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SEEKING Te Rapu I te Tika TRUTH

STRUGGLE FOR TRUTH

Peter Murnane, Clare George, Massimo Faggioli,
Paul Tankard on hidden obstacles

TRUST AND TRUTH

Binoy Kampmark and Glynn Cardy

TRUTH TRANSFORMS

Rena Macleod and Michael McVeigh

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EDITORIAL

Let Truth Breathe

Students around the world have been out on the streets proclaiming the urgency of climate change and its effect on Earth and their own future.

Georgetown University students voted to up their fees by \$27.20 per semester — a gesture to encourage compensation to the descendants of the 272 slaves sold by the Jesuits to found the University.

The student council at a South Island secondary school is funding daily breakfast for students who don't get it at home.

These and other examples show that our young people are at the forefront of spreading the truth about poverty, injustice and action to address these issues that many decision makers in the adult world ignore or deny.

We can say that the young don't have the whole truth about the issues they are highlighting but neither do we. As active seekers of truth, their perspectives add to and shape our own understanding of what is true and important in these times. They need our encouragement to keep acting on truth. And while new perspectives on truth can change what we once believed, such as the universe evolved rather than was created as Genesis describes, for the most part what we know to be true is enhanced and refreshed by new understandings and evidence available to us.

I think of truth as like running water — life giving when it is free to be itself. When water is privatised as a commodity or cut off from its source till it stagnates, it loses its capacity to sustain life. So, too, does truth cease to make sense when it is crushed into fundamentalised rigidity, and equally, when it is allowed to waft as if it has no real value. Truth needs to breathe — as a gift of the Spirit — and we need to seek truth and let it grow in ourselves and in our communities.

In this July issue our contributors discuss what it means to seek truth. Some point to the way the public attack on truth by political figures is wearing away our ability to judge what is true. Others uncover distressing situations which have concealed the truth. And other writers show how finding the truth can transform our lives.

We thank all who have contributed through writing, art, craft and skill to this July magazine. We are grateful for their generosity in sharing their perspectives on truth and their creativity, reflection, study and research evident in this 239th issue.

And, as is our custom, our last word is of blessing.



TRUTH Is Found in LOVE

During the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas, drawing on Plato's philosophy, referred to God as "the True, the Good and the Beautiful". And, he said, underpinning Truth, Goodness and Beauty is God's infinite love – expressed *within* God's own being and *within* creation. So when we engage in a journey of seeking, knowing or writing about God and God's universe, we do it with love. Theology without love is inhospitable and arid.

Theology literally means "words or study about God". So in our quest to talk about God we ask: How do we express Love as truthfully as possible? We will each have our own answers to share, shape and offer – in doing theology we journey towards truth along many pathways.

We are used to processes that aim to get as close to truth as possible. And it's a complex and careful process – just think of the work of detectives, teachers, parents and juries. To get to the truth related to a fatal car accident, for instance, requires gathering perspectives from many sources: police, witnesses, victims, road assessors and health professionals. Then the accident team will need to evaluate, sift and sort these contributions in order to understand what happened and how – and still they may not be fully satisfied. Seeking the truth involves questioning, time, commitment and tenacity.

We've seen this development in theology when feminist, ecological, liberationist and indigenous theologians have contributed their perspectives to the truth about who God is and how God loves.

We need to discern truth – to question and test our ideas of truth over time. I'd be suspicious if a friend

announced suddenly that God had told them to do something. I'd want to hear the evidence of their discernment of God's speaking. If my friend said that God was telling them to go in a very specific direction – say, to adopt the baby from India they'd seen on TV – I would question their understanding of "God has told me".

I would expect my friend to grapple with "God's speaking" – to talk it over with a trusted person, to pray about the issues involved until they were resolved and to see that my friend was feeling peaceful. I would look for these as signs of God's Spirit assisting in the discernment.

We've seen how the search for truth has been stymied by authoritarianism. We've had instances where the Church has accused theologians of error and silenced them without giving them the chance to put their case. Or, when the head of a commune completely controls the lives of families in the group. In these cases the authority sees himself as holding ultimate truth and power. The outcome tends to be fear, dependence and powerlessness.

We've also seen how truth, which includes integrity and honesty, encourages trust and enables communities to engage openly with one another. Just think of the outpouring of love and service in our country when Jacinda Ardern articulated the truth to us: the Muslim people killed during prayer in Christchurch were part of us. It's when we are free to make our own considered decisions and act accordingly that we mature.

Communities grounded in life-giving principles are likely to flourish. They promote the good of the whole

– not just of a select few. And they honour truth as indispensable for every aspect of a healthy community.

While a communal approach to truth depends on the active participation of its members, an individual's claim to truth will require testing in the public arena.


A sobering fact is that each of us can be wrong! The saving gift of making mistakes (or "doing wrong") is that for the most part, we can breathe deeply, confide in people we trust, begin a process of facing facts, prepare to take the consequences and pray for another solution to eventuate. Of course, each journey towards truth and healing will differ depending on the severity of the issue involved.

I find the following questions help me test the truth and love of my theological statements:

Do my theological arguments cohere with the Gospel vision – to practise inclusiveness, to care for outsiders, to forgive myself, to hesitate in judging others, to pray often ...?

Does my theology engage with global issues such as climate change, fake news, unrest within and among nations, inequalities of wealth, welcoming newcomers ...?

Am I willing to read theological perspectives which are different from those I would normally select?

The task of finding, establishing and coming to truth is always challenging, but it forms the bedrock of flourishing relationships and healthy societies. 



Helen Bergin, a Dominican Sister, lives in Auckland. Having previously taught theology she hopes now to focus on theological writing.



OUR STRUGGLE WITH TRUTH

PETER MURNANE reflects on the challenges we have in finding the truth.

One ancient definition of truth was “the equating of the mind to reality”. I was driven to wrestle with this concept by a little girl’s question one afternoon during a visit to the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. It was school holidays and the place was swarming with children and parents.

Among many fascinating exhibits, I inspected the first steam train to run in New South Wales. Its footplate and the carriages behind it were peopled by life-like grey plaster statues of driver, fireman and passengers.

Next came a room lit only by sodium lamps, so that all its contents appeared in colourless blacks and greys, until a white light came on and showed the true, brilliant colours of things. I stood alone in the room, quite still and awed by a world without colour. Then a girl of about five came in, accompanied by her mother. The girl looked eagerly

around the room, then came up to me, a tall, motionless figure. No doubt remembering the statues on the train, she looked up to me and asked: “Are you actually real?” I have been wrestling ever since with the layers of meaning in her deep, metaphysical question.

Finding the Truth

Finding the truth is most urgent when it comes to deciding whether a person is guilty or innocent. In February 2006 Andrew Mallard walked out of a Perth jail where he had been locked up for almost 12 years, wrongly convicted in 1994 of murdering Pamela Lawrence. His family, with a dedicated journalist and lawyer, eventually proved that corrupt police had concealed vital evidence and falsified Mallard’s “confession”. Australia’s highest court at last declared him innocent.

Five senior police were later charged and Andrew Mallard was

paid more than AU\$1 million in compensation. But records show that over the last 100 years at least 12 innocent Australians have been imprisoned for an average of 11 years each. Few were exonerated or paid compensation — in fact, two others were hanged, their innocence discovered too late. In most other countries the “justice system” carries a similar terrible burden of courts that failed to find the truth.

Suspending Prejudice

People were no doubt remembering such failures when a Melbourne jury found cardinal George Pell guilty of crimes of child abuse. Could the verdict — curiously, the word means “truth saying” — be true? That jury’s decision caused deep anguish and division in the Catholic community but for diametrically different reasons.

Some Catholics could not believe that Pell could be guilty, either because he was a cardinal, or because they knew him personally. Neither, unfortunately, is valid cause for



doubting a verdict's truth. When our deepest beliefs are put to the test, loyalty — especially when linked to piety — can blind us.

Other Catholics found the verdict easier to believe. They had already been shocked by more than half a dozen cardinals and bishops found guilty of sexual offences, or of concealing the crimes of others. These Catholics also noted that the jury had accepted the testimony and character of Pell's accuser, despite expert and ruthless cross-examination. Unlikely as it might seem that a powerful archbishop would rape choirboys in a cathedral sacristy, other famous public figures, believing themselves unassailable, have done such things and been convicted. And although it seems improbable that a genial church leader would have a hidden, darker side to his character, this too is not uncommon.

The Pell case illustrates how susceptible we are, in our search for truth in human affairs, to be moved by other than "objective reason": prejudice for or against a person;

denial of known facts; naivety about what people are capable of; fear, shame and unquestioning loyalty to a person or institution.

Truth Has Depths

Most of our efforts to find the truth aren't so urgent as a jury's task to establish it "beyond a reasonable doubt". We might strive to win our little arguments, to prove that "I'm right; you're wrong". But does one side ever have all the truth?

Our search for truth is more successful when we discover that it is found at many levels. Everyone who pursues excellence by striving with their heart, mind or body is — perhaps unconsciously — seeking truth of diverse kinds. Hildegard, Beethoven, Da Vinci, Shakespeare, Marie Curie, Toni Morrison, David Attenborough or our favourite sports stars all help us to discover truth, the "equating of the mind to reality".

Another ancient rule of thumb among philosophers listed five "transcendentals". These were found at every level of being — everything under and beyond the sun having, along with its *being*, its own *unity*, *goodness*, *beauty* and *truth*.

It hurts to be told bluntly: "You're wrong!" This bullying approach can seem to reject entirely all the knowledge and experience in the argument put forward by the "loser", as if these count for nothing.

It is more gracious — and effective — when arguing opponents seek out and respect what is true in the other's position, even when they may need to reject the opponent's conclusion. In any conflict it is good to drill down to find deeper layers where we share something with our opponent: at very least, the truth of our common humanity.

When people from opposite sides of political or national boundaries seek truth by collaborating to make music or art or to do science or play sport, wonderful growth can happen.

Respecting our opponents is one thing. But if, in trying to be inclusive, we concede spinelessly that "whatever you believe is right; your truth and everyone else's is valid", we may betray truth disastrously. Telling

the truth can sometimes demand that we firmly *reject* other opinions.

To Be Truth Seekers

Our senses bring us basic truth up to a point. They can all be tricked or deluded. Try searching "optical illusions" on the internet for an entertaining and frustrating half-hour! Touch, taste, smell and hearing can also be deceived in their own ways: one of my friends has a parrot that can imitate a ringing telephone exactly.

Consistent with the idea that truth is found at various levels, our wisest truth-seekers and meditators point beyond all practical and rational truth to the Mystery behind what we think we know as real. They point to an ultimate Truth.

And we have the "clear light of reason", so precious in science, law and all areas of life. But if we use reason as our sole guide, we can cause chaos in human affairs. Every day we see lamentable evidence of the vast destruction caused to our Earth by industry, engineering and economics guided solely by "rational" principles. We will have a true relationship with our world-environment only when we learn to love our home, this planet Earth and make decisions using "emotional intelligence" as well as the rational kind.

Consistent with the idea that truth is found at various levels, our wisest truth-seekers and meditators point beyond all practical and rational truth to the Mystery behind what we think we know as real. They point to an ultimate Truth. One thinker dared to say that God *is* Love. If it is true that we are loved by such an Infinite Mystery then — to answer the little girl's question — we must be real. 🔍



Peter Murnane is an Australian Dominican Friar. He worked in New Zealand for 20 years before spending four years in the Solomon Islands.



WHEELS MUST TURN

CLARE TEDESTEDT GEORGE tells of the dangerous conditions truck drivers work under and of the system which turns a blind eye to corner-cutting.

The balcony of my childhood home was frequently occupied by tradies, winding down after a long working week. The struggle of mortgage repayments, chronic injuries and the increasing costs of living, were matters mulled over during these Friday afternoon gatherings. Absorbing these conversations as a child, I gained a sense of how, in many ways, people can derive dignity from their work, but also how they can have their dignity totally stripped away.

An Emergency Call

As an adult, these conversations have become my work. It's 20-something years later and I'm researching the employment conditions of workers in New Zealand for the Centre for Occupational Health and Safety Research at Auckland University of Technology. We get a phone call. It's from a truck driver on the side of the road, desperate and wanting to end his

life — he cannot see another way out.

He has mortgaged his truck against his home — three generations of his family live in this home. He is an owner-driver contracted to one company, dependent on that company for all his work. He has been ordered by the company to break the work-time laws for the second time this month. He has not slept for 30 hours and he is far past fatigued. He's been told he either continues driving and makes the delivery on time or he will no longer be offered work from the company.

In theory, as an owner-driver he should have the ability to say no to this principal company and seek work elsewhere. The problem is that despite being self-employed his truck is painted in the principal company's colours — branding he had to pay for. And he is, as required, wearing their company uniform — he paid for that too. He delivers exclusively for this

company and he must now choose between breaking the law (and paying the penalties if caught) or keeping his job (contract). Union representation is difficult given his contractual status and he doesn't know who else to call.

The Prompt to Research

There are many reasons why I'm thankful the driver called us that day. He lit a fire in my stomach about the injustices that were occurring in the trucking industry — which often go unreported. The increasing number of truck accidents on our roads receives media attention. Rarely a week goes by in which truck accidents do not feature in our news, often with the truck driver pointed at or blamed. Driver fatigue, speeding, drug use, or breaking work-time laws are frequently cited reasons when an accident occurs. Yet, when we take a closer look, it becomes clear that these are symptoms of much deeper issues.

I couldn't get this driver out of my head. Uncovering these issues became my work and I spent the next five years in truck cabs, smoko rooms, living rooms, at trade shows, in court rooms, government agency offices, lawyers' offices, at trucking companies, with the Police, with unions, and with all sorts of other people to hear their side — their stories.

Bringing truth to the surface required a great deal of time and patience. Few people I spoke to were willing to divulge information about the workings of the industry beyond the sort of information found in trucking company brochures or on websites. The industry is set in its ways, with long entrenched practices, and the status quo is carefully protected by the powerful select few who benefit from it.

Fatigue is assumed to be a normal part of the job. Drivers devise strategies for staying awake — face-slaps, or phone calls home in the middle of the night with a plea to "just keep talking to me". They rarely take a break. And when they do stop, it is seldom in a safe part of town or where good and healthy food is readily available. Pies and Coca-Cola can be eaten with one hand while on the road and the fat, salt, and sugar taste so good when you're exhausted and it's 3am.

innocent member of the public loses their life or is seriously injured as a result.

A story not often told but equally tragic is that of the drivers dying young at home in their beds, or the frequency of failed marriages or failed businesses, or the children who grow up never seeing their truck-driving parent.

I am not suggesting that all truck drivers are saints and that the truck-driving population doesn't contain careless or rogue individuals. It does,

and I've met some.

But the majority of drivers I spoke with told me that what they want most is to return safely to their families, to keep other road users safe and to stay alive long enough to enjoy retirement. It's not good enough that this will not be the reality for many drivers. And for what? Profit?



Truck drivers need fair rates, safe working conditions, more time with their families and friends, less enforced isolation, more negotiating power and a safe platform to speak out.

Hidden Costs

Trucking is a competitive industry. Everyone fights everyone else to keep prices as low as possible. Truck driver pay rates are considered the industry's low-hanging fruit in terms of cost-cutting, which results in continuous rate decreases.

Many drivers are owner-drivers, and so are in direct competition with one another and are all in high amounts of debt. This makes it near impossible for the drivers to operate safely. Often paid by the kilometre, drivers face a daily decision between safety and profit.

With rates plummeting year on year and payment structures that ensure compensation only when the wheels are turning, there will always be an incentive to maximise hours driven. This isn't motivated by greed but the necessity to earn a decent wage. So, drivers stay at the wheel for days and weeks on end without rest. They speed to their destinations to squeeze in another delivery, or even sometimes just to keep their jobs.

Crucial Questions Not Asked

This information has been missing from previous conversations about how to stop truck drivers from speeding or how to stop them taking drugs that keep them awake. It has been missing from conversations about how to change the eating habits of drivers or reduce health concerns.

System Change Necessary


For years different agencies and groups have attempted to change the behaviour of the drivers, targeting the individual when in fact the problems are far more systemic. The drivers don't need to be told to eat more apples and fewer pies.

They need fair rates, safe working conditions, more time with their families and friends, less enforced isolation, more negotiating power and a safe platform to speak out. But these factors are missing, with far-reaching consequences.

Truck accidents are a serious problem, and it's a tragedy when an

We Can Support Change

Without the truck drivers our country would cease to run. We would have no food on the shelves, no goods in the stores, no petrol at the stations. They put their health and their safety on the line to ensure the availability of the goods we expect. As consumers we demand faster delivery times, competitive prices for goods and have grown increasingly impatient on the roads.

I know it's frustrating when trucks drive too close or speed past, but I hope this research has given a small insight into why this happens. When I see a truck on the road, it's now a protection prayer and compassion they receive from me, not a middle finger. 



Clare Tedestedt George recently completed an Employment Relations PhD at AUT University on the working conditions of NZ truck drivers.



TRUTH

trumps the golden calf

GLYNN CARDY warns against trading the search for truth for easy answers in religious fundamentalism and falsehood.

Exodus 32 tells the story of how the Hebrew people in their neediness and fear created a golden calf to worship. It was a fake god giving fake good news.

The Hebrew people in the absence of Moses created an alternate deity. Following Moses's God was hard work: they had no images, no temple and there was no settling down. This

God of Moses's was constantly on the move. The people longed for a simple, concrete religion and a god like other tribes had. They were fed up with the inconsistencies of a wandering God who was leading them nowhere. So they made their own.

If we substitute the word "God" for "truth" then the Bible teaches us that truth by definition is outside of

our control. Truth is not always how we would like truth to be. Truth can be inaccessible, hard to understand, uncertain. And so we are tempted to come up with our own — to make an alternate truth to suit us.

Truth Challenges Certainty

We will always crave simple, concrete answers and the seeming stability they bring. We fear uncertainty, change and complexity. It is no wonder that so many of us find ourselves drawn to fundamentalist religions and groups, with their supernatural solutions for fears and their allegiance to outspoken charismatic leaders. Fundamentalism makes truth in its own image: simple, comforting, unverifiable — a kind of golden calf. In a society without fears fundamentalism would not find a home.

Fundamentalism and Fake News

Much is shared between religious fundamentalism and the fake news phenomenon as promulgated in the presidency of Donald Trump. Trump and his entourage have used the term "fake news" consistently to disparage and mock news and views they disagree with.

On the one hand this "fake news" phenomenon is a reminder that all news, research and facts are dependent upon those who convey or communicate them. And that they do so in a way that admits and tries to compensate for bias. This is what "peer-reviewed research" is — we submit our work to peers across the world knowledgeable in the subject concerned.

Publishing Biased Opinion as Truth

Too often the biases of the dominant group — concerning race, religion, money, or biology — have been accepted as "fact" without any heed given to those outside the privileged circles. What was considered "true" was often dependent upon where in the hierarchy of social and economic power the researcher, commentators or their paymasters were placed. We need only remember the findings of the 1987-88 Cartwright Inquiry into

doctors' treatment of cervical cancer in women. Or the Church's coverup of the sexual abuse of children.

In the American political system "Washington" has become a code word for the conglomeration of hierarchical power. And Trump's strategy of labelling criticism as "fake" has gained the applause of a significant group of mostly white Americans who feel marginalised. "Draining the swamp" [of Washington] became a Trumpian phrase and ploy for disempowering the powerful.

Giving Unquestioning Loyalty

Trump supporters are a marginalised group. Many are financially and educationally poor, feel threatened racially, are religiously challenged by secularism — and hope for a male white God to rescue them. The American financial/get-ahead dream is a fading reality for them. In their view, the blame lies with immigration, Obama policy and the media's Washingtonian captivity. Having a powerful white man confirming their prejudices has absolved them of dealing with Trump's known infidelities and his tweet-level of understanding complex issues. Trump's rhetoric is that of the fundamentalist preacher: "Don't think too much. Trust me. I'm a smart guy. I know what I'm doing."

But labelling all criticism, alternate information and analysis as "fake" news or research, apart from undermining the necessary checks and balances of any democratic government, leads a government like Trump's into a self-serving, inward-looking spiral. And his palace policy becomes the poorer for it. Instead of engaging with critics his entourage just dismisses their views as "fake". We saw this early in Trump's presidency when he reversed the previous administration's policies and work addressing climate change.

And also in dismissing the well-established and verified data from US intelligence agencies that the Russian government had tried to manipulate the outcome of a presidential election. The ramifications of both of these issues go far beyond the term of the current administration.

Blind to Self and Common Good

The promulgation of the "fake news" policy has led to a leadership style within the White House which is highly attuned to popular criticism, paranoid about disloyalty and largely sycophantic. It is not surprising that many key staff have resigned. Nor is it surprising that some staff have been encouraged to lie to protect the president. For those trained in the disciplines of psychology and psychotherapy it is obvious that President Trump is on the continuum of narcissist personality disorder (NPD). This is seen particularly in his behaviour and language that interprets any and every issue to be always about him.

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carefully, listen to
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Again I suggest the model of the fundamentalist preacher is a lens through which we can try to understand the allegiance of many Americans to Donald Trump. For a fundamentalist preacher personality is huge — and the bigger and flashier, the better. His wealth is seen as God's blessing. He clearly identifies the enemy within, and the enemy without. He lives in a black and white world: if you are not for him, you are against him. He speaks the truth. His enemies' words are fake. Have faith in him and he will lead you to the Promised Land of prosperity, and the certainty that goes with it.

Participate in Democracy

Here in New Zealand it is tempting to congratulate ourselves on our distance from "fake news" and the style of the Trump presidency. But the

foundations of democracy are only as strong as the will of the people. It is too easy to label views we don't like as "fake", and politicians and their policies likewise.

It is too easy to blame "Wellington", our nexus of political and administrative power and resource allocation, for the ills that beset us.

It is too easy to blame immigrant, racial, or religious groups for the wrongs we perceive in society, and for our own social and economic circumstances.

And it's too easy to let our fears drive us towards a secular fundamentalism of simple answers and the search for a charismatic assertive leader to champion them.

We need to discern carefully, listen to contrary voices, pay heed to peer-reviewed scientific and academic research and be guided by the values most faiths promote — kindness, humility, compassion and justice for all.

We need to use the tools of the social sciences to assess who are the most vulnerable and suffering in our society and what interventions and changes are needed to empower those people and groups.

We need to use the tools of economics to work for systems and policies that promote the industry and security of employment, the reward of endeavour, community wellbeing, good and accessible healthcare and education and the participation of everyone in the care, maintenance and strengthening of the resources and environment of this land.

We need to be committed to and forever searching for truth, and not be tempted by another's golden calf. 🔍

Painting: *I Am the Way the Truth and the Life* (in Swedish) by Taruna Rettinger. Used with permission www.artforcreation.wordpress.com



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CHURCH HISTORY TO KEEP US HONEST

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI writes that "post-truth" is the denial of historical facts and that in-depth study of Church history is essential for the Church's teaching.

Photo by Cristina Gottardi on Unsplash

Is truth dead? That's the question on the cover of an April *Time* magazine, a clear reference to the famous "Is God Dead?" cover of 1968. While it's tempting to see an analogy between the two, worry over the current "post-truth" political climate is not an ontological issue of the same order. It's an issue of factual truth: What did or did not happen, what is verifiably true or false — like the size of the crowd at Donald Trump's inauguration. "Post-truth" is an elegant way to describe an attack not on the metaphysical nature of truth, but on the sheer denialism of historical facts.

Separating Theology from History

The theological culture of the institutional Church is not immune to the rise of the "post-truth". In fact, it was already showing signs of the syndrome in the early 2000s. Such challenges to the idea of distinguishing between what happened and what did not catch the Catholic Church just when it faces a crisis over the role of the study of history in theology. The consequences for the intellectual viability of Catholicism are significant, especially in considering the formation of future Church leaders.

In 2005, for example, the Pontifical Gregorian University (the most respected of Rome's pontifical universities) established the Faculty of History and Cultural Heritage of the Church, which merged the prestigious faculty of ecclesiastical history (founded in 1932) with a programme in cultural heritage (created in 1991).

This institutional push to reduce history to "cultural heritage" effectively disconnected theology and the magisterium from the critical inputs of Church history. This delinking of Church history from theology is even more apparent in the United States.

Katarina Schuth in *Priestly Ministry in Multiple Parishes* casts light on how this shift influenced seminary training in the USA in the early 2000s. The fifth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation*, issued in 2005 by the USA Conference of Catholic Bishops, made clear that "among historical studies, the study of patristics and the lives of the saints were considered of special importance". The special emphasis on the lives of the saints, typical of the devotional turn in many Catholic seminaries during the John Paul II-Benedict era, should be considered alongside the reduction in the number of history courses the *Program of Priestly Formation* required: from six in 1992 to three in 2005. Though many seminaries and pontifical universities still require the study of Church history, the history of the past century is often seen as dangerous — and the history of Vatican II the most dangerous of all.

John O'Malley worked to counter this “dangerous” framing with “Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?”, an article that appeared in 2006, and in his book, *What Happened at Vatican II* (2008). Though the article was written before Benedict XVI's famous “two hermeneutics” speech to the Curia in December 2005, O'Malley's book was surely the best response to that speech — one of the most consequential of Benedict's papacy.

Downplaying Historical Significance of Vatican II

Benedict's speech was also the culmination of the trend to downplay the historical significance of Vatican II, a trend in which Walter Brandmüller, then president of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences, also played a role. (Brandmüller is also one of the four signatories of the 2018 dubia against Francis's *Amoris Laetitia*.)

Benedict's argument was philosophical: Vatican II resulted in some changes, but it did not change the profound essence of the Church. His position of “continuity and reform” over “discontinuity and rupture” tried to undermine the legitimacy of some key aspects of the hermeneutics of Vatican II, even though of course it did not deny the historical importance of the council. It was a more sophisticated speech than the ultra-simplified interpretations from some theologians and bishops would have it.

History and Theology at Odds

But the ideological spin surrounding Benedict's speech now seems in some ways the Catholic version of the post-truth debate in politics — only a decade earlier.

Now, five years into the pontificate of Francis, only the traditionalist wing still uses the hermeneutics of “continuity and reform” versus “discontinuity and rupture” in interpreting Vatican II; Francis has never used it. But the damage is done, and not just in Rome or in the Vatican. For while on one side there is the minimising of the role of critical thinking about Church history, on the other there is the cultural turn to an emphasis on identity studies. Even at

those universities where a historical-critical approach to Church institutions and magisterial texts persists, things tend to gravitate around “religious studies” instead of theology.

Historical Critical Questions Needed in Theology

This poses a problem for history and religious studies as disciplines: trying to understand the past lives of Christians without a theological line of credit open toward the faith of those Christians limits the ability of the historians to understand the lives of those Christians. But it's an even bigger problem for theology. The historical-critical method is facing some pushback today even when it

It's become more acceptable to critique divinely inspired authors of Scripture than a pope writing on sexual morality.

comes to biblical studies.

Paradoxically it seems more acceptable in today's Catholic Church to bring the historical-critical method to bear on Scripture than to documents of the magisterium; it's become more acceptable to critique divinely inspired authors of Scripture than a pope writing on sexual morality.

A creeping magisterial fundamentalism toward the encyclicals of this last century is part of the “biopolitical” problem of Catholicism. This is clearly visible in the debate over *Amoris Laetitia*.

Sound Theology Needs Good History

Catholic traditionalists have different expectations from Catholic progressives when it comes to history. In the recent past, a strictly institutional and traditionalist Church establishment attempted to disable historians from offering insights about what Church history can teach Catholic theology, especially Catholic leaders drafting magisterial texts. As Rowan Williams wrote a few years ago: “Good theology does not come from bad history”.

Catholic theologians, confronting a possible shift from historical-critical analysis of religious history to a post-historical theology, could stand to

learn from what the current “post-truth” moment is showing us.

But the institutional Church establishment isn't alone in carrying some responsibility. A post-historical approach gives us bad theology because it tends to reduce Church history to “narrative”, where different narratives present “reparationist” accounts of what happened.

I believe that understanding Catholicism historically and theologically still needs a general “Church history” kind of approach, enriched by the new methodological insights of postmodern historical and social studies.

Church history as a discipline has a lot to learn from other methodologies

— and this might be the key to its survival as a discipline in the no-man's land between theology, secular history and social studies.

While we can bemoan the decline of the historical-critical study of the Church in its most “ecclesiastical” aspects (history of Church institutions, of canon law, of magisterial documents), we cannot really celebrate the “success” of the social/cultural approach. For if it was meant to liberate the Church from its institutionalism, it has in fact done the opposite: opening the way to an institutional Church even more reluctant to historicise itself, or even eager to elevate every aspect of itself to the level of ontology.

Through the neglect of Church history by Catholic academia, we now reject the very *idea* of changes in Church teaching; some, for example, still deny that Vatican II changed the Church's teaching on religious liberty.

If bad history first gives us bad theology, it next gives us bad politics. 🔍



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Lies Tear the Community Apart

BINOY KAMPMARK asks if the public has to accept that politicians will lie to them and what happens when lies go unchecked.

The sagacious essay writer and nobleman Michel de Montaigne was unequivocal about those who told lies when writing 400 years ago. In "On Liars" he is punishing in judging the dissimulators and deceivers. "Lying is indeed an accursed vice. We are men, and we have relations with one another only by speech. If we recognised the horror and gravity of an untruth, we should more justifiably punish it with fire than any other crime."

Lies in US Elections

The theme of lies often finds a home in political campaigns. It was the crowning feature of the 2016 USA Presidential elections, in which candidate Donald Trump, despite facing a proliferation of obsessive fact-checking squads from his opponent Hillary Clinton, won. Clinton, for her part, became the target of bizarre claims spread through social medial channels. Her campaign managers, in one notable case, were accused of running a clandestine human trafficking sex ring out of a pizza restaurant.

Public Deceived in Australia

During the Australian federal election campaign in May, Australian Labor Party voters felt that the effort made by the ultimately victorious Scott Morrison was distinctly short on the facts and heavy on the fear. The possible re-introduction of death taxes featured in particular. Such material did the brushfire rounds on Facebook, highlighting the dangers posed to inheritances of a possible Labor-Green coalition. Figures as high as a 40 per cent rate were suggested, despite the public disavowal by then ALP opposition leader Bill Shorten. In marginal Queensland seats the message sold with worried retirees fearful at the prospects of a penny-pinching Labor government.

The response from the Liberals was yawningly predictable: this was ample retaliation for the federal election campaign of 2016 marked by Labor's fibs about what a conservative government would do to Medicare. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had made it clear on the eve of the election that: "Medicare will never, never, ever

be privatised". Labor, for its part, was toiling in ground Turnbull conceded was "fertile" given cuts made to health by his predecessor Tony Abbott.

Boris Johnson in UK Court

An enduring memory of the 2016 Brexit campaign was the claim by pro-leavers that the European Union was extracting — effectively plundering — some £350 million a week that would be otherwise better spent on the health of good Britons. The claim — ignoring EU subsidies, returns and contributions to Britain — was so outrageously proud and inaccurate, it stuck. It made its way onto the infamous bus used by arch Brexiteer and former London Mayor Boris Johnson, himself a renowned exponent of tall, often creative tales. It Teflon-coated the campaign against the more accurate net figure of £190 million proffered by the Office for National Statistics.

Which leads us to a novel citizen's experiment on the issue of lying in politics. Johnson, a leadership contender for the Conservatives in their efforts to find a successor to Theresa May, found himself facing a private prosecution mounted by Marcus Ball that he "repeatedly lied and misled the British public as to the cost of EU membership". Ball, the initiator of the action and a Remain campaigner has £236,000 drawn from a crowdfunding campaign to spend.

Ball's legal representative Lewis Power QC, sounded a familiar line before District Judge Margot Coleman that many an aggrieved voter has done in the past: "when politicians lie, democracy dies." Lies spread from a "national and international platform undermine public confidence in politics . . . and bring both public offices held by the (proposed) defendant into disrepute". But Power was going further: such deceptions constituted misconduct to such a degree as to warrant sanction.

Johnson's legal team was equally familiar in their rebuttal: politics is a matter of scrapping and tussling, an untidy business of competitive claims where facts are blurred. Truth, to that end, is often obscured in the haze of battle. Adrian Darbishire QC, representing Johnson, described the private prosecution as a political stunt in an effort to use the criminal law "to regulate the content and quality of political debate". Johnson had used the £350 million sum "in the course of a contested political campaign" bound to have claims "challenged, contradicted and criticised".

The legal encounter between Johnson and Ball draws out those broader issues Montaigne was so firm over. In 1975 Adrienne Rich suggested that: "The possibilities that exist between two people, or among a group of people are a kind of alchemy. They are the most interesting thing in life. The liar is someone who keeps losing sight of these possibilities." Even more damagingly, the liar in public office is pernicious to the workings of "public life, human possibility, and our collective progress".

Can We Expect Honesty?

Do such figures as Rich and Montaigne raise the bar too high? Hannah Arendt, in a famous essay from 1971 assessing the rippling shocks arising from the publication of the Pentagon Papers, was resigned in her critique. "Truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, and lies have always been regarded as justifiable

tools in political dealings." When confronted with what she describes as "factual truths", we face an insuperable problem of compellability. "Facts need testimony to be remembered and trustworthy witnesses to be established in order to find a secure dwelling place in the domain of human affairs. From this, it follows that no factual statement can ever be beyond doubt."

Little wonder that such claims as fictional death taxes, promoted with such enthusiasm by the Liberal-National coalition in the Australian federal election, and the £350 million EU sum in the Brexit campaign, resist debunking.

Despite reservations on the part of the cynics, Justice Coleman was happy to take Ball's arguments seriously. "Having considered all the relevant factors, I am satisfied that this is a proper case to issue a summons as requested for the three offences [of misconduct in public office]." Johnson was made to face a hearing to see whether the matter is able to go to the crown court.

The tissue that binds communities matters; the untruth tears it. And a community unable to detect lies is, according to the renowned US journalist Walter Lippmann, one without liberty.

As matters unfolded, the case for criminalising mendacity in politics as misconduct did not have wings beyond Justice Coleman's initial permission. On June 7, the High Court dismissed the three counts of misconduct in public office that formed the basis of the case. No reasons were supplied, though Ball awaits them. "I have," he claimed on Twitter, "a duty to my country to keep fighting lying in politics, and I take it bloody seriously."

Had the case against Johnson stuck, possible avenues for private citizens to hold politicians to account would have been opened. While potentially rendering the practice of political campaigning, even governing, less flexible, it reprises the ethical dimensions of what Montaigne found most accursed and vile. The tissue that binds communities matters; the untruth tears it. And a community unable to detect lies is, according to the renowned US journalist Walter Lippmann, one without liberty.

Those factual truths that Arendt warned against, however, are unlikely to go away, being ever problematic contingencies in the broader field that is politics. Plato deemed it the necessary ignoble lie, and removing the contaminant of mendacity using the criminal law would still be an imperfect solution. 🔍

[This article is an expanded version of a piece that appeared in *Eureka Street* 3 June 2019]

Painting: *Abstract Landscape 1* by Fritz Jooste © Used with permission. www.fritzjoostearist.wordpress.com



Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne.

Humans Act Violently Not God

RENA MACLEOD recommends that we read violent biblical stories sensitively so we do not perpetuate violence in our homes and societies.

For many of us the Bible as the word of God is an important, sacred source in our lives. Yet the biblical texts are not straightforward. As well as being in multiple genres — creation myths, genealogies, laws, narratives, poetry, gospels, letters and apocalyptic literature — the scriptures come from ancient cultures and were written over several centuries by people with world views very different from our own.

As well as being translations from Middle Eastern languages, the texts in our bibles today are the product of various editing phases in ancient times. That is why we do not read the bible as the “literal” word of God.

Biblical expression is succinct but also fragmented — with considerable gaps and silences in stories. It’s long

been the custom within the Jewish tradition to “read” the “white spaces” around the written words — filling in the meaning with commentary.

Challenges for Reading Male-Centred Texts

Another challenge we face is the absence of women’s experience — biblical texts were written by men, for men and they convey the patriarchal social structures of the day. There are female characters, yes, but the texts largely reflect male perspectives, experiences, agendas and authority. And so they communicate a hierarchical world where men hold power and superiority and women and children are secondary in society.

There are contradictions to this bias, too. For example in Genesis 1 the text says that males and females

are equal, as both are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). Yet in other passages women’s bodies, labour, sexuality and procreative capacity are under the ownership and control of fathers, husbands, and masters (Ex 21:4, 7-9; Lev 21:9; Num 30:3-16; Deut 22:20-28; 1 Pet 3:1-7).

In Galatians Paul upholds equality: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). But Ephesians stipulates that wives submit to their husbands in everything for “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church” (Eph 5:22). And slaves are to obey their earthly masters (Eph 6:5).

Nor is the presentation of God consistent. In the 10 Commandments God forbids taking the life of another person (Ex 20:13), yet in Joshua and

Judges we find God sanctioning and participating in slaughter — Israel's massacres of Canaan's inhabitants as they seek to take their land for themselves (Josh 10:1-43, 11:1-23; Judg 1:4-5).

In short, depending on how and what texts we read, we can find biblical material that *justifies* the diminishment and persecution of others, as well as material that *opposes* such violence.

How We Read Scripture Matters

Given this content, it is clear that our participation in reading scripture matters — there is no such thing as objective interpretation.

We approach texts with our own perspectives, and this affects the meaning we derive from them. We know only too well that biblical material can be dangerous when it is taken at face value and used to promote hierarchical and violent agendas. Just think of how scripture was used to justify slavery, or to oppress girls and women.

Some feminist scholars say that the Bible is a considerable obstacle to equality because its texts have been used to sustain injurious, hierarchical structures in societies. For others, the Bible is so loaded with violent and sexist content that they advocate abandoning it all together.

But this is too simplistic an approach. We know that texts are multilayered — they contain many “truths” depending on the lenses we view them through.

Biblical scholars do the kind of work that helps us to understand the texts by informing us of the broader social contexts, issues and ideologies that informed the texts at the time they were written. They identify “scripture’s critique of scripture” — the process which saw a shift in consciousness away from practices of idolatry and towards care of the vulnerable — children, widows, strangers, outcasts and the poor. And biblical texts give insight into the way humanity wrestles with desire, love, rivalry, enmity, cruelty and murder.

Facing Violence in the Bible

A theme of human violence runs

through the scriptures. By chapter four of Genesis Cain has murdered his brother, Abel. And we can follow the trail of blood through to the New Testament where Jesus is nailed to a cross and mocked by a mob.

Furthermore, there is a gendered quality to the violence which mirrors the patterns of violence that continue to plague us today.

We read of the terrible violence men do to one another in male-dominant societies — brothers hating and killing brothers, males slaying males and military massacres resulting in legions of slaughtered men and decimated communities.

Allowing scripture to move and unsettle us ... reveals ... a God who confronts us with our own violence, so we may transform our consciousness in ways that empower us to work free of it.

While there are stories in which women perform violent acts, the vulnerability of females to male violence is especially marked. Resembling contemporary patterns in our world, the Bible shows the subjection of girls and women to rape, torture, incest, abduction and murder (Gen 34:1-2; Num 25:8; Judg 11:39, 15:6, 19:25, 21:12, 23; 1 Sam 30:2, 2 Sam 13:2-15).

Correspondingly, the Bible depicts how enculturing boys and young men into the masculinity of male-dominant societies perpetuates male rivalry, hostility and aggression. It also illustrates that, within a world where men hold superiority, women and girls become easy targets of men’s violence.

Change of Consciousness

So how do we move towards truth in our reading? I believe an answer lies in discerning a deeper sense of the transcendent at work in the Bible. By

reading the scriptures in a way that is sensitive to the portrayal of violence, we find that characterisations of a violent deity give way to the revelation that, in reality, it is humans who are violent towards one another. This deeper transcendental dimension is at work within violent narratives that challenge us to acknowledge our violence, to decry it and to transform the underlying structures that allow and promote it.

We have only to encounter the reality of the young woman, the Levite’s wife, lying tortured, gang-raped and lifeless in a doorway (Judg 19:25-26), to experience the arresting face of female victimhood and the call to do everything in our power to stop such gendered violence.

Allowing scripture to move and unsettle us as it reveals the reality of human violence will help us to discover that violent scripture is not evidence of a violent God. Rather we find God who confronts us with our own violence, so we may transform our consciousness in ways that empower us to work free of it.

Reading scripture in this way illuminates the truth that for humans to flourish we need to challenge hierarchical, oppressive, exclusive structures and together build new egalitarian ones. Importantly, we need to identify where people are using the Bible to justify dehumanising behaviour and advocate and support change.

Reject Violence and Embrace Love


This kind of critical reading accords with the deep truth that human flourishing lies in our respectful, loving and equal relationships with one another. And this flourishing is supported by a loving God who urges us to no longer oppress and persecute others in God’s name. 

Photo by Melanie Wasser on Unsplash



Originally from the Wairarapa, **Rena MacLeod** has just finished a PhD on the biblical representation of female victimhood.

NEW ROUTES

The boy on the bike
is biking his way into peace.
He hopes to arrive there
tomorrow or the day after
if only he'd not lost the map.
Once he soldiered on and on
against enemies and desert storms
protected by an unknown god and guns.
Now he wears trinkets
and the protection of tender leather.
Now he's one with the many.
They bike for tolerance.
They bike for peace.
They bike for all religions.
They bike away memories of war.
They bike into the shock of explosions
so now they look for smoke
and create new routes.
If someone dies
they don't ride for three weeks.
They visit the family.
They walk compassion.
Captain Bilal leads.
'To be a biker
All you need is to love Iraq.'
The boy on the bike
Bikes his way into new routes.

— by Anne Powell

(*The Edge of Things*. The Cuba Press 2018:37)



Seeking a Deeper Truth

MICHAEL MCVEIGH asks if there is a way for the media to bring people together around truth rather than polarise them in opinion camps.

When star Christian rugby player Israel Folau posted a comment on social media saying that “homosexuals” will join adulterers, fornicators and other sinners in hell unless they repent, the “take cycle” spun into action. The “take cycle” is journalistic shorthand for reporting people's take on a story from after it breaks to deeper analysis.

I've been in the media long enough now to predict most of the articles before they're even written.

The Cycle Starts

First and second are the reports of what happened, and the immediate reactions — from teammates, coaches, administrators, fans, people in the gay community, people in the Christian community, etc.

These days, more often than not, journalists will just need to log onto social media for quotable responses. Indeed, for people who use social media as their first source of news, it's often the gut reactions that come before the facts of the story itself: “I can't believe Folau said that”; “Folau has to be suspended from the game, now”; “He's just sharing what his religion believes.”

There'll be facts that journalists will need to hunt down — “Has Folau breached his contract?” “What will happen to him now?” “Have sponsors threatened to pull out of the game?” — but the next stage of the cycle will emerge shortly after the first facts are established.

Takes on Every Angle

Some commentators will focus on Folau's motivations, attempting to nail down what was happening inside his mind when he posted the comments. Many will call the comments “hateful”, arguing either that they're against the spirit of the Biblical passages they're rooted in, or arguing that the Bible itself is the source of the hate. They will wonder how such hatred continues to emerge from these supposedly “good” belief systems. They might ask how these attitudes can be tolerated in a harmonious society.

Other commentators will argue that there's no hatred in the comments. If Folau really believes homosexuals are going to hell, and if he really hates them, then he would say nothing at all and leave them to their fate. They might wonder why a person should lose their livelihood for expressing their religious beliefs. They might wonder about the effects of any suspension or sacking on players with similar beliefs, and on

the wider community of believers. They might ask if religious freedom itself is in jeopardy.

Another group of commentators won't focus on Folau at all, but on the effect of his words on those who hear them. They'll point out the high incidence of mental health issues among LGBTIQ youth. They'll share stories from their own past experiences of homophobia and the effect of words like Folau's in re-awakening those experiences.

They'll wonder about the young people in Folau's Christian community who might be questioning their orientation, and the damage that these attitudes might do to those young people if left unchallenged.

Some might wonder if rugby set the stage for this conflict with its support for same sex marriage in the plebiscite. If not for that strong support, Folau's beliefs may have remained private. They might ask if sporting institutions should enter so publicly into debates on issues where there are such deep differences in their ranks.

While it's important to consider different perspectives, our path to the truth isn't a world of ever-increasing, ever-diversifying “takes”.

Takes on Takes

Finally, after a time, some will look at the debates themselves. What does our reaction say about us as a society? How does it fit into our broader arguments about religion, sport, politics, business, sexuality and freedom?

Cycle Stops — Next Story

Then the takes will be filed away. We'll move on to the next story, and the take cycle will start all over again.

Evaluating for Truth

Is this inevitable? Are we doomed to repeat the cycle of takes over and over, each of us separating according to which take we find most true? Those divisions are getting deeper, those tribes more pronounced, with each passing story.

I've been wondering if there's a different way for us in the media to approach these events. A way to break out of the “take cycle”.

In *A Guide For the Perplexed*, Ernest F Schumacher describes two types of problems — convergent and divergent.

A convergent problem is one where there is a discrete answer, for example, “How do I build a fast car?” These sorts of problems are suited to the scientific method — bringing together creativity, experience, theory and experimentation to converge on the best possible solution.

Divergent problems are different. They're the sorts of problems that deal with human experience, the messiness



of our lives. Schumacher argues that using the scientific method to solve divergent problems is never going to work. He uses the example of education: “Is freedom or discipline the best way to teach a child?” We could develop a way to trial both methods, and mark the results. But in truth neither is ever going to work by itself — too much freedom or discipline is harmful to a child.

Schumacher argues that the only way to solve a divergent problem is to transcend it — to seek a higher order principle to help mediate any action. One example he uses in the above example is love — a child can flourish with love mediating between freedom and discipline.

Take Cycle Uses Convergent Solutions

The problem with the take cycle is that it’s often about seeking convergent solutions. Folau is either motivated by hatred, or belief — so a certain course of action is justified. LGBTIQ people are either hurt or not hurt by any public questioning of their identity — so any words that might be seen as harmful must be treated a certain way. Like an incident review system on the sporting field, the take cycle takes any rough conduct, reviews and investigates it, and proposes appropriate action according to the writer’s own view of the situation.

When it comes to human beings, however, these problems are too complex to be easily resolved. None of us, not even Folau himself, can know truly how the complex interplay of faith, experience, emotion, history, culture, family and community shaped his post on social media. None of us can truly know how emotions, memories, questions will come together in an LGBTIQ person when they hear words like Folau’s. We may each have our own experiences, our

own opinions on these matters. But while it’s important to consider different perspectives, our path to the truth isn’t a world of ever-increasing, ever-diversifying “takes”.


A Different Approach

I’m wondering that if in order to transcend the cycle we need to ask different questions: “What does love demand of Israel Folau?” “What does love demand of Rugby Australia?” “What does love demand of LGBTIQ people?” “What does love demand of the Christian community?”

There is no simple answer to these questions. They require that we enter into the messiness of the situation — to understand people’s context, build relationships and understanding, reflect on experience and be moved to action.

They require entering into a process in which the solution is not already set out.

The take cycle does nothing to bring diverse perspectives together. We either agree with a person’s take, or we disagree, and there it ends.

To break out of the take cycle means changing the game. It means putting something else at the centre — a different kind of truth. 

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Michael McVeigh and his family live in Melbourne. He is senior editor at Jesuit Publications and edits *Australian Catholics Magazine*.



CHOOSING THE TRUTH

PAUL TANKARD exposes ideologies that obscure truth and recommends that we practise critical thinking in our everyday relationships in community.

Let's think about "fake news" not just at this time but back 250 years in 1770. Yes, there was news in 1770, though you had to be in London. There were at least nine daily papers in London, as many again weekly papers and bi- or tri-weekly chronicles. But there were no professional reporters. The papers were filled with official proclamations, extracts from letters from overseas, summaries of new books, advertisements, and rumours: lots of rumours. Naturally, under such a regime, the papers also became the vehicles of things that people wanted to be rumoured.

The famed scholar, essayist, poet, lexicographer and conversationalist Samuel Johnson (1709-84) was an astute observer of the contemporary media. A lady of his acquaintance

"implicitly believed every thing she read in the papers" and gave "superfluous attention to such accounts of the foreign politics as are transmitted ... by the daily prints." In order to cure her credulity, during October and November 1770, Johnson had inserted a series of seven bogus reports of battles between Russia and Turkey in the *Public Advertiser*.

We are likely to be scandalised by such behaviour by Samuel Johnson, a model of piety and probity. But that will depend upon what we bring to our reading.

Earlier in the 18th century some of the first readers of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* thought they were autobiographical travellers' tales. Although they were familiar with the genre of real-life buccaneer

survival narratives, they did not know of the novel. *Robinson Crusoe* was one of the first in the new genre.

And what passed as "news" at this time, was sweepings together of the topics being discussed in taverns, coffee houses and on street corners. So in their reading, as much as in their conversations, the people of the time exercised discrimination about what and who to believe and what and who not to. The news did not claim "this just happened" but rather "this is what people are talking about".

Naïve Faith and Naïve Scepticism

By contrast, we expect that what is transmitted as news by newspapers, radio and television is accurate and we have a media industry working around the world. The stakes are higher today than in 1770: in complex societies in which people are more mutually dependent but less actually connected, misinformation can cause health crises, upset economies, topple governments and incite communal violence.

We can imagine people, like the woman of Samuel Johnson's

acquaintance, naively believing everything disseminated by the media or proclaimed by the institutions of authority, because they had seen it in “black and white”.

But when I worked as a schools liaison person for *The Age* in Melbourne, I found that many teenagers said they paid no attention to the news because it was all “bias”.

I found this naïve scepticism disturbing and also interesting. Clearly we need to be intelligently critical of official pronouncements but indiscriminate scepticism as a reflex response is as naïve as indiscriminate credulity.

I think the scepticism was a product of natural adolescent tendencies to self-centredness and suspicion of authorities and institutions, but I also thought it was encouraged by the dominant ideology in school curricula. As a secondary teacher earlier in my career, I had been disheartened by curriculum changes that extracted concrete learning from classes, and replaced it with facile methodologies for being sceptical about everything. To the extent that school leavers seem only to know that everything that passes for knowledge is the product of monolithic and self-interested power structures and anything anyone else claims to know can be dismissed as a “construct”. These “constructs” can encompass most of the ideas by which people have hitherto oriented their lives: nationhood, religion, family, sanity, race, health, biological gender, historical knowledge, grammar, etc.

I’ve found this among university students. In my paper in Rhetoric students are asked to write directly and persuasively what they think. I get answers such as: “Work means different things to different people”, or “Happiness varies in meaning from person to person”, or “Home can mean anything”, or “Everyone has a different idea of morals”, or “we all define normal/right and wrong/perfection differently.” To which I want to say: Can *home* mean having two heads? Can *work* mean pineapple cheesecake? Does any *moral system* regard murder or lying as generally okay? Can *happiness* be defined as

getting hepatitis? You get my drift.

This is not thinking — it is ideology. And it is out of whack with the realities of lived experience in the real world.

Politics and Technology Erode Trust

This naïve scepticism in youth has become a political game that erodes public trust. Politicians have realised that they can say anything they like or that suits their purposes. For example, Donald Trump claims that everything he’s involved in is “great” and that he’s a “genius”; he can say one day the opposite of what he said the day before; he enrages people with his blithe dismissals of inconvenient facts.

Truth is found when we critically examine the things we get steamed up about, don't mistake power games or salving our consciences for the hard business of connection with other people, and get on with the real, practical – and occasionally intellectual – work of faith, hope and love.

I think politicians like Trump have learned that they can treat what they do not want to deal with — wealth and poverty, oppression, refugee status, global warming — as “fake”: or in other words, constructs. They are fake because they are ideas that suit the agenda of their enemies. If Trump sees them reported neutrally in the media, then he calls the news itself fake.

Another ingredient in the erosion of our society’s faith in truth is the bland and impersonal dishonesty we encounter in our everyday dealings with bureaucracy and technology. Outside of friendships and domestic relationships, much of our interactions are not through personal means, but bureaucratic and technological. This can be convenient, but it comes with a cost. When we go through the self-checker at the supermarket, or we shop online, we don’t get to

practise what it means to be honest and direct in our dealings with people. We decrease our sense of dependence upon other real people; we erode our (true) sense of human life as a calling to live in relationship.

And when computers and machines are programmed to give out messages such as “have a good day” or “thank you for choosing us”, it is dishonest. The machine cannot respond to me as a person and the disregard for truth by the programmers and their masters is only made possible by an imbalance of technological and institutional power. The machine has the power and I have no choice.

Truth is Transcendent and Incarnate

As a society, or as individuals, we do not have the power to resist such forces.

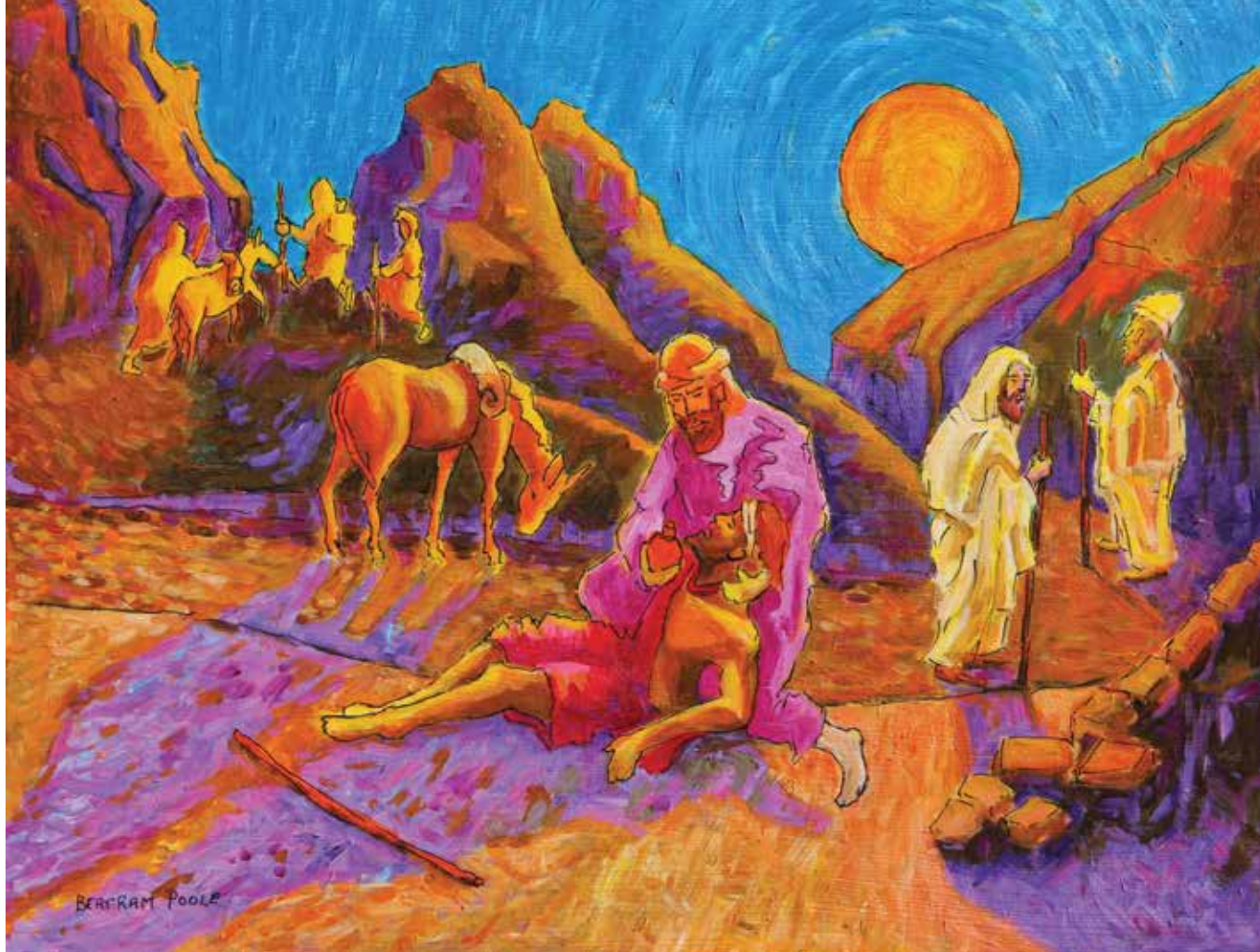
However, one of the frequently overlooked responsibilities of Christian people is to spread a philosophy that is as true as can be to the real state of the world we live in. All people, being in God’s image, have something more than a choice between the idea that the world is neither entirely externally determined and unalterable, nor is it a function of our imaginations. One of the gifts of Christianity to God’s world is the teaching that truth is both transcendent and incarnate.

When Samuel Johnson sent bogus news stories to the *Public Advertiser* in 1770, he was not suggesting truth doesn’t matter, or that it’s okay to fool stupid people. He was challenging us to critically examine the things we get steamed up about, to not mistake power games or salving our consciences for the hard business of connection with other people, and to get on with the real, practical — and occasionally intellectual — work of faith, hope and love. 🔍

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Painting: *Parable of the Good Samaritan* by T Bertram Poole ©
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GO AND DO LIKEWISE

KATHLEEN RUSHTON points to the radical challenge of the parable of the Good Samaritan Luke 10:25–37 for Jesus's first listeners and for us today.

"I was short of cash and suddenly, miraculously, a Good Samaritan leaned over and handed the cashier \$10 for me."

"I volunteer with the New Zealand Samaritans. We're there 24/7 to give confidential emotional support to those experiencing loneliness, depression or suicidal feelings."

These examples show how we use the phrase "good Samaritan", which comes from the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. But Luke does not call the Samaritan "good". That addition came about only in the 19th century.

Kathleen Rushton RSM lives in Ōtautahi Christchurch where, in the sight of the Southern Alps and the hills, she continues to delight in learning and writing about Scripture.



Until then it was known as the "parable of the man who fell among bandits" — the focus being on the injured one. In the 19th century, there was a shift in wealth and influence in European society and the Church. Good people identified with the "good man", the Samaritan, the one who offered relief — just as they dispensed charity to the poor in their societies. So the focus changed from the wounded one to the rescuer — and the radical significance of the Samaritan was lost. Charitable people became known as "good" Samaritans: those with means giving to those who were dependent.

But parables are puzzling stories — they do not support the way things are or appear to be — and Luke 10:25–37 is no exception. So what can help us to understand the Good Samaritan story today?

The Questions

Interestingly, the parable is framed by questions. The lawyer asks: "Teacher, what must I *do* to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds by asking him what the Law says. And when the lawyer quotes the commandment, Jesus replies: "Do this, and you will *live*." The lawyer asks further: "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus responds by telling a parable to expand his question from: "Who is my neighbour?" to "*To whom must I become a neighbour?*"

14 July Luke 10:25–37
RL 15th Sunday Ordinary Time
RCL 5th Sunday After Pentecost

The Parable

The parable begins and ends with the person/*anthropos* who was assaulted. In using *anthropos* rather than man or woman, the story emphasises the humanity of the person, the human condition.

Jesus's Jewish listeners knew well the three classes of people serving in the Temple in Jerusalem: priests, Levites and laypeople. The priest, from the highest class, "was going down that road" — returning from Temple duties to Jericho, 27 miles away, where many wealthy priests lived. People were readily recognised by their dress, language and accent. The priest immediately identified a problem — if the half-dead person was not a Jew and the priest touched him, then he would have had to return to Jerusalem for lengthy purification rituals. He passed by.

Then the Levite, from the second class, came riding along and could see that the priest ahead had not stopped for the wounded person. He did not either. Maybe he could not risk facing the priest if he rode into Jericho with the victim.

Now, the listeners would have expected the third person to be a layman — and the one who would act. But no, the hero is a Samaritan, one from a race of people hated by Jews. This turn of events strikes at the heart of religious prejudice and racism.

The Samaritan "came near him . . . saw him . . . was moved with compassion . . . went to him." His compassion goes well beyond what is required by law. He uses all his resources willingly for the wounded person — oil, wine, wrappings, animal, time, energy and money. The listeners might have expected him to drop the person at the edge of the town. But no, the Samaritan risks his own life by taking the wounded person to an inn in a Jewish area of Jericho.

The last scene in the story takes place the following day. Again the Samaritan risks his life by returning to give the innkeeper two denarii — enough to cover food and lodging for about two weeks.

Listeners would have appreciated the risks involved. If the wounded person could not pay his debts he could have been sold as a slave (Matt 18:25). The Samaritan made certain that would not happen. And innkeepers could be disreputable — the Samaritan just had to trust him.

Jesus as the Samaritan

Some early interpreters identified the Samaritan with Jesus, saying that in this parable he was talking about himself. He was a saving outsider, one who did not fit their expectations, one who poured out his love for the wounded, the *anthropos*. The description of the Samaritan "having a heart moved with compassion" fits exactly how Jesus is described when he

sees the funeral of the widow's only son (Lk 7:13). And the Samaritan's life-risking action on behalf of the wounded fits the salvation story of Jesus as Christ.

What Could the Parable Mean for Us?

The human condition is as fraught and compromised today as it was in the time of Jesus. We have our own wounded humanity, our own outcasts — and our own fears and prejudices. And we have striking examples of those who reach out, like Jean Vanier who founded the L'Arche communities where those with and without learning disabilities share their lives together.

Or Dr Philip Bagshaw, founder of the Canterbury Charity Hospital Trust, established by the community for the community, where health professionals and people volunteer to provide free services for those missing out on healthcare or on waiting lists.

The really radical element of this parable is that both the wounded one and saviour are outcasts. The real challenge is to be compassionate even as we need compassion ourselves.


Be Compassionate Even as We Need Compassion

But the really radical element of this parable is that both the wounded one and saviour are outcasts. The lawyer cannot cope with where he found mercy, cannot even name the Samaritan — instead saying: "the one who showed mercy." The Samaritan acted in the face of rejection and prejudice. The real challenge is to be compassionate even as we need compassion ourselves.

So God's reign is found in most unlikely people and places — in the unexpected, in the outsider regardless of race or ethnicity. Racism can surface when the religious and racial attitudes of the community are exposed.

The cost and risks taken by the Samaritan point to Jesus. Asking ourselves the question: *To whom must I become a neighbour?* will cost us. This parable guides us into the works of mercy — into *becoming* a neighbour. We will see a need and respond with "a heart moved with compassion".

And in a world of structural sin where immense harm is done to vulnerable people through political and economic systems which function to benefit the few, we need to look at the root causes of suffering and injustice, to the works of justice.

We can choose to pass by "on the other side of the road". Or we can cross the road — each person in their woundedness neighbour to another wounded one and the wounded Earth. The ethical demands are boundless. 



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Painting: *Our Father* by Jen Norton © Used with permission www.jennortonartstudio.com

Luke 11:1–4 Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him: “Lord/Kyrios, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

- 2 He said to them: “When you pray, say:
Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom/*basileia* come.
- 3 Give us each day our daily bread.
- 4 And forgive us sins,
for we ourselves forgive
everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

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



Our Daily Bread

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT suggests how we can pray the *Our Father* in this time of ecological crisis.

This prayer of Jesus is one of the best known and loved from our scriptures. It has been translated into many languages — and with each translation and iteration the nuance varies. In this article I’ll suggest how we can use it in our ecological context.

In the opening phrase of the story Jesus is praying (Lk 11:1-4). He’s engaged in a human activity but one which links him with the Divine. It reminds us that prayer is grounded in place and time — Jesus prays in “a certain place” and he ends his praying. We can ground our prayer in our own space, place and time when ecological concerns are at the forefront of our consciousness.

Then one of the disciples asks Jesus to teach them to

pray. He responds from his own experience: "When you pray say: 'Father, hallowed be your name'".

Jesus offers his disciples his own intimate name for God: Father. This name draws the disciples into a loving relationship including them in his experience of being the beloved.

But the name "Father" has other connotations. Addressing God as "Father" immediately sets it within human relationships. It is the title designating the pater familias, the head of the first-century Roman households. He owned and ruled over the entire household: women, children, slaves and property. This image of "father" has accompanied the gospel across the centuries. But in these times we recognise that an image that encourages domination and subjugation in relationships, particularly in relation to gender, is unhealthy for the human community, for the Earth community — and for our relationship with God. So as well as critiquing these connotations, we can use new metaphors such as "mother", "lover", "friend", "gardener" and many others. These addresses for God can enrich our prayer at this time in our world.

The whole of God's household is gathered up into this prayer — a chorus of the human, animal and material praising the Creator and protector.

Thinking of the first-century world of Jesus, the sense of "father" as pater familias sees God as protector of the humans within his "household" and also of the other than human — the dwelling itself, land, water, animals, tools, grain and many other items. The whole of God's household is gathered up into this prayer — a chorus of the human, animal and material praising the Creator and protector.

After opening the prayer by naming and praising the Divine One, Jesus invites disciples to pray for the "coming" of the *basileia* — the reign of God not the empire of Rome. Michael Trainor suggests that longing for such a *basileia* is the "recognition that all is not right on Earth and that God's loving power is what will eventually overcome the oppression experienced". We hear this in the request: "Give us each day our daily bread."

The request for daily bread is rich in ecological significance when we face excessive accumulation and desperate want in our world. The prayer asks for the bread that is necessary just for that day. Our challenge in the 21st century is to trust that tomorrow will provide what will sustain all creatures, all life-forms that rely upon Earth for survival. It is a radical challenge to the human community to share and to live in a way that allows all life to flourish.

The prayer continues: "forgive us our sins". In this context sin is not just individual transgressions but includes the structural and ecological sins of the global community and its local manifestations. The sins of polluting, contaminating and dumping affect the air, water and earth — the flourishing of Earth. Michael Trainor calls these "social and environmental sin" because they affect all life on the planet.

There is a sense of reciprocity and restoration in the phrase: "And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive

everyone indebted to us." As Earth dwellers we are all impacted by ecological sin and we are Earth's polluters. We sin and we are sinned against. The prayer invites us first to recognise our own implication in ecological sin and to pray for forgiveness. And our prayer must move beyond words to include restorative action in relation to all Earth's beings.

The final verse is a plea: "Do not bring us to the time of trial". In an ecological context we have heard the evidence suggesting that our Earth is slowly moving towards a tipping point where it will no longer be able to support life. Rather than dismiss these warnings as fearmongering we can face the evidence and urge the global community to change. In individual and in global ways we can promote truth and work with hope.

This prayer that Jesus first taught his disciples continues to be our prayer in the context of ecological awareness. We can pray it from a personal perspective — to guide us through our daily life — but it can also become humanity's prayer for the protection of Earth. As we pray it in our communities, liturgies and public events we can remind one another of our participation and responsibility in seeing that the whole of God's creation flourishes. Michael Trainor sums it up well: "Rather than prayer being a private... address to God, it is an address to the One who desires ecological and social renewal."

Our challenge in the 21st century is to trust that tomorrow will provide what will sustain all creatures, all life-forms that rely upon Earth for survival. It is a radical challenge to the human community to share and to live in a way that allows all life to flourish. 🔍



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WHISTLEBLOWERS NEED OUR SUPPORT

We all know the saying: "It never rains but it pours." And that's how it feels to be working in Australian journalism at the moment — attacks on the media and whistleblowers are coming in quick succession.

On 5 June, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) raided the Sydney office of our public broadcaster, the ABC. The raids were related to "The Afghan Files", an ABC report published almost two years ago related to the allegation that the Australian Defence Force had illegally killed unarmed civilians, including children, during operations in Afghanistan.

No one could dispute the story's importance. Certainly, no one could question that it was in the public interest to know whether Australian forces were responsible for killing civilians during operations in the Middle East. So last month to see our national police raid the journalists responsible for breaking the story marked an unprecedented and shocking moment in our history.

And the further I dig into the details of the the ABC raid the more alarmed I am. For example, the search warrant itself was a wide-reaching and comprehensive legal document which gave the AFP permission to access any information at the ABC that so much as mentioned the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Army, or any of the reporters involved. The search turned up an astonishing 9,214 documents. Some of these would have revealed the identities of sources and the information they passed on.

But it isn't just the extent of the net cast by the AFP that is concerning. The warrant also gave officers free reign over the ABC servers, allowing them to "copy, delete or alter" any of the stored material.

At the same time the Australian Government is prosecuting former lawyer to the Australian Special Forces and the whistleblower responsible for the leaks, David William McBride. According to ABC journalists who watched the raid unfold, it was clear that the police were searching for material aimed at building a case against McBride.

This attack on this whistleblower is not an isolated one. It came less than 24 hours after a raid on the home of another journalist, political editor Annika Smethurst. Her crime? She had received information that the Australian government was considering the introduction of citizen monitoring — accessing emails, text messages and bank accounts.

Jack Derwin lives in Sydney and is a senior reporter at Business Insider Australia. His interests include all aspects of social justice particularly in the South Pacific region.



Smethurst published a story to that effect. Again, it was a matter of real public interest, and again, the reporter and her sources were met with a hardline response.

The same day that officers went knocking on Smethurst's front door, Sydney radio presenter Ben Fordham was contacted by Australia's Home Affairs Office. The day earlier, Fordham had told his audience that a senior source from the Home Affairs Office had revealed that six boats of asylum seekers had been identified leaving Sri Lanka for Australia. Fordham was asked to give up his source but he refused to do so.

As a journalist, and more importantly as an Australian, I am deeply troubled by these three developments. We are accustomed to attacks on journalists in countries like Turkey, China and Russia, but it is alarming to have the freedom of our press eroded here in Australia.

This isn't just a media issue — it concerns us all. Our society needs whistleblowers — people willing to approach the media to call out stories of corruption and abuse of power. Right now the message from the Australian government and its police force is clear: they will act swiftly and harshly against those who speak up against them.

While Julian Assange fights extradition to the USA from British prison over Wikileaks, as China marks 30 years of censorship of the Tiananmen Square massacre, and as world leaders denounce inconvenient truths as "fake news", in our country there are forces at work to repress truth-telling.

Fortunately, there is a silver lining in that the gravity of the the government's offensive is not lost on media organisations and those in the community. Many have been quick to denounce the raids and the attacks on the journalist and the whistleblower. We need to keep the pressure on our governments.

Most of us are not privy to the inner workings of government departments or the dynamics of the news room, but we can all stand in solidarity with those who risk their lives and reputations to call the powerful to account when they deceive the public. If we do not stand up for truth and for those who tell it, we can slide into accepting uncritically what our politicians want us to believe. We need to stay vigilant, think critically and value the role of good journalism in our societies. **Q**

Testing Opinions



I am a person with opinions. And I like to talk about my opinions. My opinions developed out of my values and beliefs and upbringing. The tools I have been given to understand the world. I decide which of my opinions are important from what I see around me: topics in conversation, the news, issues relevant to my life.

The problem I have when sharing my opinions in conversation is that other people have different upbringings and environments and think differently from me. Even if our base of values is the same, the way those values manifest is vastly different. In other words: I often disagree with people.

Our world is often characterised by discussion of division, of nations that don't understand each other. Many Australians were shocked by Scott Morrison's re-election in May. Brigid Delaney, a *Guardian* columnist, was at the opposition election party, and wrote of a sense of "the cleaving of the country in two", an echo of Brexit and Trump elections, where "part of the national trauma was the realisation that one part of the country was so ill-acquainted with the other part."

Joe Pinkser, writing for the *Atlantic* observed that "social networks . . . tend to surround users with the types of people they already know". The algorithm is designed to reinforce what we already know and believe — a strategy that increases engagement with advertising.


Online, I have to actively look for content and people who have different beliefs and understandings of the world from me. While I find following people on Twitter enlightening, and my understanding of the world is expanded by what I can learn from books and podcasts and articles, it is something else entirely to be confronted by someone you know in person saying something that your every cell rejects.

Sometimes when this happens I burst into tears. Other times, I try to use logic and evidence to make my point, and hope that I'm being listened to. Sometimes I feel frustrated and stay silent because the consequences of my words are bigger than myself.

I am getting better at being patient, slower to react when I learn that people I like believe things that I don't. Curiosity helps with this: I like to ask people questions, and when I'm calm and have the emotional energy and time, I try to ask these people how they came to their opinions, and not to let the opinion be bigger than the person.

It's more difficult, though, when the ideas I disagree with are in the Bible. The Bible is a challenging and ancient

document and I do not always understand it. It's hard to separate the people of the Bible from the character of the God who works through them: people who lie and deceive, have many wives, kill others in God's name, rape and murder, hold slaves and who tell others that they don't belong. But I am curious about the Bible and how it was written; how God's perfection works through warps and brokenness. These texts are the product of a different time from today and my own upbringing and ideas. They use ideas that are in conflict with my lifestyle, identity and straight up modern sensibilities which challenge me to look deeper into them.

Maybe the same is true for the people around me whose opinions can confuse and hurt me: they are God's children and they are imperfect — and so am I. I believe in asking questions to understand the world. I was looking through a message thread with my friend recently where we were talking about our different backgrounds and understandings. "How are we different? is a great question," I told my friend, and I stand by that. Countries are splitting up, and social media is driving us towards sameness. I refuse to be afraid of other peoples opinions. Instead, I want to engage with them — gently, lovingly, carefully. 



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Shanti Mathias is at Victoria University, Wellington, enjoying using long words and immersing herself in the intricacies of media, politics, and literature.



If you would like to discuss a Bequest with us, please give us a call or send us an email.



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The Braided River: Migration and the Personal Essay

by Diane Comer

Published by Otago University Press, 2019

Reviewed by Joey Domdom

BOOK

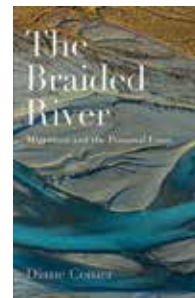
The *Braided River* features 200 personal essays on migration experiences written by 37 migrants in 20 different countries. Author Diane Comer, herself an immigrant, skilfully weaves meaning from these stories about what life is like in a new country. The book fully explores the immigrant experience: from the initial decision to migrate, to navigating the geographical, temporal and emotional distances in maintaining connections with families and friends. It shows how migration changes a person's sense of self and their existential conscious need to belong.

To migrate is to choose a courageous action. And to write

about the experience — when English may not be a first language, or when the writer's age is problematic, or cultural background is different — is an act of vulnerability that further exposes the writer to the unknown.

I resonated strongly with this book from my own experiences as “a stranger who comes to town”. I saw mirrored in it my initial experiences and feelings of isolation. I recognised my initial anxieties and anguish in saying farewell to everyone and everything familiar. But I found, too, that the book affirms the decision and the sacrifices made by migrants to carve a life somewhere else.

The Braided River is an excellent resource for migrants who want to reflect more deeply on their experiences. I recommend it also for those who may have personal or professional connections with migrants — and in a society so diverse as New Zealand, that's practically everyone. 🔍



In Your Loving Is Your Knowing: Elizabeth Templeton – Prophet of Our Times

Edited by Peter Matheson and Alastair Hulbert

Published by Birlinn, 2019

Reviewed by Janet Crawford

BOOK

Elizabeth Templeton is not well-known in New Zealand although Peter Matheson, a fellow Scot, friend and former colleague, describes her in his introduction as “one of the most outstanding theologians of her generation”. Templeton, who died in 2015 aged only 69, was not a typical theologian. Firstly, she was a lay woman. Secondly, though highly gifted and well-qualified academically she gave up an academic life in 1980 in order to raise a family. From then on she was a “freelance” theologian and public intellectual. Thirdly, she published little but gave lectures and addresses, wrote articles, preached and was a very effective religious broadcaster. Widely regarded as a “radical”, she remained a loyal, though always critical, member of the Church of Scotland.

This book is a collection of 33 talks, articles, lectures and sermons selected by Peter Matheson. They vary in length and in style according to the audience. Although displaying wide learning and scholarship Templeton also draws on her own

experience, makes frequent references to poetry and literature (including Janet Frame) and uses story, humour and imagination. She writes as a lay person for lay people, with a special concern for those on the margins of church life, or beyond. She saw theology as a “convivial, energising conversation, engaging every aspect of the self, and open to every partner from any quarter. That it is so often experienced, inside and outside the Church, as a dry, eccentric and restrictive discipline is tragic and needs remedy!” Her work is part of that remedy: lively, accessible and often challenging.

Peter Matheson's introduction briefly outlines Templeton's life and places her work in context. There are then six thematic sections, each introduced by a helpful brief commentary: Christ and Culture; Making Sense of Theology; The Common Life; Ecumenism; Living, Loving and Dying; On Being the Church. I found the section on Ecumenism the most interesting, particularly because I heard Templeton give one of the addresses (at the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991). Her presentation was like a breath of fresh air.

I'd recommend this book to those who are interested in exploring ideas about freedom, community and inclusiveness, who are open to new perspectives and who are ready to be challenged. 🔍



Praying for Peace: A Selection of Prayers and Reflections

Pax Christi Aotearoa/New Zealand

Reviewed by Cecily McNeill

BOOK

There is a richness here of ideas for inspiring liturgies marking the great heroes from scripture, from Christianity and from key events in the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

It's opening honours te Tiriti o Waitangi and, further on, the declaration of independence and Parihaka.

I love the fact that Pax Christi has gone outside the liturgical guidelines to choose a song for International

Women's Day that became a standard for the women's movement — “Bread and Roses”. Indeed the writers have drawn on an eclectic collection of readings and music appropriate to each occasion. The prayers, too, are educational.

The book is organised in chapters covering special days, peace and justice makers, indigenous rights with sections on West Papua, Pasifika and the Rohingya people, justice, family welfare, cultural minorities (including marginalised communities) and creation.

Easily accessed, this slim volume will appeal to those involved in creating liturgies to celebrate people and events as they occur in the calendar year. 🔍





Tolkien

Directed by Dome Karukoski
Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

FILM

I always find it irritating when films (mainly English ones) that treat “classic” subjects (often adaptations of famous novels) are shot through with a golden haze of nostalgia and sentimentality, with characters in immaculate period dress, backed by chocolate-box images of rural cottages, stately homes and (in this case) Oxbridge colleges.

While *Tolkien* does not escape the “golden glow” treatment, the film has enough serious intent to hold our interest and engage our sympathies. A biopic of JRR Tolkien’s early life, it weaves together three strands, each a defining influence on the young writer: his developing intellectual and imaginative powers; his relationship with Edith Bratt, a fellow orphan and his future wife; and, at the heart of the film, the intense loyalty, love and commitment that grew between Tolkien and three of his school friends, a seemingly unbreakable fellowship.

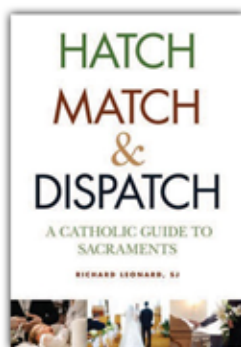
Leaving South Africa after her husband’s death, Mabel Tolkien brings her two young sons out to England, where the family is taken under the wing of a kindly Catholic priest and Ronald (as JRR was known) is sent to King Edward’s School in Birmingham. There he falls in with a group of boys

with literary and artistic interests that set them apart from the mainstream. Together they form a club, the Tea Club and Barrovian Society or TCBS, pledging to “change the world through art” — to take a stand against the bourgeois conventions that define their school and wider Edwardian society. This gives the boys a great excuse to indulge in a range of youthful hijinks, to which the film gives full rein.

Tolkien’s progress through prep school and then Oxford University is intercut with premonitory scenes of the horrors of the Western Front where we see Second Lieutenant Tolkien, half-crazed with fear and anxiety, wandering through the trenches in search of his school

friend and fellow officer Geoffrey Smith. Along with another member of the TCBS, Rob Gilson, Smith was to die in the war. As the scenes on the Somme reach a climax, we are immersed in a hellish landscape where advancing British troops are slaughtered en masse in a fiery wasteland that merges with the Mordor of Tolkien’s imagination, complete with merciless Black Riders and a phantasmal Sauron.

If we can overlook the frequent fictionalising and romanticising of Tolkien’s story, and the film’s glossy sheen, then it conveys some significant emotional truths about the formative years of one of the 20th century’s most celebrated writers. Recommended with reservations. 🔍



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by Susan Smith

Israel Folau and the Bible

"Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor 6:9-10 NRSV). Who would have guessed that Paul's words to the always challenging Corinthian community could have caused such a furore in the sporting world and in that most secular nation, the so-called "lucky country"? Folau says all these sinners are going to hell although all modern translations refer to such miscreants as not inheriting the Kingdom of God. There is no mention of hell in any of the seven highly-regarded translations I checked out.

Like other professional sportsmen, Folau plays sport to make money — lots of money. I imagine this is what lies behind his earlier decisions to switch from Aussie Rules to League to Rugby with every shift meaning more income. I don't have a problem with that but I do wonder why he can so avidly interpret the biblical text in such a fundamentalist and inherently unhelpful way when it suits him. I wonder what he, whose contract with ARU is worth \$4 million, makes of Jesus's words: "Blessed are you who are poor, yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20); I wonder how he interprets Luke's parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Such blatant fundamentalist interpretations, usually directed at the other, are less than helpful in society today.

Politics and Right-Wing Evangelicals

A concerning combination of evangelicalism and politics is raising its head in Aotearoa today as the actions of "Bishop" Brian Tamaki, and the rumours around National MP Alfred Ngaro establishing a conservative Christian party demonstrate. These moves tend to favour fundamentalist interpretations of the biblical text.

I remember reading NZ Marist Gerard Arbuckle's wonderful book on fundamentalism in which he hypothesised that fundamentalism with its black and white way of looking at things becomes more characteristic of societies in where uncertainty and insecurity reign. We are living in a time of uncertainty and insecurity but our response is not to commit fundamentalism but

to search with a deep faith for the mysterious ways of God. Faith is not about understanding everything, but living with hope in a rapidly changing world.

Loss of Species

In May the United Nations reported that more than 1 million species face imminent extinction, including 1,000 species in Aotearoa alone. Our national symbol, the kiwi, is one of the threatened species as is the lovely kererū. Around the time the report was published, at Sunday Masses in Whangarei, we were asked once more to sign a letter about the impending euthanasia vote — the third time this has happened. We duly signed again. There are compelling reasons for so doing and in our parish special letter-writing classes were arranged. I am certainly not in favour of David Seymour's proposed Bill, but I find it disappointing that in our Church there is so much emphasis on safeguarding human bodies but very little on care about other bodies — also part of God's wonderful gift of creation. This emphasis demonstrates how anthropocentric we Catholics still are. For us anthropocentrism is "in" but ecocentrism is still "out". We need good homilies about all of God's creation — surely this is a missionary imperative for today. 🔍



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The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited

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

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

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Journey Towards Justice

by Kim Workman

Published by Bridget Williams Books 2018

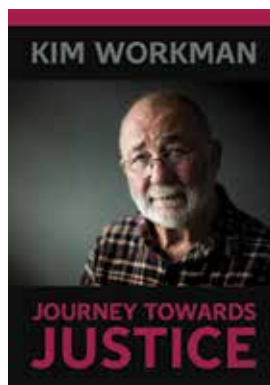
Reviewed by Veronica Casey

BOOK


Journey Towards Justice takes us on a meander through the professional and personal life of Kim Workman, well-known for his passion for justice reform. The son of a Scottish mother and Maori father, his whakapapa comes from Ngāti Kahungunu and Rangitāne. In a conversational style, Kim shares stories from his childhood, youth, career in the police, Ombudsman's Office, Dept of Maori Affairs, Director of Prisons, Director of Prison Fellowship, leader of the Re-Thinking Crime and Punishment project, advisor and supporter of

Just Speak. But it is a personal as well as a professional story: Kim writes of his successes, failures and frustrations and he openly shares his vulnerabilities. His conversion to Christianity was of great solace to him and assisted him in his social justice mission which was affirmed by his knowledge of and reliance on Catholic Social Teaching.

Kim's passion was redressing the inequalities experienced by the various individuals and groups that he encountered in his work. At this time in our country, when we are being forced to face up to our racism, he brings into stark focus the personal racism he was subject to and the institutional racism that he observed and sought to remedy.



Journey Towards Justice is a wonderful insight for all New Zealanders into New Zealand society and especially to those who are responding to the call of Pope Francis. It gives a sense of the vagaries in policy development and a rare insight into the justice system in its totality. Few are as well placed as Workman to explain why the system

needs to change — and why change is so difficult to achieve. 

What Are You Looking For? Seeking the God Who Is Seeking You

By Joan Chittister OSB

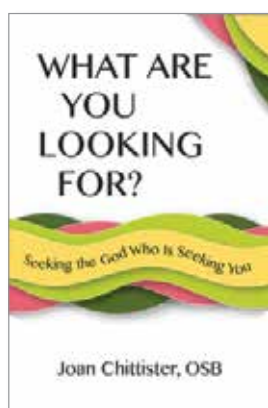
Published by Paulist Press, 2019

Reviewed by Patricia Williams

BOOK

This small book is a comprehensive resume of contemporary Religious Life. For someone who is considering the pros and cons of such a life for themselves or is simply curious, it would be truly informative.

Joan Chittister covers all aspects of vowed community — through the history of Religious Life and into a relevant expression for today. She has an easy to read, direct style of writing and is able to present a fascinating summary of all that is noble and ordinary in community religious life. I particularly liked her ability to do this using the insights



of psychology as well as the usual backing of scripture and theology.

Joan frequently uses the term "Religious Life" — Catholic readers will know that this refers to religious congregations but others may be initially confused. After all, are not all followers of Jesus called to live a "religious" life?

Joan presents an inspiring call to bring about the Reign of God through vowed community life.

Although her book is slanted towards an active ministry, I would like to have seen "being-ness" given equal value. And I would have been curious to read her take on the looming global extinction in relationship to Religious Life as we have known it.



You are invited to WOMEN'S HEART FOR MISSION

An interactive Retreat Day led by

ANN GILROY

Editor of Tui Motu

to be held 14 September 2019

9.30 am—4.30 pm

at the McFaddens Centre

64 McFaddens Road, Papanui, Christchurch
(entry and parking off Redwood Place)

Cost: \$50.00

Lunch, morning & afternoon tea provided

Registration Form

Name:

Address:

Email:

Phone:

Please return this form with a cheque for \$50.00 to **Catholic Women's Movement** P O Box 2184, Christchurch by **30 August 2019**.

OR pay by internet banking – 0317-070043-199-00 – Please include your name and ref RETREAT and email your details to Helen at helenterry@slingshot.co.nz

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Looking OUT and IN

long and silky. Dissolute dogs sniffed around dishevelled coconut husks and discarded plastic. In a sandy field, 30 or 40 young men played tag and kabadi. (Eid was two days ago. With the Ramadan fast over it was time again for games in the dusk). Chasing each other and then falling into the warm sand, I wondered if girls in this village would ever play games in the setting sun.

Once across the causeway, we weaved through the fishing boats and humps of tangled nets. The sea was more khaki than blue now we were close. Soon we were swimming in the warm frothing water. Tumbling, splashing, our best karate kicks showed the waves who was boss (but perhaps the waves were not convinced). Eyes closed, backs turned — who could predict when a wave would swish us? Ten Toes, that old game floating on your back. Who can keep their ten toes showing even as a wave washes over? Ten-year-old Jalori doesn't seem to float too well.

The salty sea was generous. The causeway we had crossed straddled a lagoon, full of industrial effluent and stench. I saw two doughty fish swimming in the black and green waters, but it smelt of waste and death. The open sewer from the fishing village drained into the sea which was also asked to absorb the sins of millions of beach visitors from megapolis Chennai up the coast. Can they always forgive, these infinite salty waters?

Looking back at the beach, we noticed a series of small sand shrines in the intertidal zone. Seven or eight small sand castles, each sitting in the centre of an etched sandy square, sprinkled with colour-powder and flower petals. His checked blue loongi pulled up to his knees, an older man shuffled to

the shore with a bright plastic bag. He squatted and also made a conical sand castle, sprinkling it with yellow flowers — then he lit an incense stick. For some minutes he paused and gazed out to sea. Then he stood up and wended his way back to the village. Was this a daily ritual to farewell the day that was? Was it a special festival day? We spoke no Tamil. He spoke no Hindi or English.

As the light leaked away and the inky blankets of evening gathered, necklaces of lights sparkled up the coast toward Chennai. "Ten more waves and I'll get out," said Jalori the Irrepressible. We dried ourselves and pulled on sticky clothes. Jalori pointed out a huge fast moth that darted across from the coconut palms. Is it a bat or a moth? Could a bat be so small? Could a moth be so fast? Prerana was sure they were bats. We acquiesced. Perhaps our evening walk and swim and all these noticings and ponderings had also been a days-end ritual of sorts.

Time to walk back to the guesthouse, salty and sandy through the gloaming. To leave the hush and swish of the waves. To leave the sentinel sand castles and the sweet swirls of smoke from the incense sticks (as well as the litter-plastic and toxic lagoon). I walk through the sand and then across the tarmac. I wonder how to observe more frequently an evening ritual in order to acknowledge the generous grace of this planet, God the Creator, the place I am in and the day that was. 🔍



Kaaren Mathias lives with her husband, children, a cat and a dog, in a small town in North India and works in mental health.

As the day closed, the white-hot sun became more contrite and the day grew flushed and meek in the gathering evening. Free at last from the worthy-but-too-long-workshop, Jalori and I walked along the highway for a few hundred metres and then turned towards the sea. Prerana and Sahba walked behind, also with beach strolling ambitions after our day in the company of airconditioned cool and laptops. All four of us from land-locked North India were eager to see the sea.

We picked our way through the village where goats sat on the hot dirt. They let Jalori stroke their ears,

From the many strands of
reality, faith
experience
hope, intelligence
love
and community
guide us in knitting the truth
Spirit of Wisdom

From the *Tui Motu* team