Tui Motu

InterIslands

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Rediscovering Abraham
Our Father in Faith

the gift of abraham

September 7 saw millions of people around the world, not just Christians, following the call of Pope Francis to pray for Syria and for the resolution of the seemingly endless crisis of civil war. Perhaps the Russian push to get Syria to join the Chemical Weapons Convention, the treaty banning the use of chemical weapons, and to give its chemical weapons over to an international body for destruction is an answer to this prayer. Certainly it is the first sane pointer away from the political game-playing in the negotiations which have bedevilled this war over many months.

Syria lies deep within the middle of that terrain from which the three great Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) have sprung. In this month's issue, we highlight the place of the patriarch Abraham in each of these three traditions. It is fascinating to register the differences each faith brings to their dealings with this giant figure in biblical history, and at the same time to grasp the commonality Abraham engenders amongst them. We are grafted from the same root. Why not, then, focus on the commonalities of humanity, dignity and creativity and face the huge fear of the 'other' that lies at the heart of the Middle Eastern crisis — and not just in Syria. The Palestinian-Israeli crisis mirrors so clearly this same strongly held fear of difference and rejection of otherness. Given this, what other factors can be brought to bear so that diversity beyond fear and exclusion is allowed to flourish, and at the same time common unifying ideas can be identified and celebrated? This is the sure and hopeful gift our writers on Abraham hold out to us at this moment in history.

October is traditionally the month in which we celebrate Mission and missions. This year has seen some celebrations for the 70th anniversary of the death of Columban Father Francis Vernon Douglas. This New Zealand-born priest died at the hands of Japanese soldiers in 1943 because he would not reveal to his captors what they thought would be useful information given to him by enemy soldiers in confession. A senior student from Francis Douglas Memorial College in New Plymouth gives us a contemporary look at this Columban who has become a college hero. At the same time another Columban, Noel Connolly, looks at the Vatican II document on mission, *Ad Gentes*, and helps us unpack its relevance today. As well, Sister Susan Smith looks at mission from another important angle, that of dialogue. It is this which will take us out of our safe places in the Church, and push us to look out into the world and find common cause with others who will be happy to join with us in offering peace, justice and truth — the fruits of the Kingdom of God — where they are needed. **KT**

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Correction: An attentive reader has drawn our attention to an error in last month's editorial. Rev Rutherford Waddell was not the minister of St Matthews, but of St Andrews Church in Dunedin. Apologies. Ed.

Front cover photograph:
With God in the Desert: the Wilderness of Judea.
[Courtesy of Syzygy Missions Support Network]

the relaunch of our website

This month we have completed at least stage one of the upgrade of the *Tui Motu* website. So we invite you to visit www.tuimotu.org to see the changes. You will find the usual editorial, cover picture and selected articles from the latest issues. But a new feature is the archive of previous magazines, which can be accessed in full. The plan is to have all the magazines loaded over time, leaving a time gap of six months before each new issue is fully available. As you can imagine, the task of recovering and loading 175 issues will take time. For now, you can enjoy the ones we have included and see how the site will work as the material is completed.

A simple search feature has been added. This will provide the full copies of the magazines which contain reference to your search request, but it will not easily take you to the exact location of your word or phrase. Again, in time, it may be possible to improve this. Another feature is a printable subscription form, obtained by clicking at the top right of the screen. We investigated the possibility of on-line subscribing, but have found that the cost of security to protect credit card subscription payments is too great for us to manage and is probably not warranted for the number of such payments we currently receive. Instead we hope that the facility of direct crediting of payments is working well for those of you who are using it.

So enjoy the new look, appreciate the retention of the old look and brand, and let us know what you like or dislike about the new features. We'll be interested to hear from you. ■

STOP PRESS

The Editor has just returned from the annual Australasian Catholic and Religious Press Associations' conferences. *Tui Motu* was awarded two gold certificates for winning entries in two classes: **Best Feature Multiple Authors** for a series in July 2012 on Inter Faith experiences (Cathy Harrison interviewing Sr Bertha Hurley, Michael Fitzsimons interviewing Pushpa and Jack Wood and an article by Jean-Jacques Pérennès); **Best Articles on Catechesis** for three articles in September/October 2012 on The Second Vatican Council (Jim Neilan, Michael Hill, Neil Darragh).

In addition we were **Highly Commended** for Donald Moorhead's striking Lenten cover in March 2013 and in the Best Original Photography section for Paul Sorrell's wonderful sea lions, used as the cover in June 2012. Congratulations to all these artists, writers and people interviewed for winning some new certificates for *Tui Motu.*

We congratulate also *New Zealand Catholic, Wel-Com* and the *Marist Messenger,* who all achieved significant recognition in the various award categories.

New Zealand held its end up well in Melbourne.

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

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

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a private matter

A factitious change of the definition of a thing does not change the nature of that thing, even if it is done by Parliament.

Personal relationships, heterosexual or homosexual, are a private matter, not a public one. They are of no interest to society as such.

Same-sex marriages are and remain just personal relationships, a private matter. They lack the social dimension.

Unlike traditional marriages they do not produce new members for society: new future workers, taxpayers and soldiers.

Looked at it strictly from a societal stand-point, same-sex weddings celebrate sterility, the discontinuity of life, a future without blossom and an empty end.

However, from the personal human point of view I sincerely wish the marrying homosexuals a beautiful wedding day and a long and happy life together.

Kees de Leeuw, *Mount Maunganui*

same-sex marriage

Well done on the same-sex marriage issue. If the NZ Bishops had a gay, talented and faithful granddaughter — as I have — I bet they would have a different view. Our granddaughter's recent marriage ceremony was one of the happiest (and holiest) family occasions I have ever experienced.

Des Mc Sweeney, *Akaroa*

gift of god

You point out in your August editorial that every human being has a right to intimacy.

Some of the language of past church documents on homosexuality is guaranteed to cause alienation rather than intimacy. Any psychologist worth his/her salt will tell you that, at least in men, isolation causes increased genital tension, which in turn makes chastity superhumanly difficult, maybe impossible.

If our bishops wish to show pastoral concern for all of their flock, they will want to point a way out of that impasse. Yes; it is difficult terrain, but far too many lives have already been lost in it. There are affirming, life-giving works that can signal a way forward.

Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Verbum Domini* stresses that the essence of Christianity is not about 'ethical choices or lofty ideas' but about our engaging with the Word made flesh dwelling among us. The 1975 *Vatican Declaration on Certain Questions of Sexual Ethics* acknowledges that for some homosexuals their homosexuality is an 'innate impulse'.

Now, innate heterosexuality is surely seen as gift and blessing of God. Should not innate homosexuality also be seen as gift of God, blessed in itself and in its appropriate expression?

Jim Howley, *Auckland*

a gay person's perspective

I am responding to the August edition of *Tui Motu* regarding marriage equality. The story on page three was written by my mother, Judith Collins, but the title should have been "A mother among many". Her story is definitely not one woman's story.

Glaringly absent was a gay person's perspective and I will describe here the traumatically negative impact Catholic teaching on this issue has had on my life. The editorial was a mostly respectful summary of many of the issues that need addressing by the Church. However, stating that marriage between one man and one woman 'must remain' somehow detracts from the positive stance taken by the remaining 13 pages. Why must it remain? Is it stubbornness of the Church to maintain its stance given the modern understanding of sexuality? Could the theological interpretation of this issue be wrong? It most certainly does not take into account the actual lived experience of most gay people as loving humans.

I realised I was gay nearly 40 years ago at age 12. I was forced to shrink away, to hide in confusion between what I was hearing and what I felt. Young people are still experiencing the same isolation and emotional trauma today as I did, because of the religious attitude towards gay people, including Catholics.

One of the most horrible consequences of religious persecution is suicide, and all Catholics must understand the reality of their words towards young and also older gay people. While no one actually discovered I was gay when I was young, the years up till age 29 were horrible. Inside I knew I was attracted to guys, but the world around me was calling me very horrible things. I lived in total confusion and conflict, wanting something no one would let me have. Outwardly I pretended I was straight, but the result is that I could not form relationships that meant anything positive to me, and I still can't. Intimate relationships with women are just plain wrong for me. The result of 17 years of lying to myself, my friends and family drove me to the ultimate end, and I came within minutes of death. Even now, 20 years on, I often fall into a depressed state and have considered suicide many times.

In my experience, the Catholic Church's teaching on this issue, and most of its members are directly responsible, and to use God to justify this is, quite frankly, abhorrent. Gay

letters continue on page 27 . . .

☞ letters to the editor

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

young people need work and income that provide dignity

'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you what is right' – Matt 20:4

Cathy Bi

Young people of my generation are struggling to find work — and getting a degree is no guarantee of getting a job. I found this out myself last year, when I spent six months looking for work after graduating from Victoria University, and I am still not in a permanent job. I was one of the faces behind the stats that said in 2012, one in six Kiwi young people between the ages of 15-24 actively looking for work was unemployed. Māori and Pacifica youth unemployment is worse, with nearly 40 per cent of young Māori out of work.

Along with this, young people are facing an increasingly precarious work environment. Government policies are eroding the quality of the jobs available to young people. The Starting Out wage for 16–17 year olds (and long-term unemployed 18–19 year olds) permits employers to pay young workers $11.00 per hour. In addition, 90-day trial work periods allow workers to be dismissed without explanation. It's debatable whether such policies actually create more jobs. But even if they did, should job quality be sacrificed for job quantity?

Caritas tackled some of these issues and challenges last month through the Social Justice Week theme of 'Walk Alongside: Meaningful Work for the Young Worker'. The journey continues, and the Church and society need to continue to support young people towards meaningful work.

To me, 'meaningful work' is work that enhances human dignity. It gives people enough to live on and leads towards life-long employment. Young people as much as anyone else need work that offers them a sense of security and a sense of hope.

As New Zealand's Catholic Bishops have said, 'Work is what we do. Work helps shape us into who we are. Work has a dignity of its own in that it expresses the self-worth of a person, something that can never be reduced to an economic value.' (*Working for Life,* 2012).

What troubles me about policies such as the Starting Out wage is that they make a sweeping assumption that young people do not need a living wage. Such policies allow young people to be treated as a disposable source of cheap labour. They allow for further disparity in our country where the gap between the rich and the poor is constantly growing wider. In New Zealand, one fifth of young people between the age of 15 and 19 do not live with their family and are self supported. I know many young people whose wages go towards their family — supporting their own children, siblings, parents or extended family.

According to Catholic Social Teaching a just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. Young people, as much as any other age group, deserve a wage that can meet basic living costs. A living wage enables workers to live with dignity and to participate as active citizens in society. It enables them to provide for themselves and their families.

In contrast to the market place attitude of 'how low can you go?', discussions about what is required for a living wage place people and the needs of the most vulnerable at the centre of wage considerations rather than the demand for greater productivity and profit.

The Living Wage Campaign is proposing a rate of $18.40 per hour as an aspirational goal for employers and employees to work towards. Caritas believes the concept of a living wage cannot be reduced only to a single monetary value. However, it is clear that the minimum wage is not enough to ensure a life of dignity for a growing number of people. Two in five children living in poverty have at least one adult who is in full time work.

Catholic social teaching on just wages challenges us to consider what each of us, employers and employees, can do to increase wages and improve working conditions for our lowest paid workers. This includes young workers and older workers. We as a society need to hold decision-makers and business owners accountable to provide work that develops the dignity of a person and offers a wage that is enough to live on.

Our responses to youth unemployment need to be long term and holistic. It is difficult to be young and without a job. Getting work experience is important. However the solution needs to include a shift in attitudes, to remember the most vulnerable worker: the least paid worker — whether young or old — who most needs meaningful work and a living wage. ■

Cathy Bi is Social Justice Week coordinator for Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, the Catholic agency for justice, peace and development.

a jewish perspective on abraham

The Jewish perspective stands tall on Abraham as patriarch, covenant signatory, religious symbol, and role model. Our author is interested in an Abraham who, while forcing us to acknowledge difference among the three Abrahamic faiths, can lead us to a deeper understanding of faith than any one of the three can provide.

Jamin Halberstadt

Abraham plays an absolutely pivotal role in traditional Jewish faith, not to mention modern politics. Historically, he, or someone like him, lived around 2000 BC. (For perspective, that's 10 generations removed from Noah, and about 2000 years from the biblical year of creation.) He is often referred to as the first Jew, which says something important about what it means to be Jewish. This is because the Torah itself, the Old Testament whose teachings Jews are bound to obey, would not be given to them at Mt. Sinai for some 250 years.

abraham the first monotheist

What made Abraham 'Jewish', then, is not his adherence to Jewish law or tradition, but that he was a monotheist, traditionally the first. Abraham came to believe that the universe was the work of a single creator, which was at odds not only with the beliefs of the day, but with the beliefs of his own father, Terah. Indeed, Terah was not just an idol worshipper but an idol salesman.

A famous story from the Midrash, a compendium of rabbinic stories and scriptural interpretations, tells of Abraham's destruction of his father's idols while the latter was away. Abraham left only one idol, in whose hand he placed the hammer he had used to do the deed. When his father returned, furious at the damage to his livelihood, Abraham denied culpability, blaming the one remaining, hammer-armed statue. His father, incredulous, bellowed "Do you take me for a fool? Idols don't have feelings! They can't act!"

"In that case", Abraham replied, "why do you worship them?"

> While Judaism, Islam, and Christianity have enormous compatibilities — historical, spiritual, and ethical — Abraham isn't obviously one of them.

Presumably because of Abraham's recognition of God's oneness, God appeared to Abraham and made a covenant with him. Although 'covenant' usually implies a contract between two parties, Abraham's covenant with God appears to be a binding promise of one party to another and interestingly, the bound party isn't Abraham. Rather, God promises "to make of Abraham a great nation and to bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him". (Genesis later outlines a reciprocal obligation on Abraham and his descendants: circumcision, which remains a necessary Jewish rite of passage to this day.)

the 'chosen' people

This, then, is the origin of the 'the chosen people': descendants of Abraham, the first monotheist, were chosen by God. Unfortunately, it is not as clear in the ancient texts what the Chosen People were chosen to do, and generations of scholars have debated what privileges and/or obligations 'chosenness' confers. Some argue that Jews are entrusted with responsibility for advocating and spreading the idea of God's singularity. An Orthodox Jewish perspective is that Jews were chosen to receive God's teachings at Mt. Sinai and Jews are responsible for following the laws therein. The Reform Jewish movement sometimes takes 'chosenness' to mean that Jews are responsible for their own choices and must actively choose to live a righteous Jewish life. Others are uncomfortable with the notion of 'chosenness' at all, believing it to be elitist and isolating. But all notions of chosenness originate with the covenant with Abraham. And the covenant is taken as the literal, 'legal' basis on which Jews historically claimed ownership of the lands constituting modern Israel.

abraham as religious symbol

Abraham is also often taken as a symbol of obedience and faith. The covenant itself seems impossible on its face. When he is instructed to leave his homeland and is promised descendants "as numerous as the stars in the heavens" Abraham and his wife Sarah are a childless elderly couple. Indeed, from Abraham's perspective, the covenant would not have seemed likely to be fulfilled any time soon, and even foreshadowed the hardships Abraham's people would have to endure before reaching the promised land, including enslavement in Egypt and subsequent expulsion in the desert.

If that was not sufficient to test his faith, Abraham is subjected to an explicit series of tests, the first one being thrown into a furnace as punishment for the idol-smashing episode. (Abraham miraculously survives the fire, but his brother Haran, who waited to see Abraham's fate before supporting him, does not — an apparent biblical lesson on the importance of faith in the absence of evidence.) The final test is the famous story of the sacrifice of Isaac, the son who is miraculously born to Sarah at age 90 and who is nearly slaughtered by Abraham's hand, acting on God's apparent orders. The story has been subjected to many different interpretations, the most straightforward of which is as a test of Abraham's loyalty and faith (which he passed). But it has also been construed as a test of Abraham's righteousness (which he failed), as a test of *Isaac's* faith (he was, after all, 37 years old), and as a punishment for Abraham's rejection of Ishmael, his first son by Sarah's maidservant.

Jamin Halberstadt [Photo: Dr Cindy Hall]

model of compassion and mercy

Finally, Abraham is considered a role model. Each of the Jewish Patriarchs — Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob — is known for a particular attribute: kindness, strength, and truth respectively. Many of the stories and commentaries about Abraham are meant to convey his compassion and mercy. For example, three days after his circumcision (allegedly the most painful post-circumcisory period) he is visited by three angels, whom he takes to be human. But despite his discomfort, he offers to feed and water them. He famously bargains for the salvation of Sodom: if he can produce just 10 righteous people in the whole city, God agrees to spare it.

Thus Abraham — patriarch, religious symbol, legal signatory, role model — is a significant and relevant figure in both traditional and modern Judaism. But ironically from the perspective of the 'Abrahamic faiths', he is also a divisive one. While Judaism, Islam, and Christianity have enormous compatibilities — historical, spiritual, and ethical — Abraham isn't obviously one of them. Indeed, from a traditional Jewish perspective, Abraham's covenant with God created unique entitlements for his descendants, including rights to the land of modern Israel (and much of the rest of the Middle East). It also characterises Ishmael, a significant patriarch of Islam, as an illegitimate son born to Abraham's maidservant, later disavowed when Abraham and his wife Sarah have a child of their own, and explicitly excluded from God's covenant. Furthermore, Abraham argues forcefully for monotheism and against idolatry, which many Orthodox Jews believe conflicts with the Christians' doctrine of the Trinity and worship of religious symbols. Abraham is, at first glance, an odd place to search for a modern reconciliation among Abrahamists.

for the future

But while 'rediscovering Abraham' may be a questionable path to interfaith peace, there is value in acknowledging our differences. For me, anyway, if there is any unique obligation on Jews, it's to engage with these contradictions, to come to understand how very different, but equally mature religious traditions can emerge from the same meager historical facts. Wouldn't it be interesting if *this* were Abraham's true calling, to reveal himself in different guises to competing faiths in order to force a deeper understanding than any one of them can provide on its own. ■

Jamin Halberstadt is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Otago.

abraham from a catholic perspective

The writer sketches aspects of the Catholic understanding of Abraham, and looks at the ways the living tradition of Catholicism influences how we see the patriarch Abraham.

Kathleen Rushton

Abraham is a significant figure in the story of God's self-communion which is revealed through Scripture and Tradition. Universal or cosmic revelation prepared for the particular and historical revelation of God's self-communication in creation, in the history of Israel and the Covenant of Sinai. Christian revelation is the crystallisation of this general and historical revelation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Mediator and the Word made flesh.

The story of Abraham in Genesis continues both in other Old Testament books and through allusions, echoes, and re-interpretation of his story in the New Testament. The relationship between the two Testaments is summed up by St. Augustine: "The New lies hidden in the Old and the Old is unveiled in the New." In Scripture, the written tradition on Abraham is interpreted through the living Tradition guided by the teaching authority of the Church. Thus, interpretation about Abraham which has developed over the centuries extends beyond the figure in Genesis.

Kathleen Rushton

how do catholics meet abraham?

Abraham is met in liturgical prayer. The Roman Lectionary is a selection of Scripture readings used in the public worship of Sunday and Daily Mass. Readings about Abraham from the Old and New Testaments are proclaimed about 19 times over the three year Sunday/major feasts cycle and about 53 times over the two year weekday cycle.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist of the Mass, when Eucharistic Prayer I is used, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, is mentioned. The Divine Office, which is prayed by priests, religious and some lay people, recalls daily the mercy shown to our ancestor, Abraham, in the Benedictus of Morning Prayer and in the Magnificat of Evening Prayer. In the Committal Rite of funerals the celebrant prays that the person who has died be received into the bosom of Abraham.(see *Tui Motu*, September 2013, p 26)

what do catholics believe about abraham?

Abraham, without prior merit, was chosen by God as the father of the chosen community. He is the father of a multitude of nations, not religions. According to the apostle Paul, he is the father of all who have faith. Through Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham came to the Gentiles (Rom 4:11). Further, the promise of Abraham applies to the Church, that is, a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles united by their faith in Jesus. Faith is essential, not birth. Abraham's call is the remote preparation for the gathering together of People of God (cf. Gen 12:2; 15:5-6).

the faith of abraham

The faith of Abraham was in promises that God had yet to fulfil. This requires of Christians the faith that Abraham had already shown: faith that human beings can entrust their lives to unconditional confidence in God. His faith is an anticipation of the trust that Christians must show when they entrust their life to the gospel of Jesus. Abraham is also a model of hope, for he believed against hope (Rom 4:18). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in a chapter on prayer, devotes three paragraphs to Abraham and stresses that since his time, intercession — asking on behalf of another — has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy.

hospitality and belief

Both the New Testament and early Christian writings present Abraham as a paradigm of remarkable hospitality. The Book of Hebrews alludes to his welcome given to three visitors in Genesis 18 to exhort people to show hospitality to the poor and strangers "for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb 13:2). Ambrose, the fourth century Bishop of Milan, writes that hospitality should not fail at our table for Abraham watched at the door of his tent so that no stranger by chance may pass.

Abraham depicted in a fresco (1782) by Alexandru Ponehalski inside the 'Church on the Hill' at Ieud, Romania.

In the Prologue of John 1:1–18, the two motifs of hospitality and belief come together. Also underpinning this is Jesus, the pre-existent Word. The divine/angelic visitors to whom Abraham gave hospitality and did not recognise, pre-shadow the revelation of the Trinity. This is behind both Jesus' claim of having met Abraham and that before "Abraham was, I am." (Jn 8:58). This understanding is portrayed in iconology such as Andrei Rublev's Trinity.

abraham's sacrifice of isaac/god and jesus.

"Behold the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29, 35) and "God sent the beloved Son" (3:16) are allusions to Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac. The Office of Readings has part of a homily given by Origen, the fourth century theologian, on Gen 22 which is an example of the 'spiritual interpretation' of the Old Testament whereby persons, places and things are seen as prefiguring Jesus. The ram and Isaac are types of Jesus.

new testament interpretation

paul

The earliest Christian writing on Abraham is by Paul, a Jew. He refers to Abraham to justify his Jewishness. Paul, too, uses a way of interpreting Scripture called Midrash, which is a kind of homily on a part of the Pentateuch to apply it to a new situation. Paul faces a struggle about whether Gentiles must be circumcised before they can become Christians. In Romans 3, Paul takes Gen 15:6: "And he [Abraham] believed the Lord and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteous." Paul argues that Abraham responded in faith (Gen 15) before circumcision, which does not happen until Gen 18. Paul argues that Abraham, the father of the chosen people, was justified by faith while still an uncircumcised Gentile.

Without Sarah and Hagar there would have been no children of Abraham. The two mothers disappear when they are no longer required. Abraham had two sons but the focus is on his two wives: 'the slave woman' and 'the free woman' (Gal 4:21–31). By way of analogy, the enmity between them begun in Genesis is magnified by Paul who argues that those who choose 'to keep the law' are not heirs of Sarah but of Hagar, the slave woman. Therefore they are 'born to slavery' as opposed to being born in the freedom that Christ can give.

luke

Abraham is mentioned more often in Luke than in any other New Testament book. In speaking of God's mercy shown to 'our ancestors' in both Mary's Magnificat (1:55) and in Zachariah's Benedictus, Abraham is the only ancestor named (v.73). Jesus is the son of Abraham in the genealogy (3:34). The woman who is crippled and is healed on the Sabbath is his daughter (13:16) and Zacchaeus, the tax collector, is his son (19:9).

The phrase 'in the bosom of Abraham' occurs only once in the Bible in 16:22. As the focal point of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus it suggests protection and security. The Greek word for bosom, *kolpos,* can be applied to both female and male. The Fathers of the Church and later iconology associate the bosom of Abraham in various ways which suggest a paternal, maternal and life-giving figure.

summary

I have sketched aspects of the Catholic understanding of Abraham in Scripture and Tradition. The living tradition of Catholicism has shaped our past and our present, influencing how we see Abraham. Preparing this material has enabled me to appreciate better the profound distinctions of the Catholic understanding of Abraham so that I may come to appreciate the profound distinctions of the Jewish and Muslim understandings. ■

Kathleen Rushton is a Sister of Mercy working in adult education in the Diocese of Christchurch, and writer of Tui Motu's *monthly scripture column.*

rediscovering abraham, our father in faith: a muslim perspective

Two of the central pillars of Islam, prayer and fasting, take their focus from the story of Abraham, while his pure faith is a model for all Muslims. The writer comments on these, and looks at the relation of Islam to the 'people of the book' (Jews and Christians).

Najibullah Lafraie

The three main monotheistic religions in the world today trace their roots to the Patriarch Abraham and assign a special place to him in their religious traditions. Muslims are well aware of the significance of Abraham in the other two religions. Many Jews and Christians, however, will be surprised to learn from the noted Jewish scholar Jon Levenson that "Islam (which arose in the seventh century C.E.) focuses on Abraham more than does either Judaism or Christianity". In this brief article, first I will present evidence of Abraham's significance in Islam, then I will discuss why Abraham is considered so important, and finally I will comment on how Abraham can provide a common ground for the three faiths.

Najibullah Lafraie

evidence for abraham in islam

Abraham plays a central role in two out of the five pillars of Islam, prayer and pilgrimage — the other three being declaration of faith, *zakat* (poor-due tax), and fasting. While praying, all Muslims must face towards Kaabah, located in Makkah, 'Saudi' Arabia today. According to the Quran (3: 96-97; 2: 127-129), Kaabah is the first house of worship on earth, rebuilt by Abraham and his son Ishmael. Abraham is also the only prophet, other than Prophet Muhammad, whose name is mentioned at least four times in each of the five daily prayers (a total of 20 times a day). That is part of what is called 'Salat Ibrahimia', with two slightly different versions, both recited one after the other:

"O God! Send peace/blessings upon Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad as You sent peace/blessings upon Abraham and upon the family of Abraham; indeed, You are praiseworthy and glorious."

Pilgrimage, *hajj*, performed annually at the last month of the Islamic lunar calendar and obligatory on each Muslim at least once in their life time if they can afford it, is a commemoration of the story of Abraham, his wife Hagar and their son Ishmael. While performing *hajj*, Muslims circumambulate Kaabah, the house built by Abraham and Ishmael; pray at Maqam-e Ibrahim (the stand of Abraham, believed to have been used during the building of the Kaabah); run between Safaa and Marwa (the two hilltops between which Hagar ran in search of water); throw pebbles at the symbol of Satan (who tried to dissuade Abraham and Ishmael from doing what they thought was God's command); and finally sacrifice animals in commemoration of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son for the sake of God. Each year, while the pilgrims perform hajj, other Muslims commemorate the story all around the world by celebrating *Eid al-Adhah* (Festival of the Sacrifice).

Abraham also occupies a special place in the Quran, Muslims' Holy Book. A chapter of the Quran (Chapter 14) is named after him and his name appears in the Quran 69 times, more than any other prophet's name except for Moses. The Quran describes him as God's friend: "Who could be better in religion than those who direct themselves wholly to God, do good and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith? God took Abraham as a friend" (4: 125). He is also described as an example and model: "You have a good example in Abraham and his companions, when they said to their people, 'We disown you and what you worship besides God! ..'." (60: 4; see also 16: 120).

what is the significance of abraham?

The most important characteristic of Abraham in the Quran is being a 'hanif', referred to in more than a dozen verses, for example: "Say, 'My Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright religion, the faith of Abraham, a man of pure faith [*hanif*] ...'" (6: 161). The Oxford Dictionary of Islam describes *hanif* as: "One who is utterly upright in all of his or her affairs, as exemplified by the model of Abraham (Ibrahim) with his pure monotheism, sincerity, and complete submission and obedience to God. These essential components comprise the upright path of Islam ..., which Muslims believe is the basic nature and goodness (*fitrah*) upon which humanity was created." Thus, Abraham was a hanif first and foremost because he was true to his God-given nature. But the Quran also makes it clear that he reached 'pure monotheism' by using his God-given reason. The Quran (6: 67-79) tells the story of Abraham rejecting the worship of celestial bodies by logical reasoning. Similarly, he used logical reasoning to smash the idols worshiped by his people and to argue with them against their worship. When asked if he had crushed the idols, "... He said, 'No, it was done by the biggest of them—this one [whom he had left intact]. Ask them, if they can talk.' They turned to one another, saying, 'It is you who are in the wrong,' but then they lapsed again and said, 'You know very well these gods cannot speak.' Abraham said, 'How can you worship what can neither benefit nor harm you, instead of God? Shame on you and on the things you worship instead of God. Have you no sense?'" (21: 58-67) This story also makes it clear that hanif means a rejection of blindly following the traditions of the forefathers. Elsewhere in the Quran, when Abraham asks his people why they worship the idols, they reply, "... this is what we saw our fathers doing"; and Abraham's response is: "Those idols you have worshipped, you and your forefathers, are my enemies ..." (26: 72-77).

The other significance of Abraham is his total submission to God, putting his trust in Him, and passing the tests. The first test was smashing the idols and readiness to face the fury of his people: "... They said, 'Burn him and avenge your gods, if you are going to do the right thing.' But We [God] said, 'Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham'" (21: 68-69). The other test was God's command to take Hagar and her new-born son Ishmael to a faraway desert and leave them there (the Quran does not say anything about Sarah's jealousy in this regard). Abraham wholeheartedly accepted the command and prayed: "Our Lord, I have established some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House, Lord, so that they may keep up the prayer. Make people's hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce, so that they may be thankful" (14: 37). Finally, another important test was his readiness to sacrifice his son for the sake of God. The story in Islam is similar to the one in Judeo-Christian tradition, but there are some significant differences. The Quran does not name the son, but Muslims generally believe it to be Ishmael, not Isaac. In Islamic tradition, the boy was a teenager; Abraham consulted him on what he thought was God's command; and he consented to be sacrificed. Furthermore, God did not directly order Abraham to slaughter his son; rather, he had a dream which he interpreted as if God wanted the sacrifice of his son (32: 102-107). Only after Abraham successfully passed the tests, God promised to grant a leadership role to him and his righteous descendents (2: 124).

Abraham is also important in Islam because of the simplicity of the message he presented, easily understood and touching the heart (see, for example, the Quran, 26: 78-80; 53: 36-42). Moreover, the attributes of Abraham (some mentioned above) serve as a model for the Muslims to follow: purity of faith, true devotion to the One and only God, total submission to God, strong opposition (enmity) to idolatry, moral courage, truthfulness, strength and vision, patience and perseverance, tender-heartedness and forbearing, hospitality ...

abraham as common ground for three faiths

Can Abraham serve as a common ground for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? The answer would depend on how each religion views itself and other religions. Every religion can be inclusivist or exclusivist, and Islam is no exception. However, as the Muslim scholar Abdullah Saeed persuasively argues, "the foundation texts of Islam (the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet) provide ample support for a more inclusive view of the religious 'other'." This is true in the case of most religions, which are believed to have originally come from God, but particularly for Judaism and Christianity, whose followers are referred to in the Quran as "the people of the Book". Abraham was the forefather of all (22: 77-78); he was neither a Jew nor a Christian (3: 65); and "the people who are closest to him are those who truly follow his ways" (3: 68). It is important to acknowledge the differences, but it is more important to remember that there are many more commonalities. Thus, Abraham can certainly serve as a common ground if we all heed to the advice given by the Quran to the Muslims: "argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly. Say, 'We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God is one [and the same]; we are devoted to Him'" (29: 46). ■

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mission in new zealand today

Pope Francis has recently begun a dialogue with Eugenio Scalfari, the atheist co-founder of La Repubblica, Italy's leading daily newpaper, in a 2,500 word letter to the editor. His taking up of this Vatican II emphasis on dialogue is indicative of the various dialogues as missionary imperatives of which our writer speaks.

Susan Smith

One important development in Catholic missionary practice after Vatican II was an emphasis on dialogue. Catholics were invited to dialogue with their Christian sisters and brothers, with women and men of the world's great religions, and with all people of good will who had no belief in divine realities.

Prior to Vatican II, mission was usually about religious priests, sisters and brothers going from Western nations to foreign countries where the people did not look or act or think like them. This 'blue-water' model of mission was almost invariably characterised by attitudes of cultural superiority and was essentially monological or one-way. Those who were sent from the West were those who knew and had solutions for 'the other' who lived in presumed darkness. Generally speaking these missionaries were zealous and caring but they had little understanding of the more theologically developed understandings around the relationship of faith and culture that we have today. Dialogue presupposes that mission is a two way process, a relationship of equals searching for truth together.

varieties of inter-religious dialogue

There are at least four aspects to dialogue. First, there is the dialogue of life when people strive to live together in peace and harmony, reaching out a helping hand to the neighbour in need. Dialogue of life means having a heart so open that "wind blows through it" (Alice Walker, 1997).

Dialogue of action involves working with others of good will for a greater good, and increasingly this means cooperating with them around justice or environmental issues. As Pope Francis put it, the atheist and the believer could meet each other by doing good.

There is also spiritual dialogue. Believers of different traditions can commune at a profoundly deep level from the cave of their hearts. Some years ago when I was living on the East Coast a group of us — I was the only *Pākehā* — made our way to the top of Mount Hikurangi. A few days later I met a local kaumatua whom I knew had doubts about the presence of a Catholic sister in Tairawhiti. He asked me how I found the day. I responded that I had been overwhelmed by a sense of something transcendent as I looked to distant horizons. He looked at me in some amazement and replied that he felt the same whenever he climbed Hikurangi. That conversation marked the beginning of our friendship.

And mountains are holy places for so many religious traditions — think of Moses meeting God on Mount Sinai, Jesus on Tabor, on Calvary, Indian holy men on India's great mountain ranges, of Māori who identify with Taranaki or Aorangi or Hikurangi, or think of our own experiences when we reach the summit and are overwhelmed by our sense of the divine.

Fourthly, there is inter-religious dialogue. This often seems to be left to theologians, to those well versed in understanding the subtleties of their holy scriptures and books, and the gatekeepers concerned to see that nothing is lost in their particular tradition.

Most recently American Divine Word missiologist, Stephen Bevans, has spoken of the need in our contemporary world for prophetic dialogue, which I think means bringing an edge as it were to our efforts to bring about a more just world in our dialogue with decision-makers.

inter-religious dialogue in aotearoa

In 1986, when Pope John Paul II met with Australian Aboriginal people he told them: "At the beginning of time, as God's Spirit moved over the waters, he began to communicate something of his goodness and beauty to all creation... And to all human beings throughout the ages God has given a desire for himself, a desire which different cultures have tried to express in their own ways". Not only did the pope's words resonate with his Aboriginal audience, they also resonated with others whose homes are located in the great Pacific Ocean.

Four years later, the pope reiterated that the Spirit is present in every time and place in his encyclical on mission, *Redemptoris Missio*, #28-29. Belief in the presence of the Spirit in all times, places and cultures means that mission can no longer be a one-way exercise.

These papal insights are important as we think about mission as dialogue in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. Most New Zealanders are no longer committed to regular church-going. However, many experience a sense of the transcendent, when they are in the bush, climbing mountains, clambering up river-beds, or enjoying themselves in the oceans that surround our country. I believe such experiences can provide

Mount Hikurangi [Image: Wikipedia Commons]

an opportunity for dialogue about the mystery of God.

I will not forget being part of a group engaged in tree planting on Matakohe Island, a small island in the Whangarei Harbour, where young kiwi chickens are raised to adult status before being released to predator-free parts of the mainland. While we were sitting having lunch, the ranger told us of a new path they hoped to put along the side of the hill. He remarked that such a track through the bush looking down the harbour toward the Whangarei Heads could 'inspire' people. The word 'inspire' rang theological bells for me. What did he mean? Did he realize that this simple expression was suggesting that people are searching for the transcendent and, by extension, the Creator who can be known through creation?

Again, I am often struck by TV programmes that have well-known New Zealanders — think Steve Logan — journeying through different parts of the country or by the long-running *Country Calendar* programme. The language of the different people we meet is often impregnated with a real spirituality. It seems to me that our shared love of Aotearoa could be a good entry point into dialogue about spiritual realities.

inter-religious dialogue with māori

Over the last few years there has been an interesting development in missiological writing on dialogue. Although inter-religious dialogue has been recognized as integral to mission, it normally occurred with representatives of the world's great religions — Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam. Now missiologists advocate dialogue should include dialogue with indigenous traditions.

Acceptance of the Christian faith was always more marked among indigenous peoples whose religious beliefs and practices were intimately related to place, not to books. Sadly whether in Africa or Aotearoa, these beliefs and practices were dismissed by missionaries as primitive, and missionaries sought to delink Māori from their traditional religions. Therefore dialogue with Māori about hidden or lost traditions would seem to be important for contemporary society.

Furthermore, if care for the environment is seen as a missionary imperative, then understanding Māori respect for Papatuanuku could be important. It is now commonly acknowledged that subsistent economies characteristic of indigenous peoples, including Māori, were less destructive of the environment than the intensive agricultural approach believed essential for contemporary New Zealand's well-being. Not that a return to the past is the way into the future, but it should be possible to learn from Māori practices as we all struggle with environmental degradation.

Māori have a deep respect for Papatuanuku. Two examples demonstrate this. I have a Māori friend who recently told me about the funeral of an elderly aunt. The family decided not to embalm the body and instead wrapped her body in a sheet. By not burying her embalmed body in a treated wooden coffin they showed their respect and love for Papatuanuku. Today in Tai Tokerau some Māori and Pākehā are deeply concerned about the government's decision to grant gold and precious metal mining exploration licences to three small companies who fortunately seem to have underwhelming capital resources. Māori are concerned about this claim because nowhere in the world have indigenous people benefited from mining on their *turangawaewae*, and along with some dairy farmers they are worried about the toxic run-off that future mining would mean.

John Paul II wrote that when the missionaries brought the gospel to Māori "they found peoples who already possessed an ancient and profound sense of the sacred" (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 2001). Our relationship as *manuhiri* with the *tangata whenua* suggests that dialogues of life, of action, of theologies, of prophetic engagement, and of spiritual values are not simply options but missionary imperatives as people seek to respond to new and often threatening economic and environmental challenges. ■

Susan Smith is a Mission sister living on the outskirts of Whangarei.

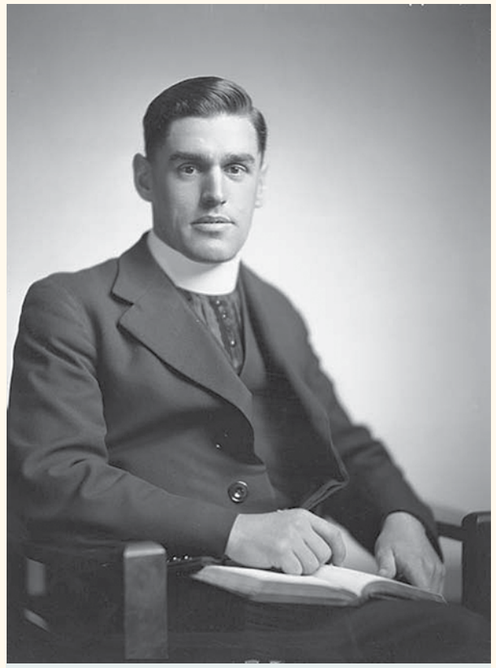
the gift of francis vernon douglas

It is 70 years since Father Francis Vernon Douglas was murdered in the Philippines during World War II. His selfless life and actions have been remembered and celebrated in various ways this year. Here, a senior student from Francis Douglas College in New Plymouth records for us what this Columban priest means to him.

Cavaan Wild

Francis Vernon Douglas was born in Wellington. He became a Columban missionary priest and was sent to the Philippines where he was murdered for preserving the seal of confession. For a short time until the beginning of 1937 he was a curate in New Plymouth.

A keen sportsman, student and notable singer, Francis is remembered by us forever as a selfless man who laid down his life for his friends. He is celebrated at Francis Douglas Memorial College in New Plymouth as an archetypal hero, in the stained glass in our Chapel and through a memorial service held in conjunction with our annual Mission Action Day celebrations. He is very special to us.



Francis Vernon Douglas

When will you sing again?

A young man with a thirst for life, without the cynicism of hard years or harsh lessons,
a young man of the people,
youth, in its finest example.
Did your Parish of Johnsonville echo with the sounds of your excellence? Sports fields ring to your urgent competitiveness, joyous cries of victory?
Did you sit, fresh faced in a classroom, learning, observing, curious to know, to understand what was going on outside your sleepy neighbourhood, with a want that would propel you far, far from the hills of Wellington to a hot, highly reactive land?
They needed you there.
You understood that.

What's that?
Your song was heeded a long, long way north,
Will you sing for us there?
'Will you sing for us here?' they asked. 'Will you carry your song across continents, amongst islands and steaming jungles to find us, half a world and an entire culture away, waiting in the dark monsoon clouds of war and turmoil, for our saviour?'
We asked of you, 'Will you carry the torch for us?'

You upped and left your place,
For your God. Your God heard and knew your song,
knew what it meant for other people and the power of your boyish enthusiasm,
knew where it would be best needed.
E Te Atua called and you answered.

There were others like you. Those GI's who just wanted to talk, young, homely heroes. Perhaps without your religious zeal and discretion, but heroes nonetheless.
Young men of the home and the hearth, sacrificed in foreign, unforgiving fields that their bare feet didn't recognise beneath them,
far, far from home,

fighting in someone else's father's farm.
Desperately seeking to avoid 'catching' one, keeling over, face first into the cold mud.
Someone else's war extracts a heavy toll on youthful, boyish enthusiasm.

It's hard to be reverent,
harder still when every Eucharist you presided over is watched by the unblinking cyclops eyes of guns, or when an anointing could be brought to an unceremonious halt by a bullet that may or may not have been meant for you.
You were a peacemaker though. This war was wrong, and you knew it.
There wasn't much a man of the church could do.
The jungle had bad acoustics.
You cried, 'Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro!'
To which they replied,
'Dignum et iustum est.'
But what was right and just about it all?
Truly, for what could you give thanks to the Lord your God?
The God you found in the lives of your new community,
the God who sent you to sing for him.
God's will can be hard to understand, sometimes.

The stations of the cross fell silent.
Aging timbers creaked, long since they last reverberated to the melody of your worship.
The pews sat in a moment of shock, the faith of your people briefly eclipsed by the shadow of anguish.

It's always been this way
For those with the clearest voices, those who hear our secrets, those whom we entreat to sing for us.
We are blind without them, numb without their touch, toneless without their notes.
They will shoulder their crosses, as well as ours.

But what if he hadn't gone?
What if he had confined his voice to the echoes of the Wellington hills, never considering its release across the seas in a lilting celebration of God's work?

Yet, down the years his voice would echo
through the farmland, across the sports field, intermingling with urgent competitive cries of victory, amongst the classrooms and resting upon the shoulders of students.
His silent witness is a constant in the rows of rose bushes in one of his resting places — Taranaki.
We named a school after him here. His voice was powerful enough to strike the first chords of an institution which would teach boys, not just arithmetic and grammar and physical education, but how needed their talents are across the globe. He set in motion the creation of a harbour for youthful souls eyeing an ambitious yet uncertain horizon across the sea of human experience.

So, set your oars. Fill your sails with the first strong, clear notes of youthful breath.
Across the oceans, they are calling us. ■

Cavaan Wild is a Year 13 student at Francis Douglas Memorial College, New Plymouth and this year's Lasallian Student Leader.

I Heard the Rock Crying

After several days of heavy rain
fresh tears trickled down
through deep ducts in the Rock
remembering as they flowed
how strangers had abused her children
the true custodians of the Rock,
remembering as they trickled
how foreigners had abused country,
the sacred lands around the Rock,
remembering as they tumbled
how climbers had left rubbish
on top of the rock—
batteries, bottles and human faeces
that even now polluted her tears
as they flowed into a waterhole
so sad below
where I heard the Rock crying
weeping sacred tears.
Yet after the rain perhaps
the green that dotted the landscape
signalled a new dream that the Rock
would become a sacred site for all-comers
and that the crying I heard
was tempered with tears of hope. ■

Written at Uluru
In the Red Centre of Australia
By Norman Habel, June 2013

[Photo: Wikipedia Commons]

a simple question: where's home?

The writer explores a deep spiritual question: where is home? She reflects on how complicated the journey of faith is, and decides that home is where we are learning to belong.

Adrienne Thompson

I was born in India. It was home for 20 years. I spent six years in New Zealand, then I lived in Bangladesh for 20 years. I returned to New Zealand 13 years ago. Where's home? Facebook gives me the model answer: It's complicated!

When we moved to New Zealand I lived this question. My marriage matured, my four children were born, my faith was moulded in Bangladesh. When I spoke from my heart, spontaneously, I thought of 'home' as the big old house in a green garden by a large pond in the river-port city of Chandpur.

But now we lived in a rented apartment in Wellington. Could this be home?

Then we bought a house on a Karori hillside, the first place we'd ever owned. It didn't feel like home, but over the years we have re-roofed it, painted bits of it, celebrated, grieved, argued and reconciled in it. Perhaps it's home now.

And the same could be said of Wellington city. We chant, "You can't beat Wellington on a good day", we cheer movie premières, walk the waterfront, picnic at summer concerts, vote for mayor. The old tug to Asia will ever be strong and deep but Wellington has its place in my heart now too.

how do I belong here?

The bewilderment and pain of feeling homeless no longer haunts me. But as the personal dilemma became less insistent it was overtaken by another, related but larger. If New Zealand is my home how do I belong here?

I have always been a New Zealander. It's my legal, political, social identity. But my ignorance of New Zealand was profound. I grew up learning Indian geography and history, reading British writers, listening to Western music. The land of the long white cloud was a remote, romantic concept, not a reality. Māori people lived in New Zealand, I knew, but my only encounter with them was at the Museum, and in the stories of Maui my mother read to us. Not until I was in my 20s did I begin to hear the stories beneath 'the unparalleled racial harmony' I had always believed in. I stayed on marae, learned a little history, visited protesters at Bastion Point and started to glimpse a more complex New Zealand. But then we left.

The changes that took place while we were away hit us on our return like a great wave of salt water, all the more disconcerting because everyone else took them for granted. We discovered there is prayer in New Zealand schools, but it is called *karakia* and spoken in Māori. We learned new words: *powhiri*, *koha*, *whanau*, *tangata whenua*. We became aware of discourses of anger, compromise, resentment, goodwill, challenge, fear, hopelessness, hope. I started to engage with New Zealand writers and art. (I've yet to get to grips with rugby, racing or beer.) Experienced as I was in living cross-culturally, I endeavoured to observe and understand this new culture that, bafflingly, I could call my own.

I wonder if this personal journey of mine echoes the experience of early European colonisers. Did they come here as I did, homesick, confused, looking for points of reference? A long-time bird watcher, it took me five years to develop any interest in New Zealand's bird-life; I was mourning for the rich variety of Asia. So I can empathise with the colonists who, so wrongly, imported blackbirds, chaffinches and skylarks. Like them I found meaning at first not in what was here but in what it reminded me of.

The conversation, however, must have turned sooner or later, for all the settlers as for me, to the question of what is here already and how do we live with what we find? The long exchange continues and inevitably always will between Tangata Whenua and all who come after.

When I revisit my birthplace in India I know how it feels to belong. Roots seem to grow out of the soles of my feet with every step. I inhale mountain air with conscious bliss. I relish the moistness of mist on my upper lip. I caress the trees.

I don't have that emotional connection with New Zealand but I wonder, how would it be if I did? I find a significance in the word *tūrangawaewae*, a place to stand. Do others, like me, feel that sense of belonging through their feet?

Or is a sense of belonging even something I can aspire to? A line of *Desiderata* affirms "you are a child of the universe, you have a right to be here". Do I have a right to be here in Aotearoa?

a home through faith

I'm not sure that I'll ever have settled answers. But I do live here. I have a citizen's rights and responsibilities. I must discern: how do I live my faith, how do I experience my God, what language shall I use to pray here and now?

In my fumbling exploration I've made some connections that give me hope.

A preacher reminded me to trust that it was in the providence of God that my great-great-grandparents found their way to New Zealand from Scotland, Ireland, and England. As Dave Dobbyn's song says "see I made a space for you here". Trickery, deception, battle were part of the history of this land but so were generosity, nobility, compassion. *Tangata whenua* have made a space for *tangata Tiriti*. Perhaps, perhaps, Papatūānuku has adopted me, Maui, the master fisherman included me in his *whanau*?

In our community church a Māori man talked to us about the traditions of Matariki. We heard of attentiveness to stars and moon, of harvest and planting, how in the hunting season the first bird captured or the first fish caught must be released again. Astonished I made the connection with my spiritual ancestors, the Hebrews of ancient Israel, noting the new moons, offering their first fruits, harvesting and planting. There too, an inheritance not mine by blood but by adoption is a strand in my identity.

I must discern: how do I live my faith, how do I experience my God, what language shall I use to pray here and now?

One of our community died suddenly. The body of our friend was brought to the community home, the casket laid in the room where on Fridays we share a meal and on Sundays hold a church service. Effectively that room took on the *kaupapa* of a tangi at a marae as adults and children stayed with our friend, talking to her and to one another. The next day the funeral service was held in the same room, and after we carried the casket to the crematorium we returned to lift the *tapu*, bless the room and restore it to its habitual use. All this seemed right and proper — and also normal. We weren't exactly following Māori protocol. Much less were we following European traditions. We were making a way of grief and farewell that suited this occasion, this group of people, that grew out of the multifarious gifts of many traditions, something recognisably, uniquely of Aotearoa.

a pilgrimage in faith

I went in Spring to Hiruharama, Jerusalem on the Whanganui river. Some of us stayed in the old convent, others at one of the local marae. Invited, welcomed, we entered the wharenui that symbolises the body of the Māori ancestor. Invited, welcomed, we entered the house built by a French nun who gave herself passionately to this land. Our motley group gathered in the church that has such a very European shape and style but whose altar is carved with a Māori representation of the Trinity. One of the prayers that weekend thanked God for those who are our tipuna in faith: Sarah and Abraham, Mary and Joseph, Te Whiti and Tohu and Tarore, Suzanne Aubert and her sisters. For a while there I had a felt sense of connection to the landscape, its history, the people with me, the people who came before.

When I revived my lost delight in birds I amplified my understanding of what it means to belong. Our most iconic birds — kiwi, kakapo, takahe — are 'endemic', found nowhere in the world but in New Zealand. Sparrows and blackbirds were 'introduced' by early settlers. But there are also birds which somehow found their way to Aotearoa, unassisted by humans, and made themselves at home here and these are called natives. One of these is the silvereye which arrived sometime in the 1830s. Maori noticed the newcomer and gave it a name: *tauhou*, the stranger. I like these little birds, the strangers that found their own place in the ecology of Aotearoa without apparently displacing or disturbing the original inhabitants, recognised and named by the people who lived here, and now counted as 'native' to New Zealand.

When I lived in Bangladesh we were called *bideshis* — foreigners or strangers. Perhaps here in Aotearoa I can take the same name, but with a very different status. Perhaps like the stranger birds I can be counted as 'native'.

Where's home? Home is where I'm learning to belong. ■

Adrienne Thompson grew up in India, then made her home in Bangladesh for 20 years. She now lives in Wellington where she practises as a spiritual director and occasional writer.

a truly missionary church

Modern missionary theology begins with the Vatican II document on mission, Ad Gentes. *The writer explores the implications of the document's major rediscovery: that God's mission for the world mimics the life of the Trinity; and that we are invited to be partners with the Trinity in transforming and uniting the world in love. The Church is sign and sacrament of this renewed vision.*

Noel Connolly

I have been a missionary for around 50 years now and mission is my life. However, I find 'mission' is an often misunderstood and confusing word. For some, missionaries are well meaning but narrow minded people who have destroyed the cultures of Third World peoples; for others they are heroes/heroines who give their lives to preach the Gospel to the poor in foreign lands. The one thing both images have in common is that mission happens overseas, 'in the islands'. Perhaps this is why despite Vatican II's strong statement that "the Church is missionary by its very nature" mission still remains an optional extra, something the Church leaves to missionaries while concentrating on the urgent local tasks of celebrating the liturgy and running its parishes, schools and hospitals.

For centuries mission has been seen primarily as 'saving souls' and 'planting the church in foreign lands'. This was the vision that moved me to volunteer for mission. But my vision was shaken a little when, on my way to Korea, I visited Hong Kong. I made my way to the border with the People's Republic and looked out over the 'bamboo curtain' at China with its almost one billion people, most of whom had not been, were not and will never be Catholic. Suddenly I realised that there must be salvation outside the church. Of course, we have long believed in 'baptism of desire' and that many were saved 'by exception'. But if billions are saved that way surely we are the exception?

Still I was a priest missionary and clearly the Church was important to me. But what exactly was its role? I believe that answer can be found in modern mission theology beginning with Vatican II's document on Mission, *Ad Gentes*.

Noel Connolly

god's mission – vatican II

As with many of the documents of Vatican II, the original schema prepared for discussion was traditional and contained only minor practical applications. Fortunately it was one of the last documents to be discussed. The Council Fathers wanted to include the radical new insights into the Church that they had developed in previous documents. So the original schema was rejected and a new committee, including Yves Congar and Joseph Ratzinger plus a number of missionary Superiors General, were sent away to prepare a new draft for discussion in the fourth and final session.

They went back to the Trinity to ground mission. Up till then it was the Church that was the major agent of mission. The Church had the mission and sent people on mission to plant the Church. But for the Council, it was God's mission. The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. (*Ad Gentes,* #2)

A major rediscovery at Vatican II was that mission is founded in the life of the Trinity. They returned to a more relational and caring God, a communion of persons. Mission begins in the boundless love of the three persons of the Trinity for one another. Their love for one another gives birth to the universe which they continue to love and sustain and wish to draw into the fullness of their divine love. The three persons of the Trinity love the universe and are constantly creating, healing, reconciling, transforming and uniting the world. We are invited to be partners with God in gathering all things together so that God will be all in all.

jesus, the holy spirit and the kingdom of god

From the beginning of creation the Spirit has been active in the world and the Spirit's mission comes to its fullest expression in Jesus. Jesus was consumed with a sense of mission. Although he was intensely conscious of the power of evil, he could also see goodness breaking through and preached that the Kingdom of God was near at hand (Mk 1:15). The Kingdom was Jesus' central message. It is mentioned 162 times in the New Testament. Jesus did not come to bring a new religion, to be a moral example or to establish a new ethic. He came to reveal God's love and liberating plan for the universe. His call was: the Kingdom has come, repent, believe and join me in recreating the universe, the new creation.

Just as if we want to know who God is, the best we can do is look at Jesus, so if we want to know God's plan, then we can know it from Jesus' vision, the Kingdom. Jesus never defined the Kingdom. It was too big a reality for that. He mostly described it in symbols. St Paul gave us the best description, "it is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17).

the church and the kingdom

The Church, the community of Jesus' disciples, has inherited his vision and mission and its role is to be a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom. She is a servant of the Kingdom which embraces all creation but is especially embodied in the Church, 'its initial budding forth'. The Church exists for the sake of God's Kingdom which is breaking into our world in many places including far beyond the boundaries of the institutional church. God is active wherever people strive for justice, peace, freedom and reconciliation between peoples, religions and with the environment. Our task is not only to proclaim but to seek out, discover, encourage, celebrate and build on the Spirit's activity in the world.

We are 'compelled' to preach Jesus. We must also build Christian communities to keep alive the memory of Jesus and reveal God's coming reign. However, the primary aim of evangelisation is not the extension of the Church, important as that is, but the revelation of God's love and the realisation of God's plan for the world.

a missionary church

One of the benefits of living as a Christian in Asia is that you are normally a minority. Inevitably you have to respect others. You learn to dialogue and collaborate. This is similar to Vatican II's emphasis on the 'pilgrim Church'. Pilgrims do not have all the answers. They are not self-sufficient and cannot afford to be superior. But they do have faith, hope and a goal and are prepared to walk with and search with others.

Also as people whose God is a communion of persons we necessarily believe in the importance of relationships. Mission and building the Kingdom can be done only through relationships. Very few of us ever listen to someone whom we feel doesn't respect or care for us and we learn best from those who are listening and learning along with us.

Finally since it is God's mission, we do not have to save the world. God will save and is saving the world. We in the Church are a sign and sacrament of that. We are a test case. People should be able to look at us and take hope that there is a future and that love and life are worthwhile. ■

Noel Connolly is a Columban Father living at the Columban Mission Institute, in Sydney.

cultural roustabout

Greg O'Brien is an award-winning writer, artist, essayist and curator. He talks with Michael Fitzsimons about being "a member of the non-conformist, seriously left, mystical arm of the Catholic Church."

It's been a busy week for Greg O'Brien. On Wednesday night he gave the Turnbull Library's Founder Lecture on *Imagination and Research* and the following night addressed a capacity audience at St Patrick's College's Mother and Son Dinner.

For someone who works quietly away in the basement at home, it's like being a rock star, he jokes, when I come to interview him. Not the usual experience for a man of letters making ends meet in New Zealand.

We Went Ashore One Morning
[Greg O'Brien]

Greg O'Brien is, in fact, a star of New Zealand's cultural scene. In 2012 he received the very prestigious Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement, along with Sam Hunt and Albert Wendt. He has worked for nearly three decades as a writer, anthologist, curator and visual artist.

Before we get started he dashes out to put the washing on the line while I wander about, taking in some of the copious art that fills every available wall space.

Greg pours us a cup of tea at the kitchen table. The words flow, working overtime to keep up with ideas that so clearly enthuse him. He smiles a lot as he talks. It's been a very creative engagement with life thus far.

"I've been a fulltime artist/writer since my early twenties, with a bit of gallery work [as a curator], which has been the only long-term job I've really had. I've always worked on projects. I've never liked the idea of a 'career'. Rather than think of life as going up a ladder, I prefer to look at each stage as a new moment of realisation, edification, and learning — and be wholly focused upon it, rather than gazing off into the future."

Greg was brought up a Catholic and, after a Utopian experience at Mount Carmel Primary School in Meadowbank, Auckland, went on to Sacred Heart College. "The school's notion of Catholicism at that time seemed inextricably interwoven with rugby and a kind of social conformism — so I felt alienated. But not from a larger concept of the Church which, I guess, I've stuck with through all the phases of my life.

"There are things from that time, though, that I remember deeply affecting me. I remember hearing some of the brothers singing Gregorian chants in the chapel, and thinking that this sound changed

Greg O'Brien
[Photo: Michael Fitzsimons]

things — its cultural resonance, its acoustic resonance, its presence in the modern world, echoing the ancient world — I found it a very powerful thing. And now, if anyone asked me what music was my music, I'd have to say sacred music… Renaissance polyphony.

"I also became very interested in Thomas Merton and, through him, I came to Ernesto Cardenal, a priest and poet who became the Minister of Culture in the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua, and I went through quite a staunch phase of being interested in liberation theology and also the radical social as well as artistic potential that lay within the Catholic tradition.

"A third thing I remember from school days was my time rowing for St George's Rowing Club. Rowing in the early morning down the Tamaki estuary was an epiphany. It was an incredible — in hindsight I might say Wordsworthian — moment of illumination, of poetic imagining. The millpond water, the clear light. It was to do with the rhythm of the boat, and the way a skiff vibrates when it goes at a certain speed, and makes a kind of hum. You're not sure if you're hearing it or feeling it, it's sensory, and sensual almost. You have a strong sense of being in your body, in the world, but being somehow transported too.

"But that was slightly complicated by other things, of course — the macho Sacred Heart rowing culture. And also the great paradox that the Tamaki Estuary was famous for being the most polluted stretch of water in New Zealand. So in the early hours of the morning, seeing the rising sun reflected in the water, though it was transcendentally beautiful, when you were taking the boat from the water at low tide there would be old tyres, broken bottles and a layer of oil in the sand. The waterway was a tip.

"Maybe it's just the bipolar nature of most things you encounter? A dialectical pushing and shoving: Ernesto Cardinal and his liberation theology pushing against the school culture — this middlebrow, Catholic, conservative, National-voting culture — and the Gregorian music, too, this deep, difficult thing, was pushing against 70s ideas of the lukewarm, modernised Church. Putting purple carpet in churches. It was a bit of an aesthetic meltdown, wasn't it?

"One thing you could never question about the Church is its artistic legacy and the radical potential therein. It's utterly mind-bendingly phenomenal: music, architecture, visual art, costumes, lighting — every sensory experience you could want. It's a religion that really took that to its deepest point. And then, in the 70s, they tried to blend it with the strangely bland, materialistic, mainstream New Zealand culture."

When he left school Greg worked as a journalist in Dargaville and then went to Auckland University where he became involved with Newman Hall and met people such as Dominican priests, Kevin Toomey and Eugene O'Sullivan.

"People like that represented a kind of spiritual dynamic, a motor running deep down inside you. And the broader community around Newman Hall at the time included people who became friends of mine, like Tony Watkins, Peter Dane, Robin Kearns and so on.

"I was probably drawn there because of James K Baxter, who'd been hanging out there less than ten years earlier. Baxter used to do readings there, and Eugene had lots of his letters, photocopied poems, and two hours of tapes of Baxter reading his poems. In 1984 I helped organise a poetry reading there to commemorate the 12th anniversary of Baxter's death, and we also put together an art exhibition which I looked after for three days, sitting there in the lounge at Newman Hall, with Eugene's cassette playing, and it was phenomenal. Listening to Baxter's poetry for three days. I found that pretty formative."

> "Who is God? For me that's the unanswerable question…the thing that if one arrived at maybe one would have lost God."

Since those days Greg has worked as "a cultural odd-jobs man, a cultural roustabout." In the world of New Zealand arts and letters, he is unusually versatile, comfortably moving between the worlds of art and literature. He is a writer, poet, artist, anthologist and essayist. And he is tireless: among other things he has written two widely-praised books on art for young people, several volumes of poetry, a collection of interviews with 21 New Zealand writers, and a study of Ralph Hotere's collaborations with New Zealand poets. Most recently he has worked on monographs of painters Euan McLeod and Pat Hanly.

Residencia En La Tierra
[Greg O'Brien]

The world of literature and art is very tied up with belief, says Greg.

"You are in a state of learning all your life, and that's a fundamental thing in the writing projects I embark upon. They are always a striking out into the unknown. It's a state of curiosity, or thirst, or inquiry — that's the motor. Curiosity is a dynamic word. It's probably one of my favourite words.

"An element of belief enters into it as well. I do believe that the reality and purpose of human life is a beautiful, extraordinary mystery, and that's why we should stay curious, and keep trying to move toward some kind of realisation… The process is the thing, and the only end point is when you check out of here."

And God? Who is God? There's a pause before the paradox.

"For me that's the unanswerable question…the thing that if one arrived at maybe one would have lost God."

Joyfully immersed in this state of unknowing but somehow believing, Greg not surprisingly has issues with fundamentalism "which is basically saying that the answers are all on the

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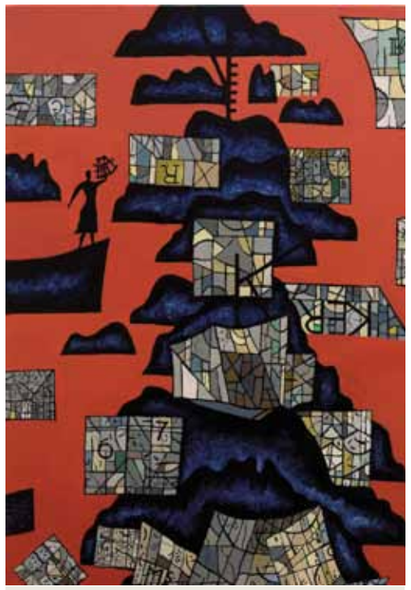


A Sextant for the Navigation of Astrolabe
[Greg O'Brien]

table… The fundamentalist impulse to structure this mystery out of existence, into something knowable, definable — I just can't go there, nor would I want to.

"Faith does not depend upon literal realities…it is something that exists beyond language, experience and knowledge… I'd invoke the spirit of Teilhard de Chardin: it's all energy, molecules, meanings and symbols coming to the surface."

There are other places Greg doesn't have to go either. While disheartening, the Church's scandals don't disillusion him "because I never had a warm, fuzzy view of it to begin with. The Church is as broad and as contradictory as humanity." He is bored by the great anti-religionists such as Richard Dawkins and Philip Pullman, "fixed in their fundamentalist state of non-belief." The disputed theological truths, which have divided churches for centuries and seen heretics burned at the stake, don't occupy his mind much either.

Far more important to Greg O'Brien than theological combat is the need for people to deal with the profundity of what it means to be a human being in the world. "I feel there's a disconcerting superficiality in our culture. It's a materialistic time. Entrepreneurs are valued far more than visionaries. To be honest, I feel an extraordinary bond when I meet people who are intelligently into whatever religion they are into. Whatever that might be, it feels as if they're sort of on the same page as I am — they're swimming around in this energy, this information, this dynamic."

It's time to wrap things up. Greg's sons are home from school and with his partner — well-known New Zealand poet Jenny Bornholdt — away in Australia, he's running home base. Before I go, he shows me his studio, the creative engine room beneath his Hataitai home. I come away with the gift of a beautiful print and copies of several of his books.

It's some hours later that I remember his answer to my simplest question: what are your favourite Gospel stories? His reply is typically all-embracing — he doesn't so much cross boundaries as leap-frog them.

"The stories that are indelibly stamped upon me are the ones that are in paintings from the Gothic era and later — Raphael's picture of Christ and the fisherman, for example. I'd bring this back to what we were talking about earlier. I could talk about Christ walking on the water, or Christ and the fisherman … or I could talk about the rowing skiff, or going to the Kermadec Islands on a naval vessel. It's about many things: an awareness of humanity and the natural world, the life-giving capabilities of the ocean, and the state of spiritual embrace that might be achieved in these places. The stories of the Gospel are most strong visually for me, and that goes a long way inside me. But they also speak of abstractions such as love, faith, doubt and—something that I hold dear — the importance of friendship which is one of the great running narratives of the Gospels.

Rapanui Luck Bird Over Raoul Island
[Greg O'Brien]

"I joke with my boys that I'm a 14th- or 15th-century man really. I'm not that modern, not 17th-century. I love Giotto. Michelangelo's probably a bit modern for me." ■

charlemagne

Known as King of the Franks, Emperor of the Romans, Father of the Empire, and Guardian of Civilization, Charlemagne forced the conversion of those he conquered. Today we question this changemaker's ethics as contrary to the Gospel.

Karen Austin

Charlemagne presents us with a dilemma. On the one hand, we ask, aren't Charlemagne's bloodthirsty ways of spreading the Church completely alien to the gospel of Christ ? On the other, we wonder would the Church have survived if not for him?

So who was Charlemagne? He was Charles the Great who became King of the Franks in 768 and ruled until 814. In that time he conquered most of Western Europe and quite a chunk of the East. In his role as King of the Franks, Charlemagne ruled over the only tribe in mainland Europe who were Christians, the Franks. The other tribes were either pagans or Arians. It was from this background that Charlemagne became not only a great military conqueror but also a missionary in his own right. As he conquered, Charlemagne used military force to compel all his subjects' peoples to become Christians.

Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the Romans on Christmas Day, 800. The Pope bestowed this honour while Charlemagne was kneeling in prayer during mass, thus cementing the partnership between Church and State. Earlier, in 775 Pope Stephen II had anointed King Pepin, Charlemagne's father and King of the Franks. In many ways Charlemagne's belief that he was lord of the Church helped build a close relationship between Church and State.

Charlemagne found his inspiration in Augustine's *City of God*. Augustine referred to two cities, the city of man and the city of God. In his discourse, Augustine suggested that these two cities were irreconcilable but nevertheless needing each other. Many historians would claim that Charlemagne may have hidden his true motive to conquer great tracts of land and people under the cloak of converting the heathens by force to spread the Christian Empire.

Nevertheless, Charlemagne had an amazing ability to organize military expeditions and in his 46-year reign sent out 53 expeditions, all of which were successful. Charlemagne wanted to reform the Church as well as the empire for Christian ends. His hope was to save Europe by building an Empire through Christian reform. Charlemagne saw himself as building Augustine's 'City of God' on earth.

Learning was central to Charlemagne's vision in creating his Empire and along with an English scholar, Alcuin, he sowed the seeds of modern education. Charlemagne was 39 when he met Alcuin and initially he invited Alcuin to bring learning to the Kingdom of Franks. At the time of meeting, Alcuin was 46, an old man in those days. Charlemagne led by example, rising at dawn for instruction, and they developed a relationship which allowed Alcuin to correct Charlemagne's language and manners. Five years later Charlemagne issued the first of three proclamations to the clergy — that they were to take up letters and learning. At the time the clergy were an uneducated lot. In the third of Charlemagne's proclamations he decreed that all male children should be schooled. This enforced schooling had its basis in the monasteries throughout the Empire. Another innovation was that all Christians had to know the Lord's Prayer and the creed in their own language but the rest of the mass was to be celebrated in Latin so that there was a unity in the Church.

When Charlemagne died in AD 814, the empire he had created died with him. This empire was from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Danube. In modern day terms, Charlemagne's empire included France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Hungary, a little of Spain and most of Italy. However, as a result of the monastery schools he and Alcuin established we have the legacy of modern education. The scholar and the king formed a partnership to build an empire where education helped the continuity of the Church. Charlemagne realised that the clergy, the literate group of his subjects, needed to be the ones who created a written culture for the Church so that the beliefs and traditions could be available to the people. Little wonder that he is referred to as the Guardian of Civilisation.

Charlemagne saved the Church by extending its temporal power in Europe. The lands he conquered gave him great power in spiritual matters, particularly with the Bishops. While his physical empire collapsed after his death, Charlemagne's framework for dioceses and parishes helped the Church to survive in the unsettled times ahead. However, the real strength of Charlemagne's rule were the monasteries. He had set them up as learning centres for the Church. Through these monasteries Charlemagne had educated the clergy and established compulsory schooling for boys (some schools also educated girls!). Charlemagne's and Alcuin's vision of providing monastery schools provided the foundation for today's Catholic school system. ■

Karen Austin is the Director of Religious Studies at St Kevin's College, Oamaru.

mercy shown to the humble

Sunday 30th in Ordinary Time Lk 18:9-14 Parable of Pharisee and Tax Collector — 27 October

Kathleen Rushton

Spring is glorious. I look up to my favourites — magnolia trees dotted all around the city. There are surprises, too, as when I took my lunchtime walk around the block to pray my daily examen, that prayer of Ignatius which helps me be aware of God in my daily life. Down on the corner of Barbadoes St and Moorhouse Avenue where I have an office is not the most scenic of places and less so post-earthquake. I glanced across the once neat lawn of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, now covered with shingle and debris. At the base of a tree trunk, a ring of daffodils had pushed up through the rubble. Life and hope from the earth, the *humus*, the Latin word from which our word 'humble' is derived.

In the Psalms, the humble and the lowly are those who know their need of God. Luke, who emphasises so often God's mercy, tells of God who listens to the cry of the poor; responds to those treated unjustly as in the story of the poor widow (18: 1-8); is aware of human frailty in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector (18: 9-14); and of our need to accept the reign of God as children (18: 15-17). The distance between the two men in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector is both social and physical. The gap is even more immense when we consider why and how they pray and are before God.

Standing with eyes raised and arms uplifted, as did the Pharisee, was the usual posture for prayer. In contrast, the tax-collector stood at a distance, bowed his head and was beating his breast. Symbolic of his self-understanding and his need for God's mercy, his gesture of beating his breast is very significant for it sets the tone for the ordinary people who gathered at the crucifixion. In the only other time this gesture is recorded in Luke, the people returned home 'beating their breasts' (23:48). Once again, the ordinary people, not the soldiers or the religious leaders, recognise their need for God's mercy and forgiveness. This forgiveness has already been given in Jesus' prayer from the cross (23:34).

The one called a tax-collector was in an occupation that made him a sinner in his own eyes and in the eyes of all those around him. He was most likely a toll-collector like Matthew. In districts, the collection of these indirect taxes was farmed out to the highest bidder. Probably, Zacchaeus who is a 'chief tax collector' and 'rich' (19:2) employed toll-collectors who sat in customs houses at crossing-points like bridges, collecting tolls for goods being moved across a district. Workers in crafts and trades paid tolls on goods and services.

Toll-collectors worked for the foreign administration during the Roman occupation. Few would have been rich. While many were most likely honest and fair, some would defraud the people. The rich and educated would have despised these workers the most, regarding them as robbers feeding off their own people. It was different for the poor and not well off, who had no goods for duties to be levied. Maybe, like many poor workers, then and today, the toll-collector was in his job because he had to provide for a family. With no other work around he was trapped. Knowing his failures and his sinfulness, he shows his need for God by asking for mercy.

This parable is about prayer and the need for the mercy and hospitality of God. It is also about a God of mercy who copes with 'disorder'. This parable, too, offers insight and comfort for many people today who may themselves, or their loved ones, be caught in situations considered to be objectively wrong or even sinful. This may be in areas of sexuality or marital arrangements, or in certain occupations or habits or ways of living. In the light of the parable, God sees 'the toll-collector' in each person and copes with 'disorder' in ways often beyond the imagination of the ones to whom morality and church discipline are entrusted.

Mercy is shown to the humble one 'standing at a distance'. The link between 'humble' and the earth, mentioned in the first paragraph above, may be extended, for the connection between the earth and the human person is as old as Genesis and as ever new as the scientific understanding today that the whole creation and the human person are formed from stardust. In the second Genesis creation account, a particular word for earth (eres) appears three times then ceases when the link between the earth and the human person is made: "because God had not let it rain upon the earth (eres) and [because] no earth creature (adam) was there to serve the earth (ha-adama) … God formed the earth creature (ha-adam) from the dust of the earth (ha-adama)… (2:5, 7).

A play on words establishes relationship between the earth creature (ha-adam) and the earth (ha-adama) even before the earth creature is yet there (2:7). There is wisdom in keeping the link between the one commonly called by the name, Adam, and the earth, which is lost in translation. Origin and interconnection are stated theologically and would be translated more accurately as: Earthling from the Earth or Groundling from the Ground. I am rather keen, too, on the link between 'humble' and the earth (humus). The 'waste' or 'disorder' in my compost heap decays to humus. This decayed organic matter nurtures my vegetable garden. Likewise, the 'waste' or 'disorder' of life, when acknowledged and entrusted to the mercy of God, as did the toll-collector, is broken-down and transformed like my compost into potential for growth and new life. ■

Kathleen Rushton is a Sister of Mercy working in adult education in the Diocese of Christchurch.

letters to the editor

. . . continued from page 4

people are completely normal and natural, and do not deserve the treatment dished out in the name of religion.

Two aspects of life have been denied me. To find a loving partner whom I could possibly marry, and then to have children. For many years I blocked this normal and natural desire, telling myself and others I didn't want to get married, or have kids. Total lies, and now the opportunity has gone for me to experience the fullness of life.

Why should I be denied the right to marry and have children? Because the bible says so? Some phrases at first glance seem to imply being gay is wrong, but what if the theological interpretation of those passages is wrong? To me, most of them refer to violence and rape when taken into context, which is the abomination, not loving relationships between two people of the same gender. This interpretation needs to be discussed openly by all churches. Remember that the earth was once the centre of the universe, and flat.

Jesus never mentions homosexuality in the bible, but he could have had many discussions about it that were not included. Many Catholic clergy are gay which indicates to me that some of the apostles were probably gay. Who is to say they were not? Even King James was known to have homosexual partners.

Earlier this year I was granted a meeting with Bishop Denis Brown to discuss the marriage equality issue. I wanted to let him know how the Church's teaching had impacted my life, how important marriage is to many gay people, including myself. I came away feeling like all my humanity had been ripped out of me again. I should not have been surprised, as he was simply upholding the Church's current teaching, as all the Bishops did in their submission regarding Marriage Equality.

All good Christians should accept every person with complete respect for who they are, and not make any judgements. To exclude gay people from any part of life, including marriage, is making a judgement that we are not good enough. If you must think like that, please keep it to yourself, and don't ever tell a gay person they are wrong.

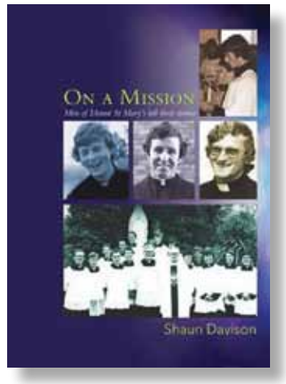
Please do as Judith Collins has asked, and allow Catholic parents with gay children to take part safely in progressive discussions regarding sexuality, marriage and raising children. Make sure gay people are included, because to make decisions about this group without their input and guidance is not acceptable.

I may have made a fantastic husband and parent but the Catholic Church denied me this opportunity and drove me to the brink of suicide. Thankfully the NZ government has stepped up and confirmed I am fully human. Will the Church follow?

Phil Evans

let the spirit breathe where it will

Book: On a Mission – Men of Mount St Mary's tell their stories



By Shaun Davison

Steele Roberts Aotearoa: 2013, $39.95

ISBN 978-1-927242-24-7

Reviewer: Elizabeth Mackie OP

In *On a Mission* Shaun Davison takes the reader on a fascinating journey into a unique period within the history of the Catholic Church, in Aotearoa and beyond. But instead of chapters of historical or contextual analysis, we find history presented through the lives of 22 young men, all seminarians at Mount St Mary's, Napier in the 1970s. Twenty-one of Shaun's fellow seminarians respond to a few simple, open-ended questions from Shaun: what led you to join the Marists and train for the priesthood? What did you experience in those years at Mount St Mary's? Who and where are you now? What do you carry with you from those earlier years? Shaun's own story is woven through the chapters in the form of letters written from the seminary to a priest mentor, Father Collins. This structure works beautifully, weaving Shaun's life and extracts from his diaries with the lives of the men he interviews. And each interview begins and ends with brief, revealing glimpses into the present reality and circumstances of the man encountered. The whole creates a brief snapshot of a particular time and place.

But what a time and what a place! These 22 young people entered into religious life and a path towards priesthood at the end of the Sixties, that decade of almost unprecedented change and ferment. The Sixties, with flower power and hippies, the Beatles and Bob Dylan, student protests, the Vietnam War and anti-war movements, the independence from colonial rule of over 30 'new' nations, the assassinations of J F Kennedy and Martin Luther King — and the Second Vatican Council. From this tumultuous background, these young people withdrew to the secluded beauty of Mount St Mary's, to a religious life shaped by centuries-old monasticism and in its essentials unchanged since its foundation. As one of the men recalled it: "The place was in the dying throes of a previous age." Yet there was much to be valued and explored. The interviews return again and again to the themes of community, deep friendships, the beauty of ritual and chant, great creativity, idealism and a longing to do good for others, to make the world a better place, the search for deeper meaning, for finding God in new and more profound ways. And there is a parallel theme of irrelevant and authoritarian structures, irritating regulations and rigid timetables — along with schoolboyish ways of circumventing them. These young people were on a journey to maturity, dealing with major issues of identity, purpose, sexual orientation, vocation and faith. No easy path and the struggles are openly acknowledged. And almost without exception they were searching for ways to be 'the Church in the Modern World'. The tension between that search, as presented by *Gaudium et Spes* and other Vatican II documents, and the monastic environment of their seminary days proved in many cases impossible to reconcile. Most of the men interviewed left the Marist Order either before or after ordination. Some few remain as priests. They still value the time they spent together in the 70s, though they have gone in many directions since.

This is a compelling read. It is at times almost breath-taking in its candour and courage. In another time and another place their path may have been very different, but in diverse ways they have each drawn from those years at 'The Mount' in their ongoing quest for God or for a sustaining spirituality, in a commitment to social justice, in their capacity to love and be loved. There is a ringing truth in these pages. Shaun and his 21 companions deserve to be honoured for sharing with the reader their lives and, by extension, that unique period in our history. ■

an emerging reign of god in the world

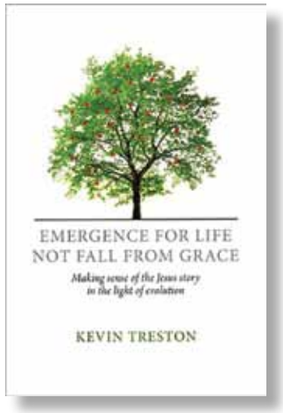
Book: Emergence for life not fall from grace

Making sense of the Jesus story in the light of evolution

By Kevin Treston

Preston, Victoria, Australia: Mosaic Press, 2013

Reviewer: Neil Darragh



A major theme in the history of Christian theology has been that the suffering and death of Jesus secured our redemption. But, argues Kevin Treston in this book, belief in Christ's death and resurrection is not primarily about redeeming us from a moral failure of our first parents, but rather a forward looking vision for the possibilities of humanity and all of creation.

Treston's critique of a 'fall from grace' or 'redemption' theology which lacks the more positive, life-giving and transformational dimensions of Christian belief, is a critique that has been around for some time now. Many might argue that such critique is an old, well worn track so why go over it all again? Treston acknowledges this argument but points out that if theologians have moved away from this old 'redemption' theology, it is nevertheless still around at the grassroots level of liturgy, devotional prayer and catechesis. It is well established, for example, in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, still a source book for teachers and pastors. It also appears frequently in the prayers of the current Roman Missal.

A major part of this book, as the subtitle indicates, is about 'making sense of the Jesus story in the light of evolution'. Evolutionary thinking does seem to be foundational to mainstream European thought. Yet I would be much less enthusiastic than Treston in advocating an evolutionary theology without reservations. Evolutionary theology has been around long enough now for us to know some of its dangers, such as the implication that humanity in some general sense is becoming better or more 'conscious', that some civilizations are superior to others on an evolutionary timescale, that some societies and cultures are more 'progressive' while others are 'backward', that 'progress' is inevitable and we can't fight it, or that Christianity itself is a primitive religious stage of human evolution now being superseded by a more progressive secularism.

On the other hand, evolutionary thinking does help make much more sense of Christian themes such as an emerging reign of God in the world, Christ as the transformer of cultures, the life-giving or death-dealing influence of one generation on subsequent generations, the development of doctrine in the church, and the work of the Spirit in the world than does a more traditional static view of the universe.

The chapter that I admired most in the book is chapter seven, entitled "The Christian story within an emergent vision". This chapter is an extended profession of Christian faith that could be recommended as a kind of summary of Christian belief to both practising Christians as well as to those interested in learning about Christianity in modern terms without having to battle their way through the old culture-bound thought patterns of much traditional theology.

We do not need to agree with everything in this book to recognise that it is a reader-friendly and stimulating treatment of many central issues perplexing Christians, especially Catholics, in the contemporary world. ■

Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

why bother?

As a child I was fascinated by the accounting technology used in some department stores. The customer purchased an item from the salesman (the evolutionary process had as yet produced few saleswomen) who wrote a docket and took the money. He then placed these in the bottom part of a small cylinder at his counter, and screwed it to its lid which was suspended from a small wheel resting on a wire. He then pulled a handle, winding up a spring which impelled the cylinder along the wire to the cashier. The latter made an entry in the journal, wrote out a receipt and sent it with any change due, back to the salesman.

Later there was a development: a vacuum tube replaced the wire system. It now seems that a serious proposition is being considered whereby an analogous system would transport people between San Francisco and Los Angeles in a very short time. It is being backed by a successful Silicon Valley entrepreneur. A giant tube would be constructed forming a continuous loop based on pylons with giant turbines creating blasts of air for propulsion.

How this would benefit humanity is not explained. As Mrs Pearson, wife of our greengrocer pre-war used to say: "More 'aste less 'urry!"

co-creation?

Tissue derived from the fore-stomach of sheep is being turned into material that encourages tissue regeneration in people, according to a report in the *NZ Herald*. Its advantage is that it is not rejected by the body. A Wellington-based regenerative medicine company, Mesynthes, already has one product on the market in the US and is working on others. The wound care product is ideal for treating ulcers, a by-product of diabetes.

Management worked hard on gaining support from top academics and surgeons in the field, and focused on proving the technology and having the data to verify their claims.

times change

Some cultures still maintain a healthy attitude towards death and treat it as part of human existence. In some parts of modern industrial society, particularly the more affluent, death is often regarded as a taboo subject. Indeed, there is a tendency to expect that modern medicine will delay and perhaps overcome entirely the dreaded event.

Business Herald columnist Dita de Boni recently had a piece on 'death cafés' which have appeared in a number of countries over the past year or so. Apparently people can explore their thoughts and feelings regarding death and related matters with others over a coffee. The various practical aspects of the end of life process are up for discussion, including medical intervention to prolong or shorten life artificially. Talk of God is generally excluded. Nonetheless it's a step in the right direction.

treasury and CST

In the July 2011 issue I reported how Treasury was showing signs of abandoning the stance it took in the 1980s underpinning the Roger Douglas/Ruth Richardson era, with such disastrous results for our society.

To recap: the Treasury Secretary had announced a new framework for ensuring our stocks of financial, human, social, and natural capital are managed in a manner that maximises current living standards, while not disadvantaging future generations. These 'capital stocks' are based on five elements that are summed up as follows: material things, and also non-material things, affecting living standards; individual freedoms and capabilities; variations in living standards between different groups (society suffers if sections of it are disadvantaged but everyone's rights must be safeguarded); and measuring living standards directly, using self-assessed subjective measures of well-being — this provides a useful cross-check of what is important for people's living standards.

In a recent interview with *Herald* economics editor Brian Fallow, the new Secretary to the Treasury, Gabriel Makhlouf, is quoted regarding various policy objectives. Some salient points from this interview reinforce the impression that Treasury is continuing to move in a direction that accords with the essence of Catholic Social Teaching — not because of theoretical philosophical leanings, as was the case with the Treasury-advocated neo-liberalism that underpinned Rogernomics — but because of a recognition of the demands of reality.

Fallow reports that "concern about income inequality is one of the big long-term global trends Treasury is mindful of." Makhlouf says NZ is in the middle of the pack in this regard "and those measures have stayed the same from the mid-nineties, but they are a lot higher than they were." He also refers to OECD reports that characterise the NZ school system as high performing but low equity because, though overall performance is good — as measured by standard tests of 15 year-olds — it does not appear to counteract family background as other systems do.

Treasury sees income inequality as a direct result of sub-par productivity. "Human capital (incredibly important), R&D, innovation, entrepreneurship, access to export markets — all of these things matter." His department is talking to various constituencies in an attempt to discover the underlying causes of sub-par productivity, and hopes to give an indication later this year as to an appropriate strategy. ■

our beautiful world

Robert Consedine

'Never has the human race possessed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a large part of the world's population is still racked by hunger and need, and very many are illiterate. Never has humanity had so intense a feeling for freedom as today, but new forms of social and psychological slavery are on the increase ... In such circumstances the world of today is showing both its strength and its weakness, the capacity to produce the best and the worst as it faces the road leading to freedom or to slavery, advance or retreat, fellowship or hatred.' (Vatican II)

There are now problems in the world that are universal which Governments seem unable to solve. All Western Governments, including New Zealand, are now controlled by global corporations who dominate their domestic political agenda.

Sometime during the 1980s a global cancer took over New Zealand and the world. It is a religious belief in unfettered markets and financial speculation. It is destroying employment, education, health, media, community, the public sector, environment and the world's resources. It has no limits, no boundaries, no morality and is above the law. It primarily benefits the one percent.

Those who miss out are in jail, starving, homeless, unemployed, unhealthy and prematurely dead. They are blamed for their own failure as the social costs escalate.

This is a system promoted and managed by sociopathic political and economic leaders with no moral compass. They have triaged the poor while giving welfare benefits to their rich supporters. They build their lives and their careers on lies and self deception. They promote endless war for profit.

They have looted the wealth of generations of people through the cult of privatization. They are not interested in relieving poverty. Inequality is ignored. Trapped in their own limitations, fear is their weapon. Police state laws and surveillance are, their response to legitimate protest.

They never question their own assumptions. Economic growth at any cost is their religion.

Pope Francis calls this "savage capitalism ... a tyranny which unilaterally and irremediably imposes its own laws and rules ... and which denies the right of control to states which are charged with providing for the common good."

Teilhard de Chardin contrasts the choice starkly. "Humanity is being taken to the place where it will have to choose between suicide and adoration."

Hannah Arendt insightfully says, "the sad truth is that most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be good or evil."

In the midst of this chaotic world, goodness prevails by the bucket-load. There are heroes everywhere amongst the tens of thousands of organisations and millions of ordinary people working for social justice. They are in every corner of the world at every level of every society, determined to heal the planet. They risk their lives, work for peace, cross borders, blow whistles on corrupt governments, go to jail, tackle problems ignored by Governments and the corporate media, build community, live simply and work miracles.

The grace of God, the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of gratitude and hope permeate their lives. They are active at every level of society reflecting diverse beliefs with a common purpose — service to humanity. This is co-creation at work for a more peaceful future for our earth and all who share it.

Our ancestors knew intuitively the empowering presence of the great spirit.

The divine life force is everywhere in every living thing, in nature, the earth, the wind and the rain, the heat of the sun and in all of humanity.

Be strong in your faith. ■

Robert Consedine
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a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

I've just spent three days at Nav Jivan (New Life) hospital (www.eha-health.org) which sits squat in a jungly, hot, and forgotten corner of India. Jharkhand has expanses of wild beautiful jungle, acres of emerald rice fields and welcoming first-peoples tribe people. It is also a region where there is signficiant political instability with the Marxist Naxalites, at times violent in their quest, seeking land reform, a diabolical electricity supply (3 hours of every 24) and the highest per capita snake bite rate and malaria rates in India too!

Yesterday, I went out with three people from the disability project. We came to a large tree in the middle of a village. Waiting for us was Raju, who has a withered hand. He's a community organiser and had got a message out the previous evening to people in the nearby hamlets inviting people with disabilities to come and meet the team again.

Over the next half hour there arrived another ten people with disabilities. There was a 10 year-old boy with intellectual impairment who came walking with his mother. Then hobbling up the road with home-made bamboo crutches came two men — each with one leg that was shrunken, thin and useless due to childhood polio. Another man arrived teetering on the carrier of a rusty black bicycle, with his son wheeling the bike along and his wife beside him helping him balance. His right leg was huge and swollen — maybe it was elephantiasis....

Ebez, the project officer, called us all together and then after a little talk about the low rains this monsoon, asked, "Have you all had a chance to discuss if you would like to form a Disabled Persons Group? It is two weeks since our last meeting. We are happy to help you."

Raju started talking: "You all know I think we must form a group. Each of us stays in our different houses quiet, and mostly we have no job. We have no voice when we are individuals. We must speak up and even go to our State leadership to make sure we get our disability pension, our opportunity to participate." He lifted his shrivelled fore-arm high and then took a seat.

Another young man spoke up. "I have no right arm since my tractor accident but I can work. All of us can do something. None of us is a beggar like so many people with disabilities. I would like to form this group."

And so the conversation continued. Looking around, I suddenly thought of the Parable of the Great Party (Luke 14) which tells of a man throwing a party. His rich friends all declined to come. So he sent helpers to go and find all the people on the edges to come to his feast — he called the crippled, those with no home, the beggars and the blind — and hosted a fabulous party for them all.

Here we were, too, a motley collection of waifs and strays: most had no access to education, occupational therapy or paid work. Most with disabilities had had numerous experiences of exclusion and discrimination. But through their determination to get to this meeting (with no wheel chairs; along muddy narrow paths; no therapists ever), with the funding support of the Australian Baptists and the work of our Nav Jivan team — we decided to work together and become a group of people with a voice. Maybe there would be opportunities to access entitlements, trainings and income generation and maybe a chance to move in from the edge to the centre.

Suddenly I had a deep sense this is what the kingdom of God is: who and how we are called to be. And though I find it hard to be away from my family when I travel for work, I felt deeply grateful that I could in a small way be part of this call to the celebration, right here right now. ■

Kaaren Mathias lives with her husband Jeph and four children in North India, where she works in community health and development.