

# TUI MOTU InterIslands

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS 1997–2017

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**EVERY CHILD IS PRECIOUS — HE TAONGA TE MOKOPUNA**

Mary Thorne • Andrew Becroft • Keiran Kennedy • Tadek Markowski • Louise Carr-Neil • AND MORE



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Cover art:

*Oh What a Morn*

by Brother Mickey O'Neill McGrath, OSFS

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## EDITORIAL

### Every Child is Precious *He Taonga te Mokopuna*

Jacinda Ardern is the only contemporary world leader who has taken the elimination of child poverty in the country as a personal responsibility. It is a bold and courageous undertaking. It highlights a new ordering of priorities and a new pro-life emphasis in our country. Yet it is a goal she cannot achieve alone. Fortunately there are already organisations with practice and research to advise her on how to proceed with this transformation, such as the Child Poverty Action Group. And there are enterprises on the ground working to relieve poverty and its flow-on effects through food, shelter and health initiatives, education, mentoring, spirituality and family support endeavours. We will need their concerted effort.

Child poverty is a new evil in Aotearoa, one allowed to grow because of the low value children in "underachieving" families have in a monetary-focused political hierarchy. They're the "collateral damage" of an ideology of personal success. Christianity cannot tolerate the impoverishment of children. Matthew warns about putting a stumbling block before children (Mt 18:6-7) and today we might consider poverty as such a block. The scripture readings through Advent and Christmas encourage us to refocus on God among us. They culminate in the nativity stories in which the inhospitality, poverty and danger surrounding Jesus' birth are overcome by the Spirit-prompted efforts of his parents and the local community – the shepherds – and the wider community – the magi and Egypt as a refuge.

The Christmas season can motivate us to join the new stand against the acceptance of hopeless poverty in our country. It gives us a new edge in working for the common good. It challenges us to love our neighbour in our attitudes, societal structures and the funneling of resources. It will require little groups and big government departments to work together without losing focus. It is our moment to act – we must keep our courage.

This 222nd issue explores in a range of articles, reflections and art how every child is precious. We thank all who have contributed through writing, art and craft.

We farewell with gratitude three of our regular columnists – Jim Elliston, Louise Carr-Neil and Elaine Wainwright. Louise and Elaine will continue to be occasional contributors.

And we are doing our annual promotion encouraging you to give a *Tui Motu* subscription to family or friends as a Christmas gift this year. Thank you for participating!

As is our custom our last word is of blessing – a blessed Christmas to you all! ✨



# OUR CHANCE TO BE CREATIVE

by Ann Gilroy

I met Cecily outside the church a few weeks after the new translation of the Mass had been introduced. “I don’t like it!” she stated firmly, “What on earth does ‘inconsequential with the Father’ mean?” Clearly the careful transliteration from the Latin had missed the mark in that congregation – and in many others.

Bishop Colin Campbell in *TM* October 2011 summed up the dissatisfaction with the translation of the people of his diocese. Comments included that it was confusing and meaningless, a backward step and Pre-Vatican II in language style, exclusive of women, with a convoluted sentence structure and archaic words never used in colloquial English. He quoted *Verbum Domini* that “a translation ... is always more than a simple transcription of the original texts. The passage from one language to another necessarily involves a change of cultural context: concepts are not identical and symbols have a different meaning, for they come up against other traditions of thought and other ways of life.”

We’ve suffered the translation for the last seven years and it is a relief to hear that Pope Francis has decided that the responsibility for the translation of the liturgy will now lie with the Conference of Bishops in each region.

Our New Zealand Bishops have welcomed the announcement and said that they will be working on the texts. They outlined the three principles that will guide a new translation: fidelity to the original text; fidelity to the particular language of the people who will use the new text; and a commitment to

the intelligibility of the text. They said that like us, they desire beauty, comprehensibility and participation in and through the liturgy.

So the time is ripe to begin discussions about the kind of language that will breathe new life into the liturgy of Aotearoa. We know the Spirit is drawing us towards new insights about the mysteries we celebrate. I’m suggesting we attend to this task with hope and creativity for the good of our faith community.

## Familiar, Fresh and Varied

Our new compositions need to be familiar and yet fresh. We know the order of the Eucharist and the purpose of the prayers within. We want these anchors to hold – but we also want enough room for variation to capture our attention again. For example, the beginnings, endings and the length of prayers can vary according to the place and purpose in the liturgical progression. We can expand the options for liturgical seasons, feasts and awareness of our part of Earth. We need the children’s versions, the family Mass versions, the 7.00am Mass versions, the youth versions. The type of participation can vary as well. The early morning-ers might embrace more spoken responses but not singing, whereas more participation and shorter prayers would work well with children.

## Our Expressions

The expression needs to be ours – particularly the English and Māori. We need our poets, writers and cultural advisers to become involved with our liturgists, scripture scholars and theologians in composing the prayers to help express the mysteries we are celebrating during Eucharist and other

liturgies. We need prayers with good theology expressed in language we can own.

## Inclusive

And of course the prayer needs to be inclusive of the community and our hope for transformation. This is our opportunity to redress the inadequacies of former translations and compose prayer for our times. We can even vary the naming of God from exclusively male to other forms. And we can test the prayers to ensure that we’re getting it right.

## Care of Earth

Our new prayers must remind us that we belong in an Earth community for which we have a responsibility of care. So we need to review the prayers which put God “up there” and ourselves “down here” that we’ve inherited from an older worldview. The ecumenical translation of the Our Father is an example of this change. And with the dangers of climate change affecting the ability of Earth to survive as our common home, we need our prayer to remind us we can be co-creators with God.

## Sending Us to Practise

As we leave Eucharist imagine the impact if we were sent with a practical aim. I am thinking of the recent Archdiocesan Synod’s 13 directions: “Go, you are sent to the peripheries of society” or “Go, you are sent to accompany one another” or “Go, you are sent to support marriage and families” or “Go, you are sent to deepen your bicultural relationship” or “Go, you are sent to care for creation”.

Now is our time to begin the conversation. ✨





# Christmas Greetings, Dear Tui

I have to admit to quite a struggle to bring this tiny piece of writing to birth. Like every other aspect of life, our beliefs and attitudes need a spring clean and refresh every now and again. Advent can mean a serious shake-up of the dear, familiar comfortableness that a lifetime of religious faith can engender. It's a comfortableness that can easily become a sort of blindness that dims my grasp of the significance of Christmas. Among all the beautiful cards bearing greetings of love, peace, joy and merriment I begin to think that we've got it terribly wrong. We're not listening to the story. We must retrieve the real meaning of this birth.

In his book *The Word that Redescribes the World*, eminent biblical scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann reminds us that we tend to drift always in the direction of making the text of the Bible congenial and respectable. We have become self-sufficient and affluent and disinclined to hear the disruptive challenge to our own points of view.

## An Uncomfortable Story

Luke's nativity story tells us that the birth of this child is the fulfilment of the ancient promise to God's people that justice would eventually be established in the land and people would be able to live in peace and security. Jesus' first adult words in Luke (4:16-30) announce his role as the one who brings the fulfilment of God's promise. It is good news for the poor. It is an assurance of an end to suffering, a promise full of hope. The promise is made to excluded, needy, broken people who long for relief and hope and it is these people who hear the message most clearly.

There is not much that is comfortable about Luke's account of Jesus' birth. It is utterly shocking and scandalous that the Most High God, Source of all that exists, takes flesh and comes to us in the midst of our muddle and dysfunction. It's as though Luke says to us: "Look! This is the mother, this is the town, and these are the folk involved! What do you make of this?"

The mother is Mary, an ordinary Jewish girl without status, on the very cusp of womanhood, pregnant under scandalous circumstances which, under Mosaic Law, make her an endangered woman with an endangered child. Yet Mary believes God's promise and it is on the lips of this young woman that we hear the hymn of praise that tells of God's plan to topple arrogant oppressors and lift up the powerless.

Mary and her fiancé Joseph, who also believed and trusted in God's promise, came from obscure and distant Nazareth. No one important had ever come from Nazareth! Circumstances beyond their control found them far from home and without a place to stay when the time came for the baby to be born. In Bethlehem this child was a problematic stranger for whom accommodation had to be made.

The ones who receive the message that this longed-for, earth-shattering event has taken place are themselves socially



undesirable. Shepherds' work makes them ritually unclean in Judaism and therefore religious outcasts. It is part of the upside-downness of the story that it is the shepherds who respond with awe to a divine revelation, leave their precious flocks and hurry to see. They are the ones who excitedly proclaimed the news to all whom they met.

## Facing the Misfit

So how does this extraordinary action of God within human experience relate to the preparation being undertaken to observe our family and cultural Christmas traditions established over many generations? These traditions involve





# *Notu Community*



Painting: *Nativity* by He Qi © www.heqiart.com

family gathering, Church attendance, special food, decorations, exchange of gifts and all the usual components of a celebratory occasion. These are not bad things. As mother, I try to balance rampant consumerism with appropriate expression of the joy of God with us. At Christmas Mass we pray for those for whom Christmas is painful and difficult.

But something is awry!

Luke's account of the birth of

Jesus, the anointed one of God, is about and for the benefit of those who are economically, physically and socially disadvantaged. It tells of the interwoven-ness of God and humanity and the intimate closeness of our compassionate God to those who long for help and relief. The angelic messengers from God spoke of joy and peace. It is an announcement that gives HOPE.

## **Acting God Is Among Us**

I can't help thinking about this year's UNICEF report that in Aotearoa New Zealand we have the highest youth suicide rate in the developed world. The image of empty shoes arranged outside our Parliament to represent lives lost is vivid in my memory. These, our beautiful children, have lost hope that acceptance and fairness could prevail. Their families suffer debilitating grief. Somehow the real Christmas story belongs here.

It would be terribly wrong of me to minimise the increasingly complex situations that have given rise to this heart-breaking statistic. If we could speak more plainly about the real, deep significance of the Christmas story and extricate it from the sentimentality and commercialism that obscure it, then perhaps the tale of the advertising brochures and the destructive component of cyber communications could be hushed. The telling of the Nativity is not a matter of words but a matter of acting in the belief that God is among us especially in our pain and struggle. Perhaps hope could be rekindled and tiny glimmers of joy glimpsed.

## **Acting Today**

The shepherds from the fields outside Bethlehem were told that "this day" One who saves is born. The word "today" is an important theme in Luke's Gospel and is not intended to be understood as a reference to the historical "then" of Jesus' time. Rather

the reference is to the present "today". Quietly and gently, experienced in ways that are nearly always unexpected, God is with us every moment of every day and knowing the closeness of God brings us moments of joy even when things are really tough.

## **Practising Wonder and Joy**

So what is the outcome of my spring clean? That attempt I make to reassess and reform my Christmas thinking reveals that comfortableness doesn't leave much room for joy. In fact, the comfortable are strangely oblivious to the essence of the message.

*The telling of the Nativity is not a matter of words but a matter of acting in the belief that God is among us especially in our pain and struggle.*

We must allow wonder and joy to touch us anew at Christmas time. Wonder and joy embolden us to act differently. The pattern that shapes all our interactions, every day of the year, has to be that shown by the adult Jesus on the road and at table, in compassionate encounters with those who most need a sense of belonging. All time, every place and each person has dignity enhanced by the God-with-us reality that Christmas brings to the forefront of our minds each year.

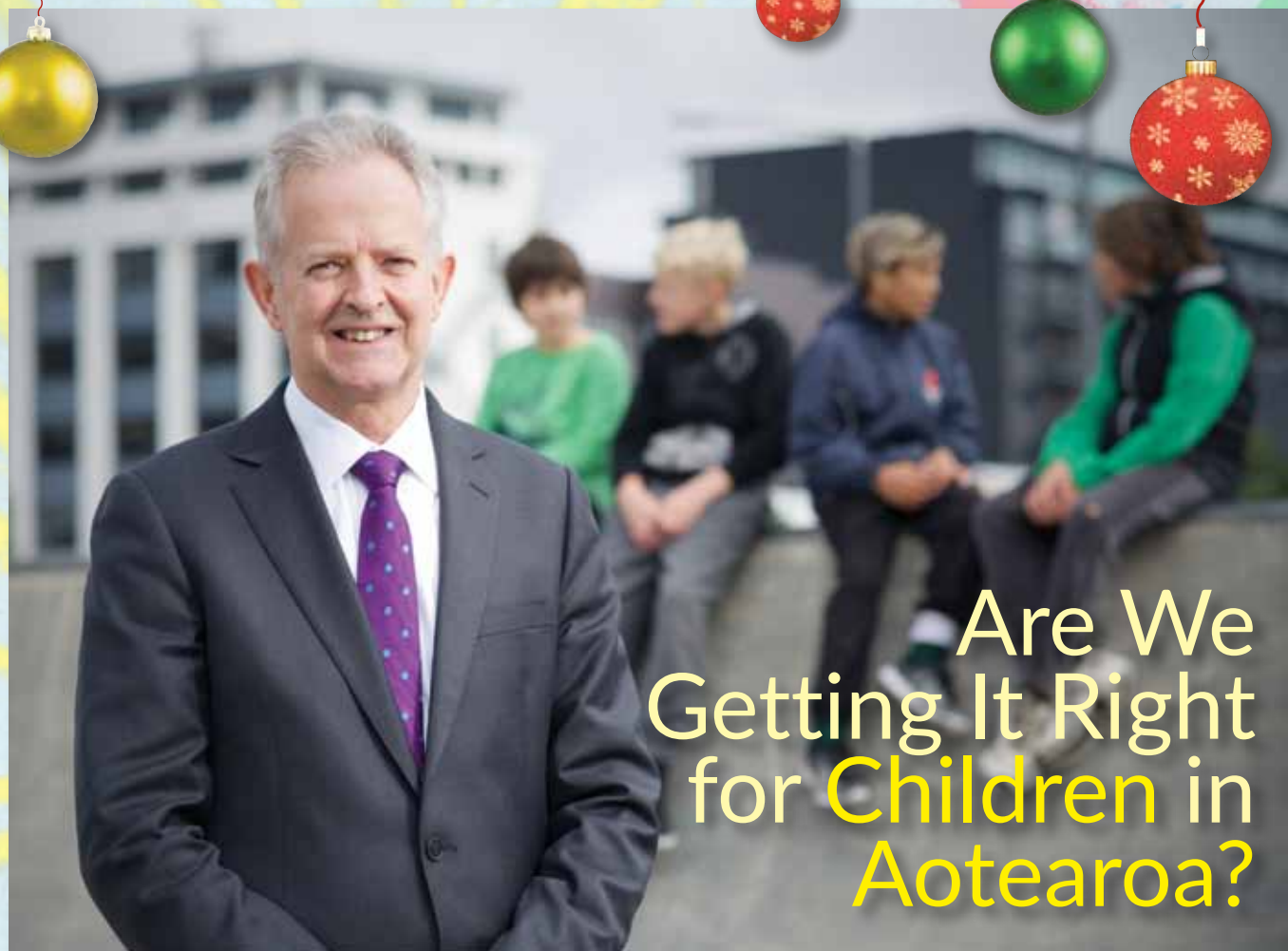
We use the word awesome so glibly, but may we experience awe this Christmas, the awe of the disreputable shepherds and the ones to whom they told their astounding news. Most especially may the news of Christmas be heard in our communities by those bowed down by life's hardship and may they know that they are the beloved ones to whom it is directed. May they be strong in hope. May there be joy in our world and may people acting kindly towards one another achieve peace.

*Mary* ★



**Mary Thorne** has been a parishioner of St Mary's Catholic parish in Papakura for 36 years. She works with imprisoned women.





## Are We Getting It Right for Children in Aotearoa?

Children's Commissioner ANDREW BECROFT asks what we still need to do together to ensure all our New Zealand children and *tamariki* flourish and thrive.

Children and young people constitute nearly 25 per cent of our population: 1.1 million New Zealanders are under 18 years old.

We may think of New Zealand as a great place to grow up – and indeed most of our children do well, and some do outstandingly well. But 20 per cent are struggling, and 10 per cent do as bad, if not worse, than most comparable OECD countries. This is not the New Zealand that I grew up in, and this has been a big motivator for me in taking up this role.

At the start of this year, I set five key priorities: Achieving better outcomes for *tamariki Māori* (Māori children), helping build and monitor *Oranga Tamariki*, encouraging government agencies and NGOs to be more child-centred, improving

children's engagement in education and improving youth justice.

As Christmas approaches and I reflect on the year, we have made real progress in some areas, but there is still much to do.

I recently gave the new Minister for Children, Tracey Martin, a briefing on the challenges that children face in New Zealand. The first challenge, of course, is reducing child poverty, represented by the 27 per cent of children who live in households earning less than 60 per cent of the median income, and the 70,000 who lack nine or more essential items for everyday life.

Poverty is not just financial and material hardship, it also is about children having fewer outings with parents or family holidays and fewer opportunities such as participating in sports or music. I am encouraged

to see the new Ministerial portfolio for Child Poverty Reduction. Along with new policy and legislation, I am hopeful that we will see a significant drop in the child poverty statistics in the next few years.

### Supporting Tamariki Māori to Thrive

Another challenge, or opportunity for improvement if you like, is how best to support the 25 per cent of children who identify as Māori. Many do well, but too many of our *tamariki* are represented in the 30 per cent of children who experience real adversity. Our existing systems – including education, health, care and protection, youth justice – are not supporting them to thrive. Changing these systems to include Māori culture and perspectives could have benefits for all children.



## Care and Youth Justice

The 7,000 children and young people experiencing the care and protection and youth court systems need the best support possible to give them good life chances. The launch of *Oranga Tamariki* earlier this year is an opportunity to build a world-leading care and protection and youth justice system.

Some of the greatest risks of harm to young people are in our youth justice system, where 2,500 young people are dealt with through youth courts and *Oranga Tamariki* each year. We have recently had a breakthrough in allowing 17-year-olds to be dealt with in the youth justice system, but we need more options to keep young people safely in their families and communities, prevent them being held in adult police cells and reduce the number held in youth justice residences.

## Education

Participating fully in education is essential for children to achieve their full potential. It is also their right. There are 750,000 children in the education system in any year, and 20 per cent are struggling. Supporting children with neurodevelopmental disorders and other disabilities and encouraging schools to adopt an appeal system from suspensions or exclusions will help all children to be engaged in education.

## Children's Rights

New Zealand signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (The Children's Convention) nearly 25 years ago. I convene a monitoring group to keep track of how well the Government is upholding the rights of children through the Convention and recently we released a report on progress in the last 12 months.

Before I took up this role, I thought I knew the Children's Convention fairly well, thanks to my time in the Youth Court. But even then, I had a lurking suspicion that we did not apply the Rights to young offenders as fully as we could. However, it was not until I started in this role that I sat down and read the

Convention in detail from beginning to end.

It is an exciting document – even 28 years after its adoption by the United Nations, it still speaks powerfully. It is a charter of guaranteed entitlements which all children deserve and which, when faithfully applied and upheld, will ensure that our children flourish, prosper and thrive.

***As a country, I think we need to be much more enthusiastic and positive about child rights, in the context of their family and community, and for Māori children, their whānau, hapū and iwi.***

Sadly, I believe we have little understanding of the Convention here, and do not take it seriously. For instance, senior Government personnel have said to me: "Does the Convention really have any relevance to New Zealand?" Or: "We do pretty well for our children, don't we? Is there anything that it can really help us with?" And, more worryingly still: "Isn't the Convention mainly for less developed countries such as Somalia, Bhutan, or Mongolia – isn't that where it can really be of importance?"

Other countries take the Convention much more seriously than we do, as I realised when I attended New Zealand's fifth examination by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in September 2016. We must uphold our international obligations, including making sure that Government puts the principles into practice. Ultimately, the Convention can help us make better decisions in the way that we treat children and provide services for them.

For example, in Article 12:

"States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views

of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

If the practice was engrained in government departments and community groups, there would be a significant change in the way we make decisions: for example in education, health, housing policy and operations and in the way we respond to child poverty. In short, children's voices need to be heard in our country to influence our responses.

Here, at the Office, we encourage agencies that deal with children to consider the impact of their decisions on children and their rights including: seeking out their voices, listening to them, factoring them into our decision making and reporting back to children the decisions made.

As a country, I think we need to be much more enthusiastic and positive about child rights in the context of their family and community, and for Māori children, their *whānau, hapū* and *iwi*. If the Convention was faithfully understood, applied and adopted, all children would benefit significantly, but especially those in the most disadvantaged 30 per cent.

Since I took up the role, I have seen a high level of commitment by parents, caregivers, and government and non-government and community organisations to do the best that we can for our children. I am sure that with our collective effort and will, we can make sure that all New Zealand children can flourish and thrive.

I wish you a very meaningful, relaxing and family-centred Christmas and New Year. ✨

[www.occ.org.nz](http://www.occ.org.nz)  
[www.childpoverty.co.nz](http://www.childpoverty.co.nz)

Photo: Judge Andrew Becroft with children.  
Background painting: Kanon Boyce, aged 5, St Teresa's School, Bluff.

Before becoming the Children's Commissioner Judge **Andrew Becroft** was the Principal Youth Court Judge. The Office of the Children's Commissioner works to ensure that all children and young people thrive in New Zealand.



# BRINGING UP OUR CHILDREN CATHOLIC

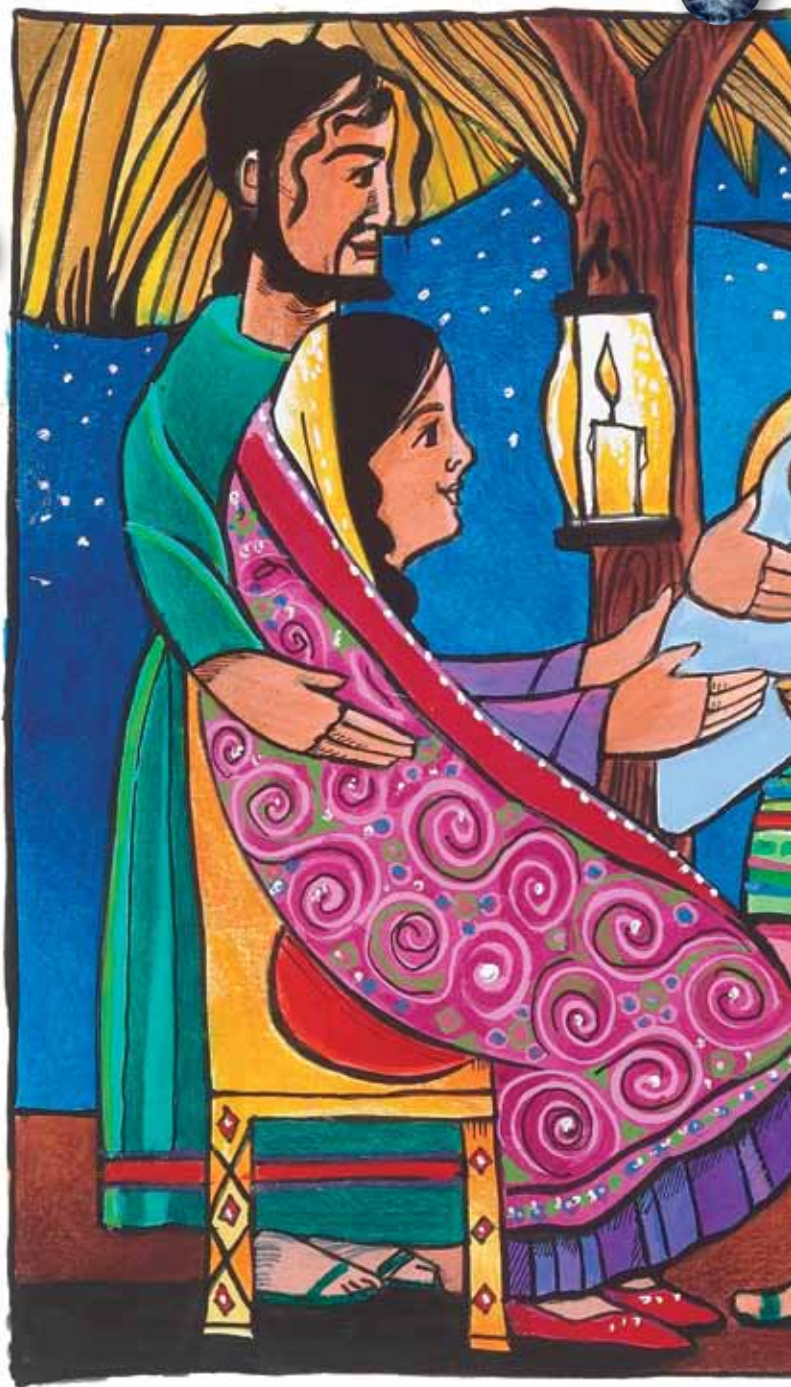
KEIRAN KENNEDY shares why she and her husband have chosen to bring their children up in the Catholic faith.

Someone asked me recently about why we were bringing up our children Catholic. At the time I thought it was a strange question to ask given that my husband and I are both Catholic — wouldn't it be expected that we would be raising our two children in the same faith? But it did cause me to reflect on why we have decided to raise our children in this faith. I guess for us we didn't see it as a choice — it was a given. We went through some struggles to have children so when our two finally arrived we felt really blessed and so of course we knew our kids would be baptised and brought up Catholic — with the hope that when old enough they would choose to remain so.

## Participating in Sunday Mass

But we know, like other families, in the business of life it can be a challenge. It is a little difficult to describe exactly what the challenge is because as far as I know there isn't a definition we are trying to meet or a manual we need to follow. But like many families, we are time short and over-committed. Bringing up our kids as Catholic is just part of the fabric of our family. They both go to a Catholic school and we are part of a vibrant parish community. When I say part, I mean we go to Mass and enjoy the vibrancy but don't really participate in other parish activities (the short-in-time issue). But Sunday Mass is our weekly ritual — a ritual full of music and contributions from a diverse community. So different from the traditional Sunday Masses I grew up with. For us it is an easy ritual to sustain because the experience of Mass is positive.

I am trying to instil in the kids that Mass is a time to be present at Church and be thinking about or participating in the Mass. Our eight-year-old is like me — easily distracted — so often at Mass she will be thinking about Sunday's activities which might involve slime-making or baking or mulling over the week's school events. I know this from the random questions I get from her during the Eucharistic prayer. I resist responding and encourage her to focus on what is going on around her. Slowly, she is becoming more present at Mass. It has helped that recently she made her First Communion so she is feeling more grown up and part of the Church community.



Our six-year-old son likes children's liturgy. He is very enthusiastic with his answers to questions. There was a time when I worried about what he was going to say or whether the group would understand him — he is a fast talker. But now I let him go by himself knowing that he is part of a group that knows him and welcomes his contribution.

## Family Prayer

We have tried unsuccessfully to introduce and sustain family prayer time. We gave it a fairly good crack, but now with a hefty night-time routine, family prayer time has fallen away. Hopefully not for good — but for now. We try harder in Advent and Lent as these feel more of a time to be prayerful.

To be honest we would have more success if we did family prayers on the train in the morning on the way into





town and school. But given that the train is busy and we are already doing reading, I am not sure how the prayers would go down with the busy Hutt Valley commuters. Our son already attracts attention when he is trying to work out whether his sister is telling the truth and he says: "Swear to the Lord" in a big loud voice, or when he pulls out the *Children's Bible* he has borrowed from the school library. I sound as if I am trying to hide the fact that we are Catholic. It's not that. In a way I see our religion as a private thing that doesn't need to be exhibited especially on the train. So for now no family prayer time on the train.

### God Questions

Another aspect of raising kids Catholic is the questions we are asked about God and Jesus — thankfully not so much about the Holy Spirit as I would really struggle explaining the tongues of fire, the burning bush and how the dove fits in. Our son is very curious about God — "Is he a person? Can he see us all the time? How does he stay up in the sky?" On the particularly tricky ones, I revert to: "Ring Gran." Our children are lucky enough to have a grandmother who can answer nearly all God-and-the-like questions. On other less tricky questions, I try to be honest and he

seems OK with "I don't know about that" as an answer. At times my Catholic knowledge is tested.

From time to time, I hear him and his sister talking about Bible stories — they were fans of Jonah and the whale and Daniel in the lion's den. Their (now tatty) children's *Bible* has been through the phase of being their book of choice for bedtime reading. Our daughter now has an *Action Bible* which is more like a comic strip so that gets her occasional attention. Our son is keener on Lego books. I am sure Bible Lego would hook him in!

### It's About Practising "Love One Another"

Maybe I haven't really answered the question "Why Catholic?" I've demonstrated what it means to be raising kids as Catholic but the why is more about us wanting our kids to have a values and belief system. Values that we hope will help them know right from wrong, help them to be kind, generous and grateful, help them to make wise choices, help them to be honest and faithful and to recognise injustice. I think we are doing OK on this front. When we see them being kind to each other, or when they tell us about sticking up for someone at school who was getting a hard time, or when they say sorry for getting angry, we know these values are present.

Their belief in God is equally important because we know that it will help and guide them as they grow and navigate the challenges of life. My husband and I have had this benefit and privilege from our parents who brought us up Catholic and so we want to pass this onto our children. In time they can make up their own minds about what they want to believe and value but for now we have chosen this path for them. ✨

Painting: *Gift of Christmas* by Brother Michael O'Neill McGrath, OSFS.  
© www.bromickeymcgrath.com



**Keiran Kennedy** lives in Lower Hutt with husband Michael and two children. She works as a tax lawyer and has a house-building project on the go.





# Bringing Up Our Children In China

TADEK MARKOWSKI writes about raising his children as Christian in Beijing.

I grew up on a farm in New Zealand. It was a great place to be a kid. There were orphan lambs to raise, plum trees to plunder, creeks to splash about in and native bush to explore. And that's to say nothing of a plentiful supply of siblings that provided ample opportunity for a rousing play fight or a game of tag and company on various outdoor adventures.

My mother came from Irish roots and my father is Polish — their union was a perfect storm of Catholicism and conservative family values. Needless to say we were raised in the classic Christian tradition — a big mob of unruly “God fearing” Kiwi kids. Every dinner time we took turns saying grace, attended the local St Joseph’s Catholic School and on Sundays went to Mass *en masse*. At home or in the classroom it was impossible to dodge the Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit)

and faith took hold at an early age. Between hunting for birds’ nests and farm chores I would find time to pray privately for hungry children in far flung places, for fraternity among world leaders, to ask God to forgive my childhood infractions and thank him for the blessing of marbles and our family’s general wellbeing.

*A simple crucifix on a chain is a keepsake my son cherishes as a token of the friendship he found in belief and the conscious decision he made to join the living Church.*

## Home in Beijing

Fast forward a few decades and I’m the father of three equally precocious

youngsters, but to say their physical and spiritual lives are far removed from the rolling hills of rural NZ and weekly incense-infused sermons would be an understatement. Home is a three-bedroom apartment in the heart of China’s wheezing capital. Outdoor fun generally consists of weekend visits to public parks hemmed by high-rises. They attend a Pakistan Government school (lessons in Islam not compulsory), and they converse mostly in Swedish. And saying grace is more of a novelty for special occasions like Christmas than a prerequisite at meal times. Much has changed in a generation, but as with most things the recent developments are a mix of the good and the bad.

On the downside we have to count the under-abundance of nature, the frenetic traffic and the equally hectic pace and pressures of big city living.

On the up-side we live in one of the most exciting metropolises in the



world and have a unique opportunity to learn about a people and a culture far removed from our own.

## Faith and Relationships

That cultural gulf includes a long standing political aversion to religious observance. It goes without saying that enrolling the kids at a school with a Christian curriculum wasn't an option in Beijing, but that doesn't mean their lives are devoid of a Godly dimension.

My 11-year-old's recent Baptism, which was an undertaking of his own volition, is testament to the scriptural truism: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them."

While religion isn't celebrated in the Middle Kingdom, it is none-the-less tolerated to a degree and as a family we look forward each month to attending a low-key service as part of an outreach programme under the auspices of a local embassy. In that tiny congregation my lad found a fellowship and solemn conviction that persuaded him becoming a Christian was a positive life choice. Key to that decision was our "fly-in fly-out" priest, whose personality and aura included many of the qualities Christians aspire to: gentleness, kindness, compassion and abiding faith. His quiet good-nature and positive message helped make Christ's teachings a living breathing presence in our lives. It's also fair to say the tightknit congregation benefits greatly from the intimacy afforded by such a small group; a communion aided by excellent coffee and cakes after the Sunday service.

Following his Baptism my son was given a simple crucifix on a chain as a parting gift from the priest. It's a keepsake he cherishes as a token of the friendship he found in belief and the conscious decision he made to join the living Church. So, while the kids don't get the kind of "Monday to Friday + Sunday" (and religious holidays) biblical instruction I got growing up, their spiritual needs are being met, even here in China.

## Sharing Friendship

As a family we feel the distance that separates us from our relatives and close friends (at opposite ends of

the world), many of whom share a common Christian heritage and the same Western-style values. But that is balanced out to some extent by a long line of interesting characters that often enter our orbit and who on occasion cement themselves a place as life-long friends.



Karin with Noa 11, Ida 6, Joakim 8.

In the ex-pat "life boat" we often meet people who challenge our cosy world-view and make us grateful for the blessings we have. That recently included a family from Syria, whose unshakeable faith and belief in their country (and all of its citizens) was a potent lesson in Christian goodwill. Our children cavorted together in parks and shared frequent pizza dates until work and duty called the family back to Damascus. For the Syrian family going home wasn't an easy choice given the parlous nature of the conflict there and the fact Christians have been targeted by various groups. As sanguine as they were about their future prospects it was difficult to see them go. Their parting gift was a wooden rosary which hangs on our nightstand: a powerful symbol of a hope that good conquers evil and love can overcome hate.

## Knitting Relationships

In Beijing we count among our pals or colleagues people from every corner of the globe. A quick survey of the origins of my children's three closest

friends elicited the following response: Ethiopia, Albania, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tunisia, Mexico, Guinea Bissau and Angola. It's not surprising they've developed an encyclopaedic knowledge of national flags.

In my seven years of Catholic primary school in New Zealand the most exotic newcomer was a skinny freckled kid, from Holland, with an impossible name. The net impact of this melange of countries, faiths and cultures is that my children are growing up "colour blind" and in a sense imbued in the crucial Gospel challenge of loving our neighbour as ourselves. It's evident in the playful scrums around our block of flats that always includes a combination of kids from three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. In China we enjoy the kind of unity in diversity that's uncommon in most parts of regional New Zealand and Australia.

We're not puritanical parents by any stretch, but nonetheless we encourage our children daily to conduct themselves and behave according to principles which in many ways trace the teachings of the New Testament — to be good, kind and hardworking. To forgive others and treat people the way they'd like to be treated.

## God Is Right There

It doesn't really matter if you're living in a breezy bucolic setting in New Zealand or in the heart of communist China, our beliefs are our own — they're precious and we raise our children accordingly. The existence of God is an article of faith which potentially can be stymied by the vicissitudes of things like being uprooted for work, but it can't be obliterated altogether.

As cheeky as they are, and even naughty at times, in my children I see God's goodness and grace and I'm determined that they get to know the possibilities that come with faith. And from where I'm standing that can happen anywhere. ✨



Originally from Hawke's Bay Tadek Markowski is a Beijing-based journalist. He's lived in China with his wife, Karin and their three children for the past four years.



# A Home to Lay Their Heads



HELEN BERGIN talked to **Don and Toni Matthews** of St Dominic's Parish in Blockhouse Bay about their involvement with Mae Sot Orphanage in Thailand run by Dominican Sisters.

**I**n a former occupation I was a businessman trading in Asia. My recent involvement with Mae Sot orphanage in Northern Thailand bordering Myanmar has been one way of my wife Toni and I returning something to Asia.

"On one occasion we invited a former parishioner and Dominican priest Fr Alex Vickers, to accompany us to Mae Sot. From Adelaide where he was then missioned Fr Alex has also become a keen supporter of the Northern Thai people and their projects.

"In 2010, Mother Josefa Alzua from the Religious Missionaries of St Dominic in Spain, founded the Holy Infant Orphanage at Mae Sot. The orphanage was entrusted to the Sisters by the local Diocese of

Nakhon Sawan.

"Argentinian-born Sr Marcela Colipan was given charge of the orphanage with one Korean Sister assisting her and two Filipina Sisters commissioned to teach in local schools.

"Today, the Sisters caring for the orphanage and teaching migrants come from the Philippines and Japan, while their postulant is from Burma.

"Currently, the orphanage caters for nearly 40 Burmese and Thai children. Approximately 80 per cent come from Myanmar (Burma) – with ages spanning 3 to 17 years old.

"The school caters primarily for girls (although in special circumstances some young boys and/or brothers of the girls are accepted). Most children have been orphaned or abandoned. A few have one parent back in Myanmar.

"The school prepares the children for work by offering life skills along with basic language and mathematical concepts.

"Daily prayer is essential for

the Sisters and thus the children experience a prayerful environment. While most come from Buddhist families, the children pray daily with the Sisters and with the priest who celebrates Eucharist. Never is pressure placed on the children to become Christian.

"Many of the children come from compromising household situations and require safety. Some never return to their families. The Sisters' mission is: "To provide a service for children in need." While the Sisters provide the children with food, clothing and shelter, they also offer care to assist in situations of parental separation, child abandonment and domestic abuse. They also help the young ones to develop skills for employment.

"On an early visit to this orphanage I learnt the story of a young woman – let's call her Rose. She is now 21 years old. This woman suffered multiple abuses from working in a brothel. Once when she was dropped home, her mother was found living on a construction site. Eventually, the young woman underwent lengthy hospital treatment – but nothing could cure her psychological pain. The plight of this young woman and of many others in Thailand is heart-wrenching.

"Some children have homes to

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





which they return. Others do not. Some find jobs and once settled, they often lose contact with the Sisters and the orphanage. Generally, the Sisters and children are well accepted by locals and some local people have also become benefactors.

"New Zealanders have enabled the orphanage to harness water for drinking and washing. Now during the rainy season, spouting collects water from the roofs into water tanks. A solar system also generates power – enabling the Sisters and children to enjoy baking and sewing among other things. The overflow from solar power supplies power to pump extra water to newly-constructed water tanks. Caritas Singapore has supported this venture.

"We know from responses of the locals in Mae Sot and in Vietnam that orphanages and schools (such as the one we visit) are still needed and appreciated. The Sisters' care for children in both countries is high and the Sisters are lovingly respected.



"Contrary to some contemporary accounts of children elsewhere being sent to boarding schools to spare families the care and expense of their own children, no such situation has occurred at Mae Sot. The children there are often abandoned because of poverty or have medical conditions too painful or too expensive for families to face. At Mae Sot, approximately 50 per cent of the children and youth are orphaned. The others need special care.

"We are immensely grateful to the many benefactors from New Zealand and Australia who have generously supported the various practical projects." ★

## Panguru and the City Kainga Tahī, Kainga Rua: An Urban Migration History

by Melissa Matutina Williams

First published by Bridget Williams Books 2015

Reviewed by Rangi Davis

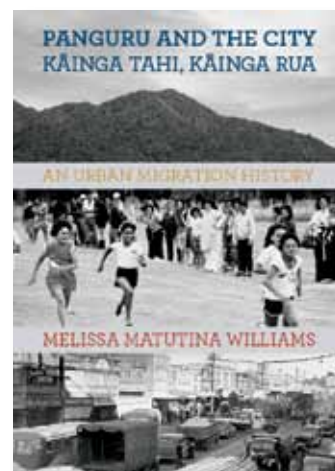
BOOK

**P***anguru and the City Kāinga Tahī, Kāinga Rua* begins with an interview with two Māori elders (brothers) who had left Panguru, Northland for Auckland as 12 and 13-year-olds. They remembered the excitement of working alongside other *whānau* with the dream of returning to the *papa kāinga* (family homestead) in the future. But months turned into years and *kāinga tahī* (home one) and *kāinga rua* (home two) became a reality. The city home was where their children were born, married and their *mokopuna* went to school with shops and facilities close by. In contrast, Panguru had two shops and they remembered the farm with mud and gumboots, flooded rivers to cross, a single vehicle to drive passengers for shopping, business or to the health clinic in Kaitiāia. Otherwise they walked or rode a horse. But Panguru was home!

Living between these two worlds had its difficulties. Many did not realise their dream and returned to Panguru only as *tūpāpaku* (deceased). One of the brothers, Taria Peita, died in October this year and was taken home to his Panguru *urupā* and *ūkaipō* to be buried with his ancestors. *Moe māi e te mātua, i roto i nga ringa manaaki a te Karaiti.*

Author Melissa Matutina Williams born in Auckland, went to live with her Nan in Panguru when she was 13 and heard the stories of *whānau* who had migrated to Auckland to earn money for their *papa kāinga* and tribal *whenua*. They always intended to return permanently but circumstances along the way changed their opportunities.

Melissa's Panguru stories are an example of Māori migration and urbanisation all over Aotearoa.



Māori were lured off their farms because the government wanted the land and offered Māori housing, benefits, paid work and education opportunities in the cities. But no infrastructure was put into place to *manaaki* (support, offer hospitality) them and many of these generous, hard-working people with principles shaped by their *reo*, *tikanga*, tribal and *whānau* connectedness and especially their commitment to their *Katorikatanga* (Catholic faith), struggled. The experience of assimilation and legislation rendered Māori people faceless and voiceless in the cities.

Melissa tells stories of her people's resilience in facing the turmoil and uncertainties of city life and how they quietly got on. "*Mahia te mahi*. Just do it" was a favourite line of my own mother from Panguru.

This book resonated with me. My husband and I moved to the city in 1988 on a mission with the Marist Brothers and to be there for our children attending college and university. Now 30 years later, we're still here supporting our children and *mokopuna*. We are living between *kāinga tahī* and *kāinga rua*! ★



# JOURNEYS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

JENNY COLLINS traces the waves of Irish and Lebanese immigration in Dunedin and their participation in the Catholic school system.

When our thoughts turn to the birthday of the Christ child, we often anticipate a time of family gatherings and summer holidays. But Christmas is also a story of a journey — Matthew's Gospel tells of a young family escaping the perils of home and surviving the dangers of travel to the hope of a better life in a new land. This story of danger and hope is part of the experience of the many refugee and migrant families who make Aotearoa New Zealand their home today. It is also part of our shared history as an immigrant nation — so many of us come from

families who left poverty and oppression in search of a better future in a new land.

## Irish Journeys of Hope

Growing up in 1960s Dunedin I remember well the lilting accents of the Irish sisters and priests who were an integral part of Catholic life in the city. But our Irish links go back further — to the 1850s when Irish families first began travelling to Aotearoa New Zealand in search of a new life for themselves and their children. Family connections stretching across the world were a particularly Irish phenomenon. Generally one family member (often an older brother or sister) made the journey first, reporting back to their families about the green country of New Zealand so like their own, and sending money so that other relatives could follow later.

My own Irish forebears were the daughters and sons of small tenant farmers who left the impoverished south and west of Ireland on assisted passages and made their homes in places such as Dunedin, South Canterbury and Auckland. Denied schooling in Ireland, they placed their hopes for a better future on a Catholic education for their children, preferably taught by Irish sisters, brothers and priests who could hand on the Catholic faith and protect their Irish cultural traditions.

## Lebanese Family Journeys

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words — it certainly tells a story of change better than any long explanation. In this photo of 47 children taken about 1926 we see some of the grandchildren of one generation of immigrants and the children of another. St Joseph's Parish School Dunedin (now St Joseph's Cathedral School) was a primary school run by the Dominican Sisters for the children of poor and working class families. While the continued presence of Irish families is clear in names such as Hagarty, Duggan, O'Driscoll, McCullough and McAlevey, the photo also introduces us to a new generation of Catholic immigrants — the Lebanese families who arrived in the city after 1890.

By the 1920s the roll call at St Joseph's included names such as Lahood, Joseph, Farry, George, Arab and Mansoor. Known as Maronites (one of the Eastern Catholic Churches) Dunedin's Lebanese families originally came from Bsharri in the Kadisha Valley — well known as the home of the Cedars of Lebanon. Leaving a subsistence existence as small farmers and years of poverty and drought, many settled in inner city Dunedin. Some anglicised their family names or adopted similar English names — for instance the name Farry, which became associated with business, was originally Fakhry, a clan of families.



Photo courtesy of the Dominican Sisters

### Children at St Joseph's Primary School Dunedin c1926

L to R : as numbered

1. L. Hagarty, D. Parsons, M. Morland, M. Dyson, F. Elliott, M. Hanna, E. McDonald
2. J. Lahood, J. Duggan, J. Bray, J. Bacos, F. Mansoor, T. McAlevey
3. M. Hannan, T. Dawkins, B. Mordy, F. Joseph, M. Prendergast, W. Keenan, F. Coory
4. R. Hanna, A. Keenan, M. Coory, N. Cockerill, R. McDonald, M. Keenan, F. Farry
5. L. Joseph, F. Arab, P. Coory, A. Mansoor, E. Cockerill, K. Conard, G. Conard, J. McCullough
6. A. Reid, F. Lahood, J. Conard, J. Hanna, F. George
7. J. McAlevey, A. Campbell, A. Dyson, R. Todd, F. O'Driscoll, W. Manson, F. Coory



Like the Irish immigrants a generation before, they brought with them strong family and cultural traditions, a love of education and a desire to improve the lives of their children.

### Faith and Catholic Primary Schools

So what about the Catholic schools that these children attended? A separate Catholic school system arose out of the 1877 Education Act and its famous “secular” clause. From the 1870s onwards, Catholic bishops used the process of establishing and funding a school system to crystallise the group identity of the Catholics of New Zealand.

Patrick Moran, the Bishop of Dunedin (1870-1895), was a particularly vigorous advocate of the Church’s view that Catholic schools and teaching religious were the only way to ensure the initiation of children into the Catholic way of life and Irish culture. By the turn of the century the fundamentals were in place, as each parish had a primary school, maintained in part by the fund-raising efforts of the Catholic community, in part by school fees and in part by the sacrifice of the teachers. By sending their children to Catholic schools Dunedin’s Irish and Lebanese parents became part of a “collective sacrifice”, a bonding process that connected every level of the community in a common cause – to pass on the Catholic faith and improve the life chances of Catholic children.

*By sending their children to Catholic schools Dunedin’s Irish and Lebanese parents became part of a bonding process that connected every level of the community in a common cause.*

### New Journeys of Danger and Hope

The presence of Irish nuns and brothers and an Irish model of education, culture and Church continued to be important for the Catholic community. Nevertheless, change was in the air. Notwithstanding their strong cultural and emotional links with the “old country”, the children and grandchildren of Irish and Lebanese settlers began to think of themselves first as good Catholics and, second, as citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand.

And, after World War II when new generations of Catholic families from Europe and elsewhere made their own journeys of danger and hope to Aotearoa New Zealand, things would change again.

Today, like the Christ child and his family, refugee and migrant families are still escaping the perils of home, enduring the dangers of the journey and hoping for better lives for themselves and their children. Their stories continue to be integral to who we are as a people and what we are becoming as a nation. ✨



**Jenny Collins** is a wife, mother, grandmother, historian and gardener. Originally from Dunedin, she lives in Sandspit, on the Matakana Coast, with her husband John.

## The Rosminian Mission: Sowers of the Second Spring

By John Michael Hill IC  
Published by Gracewing, 2017  
Reviewed by John Stenhouse

BOOK

Michael Hill’s beautifully written and superbly illustrated history of the Rosminian mission to England and Wales during the 19th century illuminates a subject about which we have known very little until now. Directed from Italy by Antonio Rosmini, founder of the Institute of Charity, the Rosminian mission contributed significantly to Catholicism’s “Second Spring” – a phrase John Newman used to describe the remarkable revival of the Catholic Church in the United Kingdom.

Who would have predicted it? In 1800, Catholicism faced huge challenges. Industrialisation was transforming the country. The evangelical revival had revitalized Protestants within and beyond the Church of England. Enlightenment rationalists were growing in numbers and influence. Everywhere except Ireland, Catholics were a small and embattled minority. The Irish famine of the 1840s sent thousands of poor, often illiterate, Irish Catholics flooding into England and Wales.

Laypeople as well as priests turned Catholic fortunes around. The Irish lawyer-politician, Daniel O’Connell, led the campaign for Catholic emancipation. Reviving – after the Napoleonic wars – new missions (domestic and foreign) began. The author paints vivid portraits of key personalities such as the first leader of the Rosminian parish missions, Luigi Gentili, a warm and passionate Italian whose effectiveness improved the more he learned about English culture. Lay women as well as men provided vital support.

Occasionally I found myself hoping to learn more about the mission “from below” – from the perspective of the laypeople involved. Noting the missionaries’ “sheer attraction”, Hill observes that, before cinema and television, the missions “provided the best show in town”. I’d love to know more. I suspect that Irish Catholic women often encouraged their men to go. The more faith came alive for their menfolk, the less they were likely to spend on drink, and the more family life would flourish. Probably the sources available to the author, for all their richness, could not shed much light on such questions.

Like history at its best, this book raises questions for us today. New Zealanders have heard for decades about the decline of the Churches and the rise of a secular society as if both are inevitable processes with which mere human beings may not interfere. Hogwash. These are not iron laws of history. Our future is open. It’s up to us. Second Spring, anyone? ✨





## CHILD OF SPIRIT, CHILD OF LIGHT

Child of spirit, child of light,  
warming hearts in coldest places,  
bringing joy to cheerless faces,  
born to love, this Christmas night,  
child of spirit, child of light:

with the frightened  
little one, among the  
you have joined the  
in the tent of  
with the frig

for the children of the  
you come cradled,  
where the hawks call  
where earth  
for the child





refugee,  
the nameless  
hurt and homeless  
of poverty,  
frightened refugee:

the world,  
you come crying  
of war are flying,  
s miseries unfold  
ren of the world.

Come and teach us what is peace:  
to our lovelessness and violence  
to the voice of terror's tyrants,  
to each home and every race,  
come and teach us what is peace!

In our time and in our place,  
one more year unwrapping Christmas,  
be the hope that God is with us,  
that each one of us know peace  
in our time and in our place.

by Shirley Erena Murray 2017©

Painting: Guatemalan Nativity by  
Fr John Giuliani © www.jbgiconom



# Painting Jesus as a Baby in His Family



ERIN GRIFFEY shows how the Dutch School of painters changed the depiction of the baby Jesus to that of a real human baby.

Images of Jesus as an infant, whether as a newborn in Nativity scenes or the Adoration of the Magi or in depictions of the Holy Family, became popular in the later Middle Ages and proliferated in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. These pictures actively participated in everyday piety by situating devotion in human terms.

It is therefore striking that the infant Jesus is often depicted in an awkwardly adult manner in the pictures — sometimes with a mature face, or with oddly developed musculature, or in some instances miraculously holding his body upright without assistance, and still others show him with dramatic gestures of blessing.



**Fig 1** Geertgen tot Sint Jans, *The Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1480-85, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

**Fig 2** Studio of Rembrandt, *The Holy Family at Night*, c. 1642-48, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

**Fig 3** Gabriël Metsu, *The Sick Child*, c. 1664-66, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Geertgen tot Sint Jans's newborn Jesus, for example, is able to reach toward some of the Magi gifts while also keeping his heavy head upright unsupported (fig. 1). These are hardly characteristics of the babies we visit soon after birth, often asleep or crying, their faces pinched, their limbs still unsure. If the supernatural features of the typical painted Christ child have a function in showing his spiritual strength, they are nevertheless somewhat difficult to reconcile with our lived experience.

## Rembrandt Paints From Observation

That is what makes Rembrandt and his pupils' sensitively observed depictions of the Holy Family so special. Paintings from the Dutch Golden Age tend to have an uncanny ability to represent biblical stories in immediately identifiable, human terms. In their attention to prosaic details — a worn floorboard, a wrinkled forehead — they insist on visual truth that does not deny the glory of the biblical story. We can argue that in fact the truthfulness of the image enhances its power for the viewer.

One of these pictures that is much beloved in Holland, and has featured on Dutch Christmas cards, is a Holy Family that was once attributed to Rembrandt but now identified as from his studio and dating likely to the 1640s (fig. 2). If aspects of the picture betray a hand different — but very much influenced by — the master, that does not detract from the poignancy of the image. At first glance we





may not recognise it as a Holy Family. Instead of something otherworldly, we find an insistent domestic interior, with its everyday symphony of colours and textures: the veiny plaster walls, knotted wood, the sheen of glazed pottery, a metal wall sconce.

It is a night scene, the family safely cosy inside. The three main figures are huddled in a tightly knit circle bathed in warm light. The infant Jesus is shown in deep sleep in his wicker basket, his head propped up on a feather pillow that sinks under his weight, his face naturalistically turned to one side, his cheeks red with warmth. It must be cold. The windows are shut and the baby is draped in layers, his mother and grandmother wear heavy clothes. Mary reads: her book seems to be both lit and a source of light, suggesting the spiritual illumination of Christ's promise of salvation.

The older woman pictured asleep nearby represents Mary's mother, Anne, who clutches the rope which rocks the baby's cradle. Even in her unconsciousness she is alert to the baby's needs.

Below, under the stairs, Joseph is pictured, awake, not breaking the stillness and safety of the scene — he is tucked away. The viewer, too, is positioned as a guard to this gentle scene, as if we, too, must keep the quiet, let the child sleep and the others keep their soft rhythms, ready to keep rocking the cradle, to keep the book open, the candle burning.

This picture of the Holy Family as a Dutch domestic scene, with its gentle evocation of the real rhythms and

textures of nature and human relationships, positions the biblical and the real world as interconnected.

In a similar sense, Gabriel Metsu's touching picture of a mother with her sick child (fig. 3) mirrors traditional images of the Madonna and Child, as well as depictions of the Pietà. The mother looks closely and lovingly at her child — both her gaze and her body enclosing and supporting the child, who looks out unflinchingly, as if too weak to implore for her help or to cry. The mother keeps something warm to eat nearby. The viewer, as with the Holy Family night scene described above, is anticipated here as a sympathetic observer. In the background, just above the child, there is a picture of the Crucifixion, perhaps a reference to the child's poor health but also linking this real-life mother and child with Mary and the suffering Jesus.

These artists understood the biblical Holy Family in deeply human terms, using their own knowledge of maternal love, human suffering, and the cadence and surfaces of real life. They understood that the first relationship we have is to our mother and our family, and that to know the Bible, to carry the mental and spiritual weights of Mary and Christ, we must also belong to the living world. The place these pictures leave for viewers, too, insists on the importance of continued relish in the beauty, however prosaic, of the world around us, and to be alert always to the needs of others. ✨



**Erin Griffey** is an art historian, a senior lecturer at the University of Auckland and author of *On Display: Henrietta Maria and the Materials of Magnificence at the Stuart Court* (Yale University Press, 2015).



# We Do Not Walk Alone



JOY COWLEY reads Luke's nativity story as a parable for our spiritual journey.

Advent is usually seen as the story of Jesus' birth and the beginning of Christianity; but if we also see the readings as parable, we move them to a personal place as guidance for our journey. Step by step they bring us closer to the light that cannot be held in words.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Arguments about the virgin birth have no place in the spiritual journey. The truth is we all have a virgin space in our lives. It is a restless space, a hunger in the heart that only God can fill. Men and women alike, we are made to become pregnant with God. That is our destiny.

And he came to her and said: "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you!" She was perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

First there comes the greeting, something like an inner nudge. This is the tug of love at the heart, so gentle that we wonder if we are imagining it. Perhaps it happens through words or a companion or a moment of beauty. Whatever, the greeting opens a closed door in us, and we can feel vulnerable and confused. What does this mean?

The angel said: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

NZ writer **Joy Cowley** is a wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and retreat facilitator. She lives in Featherston with her husband Terry Coles.



The movement in the heart is now stronger. It is a call of some kind and we are expected to respond, even though we don't yet know what it's about. Our feeling of vulnerability increases. Our head is saying: "No, no! This is a lot of nonsense!" But our heart has tasted something so sweet that it surpasses thinking, and it is clamouring: "Yes, yes, yes!"

Mary said to the angel: "How can this be since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her: "The Holy Spirit

will come upon you, and the power of the most High will overshadow you."

Our yes has been taken and turned into a Presence that is beyond our limited sensate system. It is both within us and outside us, filling and guiding, and always it is love. But our celebration is tinged with timidity. When we feel love moving us in a particular direction, we go back to self-doubt. "How can I? I'm not qualified to do this? People will



laugh or criticise. I'm afraid I will make a fool of myself." But the power of inner love is patient, saying to us: "Trust me and see," and before long we find ourselves growing into that trust. Our self-consciousness eases as we realise that the work is done for us. We simply have to make ourselves available.

Then Mary said: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word."

This is not to say that the path will be easy. Our notions of worship are often dressed in Sunday best and it's not easy to see the holy Presence in shabbiness. Nor is it always easy to walk with sisters and brothers who are outside Church approval. But now the bonding of love is so strong that it demands obedience. We may object, say: "No, I can't do this." But the call will keep coming back, each time stronger, until we say: "OK, let it be done to me."

Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greetings, the child leaped in her womb.

Faith nurtures faith. We do not walk alone. When we meet another pregnant with God the love within us leaps in recognition, light sensing light, truth acknowledging truth. We are all pilgrims on the same beautiful road and everyone's place of journey is sacred.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The call is about being real, and being real is "humility" or knowing who we are. The birthing of Christ is not in an inn but a stable. It's not about silken robes but bands of cloth. Not a royal cradle but a manger. While we have honoured the birthing story with cathedrals, jewels and fine vestments, the reality of it in our lives is always very simple. It is in this utter simplicity that we know God.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another: "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

Shepherds were nomads who had a dubious reputation, known to be thieves and murderers. Why did the good news come first to them? Well, that's the way it was. Jesus always reached to the outcasts of society, the people who struggled, the people who knew their need. We struggle. We know our need. Is this why he chooses us and trusts us with the good news? Like the shepherds we race to the manger knowing that in our neediness we are favoured by God.

## Magnificat – Mary's Gift to Us

My soul sings in gratitude.  
I'm dancing in the mystery of God.  
The life of the Holy One is within me,  
and I am blessed, so truly blessed.

This goes deeper than the human mind.  
My heart is filled with awe  
at Love whose only condition  
is that it be received.

It's a gift not for the proud.  
They have no room for it.  
The strong and self-sufficient  
do not have this awareness.  
But those who know their emptiness  
can rejoice in Love's fullness.

This is the Love we are made for,  
the reason for our existence.  
It fills our inmost heart space  
and brings to birth in us,  
the Holy Child of God. ✨

Painting: *Mother and Son* by Bryce Brown ©  
[www.brycebrownart.com](http://www.brycebrownart.com)



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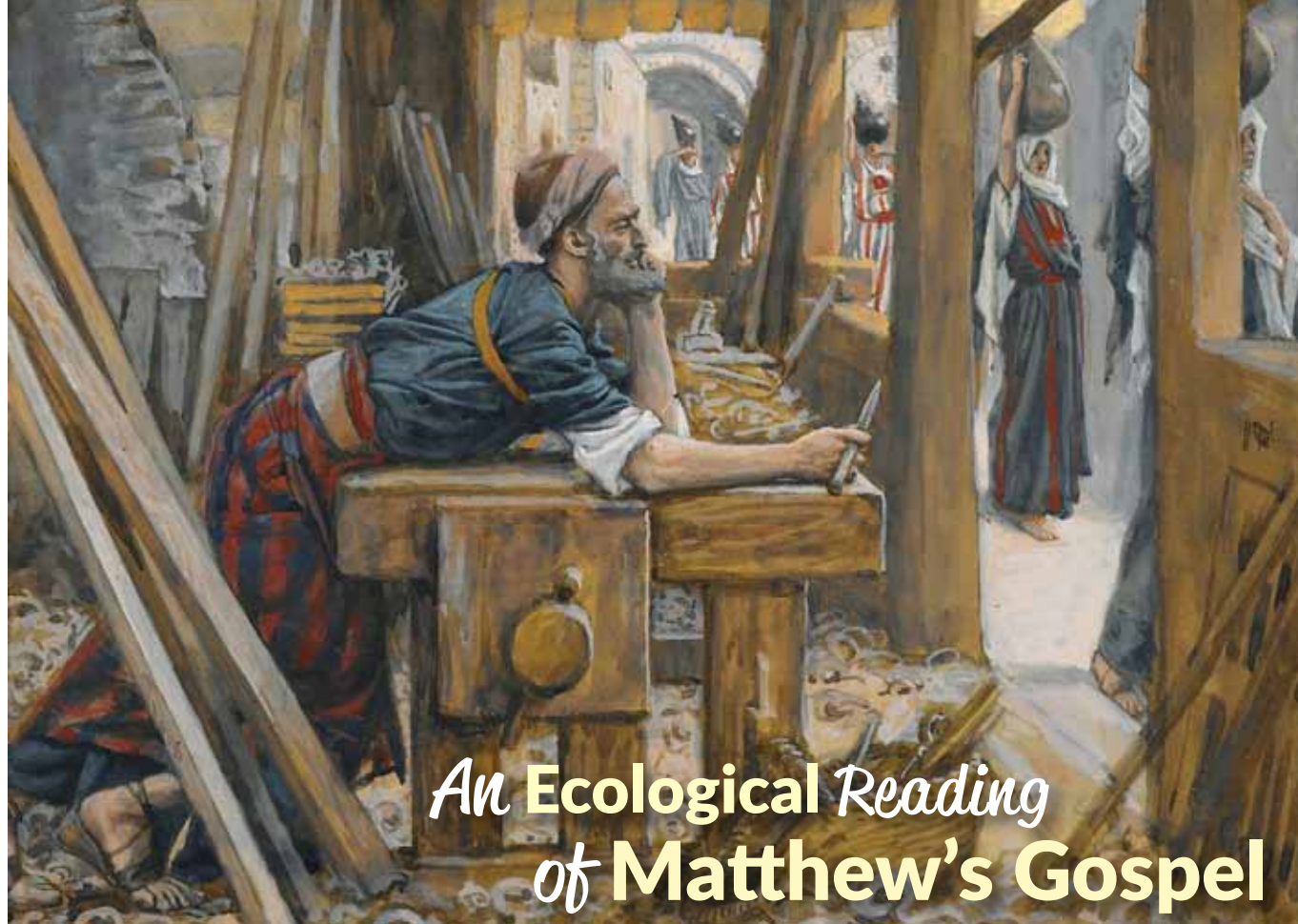
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Painting: *The Anxiety of Saint Joseph* by James Tissot 1886-1894. Brooklyn Museum

## An Ecological Reading of Matthew's Gospel

In my column in February (TM issue 212, 2017: 20-21) I looked at the opening verse of the Gospel of Matthew 1:1: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christos, son of David, son of Abraham." I noted that the phrase "book of the genealogy" appears first in the biblical narrative in Gen 2:4 where it refers to the genealogy of the "heavens and the earth", the cosmos. It is not until Gen 5:1-2 that we find reference to the "book of the genealogy" of the human community, male and female. So the very beginning of the Matthean Gospel sets the story of Jesus, the one named "the human one" (Mt 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 40 and elsewhere), not only within the human story but also within the story of the cosmic and Earth communities. This story is constantly expanding, capturing our imaginations and our very being in new ways. It seems appropriate then at the end of 2017, and in this time of Advent, to turn our ecological lens on the story of the birth of Jesus Christos.

The Matthean genealogy repeats

39 times that *male* (eg, Abraham) engendered/gave birth to *male* (eg, Isaac). This obscures the pregnant female body that embraces and sustains each one born in the genealogy. And even more, this patrilineage obscures myriad Earth processes. The Matthean narrative re-turns readers to the materiality of pregnancy and birth in Mt 1:18 which opens with the words: "The birth of Jesus took place in this way". As this verse unfolds — "when his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit" — material and socio-cultural elements intertwine.

*The salvation promised in the birth of this child can also be envisaged ecologically.*

We find the betrothal period of Jewish law is the temporal setting of Mt 1:18-25 and it points to the future potential of a shared physical space for Joseph and Mary: "before they lived together". Time and space, two keys to the ecological, play within this opening verse.

Other aspects of habitat seem shadowy or almost absent in the story.

But the materiality of pregnancy is not shadowy or absent: Mary has a child in her womb (*en gastri echousa*). The gestating child has a habitat—*en gastri*, in the womb, in the body of the woman Mary, his mother.

Anne Elvey has drawn attention to the significance of the pregnant body in her writing. She claims evocatively that the birth of the child from the pregnant woman also evokes the birth of the mother. In the Matthean narrative, *mētēr*/mother occurs first in Mt 1:18 in relation to the *genesis* of Jesus when both the mother (Mary) and the child (Jesus) are born in and through their interconnectedness with/in the pregnant body. Almost before readers can appreciate the materiality of this pregnancy and the birth of Mary as mother, however, the Matthean narrator inserts the phrase *ek pneumatos hagiou* (Mt 1:18, 20 — from, out of, or by a spirit that is holy), to describe the genesis of Jesus.

The Australian eco-theologian, Denis Edwards, envisions this Spirit that is holy as the one "breathing life into the universe in all its stages: into its laws and initial conditions, its origin and its evolution". It is this Spirit that links the birth of the human Jesus to all other births, not only of human

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births but of the more-than-human or Earth constituents, in the ongoing becoming of what is new. Therefore, in this view, the Spirit can be linked to the genealogy of the heavens/sky and the Earth in its unfolding over billions of years and through multiple processes. This same Spirit is also intimately connected to the unfolding of the male and female genealogy and to Jesus' particular birth in the story. Habitat, human and the holy are intertwined. If we can read our gospel narrative in this way then it, in turn, can read us anew, shaping an ecological consciousness.

recognises a particular moment in the unfolding of the Earth story in and through which traces of the divine are revealed in a particular human/earthed being, Jesus. G\*d has been "with us" from the beginning as indicated in the opening of the genealogy. G\*d is now with us, the contemporary Earth community, in and through the birth of this particular child in all his materiality and his con-textuality within a web of multiple interrelationships.

The Gospel of Matthew ends on a similar note when the risen Jesus promises the disciples to "be with you" to the

Matthew 1: 18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 But just when he

had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord

through the prophet: 23 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of God commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus. (NRSV)

The repetition of the phrase *ek pneumatos hagiou*/from, out of, or by a spirit that is holy in Mt 1:20 turns the reader from the materiality of betrothal, pregnancy and potential birth, to the divine purpose of this birth conveyed in the words of an angel: "He will save this people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). We usually read the theme of salvation/saving in the biblical narrative from either a human or a divine perspective — political and prophetic characters such as Moses, Joshua and Isaiah are potential saviours of Israel who rescue the people from oppressors. Likewise the Divine Saviour rescues socio-politically and also from what is named as sin. An ecological reader will bring new questions to this theme.

It is not difficult to imagine these questions as the language of "saving" threads through our ecological consciousness and our ecological networks and communities. We speak of *saving* species from extinction, *saving* old-growth forests from logging for purely economic gains, or saving planet Earth from the ravages of the human community. This violence and destruction can be named as "sin" in our times. Jesus, whom the angel proclaims as "saving this people from their sins", can be understood and interpreted as permeating not only social, cultural and political processes towards transforming newness. Such saving can be and needs also to be read in relation to what we now name as ecological sins so that the *salvation* promised in the birth of this child can also be envisaged ecologically. The Earth and the cosmos participate in the saving transformation that we so often limit to humankind.

Such an expanded consciousness can also inform our reading of Isaiah's text quoted in Mt 1:23: "Look, the virgin/the young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us'"

G\*d is with "us", Earth and all Earth's constituents within the cosmos. This evocation is not of a particular geographical, historical, political and economic community but of all who participate in the biotic and abiotic cosmic community within the context of a new ecological awareness. The Matthean depiction of Jesus as "G\*d with us"

"end of the age" (Mt 28:20). As in Mt 1:23 the "you" like the "us" need not be limited to the human community. Rather, it can extend to the entire Earth community and beyond to the all that is in the cosmos. What an extraordinary vision the opening and closing of the Gospel of Matthew can offer to those whose eyes are becoming open to the ecological, to the cosmic ✨

[Ed] This is Elaine's last column of an ecological reading of the Gospels. She will continue to write for Tui Motu on occasion.



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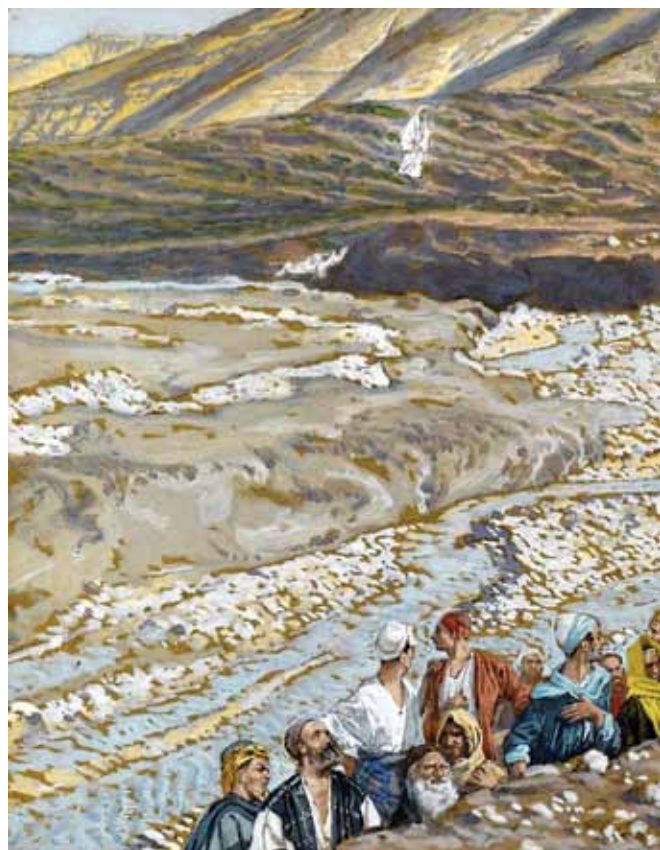
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# John the Baptist

KATHLEEN RUSHSTON explains the difference between John the Baptist in John's Gospel from the other Gospels and the message he calls us to understand.

Painting: *John the Baptist Sees Jesus from Afar* by James Tissot



No character is more associated with Advent, the coming of Jesus or the *advent*-ure a disciple undertakes by following the way of life set out by Jesus than John, known as the Baptist or the Baptiser. The evangelist well may have assumed that those who first heard the Fourth Gospel proclaimed knew about him. No mention is made of John's clothing, denouncing people, baptising Jesus, his imprisonment or death. Instead, he is quite a different character (John 1:6-8, 15, 19-37; 3:22-36; 5:31-47; 10:41). John uses an analogy to sum up his relationship with Jesus. He is "the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices at the bridegroom's voice" (Jn 3:29).

## "A Man Sent from God"

A move occurs from the cosmic (Jn 1:1-5) to earth. Events happen in time and place: "There was a man sent from God." In this Gospel's textual world, the only other character described as "sent from God" is Jesus (Jn 1:14, 6:46; 7:29; 9:33; 16:27; 17:18). The stage is set for John's role of bearing witness to Jesus (Jn 1:7; 15, 32, 34, 3:32; 5:33). His cry of witness rings out through this Gospel's early scenes. The other Gospels tell us: "A voice came from heaven: 'This/You are my beloved son with whom I am well pleased'", while in the Fourth Gospel, John testifies: "I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God" (Jn 1:34). He is the first in a line of witnesses: the Woman of Samaria (Jn 4:39),

the works of Jesus (Jn 5:36; 10:25); the Scriptures (Jn 5:39), the crowd (Jn 12:17); the Advocate (Jn 15:26), the followers of Jesus (Jn 15:27) and the Father (Jn 5:32, 37; 8:18).

## Jesus Sets Out a Way of Living

A distinctive feature of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is that he sets out a way of living. No mention is made of the reign (*basileia*) of God or of the heavens. Instead, Jesus is presented as having people seek him out to become disciples. Disciples are followers of a teacher from whom they learn a way of living. Jesus, the teacher, sets out a way of living centred on attachment to him. Knowing him is a process of unfolding discovery, a lifelong pilgrimage.

John not only has his origins with God but also the Holy Spirit, the one who will "abide" with the disciples and who will continue the works of God. The Spirit enters the human story through his testimony: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained (*menō*) on him" (Jn 1:32). It is on John's lips that we first heard the word *menō*, found 40 times and translated in Bibles as "stay", "continue", "remains", "endure", "live", "dwell", "abide". This word characterises the relationship between God and Jesus, the Spirit and Jesus, and Jesus and disciples. *Menō* describes what being a disciple is all about — abiding in Jesus.

## First Concern

John's social status and honour came from his father, Zechariah, a faithful rural priest. Concern arose in Jerusalem because John was behaving like a prophet which was not in keeping with his priestly heritage. The traditional tension between priests and prophets lingers. So, the Pharisees sent priests and Levites (Jn 1:19, 24) with two concerns. The first concern is about the identity of

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







John: "Who are you?" John denies he is the Messiah, Elijah or "the prophet." Then, adapting the words of Isaiah who says "a voice cries out" (Jn 40:3), John declares he is that voice: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."

Why the Jordan? Why in wilderness? The location where John was baptising is full of meaning for his questioners. He is not preaching or baptising in villages or cities but in the wilderness and most likely where the people of Israel once crossed the Jordan to enter a new land – the Promised Land. He is preaching to Israel. A new Exodus and new coming into the Promised Land is near. Hosts of associations are evoked. The Jordan River is found as a proper name in over 80 contexts in the Old Testament. Crossing of the Jordan is a recurring motif. Time and again, mention is made of its strong flow. Crossing into that green, fertile land was not easy.

## Second Concern

A second concern is the question of why John is baptising: "Why are you baptising?" Baptism was common in the ancient world both within and beyond Judaism. The rite derived meaning from a particular tradition or context and was regarded as symbolic. John's questioners, therefore, wanted to know what his baptism meant. In Mark and Luke, it was "a baptism for the forgiveness of sins". Not so in the Fourth Gospel. John, who baptises with water, says one is coming his questioners do not know. He continues: "The one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal" (Jn 1:26-27). Implied here, and later, is John's testimony that the One who will come

will bring a deeper, more radical purification. Clearly he points to Jesus' divine identity. The role of John is subordinated – untying sandals was slave's work.

## Bethany-beyond-the Jordan

John is not described specifically as baptising people "in the River Jordan" but in Bethany across the Jordan (Jn 1:28) – a site known today as Al Maghtas in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. While the exact location is unknown, he is placed in the powerful mythic landscape of the Jordan River. Mythic because most Jews and Christians – throughout history and today – have never visited there so it retains its strangeness and mystery through time. Our knowledge of the symbolism of the purifying water of this region comes through biblical texts and cultural traditions. A huge gap exists between rich biblical symbolism and material reality today.

The River Jordan is in an area of the planet most threatened by a decline in water supply. Generations of intense conflict is inflamed easily by water shortage. Most pilgrims who visit the three possible baptismal sites, and those who hear this Gospel proclaimed, are unaware these sacred waters are both an intently watched international border and polluted. Moral theologian Christiana Peppard describes this river as "a limp toxic strip of water. A warning sign conveys the hazard posed by coming into contact with this water." There is little Christian ethical engagement with the waters of the Jordan. She continues: "The material and symbolic status of the river needs to be drawn together more tightly if ecology is indeed a vital part of faith." Such ethical engagement permeates the remarkable documentary film, *Seven Rivers Walking – Haere Mārire*. This series of *hiko* (walks) along seven Canterbury rivers began on Ash Wednesday, 2017, as an act of repentance.

In *whakawhānaungatanga* (making right relationship happen), during Advent we join liturgically and creatively with our ancestors who expressed the relationship of John and Jesus, who in sandals walked the Earth (Jn 1:27), in the rhythms of the Universe. The birth of John is celebrated on 24 June (mid-summer in northern hemisphere) when the sun begins to decrease. The birth of Jesus is celebrated on 25 December at the time of the midwinter solstice when light begins to increase. How are we like John, who is not the light, but in the words of Jesus "was a lamp that was kindled and shining" (Jn 5:35)? ✨

Third Sunday of Advent – John 1:6-8, 19-28  
Roman Lectionary and Revised Common Lectionary

### Theology and Spirituality from New Zealand

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# UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

For most of us, Christmas is a time of joy to spend with our families, *whanau* and loved ones. But we seldom acknowledge the cruel underside of the festive season. It is common from year to year to see a spike in domestic violence in Aotearoa — meaning that for some of us, Christmas is not a time of joy but is instead a time of stress and fear.

It can be hard to comprehend that this season can have such devastating implications, but there are many factors that can make the Christmas period particularly toxic. Christmas is a time of increased alcohol consumption, financial stress, tense family relationships being put to the test, and we lack our normal outlets for dealing with high emotions such as having time out by going to work, playing sports or seeing friends. As many of life's normalities are on pause over the Christmas period, it can bring frustrations to the surface more readily.

New Zealand's domestic violence statistics are simply horrifying. According to Women's Refuge, between 33-39 per cent of women will experience physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. Yet conversations I've had with friends and acquaintances have highlighted that the extent of knowledge around abusive relationships is limited in New Zealand. It's very common to hear: "But why didn't they just leave?" — a sentence that dismisses the complexities of abusive relationships and puts the responsibility for the abuse on the victim.

In order to promote discussion and offer an opportunity to reframe the conversation on domestic violence, I would like to offer some information that has recently been shared with me. A few months ago I attended a lecture in which the speaker asked us to reject entirely the idea of "unhealthy relationships", and replace it with the idea that there can be a relationship with an abusive person and an abused person.

This change in terminology is critical in removing the sense of blame from the victim. What lies behind the shift in framing is the idea that a person who is abusive towards their partner is deliberately so — they make the choice to treat their partner in this way.

It is often thought that an abusive partner acts out in this way because they are unable to control themselves.

However, this does not fit with the typical models of abusive behaviour. If a person is choosing to abuse only their partner, (whether it be physical, emotional, sexual, or financial abuse), as opposed to inflicting the same behaviour on other people within their lives such as family members, colleagues or friends, it proves that their actions are deliberate.

I highly recommend watching a talk by Leslie Morgan Steiner that can be found on TED.com as it provides a succinct and well communicated overview of how abusive behaviour develops in a relationship — through her own story of her first marriage.

Steiner outlines common steps that an abuser takes in developing the climate for abuse: Firstly, seducing and charming the victim, proceeding to isolate them from their support networks before introducing the threat of violence, and then beginning the abusive behaviour.

Her talk highlights a key message — that it can be very difficult to see patterns of behaviours while you are in the relationship, particularly as you begin to operate in "survival mode". In Steiner's own words: "I never once thought of myself as a battered wife — instead I was a very strong woman in love with a deeply troubled man."

It can be easy for abusive behaviour to be normalised, particularly as domestic abuse is often limited to discussions around physical violence, ignoring the trauma that emotional, financial and sexual abuse cause. There is also a lot of social commentary around relationships that can be damaging for someone who is trying to work out if their relationship is causing them harm. Phrases such as "all relationships are hard work" and "all couples have arguments" can be both reinforcing and isolating for someone who is being abused.

With such high statistics in New Zealand, it is important that we keep having these conversations around domestic violence and acknowledge the complexities of the situations and offer our empathy and support to those who find themselves in this incredibly difficult situation.

There are some fantastic agencies that be contacted such as **Women's Refuge** (0800 733 843), **Shine** (0508 744 633), and **It's Not OK** (0800 456 450) with trained professionals who are there to help both those who are in a harmful situation, as well as those who are concerned about someone they care for. ★

*[Ed] This is Louise's last regular column and we thank her for the issues she has put before us over the last two years. She will continue to write occasionally.*

**Louise Carr-Neil**, an Auckland native living in Hamilton, is passionate about gender equality and human rights. In her spare time she enjoys running and vegetarian cooking.





# Concerted Effort for the Children's Sake

**T**he taxi driver leans on the hibiscus flowers draped over the car dashboard to flash us a grin.

"There's three things here in Tonga that matter most." He counts them on his fingers.

"One, family. Two, family. Three, family." His laughter rises above the radio chatter.

The man has a point. During my time in Tonga the sense of family and community was ever-present, everywhere. Handshakes, nods, calling out to friends from car windows and sidewalks are constant.

If there was a fourth Tongan value it would likely be food. Giving hospitality with food is valued in most cultures and is very true of Tonga. As a guest at various events I frequently had to discourage the local hosts from loading up my plate with more and more helpings.

Understandably, a fuller figure has also been a point of celebration. It's perhaps no coincidence then that Tonga's late King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV weighed in at over 200 kilograms, making him the world's heaviest monarch during his reign.

At the annual Church conference tables struggle to support the feast laid on them. These week-long events are noted in calendars well ahead of time — for good reason. Each village takes turns preparing one of the four feasts that take place each day. A local doctor confided that it's not unheard of for eight people to share two or three roast suckling pigs among them on these occasions.

No one would be shocked then to hear that while rising sea levels slowly eat away at Tongan shores, waistlines in the kingdom have burgeoned. The island nation is now one of the most obese countries in the world and health officials suspect that Tonga's life expectancy has regressed.

The quality of the food is as concerning as the quantity consumed. While few Kiwis and Australians dine on turkey tail or mutton flap, we flood Tongan supermarkets with these fat-laden "junk" meats. Although we deem them unhealthy for domestic consumption, we don't hesitate to export them to our poorer neighbours. Cheap, plentiful and rich in fat, they have played no small part in supersizing the Tongan populace. Equally, white bread and cans of Coca-Cola and corned beef now fill kitchens replacing the fish and fresh vegetables of the traditional Tongan diet.

A storeowner held up a frozen meat pack entirely covered in fat. "What is it?" I asked. "Chicken from the US," she replied shaking her head.

This change of diet in Tonga has happened fairly quickly but the effects on public health have come more slowly and are widespread. It is alarming. Tonga's health budget is blowing out as the incidences of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease have exploded. Around two in three of all hospital admissions are now due to NCDs.



Bread fruit

Just as this tsunami of health problems has been building up for years, it will take many years for it to recede. Fortunately, progress is being made. The high incidence of NCDs in the last decade had been a wake-up call in Tonga and now all levels of society — from government to households — have begun to address the problem of obesity. Public health campaigns have sprung up all over Tonga in an acknowledgement that while the adult population has borne the worst of the NCD epidemic, the next generation can be spared.

Primary schools have begun planting vegetable gardens and children are learning to eat and cook healthy meals with regional produce. Locals are re-learning that the long-ignored breadfruit trees growing plentifully around the islands are an excellent source of nutrition. Exercise programmes have popped up in local communities encouraging people to get moving. Billboards warn of the dangers of tobacco and excessive sugar consumption and taxes drive up the price of fatty foods.

All measures are urgently needed to turn the tide and ensure that Tongan children grow up healthy and happy. It will take all sectors of the community to reverse some of these effects within a generation, but given that it takes a whole village to raise a child, Tonga's love of family stands it in good stead. ✨



**Jack Derwin** is the assistant reporter to a foreign correspondent in the Sydney Bureau of the Japanese newspaper *The Asahi Shimbun*.

# Constant Radical: The Life and Times of Sue Bradford

By Jenny Chamberlain

Published by Fraser Books 2017

Reviewed by Michael Hill IC

BOOK

This fascinating biography of one of the most controversial characters of our time also provides a commentary on our recent social and political history. A prophet has been defined as one who comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. This precisely describes the life of Sue Bradford.

During the period of the Lange and Rowling governments of the 1980s, unemployment, which had hardly existed in the 1970s, soared to over 100,000. Being without work fosters a sense of hopelessness, chronic poverty and declining health. The classless society of earlier times evolved into the rich-and-poor divide that persists today. Throughout, Sue Bradford provided a strident voice, often a lonely one, of constant protest.

At the height of the revolution brought about by Rogernomics in the 1980s, Sue led a series of public demonstrations against government policies: they “earned Sue maximum support and admiration among the dispossessed and voiceless and, simultaneously, the unalloyed, lasting hatred of a thin but powerful layer of well-heeled conservative New Zealanders” (p 215).

For 16 years Sue and her husband Bill strove tirelessly for people out of work. First, they founded the Auckland Unemployed Workers’ Rights Centre, out of which later grew the Auckland People’s Centre. These provided a focus where the



unemployed — maliciously labeled “dole bludgers” — could find support and advocacy: explaining their rights, legal entitlements, and helping them find a place to live. Later, they would even receive free medical and dental services as well as counselling.

Sue’s life changed abruptly in 2000 when she became a Green MP. Now she was on the inside and although the Greens were not in government she was in a position to make a difference. In her maiden speech she declared: “There are two New Zealands living side by side — one of poverty and addictions, unemployment, guns, alcohol, abuse, sickness despair and suicide — the other of people who have nice clothes and high-paid jobs and cars, and know little and care less about the rest.”

As an MP Sue is remembered as the prime mover of the so-called “anti-smacking legislation” — an unfair misnomer. She argued simply that it was inhuman to deny protection to children, while it was against the law to assault one’s partner or to be cruel to one’s dog. Her courageous advocacy eventually won her almost unanimous support in parliament. Sue Bradford would not see herself as a “religious” woman — yet she is reflective and spiritual in the best sense. Significantly, for several years she and Bill lived in community with two Josephite Sisters and a Marist priest at Kingfisher farm near Warkworth. This townswoman was actively tilling the soil and “living Green”.

Sue’s life has been a ceaseless labour for the disempowered, whether they be children in violent households or economic victims of the new Right. This book documents thoroughly her struggle against this flawed economic system. May her prophetic voice continue to be heard for years to come. ★

Copies available from Nationwide Book Distributors,  
P O Box 65, Oxford, North Canterbury.

# Fair Borders? Migration Policy in the Twenty-First Century

Edited by David Hall

Published by Bridget Williams Books, 2017

Reviewed by Simon Randall

BOOK

Migration influences people in many different ways and at many different levels. It can be formative to a whole person’s self-identity, and, likewise, it can strongly influence whole community or national identities or political dispositions. Every New Zealander has a migration story somewhere in their family, and all of us continue to be shaped by them.

Recent events have made it particularly poignant to examine migration. I read *Fair borders? Migration Policy in the Twenty-First Century* against a backdrop of a pretty recent election season which in part focused on migration, lingering questions about national identity stirred up from the flag debate, Brexit, the appalling situation on Manus Island, ever relevant questions of the treaty and biculturalism, and

increasing global xenophobia.

*Fair borders?* goes beyond just looking at migration, which in such a short text would be hard enough, but focusses on testing concepts of fairness against migration, making it a hard task indeed. The concept of fairness is examined through this process as well, never quite landing what fair is as the view shifts.

I found this book initially frustrating. It is formed of several voices and perspectives, heavy on context and narrative. This style allows it to present successfully global facts and personal truths alongside one another. Given migration’s influence and the different scales it influences, this is useful and important. This examination from many angles, which is essential to tell the story, can be disorientating. This book lacks clear resolution of all of the questions it asks. All of this, in the end, is absolutely appropriate. We are far from landing what fairness looks like in migration, and the discomfort required me to question my views on the subject. We, as a society, need to embrace these big discussions, and I found this was a good prompt. ★







## No Ordinary Sheila

Directed by Hugh Macdonald

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

FILM

**A**t primary school, when Sheila Traill's class was set the essay topic "Who I would Like to be When I Grow up?" Sheila decided that she didn't want to be a princess or a film star, but herself. *No Ordinary Sheila* shows how she became herself to an extraordinary degree. An unpretentious film about an unpretentious person, it suggests that we all have the makings of a Sheila within ourselves.

A Jill of all trades — naturalist, writer, illustrator, historian, tramp, biker, sailor, astronomer — Sheila's interests were connected by her adventurous spirit and unfailingly positive attitude to life. Escapades like swimming out to a seal colony or climbing the rigging of a sailing ship in her 80s were all in a day's activity. Asked about her terminal cancer, she replies that others may "go under" when trials arise, but not her. "You just get on with it." There is not a frame where the scene is not lit up by her broad smile and dancing eyes.

The film begins by sketching out her life: beginning with her Wohlers and Traill antecedents in the Deep South and her simple upbringing on Stewart Island. Schooldays in Invercargill were followed by teachers' college and university training in Dunedin, where she befriended Janet Frame (who figures large in the narrative). Then to Wellington in the 1950s, where her artistic and writing talents were harnessed by the Correspondence School, followed by a long and productive career as the author and illustrator of numerous books.

The second half of the film chronicles her happy marriage to Gilbert Natusch, whom she met at the Hutt Valley Tramping Club, and their adventurous life which included a rugged cycle tour of the West Coast — from Picton to Bluff. We learn about the couple's spartan life at their cottage in Wellington's Owhiro Bay, where they enjoyed many happy years together — without a car,

television or shagpile carpet — until Gilbert's death in 2005. Sheila's story is told through interviews with friends and filmmakers, old photographs and movie footage.

In one of the many letters between the pair, Janet Frame wrote that it seemed as if the natural world belonged to Sheila, and that she delighted in sharing it with others. Certainly her animal and plant illustrations have a vitality and appeal that reflect the personality of their creator.

Sheila died in August this year, aged 91. This affectionate portrait of a life well lived is a tribute to a remarkable New Zealander. ✨



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## Perspectives

In May 1954 the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. I naively accepted the western view that this was a disaster. Communism seemed about to take over the whole region. Five months later I arrived in Rome and spent the first six of my eight years there at an international college. We students lived in semi-isolated groups of about 20. There were roughly 250 students mainly from Asia, Africa and Oceania, with a sprinkling from Europe and South America. With such close contact with a great diversity of cultures and attitudes, I unlearned many of my Kiwi prejudices and began to put flesh on my intellectual understanding of international affairs. I came to realise that the 1954 "disaster" was a step towards self-determination for the Vietnamese people. Moreover, I slowly began to realise the effects of colonisation on Māori.

## Beginnings

In a way Princess Diana was the catalyst for my involvement with *Tui Motu*. Political commentator Chris Trotter had written an article for the weekly *Business and Economic Review* contrasting the reaction to Diana's death with the hidden work of Mother Teresa. But he also criticised Teresa for not adopting the radical "conscientization" approach of Recife's Archbishop Hélder Câmara, whose stance was to challenge the structure of society that resulted in dire inequality. His famous statement: "When I gave to the poor they called me a saint; when I asked why they were poor they called me a communist" summed up the problem. I had learned of Câmara (an influential figure at Vatican II) in the monthly *Swiss Review of World Affairs* which I read from 1958 until its demise about 40 years later.

In reply to Trotter's item, my

letter (published as an opinion piece), detailed the vast cultural differences between Brazil and India, and explained that both Câmara's and Teresa's approaches would be ineffective in each other's culture. Teresa had created radical centres of counter-culture. I offered Michael Hill an expanded article elaborating on the subject which was published in *Tui Motu* (Issue 10, July 1998:5-7).

## Reflections

Early in the 13th century a social activist, whom we know as St Dominic, realised organised action based on rigorous intellectual formation was essential to combat the then rampant corrosive Albigensian heresy. It taught that material things were evil; only spirituality was good. Dominic gathered companions and through the ages his followers, the Dominicans, greatly influenced the intellectual life of the Church and effected many practical aspects of Catholic social justice.

My sister Pat gave me a copy of the first issue of *Tui Motu* and my hopes for something like the *London Tablet*

were bolstered. I found the vision inspiring and immediately took out a subscription. Over those first years a sound base for a fruitful contribution to the life of the Church in New Zealand was developed.

This was demonstrated in the September 2017 issue by the articles of Elizabeth Mackie OP, Kevin Toomey OP and Michael Hill IC. As an aside Rosmini, the founder of the latter order which specialises in education of youth, taught that true charity required discernment so as to respond to people's real needs, rather than just assuming we automatically have the answer. It was a delight to deal with Francie Skelton and those others over the years through frequent contact, discussions and occasional visits by editors.

## Last Post

I have decided to make this my final contribution to *Crosscurrents*. So I bid you farewell! ■

[Ed] We thank Jim for his interesting and stimulating articles and columns since 1998.



**TUI MOTU InterIslands**  
The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited

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

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

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We welcome letters of comment, discussion, response, affirmation or argument of up to 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge longer letters, while keeping the meaning.

## PRACTICE OF REGULAR MEDITATION

TM November 2017 carried the article "Dignity, Obsession, Work" by Cavaan Wild. I read it as the plight of the young as they struggle to grow and develop in today's world. From my remote monastic abode it's a world focused on self, power and prestige. There's a constant pressure to achieve or wallow in what Cavaan describes as "lethargic despondency characteristic of so many directionless young ones".

In desiring to reach out to the suffering young ones, we can feel lost and hopeless. But listening to the voice of compassion we can hear the call of contemplative prayer – being other-centred, seeing clearly, the simple enjoyment of truth. Christian Meditation (CM) offers a response. It's a practice that John Main OSB reignited after centuries of its being dormant. He describes CM as a way of "entering into freedom; a freedom available to all if we can undertake the discipline of the journey. All can find this freedom in their hearts, can be at peace, can be one with God in all they are and do – especially the young". If our life is full, a spiritual discipline is as necessary to our spirit as breathing to the body.

Tui Motu fields many interesting topics. What about prayer, especially contemplative prayer? God is communicating. Are we truly listening?

*John Pettit OCSO, Kopua*

## USING BIBLICAL PARAPHRASES

I was interested to read the article "The Word Among Catholics" (TM November 2017). I would agree with the comment that the Bible is a "strange" and "difficult" book. The role of the "paraphrase" rather than "translation" was not covered in the article. This is understandable, as it would need a separate article to do justice to this topic. The paraphrase allows the writer to place the biblical stories in the contemporary context,

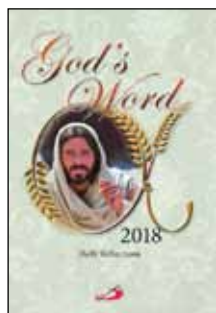
both in choice of language and theological stance.

In my own work, as lay preacher and tutor within our local Methodist Church, I have appreciated the work of the Canadian author, Ralph Milton. He has written four Bible paraphrases, titled *The Family Story Bible* (1996), and three lectionary-based paraphrases covering *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*.

Reading levels would be comfortable for the 10 to 12 year olds. A progressive theological stance makes the readings usable within all-age congregational worship. Ralph Milton's books offer a creative and imaginative reading of the biblical stories.

*John Thornley, Palmerston North.*

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## Looking OUT and IN

I was out for the morning, with my colleague Anuj, in a rural community green with sugar cane fields, mango orchards and mosques. Anuj sat me down next to Yusuf, an elderly man sitting under a tree, and went off on the motorbike to collect Yusuf's adult son for a joint family conference. I sat on the bony edge of the *charpoy* (the handmade string bed that sits outside nearly every house in the plains of North India) and Yusuf, toothless but smiling, quickly struck up a conversation.

He explained that he and his wife had lived in their single room adobe house for 37 years now and had been married for nearly 60 years. Yusuf was just 10 years old and living in this same village when in 1947 India declared independence from the British.

Most of Yusuf's uncles and cousins had moved to Pakistan at the time of the Partition, but his father had wanted to stay in his ancestral home. They had always lived peacefully with their Hindu neighbours and loved this place. He had worked as a daily labourer on others' land, but they owned a quarter of an acre for their own kitchen garden.

Hearing our voices, Yusuf's wife Leila walked slowly out of the house, blinking in the bright sunlight. On learning I was a doctor, she began a long account of all the pains, joint troubles and symptoms that prevailed on her days and nights. Her Hindi was hard to catch, mixed liberally with an Urdu vocabulary, but my ears warmed to her cadence. Barely pausing for an empathic response on her bodily pains, Leila went on to talk about her married daughters, both living nearby, and her son Mohammed with his long-standing mental illness. "He's our only son alive now. My younger son died when he was 12 years old after falling off a trailer piled high with stacks of harvested sugar cane."

Although this sad loss was clearly decades ago, Leila suddenly had to stop talking. She turned her head to blink tears at the green field behind us.

Two young goats skittered about around the wooden legs of the *charpoy*. They were part of an initiative we have been running in our community mental health project to help generate income for disadvantaged families. Yusuf tells me that goat's milk is sold at more than three times the price of buffalo

milk during the dengue fever season each August and September — as goat's milk and also kiwifruit are understood as critical for recovery from dengue in Dehradun district. I wonder how I never knew about this before and realise again that there are many important things that I don't know. Leila's pains seemed forgotten for now, smiling as she told me how happy she felt to have a visitor.

Yusuf brewed us a cup of *chai*. We sipped the sweet tea, beads of melted buffalo cream floating lazily on the surface, and talked some more. This unplanned hiatus in the middle of a busy day would have irked me on many occasions but warmed by the winter sun, this gentle and kind couple offered a grace-filled presence that permeated my usual bustle and productivity.

Eventually Anuj returned with Mohammed, and the conversation moved to mental health recovery, Mohammed's new bricklaying job, and what support Mohammed would like from his family and our team. Things seemed hopeful. As I stood to go, Leila reached out and gently rested her hand on the top of my head in blessing. Abdul reached forward and did the same. The conversation, the small goats, the carefully swept yard, the *chai*. The discussion with Mohammed and Anuj. Reminders of Emmanuel, God with us. It was all blessing. ✨

Photo: Kaaren sitting with Mohammed



**Kaaren Mathias** is a mother of four young people, is married to Jeph and has spent the last 11 years living in India. She works as the Mental Health Programme Manager.



Bless us Living God  
saturating our communities  
with unending hope and love  
so that all children  
have adults in their lives  
whose love, protection and support  
is the ground of their flourishing.

Art by a child at St Teresa's School, Bluff

From the *Tui Motu* team