Tui Motu

InterIslands

Life Changes

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open to life's changes

I stood on the footpath holding a two-litre specimen bottle and the answer to why my back was so excruciatingly painful. Minutes earlier the doctor, pointing to a gap in a line of vertebrae lit up on the X-ray box, had said: "This is bone cancer." I'd been expecting to hear that I'd developed the family "bad back" and would need surgery. This diagnosis was an altogether different story — and abruptly the day bleached.

My experience is shared by individuals and their families in many different ways and creates a new urgency in our lives. Whereas death had seemed far off, suddenly we're nose-to-nose and tripping in a flood of complicated questions and emotions. We're stunned into the truth that we do not control our lives. And we're facing our deepest fears — as it were — looking into a six-foot hole dug for us or our loved one. We're fast-tracking on a journey through treatment and recuperation, new regimes and the questions of "life after".

In this November issue we remember again that our lives include dying — our last human act — and the deaths of those who have died before us. Mike Riddell discusses the way our culture can shield us from death as if denying it will somehow disarm it. Painful though it is for us to acknowledge, death will claim us all and our only preparation is to live our God-given lives extravagantly well.

Facing dying and death can bring us to a new zest and appreciation for living, loving and community. Claire Ryan, Sarah Bradley and Noel Henry share personal stories of their diagnoses, pain and confusion and their surprising discoveries of the spirit and power of love. Joseph Wakim describes his involvement in activism for human rights and his experience of bringing up daughters after his wife's death 12 years ago. They all refer to their sense of a new relatedness with those around them brought about by vulnerability, support and prayer.

Alice Snedden reminds us that small but significant life changes — those we might call conversions — also contribute to our living a wider "catholicity", a greater sense of compassion and relatedness in the world and universe.

Elaine Wainwright's ecological reading of Mark's story of the unnamed woman she calls *Murisa* extends our theme of life changes. She explains that *Murisa* poured healing oil on Jesus' head preparing him for his death. It evokes John Dunn's description of taking his mother walking in the hospital gardens so that she can see, touch and smell the life around her though her capacity to participate in other ways is diminishing. And Anna Holmes writes of the spirituality of accompanying others in their illness and final years.

These and more make the 199th issue of *Tui Motu* magazine a feast of reading and reflection. We are grateful to all our contributors — writers, poets and artists.

We hope you look at our new website www.tuimotu.org. You can even follow me virtually on the Camino walk through Spain.

As always in this 199th issue our last word is of blessing. ■

contents

Cover photograph by Ann L Gilroy

living well into death

Kathy Lynch

As a palliative care nurse I have the privilege of listening to and caring for patients who are facing death. The repeated and current attempts to introduce legalised euthanasia and physician-assisted-suicide (PAS) cause me deep concern and apprehension. On October 14 a fourth attempt at such legislation was introduced into Parliament's ballot system for Private Member's Bills, by ACT Party leader David Seymour. Simultaneously the Health Select Committee Inquiry is taking submissions (until 1 February 2016) in response to a petition from Maryan Street requesting investigation into public attitudes regarding medically-assisted death legislation.

Those who would promote the passage of such legislation use the language of mercy and compassion in support of their arguments for the legal right to hasten death. The test of a truly compassionate society, however, is shown in how it protects and cares for the frailest and most vulnerable citizens, not how it provides an avenue by which they can be killed.

Throughout my years of palliative nursing it has not been uncommon to hear patients ask if the journey of dying can be foreshortened. This is an invitation to explore more deeply with them their fears and concerns. Once these are addressed through good symptom management and emotional/spiritual support the vast majority of these requests dissipate. "The intent of palliative care is to kill distressing symptoms, not the patient. Good end-of-life care allows persons to live longer well and die well" (MacLeod, 2012).

As a Catholic Christian I hold to a consistent ethic of life from conception to natural death. All human life is a precious God-given gift. Changing our laws to permit euthanasia or PAS puts the most vulnerable of our society at greater risk. Those who feel they are, or may be, a burden to their families or *whanau* due to their illnesses may choose to end their lives prematurely, when they would otherwise have not. The lonely, the elderly and those with depression would be particularly at risk. For some this decision could result from financial pressures, either personal or external. The right to die may be replaced by the duty to die.

Loss of autonomy, loss of life enjoyment and loss of dignity are the top three reasons recorded as to why patients in the States of Oregon and Washington seek PAS. I find this a sad indictment on our modern society.

The weeks or months of the journey toward death are often fruitful for patients and their families; much joy and healing can occur. Many times my colleagues and I witness miracles of love occurring through caring. The simple act of being allowed to care, and being cared for, imparts dignity to both the dying person and their care-giver. "Being treated with dignity is not only about self control, autonomy, independence, maintaining physical function. It is also present when one is honoured and treated with esteem" (Donnelly, 2012).

It is critical that those opposed to the legalising of euthanasia and PAS make their voices heard through submissions to the Health Select Committee. Such legislation, if passed, will change the soul of our New Zealand society. This debate is about the right to live with dignity, until natural death. ■

Kathy Lynch RSM is a registered nurse with 19 years of palliative care and hospice experience.

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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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relocating is difficult

Sue Seconi (*Tui Motu*, Sept) urges businesses to relocate from Auckland to smaller towns. Their function largely depends on the local farming community and on police, teachers, shop-owners, medical workers, etc. If an Auckland business employing 30 or so people planned such a move, it is probable that a third would refuse to relocate for many reasons — family, social, access to secondary and tertiary education, etc. This would cost substantial redundancy payments. Finding housing for the remaining workers would involve additional capital expenditure. And which small town has 10 unemployed persons suitably qualified to work for the business? There is a world-wide trend from rural areas to cities. Predictions suggest that Auckland city will hold 40 per cent of the NZ population in 2029 because of its better climate and facilities. My late brother Stanley lived in Wanganui from 1969–90s, when he left for Tauranga to be close to family because his son could not get suitable employment in that "city". From my many visits I concluded that it was basically a large retirement centre with very limited prospects for young people. We have to face facts.

Derek Blackburn, *Auckland*

growing in understanding of our home

I am so excited that I cannot contain it. Paul Sorrell's invitation to get to know our own "backyard" which you appropriately placed in the middle of the September issue is supported by his splendid photography. His artistic montage of NZ landscape superimposed by the very creatures that developed with it, gives witness to the harmonious processes which we discover in nature. It opens our eyes to a beauty which keeps surprising us again and again.

I have one small grizzle. Do we really expect the landscape to grow to be a part of us? Or am I too literal in my reading? Ever since I have come to Aotearoa nearly eighty years ago I have understood that, like our hosts the indigenous people, we are the migrants who chose to settle here and consequently are in need of growing in understanding of this mysterious and unique part of nature which has become our home. In tune with Paul Sorrell's beautiful words, nature's rich variety and beauty have never ceased to delight me.

Frank Hoffmann, *Auckland*

journey into the soul

I was drawn to Merrilyn George's use of colour and design telling Suzanne Aubert's story in quilts. I saw browns symbolising the Whanganui river, flowing in turn into gold and orange indicating life and strength. The flow connected the world and compassion. Then there was grey etched with silver and a variation of greens speaking of life, hope and compassion.

I left Merrilyn's exhibition pondering what stitches, threads, design and colours I would use in mapping my life journey. What textures and imprints would form part of my story? One thing for sure I'd love to have Merrilyn George by my side.

Thank you, Merrilyn, for sharing your insights into the soul of Suzanne Aubert. Your artistry is another way for us to understand and appreciate Suzanne's spirit. In William Blake's words your work unleashes "the imagination that binds us to each other by opening the secret doors of all hearts."

Therese McConway rsj, *Wellington*

birth control between woman and God

I can't understand that now in the 21st century, in affluent western countries, I keep reading about so many Catholics, especially women, who are still looking to the Vatican for permission about birth control! Really? I'm a war baby and everyone I know (well apart from two) has practised birth control! Ever since WWI and WWII when women had to step into the breach to keep countries going while men played war games, the game between men and women changed, in a very good way for women. Women have the babies, it's our power. I think Pope Francis is a breath of fresh air and the best Pope in my life-time, but I don't think he, or the Vatican — especially the Vatican — has the right to tell Catholics (meaning women) they shouldn't practise birth control. That's between the individual and God.

Susan Lawrence, *Auckland*

translation, please

I enjoyed the October issue as always. However, it seems to me important where foreign words are used in articles to put the English equivalent in brackets next to them. Otherwise we create an elitist magazine not fully understandable to readers who do not know Latin, Greek or Spanish — such as used in "Dear Pope Francis", (Oct, p 22). Even "magnanimous" could have been "bighearted" — to use a simple English word. I believe that Christ would have opted for language that everyone understood. Thanks for your consideration.

Gerard van den Bemd, *Auckland*

☞ letters to the editor

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

wealth to serve not rule humanity

Joshua Freeman

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TTP) has been finalised. Yet even now the government won't let us see for ourselves the legal fine print we've been signed up to.

Instead we're forced to rely on a series of two-page "fact sheets", filtered through the lens of a government determined to persuade us it's a good idea.

True, it appears some of the more extreme demands of the pharmaceutical industry have been beaten back.

But a less bad outcome doesn't alter the fact the agreement as a whole would be a step in the wrong direction when it comes to tackling the major global health issues of the 21st century.

The concern isn't just that monopolies on medicines would be extended, but that corporations would be given additional power to resist reforms.

Many of the major global health threats of the 21st century require reforms that would directly threaten corporate profits. This is true of tobacco; the obesity epidemic; alcohol-related harm; socio-economic inequality; antibiotic resistance and climate change.

But everything we know about the TPP indicates that it's based on the premise that regulatory reforms should be kept to a minimum and "business as usual" must be more or less locked in place. This is weirdly out of touch with 21st century reality, because the evidence is overwhelming that "business as usual" is taking us in a dangerous direction.

Take the climate change example alone; we know that business as usual will lead to warming of 4-6 degrees by 2100. This would have catastrophic consequences for global health.

The only alternative — if we are to remain below the 2 degree limit — is to introduce reforms to ensure that around 80 per cent of fossil fuel reserves become "stranded assets".

But everything we know about the behaviour of the fossil fuel industry and the logic of the TPP, suggests that even modest reforms along these lines would evoke aggressive investor-state dispute settlement claims.

We are assured of course that there will be safeguards against "frivolous" claims but exactly what this means will be known only once the fine print is available.

But most importantly — assurance about safeguards misses the key point — regardless of the extent to which the investor state process would tip the balance of power, it would still be tipped in the wrong direction.

We know the TPP would give corporations power to sue governments without any corresponding new powers being given to the citizenry to rein in corporate abuse.

This all seems pretty bad, but now that the content of the agreement has been finalised, is there anything we can still do to prevent the TPP?

Fortunately the answer is "yes" — particularly if we work collectively. The agreement still hasn't been ratified and we can take heart from the fact that over the last year, concern about the TPP has pulled together a remarkably committed and vocal international coalition.

This includes groups united by their faith; labour unions; the medical and health communities; coalitions of lawyers; academics; environmental NGOs; indigenous communities; local governments; universities; human rights organisations; internet freedom advocates and countless individual citizens who simply recognise the TPP is not what the world needs.

In the coming months this coalition needs to become even larger, stronger and more organised (a good organisational focal point is the website *www.itsourfuture.org.nz*).

But even if ultimately the TPP does get ratified, huge positive gains will have been made if opposition to it has led to the emergence of a strong and enduring social movement based on shared values.

The over-arching goal of this movement could perhaps be captured by the words of Pope Francis: "to ensure humanity is served by wealth and not ruled by it".

But unfortunately the TPP would promote the opposite agenda. The only question is to what extent. ■

Dr Joshua Freeman is a member of the New Zealand Climate and Health Council.

passing over

Mike Riddell ***suggests that our death-denying culture distorts our capacity for living life to the full.***

It has been received wisdom that there are two certainties in life. Now that the multinationals have found a way of avoiding tax, there's only one left. For the time being, death is the final frontier. In a world devoid of mysteries, this one remains shrouded in a delicate fog of unknowing. Science is hampered in further exploration by a lack of volunteers.

From the forensic perspective, death is, literally, a dead end. The recurrent question "What happens when we die?" is easily answered. We stop breathing. Our heart ceases pumping blood. Our brain activity shows a flat line. The body begins its long decay, back to the elements of the earth from which it is composed. Our remains are either buried or burned.

None of which is particularly appealing. Let us agree together, that for the main part, we do not wish to die. Given a choice, we'd prefer to remain upright and breathing. Our Western culture, ingeniously, has found an antibody for death — denial. That which is not spoken clearly does not exist. If we don't mention it, perhaps it will leave us alone.

fear of death

In that period of my life when I would routinely conduct funerals, I was struck by the number of people who stared at a coffin in horrified disbelief. It was like they were peering into the chasm of mortality for the very first time. Grief was overshadowed by fear, as if sharing a room with death was potentially contagious.

Strangely enough, dying is at least as common as being born. In fact there seems to be some sort of correlation between the two. Yet while birth is celebrated, photographed, talked about, and encouraged, the other end of the continuum is regarded as a social vulgarity. Dealing with death is the equivalent of cleaning up a mess the cat has left on the floor.

Of course, death can be nasty. It can come too soon, too violently, and too painfully. But then birth gets messy at times as well, and it hasn't put people off. Most of the time, death is relatively gentle and even a bit special. To be with a dying person is like waiting for the plane to leave at an airport, after your friend has disappeared into the customs hall with a one-way ticket.

fear of non-existence

The sting of death is the fear of non-existence. We invest so much in this project called life that it seems manifestly unfair it should arrive at a dead end. To some observers, such resistance to annihilation is the genesis of all religion. Fearing an end as we do, we concoct an elaborate system of beliefs to assure us of an upgrade to the afterlife.

My personal maxim is that anyone who thinks the next life is preferable to the current one is a particularly joyless soul, and unlikely to be invited to my parties. It beats me how people who experience this life as so contemptible can want an extension on their term. If Victor Frankl could find joy in a concentration camp, surely we can put up with not getting our pious way.

The searching question to ask of ourselves is whether this life is sufficient, were it to turn out that there was nothing beyond the grave? That exposes an anxiety sometimes muttered on the deathbed — did I live fully the life I was given? Has the force of life flowing in me and through me been substantial enough to endure death?

To be honest, I'm a bit of an agnostic on the mechanics of what happens after death — apart from the ministrations of the undertaker. Though many will protest otherwise, I don't regard this doubt as flowing from any lack of faith. Whether or not there is some *Hotel Marigold* in the sky just doesn't figure prominently in my decisions on how to live.

Living in the future is just as disabling as living in the past. In the moment, we have been given *this* life on *this* planet at *this* time. It'll do me, as my father used to say. The postponement of joy to a more convenient date seems a tad life-denying. Each of us has a gift to bring, and each day is an opportunity to present it to the world.

Death creeps into our lives by stealth. Every loss, every goodbye, every ending brings us to a small grief — our little deaths practising for the big one. Suffering, the inevitable consequence

of being human, should be welcomed. Avoidance of pain fails to prepare us well for death. The essence of dying is the art of letting go. It does us no harm to practise relinquishment before getting to the final act.

fear of the unknown

Our death-denying culture adds to the fear of the unknown. Without witnessing death, without knowing that it is an essential part of life, we too easily become reluctant to embrace it. We teeter on the edge like terrified bungy jumpers, refusing to take that final plunge into the unknown. Anxiety is not the most helpful of companions to accompany our dying.

faith in the goodness of life

This, I suppose, is where faith comes into the equation. Not so much faith in the afterlife — atheists are capable of noble dying, and Catholics of bitter ends. The faith I speak of is faith in the goodness of life, however that may be framed. It is the belief that nothing good is wasted, and that our own existence is a part of the good.

And so at last we come to the gospel. At the centre of our story is the strange idea that neither death nor the forces of death were enough to subdue the abundant life that was in Christ. This is not so much a celebration of life after death, as the recognition of a life that is so magnificent that death cannot defeat it.

living fully

That life begins here and now, not in some insipid vision of an ethereal and disembodied future. Only those who cleave to life and explore its outer reaches can feel confident enough to lay it aside when the time comes. Leaping into the mystery of death comes more naturally when one has learned to trust the everyday goodness of Life.

There's a wonderful ambivalence in the poet Dylan Thomas's injunction to "Rage, rage, against the dying of the light". As a young man I saw it as the legitimate protest against extinction. Now I wonder if it also contains

seeds of an unhelpful resistance to an important and inevitable stage of life — that of dying.

As an injunction to live fully, it works. As advice to die well, not so much. I have seen people wrestle against death with their very last strangled breath. And I've held a tiny baby in the palm of my hand as it briefly transited life. It would serve us all well to observe dying from time to time, and learn its intimate revelations.

relinquishing life in trust

Letting go asks that we release what is familiar in the hope of what is better. By definition, there is no way of knowing the outcome until the deed is done. The final transition is the most demanding of them all. It bids us relinquish our hold on what has seemed so substantial, and to do it with gentle confidence. It seeks our deep trust.

The best preparation for a good death is a good life. A life that is generous, adventurous, humble, festive, accepting, honest, and loving. Perfect love casts out fear. We may not know how we will die, or the consequences of it. But we can have ultimate trust in the One who has allowed us to experience life. We travel only deeper into that mystery. ■

Mike Riddell writes novels, plays, films, and apology notes. He cooks when he can, and breathes intentionally on a daily basis.

a time to mourn and a time to dance

A cancer diagnosis is always a shock and especially so if you're young, busy and starting off on new ventures. **Claire Ryan** *tells of her diagnosis and treatment and shares what strengthened her through the dark days.*

October is breast cancer awareness month; a time for everything pink and a season for every fund-raising activity under heaven; a time for arranging a mammogram; a time to remind others to have one; a time to celebrate survival and a time to commemorate those who have gone; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.

Fifteen years ago, for me, it was a time to receive chemotherapy and a time to lose my hair.

It was the dawn of a new century, the start of an exciting new job and the flourishing of a happy home on the Onehunga shores. Life was good and so was God. Always busy and with an acquired talent for disorganisation which increased the workload, I had brushed aside the signs that life may not be so good, for example the inexplicable tiredness and the even more inexplicable nausea, which may or may not have been my body's reaction to the multiplying mutant calls within, but which still should have sent me to the doctor much earlier. Then there was the lump on my breast, which, as with thousands of women before me and since, I discovered almost accidentally in the shower.

"It might be a ductal blockage," ventured my doctor when I finally saw him. After all, I was far too young for breast cancer and we agreed that I would commence mammograms when I reached 40. However, errant cells do not conform to expectations about age, health or welfare. "If there are any changes," he said, "Come back."

There were changes, clear and concerning changes, as I now know only too well, and I wince at my stupidity as I type today, but back then, life was full, busy and chaotic. A few more months elapsed before I squeezed in another visit to the GP and another month before I turned up for the mammogram he had recommended.

birthday diagnosis

The diagnosis of breast cancer was confirmed on my birthday. Birthdays were for gatherings of friends and family. They were supposed to be times when champagne flowed, (or in my case soft drinks and related carcinogenic compounds) — not tears. Brought up and educated in a conglomerate of Irish and French Catholicism in which the Eucharist featured powerfully, I treasured (and still do) the symbolism and sustenance of meals, delighted to sit with those I love, grateful that I can share food with them and concerned about those who through economic and environmental injustice struggle to eat and are shunted from the table of plenty about which we sing so happily at Mass. I was about to learn something new about the Eucharist and meals as the following three examples may show.

First, the tumour in my breast was large, moving rapidly and aggressive, hardly surprising given that these were my cells. Chemotherapy was required to shrink the tumour before it and my breast would be removed and I would become an Amazon woman by Christmas. Before my first session of chemotherapy, a friend told me to ignore the stories about the subsequent vomiting. Whether I became ill depended on my attitude. "Mind over matter, Claire," she advised in a sage tone. After that first session, I felt fine. We celebrated with scones at Cornwall Park. We attended

a performance by my young niece at my old school. As we drove home, I felt suddenly unwell but put it down to my sister's infamous driving. I had barely entered the hallway of my home when matter triumphed viciously over mind.

Secondly, chemotherapy meant that the meals I used to enjoy tasted of metal and soap. I recall attending a gathering of fellow parishioners at which there was a glorious plate of fruit. I adore fruit, especially when someone else has cut and arranged it. However, the mouth sores caused so much pain that I could attempt only one morsel. My sister Angela, medical practitioner, wise, resourceful woman with a great sense of humour and the best sister anyone could have especially during this process, suggested Listerine. Daily gargles killed the mouth sores and they never returned. Fruit became an important and consoling aspect of my diet.

Thirdly, my breast surgeon recommended a grief counsellor, as with all her patients. The counsellor took me through visualisation processes to assist in the healing through chemotherapy. He spoke of images of knights on chargers or a strong healing light, which others had found useful. I did not. One day when trying to visualise the healing process, I came upon an image of happy chemotherapy party-goers feasting on the very large tumour, a table of plenty.

fifteen years on

The chemotherapy successfully shrank the tumour and the rest, as they say, is history. Fifteen years of it. A rich blessing indeed, given that my oncologist told me that my chance of surviving 10 years was 25 per cent.

divine presences

Where was God in all of this? In the challenge to survive more than 10 years and in the oncologist whose words galvanised me. God was in those around me, a mother in the chemotherapy suite who told me her breast cancer was terminal, the man on a drugs trial who would gorge on doughnuts crammed with custard before his infusion because he knew he could not eat them afterwards, and the woman with the glorious Tina Turner wig, because she had never had red hair. God abides in my fellow survivors and in my memory of those who did not survive, especially the quadruplet of angels, Jane, Marie, Sue and Moana.

God was in a hit single of the time, Ronan Keating's *Life is a Rollercoaster.* (Play it sometime and imagine God is singing it to you.) God was in those who treated me and hoped they would still be seeing me for many years, in my family and friends who supported me practically and through prayer (and who still do), and in the words of St Mary McKillop, "See a need and do something about it" which spurred me four years after diagnosis to join the fledgling *Breast Cancer Aotearoa Coalition* to support, inform and represent New Zealanders and their families who are experiencing breast cancer. I feel privileged to have played a part in the successful struggle to have Herceptin publicly funded and hence available to those who could not afford that life-saving treatment.

Finally and fortunately, I was attending a course on Isaiah when diagnosed. These words from Isaiah 41:10 resonated then and remain with me still:

So do not fear for I am with you.
Do not be dismayed for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you.
I will uphold you with my saving right hand. ■

Claire Ryan is by night an amateur astronomer and by day a District Court judge. She has a passion for debating, eclipse chasing, scripture study, travel — and swatches.

Photo left: Claire while undergoing treatment.
Right: Claire with friend on Solar Eclipse tour to the Faroe Islands 2015.

filled with the fullness of God

Receiving a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS is a frightening event and **Sarah Bradley** *shares how her life became richer and transfigured as she lived into that reality.*

Last year I spent some time in hospital with AIDS or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. When I was diagnosed I knew virtually nothing about AIDS and was in a state of shock and disbelief. However I was very relieved I was in the right place and I now knew what had plagued my health for some time. HIV attacks the immune system, which means the body has fewer resources to fight infections. In my case the virus had depleted my body of most of my CD4 blood count, (a type of white blood cell), which allowed several infections to have a party. AIDS is present when your body struggles unsuccessfully to eradicate these opportunistic infections. Because I was not in the high risk category and my GP and I were too well acquainted, he hadn't been able to join the dots. We have had a good conversation subsequently!

shock, denial, treatment

I entered hospital with "shortness of breath" with the doctors worrying about whether I had the flu or pneumonia before I was diagnosed with HIV. In fact they found I did have pneumonia, but it was a particular variety, (PCP, for short), that can be fatal if untreated. After the doctor told me I had PCP, in his next breath he told me this organism was associated with the presence of HIV. I don't remember what I said, but I agreed to be tested.

The test came back positive. I was stunned. I showed the classic signs of denial, questioning the doctors about whether they had mixed up the blood tests with someone else's. I could not comprehend anything they said to me and something within me shut down. However one of the doctors who cared for me said something that stayed with me: "We'll look after you." That gave me a sense of peace and I knew I could trust the practitioners. Despite the doctors' putting me on anti-retro viral medication I became sicker and

sicker. I began to inhabit a landscape called nowhere and the place of unknowing. The doctors found more bacteria, viruses and fungi that were disseminating through my body. Not only was my body shutting down but my soul was as well. However I did not feel afraid.

deep knowing

I had no conscious knowledge or feeling of the presence of God, but deep within, God was there.

This is the knowing that Paul talks about in Ephesians 3: 18-19: "I pray that you may be able to grasp fully the breadth, length, height and depth of Christ's love and … experience this love which surpasses all understanding, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. To God — whose power now at work in us can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine — to God be glory."

deep gratitude

I saw God in the faces, voices, hands, minds and spirits of those who cared for me. I put my trust totally in my doctors and caregivers as manifestations of God. I was being taught to be vulnerable — to receive their gifts with grace. I had to learn to walk, talk and think cogently again with much assistance and resolve.

The love and compassion I have received after leaving hospital has been beyond expectation. The beautiful Irish woman who showered and dressed me every day for nearly three months and the parishioners who came and cleaned the house and cooked us meals are two examples of love in action. Outside the Church, I have met the most beautiful people at *New Zealand AIDS Foundation* (gay, straight and transgender) and from *Positive Women Inc*.

As I began to reflect on my experience in hospital, I found the feelings that I had put on hold needed to be expressed and explored. Again the AIDS Foundation provided me with counselling and I was able to shed many tears in a loving environment. Recently, I attended a retreat for women living with HIV and as a result I am going to be trained to share my story and be a real face of a positive person for medical practitioners, professionals in various fields and hopefully churches. What a privilege to serve HIV positive women and men. I believe in Meister Eckhart's perspective that all living creatures have the spark of God within and are therefore to be treated as such. As a Catholic/Christian I know I can share my experience and spirituality with others.

I now understand the paring away process that happens when one is confronted with life-threatening events. You discover what it is to be pruned. You realise your authentic self.

life changing experience

Being treated for and living with HIV/AIDS has been life-changing. I met a good friend last year and I was able to tell her my story. I told her I now knew what was not important in my life. She asked me what it was that was now important? Great question. Another question is how do I, as a Christian, live with HIV with integrity and openness? How can I help carry the cross of others who are struggling and live with social and moral stigma and discrimination, especially those who are sitting silently in our pews or have left feeling unwelcome? I believe it is important to help teach our church communities that we are not outcasts and not people to avoid.

I now understand the paring away process that happens when one is confronted with life-threatening events. You discover what it is to be pruned. You realise your authentic self and in the words of Thomas Merton, you become "simplified out". Talking with my specialist nurse a few months after leaving hospital filled in a lot of gaps for me about my experience and helped me understand the nature of the virus. This and counselling brought the "monster in the room" down to size. I recall cricketer Martin Crowe's words that his "friend cancer" had returned. At first hearing, that didn't make sense. Now I realise I too am able to companion and befriend my body and HIV and integrate this awareness in my day-to-day living.

becoming more

I believe that experiences of suffering and pain are transfiguring moments. To transfigure is to become more of who you are. It is not what we suffer, it's how we behold and live it. I learnt during my experience the principle of letting go and dwelling peacefully in the darkness, where growth and healing take place — where God reaches you beyond all things.

I have been surprised by joy. Gratitude to God personified can bring me to tears. I have encountered such love, compassion and hope that I now understand the phrase "my cup runneth over". In the last 16 months I have encountered God. God is presence. God is unconditional love incarnate. God is generous. God is vigilant and attentive. God is respectful. God is constant and never gives up. God can be trusted. God will "look after you". ■

Sarah Bradley is a spiritual director and teacher. She belongs to a women's group in her parish and volunteers for Grey Power.

wake up to compassion

Alice Snedden *reflects on how easy it is to ignore needy people as if they were invisible and what happened when she changed and related to them as real people.*

In the months leading up to moving to New York I spent some time in Cambodia. It's a largely rural country still recovering from a relatively recent war and persecution. The people are almost inexplicably friendly and hospitable, despite many of them living below the poverty line. Homelessness is prevalent and begging for money on the streets is commonplace. It's not unusual to be approached by five or six-year-old children crying for money. Their parents watching from the street across, encouraging them, hoping to maximise on tourist sympathies.

guidebook advice

Guidebooks urge you not to give them money. They say it encourages parents to keep their kids on the streets, where they can earn their families a living, instead of putting them in school. While this might not paint these parents in a flattering light, when money is so scarce, it is not difficult to imagine why they choose this short-term solution.

I accepted this rationale. When these children approached me crying, I said: "no". Initially it felt callous and cruel, but quickly I adjusted. It didn't take long to separate myself from what I saw, and soon my dismissiveness felt normal. I became used to the beggars in inadequate clothing, with visibly poor health, and mostly I became comfortable ignoring it.

> Decide on a sum of money ... and to every person who asked give ... this is the most effective way to remain sensitive to the storuggles of others, and to show compassion.

friends' advice

On my second night in New York I took the subway from Brooklyn to the Lower East Side of Manhattan. On this night, each train I rode had pan handlers. "Pan handlers" is the name given to people who ride the subways making speeches and asking for money. My friend, the only person I knew in New York, had warned me about this. "Don't make eye contact," he said, "and just ignore them". So I did just that. I looked down, I pretended not to hear, I turned the music in my headphones louder. I did the same with people begging on the streets. I behaved as if they didn't exist. When I talked to other people about their approach, we would despair at the situation, and then agree that giving money didn't help.

a different voice

One of my first jobs in New York was as a dog walker. All of my work was on the Upper East Side for people in multimillion-dollar apartments. The contrast between the lifestyle in New York and Auckland is severe/enormous. The winters are much harsher and the summers are hot and humid. During the winter, this job became especially hard. Often the temperature was below 10 degrees and when it snowed, the roads were slippery. The dogs would be reluctant to go outside, so I would dress them in warm coats and booties and cajole them out onto the streets where we would walk past people asking for money.

One morning, while on a dog walk, I listened to a podcast about approaches to helping those living on the streets. It argued that you should decide on a sum of money, they suggested one dollar, and to every person who asked, give one. Further, it said, stop and ask if they need help. The argument was that regardless of public policy, or abstract debate about what the best long-term goal

was, this was the most effective way to remain sensitive to the struggles of others and to show compassion.

So I began instead to follow this practice and I found that it was right. Responding when people ask for money or help reminds you that they are there. It makes you stop and take notice of your surroundings and it makes it more difficult to accept the *status quo* as an inevitable reality.

changing my approach

One particularly cold evening, I was rushing through a subway station in midtown, late to meet a friend. I had my headphones in and wasn't paying attention to much. Sitting on the steps of the subway entrance was a woman with a small child in her lap. At first this didn't even strike me as unusual. So much so, that when I saw the woman was saying something to me, I assumed she was being friendly. When I walked past, I smiled and returned what I thought had been a "Hi".

It wasn't until I got to the top of the stairs that it struck me as strange that she'd be sitting in the cold with a small child so late at night. I turned around and walked back down to her.

Once I looked more closely I saw she had been crying. I saw that her child was cold and I saw that she was not saying "Hi" to passers by — she was asking for money. I had nothing to give this woman. I didn't have any cash, I had no money in my bank account, I was meeting a friend only because she'd said it was her shout. I asked the woman what she needed help with and if she had somewhere safe to go that night. She said she just needed enough money for a ticket to New Jersey. There was a place there she could stay. I began to apologise that I didn't have any money, but before I could finish another woman stopped and asked if everything was ok. She offered money, and then another person stopped too and offered assistance. The woman wasn't just another person on the street asking for money, she was a mother with her child in a desperate situation. Even though I couldn't help her, it was as they had said in the podcast, when you stop and take notice, others will too.

What I realised is, as with most things, people have moveable thresholds and tolerance. We are so malleable that we can accept and adjust to almost any environment around us. So despite being shocked and saddened by what I saw when I first arrived, I adjusted. My threshold for witnessing terrible situations and misfortunes increased and my reaction dulled. It doesn't take much then to reflect on how I have become complacent in my attitude at home in New Zealand. To reflect on what unacceptable circumstances in my own country, or in any of the communities of which I am a member, I have wrongly accepted as concrete. I wondered what role I had played in facilitating poverty, inequality or prejudice through my own willingness to embrace the notion of a certain degree of suffering as an inevitable reality. ■

Alice Snedden is a law and political studies graduate who has just returned to living in Auckland.

my beloved mother is back

Many families have loved ones who have old-age-related mental illness. **John Dunn** *tells of his mother's illness and the painful, surprising and loving journey they are sharing.*

The tiny little figure curled up in the lazyboy chair opened her eyes and exclaimed: "It's my John, it's my John!" With a big smile, she held out her arms for a hug and a kiss and we held each other for a moment. Her name is Mary Dunn, and she is my Mother. She is nearly 94 and has suffered from a form of dementia for three years. For two of these years she has lived in the dementia hospital, which she occasionally calls home. She always recognises me and welcomes me with the same beautiful greeting. It is the highlight of my day.

And then, in an instant, she is gone back into her own world. The next two hours are filled with pushing her in her lazyboy armchair (fitted with little wheels) around the dementia hospital, feeding her with endless cups of tea, chocolate (her favourite is *Cadbury's Top Deck*) and biscuits — or at mealtimes, her meal. We go out into the garden and check up on the rabbit in his hutch, examine the flowers, and if the day is good, travel up the footpath to the end of the street examining the gardens. This is her world, which we share together every day.

capriciousness of dementia

Her language comes and goes, especially if her attention span diminishes to one or two sentences. Sometimes it is unintelligible: ("ooga, booga, wooga..."). Sometimes it is beautiful, "Thank God for violets, their smell is just exquisite". Sometimes it is abusive, especially if I do not do immediately what she wants. "You f*****g religious hypocrite, I love you forever, but not today. Today I hate you."

And then, in the middle of this delirious stream of consciousness, comes connection with reality. "Have you finished your antibiotics and your prednisone?" When I respond: "Yes," she replies: "Good, I always worry when you have to go to those lengths to get rid of the 'flu. I have been worrying about you every night." And, for a little while, I have my beloved Mother back and we can talk.

fog of dementia

Every so often — unfortunately, increasingly less often these days — she "surfaces" for a while, and is lucid to the point that we can have a reasonable conversation about her, about me, about her friends, and about her future. At those times she describes her illness as a "fog" that comes down on her, something she has no control over. Sometimes, she says, she is aware of what is going on around her, and other times not. Sometimes she has no awareness that I come to spend time with her every day. Further, I can say something to her one day and seem to get no response, but several days later, she will bring up the topic and speak about it.

community of support

Those with loved ones who have an old-age-inspired form of mental illness, be it Alzheimers, or, as in my Mother's case, some form of delirium, will recognise this story and the journey it entails. We all

follow this journey, each with its unique twists and turns, with our loved ones. We form a community of love in the hospital, where a deep understanding among families, be it of joy or pain in what we are going through, binds us together.

In a similar way, I have great admiration for the nursing staff who work with such patience and love with our family members. Because I am there every day, I get the chance to see more deeply into the workings of the hospital. I like to think that we too form a community around the patients. The staff get paid so little yet give so much. Many family members would be thrilled to see the level of care and affection which their loved ones receive.

> Unconditional love was shown me by my beautiful Mother over all the years of my life. Now it is my turn.

my turn to love

On a personal note, how do I deal with all this? I do not hide it, but proudly and publicly make my Mother a part of my current life story. It is a story of faith, hope, and love. In this sense, I think of it as "my turn". Unconditional love was shown me by my beautiful Mother over all the years of my life. Now it is my turn. I am privileged to be able to spend time with her every day and maintain our connection and, in part, her connection with the world. There is no denying that it is a hard journey, which cuts to the depths of one's being. Travelling together with many people makes it not only bearable but inspiring. The pain of watching her struggles and being in that sense party to her pain is something I accept and make part of who I am. The sense of being in such a community of care, both in the hospital and in my parish, also keeps me going, and, hopefully, balanced.

Mary's still giving

At another level, her illness raises important questions at a time when the nation debates the merits or otherwise of assisted suicide and euthanasia. To me, my Mother seems to exist on two levels: on one level there seems to be no centre, and everything has neither rhyme nor reason. On another, deeper level, her identity and sense of being a loving person in contact with the world around her, seems to remain emphatically intact. Today she was admiring the apricot colour of a friend's blouse, discussing the merits of colours, and conversing with her about her grandchildren. The true Mary Dunn, it seems to me, still has more to give.

To illustrate what I mean, let me tell a story about her. The activity officer of the hospital was a beautiful and loving young English woman named Kate. Kate fell in love with my Mother and delighted to spend as much time as she could with her, loving her as a daughter and attending to what she said and to her needs. To me, she was an angel of God's providence!

One day in January 2014, my Mother surfaced for almost a whole day, and became completely lucid. Kate wrote the story of that day for the company which runs the hospital, and finished up winning an international prize. Recently I met two Irish nurses who told me that Kate's Story was part of the required reading for all medical students at their university in Dublin. You can read it for yourself at *http://www.nathaniel.org.nz/euthanasia/16-bioethical-issues/bioethics-at-the-end-of-life/345-kate-s-story-the-person-inside-the-person-with-dementia-synopsis-only.*

I am so proud that Mary Dunn in her dementia has "gone global" and is making a contribution to reflection on how both specialists and ordinary people respect, love, treat and care for those who suffer from this terrible affliction. I continue to be proud to be her son, to love her and to share in her life. ■

John Dunn is parish priest of St Ignatius parish, St Heliers, Auckland. He taught theology for many years both in Mosgiel and Auckland.

"love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

yes is a world
& in this world of
yes live
(skillfully curled)
all worlds"

– E. E. Cummings

Photograph by Zac Holland

spirituality and healing

Anna Holmes *reflects on the healing that happens when medical staff and family understand and support their ill person's spiritual journey.*

You may well ask what a medical doctor is doing talking about spirituality. I have spent my adult life practising medicine in a number of different cultures. While there have been incredible advances in the science of understanding and treatment of disease during that time, the thing that has kept me in medicine, still fascinated after half a century, has been the connection that it made with people. I realised very early on that this was about spirituality.

understanding spirituality

Spirituality is about connection to the depths of self, to others, to the natural world and to the transcendent or sacred, however that is understood. It sends people on a life-long journey seeking meaning and purpose and coming to terms with the paradox of being born to suffer and die. It continues from birth to death — both of which take us by surprise.

My grandson Luca shows how humans really are designed to be in community. We have a holiday house where the family gather. At seven-months-old he crawled around the room connecting with every member of the family. Each cousin, aunt or uncle would lift him up, chat to him and put him down. Only the youngest, who felt a little displaced, would not respond. Luca went back three times until he got a response.

Definitions of spirituality are inadequate because they fail to include the way in which spirituality changes and develops throughout life. In the end a diagram best expresses this. The golden colour represents the sacred, holy or transcendent. The three leaves of the diagram represent the self, the natural world and the human other.

The space at the centre represents

the transcendent or God within and the space around represents the transcendent or God without. The beauty of the diagram is that it shows the intimate connection of the whole so that although it is possible to speak about aspects of spirituality in relation to the self, the other and the natural world and transcendent, in reality all aspects are interconnected.

Trying to describe spirituality is like listening to a tūī sing. Sometimes it pours out an amazing liquid noise that lifts the heart and fills the hearer with joy. At other times it is possible to see the tūī lifting its head, opening its beak and quivering its white ruff — and yet hear nothing. The song is outside our limits of hearing. Spirituality also draws us beyond ourselves and is sometimes only glimpsed.

A doctor told me about her experience: "She (a patient) lived alone and used to say: 'My cat is my friend and she and I will go together.' It was a beautiful day and I lingered to sniff the roses and saw the cat lying on the driveway and it was dead. I went in and called her and there she was in her bedroom gasping. And I held her as she died. You are left thinking: 'you are not alone'."

You can see the connections unfolding between the doctor, the patient, the garden and even the cat.

needs of the spirit

Spiritual needs emerge at times of change — in relationships, in work, in growth stages, in health. From birth we are confronted with change and this continues until we die. Like the nautilus shell we carry our previous stages with us on our journey but need always to be open to new stages of growth. This is difficult when we do not want to change and we suffer spiritual pain.

contribution of suffering

People who are ill suffer because they are on an enforced journey. They may face losing function, meaning, purpose, work, control and eventually life itself. They might say "I'm not myself any more" when it is hard to come to terms with changes and accept their new self. Initially they are often angry, fearful, guilty and unforgiving of themselves and others. They may feel a burden to themselves and others too and may fear abandonment. They have to seek new answers to the questions of life — Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going?

There is a particular problem now because medicine, which used to be focused on care and compassionate presence, has become focused on cure. But cure is not possible in chronic or terminal disease. Cure is directed at the organ or system that is disordered but can fail to look at the whole person — body, mind, spirit and relationships. A person can be cured but not healed — the organ may be put right but the person still feels ill.

The story explains the difference. A patient had seen various GPs and been referred to specialists. All investigations had been negative for physical disease. She came to see another doctor with a new symptom. This doctor read her notes and commented: "You seem to have had a lot of referrals this year. When did this all begin?" To the doctor's surprise the patient burst into tears. After a while she replied: "When my father died." For this person her body was expressing her grief.

healing and wholeness

Healing is to make whole. It is directed at supporting the person to find new meaning, reconnection and reintegration with self, family and community. Healing can happen in the absence of cure. However it requires carers to be present to the sufferer, bear witness to their suffering and offer hope.

Bearing witness is not just being a bystander but allowing yourself to be drawn into the world of the sufferer. This can be painful to do because mirror neurones in the brain cause carers to suffer empathic distress. In Christian terms it is thought-provoking to think of those who stayed at the crucifixion and those who did not.

Hope is not just about a wish for a cure. It is also about a remembrance of possibilities. Symbols of hope are very important, particularly at the end of life. These are very individual and may include photographs, music, art, or gardens. Anything which links the sufferer to the life they have lived and the world they live in may function as a symbol of hope for them.

A woman shared: "When my father died I felt lost between the places I grew up in and New Zealand. I did not know where I belonged. Walking along a beach with my closest New Zealand friend, I found a canoe anchor stone. I then knew that this was where I belonged. It was a symbol of hope."

nurturing spirituality

Paying attention to spirituality can be difficult in busy lives. It is, however, as important to attend to as the body. New Zealand has a particular spirituality of the land. Spending time contemplating, noticing the beauty, observing the touching humanity of others, being grateful for the connections in our lives, all nurture our spirits. Any creative activity — gardening, art, cooking, feeding people, writing, singing, dancing, taking time to wonder — all help our spirits grow. Through them we find new meaning, connection, growth, healing and wholeness. ■

Anna Holmes is a former GP and hospice doctor and now assists in the clinical formation of medical students in Otago University.

an ecological reading of the gospel of mark

In this tenth part in the series **Elaine Wainwright** *remembers the story of the woman who pours costly perfumed ointment on Jesus' head while he is in Simon's house in Mark 14:3-9.*

Mark 14: 3 While Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. **4** But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? **5** For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. **6** But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. **7** For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. **8** She has done what she could; she has anointed/ointmented my body beforehand for its burial. **9** Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

November is a time of remembering and particularly remembering those who are our ancestors in the gospel/good news, especially those with whom we are intimately interconnected. Therefore it seems appropriate to choose for our ecological reading a story that commissions our remembering (Mark 14:3-9). This story of an unnamed woman concludes with Jesus' affirmation of remembering her together with "what she has done", what she has held and touched and poured and smelled. Her story invites us to remember our loved ones in their rich engagement with the physical and the material aspects of their lives as well as the social, that is more familiar to us.

beginning to re-member

In re-membering the pouring woman (whom I would like to name *Murisa*), we are invited into a house, a material dwelling which reminds readers of the many similar places in which Jesus' ministry has taken place (Mk 2:1, 11; Mk 5:19; Mk 7:17). The naming of the householder as "Simon the Leper" evokes Jesus' ministry of healing, of reaching out and touching and of being touched in return (See Mk 1:40-45). The house in which readers encounter Jesus in the opening of this narrative is characterised by healing. This, in its turn, can remind readers to be attentive to the ethos that we create or bring into dwelling places in which we live and into which we enter for other purposes. It also can remind us of the places in which we re-member our loved ones and in which we shared food and life with them.

Relationships continue as Jesus and Simon and those whom we meet in Mk14: 4 are reclining at a meal. The context evoked is that of table companionship, which has been characteristic of Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus is being remembered in this story amid all the material aspects of couches, bodies reclining, and food being shared. It is into this rich material and relational context that a woman comes. The Greek phrase opening this next movement in the narrative is *ēlthe gynē* – "came a woman". She/*Murisa* courageously enters a space that is not hers according to the culture.

The gospel narrator does not pause on this anomaly, however, but moves immediately to describe her action: she brings with her a beautiful alabaster jar containing very costly ointment of nard, and she breaks open the jar and pours the ointment on the head of the reclining Jesus. This is a lavish action and the material elements she has with her enhance this. Alabaster is a beautiful translucent marble that is gift of the Earth. The content of the alabaster jar was *muron*, a reference to a range of perfumes and perfumed oils (note that the content is not *oinon*, the term used for oil of anointing).

healing not anointing

In exploring the language and the context written into this text, it becomes clear that the action evoked is not that of anointing, just as the materials are not those associated with anointing. Rather both action and language find an echo in an ancient text called the *Deipnosophistae [The Sophists at Dinner*] by Athenaeus. There we learn, among many aspects important for interpreting this text, that "[a] highly important element of health is to put good odours to the brain or head — *enkephelē/kephelē* (xv.687). This suggests that the woman's action was not seen as an anointing but rather healing. It was putting good odours to the head and neck of her companion and friend, Jesus, as he faced into a most terrible death (Mk 14:1-2). And it was the beautiful

muron in an Earth-grounded alabaster jar that accompanied and enabled her healing action. Earth and its elements were brought by *Murisa* to this poignant moment in the life of Jesus — his facing his death.

right use of resources

Those sharing the meal with Jesus and Simon object to such a lavish and earthy action. They move into what can be seen as the language of "commodity exchange" — beautiful jar and ointment sold and the money given to the poor. Readers may remember, however, that there has been little indication in the Markan narrative up to this point of the concern for the poor among those accompanying Jesus. At one level, therefore, their voices do not seem to ring true.

They do, however, give us pause, especially at this time when *Laudato Si'* echoes around us as it turns our lenses to the cry of the Earth and cry of the poor. The way we respect and use Earth resources needs discernment. The voice of Jesus speaks into this, claiming that at this time, it is he himself who needs the gift of healing *muron. Murisa* has made the right choice in relation to her use of resources.

Jesus re-affirms the actions of *Murisa*, interpreting her action in pouring out the perfumed ointment as a preparing of his body for burial (Mk 14: 8). She is doing what disciples, male and female do: prepare the material body of their teacher for burial (one of the many acts of re-membering those one loves). The words of Jesus affirm her relationship with/her use of Earth resources, but also go beyond what has been visible in the story to this point.

re-membering

Verse nine concludes this short but highly significant narrative (Mk 14:3-9). It continues to foreground the woman and her action focusing readers/listeners on the entanglement of earthed-human-bodies, including a body in extreme pain, and the power of other earth elements to heal when body and substance meet. This is placed at the heart of the "good news" that is to be proclaimed *eis holon ton kosmon* (to/in the whole cosmos) — the entire planetary realm for contemporary readers. It is also to be remembered in time — every time the gospel is proclaimed.

The Markan storyteller does not place Jesus at the centre of this story and its remembering. Rather s/he affirms the extraordinary interconnectedness within the story's interaction that collectively constitutes "good news". It far transcends a single human action or person. It echoes in and through the person of the woman, the materiality of her *muron*, her extraordinary action and in the body of Jesus. The ecological reader remembers the woman precisely in what is enacted in the house of Simon. Thus, to remember the woman (and the poured out *muron*) in this way is to read ecologically. As we re-member *Murisa* during this month of remembering, we also re-member our loved ones whom we can catch up into this material and cosmic remembering. ■

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

Above: Bas relief of Woman pouring healing ointment on Jesus in Simon's house.

how cancer saved my life

Shaun Davison *talks to his brother-in-law, Noel Henry, about his transformative journey with cancer.*

I didn't know my American brother-in-law, Noel, very well. We had last met 30 years before — so my time in Chicago became an opportunity for us to get to know each other. It turned out to be a time of grace and gratitude. Sitting on the sofa in his downtown apartment, Noel told me about his serious cancer diagnosis and how it shocked him into re-evaluating his values and relationships.

"I know it sounds crazy but I'm very happy right now because I've got my life back. Before, I felt as though I'd lost my way."

"I have had this idea for a book. I would call it: *How Cancer Saved My Life*. It started because until a couple of years ago my life was stuck in the pits. There was a lot of drinking going on, a lot of eating fast-food. I don't remember eating a vegetable or a piece of fruit for years. Everything was take-out. I became distanced from the Church, couldn't be bothered with my friends or family. That sort of lifestyle leads to depression.

"When the cancer thing came along I thought this is God's way of saying: 'Noel you're a good guy but I'm going to give you something to think about.' I do believe that this is God's crazy way of helping me see where I was going wrong. I'm not saying that God did this to me. I did this to myself. But I believe really strongly that things happen for a reason. My biggest motto is that something good will come from something bad, as long as you have faith.

"The day the doctor told me that I had cancer and I had five maybe ten years to live — I remember well. In some ways it was the saddest day of my life. In some ways, it was the best. I knew right there and then that I could either go down one road or I could go down the other.

"I chose to change and since then my life has turned around dramatically. My whole lifestyle has become healthier. Except for the cancer I am a very healthy person. I've learnt about eating properly and I'm back at Church. It's got me to refocus and with that has come happiness. I'm a very happy guy now.

"When I first got the news about my cancer I was pretty down. I must have cried a river of tears. Now I accept it. I know that no one is promised a full ride. And I accept that I've got five or ten years.

"I spend a lot of time in the gym. I pray a lot. When I'm in my office I'll shut the door and I'll pray for maybe 20 minutes and that helps me feel good. I may have some health issues but I'm at peace inside myself.

"When you're going down the wrong road it's easy to keep going down that road. It's hard to turn around and go back up the mountain. Now I wake up every morning and I give thanks to God. I know it sounds crazy but I'm very happy right now

because I've got my life back. Before, I felt as though I'd lost my way.

"My sister said: 'One good thing that's come out of this is how our family has become a whole lot closer.' So I feel good knowing this has brought happiness to people I care about.

"I've had amazing support from a lot of people — family, friends, old school mates — even people I didn't know have been busy praying for me, sending me really nice messages. It's been awesome. Everyone has given so much support around me that I really couldn't have done anything else but get better.

"Once I got rolling it was easy because there is no better high you can get than knowing that you've accomplished something that you didn't think you could accomplish. It's a natural high.

"Some people say: 'If you're going to die, you may as well just go out and have some fun.' Well the thing is I'm having fun right now. It's a real happiness, not a drunk happiness.

"Hopefully, with God's help, I'm going to come out of this a better person than I ever imagined. It's nearly three years now since my diagnosis and I feel pretty good. My latest blood results are looking good and I may get off medication soon. The doctors even seem positive of possible recovery … one day.

"It's been hard work but what really helps is faith in God — along with a positive attitude. I'm blessed to be surrounded by amazing people. I couldn't have done it without God and without my family, friends and those I work with. This is my strength. I realise I have a great life. It took the cancer to wake me up." ■

Shaun Davison enjoys cycling to his work as the DRS at Pompallier Catholic College, Whangarei. He loves the freshness of both the morning and the students' new ideas.

Photo: Noel Henry and Shaun Davison.

watching grass grow

Jenny Dawson

Thousands of arcing, arching spears of hope are poised like springboard divers, sparkling silver-green to greet the first sunshine we've had for weeks. The blades tremble in the wind, but they are deeply anchored in a bed of clover and dock and thistles. These slithers of life are solid in the community where their roots go down. We too are fragile and fluttering, but grounded firm in the soil of Christ. We too are singular and oddly isolated but nurtured by a diversity of created life that we might even call family, church, society.

My father used to say that sheep are the backbone of the economy so he insisted that shepherds and shearers must be respected, but without this grass our agriculture would be nothing. Maybe grass, of all kinds, is the backbone of New Zealand? It's odd to think that Jesus spoke of grass being cut down and put into the oven, because it was good for nothing but making a fire.

As I gaze into this patch of grass flourishing I can't see any two blades of grass exactly the same. They are all distinctive, yet the precious identity of each is so easily overlooked. I realise that we can see only the tops of most of the spears of hope, with who-knows-what going on underneath and into the soil. Is this like humanity, where we hardly see one another and when we do, it's too easy to notice only what sticks out?

Is grass really green, I ask myself? Scanning across the paddock I discover cadmium yellow, vermilion, pale blue and navy, burnt orange, all dusted with silver morning dew. A whole community of colour dances together in delight.

I sigh and sit back. The lively colours of grass gladden my heart, singing to me the promise of summer and reminding me of the fragility of the soul amidst the deep connectedness of all creation. I praise God for the gift of grass. ■

a life full of surprises

Kevin McBride *talks to Joseph Wakim, widowed father of three daughters, writer and advocate on human rights issues, who visited Auckland and gave the first Pax Christi David Wakim Memorial Lecture.*

Joseph Wakim traces his family links to the late nineteenth century Lebanese sisters who were his and David Wakim's respective grandmothers. The second cousins, David and Joseph, could have been brothers: "David was a mild-mannered pharmacist by day and a political radical by night and I am a mild-mannered logistics manager by day and write at night campaigning for human rights and against war. Both of us played active roles in our churches, like our ancestor Yacoub. Both formed interfaith groups with Muslims and Jews. Both hail from a lineage of peacemakers, fearless fighters for truth and not afraid of carrying crosses."

ISIS and the west's interests

Joseph spoke of the crisis over ISIS. After meeting Mother Agnes Mariam (superior of a Melkite Greek Catholic Monastery) in Syria, who warned that the "Arab Spring" had been "hijacked by foreign Islamist mercenaries with strong support from Western countries", he wrote many newspaper columns but found that some editors, for whom he had been writing for many years, emailed: "Sorry, we have no space". This became the title of his book about racism and hypocrisy.

The book details how "pipelines" of weapons, intended by the US/Qatar/Saudi alliance for the Free Syrian Army in order to degrade Iran, were "leaking" into the hands of al-Nusra, the Syrian franchise of Al-Qaeda, and would ultimately be confiscated by ISIS.

"The Western allies' foreign policy is like a BBQ where knobs are turned up or down to achieve the desired temperature, the desired balance of power. The West aids and abets mercenaries to emasculate a monster,

until the mercenaries become the next monster that the West needs to 'degrade and ulimately destroy'."

All these manipulations and twistings of foreign policy evoke "Mary Shelley's haunting tragedy about Dr Frankenstein, who creates a monster for his own benefit until the monster turns on him and Frankenstein hunts him down to exact revenge.

"In order to uproot the causes of radicalisation, we need to address the injustices that feed and breed it. Injustices such as Australia pounding the UN Security Council table over the tragic loss of life in Eastern Ukraine last year, but not over the tragic loss of life in Gaza a few weeks earlier. Injustices such as threatening to isolate Russia with sanctions but not daring to apply the same moral standards to Israel. Injustices such as treating Muslim fighters with scrutiny and non-Muslims with impunity.

"Perhaps we need this crisis over ISIS because there are beneficiaries of inflating this bogey. They are weapons manufacturers, Governments for whom a war may be an effective distraction from domestic issues, the military industry, intelligence and surveillance industries and the television and media industry.

advocacy because it's needed

"Some Christian friends question my advocacy: 'You defend Muslims but you're Christian'. I reply: 'I defend them because I'm Christian'." Joseph likens his approach to that of the Good Samaritan who "stopped to help the needy stranger without considering his race or religion. As a Christian, I find it imperative to highlight hypocrisies without fear and rehumanise those who have been demonised".

Joseph's two books carry his message. *Sorry, We Have No Space*, shows that the opposite of love is not hate, it is fear. "Too often our male leaders opt for a military rather than a political solution".

His new book, *What My Daughters Taught Me*, looks at problem-solving through a different lens, where "real strength is the capacity to listen, to identify issues in advance, and to prevent wars. The book testifies to the priority of always putting family first, especially in the face of illness, death and grief. And it testifies to the centrality of faith and constantly asks — what would Jesus do at this cross-roads?"

joseph's story

Joseph said what had brought him to this place, to these reflections, was the death of his wife 12 years ago, leaving him with a new normal: caring for three daughters, then aged four, nine and 11, and facing the challenges of a life full of contradictions

and paradoxes. He'd been trained as a psychologist, later doing street work with children who had left abusive homes and also with refugees from the Middle East. He'd set up the Australian Arabic Council and was engaged in a series of day jobs in the clothing and transport industries. But he also became fully immersed in his night job — writing: articles, plays, songs and prayers, exploring the power of the pen, examining the 1991 Gulf War and the 2001 attacks in the USA.

Following the trauma of his wife's death he wrote a piece about his experience as a widowed father. Although it was painful, he wrote it in a tone of humorous self-deprecation, mocking his mistakes made "trying to do what mums do". This brought an invitation to write a longer book which might inspire hope in people going through similar experiences. It deals with the untold secrets of what it is like in the heart and the head to progress from cancer diagnosis, to hospital caring, to funeral and on to raising three girls. The book struck a chord in many hearts with women, kids and above all, men, saying "me too!"

Joseph's personal story not only shared the pain but raised in public what it means to be a strong man and a person of faith. He portrayed honestly what it means to go through what many may find an intolerable burden into the joy of realising that God has given us the gifts of knowing what we need to do to survive. It's not a question of being a hero but in Joseph's case, having lost his life's partner, it was learning in humility to celebrate what he does have and of sharing that story with others who might have sunk into bitterness and loss of faith.

Joseph finds himself driven by an urgency to get more of these stories out, to share the personal stories and struggles of the many through telling his own in such a way as to touch on what we all experience as human beings. He sees it as his own way of doing *Laudato Si'*, of praising God in a fully inclusive human way.

Joseph quoted: "The language of love should not be a monopoly of mothers. It is a language that we men can reclaim and relearn, as it lies dormant within us, waiting to be brought back to life. I was sure that whoever gave women this gift would not have by-passed fathers, in case they ended up like me."

Joseph Wakim is a man determined to live life to the full, to find in every experience a way to rejoice, be glad and be thankful for what it has given him of understanding and hopefully, wisdom. And of sharing that with all in humility and honesty. ■

Kevin McBride is co-ordinator of Pax Christi Aotearoa-New Zealand and lives on Waiheki Island.

Photos: L Joseph Wakim. R Joseph with his daughters Grace, Joy and Michelle. [*Used with permission*]

truth is God's faithful saving action

In her interpretation of John 18:33b-37 **Kathleen Rushton** *contrasts Jesus and Pilate as images of kingly power and truthful relationships.*

The text of the gospel of John has been handed down to us through fragments and manuscripts such as Papyrus 457 (P^{52}). This fragment measuring 8.9cm x 6 cm at its widest was found near the River Nile. The production, reproduction and transmission of bibles have been possible through the interconnection of plants, minerals, the environment and climate. The document P^{52} exists through this interconnection. Its material substance comes from a large wetland papyrus plant which grew by the Nile. Human hands harvested its fibres to produce paper-like papyrus on which Greek letters were inscribed with pen and ink, made from wood, minerals and natural dyes. Through writing and reading, human bodies, breath and language were involved in handing on the oral and written tradition. We now touch, smell and see the paper of our bible.

There is writing on both sides of P^{52} the oldest known piece of the New Testament, dated to 125-150 C.E. It is from a codex — a sewn and folded book. On the front side (*recto)* are parts of seven lines from John 18:31–33 and the reverse side (*verso*) contains parts of seven lines from Jn 18: 37–38. In those verses, Jesus is cast as king in the trial scene and there is an exchange about the truth. I shall relook at the notion of king and truth for this scene will be proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Feast of Christ the King.

role of governor

The trial of Jesus is structured in seven brief scenes (Jn 18:29–32; Jn 33-38a; 38b-40; Jn 19:1-3, 4-7, 8-11, 13-16). Pilate is the key person in each scene, moving back and forth between where Jesus is held inside the Roman praetorium and "the Jews" in the outer

courtyard. There are three reasons for stressing Pilate's weakness and insecurities when speaking of his role in Jesus' death.

First, the trial is read from the perspective of blaming "the Jews" for the death of Jesus. The context is treated as a religious dispute. However it casts it in an ethnic framework rather than in its imperial and political realities.

Gospel reading for Feast of Christ the King (22 November)

Second, the religious perspective can obscure the imperial and political background of the negotiations. The Jerusalem leaders as allies of Rome are the ones seeking to get rid of Jesus. The Jerusalem elites gathered around the temple are the leaders in their society, who wield power as allies of Rome and are also dependent on and subordinate to Rome. Their alliance is distinct from the Jewish population of Jerusalem who, in John, do not demand that Jesus be crucified.

Third, no consideration is given to how governors functioned in the Roman hierarchal, imperial system which had at its core small allied elites. Pilate is identified with the *praetorium* (Jn 18:28) which is derived from a title of a Roman official (*praetor*) who had military and judicial duties. Men appointed as governors came from the Roman aristocracy. Their families usually had wealth based in land as well as being well-connected with other civilian and military elites. It is likely that Pilate came from this elite ruling class.

The role of governors included: settling disputes and keeping order, collecting taxes, responsibility for fiscal

administration, engagement in public works and building projects, commanding troops and administering justice — including the power to put people to death.

Pilate had seized money from the temple treasury to build an aqueduct. Ancient writers, like Philo and Josephus, record that he ruled with an iron fist and was removed from office by the Roman authorities because of his cruelty. In writing about governors, Josephus uses the image of governors as "bloodsucking flies" and attributes this image also to Tiberius, the emperor when Pilate was governor of Judea.

Jesus as king

Against the background of the powerful role of the Roman governor the portrayal of Jesus as a different kind of king is accentuated in the trial (13 times). Jesus has been addressed as king (1:49; 6:15; 12:13, 15). The Greek word for "king" (*basileus*) was used of the Roman emperor so Jesus is presented in an opposing relationship to the emperor (*basileus*) and his representative, Pilate. Jesus speaks to Pilate. (In the other three gospels he is silent.) When Jesus asserts twice that his *basileia* (empire) "is not from this world," again he is set in opposition to Rome. The term *basileia* Jesus used was the word for the empire of Rome. This shows that the issue is about power and sovereignty and how power and sovereignty are to be expressed. Jesus is a very real political threat to how Rome and Jerusalem order the world.

The origin of Jesus' *basileia* is central. God creates and loves the world — Jn 1:10; Jn 3:16; Jn 15:18–19. Jesus' *basileia* is from God (Jn 3:31; Jn 8:23, 42; Jn 16:28). Jesus reveals God's claim over all human lives and structures. It is a very political claim to establish God's *basileia* over all — including Pilate's *basileia.* There is no armed resistance from Jesus' followers (Jn 18:37). The word Jesus uses for his followers is also used of those (usually translated as "police") sent by the temple elite to arrest him (Jn 18:3, 12, 18, 22; 19:6). The sense of this word is to work with another as the instrument of that person's will. While the world of Pilate's empire and his Jerusalem allies is based on coercive power and domination, the mission of Jesus is to testify to the truth.

truth – God's faithful saving action.

Truth, a key word in John, needs careful defining. Jesus describes himself as "truth" (Jn 8:32; 14:6). The term "truth" is often taken to mean "genuine" or "real." Much has been made of this aspect philosophically. In the biblical tradition, however, truth often means "faithfulness" or "loyalty" in that one is faithful to one's obligations and commitments. The Hebrew term for "truth" or "true" (*'emet*), is often translated as "faithfulness." It is applied to God who acts "truthfully" when God is faithful to God's covenantal promises by showing *hesed* to save the people. *Hesed* is the word for "mercy" — often translated as steadfast love or loving kindness. In Exodus 34:6, for example, God is described as "abounding in mercy *hesed* and faithfulness *'emet*.

When Jesus declared that his mission is to testify to "the truth", he is telling Pilate that he witnesses to God's faithfulness in saving the people. Jesus witnesses to the truth (Jn 3:33), declares he is the truth (Jn 14:6) and reveals that God is acting faithfully to save the world God loves (Jn 3:16-17; 8:14-18). Truth, then, refers to God's faithful saving action. Jesus also explains to Pilate that the characteristic of those who "belong to the truth" is that they listen to his voice as do the sheep in the Good Shepherd parable and Mary of Bethany. Pilate does not listen. He does not "see" who Jesus is or his origin or his mission.

empire today

How do we reframe the Feast of Christ the King, a title we may find uncomfortable today? What is the empire today? How is it opposed to the *basileia* of Jesus? Pope Francis is calling on the world to rethink and develop economic and social progress that is in harmony with Creation. He notes that it is "easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth which proves so attractive" (*Laudato Si'* par 106) and "compulsive consumerism" (par 203). If truth refers to God's faithful saving action and if as disciples today we are called to be faithful to our obligations and commitments, how will we participate in the mission of God with Jesus? ■

Kathleen Rushton RSM is a scripture scholar and adult educator.

Photos: Top left, papyrus plants, and left, Papyrus 457 (P^{52}) (*fragment of John's gospel*), John Rylands Library in Manchester, UK.

God's abundance

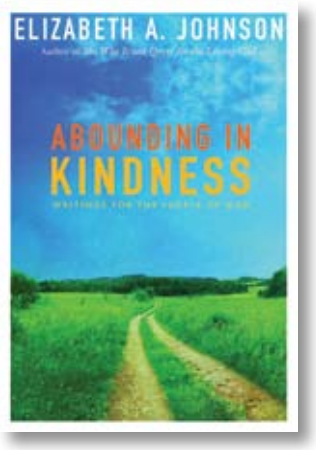
the widest cat

Abounding in Kindness: Writings for the People of God

by Elizabeth A Johnson

Published by Orbis Books, 2015

Reviewed by Mary Betz



Abounding Kindness is an opportunity to jump into the theological world of Elizabeth Johnson. It is a readable feast of two dozen adapted lectures, homilies, addresses and articles from this impressively thorough, thoughtful and creative Sister of Saint Joseph and Professor of Theology.

Johnson approaches the question of "Who is God?" with big horizons, speaking of the compassion, justice and nearness — yet incomprehensibility — of the Holy One. She links how we understand God with our ability to respect the intrinsic value of the earth and cosmos, and to live deep compassion for those who are suffering. She pleads for active solidarity with the poor, transformation of hearts and structures, and living more simply. Life lived for "the glory of God" entails finding and living God's presence — God's reign — in earth and its people.

God's "glory" or presence is also found in Jesus as the Wisdom of God incarnate. Like Wisdom, Jesus offers nourishment, life and justice for all. Jesus attended especially to those who suffered from illness, poverty or oppression, including treating women with dignity and respect. Johnson explores the historical and political circumstances causing Jesus' death, rather than God's need for sacrificial atonement. She looks with new eyes at the words, "Jesus died for us", pointing to Jesus' life of prophetic integrity and caring ministry as benchmarks for our own.

Johnson reflects on the Spirit of God as the "Lord and Giver of Life" we proclaim in the creed, present at creation and sustaining the whole of life and the cosmos. This Creator Spirit grants freedom and autonomy to humanity, and unpredictability and self-emergence to nature, all in a vision of love for an evolving universe.

Addressing the future of the Church, Johnson recalls the caution of *Gaudium et Spes* that it can have a tendency "to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion". A Church which listens to the Spirit proclaims and makes present the God of love who is passionate for what is life-giving and just.

This rich book is to be dipped into, chapters read according to interest — God, Wisdom, Jesus, the cross, Spirit, women, Church, Mary, creation, glory, justice, the communion of saints and more. My main criticism is that some topics are explored repeatedly due to the book's origins in separate presentations. But Elizabeth Johnson is one of Catholicism's finest contemporary theologians, with immense knowledge of Scripture, church teaching, spirituality and theology from the early Church fathers through to today — and she shares it here with clarity and passion. ■

Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness

by Ilia Delio

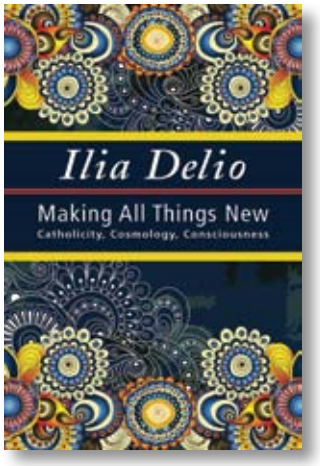
Published by Orbis Books 2015

Reviewed by Nicola Hoggard Creegan

This book is emotionally, spiritually and intellectually rich — and is not an easy read. Franciscan Ilia Delio, scientist and theologian, challenges our mechanistic world-view and presents an astounding new way of understanding being "catholic". The theme of the book is that God in Christ is urging us to greater and wider levels of catholicity, which she defines as higher levels of integration or wholeness. Her book is about how "sun, moon, stars, Kepler, Saturn, maple trees, muddy rivers, amoeba, bacteria and all peoples of the earth form a whole". The move to wholeness is catholicity.

Delio undergirds this idea of catholicity with a profound understanding of contemporary science, especially physics, and a theologically astute faith. In a world where it is often stated, or assumed, that humans are the only source of consciousness (plus or minus a few animals) and that we invent all significant categories, Delio takes another view: "the whole exists before we do; consciousness is present even in bosons". On the other hand reality is deeply relational — we live in a "participatory universe". Reality is relational but not invented by humans. She does not stop to notice that this is a stunning refutation of ultra-Darwinian randomness. And not unsurprisingly her spiritual and intellectual father is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

holicity



Delio says the catholicity she is speaking about does not belong to any church but belongs to the cosmos and the preceding wholeness and is then affirmed by humans. Humans cooperate with wholeness and hence become more catholic. This catholicity is profoundly ecological. She says we become catholic as we recognise our place in the great web of life, undergirded by wholeness, interconnection and prior consciousness.

Delio's theological revolution is profound. Jesus is the revelation of the deeper whole — the "strange attractor". Jesus is the one in whom the whole comes together. The veil of reality was peeled back in Jesus. Jesus challenges our truncated mechanical worldview at the deepest level.

Delio explores the expansiveness of the catholic story and the Franciscan ethic in this book. It gives brief introductions to important concepts in modern physics and asks vital questions about consciousness and its location. *Making all Things New* gives a renewed understanding of Jesus and the meaning of incarnation. It is a serious read and will provide a deeper motivation for the challenges of *Laudato Si'*. ■

there will be blood

Film: Macbeth

Directed by Justin Kurzel

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

This latest attempt to bring Shakespeare's Scottish tragedy to the big screen is a mixed bag, but with the accent on the positive.

While the acting is (mostly) fine and the "atmospherics" terrific, there is too much blood and too little poetry. The numerous knifings and throat-slittings may be too much even for those not normally of a squeamish disposition. More seriously, the combination of Renaissance verse and broad Scottish accents means that the Sassenach viewer has to strain to catch the dialogue. This is compounded by the director's decision – laudable in itself — to go for a conversational rather than a declamatory style of delivery, meaning that many lines are effectively thrown away.

Although the text has been deftly trimmed, the moral and psychological elements of Shakespeare's story of monstrous ambition and ensuing madness come across powerfully. While at first Macbeth (Michael Fassbender) struggles between his supernaturally fuelled desires and his loyalty to good King Duncan, his wife (Marion Cotillard) shows no such scruples. Abduring the softness proper to her sex, she berates her wavering husband for his unmanly inability to act. Unhinged by the weird sisters' promises of future glory and power, she wants to annihilate the troublesome gap between present and future.

If the play's major concerns are dealt with effectively, the film is also visually ravishing. Kurzel's use of magnificent and brooding settings — from misty highland landscapes to cavernous stone castles — are the hallmark of this production. He makes striking use of figures viewed *en masse*, whether a set-piece battle, Macbeth's rousing coronation scene, or the feast, where a dark and bloodied Banquo returns to haunt his murderer. Repeated tableaux of impassive clansfolk draped in blanket-like cloaks have a strange visual power. Costumes and architectural detailing provide much to distract the eye, but are always part of the film's wider vision.

When, at the end of the film, Burnham Wood's foretold advance on Macbeth's stronghold of Dunsinane occurs in a manner unsanctioned by the text, at first I felt cheated. But Kurzel's innovation provides a stunning backdrop for the final scenes of the film, artistically and emotionally, and his cinematographer (Adam Arkapaw) is given free rein.

If you can set aside the lingusitic issues — I was constantly longing for subtitles — and brace yourself for the gory bits, then Kurzel's *Macbeth* delivers a stunning cinematic experience. ■

Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

curial reform

The Pope's recent simplification of procedures regarding the official declaration that a particular marriage was invalidly entered into (albeit in good faith) has many positive pastoral aspects. The former procedure was onerous, time-consuming and costly — all of which contributed to the petitioner's anxiety.

This has structural implications for the Church. Earlier this year the nine cardinals (C9) advising Francis on a range of Church matters said that there would be no significant reform of the Curia before 2016. The annulment simplification is an indication of the principles underlying that reform.

The new procedures have removed work from the Roman Rota (the highest court of the Church) and have given Archbishops the responsibility to carry out this work on behalf of their neighbouring bishops. Francis has encouraged all bishops to show pastoral concern by becoming personally involved in these cases.

signs of hope

In recent times increasing numbers of commentators have described the developing instability of the apparent world order. Not only is the Middle East unravelling but even the great experiment of European unity.

Political malaise and deep-seated cynicism are rife in the USA and UK. Nationalism, in the negative sense of downplaying the merits of other countries, appears to be increasing. But as in war, the threat of a common enemy coupled with the appearance of a genuine leader, can have a positive effect.

The enemy of climate change is beginning to dawn on those with the power to address the issue. A non-partisan world leader is also starting to emerge.

it's a tough life

A number of billionaire Indian businessmen are unhappy because bureaucracy-imposed rules often delay their travel plans (in their private jets). So they are exploring plans to create a network of private airports to enable them to travel at short notice rather than face long delays.

They have asked the Indian government to make one airport, currently reserved for military aircraft, to be made available exclusively to private jets. The government is reluctant because it is under pressure to do something for the 700 million Indians who live on less than $2 per day. It doesn't want to be seen to be favouring tycoons.

some thoughts on change

I spent my childhood in the 1930s in the Wellington hilly suburbs. We had a new house courtesy of a 3 per cent mortgage. None of the women in our section of the street went out to work. They chatted from their properties, addressing one another as "Mrs".

Women in the workforce were paid less than men in the same job because men had to support wives and children. Tram was the mode of transport and our stop was opposite the Council tip.

Fifteen years ago I revisited my old haunts. Three of the four schools I had attended were demolished. The old tip had become a small housing estate. So many things had changed. I saw the new realities with different eyes from the many for whom it was not new.

One major change today regards the philosophy determining remuneration. Now the market value of goods or services produced is a major factor rather than the needs of workers and their families. In some cases men and women have equal pay but because the market value of other categories is low, large groups of workers (with family responsibilities) are seriously disadvantaged. The strangulation of the union movement has exacerbated the problem.

Another change relates to being a Catholic. Sunday Mass attendance and leading a good, moral life were the main requirements for lay people.

The 1950s seminary was run like a boarding school for adolescent boys — with predictable results. Some emerged unscathed, others did not. Most priests were motivated pastorally but some saw the parish as a personal fiefdom — distorted by their unconscious veil of proprietorship.

There has always been a core of priests and laity who understood their true roles and acted accordingly but the pressure of expectations generated by the system was a constant drain — often in destructive ways. A change of parish priest often resulted in the destruction of his predecessor's fruitful building up of ministry. Their sense of ownership skewed their judgement of people's real needs. This control led to discouragement and cynicism.

Members of religious orders have rediscovered their charisms and become agents of change in the church and society.

While remnants of former attitudes persist, I see many signs of progress and hope for the rejuvenation of the Church as intended by Vatican II. ■

rugby as religion

Kevin Ward

In the film, *Bull Durham*, Annie Savoy confesses: "I believe in the church of Baseball. I've tried all of the major religions, and most of the minor ones … I've tried 'em all … And, the only church that truly feeds the soul … is the Church of Baseball."

Baseball functions for Annie like a grand myth that gives meaning and makes sense of life. Having been in the USA for the baseball season opening, I've experienced the "religious devotion" it inspires. One observer wrote: "The decline of religion as a source of significant meaning in modern industrialised societies has been extravagantly compensated by the rise of popular culture, of which the billion dollar sports mania is the most visible manifestation." For NZ it is rugby. When we won the World Cup in 2011 Michael Laws wrote: "Rugby is more than our national sport. It is our religion, our soul." The newspaper lift-out after NZ had won began: "This is … Rugby Heaven. Thank you Lord at long last."

This raises the question: "What is religion?" For millions, sports constitute a popular form of religion by shaping their world and sustaining their ways of engaging in it. And for many sport is their ultimate concern for which they are willing to "sacrifice any finite concern which is in conflict with it". In many societies sport now functions as Durkheim's definition of religion: "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things … which unite us into a single moral community."

Michael Novak notes that the joy of victory often prompts a religious response because winning generates a feeling that "the gods are on one's side". The rituals of sport provide a mythic structure in which participants repeatedly experience death and resurrection, providing a sense of transcendence. In the UK Desmond Morris sees soccer as a quasi-religion fulfilling powerful social-psychological needs — to be together in significant groups, to voice support and experience catharsis. Hans Mol labelled rugby a national religion in NZ, arguing it represented the solidarity of the community against other groups, and in common with traditional religions "emotional commitment, the strict ritual of time and rule, the legends of the past and a stable, orderly context."

The word "religion" comes from *religare* meaning "to bind". This binding comes about through conflations of "ordinary" and "transcendent" qualities such as order, hope and charisma and reaches its ultimate context in celebration. Followers are transformed into "fans", which comes from *fanticus* "inspired by a deity, frenzied", from *fanus* "temple".

I suggest three other ways sport fulfils some religious functions. First, is in providing an experience of transcendence or ecstasy. We had that throughout the country in 2011. We hope for it in 2015. Second, the high days and holy days of a former society have been transferred from religion to sport. For NZ it is the RWC or the America's Cup final. Third, is the idea of pilgrimage, an important part of traditional religions and a practice re-emerging today. We experienced it in 2011 with pilgrims from the UK and Ireland. For New Zealanders, apart from Gallipoli, no pilgrimage is more sacred than to an overseas RWC.

As I write, the big question is whether all of these religious experiences will be enjoyed by New Zealanders, here and in London, on November 1. ■

a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

"When I was buying shirts for my sons, I would get Mukesh one that cost ten rupees more than the one I bought his brother. I wanted him to know always that I loved him so much."

Listening to stories at home and in my paid job is one of my true joys. A few weeks ago I was visiting one of our teams working to promote mental health and social inclusion in Bijnor district, a rural area in North India's state of Uttar Pradesh. The team had told me about Mukesh's mysterious death a few months earlier and I was keen to meet his parents and hear their story. Mukesh was the second son of Veeray Singh and Murthi Devi. When Mukesh had an episode of fever and illness at the age of 8 years, he had developed a number of problems. He'd started having frequent epileptic seizures and developed problems with school work. His teachers suggested he should just stay home. Then a few years later he also developed some strange behavioural problems and doctors told his parents that perhaps schizophrenia was adding to his problems of intellectual disability and epilepsy.

"But he really was quite a happy guy most of the time," continued his dad, Veeray. "He would walk around the village and talk to all our neighbours. He liked to walk with their cows to graze outside the village. Other times he would go down to where the canal runs past our rice fields and would sit and watch things there. That's where he spent a lot of time."

It wasn't easy to care for Mukesh. Veeray explained that they had spent so much money taking him to doctors, healers and hospitals to try to find a cure for his troubles. Although his seizures were controlled at times nothing had seemed to make much difference to improve his health.

Murthi served us milky chai and salty snacks. "Our daughters married and left home and our older son is working. But Mukesh was with us all the time. He liked to eat channa dal and rice. That was his favourite. Even when he was quite unwell and agitated, like when he had a period of getting angry with our neighbours and wanting to throw things at them, we would try to make him his favourite foods. Twenty something years we cared for Mukesh."

Veeray picked up the story: "We had celebrated his 37th birthday a few days earlier. I noticed he had been very quiet and we had known something was wrong for a couple of days. He seemed to be getting very sleepy and then that evening he was sleeping so heavily that we could hardly rouse him. At midnight he sat up briefly and said to me: 'Papa, let me sleep in peace and you also can sleep in peace'. A few hours later he died."

Veeray broke down, sobbing. "I cannot tell you how much I miss him. My neighbours tell me that it is a good thing no longer to have the burden of caring for Mukesh but they don't understand how we feel. We wanted to care for him. We loved him. We miss him every day. He also knew that he was loved. He was always our child."

"Now we cannot eat channa dal and rice without Mukesh. It makes us too sad" Murthi added softly.

I wiped away some tears too. Some caregiving is a heavy load, more often carried by women. But this day the grace and gift of Mukesh's life, with his multiple pscyho-social disabilities, were celebrated and treasured by both his parents. And the deep love that Veeray and Murthi conveyed pointed me to the source of All Love.

Veeray explained that now, six months later, he has finished building a memorial shrine to Mukesh on their land beside the canal. "We made this for Mukesh to be remembered — he was a *saanta* (saint) for us." ■

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

With health and life
desire and love
remembrance and gratitude
bless us abundantly
Source of life

– from the Tui Motu team