Tui Motu

InterIslands

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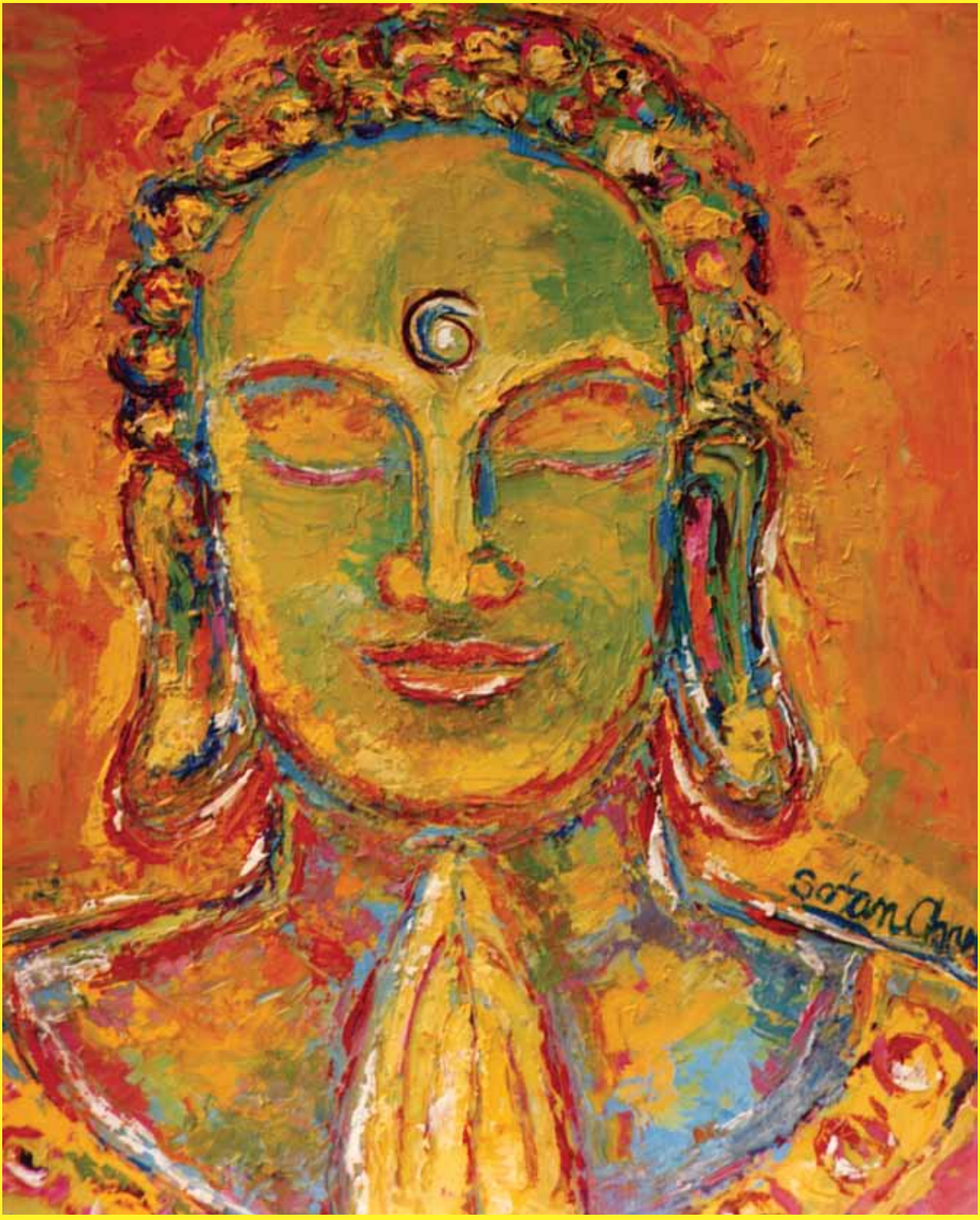

Faith has many faces

families of faith

We've looked into the faces of heartbreak crammed onto the decks of boats, mere specks adrift on the seas of the world, in recent weeks. If it wasn't for journalists, fishermen and others, these families would all drown out of our sight — without disturbing our consciences. To our shame, our neighbour government is leading the world in the "iconic" policy of "turning back the boats". This is despite the united and insistent voice of many, many Australians offering alternative and practical proposals for resettling these families in Australia.

At the moment we're too far away for boats to seek asylum on our NZ shores but we can't ignore the crisis. The desperate faces of asylum-seeking families are turned to us as much as to anyone. We might join our voices with Pope Francis in loud appeal to governments, our own included, to deal justly and compassionately with people on the move, to give adequately and generously, and to work responsibly for solutions. We could ask that as much priority, energy and resources are put into settling families as into TPP negotiations, military armaments, and multinational dispute settlements. We know that for many of those adrift, first world meddling and greed is a tap root in their problems.

Only a few generations ago boat people from Europe became the colonists in countries like New Zealand and Australia. Though we're still working through the ignorance and heavy-handedness of our initial relationships with the indigenous peoples, we have also learnt about relating to people who are different.

The stories in this month's issue give insight into the faiths of many of the people floating on the oceans or in camps. Afrooz Kaviani Johnson reflects on the influence her grandfather's martyrdom in Iran had on her Bahá'í faith and her life since. Selva Ramasami shares his Hindu beliefs and the way he feels compelled to show his community-mindedness in practical ways. Peter Small tells how Buddhism has introduced him to a new way of loving and being responsible. Najibullah Nafraie conveys his commitment to Islam and the way it permeates his life with moral direction and fulfilment. Brigid Inder and George Abdo speak of their work, infused with their Christian faith, in places of conflict.

Each writer provides a glimpse of divine Mystery — of love, creativity, response and compassion. Each speaks of the source of their faith. Each expresses in their familiar religious language the shape, colour and texture of divine Mystery from their perspective. Nick Thompson provides an interpretation of the religious landscape of New Zealand, and particularly Auckland, where different faiths are most evident.

These are a taste of what you'll enjoy in this issue. And the last word is one of blessing.

contents

Cover illustration: *Face of Serenity*, Buddhist art by Sofan Chan. [*Used with permission of the artist. www.theartofhappiness.net*]

We apologise to Andrea Eve Hopkins for omitting the credit for her painting *Haka Powhiri* printed in *Tui Motu* May p3. We acknowledge with gratitude her permission to print the work. wwwandreaevehopkins.com

time to wake up

Ka Sing Yeung and Philip Cass

Pope Francis has exhorted us to wake up. In his Lenten message he lamented that indifference is killing our earth, killing our children, killing our civilisation and tearing apart our humanity. Right now our government is involved in the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) talks. If we remain indifferent, we might discover that our voice, our heritage and our freedom have been stolen silently from us. (See TPP articles in *Tui Motu,* May 2015.) The government that we elect could be overridden by a company we didn't elect and over which we have no power.

The possibility of this happening is real. It's an assault on our rights as citizens and an attack on the centuries-old concept of the social contract that has underpinned democratic societies for more than 200 years.

It's an assault on the notion that governments must reflect the will of the people, not businesses, or special interest groups, or those who are not elected.

It's an assault on the Catholic Church's teachings on social justice which say that people must be free to live in a fair and equitable society in which their voices are heard. These common values are based on the idea that we all have rights and responsibilities, that there is a bond between

Photo: tppwatch.wordpress.com

the people and its government and that everybody must work together to make sure we live in a just world.

Concepts of the common good, of rights and responsibilities are fundamental to Catholic social teaching. Behind these teachings are ideas of solidarity, participation and subsidiarity. Principles of justice say that society exists for the benefit of the person. Individuals, peoples and nations have certain rights — religious, political, economic and legal — which are realised in community and must be respected and protected. Along with rights, people have duties and responsibilities.

The common good is the sum total of all those conditions — economic, political, and cultural — which make it possible for women and men to achieve their human potential. The government is the instrument by which people co-operate in order to achieve the common good.

This is possible only when citizens at all levels can be involved. This is what Catholic social teaching calls subsidiarity — the idea that the state must support and respect the initiative, freedom and responsibility of individuals and groups at the lower levels of society.

Democratic participation in decision-making is the best way to respect the dignity and liberty of people and to ensure that nations function equitably. But how can we say truly we are taking part in a democratic system if the voice that counts is not ours, but that of a corporation, the stock markets or an investors' meeting?

How can people achieve their human potential if the secretive TPP negotiations lead to situations where

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Tui Motu
InterIslands

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Tui Motu – InterIslands is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge and contribute to its discussion of spiritual and social 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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learning from women

I have just read another insight from the penetrating mind of Karen Armstrong. *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* shows her depth and comprehension of the purpose of life. Having been privileged to read so many female theologians over the years and hear incisive women preachers, I just wonder why Rome still buries her head in the sand re female ordination. This will come — as did the acceptance of Mary of Magdala.

Denis Power, *Christchurch*

TPP very bad for us

The heading of the first of the two welcome articles (*Tui Motu* May, pp 22-23) reads: "TPP not good for us". One can easily imagine that. But it should read: "TPP VERY BAD FOR US". These articles should be compulsory reading for our parliamentarians. I wonder, how many government members will have the courage to vote against it.

Gerard van den Bemd, *Auckland*

excellent pick-me-up

Depleted after a morning of service at my place of voluntary work, I left my iPhone in the car and took the May *Tui Motu* magazine to my favourite cafe. I tend to leave this magazine in my car nowadays waiting for an hour to read it, and this colourful Pentecost edition didn't disappoint. Is it just me, or is there a new depth of artwork, photography and imagery on offer to complement the always wonderful written word? Thank you Ann and Team for the splash of colour and creativity I feel in each edition.

My weary soul was energised with such Spirit-filled words: Mike Riddell, Ilia Delio, Joy Cowley, Kaaren Mathias — your words brought tears to my eyes and caused me to look around and marvel at the beauty, the "web of breath" (Joy Cowley, "breath, fire, love") within this cafe of cosmopolitan strangers drinking coffee with friends or smart phones. If only I could share these truths with everyone in this cafe!

May I add "writers" to the list of artists Mike Riddell listed in "The dangerous God" — "painters, musicians, poets, sculptors, dancers" — as those that inspire and "invite us to look and hear"? What would we do without the writers also?!

Theresa Vossen, Gold Coast, QLD

☞ letters to the editor

We welcome comment, discussion, argument, debate. But please keep letters under 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge, while not changing the meaning.
We do not publish anonymous letters except in exceptional circumstances. Response articles (up to a page) are welcome — but please, by negotiation.

time to wake up

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our government cannot put forward legislation that might be what we want, because it threatens the profits of a company? As New Zealand residents we must be concerned deeply at anything which threatens the sovereignty of our nation and all our peoples.

Indifference is not an option. As New Zealand residents we cannot tolerate a situation where the secret TPP threatens the freedoms and liberties enshrined in our country's laws, including the Treaty of Waitangi. We cannot ignore the principles of Catholic social teaching. We must tell our government not to agree to any provisions in the proposed trade treaty which threaten the voice of the people. And not to give up the tariffs that protect what is left of our local industries. And not to agree to any provisions which undermine New Zealand's struggle to provide meaningful employment to its people, to defend workers' rights and improve standards of living.

Pope Francis points us to Corinthians: "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (I Cor 12:26). The implications of the TPP negotiations threaten everybody in New Zealand so our response must be one that attends to the needs of all our fellow citizens.

As Pope Francis says, when our existence seems threatened in such a comprehensive way, it is tempting to feel completely unable to help. But we can help. You can help. And we must help one another. For a start, we can keep ourselves informed about the TPP talks and their implications. We can also keep ourselves informed on Catholic social teaching and think about how it relates to these issues.

We can take action, either by ourselves or with others, through our school, parish or other group by making sure we know what is going on, by writing to the government and our local member about our concerns, and by making sure they know that we expect them to respect the principles of social justice.

And we can reflect on St John XXIII's words in *Pacem in Terris*:

"Human society … demands that people be guided by justice, respect the rights of others and do their duty. It demands, too, that they be animated by such love as will make them feel the needs of others as their own, and induce them to share their goods with others, and to strive in the world to make all people alike heirs to the noblest of intellectual and spiritual values. Nor is this enough; for human society thrives on freedom, namely, on the use of means which are consistent with the dignity of its individual members, who, being endowed with reason, assume responsibility for their own action." (Par 35, 1963) ■

Drs Ka Sing Yeung and Philip Cass are members of the International Justice and Peace Committee, Auckland Diocese.

death penalty is no answer

Cecily McNeill

We gasped in horror as all the prayers, vigils, marches came to nothing and eight Bali Nine prisoners were shot dead in cold blood in April. Two of those on death row in Indonesia had caught hearts in this part of the world — Australians Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, who had reportedly transformed their lives and were working on prisoner rehabilitation. Chan had become a minister of religion and was counselling other prisoners — clearly filling a gap in the government's work.

This issue dominated editorial pages and social media leading up to the execution on April 29, particularly after Chan married his fiancee. Afterwards Andrew Hamilton SJ said in *Eureka Street*: "He might have heard the words 'what God has joined together, let no man put asunder'. A few hours later men had sundered man from both wife and life."

Indonesia is in crisis mode over its drug abuse problem. The Bali Nine were arrested a decade earlier for trying to smuggle heroin from Indonesia into Australia. The Indonesian ambassador to New Zealand, Jose Tavares, stressed Indonesia's "alarming 4.5 million people … [suffering] from drug-related problems" in a *Dominion Post* article in May. But, if the deterrent qualities of the death penalty were as evident as its supporters have claimed, capital punishment would have worked itself out of a job well before now.

Former US president Jimmy Carter says the evidence shows the death penalty has no deterrent effect. "The homicide rate is at least five times greater in the United States than in any Western European country, all without the death penalty. Southern states carry out more than 80 per cent of the executions but have a higher murder rate than any other region. Texas has by far the most executions, but its homicide rate is twice that of Wisconsin, the first state to abolish the death penalty," he said in 2012.

If we in the Pacific are critical of Indonesia's record (remember the massacres in East Timor during Indonesia's colonisation of that country, especially after the local population voted overwhelmingly for independence in 1999), how much more squeamish must we be about trading with the US?

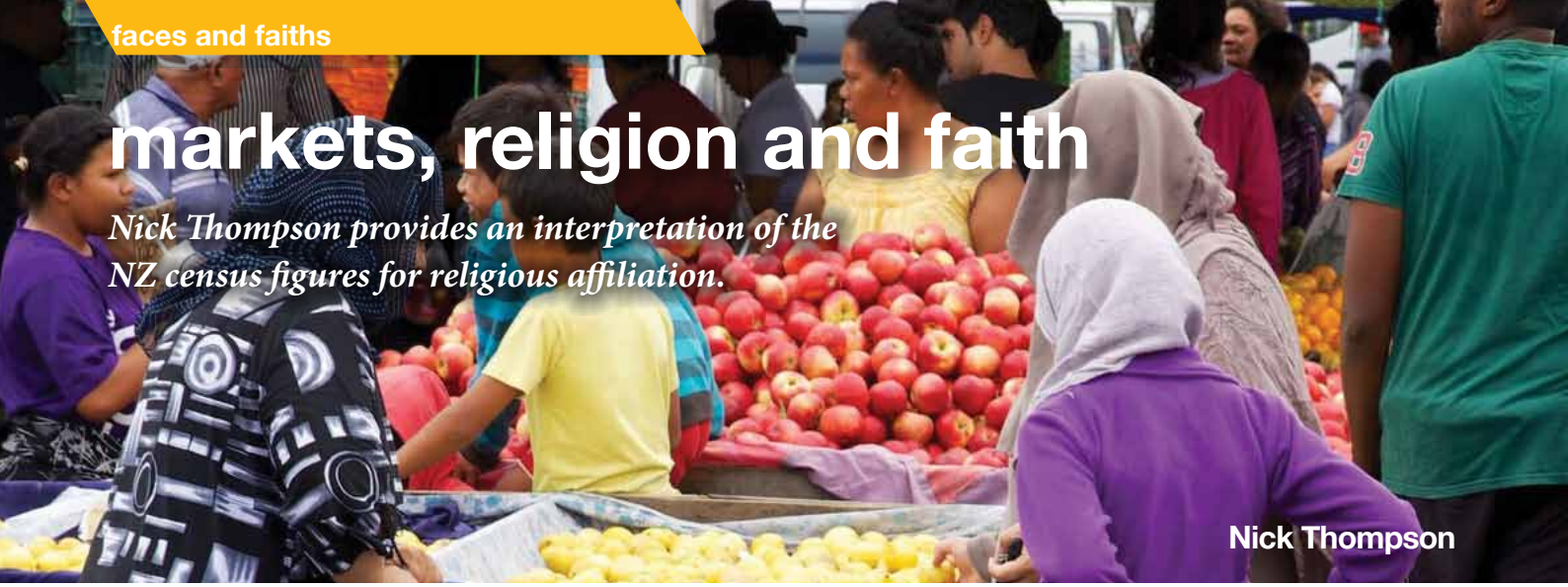
And what of China, whose record of putting convicts to death, trumps that of the US? These two countries are among New Zealand's top trading partners. In November 2013, *The New Zealand Herald* reported that with a rise in dairy exports there, China was our biggest trading partner. New Zealand-born Peter Gardner, 25, is facing the death penalty in China — his trial for trafficking of methamphetamine opened in Guangzhou last month.

This raises the issue of the extent to which our government ministers can use a trading relationship to highlight a country's human rights record. Foreign minister Murray McCully says he has made clear New Zealand's opposition to the death penalty during recent visits to China and Indonesia.

How should these execution threats inform the relationship of other countries with Indonesia, particularly in this region? One thing is certain — we must keep talking about these issues, about the dehumanising effect of institutionalised killing on all concerned, including those paid to pull the trigger. We must challenge ourselves and others to give prisoners a chance to find a new way to live, recognising the disadvantage that often sets people on the criminal path. Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran and the other six went to their deaths singing: "Amazing Grace — how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see."

How can we stand by and allow such transformation to be snuffed out? ■

Cecily McNeill is a free lance writer and editor.



markets, religion and faith

Nick Thompson provides an interpretation of the NZ census figures for religious affiliation.

Nick Thompson

Whenever visitors come to stay with me in Auckland, I like to take them to the Sunday market at the Avondale Racecourse. It's a 30-minute walk from my house on the edge of New Lynn. It's an interesting trip, not just because of the acres (literally) of food and bric-a-brac for sale, but also because I think you catch a glimpse there of Auckland's — and perhaps New Zealand's — future. Looking at the faces and listening to the voices, it's not hard to believe that Auckland is now more ethnically diverse than either Sydney or London. It's not hard to believe, either, that in just over five years from now, about a third of Aucklanders are expected to tick one or another Asian ethnicity on the census form. Nor is it hard to believe that New Zealanders with ties to the Pacific Islands will soon make up nearly a fifth of our country's population. But at the Avondale Market you will also find yourself wandering slowly between the stalls beside an astonishing diversity of new migrants from Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Pakeha like myself are in a small minority, as are Maori.

signs of religious diversity

With this burgeoning ethnic diversity comes a growth in religious diversity. Again, I can see the evidence of this just by walking through the market and back home again. In front of the racecourse stands there is always an elderly Afghan man who sells religious paraphernalia, including Muslim religious calendars, and wooden rehal — stands for reading the Qur'an while seated on the ground. A solemn Korean man circulates through the crowds, carrying a large red cross with a placard: "Jesus said, love God and love your neighbour." On the low hill above the racetrack, where Avondale blends into Mount Albert, the Baptist church advertises not only Baptist services at 10am on Sundays, but services for the Ethiopian Orthodox, an Indian Fellowship, the Korean Presbyterian Church, the Tongan Free Wesleyan Church and the Seventh Day Adventists (the last group on Saturday, obviously). If I lengthen the walk home by about 15 minutes, I will pass the magnificent, peach pink Shri Swaminarayan Mandir (Hindu Temple), a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall with services advertised in Samoan and Tamil, the Sikh Gurudwara on St George's Road, the New Lynn Islamic Centre (Sunni) beside the Lynn Mall, the almost finished Imam Reza mosque (Shi'a) behind Mitre10, and the churches of several Pacific Island Christian denominations. If I need cheap spices, nuts and meat on the same walk back, I will stop at the Food4Less supermarket, where I can buy not only halal-slaughtered meat, but any number of ritual objects, shrines and statues for Hindu worship.

migrants swell christian numbers

New Lynn and Avondale still have perhaps an undeserved reputation for being working-class Pakeha suburbs, but my walk home does also pass a few churches built by European immigrants and their descendants: the modest wooden gothic churches of Saint Jude (Anglican) and Saint Ninian (Presbyterian) in Avondale, a Reformed Church built by Dutch immigrants a little further along the road, and the modern Saint Austell's Uniting Church (Methodist-Presbyterian) in New Lynn. But if it were left to the descendants of the immigrants who built these churches, it is likely that religion in Auckland would be on the decline. Among Aucklanders of European ancestry, the number of people who ticked one of the "Christian" boxes on the census form fell from 419,856 to 367,431 (-12.5 per cent) between 2001 and 2013, while the number who identified with "No religion" rose from 244,707 to 364,338 (+49 per cent). As a point of comparison, the European population of Auckland rose by 4.4 per cent over the same period.

But at the same time the total number of Christians in Auckland grew from 604,713 to 615,936 (+1.8 per cent). Since Auckland Maori affiliation with the main Christian churches also fell over this period (60,156 to 57,309 or -4.7 per cent), it is clear that the modest growth in the Auckland Christian population is coming from newer Christian immigrant communities like Pacific Islanders, Filipino and Indian Catholics, and Korean Protestants.

hindus, buddhists, muslims increase

As my walk around the neighbourhood suggests, other-than-Christian religious

communities form a growing proportion of the population, both in Auckland and New Zealand. Nationally, the three largest religions beside Christian in the 2013 census were Hinduism (2.2 per cent), Buddhism (1.3 per cent) and Islam (1.04 per cent). These are still tiny percentages when compared with Christians taken as a whole (43.5 per cent in 2013). However, between 2001 and 2013, the Hindu and Muslim populations in New Zealand roughly doubled, while the total Christian population fell by about 10 per cent. Moreover, in Auckland these three faith groups make up larger proportions of the population than they do nationally (Hindus 4.3 per cent per cent, Buddhists, 2.3 per cent and Muslims 2.2 per cent).

increase in 'no religion'

Of course, at a national level, the statistical elephant in the room is the rapidly growing number of people who describe themselves as having "no religion." This rose from 27.5 per cent to 38.5 per cent of the population between 2001 and 2013. A recent and widely publicised report from the Pew Research Centre in the US suggested that by 2050 New Zealand would be one of a very few countries in the world where the unaffiliated would constitute the largest "religious" group. In fact the rate of increase between the 2001 and 2013 censuses suggests a much earlier date for this majority.

Certainly, growth in immigration (along with higher birth rates among some migrant and religious groups) may eventually slow the rapid growth in the "no religion" category, but I wouldn't count on it. During my six years living in Auckland I have realised that the apparently thriving Pacific Island churches established here from the 1960s onward are also worried about the loss of children and grandchildren of the first migrants. They are perhaps more worried than they should be. In 2013, 72 per cent of Pacific Island New Zealanders described themselves as Christian. Compare this with 47 per cent of Pakeha and 43 per cent of Maori. Even so, if we look at the NZ Samoan population between 2001 and 2013, its affiliation to Christianity has dropped, albeit modestly, from 82 per cent to 78 per cent while the number of Samoans professing no religion has risen from 8 per cent to 13 per cent.

Among Cook Islanders, Christian affiliation has fallen from 68 per cent to 57 per cent and "no religion" from 18 per cent to 31 per cent. In fact the chief worry of established Pacific Island churches is that their young are leaving to join Pentecostal congregations, where the language of worship is English and the fundraising is perceived to be less burdensome. Yet these statistics suggest that a small but growing number of Samoan New Zealanders are also joining Maori and Pakeha in the shift to the "no religion" demographic. In the longer term it may be that we will see the same kind of movement in the other-than-Christian communities which are currently burgeoning.

religion and spirituality

Of course, it's worth remembering that statistics don't make windows into people's souls. Those who describe themselves as having "no religion" may in the same breath describe themselves as being "spiritual." By the same token, affiliations like "Catholic" and "Presbyterian" may tell us more about a person's sense of family and cultural identity than they do about strict adherence to the tenets of those churches or attendance at worship and other activities. At my own university the *New Zealand Attitudes and Values Survey* is currently doing work on the lives and outlooks behind those census figures. The *Survey* began in 2009 as a 20-year longitudinal study of 18,000 adult New Zealanders. Religious affiliation is one of the variables the *Survey* is correlating with information about the respondents' personalities, attitudes and values on a wide range of topics. The researchers don't presume, for example, that religious affiliation is the same as belief in God or attendance at church. As the *Survey's* findings are released, it will be interesting to see how closely professed affiliation corresponds over two decades with the official beliefs and practices of the religious groups to which respondents adhere.

together in diversity

In the late seventeenth century, English visitors to the Netherlands expressed astonishment at how the Dutch kept their religious opinions private so that they could focus on the business of making friends and getting rich. The English had just spent 20 years trying (with considerable success) to kill one another over the religious differences that the Dutch refused to discuss. They were more than faintly scandalised that the Dutch seemed to think that trading was more important than doctrinal orthodoxy. When I visit the Avondale Market, I confess that I would like to think there was more that united this great diversity of people than just the fact we come to do business here on a Sunday morning. At the same time, the market seems to me a hopeful sign of the way in which people from a staggering diversity of languages, cultures and religious beliefs can establish relationships of trust and even solidarity. I hope it continues to flourish. ■

Dr Nick Thompson is a Theology lecturer at the University of Auckland.

living in the hindu faith

Selva Ramasami shares how his Hindu faith guides and permeates his life.

Selva Ramasami

L to R : Lexmen (son), Rani (wife), Renuga and Vinudan (daughter-in-law and son), Kumuthini (daughter) and Selva Ramasami

When I was growing up in the countryside in Malaysia, my parents and the community were going about their daily business without much reference to religion or faith. I followed their practices without any persuasion or understanding.

I moved to Kuala Lumpur city as a young person. There I had the fortune of meeting a guru from India. Listening to him talk about *Dharma*, I realised that my parents and the community were leading a way of life in accordance to the Dharma. The *Sanathana Dharma*, the natural universal laws for righteousness (also known as *Hindu Dharma* or Hinduism), has been shaping my life from my childhood even without my realising it.

I have been reminded constantly about *karma*, the concept of cause and effect. To quote a guru: "This concept isn't about God's doing; it is your own doing. This is a wonderful boon, because this means your life is your business and no one else's."

This understanding of Dharma and karma guides my life. How I conduct my life decides my karma. Good Dharma simply accumulates good karma for me.

I have always thought to greet others with a *Namaste/Vanakkam*, acknowledging the life force *(Atma)* in me as the same in all. It expands to encompass the whole world as one family — *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. A Tamil saint, some 2000 years ago wrote: "*Yathum oore, yavarum kelir.* This is our world and this is our people." Such inclusive teachings have great impact on me to accept and respect the diverse faiths and cultures in New Zealand.

My parents have always found happiness in helping neighbours and the wider community and I was encouraged to do so from my early age. *Sewa* and *Thyagam*, giving yourself to others in service or duty, has been a tenet of our Dharma. It is my duty to help those in need with *Daya* and *Prema*, compassion and love. It is in our prayer, *Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu*: "May all beings everywhere be happy and free, and may the thoughts, words and actions of my own life contribute in some way to that happiness."

I am equally passionate about helping people and the community with a profound understanding that it is my duty. Understanding my role, I extend a hand to many young families in need, who are without the support of their extended family in New Zealand. I volunteer my time for community work wearing several hats.

Dharma provides us with a holistic system to maintain healthy living in our body and mind through yoga, *ayurveda* and the *siddha* medicinal system. "*Unave marunthu, marunthe unavu.* Our food is medicine and the medicine is our food." We prepare food using many of the natural ingredients which enrich our health. Meditation and yoga help me to have balanced health.

Hindus worship many deities with an understanding that it is a single energy with many forms. Many of the deities are in mother or woman form such as *Durga, Lakshmi* and *Saraswathi*. We worship them together with their consorts *Shiva,*

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faith weaving my life

Afrooz Kaviani Johnson reflects on how her Bahá'í faith gives perspective, purpose and nourishment to her life.

Afrooz Kaviani Johnson

My grandfather, my mother's father, was executed by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1983 together with five other men for refusing to give up his faith and convert to Islam. This June marks 32 years since that day.

My parents and I lived in Christchurch, New Zealand, at the time. A colleague of my father heard a radio bulletin about six Bahá'í prisoners hanged in Iran and rushed into my father's office to tell him the news. I was three years old and cannot attest to remembering details of the whirlwind of grief that followed.

Some testimonies published since then illustrate the magnitude of courage and faith exhibited by those six men and, two days later, by ten Bahá'í women who were also executed. It is reported that one of the men present at the gallows described how the prisoners were hanged in front of one another, one by one, oldest to youngest, in the expectation that it might induce them to recant their faith. However, none of them did, and all preferred death.

To me, this is the ultimate demonstration of faith; to give up one's life for a love and belief in something that is greater than oneself.

To walk where there is no path
To breathe where there is no air
To see where there is no light —
This is Faith.
— excerpt from a poem by
Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhiyyih Khanum

Whether as a direct or indirect impact of my grandfather's life, my faith does not merely give shape to my life but also, weaves through my inner thoughts and being, my interactions and relationships, and my actions.

L to R: Zarina, Afrooz, Luke and Zavier Kaviani Johnson

The Bahá'í Faith calls for individuals to search after truth independently, unconstrained by superstition or tradition. So it does not necessarily follow that a child raised as a Bahá'í should, or does, become a Bahá'í in adulthood. I declared my faith at the age of 16 and have since tried to put it into practice — some days better than others.

Bahá'ís believe that *Bahá'u'lláh* — meaning the "Glory of God" — is the latest in the series of Divine Educators that God has sent throughout history to guide humanity. In the middle of the 19th century, Bahá'u'lláh outlined a framework for the development of a global civilisation taking into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life.

The Bahá'í principles include the oneness of God and religion, the oneness of humanity and freedom from prejudice, the inherent nobility of the human being, the fundamental equality of the sexes, and the harmony between religion and science. These are not just lofty ideals. The Bahá'í writings explain that true faith is conscious knowledge expressed in action; Bahá'u'lláh states that "The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds." In communities around the world, individuals and communities are working collaboratively towards realising these principles.

With a view that each of us possesses an immortal, rational soul that briefly passes through this world and continues for eternity to advance

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from the heart

Peter Small shares his discovery of Buddhism as his true path.

Peter Small

I am a follower of the largest school of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelug, which was founded by the guru of the first Dalai Lama over 600 years ago. I have been fortunate to be a part of a Buddhist centre in Dunedin and to have regular exposure to the teachings of very wise and loving monks.

It has felt like a huge privilege to be able to get this sort of education in New Zealand. The ordained Buddhists are said to practise higher ethics and it really shows through. They have gained a lot of happiness and satisfaction from Buddhism and are very steady, loving people, due to learned and prescribed behaviour.

As exemplars and progenitors of Buddhism, they afford me an opportunity for humility and service. It is an unusual thing as an adult westerner to have someone whom you can rely on to guide you like a parent. We talk about taking refuge in the three jewels, "*Buddha, Dharma* (his teachings) and *Sangha* (the community). It is really the *Lama* (guru) who provides these; the communities form around them and they are exemplars of ethical conduct who transmit the understanding of The Buddha.

I feel that by following the Lamas' Buddhist advice, I am afforded refuge from doing negative actions which will create suffering in the future. Their personal introductions to various Buddhas provide a potent means with which to accumulate unusual and powerful good karma, and gain purification through confession.

> Mere academic understanding of Buddhism is not infectious. It must be taught from the heart .

With privilege comes responsibility. Tibetan Buddhism is a relatively small and young spiritual tradition in Aotearoa and it has come here out of the Lamas' kind wishes to bring benefit, but also out of His Holiness The Dalai Lama's farsighted view of ensuring these traditions are lived and transmitted to future generations. The community as a whole has requested these people, who are the cream of Tibetan society, to uproot themselves and come to a society that has little connection to them.

So my working life is a direct result of the influence of Buddhism. Without it I'd have no resources to support the Lamas' pure wishes. And while it wears me down year in year out, that ageing was always going to happen anyway and it also keeps me engaged with people, affording opportunities to practise the many enlightening qualities like generosity, enthusiastic perseverance, ethics, and above all patience — "the most ascetic of practices".

After all the real responsibility is to learn and practise what has been taught. What they say is true; to

living in the hindu faith

. . . continued from page 8

Vishnu and *Bramha* respectively. These deities remind me of my duty to care, protect and respect the women in my home and in the community. Dharma teaches us to respect women in our society as we would revere our mother.

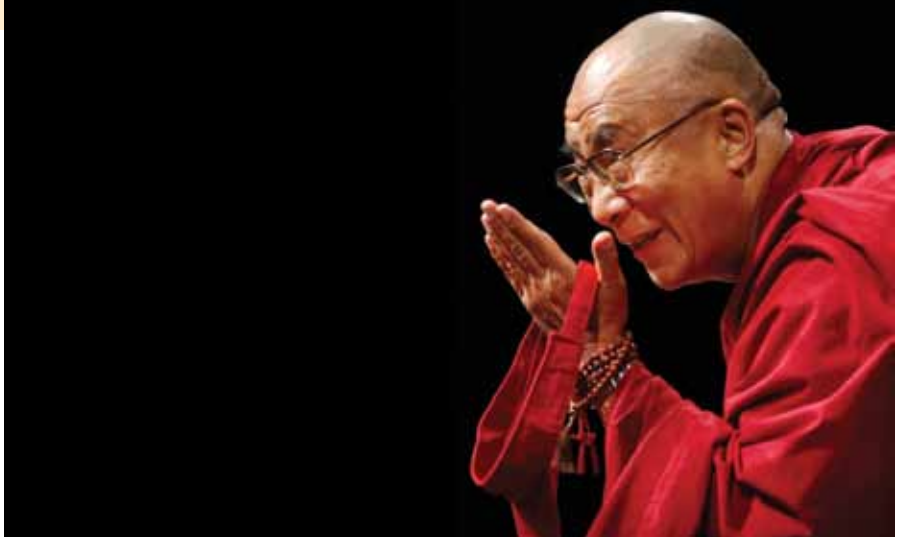
The importance of family as an institution and its values are symbolised by the deities with their consorts. Both parents have an equally important role in the upbringing of children. Dealing with conflict and anger in our homes is important to maintain the family unit together in a safe environment. *Ahimsa*, non-violence, is the Dharmic prescription for the family to deal with anger and conflict. If one understands the meaning of *ahimsa* to one's own self then it is easier to practise *ahimsa* towards others.

With practices of healthy living through diet, meditation, prayers and yoga, we are helped to manage conflicts amicably through open discussion. Having an open and honest conversation helps my relationship with people with an understanding that *satyam,* truthfulness in words, deed and action, upholds *maanam,* dignity.

Having migrated with my wife and three young children to a new land 13 years ago, I faced many challenges. My understanding of Dharma helped me to journey through many rough times in New Zealand. Guided by the Dharma, we remain together as a functional family unit even though the children have left home now.

As in my life, the Dharmic principles have been the guiding light for billions of people over thousands of years. I prostrate to the principles of *Sanathana Dharma* which continues to inform and shape my way of life. ■

Selva Ramasami JP and his family live in Wellington.



really influence people, some ideas must be lived truths. Mere academic understanding of Buddhism is not infectious. It must be taught from the heart. The Buddha himself made the statement that his tradition cannot be destroyed by external forces. It can be affected only by corruption from within. So taking responsibility means living, studying and practising teachings as much as it means caring for the health of the community.

Self or *"atman"* is a big thing in eastern religions. Buddhism is almost unique in identifying our "*anatman*" — a lack of real self. It says that just as we see a series of parts, like four legs and a flat surface on the top as a "table", we see also our bodies and even our consciousness as being an independently existing "I". From "I" the concept of "mine" flows naturally, and with that arise concepts of defence and attack. Our goal is to realise our true nature which is said to destroy all attachment and aversion we experience.

I came to Buddhism with a somewhat submerged Christian truth of loving care for all people, purely because virtue is its own reward. The Buddhist focus on self-improvement is to upscale that love and compassion both in scope (all sentient beings) and duration (across a greater timespan than just this life). It has taken a while for me to get past the view that this process undermines the ethics of pure giving for its own sake.

I have come to the conclusion that sometimes the source of spiritual troubles is that our meditation exceeds our loving compassion. The Lamas talk remarkably little about formal concentrated meditation. Their focus is on developing good heart and once this is achieved the benefits of meditation are amplified.

It is said that we should be careful what we wish for. I am very grateful to my lamas for impressing on me two things. Firstly, that developing the heartfelt wish to become a Buddha is vital, but not easy. Secondly, that the care and protection of my mind is paramount.

His Holiness has said that when he was in Tibet he had the foolish notion that Buddhism was not just the best way to advance spiritually but the best way for all people. While we must have fervour for our own faith, there is a multitude of faiths because there is such a multitude of different people, so they must all be respected.

I hope these Buddhist ideas resonate and support the practice of your own faith. ■

Peter Small is a member of the Dhargyey Buddhist Centre in Dunedin.

faith weaving my life

. . . continued from page 9

towards God, Bahá'ís believe that the purpose of life is to develop spiritual qualities that assist each of us in our eternal journey.

"Wert thou to attain to but a dewdrop of the crystal waters of divine knowledge, thou wouldst readily realise that true life is not the life of the flesh but the life of the spirit." — Bahá'u'lláh

These days my family and I are based in Asia. My work has taken me to some of the most vulnerable communities where children and adults are suffering from poverty, addiction, abuse, and exploitation. The disparity between the rich and the poor is growing, and corruption and lawlessness persist. My faith gives me perspective on the temporary nature of this life and simultaneously propels me into action to contribute, in small part, to working against unjust conditions. Amidst the despair, it is clear that both the material and spiritual dimensions of civilisation must advance in harmony.

Now that I have children, my orientation and focus has shifted. My most important work now is to nurture and guide my children's spiritual, social and intellectual development. In a fast world of distractions and discontent, I hope they may be conscious of God's unconditional love and their unique potential. Perhaps they may also be emboldened by the great examples in our family and in our world. ■

Afrooz Kaviani Johnson lives in Bangkok. She is the sector specialist in child protection with The Asia Foundation. Afrooz worked in corporate law before moving to Thailand.

talking faith with our neighbours

Catherine Jones notes that we now have more opportunities to meet and relate to those of other faiths.

Catherine Jones

In September 2009 an earthquake shook the central Pacific and a few minutes later a tsunami wreaked havoc on Samoa and American Samoa with the loss of over 180 lives. Homes and crops were destroyed. The emergency services rushed to the rescue with food, water and shelter but the inner healing after such a traumatic experience takes much longer. Some treasures, like the family bible documenting the family's faith history, were lost completely. The New Zealand Jewish Council wondered how they could help. Soon a shipment of Bibles in Samoan was sent for the families. The Jewish Council understood that reading and praying the scriptures personally and in community was a path to the people's recovery.

A request came in an email from a Turkish Muslim colleague during the month of fasting last year. "Do you know any families in need? We have some extra Ramadan food parcels and would like to share them." I replied immediately: "Yes, I know some Iraqi Christian families here in Wellington." The families were deeply touched not only by the gift of food but that it came from a Muslim organisation. This was addressing and releasing their memories of having suffered religious discrimination and persecution in their homeland.

Early on Holy Thursday morning this year, El Shabab terrorists stormed the student dorms at Gerissa University in north-east Kenya close to the Somali border. Twelve hours later 148 students were dead — mostly Christian. It was a shocking beginning to the Easter Triduum and gave intense meaning to the words "to lay down one's life". What is sometimes overlooked is that at the time of the tragedy these Muslim and Christian students were engaged together in a daily "dialogue of life" in their lecture halls, dining rooms and on the sports fields. Together they were living the dream of a university education — available to a very small percentage of the Kenyans — with its bright prospects for the future.

We hear stories like those above over and over as we grow into awareness and new relationships with those of different faiths in New Zealand. Fifty years ago the Vatican Council II produced the document *Nostra Aetate* at its final session. The Council Fathers recognised that the time was ripe for a new attitude of openness and respect for believers of other faiths, in particular with the people of the Jewish faith. The document was revolutionary in its call for a radically new way of relating to people of other religions.

bishops' interfaith committee

Demographic changes in New Zealand since the 1980s, largely through immigration and a more diversified refugee resettlement programme, have brought us closer to religious diversity. The New Zealand Catholic Bishops set up a Committee for Interfaith Relations in 2009 in response to our changing reality. They chose the title "interfaith relations" carefully as it focused on the relational aspect of dialogue, of developing bonds of friendship across former boundaries. Since the beginning the process of dialogue has developed committed friendships that have been tested in times of disagreement and disappointment. But commitment to one another, the integrity of each person's own faith tradition and to an ongoing call to conversion have endured through the testing.

home-spun dialogue

Few of us are equipped to engage in an interfaith dialogue of experts but we can live a practical dialogue of life and collaborate in works of charity

and social justice. One of my favourite activities I call the "dialogue of the corner dairy". Many dairies are owned by recent migrants, often people of a faith other than Christian. While the dairy will charge a few more cents for the milk than the supermarket, over time the conversations that can arise about ordinary and profound things, such as how the children are getting on at school, rejoicing (sometimes crying) over news from home, coping with the unforgiving English language and the bland food, are well worth the extra cents. These daily issues are the "stuff" of theologising. They are where faith, hope and love touch, share and give meaning in the experiences of getting to know and understand one another.

interfaith activities

Members of the Bishops' committee work with and through local interfaith committees in most major centres. In Dunedin they have worked closely with the Abrahamic Council at Otago University which sponsors an annual Peace Lecture from an interfaith perspective. Sister Bertha Hurley and others in Christchurch have contributed to the "spiritual rebuild" of the city as well as giving practical help to those suffering in the aftermath of the earthquakes. In Hamilton Teresa Fernandez has developed close links with the interfaith community at Waikato university. Dr Mary Eastham and the Palmerston North Interfaith Group have organised some very well attended public events. As well, they've all participated in and invited others to share in practical activities, such as working with refugee families, taking part in reforestation projects, interfaith youth activities, civic occasions and religious festivals of different faith groups. During the 2013 Year of Faith a series of events on "Abraham, our Father in Faith" brought the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities together.

challenges of dialogue

Just as important is the "inner dialogue" flowing beneath these activities as participants reflect individually and as committee on their dialogue experiences and confront the struggles inherent in them. These could be issues of religiously motivated violence or the centrality of Jesus Christ in Christian faith. At the same time the committee and its members continue to develop a spirituality of listening, of openness to the other and perseverance in the face of setbacks.

Theologians are also engaged in interfaith dialogue. The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID) regularly publishes their dialogue findings. Important documents marking Jewish-Christian Relations have been *Dabru Emet, Speak the Truth* (2002) and *A Time for Recommitment: The Twelve Points of Berlin* (2009), while *A Common Word Between Us and You* (2007) was the result of a dialogue with Muslim leaders. The World Council of Churches together with PCID has issued guidelines for interfaith relations.

dialogue for world peace

Hans Küng's warning that there will be no peace among nations without peace among the religions and that the path to this peace is the path of dialogue, has continued to challenge. Peace is the pressing priority in interfaith relations today. We know the tragedies caused by religious fundamentalism and religiously motivated violence in our world which have put millions of people in mortal danger. Although these violent activities might happen in distant places, we remember that the people suffering are our brothers and sisters with whom we share humanity.

As one way of marking the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* the Bishops' Committee and the Progressive Jewish Community in Wellington have invited Melbourne-based Rabbi Fred Morgan to visit the main centres of New Zealand in September. As well as hosting public meetings in these centres, the Bishops' Committee is sponsoring Rabbi Fred to be of service to the Wellington Progressive Jewish Community, who are without a Rabbi at present, for their celebrations of the Jewish High Holy Days. This is a new area in interfaith relationships for us. ■

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faith, commitment and fulfilment

Dr Najibullah Nafraie reflects on his commitment to the Muslim faith.

Najibullah Nafraie

Recently the *New York Times* columnist David Brooks wrote, "Every reflective person sooner or later faces certain questions: What is the purpose of my life? How do I find a moral compass so I can tell right from wrong? What should I do day by day to feel fulfilment and deep joy?"

I agree with Brooks' observation and believe these questions lie at the core of our existence as human beings. For me the search for the answer to these questions began at the age of 25, a year or so after I had gone to Hawaii, USA, for postgraduate studies at the university there. I was born and raised in a Muslim family in Afghanistan, but until that time I was a "traditionalist" Muslim, following the footsteps of my parents and conforming to the norms of the society, without giving much thought to the significance of what I did.

discovering faith

I underwent a period of crisis, finding myself at the verge of falling into the trap of the materialism and hedonism of my new surroundings or opting for the Marxism and atheism of my university professors. The little that I knew about Islamic teachings, and noticing their solution to some of the problems that the society faced, encouraged me to read more about the religion. I was amazed by what I found, especially after I read, for the first time, the Qur'an with its meaning (in English). It impacted me so much that were it not for the wise advice of an old Muslim community leader there, I would have given up studying Political Science at the University of Hawaii and had gone to some Arab country to study Islam.

Based on that advice, I continued studying Islam on my own, while also studying Political Science. Knowing about the purpose of life from an Islamic viewpoint was one of the first questions that engaged my mind. I was happy that soon I found the answer in the Holy Qur'an: "And [tell them that] I have not created the invisible beings and men to any end other than that they may [know and] worship Me" (51: 56).

Yusuf Ali, whose translation I read, commented on the verse: "Creation is not for idle sport or play: 21:16. God has a serious Purpose behind it, which, in our imperfect state, we can only express by saying that each creature is given the chance of development and progress towards the Goal, which is God. God is the source and centre of all power and all goodness, and our progress depends upon our putting ourselves into accord with His Will. This is His service. It is not of any benefit to Him: it is for our own benefit." I was so exited by this finding that I decided to give a seminar about it to the Department!

committed in faith

From that point on my faith has informed and shaped my life in so many ways that I can probably write a book about it. Here, though, I want to limit myself to Brooks' questions.

moral compass

As for "a moral compass", all religions provide such a compass. Islam goes a step further, establishing institutions that make sure a practising Muslim does not lose it. The "five pillars of Islam" – testimony to Oneness of God and Muhammad as His Messenger, the five daily prayers, obligatory poor-due tax, fasting, and pilgrimage to Makka — are at the heart of *Sharia*, the ethical/legal paradigm which encompasses the entirety of a Muslim's life. Although *Sharia* was "colonized and [its institutions] largely dismantled" and many writings on the subject "have distorted Shari'a beyond recognition" [Wael Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, p. 1], it still plays an important role in the life of practising Muslims.

fulfilment

As for what to do "to feel fulfilment and deep joy", I did not have to search for an answer. When you do things for noble goals and what you consider as your religious duty, you feel fulfilment and deep joy even if you suffer hardship. I can give the example of the time when I joined the Afghan anti-Soviet resistance movement in Pakistan. Coming from a relatively wealthy family and living a very comfortable life, and moving there from Hawaii, I suddenly found myself in very harsh conditions. Sleeping with four or five other persons on the floor of a very small room, having beans "soup" and bread for lunch and dinner, and fasting during the month of Ramadan at a time when the daily temperature was regularly above 45 centigrade, I still remember the sense

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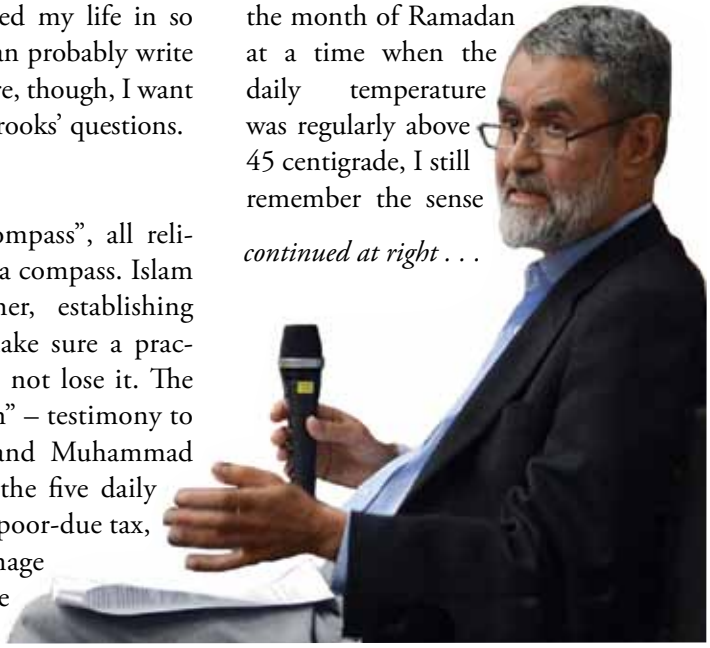


words that sustain

Nijmeh Ali explains why the poem Revenge *speaks to her of peace-making.*

Nijmeh Ali

Taha Muhammad Ali, a Palestinian poet, born in Saffuryia village in 1931, is one of the most known Palestinian poets. As a boy he finished fourth grade and started supporting his family when his father became disabled. However, nothing could prevent Ali from accomplishing his great passion — writing. His heart and mind remained in the stories he heard in his father's madafeh, guest room, where he first heard men speak about politics and poetry.

The Israeli army occupied Saffuriyya on July 15, 1948. Ali, then 17, along with his family, friends and neighbours, was expelled to Lebanon. After a year his nuclear family succeeded in snucking back into their homeland only to find that their village, along with many others, had been destroyed. He witnessed the establishment of Israel on the ruins of Palestinian villages, lives, and dreams. The family settled in Nazareth, not far from Saffuriya, where Ali opened a souvenir shop and worked in it for more than 50 years. His shop became a cultural saloon where poets, intellectuals and ordinary people gathered to debate, exchange ideas and listen to poetry.

The story of Taha Muhammad Ali is a story of 167,000 Palestinians who remained in their homeland and became a minority living day-by-day in the shadow of the collapse of their world, when suddenly the Arab Middle East landscape became the "enemy". Subjected to the new state, as Israeli citizens, any relations with their previous world, their families, their friends and mainly their culture — were forbidden. However, it is also a story of an internal refugee who became a present-absence in his homeland.

Following the *Nakba*, the catastrophe of the Palestinian people, which turned the Palestinian people into refugees inside and outside their homeland of Palestine, poetry and culture were the only things that remained to them. It was the ultimate way of reflecting their fears, wishes, anger and their political ideas.

Taha Muhammad Ali lived through the British occupation, the Israeli occupation, the *Naksa* catastrophe of 1967, the siege of Beirut, the First Intifada, the Second Intifada, and everything in between. Along the way he lost Palestine, Saffuriyya, siblings, friends, and later, his grandson, Basel, just 15 years old. He became an internal refugee, living under military rule, subjected to curfews, travel limitations, censorship, and daily humiliations. These events and experiences shaped Ali's poetry in the reality of defeats, sorrow, and oppression.

I chose Ali's poem *Revenge* to read at a peace concert because it is an "every" Palestinian poem/story. Ali wrote this poem to his enemy, sending the most powerful message while presenting a mirror in front of his face telling himself: "I will not be like you — this will be my real revenge."

Ali passed away in 2011 leaving his precious words for us. Some will see his words in *Revenge* as surrender, maybe a weak forgiveness and others will see it as a victory. Despite the continuing disasters falling on the Palestinians — the main battle is around human morality. This human morality turns the Palestinian struggle into an international battle for every human being who believes in justice and dignity in this crazy world.

I prefer seeing the poem as Ali's personal understanding of real peace after a long and painful journey in this life — as a survived Palestinian, who managed to stay loyal to his human values. ■

Nijmeh Ali is a graduate student with the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the Universtiy of Otago.

of contentment and happiness that accompanied the hardships.

Finally, I am grateful to the Almighty for showing me the path and for the countless favours He has blessed me with. Indeed, as the Holy Qur'an says: "If you tried to count God's blessings, you could never take them all in: He is truly most forgiving and most merciful" (16:18). Interestingly, a *Harvard Health Publications* article notes, "In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships." Another way that my faith has shaped my life, and another reason to be grateful! ■

Dr Najibulla Nafraie is a lecturer in the Department of Politics and research fellow with the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago.

Revenge

At times ... I wish I could meet in a duel
the man who killed my father and razed our home,
expelling me into a narrow country.
And if he killed me, I'd rest at last,
and if I were ready— I would take my revenge!

But if it came to light, when my rival appeared,
that he had a mother waiting for him, or a father
who'd put his right hand over the heart's place in his chest
whenever his son was late even by just a quarter-hour for a meeting they'd set—
then I would not kill him, even if I could.

Likewise ... I would not murder him if it were soon made clear
that he had a brother or sisters who loved him and constantly longed to see him.
Or if he had a wife to greet him and children who couldn't bear his absence
and whom his gifts would thrill.
Or if he had friends or companions, neighbours he knew
or allies from prison or a hospital room, or classmates from his school ...
asking about him and sending him regards.

But if he turned out to be on his own— cut off like a branch from a tree—
without a mother or father,
with neither a brother nor sister,
wifeless, without a child, and without kin or neighbours or friends, colleagues or companions,
then I'd add not a thing to his pain within that aloneness—
not the torment of death, and not the sorrow of passing away.
Instead I'd be content to ignore him when I passed him by on the street—
as I convinced myself that paying him no attention in itself was a kind of revenge.

— Taha Muhammad Ali (translated by Peter Cole, Yahya Hijazi, and Gabriel Levin)

Photo of Gaza, Palestine by David Sim [Reuters]

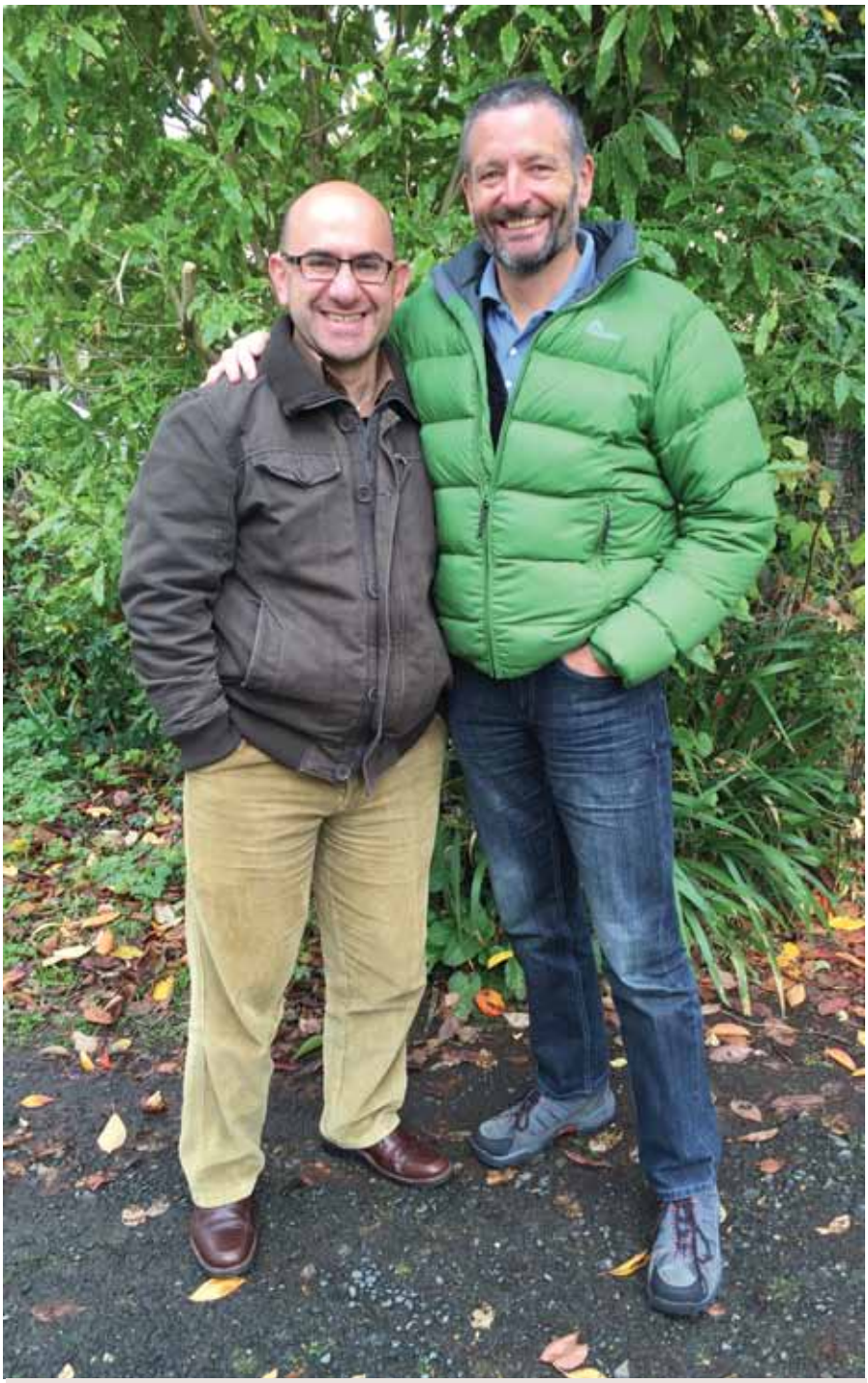
being salt and light

George Abdo tells Ann Gilroy about his call to maintain a day-care and residential home for blind and intellectually disabled children and adults in Palestine.

Ann L Gilroy

George Abdo from Bethlehem wasn't permitted to be dropped off at nearby Tel Aviv airport for his flight to New Zealand. He had to cross into Jordan and leave from there adding another 3-5 hours onto his long-haul flight. This is just one of the hardships and challenges he faces as a Palestinian.

George lives with his wife, Allison, in Bethlehem, Palestine, and is the Deputy Director of the Shepherd Society, a social services arm of the Bethlehem Bible College established in 1996 to help poor families in Bethlehem, the Gaza Strip and now also, Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Jordan.



George Abdo and New Zealand friend, Mike Tonks

house of hope

As a good shepherd, George has the interests of the House of Hope at heart. It provides day and residential care. "It was started in 1963 by a local Christian, May Ladah. She was blind and had a call by God to start the House of Hope. In the beginning she received blind people but later took in children with special needs — most with intellectual disabilities.

"In 1963 we are talking about when the Jordanians were in Palestine and the economic and general situation in the Holy Land was very difficult as most of the people were very poor. The House of Hope is now one of the oldest organisations to take care of people with disabilities.

"Currently we have 20 residential clients. We used to have more, and we would like to have more, but the House has been facing a financial crisis in the last three years, so our potential is limited. We have waiting lists. We would like to have as many clients as possible since we want to continue the vision of Aunty May. We have children from 10-14 years to adults in their 50-60s, as they often have no other option for living. We have many blind people who used to be clients, now married with families and some have good

positions in society. I have a friend who is blind and was a client, who currently has a social work position in the Palestinian Ministry of Social Work.

"Most of those at the House of Hope have families but some need round-the-clock care because of their physical conditions. The House provides 24-hour residential care. We have 17 staff, some are part-time and seven of them are blind. They are teachers for the school, cooks, and people providing activities and care. They take clients to church, have workshops and give a whole range of different care.

"We feed our clients. We educate them in skills to enable them to be independent in their daily lives. We teach the blind to use braille to be able to write and read. Also we educate them in a profession. For example, we have workshops to produce brooms and brushes. We educate clients, especially the blind, in these professions so they will have their own income and also to have an income for the House of Hope. It is really important for the House to be self-sustaining and for our clients to be able to develop their own sense of importance. We recognise that someone with an intellectual disability is not fixed in three months. We need to look at 20 years. We can't do it in a short term. The House of Hope is a commitment to a people, a commitment to a people that has nothing else.

"If the financial crisis continues we will have to reduce the number of staff. We hope that this won't come. We also have a gift shop. (The House of Hope is located on a main tourist road and a current project is to make the shop front more noticeable.) We purchase wood from the local community and sell goods to tourist groups. Since the House of Hope has been serving the community for more than 50 years it is well known in Palestinian society and the Christian community. It is really important for tourists to come to Bethlehem because they support the Christian community by buying the olive wood carvings and souvenirs. When they don't come a most important income source for the community is lost."

christians leaving bethlehem

"When there is no income Christians begin to look elsewhere in the world. Christians in Bethlehem used to have three main sources of income. First was working in Israel. Second, working in the tourist sector — in olive wood shops, factories and hotels, and third was in Christian organisations, like schools, universities and NGOs. Now the number of Palestinians who work in Israel has decreased because of the hard political situation, so currently the only work is in Christian organisations and in tourism.

"As Palestinians — Christian and Muslim — we are suffering many difficulties and challenges, for example, restricted movement. Before 1991 Palestinians could go to any place in Palestine and Israel in their cars. But now we are not allowed to go in our Palestinian cars to Israel. People in the West Bank are not allowed to go to Gaza. We also face difficulties in our movement across the West Bank. Sometimes the army puts up mobile checkpoints as well as their fixed checkpoints and sometimes they close the checkpoint so that the south of the West Bank is separated from the north of the West Bank. We have many people in Bethlehem who work in Ramallah. Instead of taking them one hour to go from Bethlehem to Ramallah it can take three, four or five hours.

"Even Palestinians with permits to work in Jerusalem and Israel, especially if they go from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, have trouble. Many of them go to the checkpoints at 2 or 3am in order to reach their work at 6 or 7am.

"The Palestine government is a poor government and sometimes it is not able to pay its workers. The Israelis hold back their taxes and it can take up to 3-4 months for the people to get their salaries.

"Christians used to be 78 per cent of the population of Bethlehem district, now they are 12 per cent. The majority are leaving because of the political and economic situation."

Recently Pope Francis referred to Palestinian Christians suffering "white glove terrorism". He said that they are being "driven from their homes, from their lands and are victims of persecution 'with white gloves'. It is hidden, but it is there."

living in Jesus' birthplace

George said: "My grandfather was an Assyrian Orthodox living in Turkey in 1915 and because of the troubles, he came to Syria because he had relatives there, and from Syria to Lebanon and then to Bethlehem because he wanted to live in the place where Jesus was born. My mother's family have been here for 300 years.

"I had never thought I would leave this country but to be honest if the situation keeps like this maybe in four or five years I will leave. This is not only my point of view, I know many, many people who are thinking seriously about leaving the country.

At the same time, "one of our goals is to keep Christians in the Holy Land to be salt and light to others. Jesus asked the disciples to be witnesses not just in Europe, USA, New Zealand or other countries around the world, but in Palestine."

And, there is the House of Hope in Bethlehem, with children and adults who need the education and care it offers, and shepherds, like George, to keep it going.

And the yearning for justice, restoration of dignity and reconciliation lacing George's words: "We should not overcome the evil with evil, but overcome the evil with good." ■

Ann L Gilroy rsj is the editor of Tui Motu Magazine.

For further information see:
www.hoh.friendz@gmail.com
www.hohbethlehem.org

an ecological reading of the gospel of mark

In this fifth part in the series Elaine Wainwright unpacks the story of the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7:24-30

Elaine Wainwright

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile [Greek], of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

[Mark 7:24-30 NRSV used with permission.]

In the first of this series, I explored how we might read scripture ecologically. Such a reading attends not only to the human and the holy that readers generally notice, but also to habitat. Place, space, together with all the elements of the natural and built environments, invite our scrutiny. They are mixed in with the holy and the human.

An ecological reading is a justice-oriented approach because it uncovers structures and practices of injustice in the entire more-than-human community. We find these injustices woven into Mark's text from its first century context as well as from millennia of readings. In keeping with the prophetic tradition, it is important to undertake this critique together with our re-reading of the text for our times. These two tasks, critique and re-reading, can be interwoven into an ecological interpretation.

borderland place

The Markan story of the encounter between Jesus and a woman who is identified only by her ethnic and geographic location (Mk 7:26) is grounded in place. As the story opens, Jesus leaves a place designated very generally by the adverb "there". The last place named in the story was Genessareth (Mk 6:53) where Jesus was healing (Mk 6:53-56), alerting ecological readers to the bodiliness associated with such healing as bodies touched. The place also encodes the materiality of the plain along the north-western side of the Sea of Galilee, rich in agriculture as the bread basket of the region.

The entanglement in habitat continues as Mk 7:24 unfolds. Jesus moves to the region of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast which borders upper Galilee. It is a borderland space where ethnicities and access to material resources were in complex interrelationship. Historically, Israel had shared a tense relationship with Tyre, which had a history of wealth. However, as an island city it needed not only its own hinterland to supply its inhabitants with food (bread) but also the land of its most immediate neighbor, Galilee. We find encoded in this opening verse bread and boundary, and the economic power that functions in relation to them.

As contemporary readers we will recognise the permeable nature of many borders for humans and other-than-humans today and the complex interrelationships across borders.

tangles of meaning

The attention shifts in Mk 7:25 to an unidentified woman (later tradition will call her Justa, the just one) who is described in relation to her daughter who, in her turn, is described in relation to her body — she has in her body an unclean spirit. (The daughter is identified twice in this way.) That is all we know of each of them at this point. The description given to the woman's daughter could evoke a number of different bodily ailments or malfunctions that were attributed to evil or unclean spirits. Spirits and humans were thought to inhabit the same sub-lunar realm in first century cosmology. Spirits were believed to attack the human body and to damage social relationships. Given the complex material and socio-cultural relationships already identified with the border location, as readers we might well consider how

much of this is projected onto the body of the young girl. The woman, desperate for her daughter's healing, falls at Jesus' feet. This accentuates the socio-religious, cultural and gender differentiations inherent in this story as well as a recognition of Jesus' healing power.

bread and dogs

It is only in Mk 7:26 that the woman herself is identified and then it is in relation to her ethnic origins and geographic location. She is Greek, *Hēllēn*. "Syro-Phoenician" makes her ethnically Phoenician and geographically from the Syrian coast or hinterland. While she is located in place she has no name. However she acts decisively. She asks ("begs" in the NRSV translation) Jesus to heal her daughter. The text further highlights the impact of the border location.

The gospel reader is shocked by Jesus' response to the woman: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Mk 7:27). This resonates with the tone of an ethnic insider looking from his own side of the border and naming the neighbouring peoples with words that encode in the text material elements used as symbol — "children's bread" and "dogs".

Bread is a daily staple that can represent a parent's care for his or her child. Earlier in the gospel narrative Jesus has fed a multitude of men with bread ("not counting women and children" the Matthean narrator will add, indicating that they too were fed — Mk 6:30-44; cf Matt 14:21). The phrase in Jesus' statement, "and throw it to the dogs", puts a negative construction on dogs. They are presumably outside the house and bread is thrown to them, rather than given with care, and then only after the children, insiders, have been fed first. This establishes a hierarchy that impacts into the human and other-than-human worlds.

hierarchy rearranged

But the words and imagery of the woman's reply upturn this hierarchy. She brings the dogs from outside to a place under the table (not yet at the table) where they share the children's crumbs. Her words are consistent with illustrations on first century reliefs showing dogs present at the dinner table and being offered food by children. An ecological reader will understand both the "bread" and the "dogs" of Mk 7:28 not just metaphorically but will *critique* the way they are used in support of hieracrchy and *reclaim* them in their interrelationship.

healing and wholeness

As a result of the unnamed woman's word/*logos*, Jesus proclaims that her daughter has been freed of the demon. It is the woman, not Jesus, who has been able to see a world healed of borders and boundaries that exclude, and of gendered relationships that oppress in word and deed. The materiality of place, or space on the edge, or at the in-between, is the context for such healing. And human bodies, bread and dogs are actors encoded in its unfolding. Healing happens to an individual and happens in relationships — grounded in space, time and in all that is material and social in them.

What the text does not say but seems to imply is that in this encounter Jesus was healed too. Then he was able to see with an inclusive vision as children and dogs moved to new places in relation to house and table. Indeed the demon was gone. ■

Elaine Wainwright RSM is the emeritus Professor of Theology at The University of Auckland and an independent biblical scholar.

women working with women

Sandra Winton talks to New Zealander, Brigid Inder OBE, about leading the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, *an international human rights organisation.*

Sandra Winton

One day a woman walks out of the bush in Northern Uganda. She brings with her two children. Susannah has been missing from her village and family since she was abducted as a girl by the Lord's Resistance Army. At the time of her abduction and during her conscription as a child soldier she underwent unspeakable horrors — being kept in the dark, unpredictably and repeatedly dragged out to be raped, given drugs, deprived of sleep, forced to witness and to carry out atrocities, even against her own. All of this lasted 12 years. Finally with incomprehensible courage, knowing that she will be killed if seen, she manages to escape. She walks for miles, finally arriving at the home of her family. How is she to be rehabilitated into family, community, normality? Where will her voice be heard?

This is the sort of situation Dunedinite Brigid Inder faces as the Executive Director of the *Women's Initiative for Gender Justice,* an international women's human rights organisation based in The Hague. The organisation works alongside the International Criminal Court (ICC) and addresses gender-based violence. The group has a two-pronged strategy: to empower and resource people to be advocates in their own situation, and to influence decision-makers. They are working in countries scarred by long-term conflict such as Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and more recently, Libya.

relationships are crucial

"We are not an organisation that goes in, documents sexual violence, and then goes out of the situation and tries to do something with that in an international report. We spend a year or two listening to communities. We form relationships. We build partnerships. We support capacity. We build leadership with local advocates for gender justice.

"For example, in Uganda, we have been there for a decade. In the Democratic Republic of Congo we have been working there since 2006. In Sudan, we have been working on the Sudan situation since 2007-8. In Libya, that's a more recent situation. We have had a programme there since mid 2011."

accountability for sexual violence

Brigid speaks with pride of the interviews local people have conducted with women in order to gather their stories. These will provide evidence to bring before the International Criminal Court (ICC).

"The goal is to change the script. Where historically sexual violence has been under-prosecuted and overlooked by the post-WWII Nuremberg Tribunal and other courts, we are trying to change and broaden the work of an international institution, specifically the International Criminal Court, to be able to provide gender-inclusive justice.

"We have built very robust relationships with the ICC. We are being true to the voice of victim-survivors, the voice that stays focused on the obligation of the court to fulfil its mandate to provide justice for communities affected by armed conflict, affected by war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. And specifically, the court's mandate to provide

Brigid Inder outside the Tui Motu Office where she lived when it was the Catholic Chaplaincy.

accountability for sexual violence in a way that no other international criminal court has ever had quite the same responsibility and obligation to do."

accountability that lasts

Brigid is a Special Advisor on Gender to Prosecutor Bensouda in the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC. Speaking of the Court and individual countries' accountability for sexual violence Brigid said: "We have not yet reached critical change. That is, change that is understood. Change that moves an issue forward in a way that rolling it back is difficult to do. Change that does not feel so vulnerable and so contested and so negotiable. While we are seeing progress in the courts we haven't yet seen any convictions. We haven't yet seen really good jurisprudence from the judges.

"While convictions are important, my own interest is in jurisprudence, what it is saying about sexual violence, what it is saying about the use and purpose of this form of violence in the context of armed conflict, understanding the impact from a victim-survivor's perspective.

"It is the jurisprudence, almost beyond convictions. It's the jurisprudence that effects critical change. It's mindset. It's insight. It's understanding. It's the conceptual realisation that I'm really interested in."

resolute despite horror

Does working with horror daily and facing disappointments from the legally educated and powerful, take its toll on you? "Mostly I am able to turn it into a sense of determination, a sense of what else we could be doing, what else could we try, what new strategy haven't we thought of? How do we bring a critical voice to this issue so that we keep a spotlight on it and it doesn't get to creep away into the corner? What more should we be doing with our partners? That's really why our country-based programmes are so effective. We do genuinely listen and collaborate with local partners who describe what needs to happen.

Painting by Teemu Mäki. Used with permission. www.teemumaki.com

I find those relationships very inspiring and there really isn't room for rage. They don't feel rage — it's too exhausting. You can't have rage and do all the things we are trying to do.

our partnerships

"An example of partners we work with is the women in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These groups are typically comprised of victim-survivors of the armed conflict themselves and/or victims of sexual violence. Many of them were not advocates before the war started. They might have been farmers. They saw that there was no one else to respond to the violence they saw occurring, so many of them stepped forward to start a programme — to respond to the violence, to give women victim-survivors a place to gather, and collect some fresh clothing. So they did not come to this work in any sort of trained or prepared way. They came to it in response to the violence and violation and the war that had broken out. So that's why we do a lot of capacity-building. Because certainly they are, as we tell them all the time, experts in the conflict. They have developed a lot of their own skills and their knowledge is incredible. Their status as trustworthy people within the community is very high.

"Another example is young women we are working with in Northern Uganda who are former child soldiers of the Lord's Resistance Army. These are young women who were abducted as girls, many of them taken from their school, or taken from their village or taken while walking home from school, forced into the LRA, forced to fight, raped and sexually enslaved and either have escaped or returned, many with children and some of whom now are becoming gender-justice advocates. So we are doing quite a lot of work building their skills and supporting their process and engaging them in our programmes. We hope to support them to become the next generation of leaders."

meaningful work

Brigid speaks of what has motivated her over the last 10 years: "I don't do this for the sake of work itself, or for the salary that might be associated with it. I guess I have always wanted to feel purposeful about my work, to have a sense of contributing, a sense of participating in creating a kind of community, or country, or politics, or movement — a world that is somehow better, kinder, more just, more gentle. And if in any way I can make a small contribution to that, that feels meaningful to me." ■

Sandra Winton OP, a former teacher, now works as a psychotherapist in Dunedin.

taking a risk

Alice Snedden describes the realities of her long-held dream of living in New York.

Alice Snedden

When I was 14 I discovered a beautiful painting depicting a bird's-eye view of Manhattan. I loved the way it made New York seem organised, busy and full. So I photocopied it in black and white and blue-tacked it to my bedroom wall right next to my bed.

only in America

Following the airlines instructions I disembarked from the plane in LA and started toward the end of the terminal. An official airport helper in a blue vest yelled at me: "What visa are you?"

"J-1 exchange," I replied.

"Wrong way then, you don't go down there!"

"Oh, ok really? The airline told me to head straight down here."

"Do what you want then. I don't care!"

So I did what I wanted and ignored her. An hour later, proved wrong, embarrassed, and now going in the right direction, I walked past her again. To her delight she noticed and mocked loudly: "Oh, poor baby!" I laughed out loud at how funny and uninhibited she was and how it was the kind of interaction I had always imagined I'd have, only in America.

new york! new york!

The afternoon I arrived in New York I headed straight to my first class at the Upright Citizens Brigade. The UCB is a comedy improvisation theatre in New York. Over the last decade it has gained enormous popularity, in part because of its famous alumni, but also because tickets to shows are never more than $10 and there's always something on. I had watched and read so much about the UCB that it felt both strange and familiar to be there.

My first class was with a group of people, many of whom became my first and best friends in New York. The students were open and kind, some offering to help with my CV and job hunt. For my first eight weeks those weekly classes were the unit by which I measured time spent in New York. I loved the classes, was entertained by the weird mixture of students and completely won over by the content. After class on my first night in New York I visited a diner alone, and in the middle of Manhattan ordered a cheeseburger and milkshake. It was the coolest feeling.

good fortune

It's lucky that we can't foresee the future; had I been able to see the next few weeks I might have just decided that New York was for visits only and not habitation. I was fortunate to rent an apartment and move in within a week of arriving. It was a large room in a beautiful loft above a TV studio in Brooklyn. It was owned by a quiet middle-aged couple, both of whom were artists and worked in the apartment's large studio. My room was homely and proved to be a blessing as in the weeks following this small victory I required surgery on my toe, contracted pneumonia and got hit by a car. Not for the first time in my life, I would cost my insurance company more money than I would ever pay them.

sick then injured

My first two months in New York were trying. As each problem presented itself, my solutions only seemed to make things worse. An infection in my toe made it difficult to walk around and apply for jobs in the first weeks. So I bought a bike but pneumonia soon made me too tired to ride. My next few weeks were spent going to as few places as possible and spending most of my money on taxis. It was when I felt buoyed by landing a job interview that I had a burst of energy and decided to hop back on my bike. The morning of my interview I left home feeling healthy, optimistic about job possibilities, and not for the first time, quietly arrogant that I lived in New York. I felt this way right up until the moment a taxi moved too eagerly through a stop sign and I rode my bike right into its side.

I lay on the sidewalk as a passerby called an ambulance and the taxi driver stopped, stunned. My head, shoulder and confidence hurt as I waited for the EMTs to arrive. The first medic reassured me I probably didn't have a broken neck. But to be safe he said I would have to sign a disclaimer saying I refused a stretcher. He didn't want to be sued.

any parent's nightmare

While in hospital, I texted my family and friends frantically, knowing it was in the middle of their night but hoping just to talk to someone. I had wanted to call them to help ease my panic but my phone was out of money. That morning I had chosen to buy coffee and breakfast over calling credit. Barely knowing anyone in New York, I thought my phone was rendered useless anyway. Lying in hospital well past lunchtime, hungry again and not at all comforted by the memory of breakfast, I realised I had made a poor decision.

When my mum and dad eventually woke up they called. I cried and apologised for not wearing a helmet.

They reassured me. My mum told me it was all going to be ok and put money in my account to catch a taxi home. As I had been put into hospital by a taxi, it was only fitting that I be returned home by one. When my scans were declared clear I was released with a sling for my shoulder and a promise I'd be right eventually. That night I missed my first class. It would have been class number seven, marking six weeks to the day of my living in New York.

kiwi in the big apple

I hadn't really given much thought to the enormous difference in scale between home and New York. I had become so comfortable at home that I had forgotten what it was like to be foreign and new. In those first few moments of seeing New York from the plane I was awestruck. The buildings were unfathomably tall and everywhere. It was beautiful but it made me feel scared and small. It didn't take me long to realise that the city's daunting scale is also its gift. I learnt that the perspective I had from the plane is not as it is up close. Up close, the city is dense, so dense that you can't see anything except what's right in front of you. It's as if by design, the city is forcing you to take it one step at a time. That's at least how I felt those first six weeks; if I just took it one step at a time that would be enough.

a job - another step

Three days later I got an interview at a New Zealand restaurant in SoHo. I caught the train there, apologised for my sling, and was offered the job of hostess which I gratefully accepted. On the way home I bought a sandwich and sat on the steps of a closed store and ate it. Across the road I spotted Meg Ryan flagging a cab just as I had seen her do in the movies — back when I could only imagine what it might be like to live in New York. ■

Aucklander Alice Snedden has a New Zealand law degree and is now trying her hand at comedy and living in New York.

brother grain and sister mustard seed

Kathleen Rushton explores two parables of the reign of God in Mark 4:26-34.

Kathleen Rushton

I was forking potatoes when Joseph, my young neighbour, exclaimed: "Ours come nice and clean in a plastic bag." I felt sad. How far his understanding was from my own childhood farm experience where everyone I knew grew vegetables. The garden-less earth surrounding Joseph's home and supermarket shelves of "clean" vegetables divorced this child from the abundance of the Earth.

I fossicked for the remains of the seed potato that had fallen into the earth, died and given new life … all a bit distant for a six-year-old. So I went to the shed for a packet of radish seeds. Joseph and I prepared the earth and planted the little seeds. I hoped to connect his experience of "nice and clean" with the wonder of the cycle of growth in the good earth. Joseph waited and watched. His excitement grew in his pilgrimages to the garden as little sprouts pushed up and leaves appeared. What was happening beneath, in the soil, was beyond his understanding.

parables of the good earth

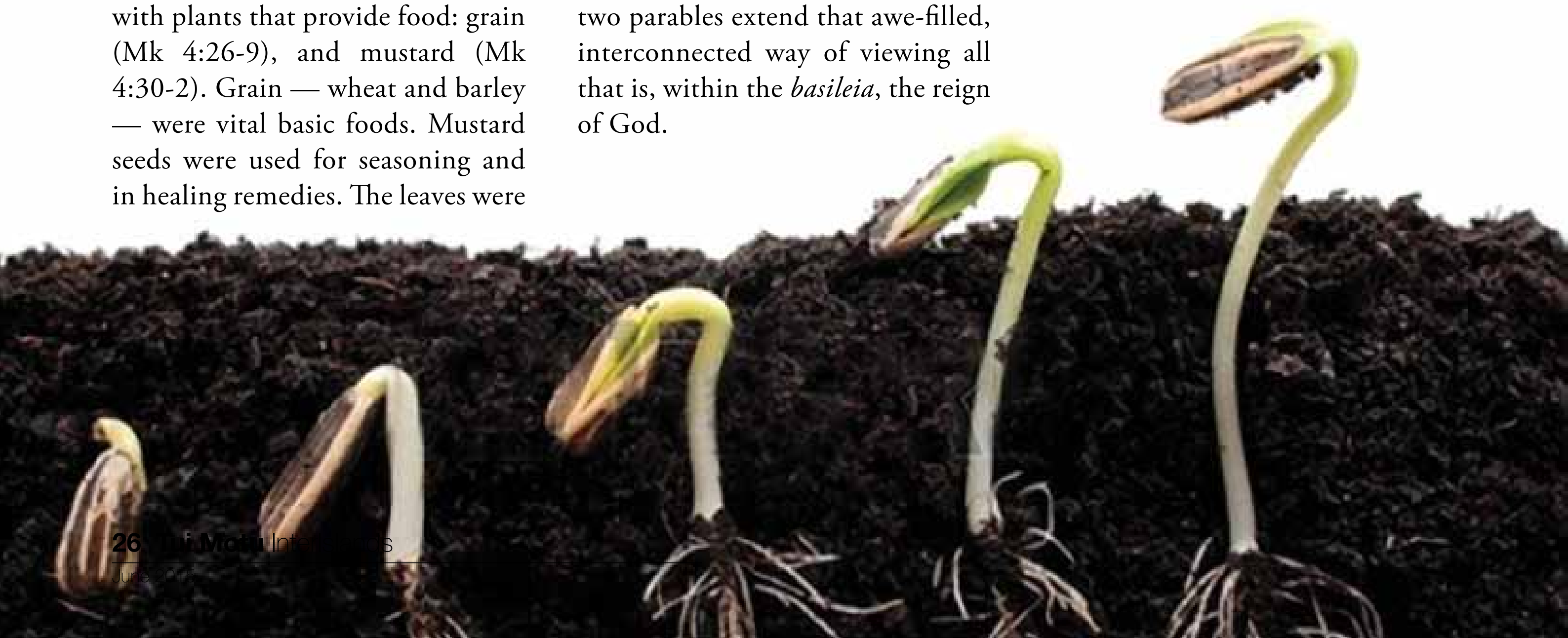
The two parables, in a series of parables and sayings in Mark 4:1-34, sketch the experience of farmers with plants that provide food: grain (Mk 4:26-9), and mustard (Mk 4:30-2). Grain — wheat and barley — were vital basic foods. Mustard seeds were used for seasoning and in healing remedies. The leaves were eaten raw or cooked. The parables don't tell of the farmers' experience. They don't mention the hardships of preparing the earth — ploughing, harrowing, arid earth, lack of water, tending, weeding, protecting from insects and disease. Absent, too, is reference to the toil for landlords, struggles of tenant farmers, debt, enslavement and dispossession. What is going on here?

Those who hear Mark's first parable of the grain are not pressed into activity (Mk 4:26-9). While it tells of sowing and reaping, the emphasis of the story is on the reverent wait of the people of the land. Today many people never see a ploughed field. If they do, they may think of what is going on beneath the earth as a biological happening only. It was very different for the people of Jesus' time who when walking through or alongside a ploughed field, understood plants and the potential food on which they would live, as God's creative work. This connection was on their lips and in their hearts, for praise of God and creation are at the core of the Psalms and Jewish prayer. Plants and Earth's processes are agents revealing God's mercy. The two parables extend that awe-filled, interconnected way of viewing all that is, within the *basileia*, the reign of God.

parables of awe-filled gazing

The main character in the grain parable is not the sower or the reaper but the other-than-human, the seed, which ripens despite all the forces stacked against it. Central to this parable is the wonder of creation. The farmer who had scattered the seed on the earth (Mk 4:26) goes about his ordinary life "night and day" in the Jewish rhythm of time where sunset is the beginning of the new day (Mk 4:27). The farmer does not understand how the seed grows. The Earth produces growth "of itself" (*automatê* Mk 4:28) without visible cause. The energy of the seed is unexplained. The focus is the working of the natural processes of Earth which transform the seed.

This parable of gazing directs the reader to the wonder of seeing Earth with fresh eyes. While other parts of the gospel stress the hardships of life on the land, this parable creates peace and composure for weary people as it illustrates what happens when God is totally in charge of life and right-relations exist. Through the agency of the seed, readers discover that the *basileia* of God develops at God's initiative and its growth is unexplained and unseen.



The second parable does not mention a human agent either. A mustard seed, the other-than-human main character, is sown (Mk 4:32). The end is in the beginning; the great in the small; the present is busy developing though hidden and insignificant. The seed grows "into the greatest shrub of all and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in shade" (Mk 4:32). This mysterious saying was well-known (cf. Ps 104:12; Ezekiel 17:23). The image of the world tree in whose branches birds find shelter was used widely and also as an imperial symbol of empire, *basileia*. Is Mark's shrub suggesting a different quality for God's cosmic reign, *basileia*?

contrasting stories of seeds

Two contrasting stories of growth come to mind. In story one, without the knowledge of most New Zealanders and with no possibility of public oversight, the Government has and is sowing secret agreements. Sprouting is the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP or TPPA) which, if concluded, will be an international treaty between New Zealand, the United States and 10 other Pacific Rim countries. Its main aim is to grow an attractive environment where its branches shelter economic empires (overseas companies) to operate here (and in 11 other countries). New Zealand will be bound not to the interests of ordinary New Zealanders but to those of big transnational corporations. A significant concern is the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) which would give foreign investors the right to sue our government in private offshore tribunals for introducing laws or policies which they claim would significantly hurt their investments. This would hamstring New Zealand moves to strengthen environmental protection. Other aspects of TPP would undermine Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the environment, human rights and democracy. (See, www.itisourfuture.org.nz, *Tui Motu,* May 2015.)

In story two, Wangari Maathai returned to her village in Kenya after years studying overseas, and discovered women did not have firewood to cook food. The once fertile landscape where her grandmother grew food was parched; gone was the ancient fig tree by the depleted, polluted, once clear stream. Forests had been cut down. Wangari gathered the women. They collected seeds from distant trees, sowed them and nurtured the seedlings until they were ready to plant as trees. The wellbeing of earth, water and people returned and flourished. This founder of the Green Belt Movement and Kenyan Nobel Peace Laureate's simple act of sowing seeds to plant trees, grew into a nationwide movement to safeguard the environment, protect human rights and defend democracy. (See, www.takingrootfilm)

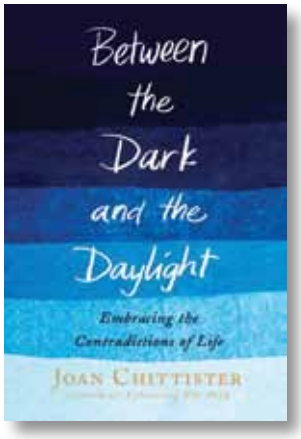
pondering parables of the *basileia*

New Testament scholar Luise Schottroff laments that modern readers do not see Jesus' nature parables as "a school for appreciating God's creation." Maybe this month we could practise an appreciation of creation. Who or what shelters in my branches and in the organisations with which I associate? In the two parables, how do the other-than-human characters and the processes of the Earth reveal God's mercy? How do the waiting and gazing parables extend my appreciation of the interconnected relationships of all life in the *basileia* of God? Waiting and gazing will definitely not be passive activities for us. ■

Kathleen Rushton RSM is a scripture scholar and adult educator.

facing dificult times

Between the Dark and the Daylight: Embracing the Contradictions of Life



by Joan Chittister OSB

Published by Image, 2015

Reviewed by Tony Ryan

In this small book (173 pages) Joan Chittister has crammed 32 mini-essays on a range of puzzling and often frustrating concerns that bother most people at one time or another. The essays are individual and independent of one another, which is good, as this is a book for dipping into, rather than for reading straight through as if it were a novel. While each essay is short — averaging five pages — it deals succinctly and surprisingly thoroughly with its specific topic. None of the topics is overtly spiritual or religious, although matters of the spirit or of religion are in the background of many of them.

In each essay, the author tackles one niggling problem, analyses it and suggests how to avoid being concerned by it. However, "by the nature of the beast" there are no easy solutions and while the book will offer some help in dealing with these deep-seated problems, it will be unlikely to resolve them completely.

Chapter headings give some indication of the content. Examples are: The place of tsunamis in the ocean of life; The insecurity of certainty; The role of failure in success; The struggle between guilt and growth; The loneliness of love; The pain of the search for spiritual painlessness.

As always with Joan Chittister, the writing is smooth, fluent and lucid. She convinces with her own certainty. She is always easy to read but is far from being facile.

This is a book for anyone who is troubled by doubts or indecisions in their lives — and who is not? ■

a bishop rev

Slipping the Moorings: A Memoir Weaving Faith with Justice, Ethics and Community

By Bishop Richard Randerson

Published by Matai House Wellington, 2015

Reviewed by Bishop Peter J. Cullinane

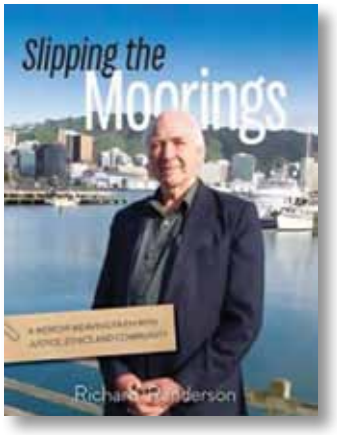
Reading Bishop Richard Randerson's memoirs has been a genuine pleasure.

Richard's vocation to ordained ministry originated in homely 1950s New Zealand, "the last decade of the Christendom era". The first years of his ministry were in "the rapidly secularising society and post-Christendom Church" of the 1960s onwards. The contrast precipitated an early vocational crisis for him. But, as it has always been with the prophets, personal crisis is what leads to one's true vocation and mission.

For Richard and wife Jackie, three years of study and ministry in the USA and Britain resolved the crisis by revealing the Church's need to turn its focus outwards from self-concern to where people are living their lives. Helping the Church to make that turn is Richard's story and the theme running throughout this book. It is a story of compassion and courage, told with loyalty and gratitude to his associates, honesty, good humour and some great anecdotes.

There are some things Roman Catholic leadership could learn from how the Anglican Church has grappled with issues ranging from liturgical renewal to action for social justice and ministry out on the edges. Between these poles there are the difficult and sometimes divisive issues,

iews his life



including a few on which we differ and some we are belatedly addressing.

But mostly it is about making the Church's voice heard in the public square, and being present there. His treatment of the still-widening gap between wealthy and poor in NZ left me wondering which is worst: the painful consequences for its victims, or the ugly attitudes of those whose policies cause it — or the indifference of most of us who let them?

Richard believes "the Church does too little to provide an intelligent and robust expression of its theology in the public arena, abandoning the field to atheists, humanists and others to peddle their anti-religious messages to an undiscerning community". This failure exposes people to the crudities of fundamentalism and the fallacies of Dawkins and Geering.

This book is the work of a skilled and dedicated pastor, who takes both the Gospel and social analysis very seriously. He shares with us his faith, his disappointments, and his personal prayer life. Though it is Richard's and Jackie's story, it somehow belongs to Church and society and all of us. ■

a generation lost

Testament of Youth

Director: James Kent

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

At a time when we are being swamped with commemorations and re-enactments of the First World War on our television screens, *Testament of Youth* comes as a welcome oasis. While no overt war violence is depicted, the film does not shy away from the consequences — physical, psychological and societal — of the war to end all wars. As one of the characters puts it: "All of us are surrounded by ghosts; now we have to learn how to live with them."

Based on the immensely popular 1933 memoir of the same name by Vera Brittain, the film depicts the young Vera's bitter journey from innocence to experience. This story of wartime tragedy follows a simple yet inevitable trajectory, chronicling the loss of a whole generation of young men through the eyes of one exceptionally talented and sensitive young woman.

Spirited and persuasive beyond her years, Vera (played by Alicia Vikander) is presented as a powerful female voice in the deeply patriarchal society of Edwardian Britain. Each step in her journey through the landscape of war represents an argument won. She first convinces her father that she is worthy of a place at Oxford, despite women being denied degrees, and then browbeats him into allowing her brother Edward to enlist — an action she comes to regret with every fibre of her being. Despite excelling at Oxford, she convinces her college to release her for nursing duties in England, and then argues her way to the front in France where she is confronted with the full horrors of industrial warfare.

As the storm clouds gather over Europe, Vera and her friends — children of secure, privileged families — enjoy a golden youth among the woods, lakes and moorlands of rural Derbyshire. Vera is adored by her brother and admired by his male friends, one of whom, Roland, inevitably falls in love with the vivacious and attractive bluestocking. All the characters are noble and well-intentioned. There is no malice or evil to be found in this Garden of Eden — only the darkening shadow of war.

Unfortunately, the decision to structure the film around such polar opposites — a pre-war idyll versus the hell of the Western Front — means that characters and situations are often oversimplified, even clichéd. Melodrama is never far from the surface, and it is not difficult to see how Vera's story was turned into a TV miniseries in 1979. Although *Testament of Youth* carries a strong anti-war message, it could have been even more powerfully expressed. See it and make up your own mind. ■

Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

reading our mind

Microsoft has created a voice-activated "virtual assistant" called Cortana and built it into mobile software. Cortana can extract appointment details from an email and alert the user when it's time to go. Although currently the device checks if the user wishes this to happen, the aim is to develop an "omniscient" device that will try to anticipate the user's needs and take over a wide range of functions humans currently perform.

The big companies are trying to create a system that will eliminate the need for individual apps — these will become secondary to the need to complete a task. A recent *Business Herald* article claimed: "Microsoft is betting that most people are not yet ready to hand too much control of their lives to an artificial brain."

I wonder if this proposed reducing of the pressures of modern living is positive progress, or is it another step on the road to individual disempowerment?

work of a prophet

Noam Chomsky, 88, is described as the "father of modern linguistics" and is even better known as a political activist and public intellectual. In an interview with *Commonweal* about Oscar Romero he said: "What's translated in English as 'prophet' doesn't mean prophet. It basically means intellectual. They were what we would call dissident intellectuals. Amos says: 'I am not a prophet. I am not the son of a prophet. I'm a simple shepherd and farmer.' He was distancing himself from what we would call the intellectual elite, and speaking for the people very eloquently. Jeremiah, of course, was not treated nicely for his pleas for mercy and justice. But that's typical. The people we call the prophets are the earliest dissident intellectuals, and they're treated like most dissident intellectuals — very badly. They're imprisoned, driven into the desert."

a prophet today

Because of their common training and work experiences it is easy for members of a particular calling to develop a sense of "community", adopting patterns of support and solidarity in varying degrees. This can lead to a closing of ranks when unacceptable behaviour occurs. Likewise when a member of the "group" publicly criticises commonly accepted attitudes he or she is "sent to Coventry". We have seen this with clericalism and police covering up criminal behaviour of a mate. It is hard to go against the majority, as Pope Francis is experiencing.

A power struggle in the Vatican and within sections of the wider hierarchy is becoming more open. Veteran observer, Marco Politi, described in *The Tablet* how Pope Francis explained to the Curia before Christmas that they need to stop behaving like an absolute power and become a "working group at the service of the bishops".

Australian Cardinal George Pell (a personal friend of Benedict XVI) and the financial reform he has spearheaded on the pope's behalf, have been a proxy target.

So far the resistance strategies have been two-fold: leaking embarrassing information (some untrue) about Pell to the Italian press, and trying to undercut new financial structures created by Francis through a series of amendments to their statutes. In effect they are trying to cut reform off at the knees. They failed and now a new tactic has appeared. Cardinal Coccopalmerio, a leading opponent in the Curia, has suggested creating a new office to supervise assets — a good idea. However it would be controlled by the Cardinals under whose departments they currently fall, and taken away from Pell's Secretariat — definitely not a good idea.

Politi wrote: "An initial analysis of the delegates to the October Synod (of Bishops) chosen by the national bishops' conferences, shows that those prepared to apply the brakes are a formidable group."

While it seems that a majority of the world's bishops would like to see Curial power curtailed, many find the radical obligations stemming from Francis's words and example are disturbingly different from the priorities and expectations prevailing in their offices.

While Pope Francis is embattled he is standing firm. Nevertheless the personal cost must be enormous. However he is battle-hardened by his experience in Buenos Aires, where his difficulties were aggravated by Cardinal Sodano, Pope John-Paul's Secretary of State. As Cardinal Walter Kasper commented recently: "Let us pray. A battle is under way." ■

The years of Vatican oversight of the Leaders of Congregations of Women Religious, LCWR, in the USA are over. With typical generosity the President, Sr Sharon Holland said: "We've learned more about listening, about asking questions, about a contemplative process that takes time to consider and understand the other person, trying to understand ourselves and see the implications of certain ways of acting. We've learnt tools for dealing with difficulty.

"All of us in it have had the experience of being able to enter into constructive dialogue. Others have watched the procedure of conversations, of dialogue, of seeking deeper understanding of one another."

Will we hear the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith's reflection on the process? ■

— Editor

new era begins

Robert Consedine

When Pope Francis was elected in 2013 a radical new era began in the Catholic Church. The election heralded a change as momentous as any in the last 800 years.

The Cardinals had chosen the first pope from the developing world, the first non-European, the first Jesuit and the first pope to be ordained a priest after Vatican II.

The new Pope took the name Francis after Francis of Assisi, a famous social drop-out of the 13th century, who gave away all his possessions to the poor.

Pope Francis has already demonstrated in word and action that Vatican II is the driving force of his papacy. He immediately discarded the trappings of monarchy and went to the local prison to wash the feet of prisoners and of a Muslim woman.

All his predecessors had followed a model of Church which began in the 11th century with Pope Gregory VII. He had orchestrated a "revolution from above" which became known as the "Gregorian Reform". He created the centralist-monarchist-absolutist papacy that catholics all took for granted. He reaffirmed mandatory clerical celibacy. And from that time rigid judicial processes predominantly governed Vatican relationships.

To begin to understand today's radical changes we need to view the ministry of Pope Francis from a different paradigm. He has discarded the authoritarian model of the last 800 years.

The greater authority is now to reside in the "people of God" as Vatican II intended. Pope Francis stresses the importance of the *sensus fidei,* and says the church must open its ears to the people. And for the people of God the times are changing.

Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister captures the historical moment: "We are currently living at a crossover moment in time. Whatever has been considered true, up to this time, will not be considered true after this time." Evolution is changing the way we think about God. Mercy Sister Elaine Wainwright contends that "we need to read our entire sacred story with a new lens – ecologically". The survival of the planet could be at stake.

The changes that are needed will be transformational. What might this mean for all of us?

My belief is that Pope Francis is unlikely to change current Church policy and teaching. That way of dictating from the top belongs to the old model.

We need to understand that Pope Francis is neither on the left nor the right. He has returned to the (radical) message of Jesus.

His approach is to model change personally and create an environment where change can happen at every level by sending signals and challenges to the people of God and the world.

He is dialoguing with more and more diverse people — women, men, families, cultures, other faiths and no faith — to set the course for the Catholic Church in the new millennium. This will take time. He could also be following a wonderful mantra from the World Council of Churches' gathering in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968: "the world sets the agenda for the Church". Vatican II challenged us to "read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel". These are tough radical challenges. The yardstick is the gospel.

As we deepen our vision we could remember what the great theologian, Fr. Richard McBrien used to say: "When we study history, we realise that there is very, very little about the church that cannot change."

Pope Francis has set the scene for change.

Don't expect the Vatican, bishops or priests to have all the answers. We all need to face the challenges.

After a process of careful discernment the "people of God" could make equally radical changes. The possibilities are breathtaking and urgent. It is time for the people of God to act! ■

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a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

Every broken wave, on the shore
Tells the next one, there'll be one more
Every gambler knows, that to win
Is not what you're really there for…"

U2, Songs of Innocence, 2014.

Waves and wind have been flowing around and through my soul in the last month. In the midst of work deadlines breaking like unrelenting surf over my head, are surprising eddies of grace, fun, joy. Racing back from a board meeting one hot afternoon last week, I suddenly found myself sitting in a hushed school music auditorium listening to a trumpet solo by my son and then to my 15-year-old Shanti singing through a piano piece. A free wave-ride to shore for a harried mother.

Celebrating Rohan's 13th birthday turned out to be another easy ride when he just wanted his three best friends to come over. We cooked sausages over a fire and played spotlight. A lemon cake for the 13 candles — and all of us plus four 13-year-olds were in bed before 10pm!

Reflecting on Ascension and Pentecost, I've also been thinking about the breath of God as a wind that enlivens. One invitation of the breath of God is to locate myself where the wind blows. Two days ago I had woken before the sun. Instead of starting work on a document that needed to be emailed urgently to a group, I pulled myself outside with a *Pray As You Go* podcast using its music, scripture and questions to reflect and pray. It was just me wading into the smudgy dawn with a cup of tea and my journal. Waves and water. Quiet. To finish that time I wrote a small prayer asking for the grace to be kind to myself and others in the new day, then jumped straight onto my laptop facing the impending flood of work.

Yellow Vespa by Sheila Tajima. Used with permission. www.fineartamerica.com

Later as the morning unfolded a colleague was helping me park my scooter onto a narrow, sloping concrete parking slot and accidentally grabbed the accelerator. The scooter raced away from us both, swiping another motorbike and knocking it down some steps and then slammed into a concrete wall. Both the bikes and both of us had a few scratches and bruises and I found some salty tears at the pain in my right knee that is still recovering from an earlier injury. Strangely I felt no irritation and failed to deliver my usual recriminations … I felt glad that no one was hurt much and that the scooter could still be driven. We picked ourselves up and carried on.

Only this morning when I was sitting in the dawn with my journal did I realise that prayer seeking grace for the day had put me where the wind had a chance to blow. It was still wafting, unnoticed, when we came to park the scooter.

Spirit of God flowing around, above and beneath. Sculpt me again and again with your waves and your winds. ■

Kaaren Mathias is a Public Health physician and the programme manager for Mental Health in the Emmanuel Hospital Association in North India where she lives with her family.

May divine mystery
allure us in love
show us many faces
open us to communion
and walk with us in creation
this month

from the Tui Motu team