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Ending 2020 Gratefully Whakamutunga

NEIL DARRAGH, MARY THORNE, MIKE RIDDELL,
TUI CADIGAN, ZAIN ALI and others reflect on the year

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EDITORIAL

Happy Christmas!



In a few weeks 2020 will end and we'll cross the threshold into 2021. We've done it — kept safe, looked out for one another and stayed united. It's not as if our worries will magically disappear in the new year. There will still be the pandemic, the unemployment figures, the housing shortage, child poverty and climate change, but it does feel as if we're getting more of a grip on how to respond well to these things — at least in this part of the world. The reality of a vaccine against COVID-19 is closer, there's a growing urgency and will to address the social issues and more people are calling their governments to action around climate change. We dare to hope.

Before the new year we celebrate Christmas. Coming in summer, our usual Christmas is flavoured with relaxation, the outdoors and togetherness — flavours that have been restricted during this year. Interestingly, both Matthew and Luke tell of Jesus's birth happening in the middle of a time of threat, which upset his parents' plans. Away from home, they had to make do at his birth and in the early months of his life.

We've had practice in coping with unprecedented situations this year. And that experience may help to knock off the pious accretions that have petrified the baby Jesus as no more than Santa's companion. It wasn't sentimentality that strengthened our endurance this year, but love and hope and faith in our leaders and in one another. This is the reality of the Divine among us in good as in threatening times — working as love, showing us the truth, nudging us to go beyond our personal interests to consider the good of all. Somehow, united by the COVID threat, we've fathomed the Spirit's reservoirs of love and action more deeply, and experienced Emmanuel, God with us. This Christmas, as we gather as families with all our quirks, we can feel the sacredness we share and be grateful to the Source of life.

As 2020 ends, the *Tui Motu* team have hearts full of gratitude: for being able to publish through the year; for being solvent thanks to the generosity of our subscribers, the government and our volunteers in Dunedin and around the country; for the support of the Board and the Tui Motu Foundation and especially for the loyalty and encouragement of our subscribers. Thank you!

All of this gives us a bridge of hope into the new year.

The December issue is the combined gift of many contributors. We thank all who have given their reflection, research, faith, art and craft.

We thank Susan Smith as she retires from writing the monthly *Cross Currents*. We'll miss Susan's contributions. We've loved having her on the team and we let her go with our gratitude.

With this magazine is a Christmas card, our annual promotion for new subscribers. If you need extra just call or email us.

Happy Christmas to you! And as is our custom, our last words are of blessing and encouragement.



This of course is not just an American problem. What happens in the USA matters for all of us who value democracy in an increasingly divided world. In these times of uncertainty and pandemic, it is too easy for the unscrupulous to undermine the truth and question everything as a lie.

We need to be vigilant — if it can happen there, it can happen in our countries too. Journalists need to ask the hard questions, to do meticulous research, to check their facts, to value the truth — as commitment to our profession requires. It is too easy for politicians to bat away inconvenient stories and public concern with political smoke and mirrors. As we have seen in the USA, this impoverishes us all.

We cannot allow misinformation and lies to spread like a virus. We cannot allow divisions to fester. When they do, the task of repairing the damage and restoring trust is Herculean.

For our communities to thrive, journalists must always be working to protect the principles of unity and truth. When politicians promise the world but don't deliver, divisions grow. When journalists — and others — don't call out blatant lies, truth is the victim. We may as well be telling the lies ourselves.

It is essential that we have healthy scepticism, robust discussions and a variety of perspectives, and we should treat all of these with respect. But we need to be equally sceptical of suspicion for the sake of it or as a tool to manipulate situations.

The truth matters and as we've seen in the USA, people get hurt and die unnecessarily when we side with opinion rather than facts, tribalism over process. If we sacrifice truth we risk too much — including the promise of the new year we're looking forward to. 🌲

Photo by Stratos Brilakis/Shutterstock.com



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

As a journalist, I cannot remember when I looked forward to a new year so much. A fresh calendar, a new start — 2021. I'm remembering the lessons of 2020, lest we make the same mistakes again — particularly in reporting the truth.

More than anywhere this year, we've seen truth sacrificed in the USA.

The coronavirus is but one example, where denial and misinformation about the truth allowed the virus to infect 11 million Americans and claim more than 250,000 lives.

It's clear now that the world's richest country failed to heed the science and follow its own pandemic plan. But the virus was perhaps a symptom of a larger failing. Distrust and suspicion have long taken root in parts of the country, allowing misinformation to spread just as rampantly as the disease.

This distrust rose to a crescendo with the November election. The election result hasn't cleared the air, as many of us hoped, but has been used as yet another opportunity to muddy the waters.

Record numbers headed out to cast their votes. More than 150 million people cast a ballot for either Donald Trump or Joe Biden, two candidates with markedly different worldviews and approaches to governance, in an election fuelled by conflict.

Leading up to the election, the media divided along party lines and some saw no shame in disseminating unchecked stories, alternative facts, untruths and discrediting truth as fake news.

Despite Biden's win, at the time of writing, Trump has not conceded

defeat. He disputes the result and the process. Many of his supporters do, too, although naturally not in the states they won. Trump's opponents — and much of the rest of the world — will go hoarse long before they convince Trump's "true believers" of the real result.

Reality appears to have fallen by the wayside in the pursuit of something more hateful. If we've been paying attention during 2020 — this year of misinformation, distrust and abuse of power — then Trump's refusal to concede defeat shouldn't surprise us. But it should trouble us.

Regardless of Trump's eventual forced departure from the White House, his actions have cast a dark cloud over the democratic process and sowed seeds of doubt where there should be none. He is making a victim of truth.

A fraudulent election is a terrible thing. But to proclaim fraud without evidence, to treat your supporters as pawns, to deceitfully claim your opponents are traitors, is bad. It demonstrates that Trump gives absolute primacy to himself and his own success. This is a misuse of the USA's power and global standing for personal gain. It diminishes the status of all involved and the institution of democracy itself.

What happens next? If people cannot trust their own democracy, they will need to take radical steps to fix it, or destroy it — or they will need to replace it with something else entirely. Trump seems determined to take democracy down with him before he concedes defeat. And some of his advisors are facilitating his efforts.



LEARNING FROM 2020

NEIL DARRAGH suggests that in our post-pandemic recovery we could become an outward looking, mission focused Church.

The COVID-19 pandemic and parliamentary elections were two extraordinary national events that affected almost everyone in Aotearoa in some way. The effects of COVID-19 and the Lockdowns have been tragic for some and devastating for the hopes and lifestyles of many.

At the end of 2020 and hoping that the virus can be contained, some voices, especially in business and economics, are calling for refocusing and retraining our national energies rather than simply returning to what used to be normal. Our new parliament further suggests that, as a nation, our future could be different, better perhaps, than the past. Underneath and driving these

various voices are deeper cultural and spiritual values to do with social wellbeing, national character, cultural identity and diversity, the impact of tangata whenua, the possibilities of green technology, and a choice for generosity rather than competition in our national politics.

All of these are religious concerns. They call for attention from people like ourselves who are both Christians and citizens. In addition, over the last year, the “bottom lines” of our national politics have become more apparent — like whether some lives matter more than others, whether some cultures are more important than others, how we can stop destroying this small planet, and whether as a nation we are really committed to democracy

where everyone has equal access to healthcare, housing, safety and education.

Among these voices, there should be Christian or church voices which contribute to that national discussion. *Tui Motu* is a place where we could expect that such voices are expressed. What we seek here is not just a single voice, nor a competition of voices, but a collaboration among voices.

Experiences of the Pandemic

Some of our experiences during this last year suggest a path into the future rather than a return to the past. During the Lockdowns we experienced “kindness” as a civic virtue replacing, for a time, competition and self-promotion as

an acceptable civic morality. Along with this came a positive experience of the value of transparency and trust in central government with the result that quite harsh government decisions were accepted with a high level of cooperation. The severe restrictions on our civil liberties, restrictions on our right to freedom of movement within our own country and our right to work, for example, would have hardly been thinkable a year ago.

The high level of cooperation was possible, I think, because most people accepted we were being told the truth by the government and the Ministry of Health. Allied with this were government efforts to mitigate some of the most severe economic hardships to people and businesses, and this was supported by the similarly committed people in public agencies such as health workers and police. Recently there have been criticisms of these efforts, yet no one could have got everything right. With some exceptions perhaps, "citizenship" was a value respected by government and state agencies. We could not help comparing this with the continuous newsfeeds from some overseas countries where disinformation was common and enforcement harsh.

Experiences of Churches

Some of the effects of COVID-19 have been particular to churches. Because of restrictions on people gathering, many regular church attenders had the experience of not being allowed to go to church on Sunday — a wrenching away of something at the heart of their spirituality and communal lifestyle. One of the results was the bizarre experience of watching a priest "say" a private Mass before a camera, the slightly less bizarre Eucharists where a small "bubble" of people actually communicated together while hundreds of others watched over the internet, and the odd even if not quite bizarre "Liturgies of the Word" (Scripture-based but not Eucharistic liturgies) on Zoom or similar platforms.

At a deeper personal level, the spirituality of Christians has not been dramatically affected by the

prohibitions on people gathering except, notably, in the case of funerals and tangihanga. Spirituality has many other resources and practices by which people's communion with God is deepened and strengthened. Acting in ways that are life-giving and loving towards others could still be maintained even if in limited ways. There are some financial difficulties, but most church organizations could continue to count on their members to support them. Few church organisations will close down because of COVID-19 though some will operate at a reduced level. Unless there are new waves of the virus or there is an economic collapse, church activities could easily return to a pre-COVID-19 "normal" with some inconvenience to their organisers but without serious difficulty.

A mission focus means in practice a commitment of our energy to social justice and ecological sustainability.

Reactions to a Pandemic

There are many stories of church involvement in epidemics in past history, especially the worldwide influenza pandemic of 1918. Some of these stories record those peculiar disfigurements of Christianity which attributed an epidemic to punishment from God or which put trust in deliverance from the epidemic by God alone, unaided by any human beings "on the ground" so to speak.

Disfigurements aside, many of the stories are about the heroic actions of church workers (along with others) who cared for the sick and buried the dead with the result that they themselves fell victim to the epidemic.

Almost none of this has occurred in this pandemic in New Zealand. People have trusted in good government and a cautious discernment of good science to survive. Church workers did not have to die for their commitment to caring for the sick.

Almost exclusively, church leaderships have reacted to the pandemic by cooperating with

government decisions and accepting that science is directing our response. This has seemed to most church members to be so natural that few have noticed how different this is from traditional (and still lingering) church resistance to "secular" society and a suspicion of science as anti-religious.

Both society and the Church have evidently changed in some basic ways and not everyone has noticed how basic that change is.

Indications of a New Future

What then might the Church experience of COVID-19 contribute to a post-pandemic recovery? Churches could simply return to "normal" — to the normal practice of church liturgies, personal development in faith, spiritual reflection and prayer, community-building, pastoral care of their members, administration of church property and compassionate help to others in need. We would need to include here also the recent emphasis on "safety" — measures to protect children and vulnerable adults from abusive behaviour by church personnel and to support victims of such abuse.

Or, Churches could see this recovery as an opportunity for refocusing and retraining our energies towards a new creative future for both Church and society as a whole. We would then shift the focus of our energies from the church community itself to the wider society. In church language, this is a shift from a "self-focused" Church to a "mission-focused" Church.

A mission focus means in practice a commitment of our energy to social justice and ecological sustainability. In biblical language, this is a focus on the "reign of God", which includes the wellbeing of all people, not just church members. It includes, too, being careful and respectful of God's creation — of all the beings and processes that make up planet Earth. 🌲

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Neil Darragh is a pastor, writer, and theologian with a long-term interest in the impact of the Christian Gospel in New Zealand society.

The END is a FRESH START



MARY THORNE writes that we need our energy for the challenges of 2020 to last beyond the last day of December.

All good things come to an end", we were told about holidays and parties. "This, too, will pass", was the message when the going was tough. Everything ends. This year, 2020, is coming to an end, to the relief of people around the world. It has been a year of uncertainty, anxiety and distress but it has also offered

opportunities for quietness, simplicity and new endeavours. Its challenges will extend beyond the last day of December.

Life is made up of comings and goings, ebbs and flows, orbits and seasons. Woven into these patterns are opportunities for pause, reflection and renewal.

Radical Change Needed

Physics tells us that it is a characteristic of matter to continue in its existing state of uniform motion unless changed by an external force. This is inertia. In our human lives, our familiar and mostly comfortable rhythms flow on, moving towards predictable endings with only the odd tweak or diversion.

We don't relish radical change. In fact, we take great care to avoid it or protect ourselves from it.

In the spheres of human health, education and employment, we accept the need to undergo assessments, examinations and appraisals in order to achieve optimal results. The process of reflecting and discerning individually and corporately is necessary for healthy strong life.

It is possible that in our eagerness to tick things off and move on to the next project, we allow our reviews to be a little perfunctory and don't search them for the wisdom that could ensure truly meaningful change.

Purpose of Review

Review is not just about the broken bits and the failures; we must give equal attention to strengths and successes. Gladness and thankfulness for what has gone well energises the clear-sighted honesty required to recognise the hard change that needs to be made in order to progress.

Life is a gift that must be tended. It is disrespectful, ungrateful and ultimately destructive to treat life carelessly. Life is dynamic and surges onward, adapting and evolving. The constantly changing nature of aliveness demands that we be vigilant to adjust and renew as required.

Years ago, on the first day of

my new job as “Pastoral Associate” in a parish, I was asked by the accountant who chaired the Parish Finance Committee, what my KPIs were. I was baffled, then indignant. How could the business concept of Key Performance Indicators relate to my passionate commitment to assist in the work of addressing the pastoral needs in the community?

I see more clearly now that this man was being a good steward of the parish resources. Transparency and accountability are an essential part of all human interactions; no one is exempt from them although the processes by which they are achieved may have different names.

Pruning to Encourage Life

Individuals can be resistant to critique but serious renewal demands disruption. Gardeners call this pruning. The blossoming and fruiting finish, the sap ebbs and plants become dormant for the winter season in preparation for another spring. In what seems a violent and traumatic process, a drastic cutting back reduces the branches, leaving the plant looking mutilated and diminished. However, next spring, fruit is better and more plentiful after the pruning.

Although much talked about these days, the notions of review, transparency and accountability are ancient. The exhortation to reflect, discern and renew rings out through the Scriptures of our Judeo-Christian faith.

The prophets urged Israel's leaders to look at themselves, their decisions and their lifestyles which had strayed far from the covenant promises of obedience to God and justice for the widows and orphans. The prophets were advocates of a good pruning.

From Nazareth, Jesus set out to preach renewal to his people. He knew it would be a radical and painful disruption to the status quo. “I come to bring fire to the Earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptised, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the Earth? No, I tell you, but rather

division!” (Lk 12:49-51).

In the smelting process, fire burns the dross and exposes that which is genuine and valuable. Division is the result of refusal to compromise God's word for the sake of ease and comfort.

Jesus's challenge was so radical and disruptive that he had to be killed. And his message to renew, spoken today by the Spirit of God in our midst, is still unwelcome.

Challenge to Alertness

A clear theme in Jesus's teaching to his followers is to stay awake! Be alert to what is happening and be prudent and proactive in the work of bringing about justice and peace for all of God's creation.

As well as teaching us to be alert, Jesus tells us that the work is costly. It will take as much courage, energy and commitment as we have. We will have to relinquish some comfort and security.

Act for Earth's Sake

As 2020 ends, there is the opportunity to ponder deeply what changes need to be made in order for life on our planet to be healed and restored. The need for urgent action is clear. Despite the ubiquitous coronavirus, the highest priority is environmental crisis and climate change.

The most recent Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet Commission on Planetary Health report finds improved statistics regarding human life expectancy, poverty and child mortality but serious declines in figures relating to carbon dioxide emissions, ocean acidification, tropical forest loss, water use and fertiliser use. Ecological disruption comprises an unprecedented threat to all life support systems.

A great deal of human inertia has continued within a world view of growth, control and profit. Many are motivated to achieve prosperity at all costs. Our unbridled individualism refuses to be constrained or impinged upon by simpler or more co-operative ways of living together. We hear that wealth alone merits public attention and admiration.

My New Year's resolutions are usually a bit of a joke. I half-heartedly

resolve to take measures to improve my own wellness and fitness (less wine, more exercise) and perhaps do something to contribute to my wider community. By March the intentions have largely fizzled out and are forgotten.

Making Genuine Resolutions

This year I am reflecting more deeply. I want to communicate with my family, parish and wider networks about ways in which we (these vines) can be pruned.

Rigorous attention to what we buy, what we eat and all that we do will help us make long-term change.

There must be potential for us to establish some extensive carpooling, ride-sharing networks and share information and collection/transport opportunities for recycling of electronic waste.

We could encourage reusing rather than throwing away eg, reusable nappies and wipes.

We can retain the Lockdown learning of being content with less. We can talk over societal and family traditions around gift-giving and celebrating.

There will be many ideas and we can allow our love and enthusiasm to push through the barriers of prioritisation and time constraint.

Much at Stake

Former aspirations to “live the dream” are now more widely acknowledged to be the nightmare that destroys our home Earth. It isn't easy to change world views but it is urgent and it is happening.

So Happy New Year planet Earth and all which abide within your wondrous systems! May your human population find the courage and generosity to forgo some comfort and convenience for a future of abundant fruitfulness. 🌲

Painting: *Glad Tidings from the Inner Land* by Clare Reilly © Used with permission www.clarereilly.co.nz (new website in construction)



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



WAKING UP *to The* BIG PICTURE

MIKE RIDDELL presents the two options we have in this time of crisis.

So that was the year that was. 2020: one that will no doubt stick in our memories for any number of reasons. The year of COVID-19, the year of Lockdown, the year of the beginning of the end. Nothing is the same, and yet everything continues as if it was. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

We find ourselves perched on a

precarious cusp. The mills of death are running apace; the forests are burning; the fragility of life is evident to all. And yet, and yet. Have there ever been a dozen months in which we have pondered so deeply what it's all about? Why we continue unthinkingly in the mad dance of life, so seldom reflecting, so unimaginatively dogged by habit? To continue to exist and get by, is that enough anymore?

By the time you read this, the year and the decade will be drawing to a close. Some will sigh heavily, relieved to have survived. Many will ponder what we might have done to

deserve such assault on our way of life. Here, in Aotearoa, most of us are feeling grateful, without any great confidence we're out of the woods yet. Uncertainty is the air we breathe; our future precarious in ways we never previously imagined.

Our Options

In any crisis, there are two competing ways forward that must be chosen between. The correct one might be known in retrospect, but is seldom obvious in the present. If I may be so bold as to characterise the options: the choice for humanity is between a wake-up call and a return to the

familiar. Looking forward, I'm not at all sure which path we will choose.

Create a New Normal

My sustaining hope is the very simple declaration that "Earth belongs to God, and everything in it". Not that it is the way we have acted.

Return to the Familiar Normal

Our preferred belief is that Earth belongs to humanity, and we'll do whatever the hell we like with it. From the great tectonic disruption of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, we have regarded the planet as our own possession, to be exploited at will.

The perverted and despoiled version of humanity which now leads and encourages such a philosophy has been in the ascendant for so long that we now barely recognise it as aberrant. In 2020, for the first time in my life, I have begun to despair entirely of the human race. More significantly, I have wondered about our chances of survival, and the wisdom of seeking it.

Our guiding principle of recent centuries has been mastery of all we survey — and if that term sounds male-oriented, it's because it is. We have chosen exploitation over husbandry; domination over partnership; greed over sorority.

The stunning magnitude of our hubris is revealed in thinking that we could do so without consequence. Like the many birds of Lockdown, the pigeons are coming home to roost. Although they may be vultures.

Coronavirus is a Product of Old Normal

Coronavirus is our warning call. Not the first or even the most challenging. But easily the most understandable to feel anxious about, with its threat of personal destruction. In many ways such fear is akin to complaining that the bread on the asparagus rolls is stale while watching Armageddon unfold around us. The game is largely over; the final result looming.

As I listen apprehensively to the voices around me, I hear few advocating change of the scale necessary to claw our way back to

a more balanced way of living. But mainly there's a general clamour to get back to how things were before this mysterious plague interfered with the familiarities of life.

A great number of people around the world are angry because their previous lifestyles have been disrupted, and are looking for candidates to blame.

Our obsession with economics, with profit-making and taking, with extracting every last sliver of value from the natural environment, with suppressing voices of dissent, with elevating our own position at the expense of our neighbours — these forces seem unabated by anything that has happened in the last 12 months. It never seems to occur to us that in fact WE are the virus.

Earth belongs to God, and everything in it... There is choice, there is possibility, but there is also a greatly diminished horizon of exercising it.

Our planet is edging toward a catastrophic imbalance that would make human life untenable. This is not a surprise. It has been well known for decades. We have been warned, but we have not listened. We seem to want two things: to continue to live in the way that we have become accustomed to, and to do so without any consequences from our destruction of the environment.

It's a sign of immaturity and lack of normal development for people to imagine that predictable consequences don't apply to them. Yet in the developed world, we live as if we can escape the harsh world of cause and effect. Our relentless destruction of biodiversity, our clearance of forests, our pollution of waterways and atmosphere, our ripping up the bones of Earth to extract fossil fuels — these are what

have brought us to the abject state in which we find ourselves.

We Are Dependent on Earth

And yet we deny responsibility, mindlessly expecting that someone will rescue us from our self-imposed horror story. We are the problem. We are the potential solution. But not without a thorough going examination of what it means to be human; what it means to be sustained by Earth; what it means to be humble and dependent and held.

Earth belongs to God, and everything in it. This is a profound theological statement — one that our very existence now depends upon. We have known the biblical story of leaving the garden, and the effects of doing so.

As this decade ends, we either learn that parable once again, or I fear that we will reap the whirlwind of our own making. There is choice, there is possibility, but there is also a greatly diminished horizon of exercising it.

Not Easy but Essential

Currently I'm undergoing a course of chemotherapy, in the company of others who are cancer patients. It's a systematic and slow poisoning of the body in the hope of overcoming the exponential and destructive growth of rampantly dividing cells. That growth will, unchecked, destroy the very host it feeds upon, and there will be no life at all.

Going through chemo is not pleasant. But currently it seems to me a metaphor for the assault on our good Earth. Our course to life is set before us. We retain the possibility of change, if only we are prepared for the massive transformation necessary to achieve it.

My hope for the coming year and decade is that we might find reason to save ourselves from ourselves. God help us. 🌲

Painting: *Bosley Mere, Evening* by Hester Berry ©
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Mike Riddell writes novels, plays, films and apology notes. He cooks when he can and breathes intentionally on a daily basis.

UNCERTAINTY and HOPE

SUSAN APÁTHY weighs the gratitude and learning alongside the anxiety and isolation of 2020 and finds that trust tips the balance.

Hasn't it been a funny old year! It feels as if we have lived more intensely in 2020 than in previous years even though we have been constrained to do less.

January

Our year started with joy. In January we were relaxing after the Christmas visit of our Sydney family with our two little granddaughters. It had been a delightful and busy time. We talked about how much the children would have developed by the time we visited them in mid-June. We rejoiced in the garden which we were still getting to know, having moved from Wellington to Waikanae eight months earlier following my retirement not long before that. Each day brought new discoveries in the mature, beautiful garden we had inherited. Inside, we contemplated boxes of books still to be unpacked, bookshelves to be bought and endless summer sunshine tempting us outside again.

February

Until February, when our attention was called to the wider world with the first news of the latest coronavirus, soon to be known as COVID-19. We could not have guessed that it would absorb us entirely for the year ahead.

My generation of New Zealanders has not experienced a great depression, a pandemic or a world war. My husband, as a child in a refugee family that arrived here from Europe in 1957, knows more of the horrors war and revolution can impose. He was perhaps better prepared for what lay ahead, already equipped with the mental and emotional stamina needed to adjust to the world we were about to move into.

March

Our lives changed suddenly with the arrival of Level 4 Lockdown on 26 March, and the country's first death on 29 March. As a country we listened to the daily bad news. We tried to follow Jacinda's mantra to "Be Kind", and, as older people, to follow the advice to protect ourselves by staying home.

Our community's togetherness showed in the friendly (distanced) greetings we gave and received on our daily walks, the teddy bears displayed in so many unexpected places and the many stories of people looking after others, reported daily in the media. The strength of our communities suddenly became public. At home, the phone



calls and messages to friends and relatives sustained us, even if we could no longer invite people into our living rooms except on FaceTime or Zoom.

The days wore on. We hunkered down in our bubble, following the rules, comfortable if bored at times. We didn't like thinking that, as older people, our contribution was to stay home. But that's how it was. I envied those who were busier than ever in their jobs.

April

In early April I fell and broke my arm while out walking. The hospitals served us well with all the extra precautions that were needed.

My gratitude increased by the day for the strength of our New Zealand community, for our leaders, our essential service workers, and that our own wider family were well

and still had jobs. It was “a time for breathing — breathing in and breathing out”, as Dominican Mary Ann Barrett wrote in a poem prayer. But this did not stop my boredom and claustrophobia from dipping towards depression at times.

I tried to make sense of it all. Pope Francis and others situated coronavirus within humankind’s abuse of our

wasn’t us — not yet, anyway!

As the year wore on, we heard more of the horrors of illness and death in the rest of the world.

New crises battered us almost daily. We experienced dissonance: the news was filled with overseas COVID deaths, climate change, refugee camps, unrest in the US — but we received this news in our environment of almost unreal quiet and normality.

How were we to reconcile our locked down life in New Zealand with the state of the world at large?

June to November

We could contribute little for much of 2020. Before Lockdown, we had been engaged in small actions on climate issues. Recently we have supported those fasting outside parliament to draw attention to the climate emergency. We recognised their presence as a form of prayer, and we were grateful for their preparedness to put themselves on the line. Some of the next generation in our family are strong activists and we know it takes huge commitment on their part.

The ongoing assessments and warnings from the science community can be scary; hope can be hard to find — for activists more than others.

As I look back on this huge year, I want to feel that I have gained some wisdom. I am fairly sure I have learned more humility as I have had time to confront my own failings.

I try, with varying degrees of success, to walk humbly, kindly, gratefully, to keep my balance, and to accept that I live locally and will not fly to Sydney to visit the grandchildren for some months yet.

I place in God’s hands those who need prayers and support. I joyfully meet with my local relatives and friends, I enjoy the irises, roses and wisteria in our garden and do what I can to make an accommodation with the weeds. I try not to be downhearted about all the things I have not been able to do for those in my community.

December

I look forward to Advent and although our Christmas gathering will be smaller than usual, I trust the hope of this period will sustain me.

As for next year, I will try to commit my worries about 2021 to God, to concentrate on the small tasks which are mine to do, and to be grateful for the country I live in, the leadership we have, the love of those close to me and the love of God. 🌲

Art: *Kāpiti Sunsets: Pixels and Paint* by Tania Dally ©
photos by Jed Brophy © Used with permission www.taniadallyart.co.nz



Susan Apáthy spent a long time teaching, then working in the New Zealand Catholic Education Office. She is now adjusting to life in her garden.

planet. COVID was framed as a potential turning point that might bring us to our senses in relation to climate change, gross inequalities within and between nations, materialism and individualism.

I would like to feel that major change will happen fast. I have followed “third world” issues, poverty and climate change for most of my adult life and know that change comes, but it is depressingly slow. Will COVID finally activate us towards deep and rapid change?

May

By mid-May we were down to Level 2 and although many restrictions were lifted life was not back to normal.

And then there was the second Lockdown, cutting off Auckland while the rest of us lived in an eerie uncertainty, wondering when it would be our turn, grateful that it





The GOOD, the TRICKY & the WORKING TOGETHER

TUI CADIGAN writes on what stood out for her during this year and the agenda it gives us for the future.

The pandemic is changing the lives of people all around the world. It has infected or killed millions of people, diminished spiritual wellbeing and social interaction, overridden cultural norms, reduced economic growth, increased mental stress and slowed the momentum on climate change. I want to share some personal experiences of COVID-19 in

Aotearoa as we finish the year and move into 2021.

The Government Lockdown imposed to deal with this pandemic has delivered mixed results. But overwhelmingly we are grateful that it stopped the spread of the virus through our country.

Coping with Lockdown
I know that Lockdown also took

a psychological toll on many people. I felt safe when Lockdown started. But as the days passed I became claustrophobic and caged. I couldn't travel to my turangawaewae or visit with whānau, even those in the same city. I found that the internet and phone were inadequate replacements for human contact.

Although I observed all the health warnings, including wearing protective gear, I felt my stress levels rise whenever I needed to leave home. Waiting in line for services increased my sense of vulnerability. As the weeks passed, my "safe zone" was my property.

The government's daily updates identified clusters of infection in the country and the number of deaths rose. We realised the seriousness of COVID-19.

I usually have energy but I struggled to find safe ways to help whānau, hapu and iwi. As a kaumātua and a religious I was acutely aware of expectations on me and I felt my responsibility looming large. But I couldn't fulfil them in my usual way.

For me spiritual wellbeing is essential for balance and overall health. I leaned on my spirituality, prayer and reflection on Scripture to guide me in the solitude of Lockdown. The risk of infection put a handbrake on any desire I might have had to attend gatherings. I was surprised at how easily I embraced liturgies online as an authentic means of worship. I certainly welcomed the freedom to vocalise my thoughts during the homily! I could choose the online Eucharists with their preachers that I wanted to join. And so I participated at virtual Eucharists all over the world.

I found that the online experience gave me a level of quiet to listen more deeply to the Word in contrast to the distractions of a noisy church environment.

And I developed a critical analysis of the homilies. I could identify which homilists lacked proper preparation, exclusive language got my back up and I was disturbed by poorly crafted content and relevance in the Prayers of the Faithful.

Coping with Restrictions on Tikanga

Lockdown certainly changed our social engagements.

The restrictions that caused iwi the greatest distress were those that limited gatherings, particularly the usual gatherings around dying and the death of whānau. The requirements during this time to set aside tikanga intrinsic to Māori wellbeing and identity had social, spiritual and psychological consequences for whānau, hapū and iwi.

The process of tangihanga, with its enhancing of mana and addressing of tapu, enables Māori to retain knowledge of ritenga tapu/sacred ritual.

The sharing of breath in the hongī is an ancient and sacred expression in ritual encounters.

Both of these traditional rituals have layers of meaning for Māori through links to tipuna and whakapapa.

We understood that the decision to restrict tangihanga was necessary at the time in order to halt the spread of the virus. And we are grateful that now the restrictions have been lifted.

We look forward to an effective vaccine in the future which will assist Māori to participate in rituals without anxiety.

Throughout the pandemic there has been support from Ngāi Tahu social services in the form of phone calls to kaumātua to ensure that they had what they needed and boxes of kai and care packages delivered to whānau. These were welcome and thoughtful expressions of manaakitanga.

The Year Overall

I think this year has had positive as well as negative effects on our lives. I've spoken to many who look forward to the end of 2020 because they are wearied with anxiety around the pandemic and its effects.

Some are reeling from the financial impact — loss of employment, closure of businesses, reduced tourist numbers, reduced spending — felt all across the country.

The government subsidies have been gratefully received but they have limitations as well. There have been

reports that some large corporations have abused the system. If that is so, it will increase the burden of national debt on future generations.

There have been reports that the number of people seeking help for depression is up, as is the number of incidences of domestic violence and alcoholism. On the positive side, everyone was housed, albeit temporarily, and the overall crime rate was down.

All sports were stopped during Lockdown — a negative in our sports-mad country. But the restrictions were lifted gradually as we moved to lower alert levels. Now most sports have resumed and some international teams have entered and are able to play before the usual crowds. However, we live with the knowledge that COVID-19 is rife in the world and we cannot be complacent here.

Appreciating the Local

One of the successful measures to keep COVID-19 out of New Zealand was to close our borders. This has forced us to focus on our local and regional goods and services. We've noticed an increase in friendliness and goodwill as New Zealanders shop in their local communities and take holidays in New Zealand destinations. This is our effort to support the local economy. It is no doubt relief, too, to be able to have human contact outside of our bubbles!

Renewed Efforts

We now have an opportunity to review and reset directions and one urgent issue is the health of our planet. We cannot ignore it and go backwards in our efforts.

Another urgent area has come into focus with the Black Lives Matter movement. Now is the time for us to address the reality of Māori here. It is a matter of justice that Churches, elected officials and other ethnicities must continue to work on.

In Aotearoa Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the equivalent of the English Magna Carta. It articulates the rightful place of Tangata Whenua but to date Māori have not achieved a voice where it can count.

We can see this failure as a virus

that has been with us since 1840. Now It is time for Pākehā and Māori to sit at the table as partners and set the agenda for the future together. Other New Zealanders have come into this relationship later, and only when it is settled will they find their own place and space here. We can't let dominance or fear or lack of courage and respect hold us back.

Many of us felt elated when Kamala Harris was elected as the US Vice President last month — the first woman and first woman of colour. But we are more proud of Nanaia Mahuta appointed as our Minister of Foreign Affairs — the first woman and the first Māori woman in this role. She will now represent Aotearoa on the world stage.

Our New Normal

As we face a new normal, hopefully a post-pandemic normal, we can all contribute to articulating the directions we want to take. We will seek to stop the reckless way we have damaged the natural environment in the past. Just as our combined efforts are keeping coronavirus out of our country, our combined efforts can also contribute to other world-leading ventures.

I know I'm not the only one who developed a garden during Lockdown that now attracts numerous birds and bees. These are the individual contributions that combine together for the good. Together we can do much.

Let's make 2021 the year Aotearoa leads by example and chooses healing, integrity and inclusion over dominance and greed. In Christian terms we image this as living just and loving relationships with ourselves, with the rest of creation and with the Creator. 🌲

Painting: *Tui With Pohutukawa* by Dave Sotogi ©
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Tui Cadigan RSM affiliates to te Hāpu o Kati Mahaki ki Makaawhio and is of Poutini Kai Tahu descent.

Source of Hope



ZAIN ALI outlines the responses to COVID-19 he noticed and shares how his spirituality helped in this confusing year.

It's six in the morning. I have just finished the morning or *fajar* prayer. I turn on my computer and log onto Zoom — I have an Arabic language class to attend. I started these classes in June this year. While I can read the Arabic script, my level of fluency is similar to that of a primary school student. There's a lot of vocabulary to learn, and grammar, and I'm finding it challenging. It has been a humbling experience. Initially, I thought it would take months to become fluent, but now I appreciate that learning a language is more like a marathon than a sprint. It requires patience, perseverance and a good-natured teacher.

My decision to take up a serious study of Arabic is in part due to COVID-19. The Lockdowns gave me time to reflect on the things that were important to me. Though it sometimes feels selfish, I think it is important to reflect on the things that give our lives meaning and purpose. It is a form of spiritual reflection on our own lives. Given my interest in philosophy, religion and spirituality I became interested in how people were making sense of COVID-19. Broadly speaking, there seem to be seven types of response to the corona crisis.

It's Not Real

The first type of response seemed to be that of denial. The risks posed by COVID-19 were overstated, it was similar to the flu and was not to be feared. Accordingly, the calls for border closures, quarantining and mask wearing were seen as an overreaction.

It's China's Fault

Secondly, there were those who were keen to lay blame for the virus outbreak on China. Some even referred to

it as the China virus. It wasn't really our problem, rather it was a China problem and all they needed to do was close their wet markets.

It's a Dark Plot

A third response involved conspiracy. Perhaps China or the US had deliberately released this virus as a way to further their political agendas. There was some debate as to whether the virus was naturally occurring or had been engineered in a lab somewhere in Wuhan or Area 51.

There were also responses with a religious flavour.

It's God's Punishment

The fourth response saw the virus as a punishment from God. That humanity has strayed too far from the right path and become immersed in sin. The virus is a punishment for our wrongdoing. There is biblical and Qur'anic precedent for this: just think of the story of Noah where God severely chastises the sinners. The virus is here on account of our sins. The best course of action is to repent and return to obedience.

It's God's Test

Or maybe the virus is not a punishment but a test from God. This is the fifth type of response I encountered. COVID-19 is a test of faith, a test of the faithful. Again, there is biblical and Qur'anic precedent for this: the story of Job – a fundamentally good man who is tested mightily. Poor Job loses his wealth, family and health, perhaps some of his mental equilibrium as well. Job, known as Ayyub in the Muslim tradition, asks God about his suffering: why do bad things happen to good people? Some maintain that when suffering is a test, it leads toward sanctification – it is like the fire that is used to purify gold. To have faith in the face of suffering allows our souls to be purified from darkness.

It's a Blessing

The sixth response is that the virus is a blessing. Think of the media stories during Lockdown about rivers becoming clear and less polluted.

There has been a resurgence of marine life in areas that were once badly polluted, animals and birdlife were once again seen and heard in cities. The virus and the subsequent Lockdown allowed nature some breathing space from humanity's relentless presence. Nature was allowed to heal and be itself. And there was more space for family time. During Lockdowns, with our hectic schedules on hold, families were often at home together. I appreciate this is not universally true, since it is not always easy being around family, especially if you're around each other without a break week after week. (During Lockdown, I tried online yoga classes in the comfort of my lounge, much to the delight of my children!)

I didn't really
know how to
make sense of
COVID-19 ...

This is where
faith helps: I
do believe in a
loving God, and
so there is
always hope.

It's a Challenge

The final response was brought to my attention by my university students. The virus has forced us out of our comfort zone.

For example, during Lockdown I could not meet with my students face to face, so we had to use Zoom. I had been aware of Zoom, but I hadn't really seen it as a teaching tool, or indeed as particularly useful for anything. I had taken face-to-face teaching for granted, but now my perspective has changed. Technology is a blessing. Teaching by Zoom hasn't been ideal, but it allowed us to stay connected.

COVID-19 has forced us to recognise what we take for granted,

challenged and overturned many of our assumptions. I had assumed that we were safe in New Zealand, too geographically distant to be affected in any significant way. Yet here we are: we are not an exception, we are very much part of the world.

My Experience

I didn't really know how to make sense of COVID-19 and so, as well as by brief foray into yoga, I decided to deepen my Arabic during Lockdown. Perhaps the virus is a punishment, a test, a blessing, or a challenge, or perhaps it is all these things rolled into one.

Learning Arabic allows me to connect with the Qur'an, and this is important for me as a Muslim; it also allows me to connect with my own religious culture and Muslim intellectual tradition. I am also a Kiwi, so God willing I plan to learn more te reo Māori. I have reflected on my own spirituality, on the meaning and purpose of my life. This has not been easy; I have reflected on my role as husband, father, teacher, and the results haven't been all rosy. I have experienced spiritual distress, times when I have not understood the meaning or purpose of my life at all. This is where faith helps: I do believe in a loving God, and so there is always hope.

I offer a reflection from the Sufi poet Rumi, who imagines a person as a guesthouse, where guests such as joy, sorrow and sadness arrive, often unannounced:

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight 🌲

Art: *Thank You Collage* by Nathan Wyburn. A digital collage of 200 NHS workers as a tribute during the 2020 pandemic. www.nathanwyburn.co.uk



Zain Ali is a scholar of Islamic studies and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Auckland. He lives in Auckland.



LOOK FOR TRUTH

Gabrielle imagines standing against the fear and anti-science rhetoric around COVID-19.

Look up and see the warmest sun!
the bluest sky
for days to come.

I dare not look down to my feet,
where the fire burns,
with explosive heat.

The ropes are tight,
the wooden beam, solid.
The crowds yell spite
like cheers, though horrid.

I scream!
In fear, in joy, in laughter,
in future of
a happy ever after.

"Witch!" they say,
with torch in hand,
but they know not
the ground they stand.

We all are actors
on a scorching stage;
wingless birds
in a fiery cage.

Do not blame me,
once you combust.
You too shall burn,
and turn to dust



by Gabrielle Rasalan,
Year 12 poet at
McAuley High School.

Now is the Time

Well well well, 2020 you got me
You pushed me off my high horse
And no one was there to catch me
As I let myself go.
I remember
All the hopes and dreams I had for you,
The plans I made thinking of you.

Now I sit here,
Failing and complaining
Wondering what we did to deserve
A year like this.
The economy is dropping,
While my grades are currently flopping
And I blame COVID-19.

Jacinda making decisions
Like a surgeon makes incisions
One wrong move
And Beep...
For right now I wonder
What this year would have held if COVID-19
didn't invade.
Or what would've happened
If I had just prayed.
But this is a year worth living,
A year full of giving.

And as we fight for survival all I can do is say

Rest now e Papatuanuku
For the world is silent.
We battle for our health
While you fight for yours.
The difference?
You're fighting a deadly war.

To believe you're dying
Is to own up to our mistakes
And say,

Our World is loudly crying
For our help but no one is trying,
But,
Now is the time to fight
To bring your spirit back to life
And light up our forests again.
But for now I say rest
Because your life is our life.

And I know this
Because COVID-19 showed me.



by Raihara Passfield,
Year 12 poet at
McAuley High School.

TRUMPIAN CAPTIVITY OF CHURCH ENDS



MASSIMO FAGGIOLI discusses the defeat of Donald Trump and the fight for the “religious soul” of the United States.

The fact that United States was unable to know the name of its new president for several days after the polls closed was like a sort of corporal punishment for a country being forced to atone in a painful way.

Now we know that it will be up to Joseph R Biden Jr, a Catholic, to begin the process of healing the moral and corporal wounds Donald Trump has inflicted on the country: by the way he's handled the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing crisis of globalisation.

Biden is the second Catholic, after John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1961-1963), to be elected to the highest office in the land.

The American presidency is not just political office. It is also an office with moral and religious aspects. And Joe Biden will assume that office at a time when political identities in his country have assumed theological and dogmatic intensity.

Trump's Attempt to Divide Catholics

Over the past four years the White House (through officials like Steve Bannon and Mike Pompeo) has directed a *political* attempt to divide the Church in two — for and against Pope Francis.

A handful of American bishops and a number of high-profile lay Catholics have given their blessing to this attempt. But the effort at division has failed.

Nonetheless, the *ecclesial* attempt remains, in a Church in the United States that is divided in two like never before. The "culture wars" have taken the form of intra-ecclesial theological wars and have exposed American Catholicism to the risk of a soft schism.

The Trump presidency and the 2020 elections have shown the extent to which the two Catholic ecclesial parties have identified with

the platform of the opposing political parties.

While there is some of this among that group of Catholics that support Biden, it is much more obvious among the Catholic faction backing Trump. It has bended a proclaimed theological orthodoxy to a political orthodoxy, thus leaving very little room for argued dissent.

The moral failure of institutional Catholicism in the United States can be seen in the desperate attempts to stop the LGBTQ agenda and in the inability of the Church here to speak with a unified voice on the issue of racism.

Paralysis of Catholic Hierarchy

The hierarchical Church seemed to accept everything that came from the Trump administration without a blink, except on the issue of immigration — the American Catholic question par excellence.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), for example, refused to say anything about the Republican Party's blatant attempts this year to manipulate the electoral process and hinder minorities (many of them Catholics) from casting a ballot. It was the latest sign of an intellectual and moral paralysis that has gripped the USCCB.

It was already evident during the Obama presidency, when the bishops' conference was unable to take any public position on the economic and social issues related to the great recession that began in 2008.

It's true that part of American Catholicism (though not a marginal part) supported Donald Trump, partly as a ploy against the Democratic Party. But it was also a genuine anti-democratic turn that represents a departure from the last century of intellectual history in the Church in the United States.

The reconciliation between Catholicism and constitutional democracy in the 20th century is part of American history.

Beginning with the US exile of Jacques Maritain and Luigi Sturzo during World War II, Catholic thinkers in the United States laid the foundations of a modern theology of religious freedom, culminating with the contribution of Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

Catholics and the Neo-Conservative Movement

However, in the mid-1980s there was the emergence of the neo-conservative movement in the United States, in which Catholics have played a central role. They include people and publications like the late Richard John Neuhaus and *First Things* magazine.

From the early 2000s, and then in a crescendo after the election of Benedict XVI in 2005, the neo-conservative and theo-conservative movements have been mutating into a single neo-integralist and neo-traditionalist movement.

Its creed was the rejection of Vatican II as a way to reject theological and political modernity.

At a time when the WASP establishment was collapsing, conservative America called for a Catholicism that was no longer just conservative or post-liberal, but openly anti-liberal.

The model is no longer John Paul II or Joseph Ratzinger. It is now Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian Prime Minister and self-avowed champion of "illiberal democracy".

The USCCB's constitutional agnosticism has stifled the bishops' ability to confront Donald Trump's open threats to the democratic system. US Catholics had rightfully expected their bishops to say something. Instead, it was women religious — the nuns — who spoke out!

American democracy is in peril when there is an involution in its religious soul, of which the Catholic Church plays a particular and unique role.

A Catholic Church trying to protect its own freedom, while disregarding the rights of others, will end up losing its own freedom — after having lost that minimum of respect and self-respect necessary to act in the public square.

A president who threatens the foundations of the political and civil community is also a threat to the freedom of religion and of the Church.

Vatican II Catholicism in USA

If the United States is a sick giant, the American churches are sick too. And it's not just a problem on the conservative side of the spectrum.

The intellectual life of Vatican II Catholicism in the United States currently finds itself in something like a no person's land. Religious progressivism, defined by social questions, is articulated today in an often anti-institutional and post-ecclesial language.

This has left a void that is being filled by Catholic "militantism", which is neo-integralist and anti-modern, both in politics and in the intellectual

debate. And this will continue even after Trump is gone.

Fight for the "Religious Soul" of Democracy

But the existential crisis of Catholicism in the United States has not been resolved. American democracy is in peril when there is an involution in its religious soul, of which the Catholic Church plays a particular and unique role.

Thanks to Joe Biden, the Democratic Party spoke more often and convincingly in 2020 with a language intelligible to religious voters. But there is a long way to go before it can seize from the Republicans the self-proclaimed banner of "God's party".

Right-leaning intellectual and political Catholicism in the United States today ranges from neo-conservatism that claims to be inspired (though very selectively) by John Paul II and Benedict XVI to a neo-fundamentalism that has taken Carl Schmitt (d. 1985), the Nazi-era political theorist, as its muse.

Left-leaning political Catholicism in the US must deal with other issues. Biden is a John XXIII Catholic, but it would be fatal to think his election to the presidency is a long-term substitute for a Vatican II Catholicism that, at least in the US context, has been weakened on many levels.

The American Church's relationship to politics today is reminiscent of the French Church between the 19th and 20th centuries.

But the new Catholic militants in the United States seem to be embracing Charles Maurras' reactionary nationalism much more than Jacques Maritain's reconciliation between Catholicism and democracy. 🌲

The full article was published in *La Croix International* 12 November 2020.

Photo by The Old Major/Shutterstock.com



Massimo Faggioli is a Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at Villanova University, USA and the author of *Catholicism and Citizenship*.



THE BEST LAID PLANS

LINEA SIMONS tells how she had started her gap year before the New Zealand borders closed.

This is the year that I step out and become my own person! Discover more about myself!

Move out and to another country! Do some awesome volunteering and come back a changed woman! Having just finished Year 13, these were some of my thoughts at the beginning of 2020. All of these things ended up happening, but not in any way that I expected. I did move away from the familiar and into the unknown, but it was more because of the disruption of my plans than because I had made them.

I finished high school last year, and my plan was to volunteer with a Catholic youth ministry organisation in Australia called Youth Mission Team (YMT). I started in January, was trained with my team, and travelled to Melbourne, our assigned location. We were just settling in and getting into the flow of our work in schools (running retreats and reflection days) when Australia's COVID cases rose and restrictions were put into place. YMT management decided to send us all

home and then bring us back later in the year when the cases subsided. This worked out for my team brothers and sisters, but because of the New Zealand travel restrictions and no guarantee of them lifting in time, I felt very afraid that I wouldn't return to my scheduled year — which is what happened.

The amount of uncertainty, which everyone has experienced, is astounding. This uncertainty made it difficult for me to make plans for anything once Lockdown lifted because I was living with the hope that I'd be able to go back to Australia. I felt like I shouldn't reconnect with my friends or get involved in much in New Zealand because I'd just leave again.

I was deep in the messy discomfort of not knowing, the liminal space of uncertainty where I had to trust that since I couldn't see the future, I would have to find God in the present. I struggled with the desire to respond to my situation in the "perfect way", the way that looked the least messy, kept me the most comfortable, required the least pain and therefore had the least opportunity for growth. Some things that worked for me were walks, tree climbing, rambling journalling, calling people and crying, cuddling my dog and family. I also found a job in a good

environment which helped.

Discomfort is, by human nature, something that I'd like to avoid, but I've learned that it reminds me that I'm alive, like the sore muscles after exercise. It is God's way of drawing me back into the moment, into living, into growth — if only I accept the invitation.

Even now, I'm working and waiting to start university next year, and there is some part of me that just wants to get the waiting over with, to get on to the next thing. But I'm trying to remember that the discomfort of the waiting is when I'm living life. Life happens when I allow myself to experience all the emotions and feelings that come with being human instead of avoiding them, and I honestly believe that God is most present in the emotions and mundane in-between moments.

The Kina Grannis song "In the Waiting" sums it up for me: "Oh what a crime / that I can't seem to understand that life is in the waiting". I am fully in the moment of the in-between when I appreciate little joys and notice little moments: a bird landing on a telephone wire, my dress billowing on a windy day, walking to work in snowfall, tying pea plants to stakes with blades of grass. Every day, the Divine teaches me about the waiting and about loving both the journey and the destination. 🌲

Linea Simons is an aspiring gardener, loves dogs, cookies & cream ice cream, forest wanders and will start uni next year.



Thoughts from McAuley High Students

Sigh. The year I'd expect would bring joy. The year I *hoped* would bring me easy success. What happened? 2020, why did you change so abruptly?

This year *many* things occurred. I wish I could say they were good but the reality is they weren't. COVID-19 has shaken every nation and my own world. Auckland was forced into Lockdown TWICE which meant going to school,



Claudia Terepo, Year 12, has a wide array of interests and is particularly passionate about music.

attending church and travelling abroad weren't possible. During my days attending classes

online, I was miserable. I *hated* not being able to continue that strict routine in the morning, interact in person with my peers, project that energy being at school gives. I felt like I was being restrained from life itself.

Coping hasn't been easy. I wasn't prepared for the worst. However, I will say that music has remained a major part of my experience. The music I hear acts as a barrier against the worst of many problems that have transpired from this tragic year.

2021 — let me do what I intend to do. Let me make my family *proud*. It's the least you can do for me and for those who need it most. 🌲

I had high hopes and expectations about what 2020 was going to be like. It was my last year of high school and the year I was going to be considered an "adult", experiencing exciting new things. But it did not go the way I imagined. COVID-19 changed me emotionally and mentally.

In Lockdown I questioned if this was going to be the new normal. Online schooling was one of the hardest changes to adjust to. I found it difficult to suddenly put myself in a learning headspace without actual people in front or beside me. It was just me, stuck in my bedroom. Coping was extremely difficult as I felt alone. But it was also a time where I truly experienced myself growing up. I knew myself as a positive and idealistic person but being stuck at home

with my thoughts and the effects of the pandemic, I became unmotivated. My mindset became negative and I was worried that the pandemic might change me as a person.

Luckily I had support around me: my home filled with love and positivity, care from my friends, and the small hidden hope in my heart which I relied on to make me stronger.

I'm looking forward to 2021 to do what I missed this year, to make up for the time we lost due to COVID-19 and for it to be more fulfilling. 🌲



Julyn Perla is in Year 13 and she is unusually tall for a Filipino girl.

This year made me realise a lot of things. During Lockdown my schooling was affected. Not only do I lack knowledge about technology, but I found just trying to understand what was being taught on a screen was difficult. Communicating online was hard because sometimes when I asked questions, the teacher would either misinterpret the question or be completely confused



Lydia Anthony, Year 12, likes to read and to learn anything about WWII.

by it. This led me to become more confused. To my surprise I wasn't the only one who

found online learning difficult. A lot of people who were knowledgeable about technology also found it hard. I realised that old-fashioned face-to-face learning is more effective because communicating with the teacher, or anyone, is a lot easier in person than from behind a screen.

That being said, I think that the use of technology during Lockdown helped those who live alone to keep in contact with their loved ones. Being able to communicate with others brought a sense of comfort especially during scary situations.

Overall, I think that this year brought us challenges that we all learnt from and changed the way we live forever. 🌲

I was hoping for a normal first year at high school. I expected a few ups and downs, but I wasn't ready for what 2020 brought.

2019 didn't end very well with the Australian bushfires and the Whakaari/White Island eruption. This year didn't have a very good start either, with a deadly virus spreading around the globe like wildfire.

I was worried when I heard COVID-19 was contagious and airborne — not only for myself and my peers, but for my family and grandparents. They don't have strong immune systems and I'd hate to see them ill.

When the first wave of COVID-19 hit, I wasn't too shocked to see people going rogue over toilet paper, bottled water and non-perishable food items, but it was difficult to get used to staying home, since I'm used to

seeing many faces everyday and being more active.

With the help of technology, I was able to contact extended family and check on how they were doing. I was relieved that they were doing well and had enough supplies for Lockdown.

Just when everyone thought all was in the clear, a second wave hit Auckland. Everyone was on edge, but we knew how it would play out, and that all would be well in the end. But even so, it was an alarming experience.

I hope we find a cure, especially for people in countries that don't have enough healthcare facilities. No one should suffer as a result of this. 🌲



Zyon Lesoa-Stewart, Year 9, is inquisitive and a little too quiet at times.



Shoots of Hope for All Creation

Isaiah 61:1 The spirit of GOD is upon me, because God has anointed me; has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners; 2 to proclaim the year of the God's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of YHWH, to display God's glory.

Is 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in YHWH, my whole being shall exult in my God; for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation, God has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so YHWH GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

“**P**rophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world.” Abraham Heschel wrote these words in *The Prophets: An Introduction* over half a century ago. I have pondered his words for almost 50 years and have marvelled at their constantly contemporary ring.

The “plundered poor” of the late sixth century BCE are named in Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11 as the poor or oppressed, the broken-hearted, the captives, the prisoners and the mourners in the human community.

This passage belongs at the heart of the third and final section of the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 56-66), generally designated Third or Trito-Isaiah and my reflection addresses the text in the context of the Hebrew Bible rather than in relation to its appropriation in the Christian Scriptures.

Pope Francis Calls Earth "Poor"

Pope Francis has expanded our understanding of those rendered poor by describing Earth in our times as “burdened and laid waste... among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor” (*Laudato Si'* par 2). Since the Industrial Revolution, and particularly since the period of nuclear testing post-WWII and the consequent release of radioactive isotopes across the face of the planet, Earth itself has been “oppressed” and rendered “poor”.

Earth is crying out for justice and mercy, for a cessation of logging in old growth forests, of mining for fossil fuels, of wanton pollution of oceans and rivers, of over consumption, of all that plunders the riches of our planetary dwelling.

While the cry of Earth for justice and compassion has a particular poignancy at this time of climate crisis and pandemic, it is salutary to remember that Pope Francis's insight is grounded in the prophetic tradition of Israel. It echoes the eighth-century BCE prophetic judgment of Hosea on the destructive effects of human behaviour on the natural world. Hosea laments: "there is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no acknowledgement of God in the land.... Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing" (Hosea 4:1,3).

If we hear the prophecy of Isaiah 61 against the backdrop of Hosea's earlier prophetic indictment and in dialogue with the recent words of Pope Francis, they might release their power to impel us to clothe ourselves with garments of salvation, of righteousness or right relationship, and to bring comfort to the whole Earth community, human and more-than-human.

52:13-53:12), even if from a different hand. The Servant in Second Isaiah is God's chosen, the one on whom God's Spirit rests, the one who brings forth justice to the nations, the one who glorifies God. These are also attributes of the speaker in Trito-Isaiah.

Much of the post-exilic story is shrouded in mystery and scholars have more questions than answers. It seems to me that the one who proclaims these words is a priestly, prophetic, royal and servant figure who offers hope to the people, returnees as well as those who remained in the land under foreign rule, as they face the daunting reality of rebuilding their lives and their devastated city.

They are not abandoned. They have been released by the Spirit of God from captivity in Babylon and God's Spirit is upon those who are leading them into a new future.

Our Rebuilding

As the deadly COVID-19 pandemic continues to claim lives and instil fear in hearts across the globe, there is a growing realisation that we, like the people of Judah in the sixth century BCE, need to rethink the ways in which we inhabit our world, not only in the immediate future, but for the long term, so that we might rebuild communities of

The righteousness that God causes to spring up is ... for the sake of "all the nations".

Isaiah Encourages Rebuilding

The focus of this section of Isaiah is on rebuilding, on the rebuilding of the "plundered" city of Jerusalem in the post-exilic period and on the reconstitution of God's people in what had become the Persian province of Judah.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem, the returnees along with those who had remained in the land, will not simply be restored to their former state of being. Their post-exilic ways of being will transcend the former pre-exilic ways of their ancestors, just as the glory of the restored city will transcend its former state.

Attending to the Speaker

The speaker (the "me" of Is 61:1) has a key role in the realisation of this dream. But who is this speaker? Are we hearing the words of an individual or a collective personality, or both? Are they the words of a/the prophet, a returnee perhaps? The words uttered are prophetic, but the role is more all-encompassing than the uttering of words of hope or judgment.

The speaker is anointed to "bind up" the broken-hearted or bandage the wounded spirits and to comfort those who mourn. Maybe this speaker is a priest or a royal figure in the line of David, a descendant of Zedekiah who was the last king of Judah. In the biblical tradition, prophets, priests and kings are said to be anointed, but only monarchs or designated authorities have the power to bring about the changes envisaged in this prophecy.

Some scholars suggest that these verses constitute a fifth Servant Song in the tradition of the four Servant Songs of Second Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-1;

righteousness or right relationship.

Our reading invites us to hope for and believe in a time when God will truly reign, a time that can be realised, at least partially, in the here and now.

As we reflect on this reading, we might hear ourselves called, in this Season of Advent 2020, to recognise that God's Spirit is upon each of us, that we are truly anointed to bring good news to the destitute, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of Jubilee and to have the courage to eschew the paths of violence that destroy the wonder of God's creation.

It invites us to trust that "just as the earth brings forth its shoots", even so will God "cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations" (Is 61:11).

The righteousness or right relationship that God causes to spring up is not only for the restored community of Zion. It is for the sake of "all the nations".

For those who read the prophecy against the backdrop of Hosea's words about the mourning of the land and in dialogue with Pope Francis's embrace of Earth's agony, the future hope expressed in these lines relates to a new future for all the plundered of our planet. 🌱

Painting: *Kāpiti Essence* by Sonia Savage © Used with permission www.soniasavageart.com



Veronica Lawson RSM is an eco-feminist biblical scholar and author of *The Blessing of Mercy: Bible Perspectives and Ecological Challenges*, (2016).



LEARNING FROM PROPHETS

KATHLEEN RUSHTON describes Mary and Joseph's encounter with the prophets in Luke 2:22-40.

Painting: *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* by James Tissot (1836-1902)
Photo by Brooklyn Museum

27 December Luke 2:22-40
RL Feast of the Holy Family
RCL 1st Sunday after Christmas



Kathleen Rushton RSM is author of *The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor: Hearing Justice in John's Gospel* (SCM Press 2020).

Matthew and Luke are our only sources about the infancy of Jesus. Christians familiar with the blending of these two stories can be shocked to discover how much the accounts differ. Rather than try to reconcile the differences, we can understand what the Holy Spirit is giving us with two different accounts. Worrying about historicity or sources of information can distract us from the religious message on which both evangelists agree.

Their religious message has two major points: the first centres around the identity of Jesus and the second on how Jesus, in his early life, sums up Israel's history. We shall explore this message as embedded in Anna, who speaks out in Luke. The Spirit is prominent in this two-part story which features characters who are filled with the Spirit.

Jesus Is Recognised

Jesus's identity is known only through God's revelation which is recognised by those who wait faithfully. We hear that "*the time came* for her [Mary] to deliver her child" in Bethlehem (Lk 2:6). After eight days "*it was time* to circumcise the child" (Lk 2:21).

Then the location shifts: "*When the time came* for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord" (Lk 2:22). This scene takes place in the outer precincts of the temple. Only there could Mary be met by both a male and a female prophet. The gender pairing of two characters is typical of Luke.

Recognised by Simeon

Simeon is described as a "righteous and devout" person (*anthropos*) "looking forward to the consolation of Israel". Although he is not called a prophet, we are told three times that Simeon is led by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit "rested on him and revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah." Guided by the Spirit "Simeon came to temple" and took the child in his arms and praised God.

Recognised by the Prophet Anna

And at that moment Anna, a prophet, is there. Though the text calls Anna "a prophet" it is often mistranslated as "prophetess" (eg, Jerusalem Bible). Anna is the only woman in the New Testament to be given the title prophet which is comparable to women prophets in Judaism – Miriam (Ex15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4), Hulda (2 Kgs 22:14) and possibly the wife of Isaiah (Is 8:3).

Anna is very old and has been a widow

for the greater part of her life. She is named in her own terms as the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher and not by her deceased husband's name, family or tribe. "Daughter" evokes the prophet Joel quoted in Acts 2:17: "I will pour out my Spirit ... your daughters will prophecy." In addition, Philip's daughters "had the gift of prophecy" (Acts 21:9). Anna's presence with Simeon points to the understanding that in messianic times the outbreathing of the Spirit is characterised by the fact that both women and men prophecy. The women of Pentecost (Acts 1:14) have their forerunners in Mary, Elizabeth and Anna.

God Is Continuing to Act as in the Past

Luke's infancy narrative is set in the context of Old Testament references and reminiscences. The hymns of praise attributed to Mary (Magnificat Lk 1:46-55), to Zechariah (Benedictus Lk 1:68-79) and to Simeon (Nunc Dimittis Lk 2:29-32) show that God acting through Jesus is behaving consistently as in the past. Whereas Simeon speaks only to Mary and Joseph, Anna makes a public declaration. In telling us that she "spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Israel" (Lk 2:38), Luke presents her as the first evangelist.

Prophets Continue to Point to God's Acting

In Luke the Spirit is the prophetic Spirit. A prophet is gifted by God with insight into the present — the now — and becomes aware of the need for change and for creating a new future in light of God's revelation in the past. The prophet, therefore, learns to read present events and recognise God's revelation as time unfolds. Anna's declaration is a prophetic proclamation.

Once the identity of Jesus is known it is quickly shared with others. The revelation which Anna receives, like that of Mary and the shepherds, is not to be a private possession. God's revelation of Jesus is to be proclaimed to others who are eager to receive

it. The good news has an element of sadness — not all will believe.

Jesus to Continue God's Liberating Work

Luke expresses the expectation that God would redeem/liberate Israel (Lk 1:68). We have Anna's declaration. After Jesus's resurrection the disciples on the way to Emmaus declare: "But we hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Lk 24:21). The expectation begins with the redemption of Jerusalem and then after the resurrection moves from Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Joining in God's Work Today

The Advent season is our time of waiting and being present. We can poise ourselves to hear and act on the prophetic word for this time — to the signs of the times. What voices prompt God's mission of liberation and healing today? Where do we feel the Spirit drawing us to participate? How is the Good News influencing us in our COVID-19 world? Do we hear and listen to the voices of women?

Christmas is our *time* of celebrating the humanity of the Risen Christ, who sharing our humanity and history, builds on all that went before and transforms it. The evolutionary challenge of our *time* is a new consciousness of being loving humans. In the Risen Jesus we do not meet God who "came down" for a visit, but God who emerges in the same Earth as ourselves. We can be open to the Spirit, the life-giving Breath of God, so that the Gospel of the Risen Jesus will permeate the way we live in our increasingly diverse societies. We all share a common humanity.

It is through the Gospel that we regenerate creation — including humanity. This Christmas we can ponder how we are friends and pilgrims with the people of our time. We can work on an attitude of respect for all, even if we do not agree with them. This creates a positive atmosphere for dialogue within our cultural setting in our common home. 🌲

Still Lives: A Memoir of Gaza

by Marilyn Garson

Published by Mary Egan

Publishing, 2019

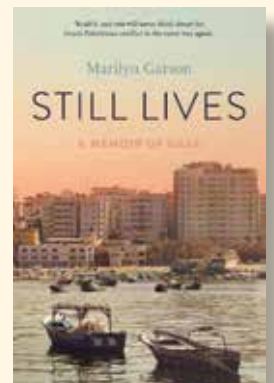
Reviewed by Lois Griffiths

BOOK

Still Lives is New Zealander Marilyn Garson's account of her work in Gaza and the 50 days when the Israeli Defence Force bombarded the Gaza Strip. Marilyn was already experienced in helping civilians recover from wars in Cambodia and Afghanistan, when she went to Gaza as a consultant with Mercy Corps in 2011. She helped create opportunities for the many well-educated computer-savvy but unemployed young Gazans. Garson, who was brought up Jewish in Canada, was challenged by the reality of life in Gaza — especially as her own sister is prominent in Israeli Zionist circles.

Marilyn joined the UN emergency team in Gaza in 2014, when it was clear that the Strip would be attacked. The ensuing "Operation Protective Edge" bombing was vicious. People had barely enough forewarning to grab their children and get out before their houses were demolished. Schools became emergency shelters for thousands, yet the IDF fired on some of them despite being notified of what they were.

Marilyn returned to New Zealand in 2015 and I met her recently. She explained the title of her book: "It's purposely ambiguous. Palestinian Gazans are still alive, but their lives are very restricted, ie, still." 🌲



Crowned with Friendship



I finally had it in my hands. It was the object I had been waiting for all afternoon. The crown was made of woven harakeke, with colourful flowers threaded through it. It was abundant, glorious, exactly what I'd asked for.

About a month earlier, I had put 20 of my friends in a group chat and explained that what I most wanted for my birthday was a treasure hunt and a flower crown. I then left the group chat and presumed that they

would sort it out and I could be surprised, but also get what I wanted. At the party afterwards, my friends recognised each other from the chat, even if they hadn't met before.

I pontificated, beaming. "Life is too short to make people guess what you want," I said. "The best gift I could get was my friends working together. I like giving people the opportunity to rise to the occasion."

I truly adore my friends, who are brilliant and creative and incredible. At this stage in my life, it feels like friendship is full of possibilities: there are so many people who I like, so many who I want to know, to untangle the knots of the world together. Friendships aren't easy, either—to know someone as a friend

means accepting that there are some things they are better at than you, or that there are some things you're always going to disagree about. Every conversation with a friend teaches me a little about myself, and about them, and how we are becoming ourselves beside each other.

There are times when I look at the life of Jesus and it seems idyllic. It's hard to find the time to see my friends – we're all caught up in the whirlpools of our own lives – whereas Jesus seems at liberty to wander, chatting and meeting new people. And Jesus and the disciples make me think about the nature of friendship. The disciples didn't always get along – they bickered, and learned from one another and from Jesus. Did they, like me, feel smug after an hour of talking to a friend and putting the world to rights? Did they feel they'd be friends forever? Did they challenge one another to realise that they could do more together than they thought possible?

And yet my life is part of something much greater than my friendships, as nourishing and vital as they are. All our conversations, reading articles, watching videos about climate change which break my heart, make me realise we are all part of something much bigger. We are connected to the wider world and need to join in protecting it.

My faith reminds to look beyond the flowers of my crown – which died, as flowers do. But the structure of the flax they were woven into remains. I realise that the structures that let me spend time studying, running and reading are also the structures that keep many people in poverty while we assume that resources can be consumed indefinitely. They can rob individuals of power and exacerbate climate change. In my friendships, I find sustenance. I hope, too, that sustenance will keep prompting me to look beyond myself to care about the needs of the world. The crown is a circle of love that surrounds me and I need to keep that love radiating out and out. 🌲

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



Life to the Full: Stories of Infertility, Faith and a Hope-Filled Future

by Debra Vermeer
Published by St Pauls, 2020
Reviewed by Amy Armstrong

BOOK

The path to parenthood is different for everyone and for some it never eventuates. Sometimes this is a choice and sometimes it is not. Whatever the journey it is very personal. In Debra Vermeer's *Life to the Full*, seven couples share their intimate stories of grief with infertility. These couples, who all very much wanted children, are open and honest about how their faith was strong and faltering at varying times throughout the ups and downs

of their journeys. This book is helpful for all readers in opening our eyes to the reality that one in six couples in Australasia struggle to become pregnant. I appreciate how the stories allow us to see that the path is not the same for everyone, and each couple needs support in different ways.

A common theme for all seven couples is that following the Catholic Church's teachings was paramount to them. While this is to be respected, it is not the path all Catholic couples choose to take. In reading this book, I would say it is important to keep in mind that there are other options out there that work for some and the Church does not have all the answers. 🌲



Shouting Zeros and Ones: Digital Technology, Ethics and Policy in New Zealand

edited by Andrew Chen
Published by Bridget Williams Books, 2020
Reviewed by Peter Hassan

BOOK

Shouting Zeros and Ones shines critical light on the impacts of digital technology. I found this book readable and also relevant in this year of elections.

The authors cover some disturbing realities of the digital age, such as algorithms capable of inventing and disseminating lies for political ends or exploitation of the vulnerable. We could all find examples of the lies it defines: "disinformation", as knowingly-posted lies designed to manipulate opinion; "malinformation", as truth presented out of context; and "misinformation", as inaccuracies spread by well-meaning but ignorant people.

Reading that most of New Zealand's internet usage is hosted by coal-powered Australian data centres was a shock for me. Also disturbing was how easily social media can be used to promote violent and extremist world views.

The book offers positive ways forward, such as the "Christchurch Principles" focused on "reducing the impacts of harmful online content". It also presents ways of using data to improve medical and penal outcomes. The last chapter explores an epidemiological model for exposing and countering online fascist movements.

Shouting Zeros and Ones offers a valuable start for anyone wanting to become more informed about the digital world. It presents useful ideas for ensuring "zeros and ones" serve the common good. 🌲



Magnolia Kitchen: Inspired Baking with Personality

by Bernadette Gee
Published by Allen & Unwin, 2019
Reviewed by Mary Betz

BOOK

Magnolia Kitchen offers recipes like brioche, cakes, macarons, cookies and doughnuts, many of which are allergy-free. There are also instructions for cake assembly and tips on kitchen tools.

My daughter Kerry (in Canada) and I shared recipe testing. We both baked a Lemon Poppyseed Loaf which had a lovely taste and beautiful glaze, but we would add more lemon. Kerry's loaf was quite dense, and when she checked the conversions given for baking in Fahrenheit instead

of Celsius, she found the book had miscalculated by 13°F.

The Signature Rich Chocolate Cake with Chocolate Ganache lived up to its name — my theology group was delighted. Kerry's Carrot Cake was moist and flavourful with an airy Cream Cheese Icing — her fiancé's workmates were lucky beneficiaries. The Chewy Chocolate Chunk Cookies bettered my usual recipe for "crispy outside and chewy inside", but I would use less sugar next time. My husband's teacher colleagues gave them the "thumbs-up".

Strangely, every other page in the book seems to use f--- and s--- words. If you can overlook the questionable language, the book is beautifully illustrated, clearly laid-out, and may offer just the right treat for a special occasion. 🌲





Charlatan

Directed by Agnieszka Holland
Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

FILM

Based on the true story of a Czech herbalist and healer who gained a wide following during the 1930s, *Charlatan* will perhaps be remembered for its individual dramatic episodes rather than as a wholly convincing portrayal of an exceptional man and his turbulent times.

Relying heavily on flashbacks, the film charts the career of Jan Mikolášek (1889–1973) played by Ivan Trojan. A herbal healer — he refused the title doctor — who was able to diagnose and treat hundreds of patients a day simply by examining their bottled urine against a strong light source, always delivering an accurate diagnosis. At the end of this medical production line, patients were given packets of herbal medicine, often pre-sorted into mixtures appropriate for their condition.

Although Mikolášek's seemingly miraculous methods heal thousands, no one, it seems, will accept him for who he is. He offers his skills free, yet people question why he is apparently well off. He claims that his healing powers are based on an encyclopedic knowledge of plants, yet asks his clients to believe — faith, he says, is half the battle in regaining one's health.

Jan's intimacy with his male

assistant, František Palko, is also suspect under a regime where homosexual relations are proscribed. And can a man who treated high-ranking Nazi officials and their families be trusted in post-war communist Czechoslovakia? Christianity is also added to the mix, albeit a little awkwardly. Although Mikolášek professes not to believe, after sex with Palko he is seen kneeling in penitence beneath the cross on a bed of sharp stones. Pledging the efficacy of his cures, he nonetheless appears riven by doubt.

This complexity of character is, however, undermined by a vein of melodrama that at times makes this film feel more like a stage play. I felt

that the often traumatic experiences that shaped the protagonist's calling and the contours of his unconventional personal life could have been handled more subtly and in a way that made the connections between events less predictable.

Mikolášek's "powers" eventually prove too much of a challenge to the state, which claims all power for itself, and the notorious healer and his assistant are arrested and brought before the courts on trumped-up murder charges — events in which Palko seems oddly complicit.

While not a must-see movie, *Charlatan* raises some important moral issues that are worth considering in our own time and place. 🌲



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CROSS CURRENTS



by Susan Smith

Learning from a Medical Event

Three months back I experienced the euphemism that is a “medical event”. I know that it is customary to criticise and even condemn our taxpayer funded public health service but my experience was great — professional and friendly care with no long waits. That exposure to the public health service also allowed me to see just how capital intensive the provision of adequate health services is in today’s ever more technologically sophisticated world. I would not like to be a health minister as people and opposition parties demand both better services and lower taxes.

One learning moment in all this has been the insidious reach of algorithms in my life. As I perused the different medical reports that came to me, I encountered jargon and acronyms which I did not recognise. I can manage TB, STD, AIDS, HIV and by then have just about reached my limit. As always, Google helps overcome my limitations in these matters, so I duly typed in unknown acronyms and am now daily spammed with information about how to cure all sorts of ailments. Now algorithms process my emails, my Google searches, documents, social media I look at, and then determine what I need to know. We live in a world where safeguarding privacy is becoming more and more problematic.

Ask the Beasts

In 2014, American theologian Elizabeth Johnson wrote *Ask the Beasts*. Sadly, she did not include the second half of Job 12:17: “Ask the beasts and they will teach you.” As we move towards the feast of Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Jesus, of new life, I have been struck by what other creatures can teach us. We read in Psalm 8 that God has given

us dominion over the works of God’s hands; all of them have been placed under our feet: sheep, oxen, beasts of the field, bird of the air, and fish of the sea (Ps 8:6-8). I wonder if we deserve such responsibility when I read about yet another baby being bashed to death somewhere in Aotearoa.

Here at home we have pūkeko, pheasants and quails nesting on the ground. This means that little bundles of fluff are soon out and about as it is too dangerous for them to be left unattended in ground nests given the ongoing surveillance of hawks in the skies above, and rats and stoats below. I marvel at the watchfulness of the parent birds over their young. One quail seems to be designated “official watcher” and sits on a fence post while adults and chicks feed away underneath. The pūkeko, too, are assiduous guardians with somewhat negative results for our garden. We see them foraging for food and then running back to the

relative safety of the paddock where other adults are safeguarding the young. The pheasants do something very similar.

Down the road the day-old lambs, still lacking in any awareness of the life-threatening challenges that may come their way, are curious when we walk past. Again, their mothers are very quick to summon them back.

Human babies and toddlers are likewise in danger and it is a tragedy when we learn from the media about parents who forget their role as carers and nurturers of life and become destroyers of life.

Matthew’s Gospel reveals that Mary and Joseph’s child was in need of protection from King Herod, determined to destroy all those whom he thought might constitute a threat to his privileged position as despotic king in Galilee. Like the pūkeko, quail, pheasants and sheep, Mary and Joseph provide a wonderful example of protective parenthood.

Now I Pass On the Baton

This is my last contribution to *Cross Currents*. When editor Ann Gilroy asked me about taking it on, I hesitated at first as I knew I had a hard act to follow. However, it has been a great experience being part of the *Tui Motu* team, albeit in a minor way. I wish them well in the years ahead. 🌲



TUI MOTU InterIslands
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Tui Motu magazine provides Catholic as well as ecumenical and inter-faith perspectives and discussion on current issues in church and society. It focuses particularly on issues affecting Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. Its intent is to promote the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, engaging faith and the world through informed, thoughtful comment and discussion for a general readership. The magazine publishes 11 issues per year in print and regular digital postings on social media.

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OMISSION IN LATEST ENCYCLICAL

I am deeply concerned about Pope Francis's terrifying omission in *Fratelli Tutti*. The document, over 38,000 words long, lacks even a single reference about the abuse of children and women religious within the Church. Thus, truly lost, here I am begging for pastoral guidance. Under the dark shadow cast by this horrible omission, now I ask in which way

should I interpret passages such as Matthew 25:45 and Luke 10:30-37?

Is it acceptable for our Pope to "cast the first stone" upon others' abuses before stating our own clergy's faults? I just can't imagine enough the suffering of living victims who, on reading the whole encyclical, are to find not a single comforting word under such a pretending title, *Fratelli Tutti*. Does this terrible silence allow implicitly us to interpret Matthew 21:13 as if appending "and abusers" to the end of the verse?

I am in urgent need of a pastoral answer. Please, leave the 99 parishioners who might have no problems with the above at their pews and rush to my rescue. Or even better, pass this letter to all and come together, the 99 and you. Here I am, lost.

Guillermo Aldao-Humble

WHERE CAN WE GO?

In November our little Christian community lost our much-loved parish priest Leo, because we were not being considered viable enough to retain a priest. It's doubly sad as we are a Eucharistic fellowship and Leo, though greatly gifted, hasn't much chance of finding a place to belong and where does our group of friends disperse to for our turangawaewae?

Which brings me to the wise words of Thomas O'Loughlin: "Church must be a community of welcoming acceptance and working together."

Obviously as Anglicans we could disperse to other parishes, or to other mainline churches, but most of them aren't Eucharistic, i.e. Jesus's call to celebrate, receiving his very self at the table, isn't part of their tradition.

We could creep into a Catholic church but that would be unfair to that parish priest (for the present, anyway). Thinking of the troubled world we live in I keep coming back to Jesus's cry that we Christians might be so united that the world would be witness to Jesus coming in a dramatic display of what his Spirit can offer, turangawaewae!

But, isn't that a challenge to our community — to find a Eucharistic "belonging place" and leave the response to "rule-breaking" in God's hands.

David Day

Fridays with Jim: Conversations about Our Country with Jim Bolger

by David Cohen
Published by Massey
University Press, 2020
Reviewed by John Meredith

BOOK

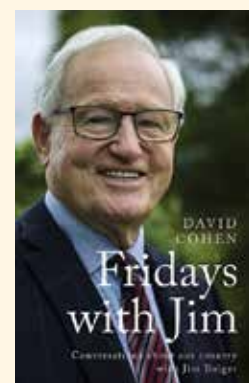
Fridays with Jim is about Jim Bolger, a self-educated son of Irish immigrants who was New Zealand's Prime Minister from 1990-97 and Ambassador to the United States from 1998-2002. David Cohen presents Jim's views throughout, just adding short introductions to each chapter.

In his conversations Jim pays tribute to the influence of his wife

Joan and his faith in his life. His belief in the inalienable worth and dignity of every person informs his concept of social justice and

his idea of a just economic order and a humane welfare system for the country. He identifies inequality and climate change as issues that must be addressed urgently now. He is committed to building peaceful relationships between nations and to making the world nuclear weapon free. He credits the historic struggle for Irish independence from England (as learned from his parents) as a significant influence in his commitment to justice under the Treaty of Waitangi. Jim emerges in these conversations as a person of compassion, humility, vision and service.

The book is illustrated with photographs, cartoons and extracts from Jim's speeches and would make a great Christmas gift for someone interested in New Zealand history. 🌲



Walking the Mystical Path

Walking the Mystical Path is an "at home" programme for those wishing to integrate a contemplative dimension into their lives.

March to November 2021

Facilitated by Agnes Hermans, ACSD, who is on the coordinating team for the Contemplative Network Aotearoa. Agnes is currently a student with Richard Rohr at the Center for Action and Contemplation.



Cost: \$340 for materials and spiritual companioning sessions.

For further information email
amhermans@xtra.co.nz



place long enough to harvest produce, despite the capricious nature of COVID and all the other uncertainties of our age. Other steps of trust for this week will be making an Advent wreath, discussing ideas for having fun at the Catholic Worker Christmas lunch, and scheming tramping routes for the summer.

So the invitation for me this Advent is to faithfulness. It is doing what I can. Taking one step in front of the other. It's been a big year, a year of change. Advent is a chance to stop at the orange, take a breath of rest and expectation before 2021 gets the green light. A reminder that after a year of change — for us from Uttarakhand to Christchurch — there will be more changes still. Our challenge will be to say “yes”. Tonight I will rest and tomorrow I will head back to another day at the office. But I must remember to drop some of our excess beetroot at the Sydenham Community Pantry. This evening I circle back to this prayer from Brother Roger of Taizé:

*In following you, O Christ,
we choose to love and not to harden our
hearts,
even when the incomprehensible
happens.
As we remain in your presence with
perseverance,
day after day, and pray with simplicity
of heart,
you come and make us into people
who are a leaven of confident trust by
the way we live
And all that your Gospel calls us to,
all that you ask of us, you give.* 🌲



Kaaren Mathias is living in Christchurch with her family. She sings, cycles, writes and sews wizard capes and promotes community mental health in New Zealand and India.

It is 5pm, and my bicycle and I slide out of the quiet grey office and into a bracing easterly. The sky above is flapping blue and white. The hours of quiet and industrious tapping on a computer melt away and I am back in the colour and grit of Today. A grid of orange netting frames the gravel footpath (these interminable road repairs in central Christchurch). Astride my flimsy grasshopper on wheels, I am sucked by the grey breeze of a mega-truck refrigerating past me as we all race the green light, streak down Barbadoes Street. I wheel past the Salvation Army Family store where last month I bought a smart brown and black pair of boots for just \$4. But after two weeks of strutting around in them, the sole of the right boot fell right off.

Past the bedheads and old sofa out on the verge. Past the hairband lying on the asphalt threaded with spiral wisps of grey hair. Past the filing drawers with the cheerful title “Sydenham Community Pantry” whose drawers are nearly always empty. I am speeding now with the wind behind me, and nearly home to

my kin. I have done my day's work and a whole evening lies open ahead of me. And Advent is coming.

Advent is saying “yes” to a future unknown and inconvenient. Trusting that God is good and will only lead and ask us to take on as much as we can manage. We wait in hope. We look for the dawn. I wonder if Mary once or twice regretted responding: “Let it be as you have said.” Maybe after she found that Emperor Augustus had scheduled his disruptive census exactly at the time her baby was due. Or that time when Joseph floated cancelling the engagement. But she stuck with her commitment. She was faithful and did what was hers to do.

Back home, I check in on the tomatoes and rocket plants. For the first time in 15 years we have a vegetable garden. Mischievous monkeys and other free-spirited four-legged creatures made all gardening efforts futile while we lived in India but gardening seems a better option in the 'burbs of Christchurch. Planting and watering veggies is a gesture of hope. Believing we will be in this

Be with us Emmanuel
as we relish being together
yet feel our separation from others

as we breathe in relief here
yet have illness around the world

as we celebrate being at home
yet cannot let visitors over our border

as we rejoice gratefully in the kindness, health and love
we share this Christmas season

From the *Tui Motu* team