story of separation is at odds with our usual Christmas associations: tree lights and decorations, special food, lots of gifts and bubbly toasts. But all these Christmas "trimmings" disguise a truth that our society needs to hear. The nature of the Christmas story ought to be able to offer safe harbour for pain such as Dee's. How EARTHY this story is and how confidently we can locate our own struggle in it. The context of the birth of the Messiah, the anointed one of God, is dislocation and the absence of usual networks of support and reassurance.

Birthing Needs Support

The mother is Mary. She is young and this is her first baby. She has had to remain steadfast in her faith and trust in her God to get through the bewildering circumstances of her pregnancy and the upset this must have caused in family and community circles. Her betrothed, Joseph, is kind and good but now she is in labour. Her baby is about to be born and she is a long way from her home. We can be sure that she longed for her mother and the familiar network of familial support that would have been there for her at home in Nazareth.

In ancient times a woman gave birth to her child at home, surrounded

by women she knew and trusted. Certainly, her mother and women of the household would be present. Necessary preparation would have been made: warm water, cloths, oil for massaging and good things to smell to revive the birthing mother. The women worked in shifts to massage her, support her under her arms and wipe her face and body with damp cloths. Also in attendance would be experienced midwives from within the family and close community. Midwives were respected women with skill and knowledge of the birth process. They gave comfort, pain relief and encouragement during labour, assisted with the delivery and dealt with difficulties. After the birth they would supervise care of mother and baby including the wrapping of the newborn in coarsely woven strips of linen cloth — the swaddling bands.

Perhaps we need to think more deeply about mothers and children — and about the need to support them being together even through difficult circumstances, because damage to this relationship creates wounds that are hard to heal.

How awful it must have been for Mary of Nazareth to be separated from her mother and this whole maternal network of wisdom and care during the vulnerability of childbirth. She had recently gone to support her cousin Elizabeth in her pregnancy, so there is no doubt that this would have been her normal expectation.

Missing the Realities of Birth

Luke's account of the birth is two verses: "While they were there the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for him in the inn" (Lk 2:6-7).

The swaddling bands are the only remnant of the birth process that remains in this story. Maybe local

women came to help her.

Unlike today, men usually played no part in childbirth so it is understandable that the evangelists do not focus on Jesus's birth. This may contribute, however, to the fairy-story character that has grown around the nativity. It is a charming backdrop to the festivity — identification with pain and struggle is precluded.

Mother and Children Bonds Foundational

We cheerfully sing "When a Child is Born" at Christmas time. Throughout the Gospels the reign of God is explained and illustrated by ordinary natural life. Plants and animals, human activities and relationships help to show us the deep reality of God's way. Perhaps we need to think more deeply about mothers and children — and about the need to support them being together even through difficult circumstances, because damage to this relationship creates wounds that are hard to heal.

Do you ever watch family reunification programmes on television and wonder at the profound, lifelong effect the absence of a relationship with one's birth mother can have? Many staunch, pragmatic individuals show deep emotional distress as they await outcomes of a search to discover the story surrounding the women who gave birth to them.

I resolve, this Christmas, as I hold my new grandchild in my arms (God willing), to reflect more deeply on UN Sustainable Development Goal Number 3 — to think about the heartbreaking reality of mothers and children separated for so many reasons and about Incarnation, which encompasses all pain and struggle in every time and every place. There's an important connection that's hard to put your finger on exactly. ★

Painting: *Paulette Carrington* by Mary DeWitt © Used with permission www.marydewittpainting.com



Mary Thorne and husband Russell live in Papakura and are coming to terms with retirement. They have many projects awaiting the time to begin.

Poor Women *and* Poor Health

ANNA HOLMES writes about her work as a doctor over 50 years in several countries where poverty and gender affect the quality of healthcare provided.

In 1963 I was a medical student and went to the US and worked in Rochester, New York. I was appalled at the inequity of healthcare: if you were rich or well insured you were eligible for everything; if you were poor or on the dole the services were minimal and scantily given. The junior staff looked after the public beds downstairs in somewhat gloomy wards while the senior staff looked after the private, single rooms with views — each with bathroom. I recall being labelled “that commie Scottish doctor” — this because once, in ED, a small black child was brought in fitting. “Fetch the emergency tray!” I said to the nurse. She looked at me blankly and said: “They haven’t paid.” “Just fetch the tray now,” I said. “If necessary I will pay.” The inequities persist as President Trump repeals the advances made under President Obama.

Healthcare in Algeria

The next year I looked for the poorest country to work in and ended up in Algeria. The civil war had ended just a year before and the French had departed leaving splendid facilities but very few trained staff and no health services in rural areas.

Our volunteer team was funded by the UN Association of the UK, an NGO. We were based on the western border of Algeria which had 40 million landmines laid along it.

We worked in village clinics looking after 26,000 people — three nurses, two medical students and one doctor.

Many women were suffering from *kulshi* which was pain everywhere. In retrospect I think it was post-traumatic stress. Many villages had few men left and the women had to do everything.

The children suffered from many infectious diseases ranging from trachoma to gastroenteritis — the latter being the major cause of infant and early childhood death. At that time, children died of dehydration as the giving of oral rehydration fluids was not understood. Other infectious diseases like TB were also common. And many were injured by landmines since the farmers stole the barbed wire marking



off the mined areas to fence in their sheep and goats.

I learned that in the Algerian culture, grandmothers were the key to health changes. Without their support, no change was accepted. As I was a young, unmarried woman the grandmothers didn’t think I knew much. Lack of education and gender inequity were huge problems for women.

Health in Tanzania

In 1970 we went to Tanzania and lived on the plateau 90 miles south of Lake Victoria. By then I had a husband and three children under four. We lived on a diamond mine which was well supplied with an excellent hospital and three doctors, including two surgeons. I worked outside the mine in a hospital run by Maryknoll Sisters from New York. They had no doctor.

The main diseases affecting the children were malaria and other infectious diseases, including measles, since there was no immunisation. Measles can be a fatal disease. And I found that tetanus of the newborn was common, as a local custom was to dress the umbilical cord with cow dung.

Most women had their babies attended by local midwives. Genital mutilation was very common and caused difficulty in childbirth. Some women developed incontinence of urine due to this.

The children and women also suffered if there was a shortage of food due to drought. Boys were sent to school but the girls were kept home and grew up without education.

Then President Nyerere introduced mass literacy campaigns and over four years illiteracy fell to 27 per cent and has continued to decrease. Everyone had a chance to learn basic reading and writing. He certainly tried to encourage equality of the sexes with his plan for *Ujamaa* — familyhood. The public health services in Tanzania were well organised, if rather poorly funded, and ranged from simple village clinics to major hospitals.

Many women were suffering from kulshi which was pain everywhere. In retrospect I think it was post-traumatic stress. Many villages had few men left and the women had to do everything.

Spread of HIV and AIDS

In the 1980s, HIV/AIDS spread very rapidly even to the most isolated communities in sub-Saharan Africa. This was due to men making use of prostitutes when they were on the road and infecting their partners. The HIV/AIDS outbreak is only now beginning to be controlled, particularly its transmission from mother to child.

In the past 20 years many African countries have introduced basic training for local midwives which has made a measurable difference to both mother and child health. Genital mutilation has decreased by 70 per cent.

Mobile phones have made it possible for village clinic staff to get medical opinions, advice and further training which has also improved the care available.

Healthcare in Bangladesh

In 1990 and 1992 I worked with the SMSM Sisters in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a waterlocked country and the land in the south is only a metre above sea level. So every monsoon season the low-lying land is flooded. Now, rising sea levels due to global warming will swamp much of the country.

The hospital where I worked was in a village about 80km from Dhaka, the capital. It was an eight-hour boat trip to get there. The hospital provided general healthcare and particularly maternity care and did an amazing job.

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. Apart from hunger, the people suffered from many infectious diseases including cholera, typhoid and severe infestations with worms.

The poorest people I encountered were the mud cutters — mostly women. In the dry season they literally cut mud and carried it in baskets on their heads to build up the islands on which the villages stood. In the wet season they starved. The main issues for the women were genital mutilation, lack of antenatal care and the gender inequity which meant they were seldom educated.

Inequality and Health Problems

What has been most striking for me in the past 50 years in New Zealand is the development of inequality — haves and have nots. The housing situation has gone from being very good, where everyone expected to have a house, to an appalling shortage of low cost housing.

Our health services are still adequate though not as accessible as they used to be. Social benefits that were universal and provided an adequate living, are no longer so for families. Tertiary education, which was seen as a right in 1966, now has to be paid for, leaving young adults with large debts.

The problems of maternal and child ill health are much worse for those who are poor — the cost of food and heating have escalated and both have major effects on health. Healthy food is more expensive than unhealthy food. Maternal healthcare is still good.

By world standards we are very fortunate. However we have one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world — our own kind of “pain everywhere”. Perhaps as a nation we need to reflect on why this is so. ★



Anna Holmes, married to John for 50 years, now has a great-grandchild. She tutors medical students, passing on her experience of 46 years as a GP.



WHEN 1 IS KING

KATE KENNETT, TEANIBUAKA TABUNGA and MARETA TAKEIMO A tell of the gains Kiribati has made in maternal and infant health as well as the threats and challenges the country still faces.

In Kiribati, first birthday parties are delightful celebrations. The whole extended family, neighbours, church members, colleagues and visitors are all invited. We will decorate, prepare a plentiful feast, bake a grand cake, have spectacular performances by dance groups, give speeches and bring many gifts. Visitors to Kiribati say it reminds them more of an 18th or 21st birthday than a child's party! All of this is prepared for a beautiful toddler dressed up like a royal in a special party dress or suit. The child probably has no idea what is happening — that all the celebrations are in their honour.

In the joy of the festivities it is easy to overlook why first birthdays have such significance in Kiribati. So many of our infants haven't survived to reach their first birthday — when they do, we give our thanks.

High Child Mortality

Kiribati has always experienced high levels of child sickness and death. Even today, Kiribati has the second highest infant mortality rate in the Pacific, with only Papua New Guinea higher. Out of 1,000 babies born in our island nation, 10 will die in the period around their birth, over 40 will not reach their first birthday and 56

will die before they are 5 years old. This is far too many lost children.

Respiratory illnesses, diarrhoea and malnutrition, or a combination of these three, are the major causes of childhood illness and mortality in Kiribati.

How can these preventable conditions cause so much harm in our community? The reasons are complex and multifactorial, but well understood by the I-Kiribati who experience them daily.

Our Islands

It starts with our home — our islands. The sea and the land provide us with sustenance, but access to a freshwater supply is fragile and precarious.

Our atolls have a thin layer of fresh water that sits just below the land and on top of the salt water. This is our only permanent source of drinking water. And it can be replenished only by rain.

The scarcity of fresh water creates a whole range of challenges that impact the health of our population, especially children. Access to safe water in adequate amounts is restricted, so finding toileting solutions is an ongoing conundrum and the watering of fruits and vegetables is limited. These

were problems for us even before climate change, which is increasing the saltwater inundation of our freshwater supply and is eroding our land.

When we add social barriers, such as low education and income levels, over-crowding in the capital and the remoteness of the Outer Islands, myths and cultural practices that delay people seeking help from health service, as well as limitations on access to health services, it becomes clear that problems that are considered minor in many countries quickly become fatal for our Kiribati children.

Mother and Infant Health Programmes

Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescence Health (RMNCAH) is a significant programme of work for us at the Kiribati Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

One initiative that is having a positive impact is our "Continuity of Care" programme. Midwives or nurses follow a new mother and her baby for the first six weeks after birth to support their health and wellbeing in a range of ways. This can include establishing breastfeeding, baby hygiene, recognising signs of illness and when to go to a health clinic, how to prevent and manage diarrhoea and when immunisations are due.

Becoming pregnant and having a child is a blessing in our community. All children are welcomed, loved and cherished by their families. Mothers are honoured for bringing a child into the world. The health and wellbeing of mothers is essential for our children to be healthy, too, yet over half of women giving birth are considered to be in a high-risk obstetric category. We know that there are many women in Kiribati who wish to access safe and effective family planning to space having their children. These needs are unmet due to women being unable to get to a family planning clinic, or because the clinic has run out of family planning methods or because of social pressure to resist family planning. Improving access to comprehensive family planning services is one of the priorities of the current Kiribati Health Strategic Plan.



Improving Nutrition

Another significant issue for mothers and children is poor nutrition. In children, insufficient protein and vitamins in their diet is manifesting in increased cases of malnutrition presenting at our health clinics. In mothers and adults, poor diet is leading to rising obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. The issue of access to healthy, safe and affordable food affects our whole population.

Food security is an underlying determinant of health and a common thread connecting childhood illness and mortality, chronic disease and life expectancy, development and climate change.

We recognise that while we need to solve many local issues which will improve child and maternal health in Kiribati, we also need each person in the global community to contribute by reducing carbon emissions and caring for our planet.

We are encouraged and are taking hope from improvements in the health and wellbeing of children and their mothers gained in the last few decades.

Our infant and childhood mortality rates have declined through the commitment and efforts of many of those working in partnership with us. These include improved immunisation schedules, health-worker training, enhanced health information data, outbreak responses, community health education and communication campaigns. These initiatives are

reducing the rate of childhood illness and improving the delivery of timely care to sick infants.

These gains give us inspiration and motivation to keep striving for a healthier future for our mothers and children. We can't take it for granted that the situation will somehow get better on its own. We know that Kiribati did not achieve any of the 2015 UN Millennium Development Goals despite our efforts.

We are resolved to persevere, to act with urgency and in partnership with our community, the whole health sector and government departments and our international friends. We are determined to do our part to improve the health and wellbeing of today's and future generations. We hope that they will have a future in Kiribati and we will join many, many first birthday parties. ★



Kate Kennett is a health promotion professional in Sydney who has worked with Teanibuaka and Mareta in Kiribati several times.



Teanibuaka Tabunga is the Deputy Director of Public Health, Kiribati Ministry of Health.

Mareta Takeimoa works in the Health Promotion Unity.

A FUTURE OF HOPE

TRISH MCBRIDE shares her experience of seeing the transformation in women during the Drug Treatment Programme in Arohata Prison.

I can just see the late Celia Lashlie nodding in agreement: “Yes, I told you that prison could be the making of these women because it is often the first time they have been safe and nurtured.”

The Drug Treatment Programme for women in Arohata Prison, near Wellington, proves her point. Groups of 10-12 women are selected for this three-month long programme. The programme starting times overlap — group 1 is beginning as group 2 is moving into the six weeks leading to their graduation.

The women have intensive therapy from the clinical team and input and support from a range of volunteers, as well as the usual support from corrections officers, chaplains and other staff. They learn yoga, quilting (completing a quilt to take home), attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, engage in Seasons for Growth, a Catholic-based coping with grief programme and practise public speaking at the fortnightly Toastmasters meeting.

Practising Public Speaking

I’ve recently joined three others who have been offering Toastmasters in the prison for over eight years. We coach the women in listening and speaking as well as in how to manage formal meeting procedures — so “hearing people into speech”. We’ve found the Toastmasters dynamic works as well for the shyest and most nervous women on the programme as it does in the outside world, with lots of praise and encouragement and perhaps a suggestion for developing their next speeches.

It delights us to see the women gaining confidence and skills over the three months. We’ve found the women grateful for the time we spend with them and they enjoy a corrections officer or two being present as well — it’s an opportunity for officers to see a different side to their charges.

Speaking from Life

In their speeches the women talk about their lives. We’ve listened to heartbreaking stories — horrendous sexual abuse, violence, gang affiliation and homelessness, then

self-medicating with alcohol or drugs to ease the pain, leading to offending, and so to prison. Some begin their speeches in te reo Māori. They’ve given well-researched self-help speeches on topics such as co-dependence and social anxiety. They’ve told of supportive families, of children they will go home to as better mums now, of their hopes and plans after release. We’ve heard inspirational speeches and seen significant talent and wisdom emerge. We’ve laughed at hugely funny speeches. And, recently, we’ve been moved by their “letters of farewell” to the drugs that had both sustained and enslaved them.



Claiming Life Again

Graduation ceremonies are the culmination of the course — with wonderful energy, style and mana! Volunteers, staff and clinicians are welcomed with rousing kapa haka onto their marae for the occasion.

A woman chosen by Group 1 leads the occasion, welcoming the manuhiri according to their contribution or role. She often begins in te reo Māori and continues in what is familiarly called te reo pākehā. She addresses her own group and then those graduating. This recent speech, which the speaker gave permission for me to share, epitomises the hopes and resolution:

*“He Wāhine, He Wāhine toa!
On behalf of Group 1, we thank you for allowing us the insight and privilege of seeing your journey, for walking*

beside us as we began ours, for imparting all your wisdom and knowledge to each and every one of us, for all your support.

You are all true role models and leaders, which leaves really big boots to fill!

We wish you the best of luck when you leave, and courage as you further put your learning into practice.

Choose to live by choice not chance.

Choose to be motivated not manipulated.

Choose to be useful not used.

Choose to make changes not excuses.

Choose to excel not compete.

Choose self-esteem not self-pity.

Choose to listen to your inner voice, not to the random opinion of others.

Remember knowing is not enough, for we must apply it.

Wishing is not enough, for we must do!”

The wāhine toa, graduating women, then speak — frequently starting with a brief karakia (prayer). They express heartfelt gratitude to the corrections officers for their respect and compassion, to therapists and to each group of volunteers. They reflect on what they have learned — newfound self-respect, their hope and intentions for the future. They acknowledge the love and nurture they have shared together as a group.

Every speech is inspirational. Graduates and visitors

alike reach for the boxes of tissues. The women even look different, softer, more relaxed and in touch with themselves and with plans for a clean and sober future. Everyone is proud of them as they receive their certificates, often with big hugs.

Correction staff and volunteer representatives also have the opportunity to speak before the ceremony concludes with waiata and the AA Serenity Prayer in te reo Māori and English:

*“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.”*

Then the kai is blessed and shared.

Each graduation has its own flavour, reflecting each unique group, but there is always an abundance of transformation metaphors: buds to flowers, caterpillars to butterflies, new life from hopelessness.

Choose to live by choice not chance.

Choose to be motivated not manipulated.

Choose to be useful not used.

Choose to make changes not excuses.

Choose to excel not compete.

Choose self-esteem not self-pity.

***Choose to listen to your inner voice,
not to the random opinion of others.***

***Remember knowing is not enough,
for we must apply it.***

Wishing is not enough, for we must do!

Giving Support

We know that not all the women are going to make it this time. Someone may not make it as far as graduation before being taken off the programme. Each group usually has one or two women going through for a second time — they really want full recovery. We also know how crucial it is that adequate support, accommodation and a job are in place when they are released so that they can continue the resolutions and learning of their course.

I’m awed by the good work being done for women in this prison. It has been a real eye-opener and a great privilege to take a small part. And I encourage employers to take a chance on one of these women. They deserve opportunities in which they can thrive and maintain their new positive ways of being. ★



Trish McBride is a Wellington grandmother and internationally published social justice writer.

I Heard the Angels Sing

Her mother said the last month would be the hardest. Well yes, in a way it was, with the weight of the baby on her bladder, the little feet kicking when she was trying to sleep. That fascinated Dave. He'd put his hand on her heaving abdomen and make predictions about an All Black or kick-boxer.

They'd chosen not to know the baby's sex, so there was no decision about names. The Bump, Dave called it, although it was more than a bump now, her belly like a beach ball, so big that when she stood she lost sight of her feet.

Sometimes she undressed in front of the mirror, wondering if she would ever get her body back.

Hot weather got to her. Her ankles swelled and each morning she woke up tired. She got into the habit of putting her feet up late afternoons and turning the TV to the children's programme. People said you should read books to the child in the womb, but she never got around to that. She didn't get around to a lot of things. It was late January and she hadn't taken down the Christmas decorations.

She looked at one of the Nativity cards. How did Mary cope? Surely nothing could be worse than riding on a donkey over rough country. What was Joseph thinking of, for heaven's sake?

She said to Dave: "You know, it's not only my body that's lethargic. My brain's slowed down, too."

He listened. He always listened. But he didn't understand.

Then came the day that was different. She woke up fully alive! Charged with new energy she cleaned the stove and the inside of the kitchen windows as the sun came up over the rooftop next door. She noticed, with pleasure, how the light splintered on the dew-soaked lawn. It was going to be a beautiful day. Humming a half-forgotten song, she woke Dave with a cup of coffee and pulled back the bedroom curtains. "Wakey, wakey, lover boy!"

Then, in the bathroom, she saw a smear of blood. Her heart beat fast. It was coming! Five days early!

Dave slammed down his coffee cup and came out stark naked to phone the hospital. His hand was shaking. "I'm not going to work," he told her.

"The contractions haven't started yet," she said, "It might take a couple of days. That's how it can be with the first."

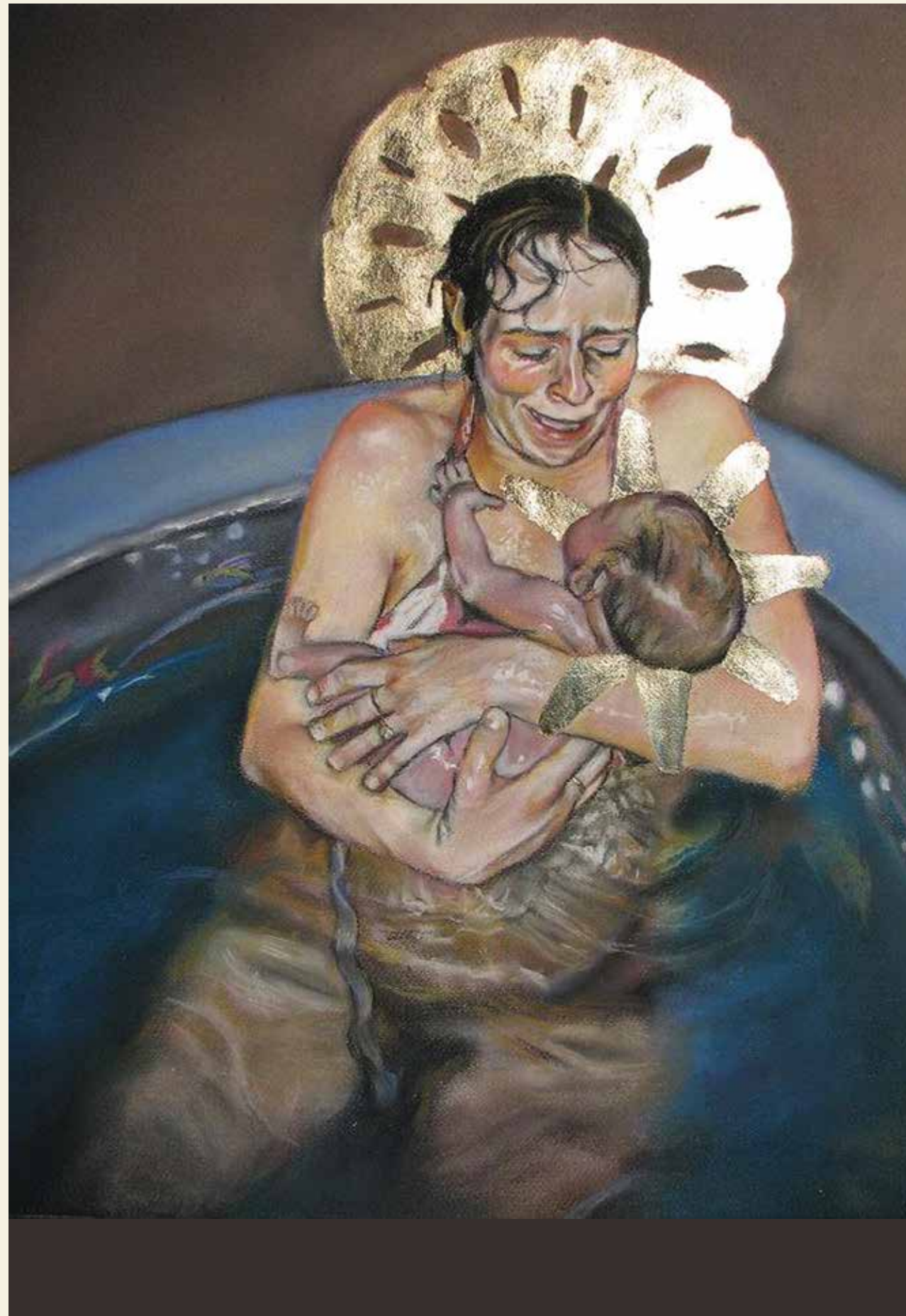
She was wrong. The bump was in a hurry to be born.

That morning, the ache in her lower back came and went. The tightening in her abdomen also became an ache. She knew what was happening, but the information in her head did not match what she felt in her body.

By mid-afternoon the gaps between contractions were shorter and Dave phoned the hospital again. It was time to get in the car, suitcase on the back seat.

What she saw after that were snapshots between the spasms of pain that made her shut her eyes. Traffic lights, hospital gates, blue uniforms, a wheelchair, Dave dragging the suitcase with one hand a clipboard in the other, corridors, nurses, white gown, a crisp bed with a plastic chair beside it, all in a stream of movement.

Then the room cleared and it was just her and Dave and the pain. There was less than two minutes between contractions. She could no longer hold them in silence. Pain came out in strange voices, groans, whimpers, snarls at Dave who was trying to help. No, she didn't want her back rubbed. Or her hand held. As for the gas mask that was supposed to ease the pain, it wasn't all that effective. She held it over her nose like a diving mask while a tsunami of torment swept over her body, drowning all other awareness. When it passed she surfaced,



gasping, and saw Dave's face close, reflecting her struggle.

His concern did not comfort her.

The room became dark and lights were switched on. A nurse examined her. "Nicely dilated, my dear, not long now. How do you feel?"

A new wave of pain started. She grabbed the mask and her voice was muffled: "Like Mary."

"What was that my dear?"

"Riding a bloody donkey!" she groaned, her breath catching on an urge to push.

"No pushing yet, dear. Deep breathing, in, out. We'll get a gown and mask on baby's daddy and take you to the delivery room."

Her mother, who was sometimes a giver of useless information, had said the second stage of labour was like being severely constipated with a cricket ball. She had dismissed it at the time, but now the advice came back as something much bigger. She wanted, now, to have Dave hold her hand. She needed his support as she sucked in air and pushed hard into the base of her spine.

The tsunamis had formed a series of rolling waves that flattened when she pushed. Pushing meant less pain. But it was the hardest work she'd ever done. One wave followed the other with scarcely a pause between.

"Stop pushing!" said the nurse. "Panting breaths. I can see baby's head. Lots of dark hair. Pant, pant! Shallow breaths my dear! That's right." The nurse bent lower. "Now, with the next contraction, another push."

She closed her eyes and clutched Dave's hand. She didn't know what was happening. Her body seemed to be working without her. She took a deep breath, caught it in her throat and pushed down again.

She felt it, the tightness, then the sudden release of tension. Warm wetness was against her thigh and the pain was gone.

"Look! You have a beautiful daughter!"

She raised her head. A plump baby girl, face folded like a flower, dark wet hair, Dave's slanted eyes. The puckered mouth opened and there was a snuffling deep-throated cry.

Her body had produced this miracle!

Not only had the pain gone, but she was filled with something that could only be called ecstasy. And she knew, absolutely knew in her body, that she was the only woman in the world to have given birth to new life.

Dave put his arms around her. He too, was crying.

The nurse cut the umbilical cord and put the baby on her breast, warm skin against warm skin. Then the lights were dimmed.

The little girl opened her dark eyes and looked at her mother with a gaze that came from forever.

She stared back, finding herself falling in love in a new and remarkable way. And it was at that moment, she heard the singing of angels. ★

Painting: *Kasie and Nikolai* by Kate Hansen © Used with permission www.katehansen.ca/madonna-and-child-project.html



NZ writer **Joy Cowley** is a wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and retreat facilitator. She lives in Featherston with her husband Terry Coles.

Over Christmas I will be volunteering at Mt Eden Prison with the Vinnies team to assist in the running of Sunday liturgies. Over the last year through this mahi and face-to-face encounters I feel I have changed for the better. It used to be about “what” I was visiting, now it has become more about “who” I am visiting. They are people first and foremost, and the more I chose to connect with this realisation the more I grew. How we related to one another gave me insight into who I was as a person. I had a lot to learn and I am grateful for how this place has gifted me. With questions about where I have come from and who I am called to be, our paths became intertwined through the sharing of narrative.

I’ve found there’s much to be gained from a simple conversation – it makes the difference between a bad day and one filled with meaning. Connection thus elevates yet grounds me, raising my awareness of self while keeping me rooted in the realities faced by those who are incarcerated.

Gene, Youthworker and AU Graduate

I go to Marist College in Auckland and at the moment all of us juniors are helping assemble 500 care packs of toiletries together during our Religious Education classes. These contain deodorant, soap, conditioner, toilet paper and so forth. The bulk supplies were dropped off at school by the St Vinnies team. All of the ready-assembled care packs will go into Christmas food boxes that will be given out to families who can’t make ends meet.

I am doing this because I feel it is really important. It is unfair that other people struggle while I have extra to give. Doing this really made me think and makes me appreciate what I have and who I have. It also makes me aware that I can make a difference.

Kate, Year 9

During the Christmas Season I will be working right through so that my family doesn’t go without and so I can share what I have with those I love. Christmas can be quite expensive, lol!

And as well, I will be volunteering right through too. I will be helping out with the Young Adult Vinnies at the Auckland City Mission Drop In and in prison. At the Drop In I will be making hot drinks and food for all the whānau who come in. It is a real eye-opener and makes me really appreciate what I have. I would struggle if I lived on the streets or if I was disconnected from my loved ones. The thought of not having a family to spend Christmas with really saddens me.

The conversations I have had with my fellow volunteers and with those who are “homeless” have really impacted me. I won’t be the same again. I feel they belong to me and I to them and that I have a responsibility to them as they have to me. We are all whānau, whether we are rough sleepers in the CBD or sleeping in a cell in one of our prisons – we are all whānau. Christmas is about family, it’s about looking after one another, it’s about love.

Yvonne, Youthworker and Early Childhood Teacher

Over Christmas I am coordinating music at Wesley Rest Home for the elderly. I will also be assisting in the coordination of St Vinnies Family Fun Day hosted at a local prison for the mothers and children during visitas. Doing this mahi brings me so much joy and a sense of fulfillment. I feel quite at home working among these whānau and feel a deep sense of call to do so. I am learning more and more that my yearning and movement towards serving the most vulnerable in our communities actually is about me and my own healing and personal wellbeing.

It is in the mere sharing of time, presence and of deep listening with others, that I am reminded that I am connected to the human race and that we all belong to one another. Therefore I, and we, have a responsibility to one another, to lessen the other’s suffering. It is in helping to lessen the other’s suffering that we lessen our own.

Ria, Uni student and Youthworker

During the Christmas Season I will be enjoying the summer sun surrounded by my friends, family, good food, smooth jams, stunning views and memories that I will cherish forever. After another busy year of completing internals, planning charity events, sporting seasons and sitting a number of external examinations, I look forward to simply relaxing and enjoying the company of my family during the Christmas season.

But before doing this I will be volunteering with my school Vinnies to co-host a “family funday” for those in our local caravan park. The housing crisis in Auckland is serious. We have over 300 people living in this particular caravan park. It is really hard to come to terms with how unfair and unjust some people’s realities are. It saddens me deeply.

My friends and I will be helping prepare the gifts, supervise the activities and serve the food. Doing this gives me a sense of purpose and allows me to really connect with people especially the children – I love the children! This also allows me a way to put my faith into action.

Christmas is all about togetherness and unity. It’s about being there for each other and being grateful for the year we have been blessed with, the people we have met along the way and our Heavenly Father who never left our side.

Jasmine, Year 13

Hi I’m Craig and I’m helping with packing the the food parcels. These food parcels feed people who cannot afford to put food on the table. I understand the need comes from many factors and many different issues which affect their finances and lives, such as unexpected bills, a family crisis, etc. It is sad because Christmas is supposed to be a festive time of joy and celebration.

Personally, I feel that making up these food parcels gives me a way to give back. I know the parcels are a real blessing for others but I benefit also. This involvement allows me to connect with my faith on a deeper level. It gives me a tangible means to actually put my faith into action. My faith calls me to be an imitator of Christ. I feel that by doing these little things I can share the love of Christ.

Craig, University Student

My name is Ty and during the Christmas Season

I am volunteering at the Society of St Vincent de Paul Centre to make up Christmas foodboxes. I have been doing this every year for the last four years. It has become a part of me and I really feel drawn to doing it each year. This is partly because I have seen first-hand the difference that it makes for people. I have also had the honour of meeting some of the families and learning a little about their stories. It is sad to hear what some people have to put up with and how many don’t have many choices. That meeting really impacted and changed me.

Coming to the Centre makes me feel as if I can make a difference. It also makes me feel connected. Working alongside like-minded people is really awesome. It is such a cool buzz and creates a real sense of belonging.

Ty, Year 13

Why I’m Involved with Vinnies this Christmas

Jesus and Mary in the Qur'an

ZAIN ALI describes how Jesus and Mary are depicted as beloved by God in the Qur'an.



Jesus, within Muslim tradition, is referred to as *Isa*. The name *Isa* shows up almost 30 times in the Qur'an. Similarly, Mary, the mother of Jesus, whom the Qur'an refers to as Maryam, is mentioned approximately 35 times — there is even a chapter in the Qur'an named after her (the Qur'an has 114 chapters in total). The name Muhammad, on the other hand, appears only five times in the Qur'an.

Mary and Her Family

The Qur'an is deeply reverential in its view of Mary and Jesus. Mary is referred to in the Qur'an as someone who has been chosen and purified above all women of all nations (Q 3:24). This is surprising, as the initial audience of the Quran were Arabs, yet Mary, the most respected woman

in the Qur'an, is Jewish. Although the Qur'an describes Mary's mother as the wife of Imran, a number of commentators note that this is not a literal description of Mary's father, but rather an indicator of Mary's lineage. Imran is the Arabic equivalent of Amram, the father of Moses and Aaron. Mary is, then, seen as a descendant, and perhaps inheritor, of the family of Moses and Aaron.

Mary's mother is depicted in the Qur'an as a deeply religious character who dedicates her daughter to the temple, placing her in the care of Zachariah — a priest in the temple. It is during Mary's stay in the temple that she is visited by angels. They advise her that she will receive the gift of a holy son. Understandably, the news is

unexpected and Mary responds with a question: "How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?" (Q 19:20). To which the angels reply that it is a matter willed by God, and that God wishes her son to be a sign (*ayah*) for humanity and a source of mercy (*rahma*). The Qur'an has more to say about Mary and Jesus, but we can first consider the narrative about John the Baptist.

John the Baptist

Alongside the Qur'anic narrative of Mary, there is a parallel narrative about her guardian Zachariah, who is depicted as praying for a successor. Again, angels speak to Zachariah and inform him that he will soon have a son who will be named *Yahya* (John),

and that *Yahya* will be "honourable and chaste and a prophet (*nabi*) from among the righteous" (Q 3:39). As we know through the Gospels, John was beheaded at the command of the morally degenerate Herod. According to Muslim lore, the head of John is buried in Damascus in what is today referred to as the Umayyad Mosque (prior to Muslim rule, the site was home to the Basilica of Saint John). The burial site within the mosque has been developed into a shrine and was visited by Pope John Paul II in 2001.

Birth of Jesus

Returning now to Mary, the Qur'an provides a brief snapshot of her life that focuses on the birth of Jesus. As her pregnancy is drawing to an end, the Qur'an notes:

"the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree: She cried (in her anguish): 'Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!' But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the (palm-tree):

"Grieve not! for your Lord has provided a rivulet beneath you: And shake towards the trunk of the palm-tree: It will let fall fresh ripe dates upon you.' So eat and drink

and cool (your) eye..." (Q 19:23-26).

This must have been a difficult time for Mary, having become pregnant out of wedlock, and now having to endure childbirth without any obvious family support. The Qur'an is silent about the presence of Joseph. The pain has driven her to a palm-tree. She is in anguish and wishes that she could have been something forgotten, perhaps even dead. As readers, we are drawn to her. We feel her pain and her deep distress, perhaps even spiritual distress. She is comforted by a voice, perhaps that of an angel, or perhaps God, who reassures her with provisions of dates and water.

There is a miracle here that's not easily visible. An old Palestinian acquaintance explained to me that a fully grown man would find it near impossible to shake dates off a palm-tree, let alone a young woman in the throes of childbirth.



The Qur'an acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah (Isa al-Masih), as a sign (ayah) of God, as source of mercy. He is lovingly acknowledged as the son of Mary (Isa ibn Maryam) and as a messenger of God (rasul Allah).

The Qur'an does not say that Jesus was born at the base of the palm-tree, it only depicts Mary as finding refuge at this location. This is significant if we keep in mind the Church of the Kathisma built in the fifth century. It is located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem — and according to local Christian lore, it is where the pregnant Mary stopped for a rest on her way to Bethlehem. There are early records suggesting that the site also had a sweet water spring that pilgrims would drink from.

There isn't much of the Kathisma that's left today. It was forgotten for many centuries until its mosaics were rediscovered in 1992. Wouldn't it be wonderful if this structure were restored in some way, perhaps through a joint effort sponsored by Christians and Muslims — *InshaAllah*, Godwilling.

Jesus the Newborn

There are additional challenges that

Mary faces when she returns to her community with her newborn child. But the person of Jesus is significant here. The Qur'an acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah (*Isa al-Masih*), as a sign (*ayah*) of God, as source of mercy. He is lovingly acknowledged as the son of Mary (*Isa ibn Maryam*) and as a messenger of God (*rasul Allah*). He is also acknowledged as the word of God (*kalam Allah*) — incidentally, the Qur'an is also seen by Muslims as *kalam Allah* or divine logos.

Jesus in Muslim Theology

Muslim theology shares much in common with Christian views on Jesus. We agree that he is fully human, the son of Mary, the Messiah, a messenger from God, a worker of miracles and a healer and as having a special relationship with God.

The difference is that we stop short of seeing Jesus as God. I understand the title "Son of God", as "a relational metaphor, pointing to an intimate relationship with God". This theological difference is significant, although there may be ways to build bridges. For example, according to Muslim tradition, when God dearly loves someone, God becomes very close to that person: "I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he seizes, and his foot with which he walks."

I believe Christ and Mary were such people — persons so beloved by God that God wove his light into their souls.

As Christmas draws near, we can take time to reflect on the important figures in this narrative — let us remember Zachariah, Mary, John, the mothers of Mary and John, and of course Jesus. Let's reflect on their faith and humanity, their anguish and sacrifices and their humility.

O come all ye faithful.
O come and let us behold them.
O come let us adore them
Most beloved of our Lord. ★



Dr Zain Ali is Head of the Islamic Studies Research Unit at the University of Auckland. He also teaches an introductory course on Islam.



NOURISHMENT FOR LIFE

JUDITH SALAMAT draws upon the image of a mother breastfeeding her baby and Christ nourishing with blood to highlight our need for spiritual nourishment.

A homily got me thinking. The priest said something like: "Like a child being nursed by his mother's milk which apparently comes from blood, so does an individual's faith nourishment relate to blood, the blood of Christ."

I began to think: "What's the relationship between a child being nursed with his mother's milk and my Catholic spirituality?" My thoughts travelled to the times when I was nursing my two sons at two different stages. I recalled seminal lessons

on human anatomy and physiology. My musings moved from the image of a baby feeding on his mother's milk to the relationship of ourselves, Christ and Church.

My reflection has three layers. First, I focus on the basic physiological process of the interdependence of mother and baby in the feeding process. Then, I explore the relationship between our seeking spiritual nourishment in faith and the response we find in Jesus Christ. Third, I ponder on and offer ideas as to how our spiritual nourishment can be stimulated by the Church, our community of belonging.

Milk and Nourishment

Mother's milk, recognised as the most nutritious and complete food for a baby in the first six months, is produced in a complex process. Colostrum, the most important milk in the newborn's first three days, contains nutrients and antibodies that are indispensable to the baby's health.

The milk a baby sucks from his mother's breast is produced with the aid of two active hormones, prolactin and oxytocin. Prolactin acts on the milk-making tissues and oxytocin causes the breast to push out the milk, called the "let-down" or milk-ejection reflex.

In producing milk, blood from the mother's bloodstream is converted from red to white by the time it reaches her breast and is ready for the baby to drink. The mother's pituitary gland in her brain sends the signals to turn blood into white milk. The baby's sucking mechanism helps this process.

As the baby sucks on the breast, tiny nerves in the nipple are stimulated, which causes her hypothalamus to work as if saying: "Come on, time to produce milk to feed your

baby." Generally, the more frequent and intense the stimulation, the greater the volume of milk produced.

The mother needs good nutrition, a conducive environment and positive emotional and psychological conditions for producing an adequate, high-quality supply of milk for each feeding.

We've learnt also about what helps a baby to suckle well. Proper positioning, giving enough time to suck and a comfortable, appropriately stimulated environment all help. Sometimes music or silence encourages a baby's feeding. With this positive environment and reassuring support, baby and mother mutually benefit. A sense of bonding, safety and security develop in the child and a sense of confidence and importance in the mother.

Family support is always necessary. The father needs to encourage and support the mother emotionally, particularly during the first few days when the mother is starting to adjust to the new routine for herself and her baby. I remember my husband preparing steaming-hot fish and seashell soup for me so I could provide more milk for the baby and, as well, to quench my unusual thirst during my nursing hours. He also did household tasks which we'd done together before — cleaning, laundry, shopping and cooking. And he took his part in looking after the baby so I could nap between nursing. All this helped our relationship as family, as belonging together.

Relating with Christ

The interdependent relationship between baby and mother in breast feeding can be used as an image of our spirituality developing in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Indeed, in the medieval Church, images of Mary breastfeeding Jesus were popular as were those of Christ feeding the faithful from blood coming from his wounded side. Both had connections with Eucharist. In his sermons on the *Song of Songs*, Bernard of Clairvaux used the image of Christ's motherhood to describe the relationship he desired his Cistercian monks to have with God.

We can imagine our dependence on Christ increasing the nourishment we receive as well as deepening the meaning of our relationship. When we cry to the Lord for help, we find that God provides an environment and opportunity for the quality and quantity of our spiritual nourishment. Without our knowing, Christ identifies our needs and is ready to provide. The trials and challenges we face are woven into and call forth the nutrition that Christ provides. They develop our faith, deepen our spirituality and establish a stronger relationship with our Creator.

GRACE IS . . .

Noticing
a lonely look
Noticing
a tear drop fall
Noticing
a slight sniff
Noticing
a lip quiver
Easy to miss
Why?
Eyes closed
nose in a book
earplugs on
or just staring into space
But...
head up
Aware
Attentive
Taking notice
Seen
by unshut eyes

by Grace Schmidt, St Joseph's School, Otahuhu, Auckland

Metaphorically, we can think of ourselves as "sucking" milk from Christ's "breast" and stimulating Christ to produce blessings. We can accept and integrate what seems to us to be trials and challenges. Like the "red" blood from Christ, in accepting these trials they become positive nutrients — milk — that strengthen us day by day as we live in the Spirit.

The Church as a Nourishing Community

The family as the basic unit of society is responsible for raising the child.

Children need the care of their mothers and fathers and the support of the entire family to fully maximise their nourishment. So, too, we can think of the Church as responsible for our spiritual nourishment. While we do our best to send stimulating signals about our needs and capabilities, the Church has to be sensitive to our needs in order to provide the right nourishment for us.

The Church then has a role in enhancing and optimising our spiritual needs and capabilities — in nourishing our spirituality. There are various ways the Church can respond to us including holistic programmes for our spiritual development. As Church we can develop a nurturing atmosphere in which family — mothers, fathers and caregivers — are themselves nurtured. As Church we can encourage positive cross-cultural interactions in the community. The Church as community can involve each member — even the youngest — in participating in the whole.

My reflections have compared the experience of a baby being breastfed by his mother and the interdependence developed in the relationship of feeding to our relationship with Christ and to the Church's role in helping to develop our faith and spirituality.

The image of the "milk production" of raising Christ-centred individuals is an image of our connectness through the blood of Christ as spoken of in John 6:51-55. As Church, we are linked to the maternal, spiritual Divine source — we can think of ourselves as "raising a child". The Yoruba proverb says "it takes a village to raise a child" — and I think the same is true of our Church. "It takes the whole Church, the family of believers, to raise each Catholic." ★

Painting: *Gladys and Elizabeth* by Kate Hansen © Used with permission www.katehansen.ca/madonna-and-child-project.html



Judith Salamat is a Registered Diversional Therapist working at one of the aged-care centres in Kapiti, Wellington.



A WORLD FIT FOR US

We seem to be living the good life in New Zealand.
We have an abundance of food, water, a closet full of clothes and everyday appliances that make life easy.
There are other places around the world that are not as fortunate as us.
What we don't have a lot of, is empathy.
We could donate a little more for those that need it because even just a few dollars can make a difference in someone's life.
We want everyone to have what they need to live and enjoy life.
"Never see a need without doing something about it."

We want everyone to accept each other, to love their neighbour like Jesus did. A world without racism and wars.
There will be no refugees, no human caravans, and everyone will feel safe to walk freely where they choose.
We need to learn to accept others' differences and be more willing to learn and appreciate these differences. We want world peace.

We want clean rivers and a plastic free ocean.
We want technologies to help whales when stranded.
We want environmental friendly products.
We want no habitat loss for animals so big businesses can profit.
We want to stop global warming and need to agree to it.
We want people to treat animals kindly.
We want people not to kill animals for the black market.

by Chelsie, Ella and Shayla Year 7, St Joseph's School, Wairoa

Christmas is about...

CHILDREN FROM SACRED HEART
SCHOOL, DUNEDIN, SHARE WHAT
CHRISTMAS MEANS TO THEM.

Painting: *Nativity Scene* by
Christina Jarmolinski ©
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www.jarmolinski.com

When I think about Christmas what do I see? Presents? Santa? Well I'm here to talk about the true meaning of our most celebrated holiday.

Many people who aren't religious can celebrate Christmas and don't even know what it's all about: Jesus's birth. It made a huge impact on our world. As Catholics we believe that we wouldn't even be here, living the lovely lives we live today if it weren't for Jesus coming to save us. That's the point of Christmas. Jesus came down to earth to teach us how to live so that we can do the right thing.

To me Christmas means celebrating our Lord Jesus Christ with my family.

Claire,
Year 6



Christmas? To me, it's practically another birthday because it's got presents, songs and even jokes! But let's go and do some history... Back then, the world had a census when everybody needed to go to the place they were born. So Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem, where Joseph had been born. There was no room in the inn so they needed to sleep in a stable, where Jesus was born! So, winding back to now — we celebrate Christmas because Jesus was an amazing gift. No, not just to Mary, but the whole world!

Theodora
Year 4



Christmas is a happy time of year. At Christmas I think about baby Jesus in the manger. When I wake up I feel really happy and at midnight Mass I just feel so peaceful and calm. In the morning all I can think about is how happy I am. Dad puts on Christmas songs and we all listen. Christmas time is for joy and happiness. Christmas isn't just an excuse to have candy canes and presents. Christmas is magical because Jesus is born.

Sophie
Year 5



On the exciting Christmas morning, I get a special, tingly, jumpy and weird feeling in my tummy. I think about Jesus Christ being born in the stable, in the manger, with Joseph and Mary. The giant star above, and the angels visiting the shepherds, bringing good news. The wise men, coming to give Jesus special presents.

At home there's decorating and putting up the Christmas tree and opening presents under it. Thinking about what I want for Christmas, and thinking about what could be in my stocking and all my other presents. Santa Claus and his jolly face, his GIANT sack full of presents, the twinkle in his eye, and his happy laugh (Ho! Ho! Ho!). And there's writing letters to Santa, singing Christmas carols, and I do not forget the Santa Parade!

But the real meaning of Christmas is Jesus's birthday and spending time with my family and rejoicing. So Christmas is totally my favourite part of the year.

Daphne
Year 4



PRAYER

May we know blessing
drop after tear
infinitely gentle
hopeful
soothing pain
balm for souls
that are splintered, brittle.

May Earth, our parent,
our only home,
know blessing:
ours
our listening
our passionate caring
our commitment to change.

May we understand that the wellbeing
of our souls and our planet
are interwoven,
dependent.
The salvation
of one reliant upon
the health, the shalom, of the other.

May we be granted
wisdom and courage
and memory and resilience
for the facing of these hours.

— Glynn Cardy



PUTTING THE PAIN OF OTHERS FIRST

Oscar Romero's canonisation, although championed by Pope Francis, was delayed for many years by some of those in the Vatican with a vested interest. However, its significance transcends church politics, as ROWAN WILLIAMS explains.

On 14 October this year, Pope Francis declared Archbishop Oscar Romero a saint. It was an outcome that many had been praying for over many years, since Archbishop Romero's murder at the hands of government-backed death squads in El Salvador in 1980.

Those who had been anxious that such a recognition would be an implicit papal blessing of liberation theology — and thus of a leftist political agenda — had successfully held things up; though you might think that a bishop killed at his altar after protesting about the murderously brutal

treatment of the poor was a reasonably secure candidate for sanctity.

Pope Francis is known to have made this a personal campaign, and there was a palpable sense in Rome that — at a time when Francis is somewhat beleaguered and heavily criticised in the Roman Catholic Church — the canonisation was a defiant affirmation of what is most important to him.

But this is not about a political agenda, not even a church-political one. What is striking about Romero is that his preaching makes it crystal clear that he held to a strongly, uncompromisingly integrated view of Christian identity, in which personal faith and spiritual discipline were the foundation of public justice.

A couple of weeks before he was assassinated, he delivered a lengthy discourse on the way the Church must serve the cause of "transcendence": not a transcendence that removes us from concern with the immediate social crisis, but what he calls a connectedness with our own origins. Without discovering and nourishing this connectedness, we are not at one with ourselves, and we drift into "ingratitude, faithlessness and hostility".

Part of this is discovering how to make sense of our suffering and our incapacity to make the change we want:

suffering and helplessness, including the frustration of the compromised politician or priest struggling to find a way through the thorny tangles of a sophisticated modern tyranny, have to be re-imagined as a way into solidarity, a personal sense both of the common struggle with oppression and violence, and of a common hope.

Hope, he says, cannot be just hope for "justice" in the abstract. It must be hope for what he calls "communion". Only when we understand our own suffering as something that roots us more deeply in the awareness of a humanity we share are we in touch with the "transcendent". Our reflection on and identification with the suffering of Jesus is not a morbid brooding on our status as victims but a discipline that reminds us of the mutuality we are made for.

No one suffers alone, whatever they may sometimes feel: we are all implicated, all diminished by the suffering, all enlarged by the sharing. "Communion" is more than a warm sense of togetherness. It is the sharp recognition that no human being's pain is just their business and none of mine.

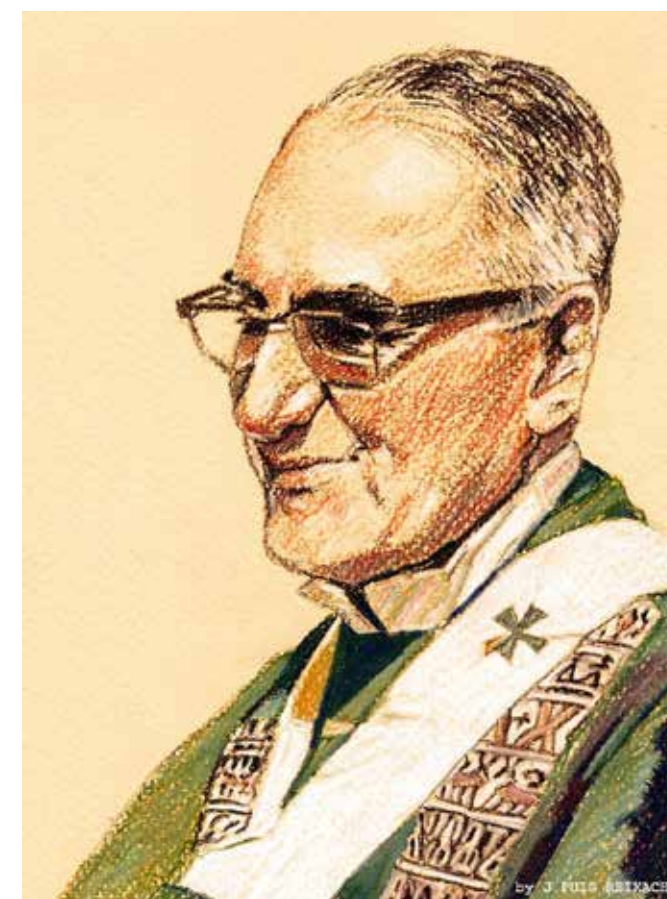
Romero is passionately eager to hold two things together: on the one hand, the pressing urgent, costly task of building active and vocal resistance to a state that is both violent and sophisticated in its methods; on the other, an inner self-scrutiny born of quiet, attentive presence, which insists we never forget the connectedness with God that comes to light as we discover our connectedness with one other. Hostility, fear and injustice are all the result of losing touch with this fundamental fact of connection. We are always drawing on the life and gift of others, never independent in the crude sense of owing no one anything.

Perhaps that is why Romero is a saint particularly relevant for this wretched decade in which the rhetoric of national and partisan identity, separation and protection has become the common coin of so much political talk on the left as well as the right. The fierce assertion of who I am, the self I have the right to defend at any price, is understandable as the outcome of suppression and marginalisation.

But if Romero is right, real "justice" only arrives when this is transcended — when we allow ourselves to recognise that our own security and liberation cannot exist without recognition of the mutual connectedness of human creatures, the fragility they share. We might want to add today, this is a solidarity that we must learn to extend to the rest of Creation, as Pope Francis has spelled out eloquently in his encyclical on the environment.

In a trip to Latin America in September for Christian Aid, I had the privilege of visiting projects that the charity supports and partners with in Brazil. It was not long before the Brazilian election put the clock back decades, witnessing to the power of resentment and the way in which vested interests can turn that resentment to powerful effect. It was also an illustration of how Christian voices can be used by these vested interests, with immense posters in Sao Paulo of Pentecostalist pastors endorsing the candidates of the far right. Not much of Romero's transcendence there.

But meanwhile, a small human rights centre in Sao



Paolo continues to help funding and training for a project that gives homeless people the possibility of learning machine-tool skills in a factory environment, working with recycled materials, and another project that oversees what is in effect a massive squat in a disused hotel building, now accommodating more than 200 families, where there is a vigorous co-operative culture, sharing responsibility for child care, maintenance and security, and enforcing a rigorous policy against sexual violence.

Speaking to one young woman, living in a room with four children under seven, my Brazilian colleague asked her if she wanted to send any message to the UK. She thought for a moment and said simply, "Love". Nothing about how needy they all were or how frightened she was by the prospects of the election. It might have sounded sentimental if it hadn't been spoken where it was spoken and by whom it was spoken. Transcendence, in Romero's sense. A connection with the origins we share, in some creative gift we can't easily imagine. ★

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Photo opposite: Street art of Oscar Romero
Above: Oscar Romero by J. Puig Reixach



Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, is the master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and chair of Christian Aid. His most recent book is *Christ the Heart of Creation*, published by Bloomsbury.

THOMAS MERTON

On the 50th anniversary of Thomas Merton's death in Thailand, JIM MCALOON traces his influence spreading far beyond the enclosure of his Gethsemani monastery.

When Pope Francis addressed the US Congress in September 2015 he remembered four exemplary Americans who "offer us a way of seeing and interpreting reality". They were Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. Merton (1915-68), a Cistercian monk, was one of the 20th century's most influential – and prolific – spiritual writers committed to inter-religious dialogue, racial justice and the non-violent path to peace. *Tui Motu* March 2015 included a number of articles for the centenary of Merton's birth. This month marks the 50th anniversary of his accidental death in Bangkok, and in this article I would like to look more

particularly at Merton's later years.

Thomas Merton was born in France in 1915 to artist parents. His father Owen was born in Christchurch; his mother Ruth Jenkins, in Ohio. Ruth died in 1921 and Owen in 1931. Having become a Christian and a Catholic in the late 1930s, Merton entered the monastery of Gethsemani, in Kentucky, at the end of 1941 and took the religious name of Louis. Gethsemani was a monastery of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, commonly known as the Trappists. Merton had shown literary promise at university and his spiritual autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, appeared in 1948. A vast output of essays, books, reviews

and poetry followed in the next 20 years (and afterwards). Merton the writer was also a formidable reader, competent in several languages including Latin, French and Spanish.

Roles in Gethsemani

From 1951 until 1965 Merton was successively responsible for training scholastics – monks preparing for ordination – and then novices preparing for final vows. Paradoxically, while fulfilling these responsibilities and reading and writing almost compulsively, Merton idealised other, more solitary or isolated, monastic lives. His journals and letters record his conflicts with James Fox, abbot from 1948-68, who was not always

receptive to Merton's enthusiasms. (Merton could be quite oblivious to the realities of managing, and sustaining, a large monastery!).

Some accounts take Merton's complaints about Fox at face value, but Merton would not have become who he was without the structured life over which Fox presided. Without Fox's sometimes cautious acquiescence Merton could hardly have written, and published, what he did on prayer and monasticism, war and peace, ecumenism, engagement with Islam and Buddhism, literature and culture – to say nothing of his voluminous correspondence.

Changing Focus

By the early 1960s Merton was becoming an important figure in the renewal of the Catholic Church. An excellent introduction to the range of his interests and concerns in that decade is *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966), a compilation of meditations, notes on theology, religion, war, racial justice, current events and the quirks of life in the monastery. In contrast with the sometimes world-rejecting language of his earlier work, Merton now made it clear that some monks, at least, had a responsibility to engage with (as Vatican II put it) "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties" of the time.

Advocate of Peacemaking

Merton's concern with war and peace is well-remembered. He registered as a conscientious objector before entering the monastery (his mother came from a Quaker family). From the late 1950s, with the nuclear arms race and then the Vietnam War intensifying, Merton argued that peacemaking was integral to the Christian vocation. The French superiors of his Order attempted to prevent him from writing on these theme, but Merton anticipated and was vindicated by John XXIII's 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*.

During these years, Merton made important connections with religious peacemakers outside the monastery. Even in the 1930s he had been influenced by Catherine de Hueck Doherty, whose Friendship House in

Harlem had similarities to the Catholic Worker Movement. During the 1960s Merton and Dorothy Day, the Worker's founder, were frequent (if not always uncritical) correspondents. He also enjoyed warm relationships with Daniel Berrigan, and the theologian and rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. His letters to a younger peace activist, Jim Forrest, are a sustained exposition of a spirituality of peacemaking. In particular, Merton emphasised the importance of persistent witness rather than the illusion of immediate results.

Engaging with Asian Religions

With his responsibilities for monastic formation, Merton thought deeply and at length about monastic theology, and varieties of monastic and contemplative experience. This led him into profound engagement with Asian religions. He wrote extensively on Buddhism, especially Zen, and also on Daoism, Hinduism and Sufi mysticism within Islam. In his own thinking, Merton emphasised the "true self", the person we are before God, without the illusions and distractions with which we encumber ourselves. Without underestimating the differences, Merton here drew connections between Christian and other mystical traditions. Merton was deeply immersed in the sources of Christian monasticism, back to the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the third century, and his last – posthumous – book, *The Climate of Monastic Prayer*, demonstrates this, and that he was, always, a monk in the Roman Catholic tradition (and no enthusiast for change for its own sake).

The restless Merton had often dreamed of more solitude and from the 1950s was allowed to spend time alone in a number of places within the monastery grounds. Finally in May 1965, resigning as novice master, Merton was permitted to live full time in a hermitage some distance from the abbey. While devoting more time to prayer and meditation, Merton did not reduce his writing or reading, or, indeed, his correspondence and meetings with men and women who shared his concerns. His hermit life was also disrupted by hospitalisations

for various problems. From one such medical episode in 1966, arose a major crisis in Merton's life – a brief and intense relationship with a young nurse. On this episode we have only Merton's account; after some months the pair broke off the relationship and Merton renewed his commitment to his monastic vocation.

Leaving the Enclosure

Merton had received frequent invitations over the years to attend conferences or visit other monasteries; his superiors had always obliged him to decline. However, in 1968 a new abbot, Flavian Burns, allowed Merton to visit other monasteries in America and, most importantly, to attend a conference of Asian Benedictine and Cistercian superiors in Bangkok. Merton was permitted to spend several months travelling in Asia (and hoped to visit his New Zealand relations in 1969). In Bangkok, after speaking on "Marxism and Monastic Perspectives", Merton was accidentally electrocuted by a badly-wired fan. The date of his death – 10 December – was the 27th anniversary of his entry into the monastery.

Merton was profoundly moved in his travels. He and the Dalai Lama met twice and achieved a mutual rapport. At the ancient Sri Lankan city of Polonnaruwa, among the huge statues of the Buddha, Merton experienced a spiritual illumination: "I know and I have seen what I was obscurely looking for." At a meeting of world religions in Calcutta, Merton emphasised the importance of true communication grounded in fidelity to one's own tradition and vocation: "We discover an older unity. My dear brothers and sisters, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. So ... we have to recover ... our original unity. What we have to be is what we are." ★

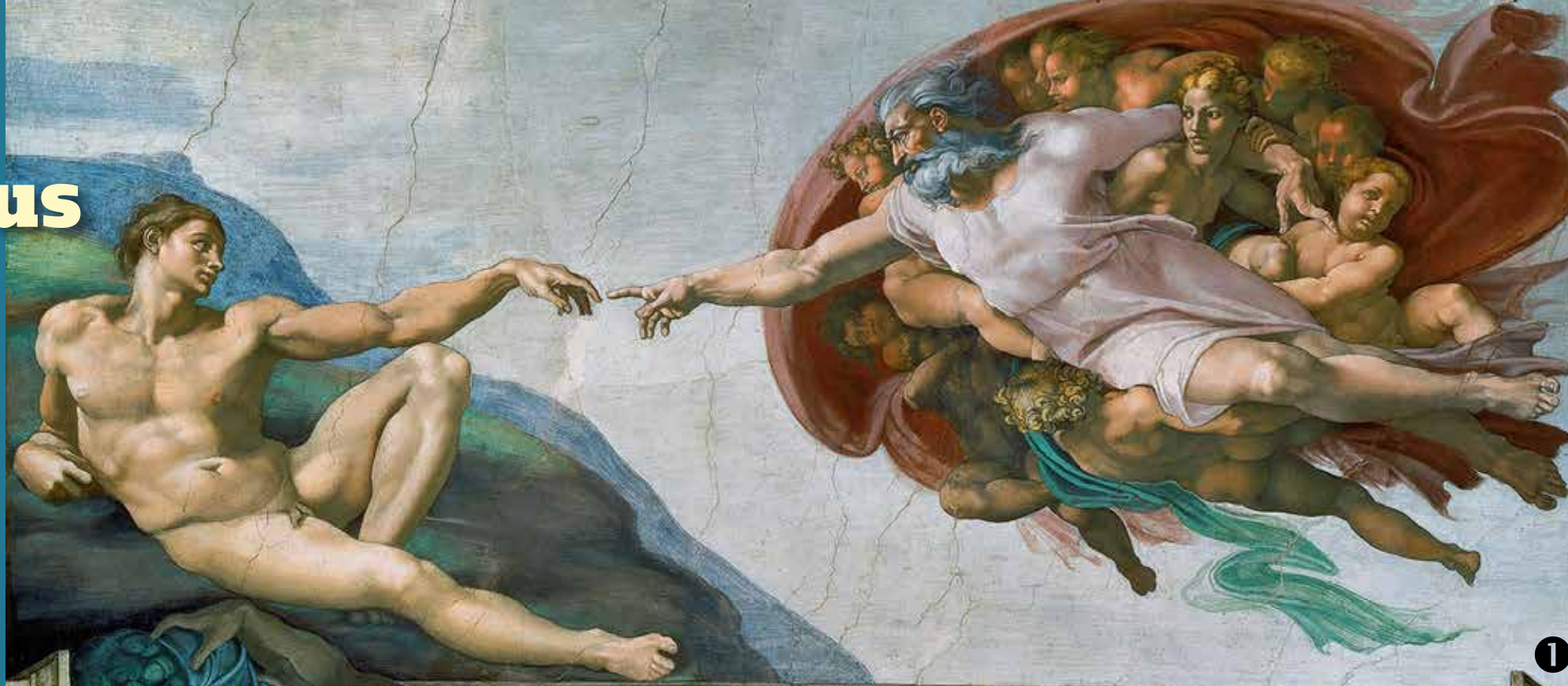
Photo: *Thomas Merton*. Used with permission of the Merton Legacy Trust and the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University



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God's Continuous Creation

CHRISTOPHER LONGHURST discusses the similarities of the idea of God as Creator in the Qur'an with Michelangelo's portrayal in the *Creation of Adam*.



The idea of creation that develops from Islam's notion of God as Creator in the Qur'an (Q 59:24) and depicted by Michelangelo Buonarroti in his fresco *Creation of Adam* (Vatican c.1510) [fig.1], portrays one of the most suggestive images of a Creator-God ever seen. Reflecting on similarities between these two images, the following explores how two relatively conservative religious traditions reconcile with modern scientific theories on creation and evolution.

Qur'an 59:24 specifies God as a creator of triple designation: "Allah, the Creator (*Al-Khāliq*), The Evolver (*Al-Bārī*) and The Fashioner of Forms (*Al-Muṣawwir*). From this Qur'anic sign come three of Islam's "Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Divine Names" (*Asma Al-Husna*). In Islam, these names designate distinct modalities of creative action in the one divine essence. Muslim theologian Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) described their relationship using an analogy: What comes into existence from nothing firstly needs to be planned, like building a house requires an architect. This is the work of *Al-Khāliq*, The Creator. Secondly, it must be originated or executed according to the plan which requires a builder. This is the work of *Al-*

Bārī, The Evolver. Thirdly, it must be perfected or enhanced which requires a decorator, and this is the work of *Al-Muṣawwir*, The Fashioner of Forms.



God's Divine Creative Power

The first name, *Al-Khāliq* implies divine creative potency insofar as God "is" creator before and outside creation. And so to *Al-Khāliq* Islam attributes divine creation in the strict sense of the term. Another way of seeing *Al-Khāliq* is as the divine ideas which are eternal and unchangeable because they are identical with God's knowledge which is God's essence. Though their realisation in the creative process is temporal and can change.

God's Creative Power in Action

Considering the second name, *Al-Bārī* implies a God who models formless substances or creates from primordial matter. The Arabic word *bārī* used in Q 59:24 expresses an

action of generative power which relates to the practical order since "making" and "originating" involve a kind of derivative action ordered towards a specific end. English transliterations of *Al-Bārī* are usually "The Evolver," "The Maker", "The Producer", The Inventor" and "The Originator". This secondary divine creation seems to take place according to a particular design or orderly plan: "You see not in the creation of the All-merciful any disorder." (Q 67:3) Therefore, it would reside in divine volition willing things into existence from *Al-Khāliq's* pre-existing ideas. It would be a creation not *ex nihilo* (from nothing) but *ex novo* (from the beginning), the materialisation of divine ideas, the cause of new existences and the conservation of existence in effect. In other words, *Al-Bārī* is God's will immediately operating in all finite causality, evolving the Earth, introducing plant and animal life, and originating the first human beings.

God's Creating Different Forms

Considering the third name, *Al-Muṣawwir*, "The Form-giver", the Qur'an uses the Arabic term *musawwir* as a title for Allah as bestower on each created thing its particular form. This is God's action that fashions

the countless details of nature, the diversity of species, every rebirth, nature's cycles and the intrinsic beauty in nature's colours, shapes and patterns. To this name is attributed a God who arranges the forms of things in the finest order, who causes change, imparting motion to existent subjects, modifying existing materials and continuing all natural processes. All the wondrous things of the universe, its balance, harmony, and order, the patterns on the wings of a butterfly, and the sacred geometry of the honeycomb all arise from the creative wisdom of *Al-Muṣawwir*.

Given the transcendence of *Al-Khāliq*, the immanence of *Al-Bārī*, and the mediacy of *Al-Muṣawwir*, much of creation, if not all, implies a theistic kind of natural evolution. Perhaps it is Islam's own version of progressive creationism, a position sustained by most Christians and Muslims who look at God's creative works after the original immediate creation. Creation is, therefore, both explicitly revealed and implicitly natural.

Divine Creating through Michelangelo's Eyes

Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* [fig 1] also depicts a kind of progressive creator-God. The Florentine humanist, *Il Divino* (the Divine One), as his contemporaries called him, appears to

have portrayed God in creative action both during and after that wondrous cosmogonic event. In his *Creation of Adam*, the earth is formed and Adam is already moulded from the earth — alive, lounging on its surface. Adam is static. Meanwhile, God is dynamic, in creative action, about to impart the divine image of Genesis 1:26.

Two distinct creations are evident:



the Earth and the human. Another is to emerge, the image. So, the title is technically wrong. It is not the *Creation of Adam* but the bestowal of the divine image. Michelangelo depicted the gift of God's image by situating God in the form of a brain, the organ of human cognition. The shape of God's billowing shroud outlines a human brain, as shown in [fig 3], to symbolise the locus of knowledge and understanding imparting itself to Adam. Both Christianity and Islam hold that among God's finest creations is the

human person, Adam (Q 95:4), an image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26).

Michelangelo's three implicit creations correspond to the attributes of the divine names in Q 59:24. *Al-Bārī's* creations are depicted by the earth (*ha'adamah*) and by the genderful human form of Adam fashioned from the earth. This imagery underscores the creation myths of indigenous cultures. For example, te ao Māori sees Adam as a child of the earth, an earth-creature born from the soil of the earth-mother Papatūānuku. Note that the form of the land from which Adam evolves is a feminine figure [fig 2]. In many cultures, the earth is a feminine principle. Te ao Māori aligns women with the whenua (land), because the whenua gives birth to humans just as women do. Further, some suggest that the form around God resembles a placenta. In te ao Māori, the lands above the waters are placentas from the wombs of Papatūānuku.

Both the Qur'an 59:24 and Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* provide an image of a God who plans all things according to divine ideas, develops them according to divine will and perfects them through divine wisdom. Michelangelo symbolised the divine wisdom by putting a woman in God's mind before the image was imparted to Adam. We see that God's non-creating arm extends around the shoulders of a beautiful young woman poised for action with eyes alert and knee bent. She is often identified as Eve. I think she personifies divine wisdom, situated in the brain of God. Islam holds that God created the entire world according to divine wisdom (Q.30:27).

Despite all this theologising, while the names present distinctions in creative processes, they cannot be real in the divine essence, but only evident in the outworking of divine creation in action. For God is one! Nevertheless, the question remains: Is Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* an aesthetic reading of Q 59:24? ★



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JESUS COMES BRINGING PEACE



KATHLEEN RUSHTON draws attention to how the story of Jesus's birth in Luke 2:1-20 challenges our domesticated Christmas images and ideas.

We have many popular stories and images of Christmas — all moving and much loved — but we can set these aside to read the Luke 2:1-20 story reflectively. What do we see, hear, feel? What moves us?

Luke tells of the birth of Jesus in two verses (Lk 2:6-7) which are surrounded by Old Testament associations and theological strands concerning this newborn. I will draw on Michael Trainor's *Earth Bible Commentary* on Luke in exploring these associations, namely, God's word-deed (*rhēma*), the "inn", the "manger", "wrapped in cloth strips" and the shepherds.

God's Word-Deed

In the Genesis creation story, and in words of prophets, when God speaks, creation happens. God spoke: "Let there be light", there was light. The infancy narrative links the coming birth of Jesus on Earth with the creating Word of God through the term *rhēma*. To keep the sense of God's word, which speaks and brings about in material form

what is spoken about, *rhēma* would be better expressed as "word-deed".

Usually, we hear the angel's last words to Mary at the annunciation as: "For nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1:37). That translation loses the significant link with the biblical creating Word of God. Raymond Brown translates the angel as saying: "*Nothing said (rhēma)* by God can be impossible." Mary, too, acknowledges the creating Word of God when she responds: "let it be with me according to your word-deed (*rhēma*)."¹ What is about to happen to Mary is an act of God's word-deed.

The shepherds, having seen "this word-deed (*rhēma*) which has happened", go to Bethlehem. They "spoke publicly concerning the word-deed (*rhēma*) that had been spoken to

CHRISTMAS

Both RL (Midnight and Dawn) and RCL (Eve, Morning and Midday) have verses from Luke 2:1-20.

them about this child" (Lk 2:15, 17). Most likely they return to "keeping watch" over their sheep. Mary "kept all these word-deeds (*rhēma*) pondering them in her heart" (Lk 1:19; 2:51). Both "keeping watch" and "pondering" suggest care, nurturing and sustaining which all are called to do for people and Earth.

The "Inn"

Imagine Joseph and Mary journeying with families of peasants and labourers. They're on the move for political and economic reasons. The couple are travelling to Joseph's family city of Bethlehem to be registered in a census which would decide what taxes will be imposed on them by the Roman administration. While popular Christmas stories include an inn and innkeeper, Luke focuses on place. For Mary and Joseph "there was no place in the lodging area". The earliest hearers would know that a guest house was where elites stayed. No place there for peasants! Socially, they did not belong.

If Joseph had family there, they would stay with kin. What is the significance of place? Is Luke inviting us to go deeper? Is Luke inviting the well-to-do of his Christian community, and Christians today, to consider those among whom Jesus cast his lot — the poor and outcasts? Is the Christian community being called to conversion? Maybe, after all, the lodging area of the well-to-do, the wealthy and the powerful was not a suitable place for the birth of this child.

The Manger

The manger is mentioned three times in the story (Lk 2:7, 12, 16). The manger points to the life of Jesus and to an ecological connection. It is a place of life, nurture and food. Food, meals and the place of eating will feature significantly in the public ministry of Jesus. Through his ministry of hospitality, the isolated and socially-excluded are welcomed.

We can set aside the dainty wooden centrepiece in a crib set. There is archaeological evidence of only stone mangers in Jesus's time. Usually peasant houses had only one room. (In Mt 5:15, the one lamp gives light to the whole house.) The family lived and slept in this one room which was often raised. Animals occupied the other end of the room which sometimes consisted of a cave up against which the house was built. The manger was placed between the two ends. It would have been the usual place for peasant births.

The manger links Jesus to the land, the human and the other-than-human worlds. The child is at home in these worlds. The manger, like Mary's womb, is a place which receives the body of the child.

"Wrapped in Cloth Strips"

There is reference to the child wrapped in cloth strips twice. At first, the focus is on Mary who "wrapped the child in cloth strips" (Lk 2:7) to complete the tasks of traditional afterbirth care. Later, the clothing of Jesus will be touched for healing (Lk 8:44), become dazzling white at the transfiguration (Lk 9:29), and Herod will clothe him at his trial (Lk 23:11). A linen shroud envelopes his dead body (Lk 23:53) and it is discovered by Peter after the resurrection

(Lk 24:12). The cloth Jesus is wrapped in links him with the Earth, as clothing then was made from natural products materials such as flax, wool and cotton. The wrapping and placing of the newborn body of Jesus in the manger, mirrors what will happen to his dead body — it will be wrapped in a linen cloth and placed in the tomb.

A child wrapped in cloth strips is a part of the sign in the angel's message to the shepherds (Lk 2:12). This is an action done to Jesus. This is what God does to Jesus. Jesus is wrapped in space and theology beyond the human household to the heavens and the cosmos.

Shepherds

The focus shifts from city to countryside. The shepherds "were in the open fields keeping watch at night over their flock". They, too, received good news from an angel. They are not to be afraid. The message (Lk 2:10-14) has five elements: it is a message of joy for all people; the birth of the Saviour is the reason for the joy; this Saviour is the awaited Messiah who is in the "city" of David; the sign is that the baby will be wrapped in cloth strips and lying in the manger; and because of his birth, God will receive glory and peace will come upon the Earth.

The shepherds are of lowly social status. Often unrest existed between them and peasant farmers depending on whether available land was plentiful and fruitful. They were all reliant on the relationship between the human and creaturely worlds. Sheep were valuable for many reasons. Stories throughout the OT show they provided food, milk, wool for clothing and tent coverings. They were also a significant part of the system of religious sacrifice. They were a source of wealth, livelihood and security.

Jesus Connects

Jesus's birth outside conventional places of hospitality shows his connection with the land and the people. His birth in a "city" brings together urban people. The manger, associated with the peasant farming households, represents the rural poor. Mary, Joseph and the shepherds represent the landless.

Heaven and Earth come together in this birth. These cosmological spheres, known to Luke's readers, are affected and come together. The whole inhabited creation is involved. Having heard God's sky messengers, shepherds witness and validate Jesus's birth on Earth. While the Gentile world during the *Pax Romana* regarded Emperor Augustus as the prince of peace, Jesus comes as the One bringing peace. We might still hold dear our Christmas stories and images of Jesus's birth. But there is room to add to them by reading Luke attentively — witnessing Jesus's birth anew through fresh eyes. ★

Painting: *Nativity* by Jane Maisey RSJ © Used with permission www.designjane.com



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GOD WILL LEAD US

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT introduces the prophet Baruch encouraging the Hebrew exiles with God's promise of their return to and restoration of their land.

We will hear Baruch 5:1-9 for the First Reading on the second Sunday of Advent. The verses make up the final prophetic oracle of an unknown prophet. His work has been attributed to Jeremiah's scribe who bears the same name, Baruch. The book is not included in the Jewish canon nor that of most Protestant denominations. In the Catholic Lectionary it is one of the Deuterocanonical books. However, readers will hear in this text echoes of other postexilic prophets envisioning the exiles' return to the land of Israel and to Jerusalem.

These prophets can provide inspiration to the ecological reader as

they draw on imagery from the material world to envisage a new future for the people of Israel on their return to their place, their land. Initially, the prophet addresses the city, Jerusalem — destroyed by the Babylonians and left in ruin during exile. It is as if the city is clothed with a garment of "sorrow and affliction".

It takes little imagination for us to call to mind cities of present-day Syria, for instance, that are likewise clothed with a garment of sorrow and affliction. Indeed, there are so many such places enduring sorrow as a result of the manifold ways of devastation of Earth and its peoples. They cry out for a restoration that is not just human but ecological.

Dressing for a New Time

The prophet challenges the exiles to take off sorrow and affliction and to be reclothed. One image of this reclothing is to put on "the cloak of God's justice" (Bar 5: 2). The prophet also gives the city, Jerusalem, a new name — righteous peace, Godly glory (Bar 5:4). The words "justice" and "righteousness" permeate the new vision. They evoke right ordering, the ordering that is of God and God's desire for the universe. For us, today, this must include the other-than-human. Habitat, the human and the holy must all be caught up in the vision of "righteous peace and godly glory".

Vision of Exiles' Return

The return of the exiles is envisaged in a number of ways. The prophet recalls their being led away on foot and contrasts this with the image of their being carried back as would be a triumphant ruler. It is imagery

of the humans. It is followed by the use of Earth imagery: the flattening of mountains and hills, the filling in of valleys. The reason given for such a transformation of Earth is that "Israel may walk safely in the glory of God" (Bar 5:7).

As ecological readers, we are aware of the ways in which Earth can be violently manipulated to serve human ends — mining, agriculture and industry to name a few. Mountains can be flattened and valleys filled in as the prophet envisages. And for Baruch, this is to serve the needs of the exiles — that they have a route of return along which they can travel safely.

Critique and Reclamation

We discover as we engage with this prophetic vision of hope expressed through Earth imagery, that ecological reading entails a twofold movement similar to prophetic reading.

Baruch 5:1-9 [Reading for the Second Sunday of Advent]

- Baruch 5:1 Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God.
- 2 Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting;
- 3 for God will show your splendour everywhere under heaven.
- 4 For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory."
- 5 Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them.
- 6 For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne.
- 7 For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God.
- 8 The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command.
- 9 For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of God's glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from God.

Initially, it is necessary to *critique* those aspects of the prophet's vision that fail to evoke ecological justice and fullness of life for all Earth and Earth beings. And so we look closely at the imagery of flattening hills and filling in valleys as a manipulation of Earth for human need.

Having undertaken the critique, we now engage in the second phase, namely the *reclamation* of the text and its message.

The text says that the flattening of mountains and filling in of valleys is part of God's work in returning the exiles — "so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God". The reader discerns what is the right and just relationship within the Earth community of the human and other-than-human at different points along their shared journey.

The image that the prophet selects to give expression to this right and just relationship is significant for the ecological reader: the woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command (Bar 5:8). Human wisdom knows how important trees are for the health and survival of the planet and all its constituents. The prophet draws on this wisdom and

returns it to the human community.

The ancient prophet concludes his words of hope to a displaced people with a promise: God will lead Israel with the mercy and righteousness/justice that come from God. Righteousness or justice is the right ordering of relationships. The prophet sees these relationships of mercy and justice among the human community and with God.

We think of mercy and justice as core ecological virtues, ways of living and being. Were Baruch preaching today he might conclude his prophecy in this way:

"For God will lead the Earth community with joy, In right relationship with God, with the mercy and justice that come from God." ★



Elaine Wainwright is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.

It's About Partnerships

There's no doubt that the world has always been somewhat divided. Think of the Cold War which split the globe along the length of Berlin, or the last World War, which definitively categorised each of us as an ally, axis member, or anxious spectator.

In such times, the idea of unity seems to fall by the wayside until it's too late. It is only in the aftermath of these deadly divisions that we see efforts to reunite. It wasn't until Europe had been torn apart by WWI that the call for the League of Nations came. And there was no United Nations until after we'd failed to stop a Second World War.

The United Nations epitomises both the possibility of our partnerships and the toxic nature of our individual greed. The idea of the UN, in loftily attempting to represent ever disparate worldviews and to stop us tearing each other apart, is an admirable one. But the mechanisms by which it achieves peace require some adjustment.

A case in point is the UN Security Council, which has become hamstrung by the veto powers of its heavyweight members with ever-conflicting interests. While it takes just one look back at the 20th century to understand the need for checks and balances, the current process has managed to produce more gridlock than good. The five adversarial members trip each other up.

The refusal to act — even when action is clearly necessary — is sadly enshrined in crises such as Rwanda.

Indeed, the UN's own report into the Rwandan crisis concluded that the UN had only itself to blame for the inaction and inertia that permitted the horrors witnessed there. And in the decades since that tragedy, US and Russian interests have largely been prioritised above the situation on the ground and the predicament of innocent civilians.



Britain and France, two of the Council's permanent members, have in recent years supported the notion that its veto status, for example, should be suspended in matters of mass atrocities. That is a sound proposal. The strategic interests of one country should never displace the common interest of preserving human life, especially when it is most immediately and widely threatened. Superpowers should not be granted disproportionate power to dismiss global crises.

The UN Security Council is a simple example of how divided organisations falter, but is far from the only instance in which sound objectives have been compromised by conflicting powerful interests. Various lobbies at different levels of government representing every

interest including coal and oil, weapons, pharmaceuticals and the super-wealthy, influence politics to a dangerous degree. Armed with clout and financial support, these lobby groups pry power away from constituents to unfairly represent a few special interests.

And that's the problem. A straightforward consensus among the many should trump the self-interest of the few. Positive change needs to be enacted by the former at the loss of the latter.

With a global majority believing climate change is a serious problem, for example, it seems absurd to know that the fates of many small Pacific Islands are held precariously in the balance as the world waits for large global polluters to take action.

While we cannot force the hands of individual nations, we can do more to amplify and unite the voices of the majority and re-orientate ourselves. That's what's needed if we're to transform our energy systems to renewable and sustainable ones. To end poverty and hunger, strive for equality and inclusive education.

After all, complex world problems cannot be solved by individual states. Their resolutions rely in partnerships that put the collective whole above the separate parts. The UN Sustainable Development Goals, on which this year's issues of *Tui Motu* have been based, are a perfect example of this. They are a standard to which we can aspire, each working together to take responsibility for all. ★

Jack Derwin is an Australian journalist currently working for Channel Nine in Sydney.



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See No Evil: New Zealand's Betrayal of the People of West Papua

by Maire Leadbeater

Published by Otago University Press, 2018

Reviewed by Ron Healing

BOOK

Maire Leadbeater, author of *See No Evil*, is a peace campaigner and activist. In a recent conversation she said to me: "Ron, once you have heard the story, you can never walk away from it." I found the reason in her book.

West Papua occupies the western part of the island of New Guinea, sharing a border with Papua New Guinea to the east. The indigenous Papuans are Melanesian and have inhabited the region for 40,000 years. The book outlines the principal events which have occurred in the last 60 years as a result of the Dutch former coloniser ceding all its territories, with the exception of West Papua, to the new Republic of Indonesia.

From the outset, the Indonesian authorities sought to wrest control of West Papua from the Dutch. As a result of the 1962 New York Agreement signed by the Dutch and Indonesians, the Indonesian authorities took control of West Papua on 1 May 1963 with the provision of an act of self-determination by the Papuan people at a later stage. The

proviso resulted in the so called "Act of Free Choice". However, the Indonesian authorities embarked on an orchestrated campaign of violence, intimidation and coercion to achieve the result they wanted.

In the years since this "Act of Infamy" the Indonesian military have imposed a murderous crackdown on the native people with killings estimated to be in the region of 500,000. Meanwhile, as the title of the book suggests, the world looked on unwilling or unable to see the evil perpetrated. At that time the West saw Indonesia as a strategic component against Communist expansion in South East Asia and so to be courted at all costs. But what sealed the fate of the indigenous people was the discovery of the world's richest gold deposit and its subsequent development by American interests.

The main thrust of this book outlines New Zealand's stance through the years of Indonesian oppression right to the present day. It does not always portray us in a good light. With the exception of Walter Nash, New Zealand politicians have turned a blind eye to the plight of West Papua. However, *See No Evil* sees a brighter future and ends with a message of hope. This is a book not just to be read — it is also a call to action, one for which Leadbeater is to be commended. ★



Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination

by Andrew Bolton

Published by Yale University Press; Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018

Reviewed by Jo Ayers

BOOK

This large coffee-table sized, two-volume catalogue illustrates the gorgeous, provocative and outrageous garments of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's (MET) 2018 costume exhibition on "Catholic Imagination".

The exhibition, which attracted both praise and heated opposition, aimed to "forge and express relationships between costume and specific works of religious art held in the MET". It honours the unique contribution that the Catholic imagination has had in the arts. Through ceremony, architecture and the fine arts the Catholic Church has provided an access point for us to enjoy the beauty and inspiration that art contributes to our lives. The stained glass, sculpture, painting, architecture, the use of precious metals and stones, the systems of colour and the choice of materials were all used to inspire and to make theological statements.

And this inspiration and creativity is reflected in the contemporary *haute couture* fashion garments exhibited at the MET. There are dresses inspired by mosaics. Filmy, dreamlike pastel creations that challenge the ideas of the spiritual. And pieces that seriously question Catholic

thought and practice. One particularly wonderful papal evening gown, with a full skirt and nipped-in waist, I thought suggested a future for the papacy! Some redesigned religious habits are comic statements commenting on a darker side of religious life. The exhibits all pose a challenge: What does religious art communicate to us and how do we receive the view of the secular world?

In his accompanying essay, theologian David Tracey uses the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel to demonstrate the power of art to communicate theological concepts.

He describes how Michelangelo's work illuminated the philosophy and theology of the Renaissance with a potency that makes him the "best theologian of his century". Tracey's essay integrates the relationships between art and theology with the whole thrust of the exhibition.

The exhibition also includes 40 articles on loan from the sacristy of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. Exquisite pieces of art? Yes — but one set of 12 embroidered chasubles took 15 nuns nearly 16 years to complete! It's a reminder that the sumptuous clothing made for liturgy to highlight the Divine presence also stratified the people of God. They reinforced the "superiority" of a small aristocracy including clergy and gave them power to exclude the majority from full participation in the rituals.

Heavenly Bodies provides a view of the art of the past as well as a view of contemporary, imaginative fashion. On show in your home, these volumes will be pored over for hours and start many conversations. ★



They Shall Not Grow Old

Directed by Peter Jackson

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

FILM

As the World War I commemoration period draws to a close, the time is ripe for reflection on the war that was supposed to end all wars, and the scourge of war in general. In *They Shall Not Grow Old*, Peter Jackson has created an intimate and moving portrait of the ordinary British soldier in the trenches, bringing original footage to new life through modern digital technology and a hefty dose of cinematic creativity.

Eschewing dates and names (of both men and battlefields), Jackson simplifies the Tommies' story to present a clear trajectory of their experience of war from enlistment, through training and deployment, to the full horrors of modern industrial warfare — and, finally, the relief of Armistice Day when the front fell eerily silent after four years of unbroken tumult.

Made in partnership with London's Imperial War Museum, the film consists of 99 minutes of meticulously restored wartime film footage, accompanied by the voices of dozens of frontline infantrymen, drawn from postwar interviews. Although there is no narrator, words and images are

seamlessly matched. Occasionally, the figures on the screen are given their own voice, their words recreated by eagle-eyed lip-readers.

They Shall Not Grow Old opens in black and white, showing optimistic new recruits voicing their enthusiasm for the war, eager to "have a crack at Jerry". It is a magical moment when the film suddenly bursts into full colour, but also a sombre one, as we know what awaits these keen young men on the killing fields of France and Belgium. We all know what they found there — the bombs and bullets, rats and lice, the stinking, unburied corpses, the churned-up mud that sucked men and horses to their deaths — and Jackson's film depicts all these things in heart-wrenching detail.

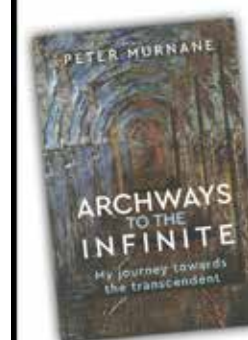
What especially attracted me about the film were the unexpected details — the men's self-consciousness in front of the camera, and the terrible state of their teeth! The restoration by Weta Digital is so good that we can see every detail — from a young soldier's shy smile to the slates falling from a roof as an artillery piece opens up.

Another surprise was the bonds that developed between German prisoners of war and their British captors — a soldierly familiarity that is clearly evident on screen, and an attitude that casts everything about this war into doubt.

With only a limited release in this country, *They Shall Not Grow Old* may be hard to track down, but the effort will be well rewarded. ★

ARCHWAYS TO THE INFINITE

by Peter Murnane



From his memories as a young child to his arrest as a priest following a major protest at the Waihopai Valley spy base in New Zealand, Peter shares his personal struggles in human rights, censorship, sexuality, celibacy, doctrinal belief, and, above all, his relationship with what he terms The Transcendent.

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by Susan Smith

Imposed Clericalism

Several aspects of Church life are worrying at present. We have the apparently unannounced arrival in the country of foreign priests who engage liturgically and devotionally with communities in ways that have little to do with Vatican II Catholicism. For example, I heard recently of a priest celebrating Mass in a small rural community insisting that all those who wished to receive Communion had to go to Confession before Mass started. Visitors, like these, tend to have a divisive effect on the communities in which they operate. And sometimes the communities are not all that well-equipped to cope with covert assaults on what has been their understanding of Catholicism.

Women's Contribution

Whangarei's faithful Catholic Women's League branch closed down. The CWL was established in Auckland in 1931, and is one of the few organisations in the Church that has had life before and after Vatican II. Soon after its inception, its members were reaching out to those most affected by the Great Depression and, before long, were busy raising money for overseas missions, particularly those in the Pacific area.

But the closure of Whangarei's branch isn't the end of the story. Now a new community of women meet monthly, the "Martha and Mary" group, for morning tea, prayer and sharing and have input from invited speakers on topics ranging from loneliness, palliative care, the changing demographics of the Church, to Advent. The focus is on both heart and head qualities and attendance is good — typically between 30 to 50. The Martha and Mary group is an example of how much devoted lay women —

yesterday and today — contribute to the life of our parish communities.

Short-sighted Agreements Harm Environment

Yet another example of environmentally unfriendly National government policy has come to light with the revelation that, in 2015, the independent government agency, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, was a key player in encouraging Chinese bottling companies to invest in local water businesses. Earlier this year, Chinese company Nongfu Spring was given permission to export more than one billion litres of water a year from Otakiri Springs near Whakatāne. Unsurprisingly, groups concerned about environmental degradation are not happy with this. Aotearoa Water Action is one such group and argues persuasively that financial benefits for the few are far outstripped by the environmental costs. Whakatāne environmentalist Mawera Karetai told Radio New Zealand she was "absolutely gobsmacked" by the revelations. In its application, Nongfu

Spring stated that turning its bid down would likely "adversely affect New Zealand's image overseas" given the National government had sought out the investment in the first place.

Recently, the Australian government has been warned about the political and financial influence China is now exerting on Australian life. University of Canterbury academic Professor Anne-Marie Brady states the influence has likewise reached a similarly critical level in New Zealand. Other powerful Asian nations are also in the spotlight. In mid-Canterbury the Japanese-majority owned ANZCO feedlots for cattle destined for the domestic and overseas markets are another environmental disaster. They are yet another example of the previous government's proclivity to allow foreign companies pretty much a free hand when it comes to our environment. What matters is more money, not more care of God's gift of creation.

Our enthusiasm for *Laudato Si'* needs to be complemented by sustained political action on behalf of creation. The cry of Earth is as important today as the cry of the poor, and if we close our ears to both, then all creation suffers. As Francis reminds us: "Today, we have to realise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (LS par 49). ★



TUI MOTU InterIslands
The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited

Tui Motu - InterIslands is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge and contribute to its discussion of spiritual, social and ecological issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-Church and inter-Faith dialogue is welcomed.

The name *Tui Motu* was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means "stitching the islands together...", bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.

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We welcome letters of comment, discussion, response, affirmation or argument of up to 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge longer letters, while keeping the meaning.

FOOD AND REFUGEES — BOTH NEED ATTENTION

I am a retired secondary school teacher from the Immaculate Conception Parish, Lami in Fiji. I am a regular reader of the *Tui Motu* magazine.

I have been overwhelmed by your many astounding stories of joy and sadness in your beautiful magazine. Two stories have prompted me to put pen to paper. One is Jill McLoughlin's review of *Thought for Food: Why What We Eat Matters* (TM Sept 2018). The article touches me for two reasons. One is the current frightening reality of human eating habits being the number one cause of countless deaths in the world today through non-communicable diseases (NCD). Second, many of us in Fiji and other Pacific Island nations endorse Potter's statement that we are no longer "like our ancestors who depended on their skills as foragers, gatherers, scavengers, hunters and fishers of food." We depend too much on ready-made junk food. The book highlights the importance of a fruits and plants diet. I fully agree with Potter's suggestion to "shift to our ancestors' plant-rich diet". My family, like many in Fiji, is trying to follow this path faithfully because we know that we will pay the ultimate price if we eat otherwise.

The other story is "Taking a Stand for Kids" by Michelle McDonald (TM Oct 2018). Michelle's story is touching for her unwavering actions of love with members of Christian churches and organisations in Brisbane for the refugee children and

adults who were brought to Australia for medical attention from Nauru and Manus refugee prison camps. Thank you all for your outstanding support of our refugee neighbours. I abhor the barbaric treatment of refugees by the Australian government. I appeal to that government to follow New Zealand's example to welcome and accept refugees as human beings. I suggest that the Australian government should appeal to all Pacific Island nations, including nations which share the Pacific Ocean, to help in resettling refugees if it feels unable to deal with the issue alone. Christians and members of other religions in these nations are likely to give a hand. I have begun what I can do for the moment — pray for God's mercy over Australia and our Pacific Island nations to sort out something better for our refugee brothers and sisters.

Leitupo Kelekolio Lafai Sa'e, Fiji

COMMERCIAL BANKS NEED TO BE REINED IN

We have failed to carry out the in-depth social structural analysis necessary for us to recognise the connection between our banking system and why we have such poverty and inadequate housing in New Zealand and elsewhere.

It remains to be seen whether the current review of the Reserve Bank Act will unearth the truth of what is actually happening in the banking sector. I spent a year while on the Auckland Catholic Diocesan Peace and Justice Commission Affordability for Housing Committee working with the groups Positive Money NZ, Fair Money Australia and Positive Money UK. Our research unearthed correspondence from the NZ Reserve Bank's Economics Department stating: "Around three per cent of M3 (currency) is created by the Reserve Bank. The remainder is created by commercial banks."

With almost no restriction, commercial banks have been able to create digital money from nothing and lend it at will — in huge amounts especially to home buyers. The interest commercial banks accumulated has allowed them to suck profits to Australia — over \$5 billion per year. It has been the primary cause behind house prices becoming unaffordable for most potential home buyers and contributes to the soaring prices of rental housing.

We need to ask Parliament stop this rout by commercial banks. The Reserve Bank with Treasury has to have the sole and sovereign right to create digital money along with M3 currency. Only then will housing become affordable again as it was in 1935 and onwards for quite a time.

Michael Blakely, Auckland

PREACHING BY THOSE WITH THE GIFT

I would like to thank Colleen O'Sullivan RSJ for her article *Telling a Story* (TM Nov 2018) — an article that touched my heart as I'm sure it did others. I listened to Brené Brown's TED talk on vulnerability and loved it. She is a natural gifted speaker as I later found out when I listened to a homily she preached in her local church.

It was in listening to her preach that I once again lamented the fact that only ordained men can preach in the Catholic Church. Some are able to preach well — for others it is a trial. This gift is not given to all. We are missing out on the gifts of many lay people and religious sisters to our detriment because of this ridiculous "rule"! As a congregation we can also become very tired of having to listen to the same preachers week after week. Often nothing fresh or nourishing is offered and as a consequence there is no "inner-growth" for us. Maybe one day ...

Pat Hick, Waipa

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Looking OUT and IN

significant margin). It was fascinating, a little strange, but definitely a privilege to meet people who have followed the journeys of my family via this wee column.

I am generally wary of cliché, but I find the term “faith journey” is a perpetually relevant one. For me faith seems more about journey than destination. My mother shares her faith journey in compelling terms. Her willingness to be reflective and to examine her life for the spaces where God is calling her inspires me.

I am an English literature student and a writer. I am good at spinning meaning from other people's writing. But often I feel trapped in my own life, bound by my own ordinariness. I can examine a poem for meaning or go to an art gallery and feel cultured and intelligent, without feeling that I need God all that much. Examining myself is far harder and often relentless, seeing as I'm trapped in my own head. Reading *Tui Motu*, the words on the back cover and also inside, remind me that it is good to ask questions and it is good to ask questions of myself and my faith journey. In fact, that's just what God calls us to do.

Tui Motu (via "A Mother's Journal" and "Looking out and In") has provided an audience for the many terrible pictures of me as a child. I'm sorry about the fringe, I'm sorry about the randomly tilted head and gormless expressions. I assure you all that I look much more like myself now. ★



Kaaren Mathias parents, prays, advocates for social inclusion, and cycles around Mussoorie, North India.

Shanti Mathias studies, writes, socialises and commuter cycles around Wellington, Aotearoa.

KAAREN: My mother, Beulah Baldwin, daughter of Waikato sheep farmers, trod the first steps in her faith journey in the stern, earnest but organic faith of the Open Brethren at Kensington Street Gospel Chapel, Putaruru. Later, as a high school teacher studying for a Bachelor of Divinity, my mother married Brian Wood. Together they worked for 13 years in international and national schools in India and Nepal where I was born and spent my childhood. From my earliest years, my mother modelled the value of a personal devotional life. A morning “quiet time” with prayer, Bible reading and stillness in the presence of God was a requisite rhythm for her, before launching into her busy day.

My father's tragic death in the mountains hurled our family into turmoil. Beulah, widowed with four young daughters (we were aged 4 to 11 years), returned to live in Putaruru. To chart her own path out of loss, she started writing.

“Hope is . . .” and “A promise is . . .” were small devotional books that Beulah wrote, marking out signposts of the faithfulness and presence of God in the early days of her grief. In the ensuing decades, my mother wrote about life and faith in New Zealand and then wrote during a further 17 years in India as faculty at

a post-graduate evangelical seminary. Now in her eighth decade, she is actively engaged in leadership in the Baptist Church in New Zealand.

A thread that weaves across her years, and now into my own life, is writing about life and faith. Writing for me also is a spiritual discipline that helps me condense my thoughts and discern God's presence in my life. It's a story that continues. In the next generation, my daughter Shanti, who is studying at Victoria University, picks up the thread:

SHANTI: For as long as I remember, a *Tui Motu* would arrive at our house about once a month. It arrived quietly, in a brown paper envelope. Opened without excessive ceremony, it would sit around the house, migrating from couch to table to bed as different family members leafed through it.

Eventually, with no great sense of urgency, I would pick it up and flip to the back cover. There I would find my Mum's column. Usually I didn't know what she'd written about ahead of time. I might learn something new about her life or see something I had experienced, reflected back at me through someone else's words.

Earlier this year, I went to a *Tui Motu* event held in Wellington. There were lots of people there (though I was the youngest by quite a



Be with us Emmanuel as we

Cherish life
Hear our children
Relax when we can
Insist on loving
Speak with gratitude
Take time with family

Make good things to eat
Ask who needs help
Spice life with humour
this Christmas season.

From the *Tui Motu* team