Tui Motu

InterIslands

monthly independent Catholic magazine
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The isolation of suicide

opening the windows

John XXIII's "opening of the windows" began 50 years ago next month – the Second Vatican Council opened on 11 October 1962. In retrospect, Angelo Roncalli's whole life led serendipitously to the decision to call a General Council of the Church. When he was elected Pope, however, he was seen as a 'do-nothing' Pope — there as a 'seat-warmer' for the next man. Papa Giovanni died in 1963 well before the Council was concluded. Yet he undoubtedly initiated a Copernican revolution in the life of the Catholic Church, one which we ignore at our peril.

Over the next few months (and years, in fact), *Tui Motu* will highlight aspects of the Council. We hope that the richness and depth of thought produced by the Council fathers will continue to resonate with us, and help us with contemporary challenges and expression of Christian faith and mission. So to begin this series, Jim Neilan and Fr Michael Hill, both present in Rome at various stages of the Council, set the scene. They share vivid memories of that time, looking at some of the interesting realities that needed to be faced, especially concerning the formation of priests. On a slightly different note, Robert Consedine underlines the profound effect that theologians like Yves Congar OP and John Courtney Murray SJ had on the course of the Council.

The other major theme in this issue is that of suicide. A number of readers have asked us to tackle this delicate topic. Preparing the material was for me sometimes difficult, as I felt deeply the angst of many. But beyond this angst, our articles point to a series of key and interrelated ideas. These can be summed up in the three words: community, connectedness and relationship. These come out clearly in Stephanie du Fresne's article. It is the interconnectedness and depth of our relationships, in a variety of community situations, that sustain those at risk. They give life to people involved in this difficult process. Moreover, these three ideas are well mirrored in John and Lou Maguire's moving recounting of Dan's life and in the way that Fr Mark Chamberlain reflects on the crucial importance of pastoral involvement.

From another direction, I hope that you enjoy Ray Stedman's reflection and Lorna Johnson's interview with Nic Steenhout. Here we look with a compassionate eye at people often pushed to the edge of society through no fault of their own, simply because they are different. How do we cope with them and their difference?

Do look at Jim Elliston's column this month. His acute take on some of the problems presently facing Pope Benedict reflects turnings from the decisions of the Vatican Council and the practical choices which now need addressing.

Finally, there is another lovely link with parish "community." Jim Consedine's comment and Judy McCashin and John Walsh's piece on the late Father Tom Power show the need and the gift of skilled pastoring: team work, power sharing, humility and deft preaching.

All in all, there is much to chew on in this issue. Good reading. **KT**

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This month's cover photo: Patrick Fitzsimons

our brother's story

Our brother died last month. As sad as that was, it was hardly an unusual event, in many respects not even remarkable, just part of the human condition which catches up with us all eventually.

What was remarkable, however, was the number of people who had come to know him and hold him in high esteem; who came to pay their respects. People from all walks seemed to know him and regard him with great, even enormous, affection.

He wasn't a high flier as we think of high fliers; he wasn't a CEO or a mover, or a shaker, he didn't make bags of money. He couldn't read or write or count beyond five and always had difficulty with his speech. He was intellectually handicapped.

It struck me, in one of those quiet moments one has at such times, that in his life we see a glorious flowering of the potential to love and be loved. What a telling contrast, with the desire these days to euthanase and to abort every problem, imagined or real. There are those who would condone or advocate aborting such a person. They see lives full of promise and achievement as the only way of being human.

What of a life like that?

He didn't read Shakespeare, he didn't write a symphony, he didn't understand politics (he would have been one of the few in the country who thought Rob Muldoon, along with JR Ewing from *Dallas*, was a wonderful man).

Maybe he wasn't a mover — maybe he wasn't a shaker but by his achievements he confounded the experts. When, as a little chap, he began at the Sarah Cohen School in Moray Place, Dunedin, he was well adjusted, well socialised, he could care for his personal hygiene, he could dress himself and tie his shoes, he could tie a tie, use the vacuum cleaner, do dishes, make tea, there was such a lot he could do and he had the knack of being able to pass his skills on to many of his peers.

He didn't score a symphony, or write a sonnet; there were many things he didn't do. But what of his chief accomplishments? What was his gift to us? Well, he accepted people at face value, he was tolerant, he was non-judgmental, he was affectionate, he was loyal, he loved deeply and longingly and purely — an unselfish love of great depth.

I'm not so naive as to claim that his life was not without problems; there were many of them and my parents and my brothers and I experienced them first hand. There were exasperations, frustrations, anxieties, there were health issues, embarrassments... But what is most telling is that because of him we are all better people, as are the countless others who knew him through the years.

I have heard it said by the wise and well-meaning, that people like him don't experience emotions or love as proper people do. Our experience would teach us otherwise. The depth of his emotional experience was profound, the depth of his love freely given and gratefully received, was profound.

And there's the rub. St John in his gospel says,

"God is Love and those who live in love, live in God and God lives in them."

Simple isn't it? A lesson for all of us perhaps?

God rest you, little brother; go, live in God's love forever. ■

Ray Stedman is retired and lives in Greytown.

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

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

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taking issue

Terry Mikklesen has stopped short (by a mere whisker) of calling the Editor of *Tui Motu* ignorant. Serious reflection on his reasoning might reveal to him the true seat of ignorance.

If he owned a business would he sell one of its lucrative parts to square the books? Or would he heed the advice of friends to forego a transient quick dollar and instead enjoy the on-going returns from his whole asset which he retains to benefit his descendants?

His comparison of private versus public ownership is irrelevant. The escalating cost of power is solely due to the imposition of a market model based on an ideology of competition with its profit motive. Profit has no doubt won, but the idea of competition between such uneven generators as hydro, geothermal and fossil power is farcical and ignores environmental imperatives.

Max Bradford has last century fragmented a well-structured industry into several profit making entities for no better reason than a fat tax take which is reflected in our power bills.

As well, the lure of profit has encouraged greedy competitors to engage in legal battles for an increased market share, adding millions of dollars to the cost of electricity.

Needy families may have to shiver in unheated homes, but the relentless path to a partial sale has been prepared.

Frank Hoffmann, ***Papakura***

a recent homily

Recently I heard in a sermon that the miracle of the loaves and fishes could be regarded as a glorified pot-luck occasion. This is palpably wrong.

The scripture clearly states that it is a gigantic miracle. No doubt people brought along private food which they probably shared with others. The generosity of God inspired them to do this. But to suggest that you have a choice of believing that the people provided the food and not God is clearly unscriptural. A reading of the passage leaves no doubt that God is the Rich Provider!

It is important that the dilution of the Gospels is strictly guarded against. To distort scripture by woolly thinking is dangerous and can produce consequences totally foreign to their intent.

One final point: A member of the cloth when preaching from the pulpit bears a heavy responsibility that the content of his words are accurate and in accordance with the teachings of the Magisterium. This sermon did not meet these criteria. There were impressionable young people present and they could be excused for thinking that private interpretation of the scriptures even if against the Church's teaching was perfectly in order!

John Vincent, ***Dunedin (abridged)***

alice revisits wonderland

The Catholic Church has a pope. I get that — shades of Peter, rocks, and chief bishop at world headquarters. The Catholic Church has bishops. In theory they participate in the teaching role of the church, are chief pastors in their own dioceses. I say in theory, because today's reality often casts doubt on such practice being permitted. The Catholic Church has priests — celebrants of (most of) the sacraments, pastors to the people of God in their locale. The laity (and I include religious) make up the majority of church membership.

Why then, in the name of all that is holy, are some New Zealand dioceses training deacons? Helping out in parishes with baptisms, weddings and funerals is hardly meeting current needs. It certainly does nothing for the central pinnacle of Eucharistic celebration. Licensing trained laity for the above tasks as required would be more appropriate, without adding another layer to the clerical framework. And in these days of many educated laity, does it really require ordination to read the gospel or give a homily?

In some cultures and in some limited circumstances deacons may have a possible value. Prison/hospital chaplains, for example, form in-need relationships within their pastoral care environment. But historically some of those roles have been successfully filled by women. And they are still excluded from the diaconate. Either way, when reconciliation or the sacrament of the sick are required, it is still a case of: call for a priest. Which rather seems to defeat that theory.

Let's climb out of the rabbit-hole and back into the real world. The central issue is the true and relevant nature of the ministry of priesthood in 2012. Stripped of the miscellaneous tasks that have been acquired historically (which require the individual to be a jack of all trades and a master of none), what are we left with? When we can answer that question authentically in the here and now, we may begin to see some light.

I have been convinced for many years that the growing shortage of priests in the Western world is God's way of trying to tell us something, to take a forward step in the evolutionary journey of this pilgrim church of His. And importing men from other cultures is not the answer. Would that we would listen, and try to discern. I don't think God has deacons in mind.

"It would be so nice if something made sense for a change," said Alice. But then I write as a mere laywoman!

Marilyn Elliston, ***Auckland***

☞ letters to the editor

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

community – different but the same

Jim Consedine

We recently celebrated former Addington parishioner Bernie O'Neill's 100th birthday. The family held a party. Not that he was physically present, for he died 26 years ago. But his spirit certainly was. So were his remaining eight children, their families, many grandchildren, their partners, some long term friends.

The idea was to celebrate the man, his commitment to family and to honour his faith journey. We toasted him and sang happy birthday. And told stories. Tales of another era. Of Bernie taking his new bride home in a horse and cart. Of hard work and plenty of it. Of spud picking at Mount Magdala in Halswell where Bernie worked as a truck driver for the Good Shepherd Sisters' laundry. We remembered family gatherings — and lots of parties.

We shared stories of life in the Addington parish and the things that held it together. These days we would call it community building — bring and buys, parish fairs, hot cocoa for school children in winter, Holy Name society meetings, the tennis and table tennis clubs, sodalities, parish dances. We remembered with affection the role Bernie often played as a gifted MC. The celebration concluded with a large family attendance at Sunday Eucharist, a prayer of thanksgiving for a faith-filled legacy.

Reflecting on the community which spawned people like him we noted the differences from today. He lived in settled times, with ready employment and simpler expectations. Most travelled by bike. Many married locally. The church was a building which one attended under pain of sin on Sundays. There was one-size-fits-all theology, hewn from the penny catechism. The god-like figures of the clergy keep it all together.

new times, new ways

As we know, nearly everything has changed since those times. No longer is the population settled. Families are smaller. Society is far more individualistic. Travel is almost universal. Employment is no longer a lifelong choice. Much of the stable community life has gone.

Parish leadership has changed. There is a wider range of vocation. Since Vatican II and the better educated laity which it produced, parish roles have depended much more on capability and a changed understanding of Church. The people now see themselves as central players in the mission of the Church. It is now a Church with a worldwide vision. We are responsible even for the planet we live on. We know about interconnectedness.

The Mystical Body of Christ has become flesh in a new way. The central commands of Jesus remain the same — love God and love your neighbor, practice justice and mercy, treat one another with compassion, nurture life and its sources. Bernie O'Neill's neighbour tilled the next paddock or worked at the railway workshops or grew cabbages on the corner section. With modern travel and technology, our neighbour can be an Ethiopian refugee stuck in a camp in the Sudan or a homeless child in Peru. With expanding knowledge, the world has shrunk that much.

Surprisingly, the component parts of community remain the same. The transitory times we live in mean though that community formation is not automatic. Now we have to create, sustain and nurture communities in the same way as we sustain and nurture children and families. We can no longer take our communities for granted. Even small rural and seemingly isolated groupings need to work on their relationships if any real notion of community is to be maintained and further developed.

Yet we know from experience that to belong to a real community is the greatest thing in the world. Here we can be known, accepted and loved without question. Here even the weakest and the less gifted find a place of sustenance essential to continued happiness. Real communities are a gift from God and precious.

With traditional infrastructures and social groupings constantly changing, parish communities remain one of the most useful forms of social organization. They can be treasures. We need to make them welcoming, inclusive, non-judgmental, sensitive to differing familial situations, conscious of the societal wide hunger for spiritual growth. They need to be especially sensitive towards the special ones of Jesus — our modern day lepers and marginalized people.

They should be maintained at all costs. Plenty of modern day Bernie O'Neills are prepared to devote everything to their maintenance and development. The amalgamation or closure of parishes that have developed over decades is often a tragedy. Because they constituted community, they provided lifeblood to their members.

Here priests can play a significant role. The days when they had the final say about anything other than certain liturgical matters are over. Besides general pastoral care, now their primary role should be to help the people build and sustain parish communities. This requires real skill. It means team work. It involves power sharing. It's also a call to humility, of servant leadership as illustrated by Jesus when he washed his disciples' feet. It means integrating oneself into a community that has already existed perhaps for 100 years before the current pastor happened along. It's a wonderful vocation and a privileged position.

One hundred years has changed community life. Yet the basic essentials remain the same. ■

Jim Consedine is a priest of the Diocese of Christchurch, and the editor of The Common Good.

the world before vatican two

The first editor of Tui Motu *studied in Rome at the time of the Council. He reminisces about the contrast of the Church before Vatican II and after it, and highlights some of the contradictions that he experienced those 50 years ago.*

Michael Hill

Early mornings in the Roman catacombs are always a poignant experience. You are retracing the footsteps of the first Christians gathering before dawn to remember their dead. For me, the catacombs have always been a favourite place. The ancient passageways and chapels still breathe the atmosphere of the early church. Inscriptions and wall frescoes reflect the purity and fervour of a simple, ardent faith. They are a far cry from the magnificence, the pageantry and pomp of St Peter's and the great basilicas.

an early morning celebration

A few days after I was ordained priest in Rome in 1964 I led a little family group there to celebrate early morning Mass. We descended into the earth by candlelight. In the little chapel we were allotted I found a tiny altar table in the middle. When I looked up, I was eye to eye with my parents, family and friends. It was an unexpected foretaste of the huge transformation about to impinge itself on the Catholic world.

A priest always used to celebrate Mass with his back to the congregation. But, face to face, you suddenly became aware that you are part of this community of believers, not detached from it. You are certainly not raised above it into a sphere of superiority. For me, a newly heard phrase 'priesthood of all believers' had become a reality.

a copernican revolution

Meanwhile on the other side of the city, the Vatican Council was in session initiating this Copernican revolution. They started with the liturgy. The vernacular was to be introduced instead of a mysterious, sacred liturgical language. Altar rails and rood screens separating priest from people were about to be swept away. Priests were invited instead to go among the people and share Eucharist, break open the word and exchange the kiss of peace. All those rituals which had crept into Catholic practice over the centuries, changing community into hierarchy, were about to be swept away. The pristine unity of believers was to be restored.

helpful changes

These changes were a sign of what was to follow. The Bible, the word of God, would be restored to its rightful place in prayer and worship. The church itself was about to be redefined not as a hierarchy but as the People of God. The Council beckoned Catholics to come out of their ghettos, to meet and greet their separated brothers and sisters, and to become a beacon of hope in the great wide world instead of a mysterious and detached enclave.

the pre-vat II church?

So what was the pre-Vatican church really like? Those of us old enough to remember will each have a unique story. I wish to share mine. For me, a dominant memory is one of cosy belonging. I was born into this church — very much a minority in the Britain of my childhood, as it still is — yet something I was always comfortable to belong to. It didn't especially challenge me. It nurtured me like mother's milk. I am grateful for it. But it certainly generated in me — and perhaps in many of my contemporaries — a sense of smugness.

the true faith

We possessed the true faith. We felt pity for those left outside. I think most of us would have willingly subscribed to a tenet of the mediaeval church that 'outside the church there was no salvation'. When we hooked a new convert we rejoiced, in the words of an eminent churchman of that period, that he or she was now "in the bag". Another prize fish had been caught. We gave little thought to what that person might have left behind.

a halcyon age

It was the age of G.K.Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, celebrated Catholic authors who rejoiced in Catholic tradition and gave it a sense of superior authenticity. We breathed the spirit of triumphalism. At school we learnt apologetics, how to prove that there was one true faith — which was ours — and how to guard ourselves against the seductions of secularism and socialism.

two important memories

Two events stand out among the receding memories of those distant days. Shortly after World War II finished I visited Italy for the first time to celebrate Holy Year. Going to Rome with two school friends in September 1950 was a great adventure, the first overseas trip after being locked up in Fortress Britain during the bleak wartime years.

seeing a universal church

Rome was a revelation: the crowds, the monuments, the ceremonies, the babble of different languages, visiting the great basilicas, the shrines, the catacombs; not to speak of the wine and the pasta! All this served to reinforce a sense of belonging to a universal church. Many peoples, many tongues, but bound by a single ancient language in which we celebrated together the unchanging, age-old rhythm of Eucharist.

The Good Shepherd. *3rd century, Catacomb of Domatilla*

For me, one slightly discordant note was the old Pope. We went to St Peter's along with about 50,000 others to catch a glimpse of what appeared to be a piece of pale porcelain being carried around the Basilica on a somewhat wobbly platform. Pius XII did not appear like a human being. He was a remote relic from another age. I did not share in the wild cheering of the crush about me. The experience left me wondering.

a triumphalistic celebration

A year later I went with my family to Wembley Stadium to celebrate a great open air Mass for 100 years of re-established Catholicism. There was a pageant to remind us of the long pre-history leading up to the time of persecution following the Reformation. The whole event was a celebration of a triumphalistic church. It should have served as a reinforcement of that cosy sense of superiority. But somehow it didn't. I was now a young adult, increasingly aware that the old world was passing away.

breaking out of the ghetto

Studying at a largely Protestant University helped me to begin to break out of the old ghetto. Most of my new friends were not "in the bag" and seemed perfectly happy not to be so. I was not tempted to abandon my faith, but I became convinced it wasn't the only ticket to heaven.

studying in rome

When I went to Rome to start studies for the priesthood in 1960, I was faced with conflicting experiences. The most striking was the character of the new Pope. During my first week we went for a trip out of Rome to Subiaco, once the mountain refuge of St. Benedict. Who should also be visiting but good Pope John? Across the road towards this band of students waddled the familiar, stout figure in white, seemingly delighted to meet and salute some Rosminians. What a contrast with Pius XII!

releasing the holy spirit

Pope John was always approachable, always smiling, quick with the humorous remark and the unexpected gesture — like launching an ecumenical Council to release the full blast of the Holy Spirit through the church. At the height of the Cold War, it was he who personally welcomed Khruschev's daughter and son-in-law to the Vatican. His personal intervention broke the tense stand-off between Washington and Moscow. And he issued the greatest of all peace Encyclicals *Pacem in Terris*. When he died, all Rome wept and all the world mourned.

an imposed theology

In dark contrast to this truly enlightened leader was the educational system at the Lateran University where we were sent. Autocratic, traditional, antagonistic to change — and especially to the new theologians of northern Europe — its policy was to brainwash by imposition. No debate, no discussion, no possibility of error. It was here that I had my first experience of *odium theologicum* (literally 'theological hatred'). Opposition to the proclaimed orthodoxy was dealt with by condemnation and, if possible, by destruction. I emerged from that experience chastened but immunised against such blind dogmatism.

I will close with a golden memory. The Council had just started and one of the New Zealanders, Bishop Reg Delargy, chose to spend the occasional break with us at our study house in Rome. He had been instrumental in inviting the first priests and brothers to open Rosmini College on Auckland's North Shore in 1962. In Reg I met my first truly post-Vatican II bishop. He talked to us about his work in Auckland putting into action the principles of Cardinal Cardijn, the founder of the Young Christian Workers. It was inspiring pastoral theology.

a new theology of prayer

In the evenings he would come and join in our recreation. Perhaps he was looking for talent! One day I remember doing my household chores polishing a marble terrazzo floor. He passed by and stopped to exchange a friendly word. Out of the blue I asked him: "What do you think will be the greatest fruit of this Council?" He thought for a moment. "It will be a new theology of prayer", he said.

Fifty years later, I still think he was right. I rejoice in the church reborn at Vatican II. And I agonise at present attempts from the centre to turn the clock back. ■

Michael Hill IC is the editor emeritus of Tui Motu. *At present he is researching and writing the first modern English biography of Blessed Antonio Rosmini, founder of the Institute of Charity (IC).*

history in the making

What was it like to be in Rome during the time of the Second Vatican Council? Jim Neilan shares some personal memories of living there during the months of the fourth and final session of the Council in 1965.

Jim Neilan

What a pity I have no grandchildren, no captive audience for stories of 'the good old days'. I could boast that their grandpa once attended the largest meeting in the history of the world. 'Attended' might be laying it on a bit, but on two occasions I was there in St Peter's Basilica, along with two and half thousand bishops, dozens of cardinals, tribes of theologians, official observers from other churches and those, like me, who had wangled a visitor's ticket from a bishop. This was the Second Vatican Council — and it was a meeting unique in world history.

throwing open the windows

Others will be writing about the teaching and consequences of the Council, but the overall atmosphere around Rome was also important and had its own effect on the church. One needed to be there to get a feel for what was happening: no documents could convey this. There was a sense that Pope John's 'throwing open the windows' really was letting fresh air into the life of the church.

no sartorial police any more

The Eternal City, famous for its tourists, is always awash with clergy. Until the time of the Council all priests in Rome were expected to wear long black soutanes, but in the sixties the sartorial police had to back off when confronted on the streets by an invasion of bishops wearing ordinary suits — a minor detail perhaps, but it was an indication of a culture change that was taking place.

Bishops who may have stood on their dignity, expecting special treatment back in their own dioceses, were brought down to earth when they had to pile into buses or walk to St Peter's for their meetings. I was passing St Peter's one afternoon just after the Council session for the day had finished and Cardinal Rugambwa from Tanzania was starting to walk up the hill to the college where we were both staying. I offered him a lift on my Vespa and he didn't hesitate, tucked his satchel under his arm, sat side-saddle behind me and off we went with his scarlet-trimmed soutane and sash flapping in the breeze. (Now that would have been a photograph for the grandchildren!)

a roman holiday?

Many of the bishops arriving in Rome in October 1962 felt overawed by the Vatican and those who ran its departments — the Roman Curia. What could ordinary bishops contribute to a meeting such as this? Some were hoping it would simply be a nice break away from the stresses of diocesan life. After all, it would all be over by Christmas. How wrong they were. This was to be no "Roman Holiday".

surprises on day one

From the first day of meetings, the Curia was determined to keep control of proceedings. The bishops — the 'Council Fathers' — were asked to select 160 names of those they wished to be on the ten crucial committees responsible for the Council's deliberations. Curia officials knew this was an impossible task, so they circulated a list of names they considered best suited for the positions. Immediately their plans were stymied: two European cardinals protested, "We need time to get to know one another and then we'll choose the appropriate men for the commissions." A huge majority agreed to a postponement. The first meeting of the Council was over in 17 minutes!

the bishops' council

The bishops now realised they were not there to rubber stamp the Vatican prepared agenda; it was to be their Council and so a lot of homework would need to be done if they were to carry out the task set them by Pope John XXIII in his opening speech, "We are going to bring the church up to date... to restore the simple and pure lines that the face of the church of Jesus had at its birth". Very few of the bishops had had the opportunity,

The crowd in St Peter's square on 8 December 1965 at the closing Mass of the Council.

or the time, to study the huge developments in Catholic thought that had taken place since they were seminarians. Now they had a golden opportunity.

the influence of *periti*

Many of the Church's finest theologians had been invited by their bishops as 'periti' (experts) and they would have an enormous influence over the four sessions of the Council. Archbishop Hurley of Durban called it "the biggest, most famous, historic adult education project ever held." This created a valuable spin-off for students like me — opportunities to join bishops and cardinals at seminars and meetings in venues around the city to hear these men. (Women theologians would soon be making their mark in the post-Vatican II church.)

This 'education project' caused more friction with the Curia, as a number of these theologians had previously been censured by Rome for writings considered "dangerous to faith and morals". One of my professors, Fr Bernard Häring — one of the church's leading moral theologians — told us about his experiences of being on the 'Vatican heresy mat'. He considered it more gruelling than when he was interrogated by the Nazi SS for helping Polish prisoners during World War II.

'warts and all' account

Another of my professors had a big influence on the times. The 'Romans' tried to limit news of the Council to official bulletins but Fr Francis Xavier Murphy in his regular, gossipy *Letters from Vatican City*, published in the *New Yorker*, gave a 'warts and all' account of behind-the-scenes confrontations and disputes that took place.

To avoid trouble from the Curia, he wrote under the pseudonym, Xavier Rynne. This was an open secret to us at his university and, though the preparation of his lectures may have suffered, we were well compensated by the stories he was able to tell us from his 'sources' among the Council fathers. He enjoyed a wide readership during the four sessions of the

Pope Paul VI, the second pope of the Council, seated on his *sedia gestatoria* in St Peter's Basilica.

Council. People were intrigued that a church that had always presented itself as unchanging and united on all issues was now willing to be updated.

getting inside

Twice, I was able to get a ticket for a 'public session' of the Council. The interior of St Peter's was unrecognisable. The huge nave had been converted into a massive lecture theatre with 2,905 tiered seats. My most vivid memory was going in to the coffee bars that had been set up in the basilica. Some clerical wags had come up with biblical names for them — Bar Abbas and Bar Jonah. There was no standing on ceremony. If you wanted a coffee you used rugby tactics to fight your way through a sea of purple and scarlet.

closing mass and reflection

On 8th December 1965, I was in St Peter's Square as the two and a half thousand bishops took their places around Pope Paul VI for the closing mass of Vatican II. I wondered what was going through the minds of these men. Well, that night I heard first hand from one of them. Another Kiwi and I went to a pizzeria, and a bishop, alone at a nearby table, thinking we were Americans, introduced himself and joined us for the meal. He was Iceland's only bishop — the pastor to one thousand Catholics and seven priests.

His thoughts about the past four years were probably typical of many. He had arrived in 1962, overwhelmed by the atmosphere. He had sat through hundreds of interminable speeches in Latin — unintelligible until he received translation handouts. He had been scandalised by some of the bitter infighting between those he had always looked up to as leaders in the church. And he was exhausted, wanting only to get home to his diocese.

catchword 'collegiality'

But he admitted it was the greatest learning experience of his priestly life. He had attended seminars and bought books to update himself in current theology and scripture study; he had revelled in the opportunities to mix with other bishops. He was excited that the role of bishops had been spelt out — that, with the Pope, they were responsible for the people of God. The catchword was collegiality. Local bishops, and not the Curia, were the ones who knew best how the church should carry out its mission in their particular culture. Translations of the liturgy were mentioned. His main worry was how to convey the new spirit of openness in the church to his priests and laity.

If he and his fellow Council fathers could have looked forward 50 years, I wonder how they would assess their efforts of those four years. Fortunately, perhaps, there are only about 50 survivors. They would not hear a 2012 bishop asking some children, "What is Vatican Two?" and receiving one hopeful reply, "Is it the Pope's holiday house?" ■

Jim Neilan is a parishioner of Sacred Heart parish, Dunedin.

community and connectedness

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of suicide in the OECD countries. People taking this seriously have over a period of time produced a significant rate reduction but the figures are creeping up again, most probably related to the state of our economy. A Dunedin psychiatrist gives us a helpful insight into aspects of this cruel phenomenon.

"Relationship in every way, and in whatever way you can find, is the most important counterweight to the idea of suicide. Beware of anything that undermines our sense of relationship, because it is our relationships that hold us back from killing ourselves," says Dr du Fresne. Suicide is an extraordinarily complex matter, but it is community, relationship and connectedness that can make the difference.

who's at risk?

People are at risk of suicide across all the categories you can think of. This is so among the old when there are difficulties with money and heating the home; with the middle aged (including more recently women), where there is unemployment and redundancy; and perhaps most importantly with young people. For them, "... both suicide and self-harm have become exciting and romantic, with lots of web pages that tell you what other people have done." A problem with adolescents is that they do not have an adult view of death — "some think they will be present at their own funeral watching everybody feeling really sad… glorifying them, romanticising them and saying what a wonderful person they were." This idea makes it very dangerous.

What is most important to know is that when people (especially young people) are at risk of suicide, the building up and maintaining of existing patterns of relationship is crucial.

family relationships

The relationships that are important for other people, and hold them back from suicide, are often very tenuous and shaky for adolescents. However, it is the patterns in a household that matter. It is possible to have shared activities that run through adolescence. Parents can say, 'We've always done stuff together, we will keep doing stuff together'. These things make for a better environment.

"Where adolescents have enough contact with parents, then parents are going to notice any change. Before, Jimmy was on for kayaking at the weekend if his Dad was, and now he says 'no'. Parents notice the changes in their kids and who they are hanging out with, so they know whether their kids are in with a group who are excited about drugs, self harm, or whatever.

"Parents sometimes try to deal with these shifts and changes by saying, 'Let's sit down and talk'. Adolescents often feel OK to talk when they live in the kind of environment where it is possible to talk about worries, because they have seen the helpful way grown-ups talk. At the same time there's a limit to how much you can do that with an adolescent. They have to shake loose to some extent from their family to become their own person. They need to say, 'Stuff you, I'm my own person, I'm not going to talk to you'. And that can make for a dangerous gap."

Dr Stephanie du Fresne in the grounds of the Ashburn Clinic. [*Photo courtesy Otago Daily Times*]

schools and bullying

Bullying in schools is a contributor to suicide. How schools manage a difficult post on a *Facebook* page, or inappropriate texting where the kids don't know how to deal with the content, is crucial. Some schools are extremely competent at this. Dr du Fresne spoke warmly about programmes used in some primary and secondary schools, like *Cool Schools* and vertical streaming, where year 13 kids are responsible for looking after the younger ones, down the line.

"These help give young people skills in talking things out, facing difficulties, how to mediate conflict. Children who have come up through these schools keep the skills they have learnt after they leave school. Because once kids have got some skills in conflict resolution that's contagious as well. Once a group of kids with confidence says, 'Hang on a minute. Let's stop this and talk about it,' then that's as contagious as 'Ye, ye, ye, he's a fag.' Giving talks to a school about conflict or bullying will go over kids' heads if a school's culture is that the big ones pick on the little ones.

"More responsible reporting in newspapers has helped, as well as the Mental Health Commission *Like Minds* programme. The fact that John Kirwan has spoken out has helped raise awareness of the fact that it is OK to be depressed."

within community

Within our local communities there are some simple things that need to be addressed.

Plunket and women's collectives do good things for young mothers. Dr du Fresne recalled a Facebook page set up after some young mothers had done group work together. "This Facebook page let the group know that one of their members was not coping well. So they said, 'Let's go and see Mary, because her Facebook page shows she's not so good.' Again, it's the connectedness and relating that is important here." As well, a time was recalled in Invercargill when a couple of young mothers had committed suicide. A sister working in a local parish had the inspiration to set up children's playgroups, and the suicides stopped.

There are helpful and unhelpful ways of speaking in a more general way within our society. Some think it is politic to attack a group, like young mothers parenting alone. This is destructive, as it makes those attacked feel like they are pariahs: 'You are bludgers out there on the edge.' Young mothers, especially those without support, are at risk. Being a mother is extraordinarily hard work at any time. To place an extra burden on them is at best not helpful. Often they have very little or nothing to hold them during down times.

Being careful in supermarkets and pharmacies, when selling drugs like paracetamol over the counter, is important; likewise, being careful about the ways in which the young, especially the very young, use the internet — monitoring what websites are being accessed. Those at risk tend to be looking in most unhelpful places.

What do families find most difficult in a suicide? "Suicide is very different from a death caused by sudden illness (cardiac arrest) or accident, because it is a violent attack on personal relationships – an abandonment of family and friends, without any negotiation. Those left say, 'How could you go without saying goodbye?' And though suicide notes may make sense to the one who writes, they often don't come out of an adult relationship. Adolescents think they can absolve themselves of the violence of the act by leaving a note. This idea is very strong in the minds of young people, while most difficult for those left behind."

> Suicide is an extraordinarily complex matter, but it is community, relationship and connectedness that can make the difference.

Another factor that Dr du Fresne sees is that those preparing to commit suicide dehumanize themselves. "Thought patterns can go like this: 'I'm just a useless so-and-so; all the kids at school hate me; I failed my exams; I didn't get into the team; and I can't sing. I'm nothing but a failure.' or 'They will be better off without me. I am just a burden.' And very often the person will distance themselves from the relationships with those that would hold them back, or they will use disinhibiting factors, like drugs or alcohol, to ease their path. Both these are difficult for family members."

What helps families after a suicide? "Often people don't know what to do. The most helpful thing is to be in relationship with the family and friends: simply to go around to the house, bring something to eat, sit down and talk. Having people around is good for those bereaved. It's being a neighbour!

"Often people will say, 'I can't go there, I won't know what to say.'" Dr. du Fresne says, "Go. It is as simple as saying, 'How's it going?' and then listening to their experience, trying to be as open as possible without putting the hobnail boots of one's own pet theories on to them. Resist doing that! Just sit and listen, have a cup of tea with them! Allow the bereaved to put words to this experience themselves."

Dr. du Fresne points out, that when there is a violent death like suicide, there are usually two stories. "The first is about the actual narrative of the death, and very often people want to tell that first. It is especially so for mothers thinking of what it must have been like for their child. They may want to talk about that with you. And then there is the other story about the person's life which we are largely familiar with, with all its cultural and faith-based things. It is important to hear both these stories.

"It is good to remember that the people most involved are living for the vulnerable ones in their network. I have learned to respect that enormously," says Dr du Fresne. "And so rather than asking what are they doing to look after themselves, you affirm them 'It's great that you are managing the children.'

"Don't presume you know all about grief. Overcoming grief may take a long time. *The League of Compassionate Friends* in the UK who are a group of people who have lost children say it can take five years before you can function and the grief never goes… When someone says, 'Surely Mary should be able to go back to work now. She's been off work for a year', I will say five years… because you are grieving potential life which is quite different from a favourite aunt who dies at 92.

"Think, too, of Queen Victoria! She was out of circulation for four years after Albert's death. These sorts of time frames can be helpful models to recall."

patterns of relationship

Suicide is an incredibly complex matter. But in all the ways we can utilise the goodness of our communities and build up the existing patterns of relationship, we build the connectedness that can make the difference, both before and after suicide. It is important to cultivate these in every way we are privileged to. ■

Stephanie du Fresne is a psychiatrist and the deputy Director of the Ashburn Clinic, a private psychiatric clinic in Dunedin.

the mystery of dan

Tui Motu *interviewed the brother and sister-in-law of one person who died suddenly and unexpectedly by suicide. One person's life journey is revealing.*

"I think that the only time in the 27 years of his illness Dan was capable of committing suicide was the point at which he did it... That sounds bizarre, because it was the point at which he was the best he had been for a long, long time." This is the firm opinion that John Maguire holds about his brother, Dan, who died in September 2009. John and his wife, Lou, sat down with me to tell the story of Dan's life and how it ended.

Dan's life

Dan grew up in a family of six, four brothers and a sister, in North East Valley, Dunedin. Says John, "He was a lovely child, fun to be with, entering fully into the life of the family". He remembers when Dan was around 13 he had goals to be a lawyer, a goal he fulfilled, and to be an ambassador for social justice. In 1983 Paddy, their father, died suddenly. Dan was 18 at that time, the only sibling at home with his mother. He handled his grief and this difficult situation well. It was at this time, though, that his life began to change. In 1985 he had the first of the manic episodes, part of the mental illness with which he was to struggle all his life. Dan studied law, was admitted to the Bar, and practised law. He married a woman he loved deeply. Regrettably, due to his illness, this marriage did not last.

First difficulties

In 1996, Dan had an episode that led to his being committed to Wakari Hospital. This was difficult for him, and for John, Lou and the family. Said John, "We knew nothing about his mental illness to begin with. It was a tough, gradual journey learning what this meant." Over the next 17 years Dan spent other periods in hospitals throughout the country and overseas. Between these episodes, Dan was "a lovely guy" who lived independently and was happy to be with John and Lou and other family members. He loved their children and like a generous uncle, loved gift giving. He could hold his own in any circle, and had many friends especially those he had made and retained since school days. But slowly John and Lou began to recognize the pattern which emerged when another manic episode would take place. Dan would refuse to admit to John and other family members that anything was wrong and would disappear, only to emerge in an elevated state, out of control and in need of care. His illness became such that he was no longer able to practise law, and had to give up his practising certificate.

dan's last four years

In Dan's last four years of life, there were no such committal episodes, and he found a new stability as he struggled to find quality of life and meaning. He was able to take up a part time job, doing some cleaning work four hours a day. Then he got part time work in a legal firm, regaining his practising certificate. "In terms of social integration back into society, of having paid part time legal work, there was a lot going for him: there were a lot of positives," John said. He undertook wood-turning and stone carving at the Artsenta; he helped out at the Botanical Gardens Kiosk as a volunteer; was involved with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and sang in a local choir, *Sunnyside-up*. He had taken part in *Grow*, a 12-step programme for mental health and made good friends through this including his flatmate. Lou regards this slow return to a more normal life as 'incredibly courageous': "I know how hard he tried, to get up each day and face things at the level of difficulty there was in front of him."

leading up to dan's death

Just prior to Dan's death, his occupational therapist of the previous 18 months, had discharged him from her care. She had supported him well, and this was a sign of his improvement. The day before he died, Dan was counsel in a court case, his second since returning to legal practice. The hearing was postponed until the afternoon. That same afternoon he was to have flown to Auckland for a weekend *Grow* conference. We do not know what happened, except that he never got to Auckland. However, we do know that before he left the office around 5 pm, Dan poked his head around his colleague's door and said chirpily, 'I'm away — see you tomorrow'. He seemed positive and happy. He was then seen walking home that afternoon with groceries in hand.

Dan died some time that evening. He was found hanging the following morning by his flatmate. What happened between that late afternoon we know about and the next morning will never be revealed. We can surmise as John did, "that the events of the previous days had tipped the balance." Lou added, "Looking back, he had just got worn out."

unexpected shock

Dan's death was "unexpected and a shock for the whole family… and for the whole community." Dan was well-known. John and Lou got on with the task of preparing a funeral with all of the family who gathered, and of supporting those in most need, especially Dan's Mum, and his close friends.

For those closest to Dan or his

John and Lou Maguire

workmates, there had been no indications of impending suicide, and no one expected this sudden death, even though Dan had attempted suicide once before. John said, "You knew he had suicidal thoughts because he told you. I could understand why he hadn't committed suicide because he had talked with me about that — about why it was so wrong or hard for him, and that he wouldn't do it."

Lou reflected on Dan's suicidal thoughts: they… "troubled him hugely for a long time and he fought and fought against them. And then he got to the point of being quite well, and achieving the things that were on his list of what he wanted to do, and yet he realized that life was still too hard. From somewhere Dan got the clear mindedness to make that decision — because he was often not clear-minded and making decisions was hard for him."

The effects of his death

When asked how Dan's death affected him, John said, "For me, there is and was no anger … Nor did I feel hurt personally by Dan. However, the loss of Dan was and is immense in my life. I think we felt his level of hardship so much that we had to be able to let him go, and those feelings came very, very quickly." As well, John says that he found a sense of peace in Dan's death. "It was freedom for him, because I just couldn't envisage another five years of this for Dan … it was too painful for him." He added, "And this is not saying that suicide is now an acceptable thing … and therefore it's all right now. Not at all. It's saying, 'Dan, you've done this. I know why you did it. I don't know how you got as far as you did with the difficulties and losses you faced. And I don't know what your life would have been like beyond this. I do know your journey would have been tough.'"

It was a release from the journey that John and Lou were on with Dan, and the life commitment they had made to support him through his illness.

learnings

It was important to treat the person who is mentally ill as a human being, and to maintain the priority of the person over the illness, while still being aware of that. This was a delicate balance. "There were times," said John, "when I forgot Dan had mental illness. When he was good, he was very good. I saw him as my brother and friend. I'd forget he was on medication and say 'Would you like a beer?' … Often that was OK, but you could end up in a deep dialogue till the early hours as Dan tried desperately to resolve his confusions, hurts and challenges — because I had overlooked the illness."

John says that it took Lou and himself a long time to understand Dan's mental illness. Using a good teaching principle, however, he said, "You can't understand anything until you are ready to learn. There was a whole learning process about mental illness here. John Kirwan wasn't there when we began to learn."

If understanding was needed, then acceptance of the illness was crucial, taking time and patience — both on John and Lou's part and Dan's, especially when Dan found it difficult to accept that he was ill. It often meant being "prepared for hurt and rejection." However, "We, the wider family, were always there for him. Looking back, we all had a sense of compassion, wanting to be for him, with him, to protect him."

care of carers:

Lou: "… having known Dan over so many years, we became aware of how much John and I had to look after each other as carers of someone who is so sick… Sometimes the best support I could give John was to pull back from supporting Dan together, and just give John the time he needed to be with Dan. When John would come back I was ready just to listen and let John grieve for Dan or share the stress. This way, one of us was staying stronger. We had different roles to play, and it took time to realize how important this is too." Often it needed a team of people to help in complementary roles. And being aware enough and strong enough to ask for this support from family, friends and the health system was also crucial.

faith values held

Words that constantly recurred during this interview were: courage, compassion, struggle, vulnerability, love, understanding, acceptance, and support.

For the wider Maguire family these words reflect their sense of unity and the shared Catholic faith which helped them as a family in dealing with the positive and negatives of Dan's life, and the mystery of his suicide at a time when he was the best he had been in a long time. And while it is often hard to discern what truly sustains and holds any one of us, they believe all of us are held in God's hands. ■

John and Lou Maguire are teachers who live in Dunedin.

no-one is ever lost or forgotten

The role of a chaplain or pastor is often crucial in the care of those who surround someone who has committed suicide. Here we interview a priest who has long experience of that sudden death which is suicide; and of the pain, brokenness and confusion that accompanies and follows it.

I am sitting with Mark Chamberlain, who tells me, "One of my first memories as a priest is of the sick feeling in my stomach when I heard that Jack had hung himself. Just 18 years old, he was full of potential and life. On seeing his disfigured body, I couldn't help think, 'how on earth did we get to this place?' I loved his parents and sensed just a fraction of their severe pain and horror. I can still see Jack's Mum holding his head and just kissing it, over and over. I felt very powerless. There was nothing I could say, nothing I could offer other than just being there. I sensed presence was important, and I think if we can be vulnerable enough, then God's care comes through in ourselves, the presence and compassion of God."

In talking about pastoral situations and his role as a priest, Mark emphasised that often all that he does applies to us too — we are each pastors in our own way.

convey god's care and mercy

Dealing with sudden death by suicide is very different from other deaths. The one loved has violated themselves, destroyed themselves. There is initial shock: "We loved the way they were, their smile, the way they spoke. That all this is extinguished is awful."

As a pastor, Mark is clear we need to convey God's care, and that God's mercy is with the family — to tell or symbolize to the family, and the intimates, that they are not alone, although they are in a place of isolation and powerlessness.

He says, "We need to find all the ways in community and neighbourhood that people may gather round: bring food, text, send emails and letters, come to visit, just to sit – all these are crucial. We use every simple way of saying to the family and intimates 'you are not alone, and that God has not abandoned you in your grief and shock. We are with you on this huge journey.'

"I remember being called to a flat on campus where a young woman had overdosed. It was exam time. Sarah had been lying dead in her bed for three days. Her flatmates had carried on with their timetables as normally and thought that she, too, was at the library. I remember seeing these three young people, their faces white, drained of colour. At a very human level there was a sense of these three feeling totally bereft of support, of warmth and of perspective.

"How important things like pizzas and food were! I brought them over to the house for a meal and they had most meals with me up till the funeral. We used meal times at Holy Name to experience some warmth and to be able to talk through what they'd seen. The care of the university departments involved, Student Health, and their families was great.

"One thing that really helped was going into Sarah's room, lighting a candle, and listening to some of her favourite music. Tears flowed in silence, and we finished by praying a simple prayer together. That little ritual seemed to bless their space.

"I think for young people death really is off their screen and when it suddenly hits them, that someone has done this to herself, they are really rocked."

Father Mark Chamberlain

handed into the mystery of Jesus

Mark says it is important to remember that the family or intimates cannot speak to the person. "They can't get any resolution. Often they blame themselves, 'what didn't I do', and are rendered hugely vulnerable to public opinion. They have been rendered speechless. Suicide can be the ultimate slap in the face, and at one level there's no hope of reconciliation… It is for us pastors prayerfully to offer a depth dimension, to listen to the frustration, ambivalence and confusion, and to let the families know that their emotions often reflect the painful, hopeless and despairing feelings of the one who has died. It is when relatives and friends realize this – that they are in the same space as their dead loved one, then hopefully we can offer them the possibility of being open to grace, to the gift of healing, to some level of being reconciled to what has happened… and that all of this is somehow handed into the mystery of Jesus, as at the foot of the Cross. But handing over can

happen only after many intense feelings have been expressed."

delay the funeral

"It is partially for that reason that the funeral should be delayed, even by a day. It is simply to allow those involved really to talk to each other about the way they found the body, the way the body looked, what they saw, the way the room was, and it is important too for us to go into the bedroom or the office of the person and somehow stay there for some time — yes, the place where they have died — and also the place where they spend their lives, and bless these places. It is to avoid rushing and to allow this movement to occur slowly, to overcome that whole energy that we must do something."

the importance of ritual

As well, it is really important "to give attention to the body, to acknowledge that this is the body that housed the person we loved, either through using oil to anoint or water to bless the body. Why? We use our age-old rituals that are designed to remind us of the sacredness of the person and to help us honour that sacredness by participating in a simple ritual. Secondly, suicide is a 'beyond words' experience. Ritual matches that experience… we do not have the right words but we can touch, we can bless, we can use water, we can light candles, we can do whatever we need to do, and we don't have to say anything. But something deep inside us, beyond words, is expressed. This is a way of acknowledging what has happened, and allowing healing to begin.

"Often what I will do is to invite those who want to, to come and stand in the presence of the body of the one we loved. I hold blessed oil, and simply allow people to come up one by one, or in groups, to bless or anoint the person with the oil. Often they say nothing. And I do the same with the closed casket when the body is too deformed, but this time we use holy water."

at the funeral itself

"The funeral of a person who has committed suicide is not like a normal funeral where there is a celebration of the life of the person. There is a presence of a dark energy, which needs to be acknowledged somehow. Whether straight-out or in so many words it is good to be able to say at the funeral that this is a case of suicide. It allows some people in the congregation who did not know, and the family who may be feeling a sense of shame or even resisting naming what's happened or allowing it to be known, to face the situation honestly and more openly. It is pastorally effective often.

"I can remember Ted's funeral, where the family went to great lengths not to speak about suicide. It was not to be talked about. The flowers on the coffin were huge — everything was larger than life. But in the homily I was able to let people know, and you could almost sense the relief in the group. It helped some people to know how to be with the family. And I heard back from the family that it helped them also."

"Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in our hearts." ... we are powerless in the face of suicide, but somehow we are able to allow God's care to shine through us.

coming to reconnect

"Another major part of helping families and intimates is simply to remind them that they are not the only ones to have experienced a suicide. It is a common and a sad fact. I encourage them to appreciate this fact, and that it will take time and energy to work this through. And that in time they will adjust slowly to what's happened and reconnect with the person who has died.

"Initially the event of suicide blocks any relationship, and this is very different from other deaths. Yes, how could they have done that? Blown their head off or overdosed, how could they? Have hung from the ceiling? This is what is so immediate. There are a multitude of feelings around that, and it takes a huge amount of time for them to subside, and for a deeper sense of the fact that the person was unwell to surface. Only after that can come a sense of reconnection to the person."

Is this a reconnection in new way?

"Yes, it is because it acknowledges all that has happened while taking hold of what was also good about this person. Great help can come through GP's, counseling, spiritual direction and psychotherapy. For the priest, it requires being faithful over time. Our part doesn't end with the funeral. It happens through visiting and maintaining contact. It may be that we meet in the supermarket and I mention the person's name — Sarah or Anthony. We can talk about the funeral in a simple way: had they any contact with Sam's friends. Or I say I saw a friend of Sam the other day. What we are doing is bringing Sam into the present into this intimate space. The name of the dead person is sacramental. Suddenly there is presence between us again. Whether that's positive or negative, it is good because Sam is there in front of us. We have reconnected."

last thought

Mark concludes "Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in our hearts." We know that we are powerless in the face of suicide, but somehow we are able to allow God's care to shine through us. And the deep potential for healing lies here. ■

Mark Chamberlain is the pastor of the Dunedin North Pastoral Area, which includes chaplaincy to the University of Otago, and to the Dunedin Public Hospital. He is a trained spiritual director and psychotherapist.

Hope for the Humbled:

I was standing on the sidewalk in Madras Street, in front of one of the remaining buildings, on a blue-skied, cold winter's crisp day. What a surprising site. In the midst of the ruins were Michael Parekowhai's two wondrous bulls, both on top of grand pianos. The bulls were glistening black, made to last in all weathers – bold, strong and powerful. They pervaded a sense of beauty and magnificent permanence while standing on a bare earthen plot where a building had been wrecked and removed.

There was a pile of twisted iron nearby; a weird sculpture of salvaged metal from a plundered palisade. In the distance, there were Romanesque arches being held up by Gothic flying buttresses of reinforced steel. There were cranes in the skyline — now symbols of both the destruction and the rebuild — and the ever-present pile of red bricks.

Michael Parekowhai's carved Steinway was being played from the building behind me, filling the air with sounds of cascading hope. There was music on Madras Street!

I felt the numbness subside, a stirring in my spirit, a quivering of creativity and I laughed.

Thanks be to God.

Thank you, Michael, for entrusting your quirky works of art to the Christchurch elements. A resurrection moment in the rubble!

Niki Scott-Brosnahan

Bulls on Madras Street

contemplation, or meditation?

Here is another take on the way God wants to have communication with us. Donagh O'Shea speaks of a full presence of God in our ordinary lives, to which he gives the name 'intimacy'. It is to be found where each person is, not just in monasteries.

Donagh O'Shea

Asked what contemplation was, a great teacher replied: "Intimacy." Contemplation is about being intimate or fully present to experience. We all manage this in moments of surprise or delight, but we soon return to our habitual tracks: thinking about what happened, or talking about it, or planning to talk about it later. During the moments when we are fully present to something we have no words. The event that brought us to silence does not have to be a cataclysmic one; next time you knock over a mug of coffee take time to notice what was going on in you in that moment. Such moments may not be the stuff of history, but they are seeds of contemplation.

counting from the heart

'Seeds of contemplation' bring Thomas Merton to mind. A monk from his monastery visited our priory in Cork, and I apologised to him for the many steps (exactly 100, as it happens) as we climbed the flights of stairs. "There are many steps in Gethsemani abbey, too," he replied. Then he added, "I always count them as I climb…." I asked how many there were, and to my surprise he said, "I don't know!" As I wondered silently what form of dementia this indicated he continued: "This is how I count them: one, one, one…!" The mind can count until it tires of it, but the heart can count only as far as one. This was one of the most profound and practical teachings I have ever received.

In the spiritual life it is always the beginning. The mind likes to run ahead; it is already on the top step as my foot is on the first. It also likes to count and quantify everything: I knew, for example, that there were exactly100 steps in that priory. But his way of counting was different: there was no accumulation and no projection into the future; everything was here and now. The monastic life that shaped Thomas Merton had shaped his brother too.

> Contemplation is not an escape; instead it is a deeper and more intimate experience of our ordinary lives . . .

Contemplation has the name of being airy and unreal. Yeats wrote of

Levelled lawns and gravelled ways
Where slippered Contemplation finds his ease.

The temptation to escape from ordinary experience is almost overpowering at times (those lines from Yeats occur in a poem about civil war). But contemplation is not an escape; instead it is a deeper and more intimate experience of our ordinary lives, whether these are difficult and painful or as simple as climbing a stairs. Nor do we have to enter a monastery to find it. We can find it where we are; in fact, we can find it nowhere else.

different kinds of knowing

There are different kinds of knowing. They contrast with one another and yet do not exclude one another. There is factual knowledge, there is theoretical knowledge, and there is intimate knowledge. To illustrate this: unless you had some training as an archivist or historian you could not write a satisfactory biography of your mother; yet in another way you know her more intimately than any historian or archivist ever could, whose knowledge was just factual.

As for theoretical knowledge, it would scarcely touch your mother at all: it is about mothers in general. But intimate knowledge is not usually able to give a fluent account of itself, and so to the other kinds of knowledge it appears very simple and poor: no footnotes, no bibliography, no historical background, little or no relationship to contemporary events. A historian would dismiss it at once. But to your intimate knowledge the historian's knowledge looks cold, impersonal and abstract.

contemplation

There is a special kind of intimate knowledge that Christians call contemplation. It is poorer, Meister Eckhart said, than factual and theoretical knowledge – poorer and yet richer. "Anyone who would see God must be blind…. God is 'a light that shines in the darkness'…. The blinding of the soul means that she knows nothing." He is not

alone among mystics in using this kind of language. Mystics through the ages speak of darkness, emptiness, nothingness, the void. These are words that may well frighten one away from the very thought of contemplation. But they only mean that in this kind of knowledge there is nothing between us and God: no images, no theories, no stories…

The innermost part of the Jerusalem temple was called the Holy of Holies; it was "the place of meeting with God." By the time of Jesus it was completely empty. This has become an abiding reassurance to Jews and Christians who seek to enter the heart of contemplation. The Holy of Holies is empty. There is nothing in it, or rather no thing; there is only God. A less challenging word would be 'presence', but it has to mean full presence, intimate presence to the One who is not a 'thing'.

The temple in Jerusalem no longer exists; we are now the Holy of Holies. "You are God's temple," St Paul wrote (1 Cor 3:16-17) – meaning the Holy of Holies. There are many teachers in the Church whose Holy of Holies is lined with books: books of theology and canon law. These books may be good, but they are in the wrong place. Their place is in an area of the temple known as the Holy Place, between the Holy of Holies and the outer courts. Books and lectures may help guide us to the Holy of Holies, but only we can go inside. Nobody is learned in the Holy of Holies; all learning is left outside and the one who enters "knows nothing."

me a contemplative?

Since we don't have to be learned to enter there, everyone has an equal chance. God gives the supreme gift of Divine Presence to the ignorant and even to scoundrels, Eckhart said, to show that everything is gift. This means that none of our excuses for turning away from contemplation is of any account. We don't have to be monks or nuns to do it; we don't have to be learned or respectable; we don't have to go anywhere. We ourselves are God's temple, and so it is nearer to us than we are to our own selves. We often settle for less; we settle down in the outer courts, buying and selling — not only material objects but everything – trading even with God. Jesus threw the buyers and sellers out of the temple, Eckhart said, because God does not trade with us; God insists on giving "freely and for nothing."

There is a world-wide interest in contemplation today (or meditation, as it is more usually called). It crosses all divides of age and race and religious affiliation. It is evidence of a great hunger for deeper life in God. Millions are finding their way to the Holy of Holies, even when given little or no help or encouragement by their own religious leaders. Only those who have experienced this intimate knowledge will think it worth mentioning. But the crowd is swelling. "Many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob'" (Isaiah 2:2). ■

Donagh O'Shea is the director of the Tallaght Dominican Retreat Centre, Dublin, and well-known retreat giver and writer.

a priest and his people

Father Tom Power, much-loved parish priest of St Peter's Beckenham in Christchurch, died recently at the age of 92. The writers offer an insight into the nature of diocesan priesthood and the intimate connection between Fr Tom and his parishioners.

Judy McCashin and John Walsh

Father Tom Power

"You have become the most important people in my life" Fr Tom said in the homily he delivered on the 56th anniversary of his ordination. "You bring the priest into the most sacred part of your existence, the part that weaves the very story of your life from birth to death. And," he continued, "you give my life meaning. Every baptism, every marriage, every funeral, your children's First Communion and Confirmation days and all the things that happen in between create a closeness between the priest and the people. There have been private and public moments where our lives have merged. I have shared your joyful times, your heartaches and your sorrows, your doubts and your gladness. We have wept and laughed together, rejoiced and debated, felt disappointment and made new plans — together. You have invited me into your homes."

known just as fr tom

The title "Monsignor" did not sit well with Thomas Adrian Power. He was first and foremost a priest to his people and totally fulfilled in his calling. Even after being made a Monsignor we knew him as Fr Tom and loved him for his dedication, for his example of faith and love of God, and for his human qualities. We loved his feistiness, his stubborn determination, his sense of justice and fairness, his commitment continuing well beyond retirement age, his sense of humour and his sharp mind.

sharing memories

Father Tom discouraged eulogies at funeral Masses but understood their value — at a different time and place. It was entirely appropriate then, that at the vigil service on the evening before his funeral people were given the opportunity to share memories of their much-loved pastor.

was fr tom god?

What was notable was the number of children and young people who went to the microphone to speak. Many admitted not always understanding his jokes. At least one young speaker had thought (when younger) that Fr Tom was God.

A mother talked of Fr Tom's support for mothers doing "the most important job in the world". Staff at our parish school also noted and appreciated his involvement.

creative and open

More than one person commented on his homilies, his willingness to try new things, including on one occasion, the use of masks. He used to invite the congregation to discuss what they had been listening to and how it applied to their lives. There were a number of parishioners who had the homilies emailed to them weekly by this very computer-literate nonagenarian.

A representative of St Vincent de Paul and a supporter of the pro-life movement both expressed gratitude for the money received from parish funds each year to support their

work. Fr Tom promulgated the parish policy of donating a proportion of its income to causes voted for by parishioners.

frugal and critical

A frugal man, he resisted spending money on a heat pump for the presbytery and he was critical of the cost of the new Missal — and even less impressed when he found multiple errors in it.

There are many examples of his self-deprecatory and ironical sense of humour and of his sharp mind. Viewing an early version of the Diocesan Plan and its projections for 2014, he pounced on the fact that there was no reference to a priest over the age of 90 working in the Diocese. "They obviously think I will have died," he smiled, and it was clear he had no immediate plans to oblige!

In spite of decreasing mobility and the pain he had to endure in his last years, there was no way he was going to retire, and there was no one who would dare to try to make him! He continued to perform all his priestly duties and was reluctant to hand over chores like locking up the hall. He also accepted invitations to Passionist Family Group events, including meals and House Masses, maintaining his interest in the parish right to the end. Who could forget his stoicism as he lived out his priestly vocation with faith, hope and love for God and his people?

Rest in peace, Father Tom. ■

Judy McCashin and John Walsh are parishioners of St Peter's Beckenham, Christchurch.

Procession

Councils, conferences and convocations
weave their way through the vicissitudes
of governance and control
flanking the river of time.

Cardinals, confreres and clergy
like well-intentioned palm wavers
going before Jesus to Jerusalem
expect triumphal resolution.

On one side domination and slavery
on the other freedom and salvation
and He in whose honour they process
knows everything asked of him is in place

not least the efficacious memorial
of his life, death, and resurrection.
In procession most pass over the bridge
put in place via power and prestige.

Few see footbridges of joy and peace
of anticipated escape and journeying
of search and rescue along the way
recalled in annual household ritual.

In recapturing the sacred intimacy
of clustered household Eucharist
may priesthood be again set free
to tread bridges of familiarity.

Christopher John SSF

blessed are the unemployed

This article tells the story of a married couple who are required to fit into the welfare system after they fail to obtain jobs. It tells of their spiritual response to what they experienced.

Adrienne Thompson

Some years ago my husband and I finished our former job. It was a highly polished finish with multiple farewell functions, tears, prayers and eulogies. For us, a good ending to 20 years with the same organisation. We left with a feeling of being loved, valued and appreciated. Six months down the unemployment road those feelings had eroded almost down to bedrock.

future strategies

We used to be busy all the time – consulting colleagues, being called on to give advice, making plans and actioning plans, thinking ahead to large future strategies as well as coping with minor daily chores and a variety of not-so-minor crises; always interacting with people, always challenged, always taken out of ourselves.

Our colleagues were also our friends, our employees were also our fellow church members, our home was also our workplace, our hospitality was also our job. We were useful, we were tired, we were stressed, we were fulfilled, we were employed.

artificial busyness

In contrast, now we contrived our routines to fill our days with what feels like an artificial busyness. We did what you're supposed to do.

We'd been to the employment agencies. We'd scan the paper and the Internet for job opportunities. We'd rung up for job descriptions, studied them, chosen the possible ones. We'd filled in the application form, sculpted our CV to the scope of the job, crafted the letter to go with it, posted it off with prayer and hope and anxiety.

Sometimes there was no reply at all. Sometimes a polite regret that the position had been filled. Three times, an interview, then the wait with heightened hope, and the disappointing let-down.

pushing uphill

We didn't want to do it, but after a fruitless month we decided we'd better apply for the benefits we can claim. That felt like a big lump to swallow. We'd never even been entitled to family support before now. Venturing into this world of WINZ and IRD felt like trying to push our way up a hillside covered with thick gorse. We collected pamphlets and booklets and forms and tried to puzzle them out. We put off making the application because we kept thinking that next week we'd have a job.

> We pray daily for a job, not just any job but the right one. We assure ourselves and each other that something will turn up soon . . .

We discovered that different schemes cancel each other out. If we applied for family support we should get it; but if we received an unemployment benefit it seems we didn't get it any more, so we debated about whether it's worth applying. We had had to declare our income for 1997–98 in order to get one allowance. But we had to declare our income for 98–99 to obtain community cards. The gratuity we received from our former employer meant we had too much money in the past 26 weeks to receive the unemployment benefit for another ten weeks.

guilty and embarrassed

Along with confusion and frustration we felt guilty and embarrassed about asking for anything at all.

We wanted help, so we went to the IRD office. Sorry, they said, we don't talk to customers face to face. Please ring this number. Dial, wait on hold, press this digit if you want this service, finally get to talk to a faceless voice and get our questions answered.

We took a form into WINZ. The large, impeccably groomed lady on the desk was friendly and helpful but conveyed a slightly menacing presence like a strict school principal. She checked our form and said we'd filled it in correctly but we couldn't just hand it over to her. "Please put it in an envelope and post it back to us."

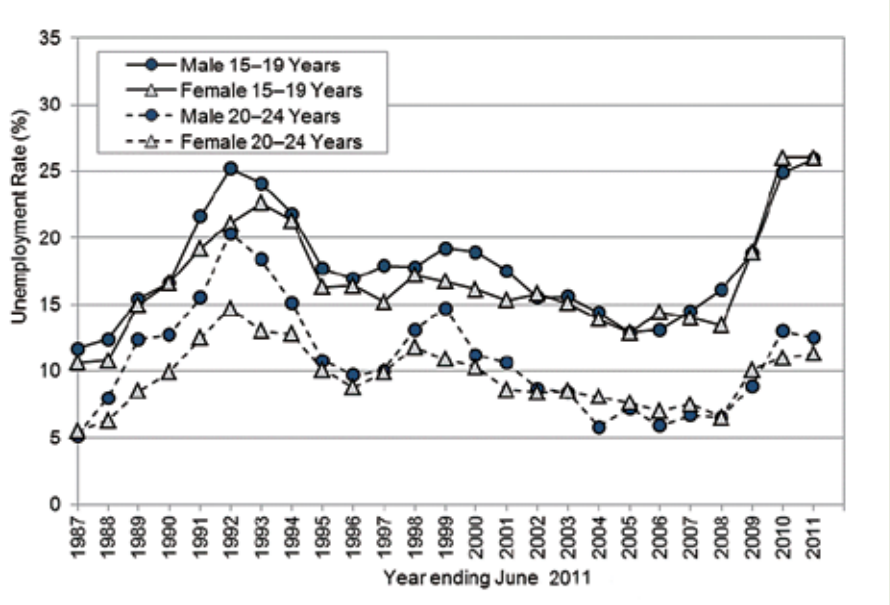
We felt confused, cross and out of control. We felt the system hates us. We looked around at the others in the office. A Somali woman swathed head to foot in flowing gown, a man with his leg in plaster. Tired people, ordinary people, out-of-work people. Like us. We didn't want to be counted here.

We were assigned a case officer, a cheerful, friendly young man who was positive and encouraging. "You're eminently employable. I'll make an appointment to meet you again in a month but I don't expect to see you back here." Grudgingly grateful for his encouragement, I felt irrationally resentful of his cheerfulness.

keeping things in perspective

We tried to keep things in perspective by counting our blessings. We have somewhere to live, we have

each other, we have friends, we have family. People write or telephone with encouraging messages. It's good to feel that they care. But inwardly nagging is the feeling that we don't just want love, we don't just want support, we want to be doing something. We started out with great faith in our gifts and skills. Each rejection puts another hairline crack in our self confidence. Maybe we're not so competent after all. Maybe all these people who turn us down are perfectly correct in their conclusion that we're not worth employing.



Source: Statistics New Zealand Household Labour Force Survey

the beatitudes

In counting our blessings I've gone back to the beatitudes. I learnt them as a child from a beautiful children's prayer book. The words are associated for me with a picture of bearded men in long robes sitting on a peaceful green hillside listening to a gentle discourse from a golden-haired Jesus. The way I'm learning them now, a more appropriate picture would be a violent mountain torrent crashing down a steep gorge. My frail kayak hurtles around huge bluffs, each of them labelled: blessed ... blessed ... blessed.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Or as The Message puts it "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope". So this is a blessing? We are blessed in being dependent, jobless, without resources? We're blessed in being poor in recognition and status? I look for the blessing here and find this: that we're experiencing God's fatherly care. We've had enough money to live on, even without a salary. We've opened in ourselves a small window on the experience of the truly poor of the world.

This encounter with loss — loss of friends, work, income, home, self-worth — is a deep wound. I can't find any sweetness or blessing in it at all. But Jesus said, *Blessed are those who mourn because they shall be comforted.*

Will we feel in the future that God companioned us on this road of grief? Right now I can't say. The grieving is now, the comfort still future tense.

And, *blessed are the meek*. Chewing and cogitating on what it means to be meek, I wonder whether this blessing can possibly be ours. It seems that this experience of unemployment may offer us an advanced class in meekness should we choose to enrol in it.

Can we trust in God's assessment of us, not be undermined by employers who reject us? Can we accept gifts gratefully and simply instead of fretting because we're not in a position to return favours? Can we be ourselves without apology? Not exploit people's good will nor be embarrassed by their pity?

To hunger and thirst for righteousness in this place of unemployment seems to me a call to want God more than his good gifts. We pray daily for a job, not just any job but the right one. We assure ourselves and each other that something will turn up soon, God must intend us to have a job and even a ministry. On my good days I believe it. On my bad days I reinforce my broken faith with the splint of this beatitude: God first and God last, whether or not God grants our prayers.

an easier lesson

The mercy transactions are an easier lesson. We've given and taken mercy over the years, this is familiar ground. Not so, purity in heart. No wonder I don't see God very much.

I've never before lived the beatitudes as I'm living them now, or trying to. I still don't know what they mean, but I'm striving to direct my experience of joblessness through these steep, rocky, difficult words.

Jesus never said, "Blessed are the unemployed". And if he had, I don't think he would have added "for they shall obtain a job". But he might have promised a radically transformed perspective on what it means to be blessed. ■

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

This article was originally published in Reality *magazine.*
See: www.reality.org.nz

not focussing on difference

Nic Steenhout is a disability rights activist with international experience of campaigning for the rights of the disabled. He speaks swith Lorna Johnson about his passionate advocacy for many aspects of life where he finds injustice and misunderstanding.

Meeting a person who happily admits he has been called a 'rabid' disability rights activist is an interesting experience. Nic Steenhout calmly recounts numerous examples of how he has challenged society by taking action to draw attention to injustice for people with disabilities, both in the USA and New Zealand. As we talk over a ginger beer in a Palmerston North cafe, it seems hard to believe that this is the same person who has been arrested over 20 times for civil disobedience. That was in America, he hastens to add, since New Zealanders aren't such a protesting sort of people.

Born to a French Canadian mother and a Belgian father in Greece, Nic has travelled extensively and worked in many countries. His first language is French, and a slight trace of accent remains. English is his fourth language. He trained as a chef and worked in commercial kitchens for a number of years. He has retained his love of cooking and maintains his own website where he shares his recipes and his other love, food photography. Nowadays his paid work is in administration at Massey University.

doing things with people

Nic first became involved in disability advocacy in the United States in the mid 1990's, when he worked in a large (by NZ standards) not-for-profit organisation. He was there for five years as programme director. The organisation served a population of 2.5 million people and provided information, referral and advocacy services for people with disabilities. The philosophy was to do things with people, not for them.

Nic Steenhout

deinstitutionalisation

Nic later moved to Savannah, Georgia, where his work involved preparing people with disabilities to move into the community and live independently. At that stage in the USA, many young people with disabilities were in nursing homes. The concept of living in the community was in its infancy. On moving to New Zealand ten years ago, Nic discovered that the program of deinstitutionalisation was much further ahead here. Although expressing satisfaction with the progress that has been made, he sometimes questions what is really meant by 'community living'. "The idea of 'warehousing' people with disabilities in small warehouses (homes) in the community rather than large ones (institutions) is not true community living. Interactions with the community are important. Are people with disabilities really taking part?"

strong sense of justice

Despite working full time, Nic continues to devote a lot of energy to campaigning on disability-related issues in New Zealand. He is clearly passionate about his activism, and I wonder where that drive comes from.

"I have a strong sense of justice, which comes from my parents and my upbringing. I can't sit back, I need to confront discrimination and challenge attitudes that are wrong. I do take different approaches. It doesn't always have to be 'in your face'. Fundamentally I want to leave the world a better place than how I found it".

physician assisted suicide

The issue that he describes as 'dear to my heart' is that of legalised physician-assisted suicide. He talks knowledgeably about the studies that show 80 percent of medical staff felt quality of life for a person

with tetraplegia would be so poor that assisted suicide should be an option, compared to only 20percent of those who actually were tetraplegic. As he points out, "Who would be making the decisions in these cases and influencing friends and family, as well as the patient themselves?"

Statistics also show that the majority of able-bodied people, when asked, indicated they would prefer to be dead rather than in a wheelchair. Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, wheelchair users did not feel the same way. Nic feels that even with safeguards, a slippery slope mentality would prevail.

being a burden

He cites evidence from disability advocates in Oregon (where physician-assisted suicide is legal) who report that the elderly and disabled fear being a burden on their families and that this increases pressure on them to accept assisted suicide. He talks about some of the people Jack Kevorkian assisted to die who were not terminally ill, just in life situations they felt were untenable. "They were not given the assistance they needed. Of course they felt there was no other option. We need to be offering solutions, not helping them to die. We wouldn't be suggesting an able-bodied person be helped to die in the same situation. It's a scary proposition."

I ask him where he thinks the pressure for legalisation of physician-assisted suicide originates. "I think it stems from fear. There are also some vocal individuals who want it for themselves, for example Terry Pratchett in the UK." He points out that there is often another agenda at play here.

not fitting

"Disabled people don't quite fit, perhaps make others feel uncomfortable. The concept of eugenics is never far away in this debate. In the Holocaust, 500,000 people with disabilities were killed. Our thinking may have evolved, but a disabled person is not yet seen as 'just another person.'"

A further aspect is that the voice of the disabled person is often dismissed in the debate. "Those with disabilities are not considered capable of making their own decisions. The same tactic is used to disallow the opinions of those with a religious perspective 'Oh that's just religious guff.'" In this aspect of his campaigning he has found allies in the Catholic Church and has worked closely with The Nathaniel Bioethics Centre in Wellington.

"People talk about suffering, but a disabled person will suffer as much as society imposes suffering on them. Of course, people will be unhappy if they are told being disabled means they can't be in a relationship, for example."

marriage for the disabled

Nic is unhappy with the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage for disabled people; in particular, the aspect of Canon Law that determines that if a prospective marriage cannot be consummated, the sacrament of marriage cannot be celebrated. "We need to stop telling people with disabilities, 'You can't do this or that.' Let's shatter the prejudices and open the door."

abuse of mobility parks

Over the last five years, Nic has mounted a campaign against abuse of mobility parks that has included publishing photos of offending cars on his specially designed website. He ended up with evidence of hundreds of cases of illegally parked cars.

"I wanted to raise awareness. People think, 'I'll only park there for a minute, it doesn't matter', but it does matter, because then another person comes along and parks for a minute as well."

Wheelchair users, in particular, are vulnerable at night if they have to cross a car park, since they are lower than a driver's line of sight and risk being reversed into. At one point, when confronting a driver parked in a mobility park without a permit, Nic was assaulted and needed hospital treatment. The case made the local newspaper. Nic shrugs it off, saying, "People often respond with aggression. They've been caught out and they feel awkward."

I wonder what effect his site has had, and he smiles when he mentions overhearing a conversation in a store car park where one person said to another, "Don't park there, someone might take a photo of your car and publish it".

mobility assistance dogs

Other issues that Nic has worked on and achieved success with, are access to buildings, in particular access to the council buildings in Palmerston North and improving the status of mobility assistance dogs in NZ. "I met with several MPs, made submissions to Council and now they're recognised as service dogs and the NZ Dog Act now talks about 'disability assistance dogs', which include service dogs, mobility dogs, guide dogs and hearing dogs."

having hope

So are people open to a well-argued case, I wonder? "They often react emotionally, and they're not listening at that point. We are all people and I think it is important to focus on what we have in common, not what makes us different. I like to think I've had an impact, that I've played my part. I do have hope though, that things will change. You can only change one person at a time." ■

Nic Steenhout is a wheelchair user.

URLs for Nic's websites:

Wheelinggourmet.com
Accessibility.net.nz

after three days he will rise again

Mark 9:30-37 – 25th Sunday Ordinary Time – 23 September

Kathleen Rushton

The gospel readings of the Liturgical Year come now to the second part of Mark's story of Jesus. The two parts of this gospel may be viewed through the two-stage healing of the man who is blind (8:22-26). "Can you see anything?" Jesus asks. "I can see people," the man replies, "but they look like trees walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on the man's eyes again: "he looked intently and his sight was restored and he saw clearly." This two-phase seeing — seeing people moving like trees and seeing clearly — are the phases of the coming to faith of the disciples and of us who hear this gospel.

first half of the gospel

In the first half of Mark, Jesus reflects God's power in 'mighty deeds' *(dunamis)* of exorcism, healing, raising up, stilling seas, walking on water and feeding the hungry. He talks to the disciples about their being fishers of people, their preaching, casting out demons and curing the sick. He reaches out to the most alienated and suffering. Jesus talks in parables and riddles explaining what God is like.

Yet in Jesus' parables and 'mighty deeds', the disciples do not get it; nor do we. We see vaguely as in the image of seeing people looking like trees. Do you detect Jesus' frustration? He questions the Twelve: "Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? Do you not remember?… Do you not yet understand?" (8:17-21).

The bronze figure of the *Risen Jesus* visible from outside the entrance doors of the Cathedral of St Mary of the Assumption, San Francisco, from the inside is silhouetted through beautiful stained glass.

second half of the gospel

Jesus continues teaching the Twelve and healing on the way to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52). In the second half the gospel, he is vulnerable to various plottings against him. He talks of dispossession, poverty, death and of talking up his cross. It is the same for the disciples as for us: "follow me." The cross, many say, is the key. Yet transfiguration is at centre of the narrative (9:2-9) as we heard on the Second Sunday of Lent. The whole story is cross plus transfiguration. God's creative power transforms and transfigures suffering humanity into persons of radiant joy. This is the key to Mark. Jesus in suffering shows what God is like — transforming and transfiguring us. We enter into mystery.

framed with a call

This gospel is framed with a call. At the beginning we are called to expand our minds through "a baptism of repentance" (1:4). The word *metanoia*, (repentance, conversion) is composed of two words: *meta* (expand, go beyond) and *noia* (mind). We are called to "go beyond" or to "expand our mind." Near the end of this gospel, Jesus said: "Go into the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation (*ktisis,* that which is created)." (16:15)

In this framework, let us explore Jesus' words: "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again."

Three times, Jesus speaks of his death and resurrection. The first occurred in 8:31 (gospel for 24th Sunday, Ordinary Time) and the third in 10:33-34. The second is in our gospel (25th Sunday, Ordinary Time) in which Jesus "was teaching his disciples and telling them." The tense of the verbs here indicates a

continuous process of telling. Jesus hints at the mystery of the Cross: "The Son of Man is to be handed over." This evokes the Suffering Servant of Isaiah who "handed himself over to death" (53:12 "poured himself out to death").

The word for to "be handed over" (*paradidomi*) was a key word in the early Church's understanding of the passion. This is not often recognised because in different contexts *paradidomi* is translated as 'arrest' (Mk 1:14; 14:44), 'hand over' (10:33, 13:9 etc.), or 'betrayed' (3:19, 9:31, 14:18, 21). Jesus was not a helpless victim of forces beyond his control; he handed himself over to death. He identified freely with all human beings. Death faces all that has been created.

Mention of Jesus' death in Mark, and in the New Testament, is always found alongside his resurrection. Further, Jesus in the resurrection stories is never shown as a heavenly being or in brilliant light or other-worldly. He is as a human being among other human beings. Some recognise him. Some do not. His is a transformation into a new mode of physicality for which there was no precedent nor subsequent example.

beginning of new creation

Mark's story of Jesus begins with the word 'beginning' (*arche*) evoking the first words of the Book of Genesis. Later, it returns to "the beginning of creation" (10:6). This follows Jesus' transfiguration and ushers in his radical teachings on poverty, powerless and childlikeness. The verb 'rise' in 9:31 is in the active tense indicating that Jesus will take up new life.

At the end of this gospel, images evoke creation and new life (16:2). It is the first day of the week, the day when God created light (Gen1:3-5). It is the beginning of the new creation. After his resurrection, Jesus said: "Go into the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation (*ktisis,* that which is created)"(16:15). For Pope Benedict, Jesus' resurrection "ushered in a new dimension of being, a new dimension of life in which, in a transformed way, matter too was integrated and through which a new world emerges" (April 15, 2006, Easter Vigil Homily). The giving up and 'handing over' of oneself in death is the birth of new life. ■

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

We are the patient

We are the patient –
one body in need
of care, of air
of need to disappear
from constant view

Today we are dead –
to the world
we are not fully alive
not fit for speed
for high street commerce

We are wired for silence
disfigured even –
held in place, told red
is the colour to press
to call out from curtained cell

We are weary
of the menu, of machines
of polished floors, closing doors.
We do not sleep easy.
We are simply here, for now.

A dog's eye view

The day the dog ate my Mastercard
I knew it was time to give her credit.

Despite her master's voice, raised and shrill
She formed her own financial crunch –

Rolling over with a dog-grin
that said 'take it easy man,'

Let me lead you today
into the world of fair trade.

From this day on, I get paid in bones.

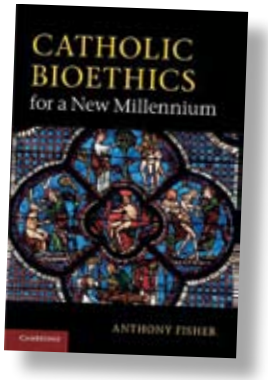
— *Robin Kearns*

a robust theology

Catholic Bioethics for a New Millennium

(Bishop) Anthony Fisher OP
Cambridge University Press 2012

Reviewer: John Kleinsman



I have recently had the pleasure of engaging with various groups of senior Catholic students. A surprise was the uncritical way in which they have bought into a strongly consequentialist and individualistic approach to decision-making that too narrowly defines human dignity in terms of respecting choice and tolerance of others' views. Catholic educators face a considerable task.

In light of that task this book, authored by Australian Bishop Anthony Fisher, provides a rich resource. A key idea is captured in the foreword: "… a people lives, and carries itself into the future, only by a kind of deep solidarity." Protecting this solidarity is presented as the key to true personal dignity rather than the contemporary cultural preference towards protection of individual choice. For this reason, many of the arguments in the book will appear as counter-intuitive for some. The essential claim of the book is a bold one: "Christianity is not a buffet of beliefs and practices."

I believe that many persons reject Catholic teaching because they don't understand it. A particular strength of this book is the solid foundational grounding it provides in Catholic principles (Part I). Subsequent chapters in Part II (Beginning of Life) and Part III (Later Life) then focus on real-life issues including stem cells, abortion, transplants, artificial nutrition and euthanasia. Fisher does a fine job of showing how insights derived from faith enrich bioethics. At the same time, he emphasises that the Church's teaching "is not some external source of moral thinking" but "an internal pattern of life" based on a truth knowable through reason.

Given my recent involvement in euthanasia I was particularly interested in the chapter on life endings. The treatment of scriptural references to suicide and voluntary euthanasia I found particularly illuminating. Noting how some use Scripture to support euthanasia, Fisher highlights how easy it is to allow the Scriptures to function as a 'mirror' of ourselves rather than a 'window'. He then outlines in some detail the scriptural basis of Judeo-Christian opposition to suicide and euthanasia. Here, and in his treatment of assisted nutrition and hydration, the point is made that decisions at the end of life must be based on the usefulness/burdens of the treatment rather than the worthwhileness of a patient's life.

I found Fisher's treatment of abortion refreshing, specifically his efforts to map out common ground. Whether or not people agree that the unborn are morally equal to older human beings, "hardly anyone thinks [the current] huge scale of abortion is a good thing. It requires too much intellectual, emotional and cultural gymnastics to keep excluding unborn children from our species, family or community." At the same time he cautions "pro-lifers" who fall into the same trap of over-generalising as their opponents: "Both sides should recognise that the results of abortion are by no means homogenous, nor is it universally experienced as all good or all bad."

The book is limited in that there are many issues that are not dealt with such as the allocation of scarce health-care resources and genetic engineering. That said, I would recommend it as a basic if solid text which can be used to unpack Catholic teaching from a well-informed philosophical and theological perspective. While not always an easy read, this is the price of a more robust critique of bioethics than is offered by the individualistic consequentialist approach that has become the fall-back position for many Catholics, young and older.

If Catholics are to question the teaching of their tradition let them at least do so from an adequately educated perspective as offered by this book. ■

whisky and redemption

The Angels' Share

Director: Ken Loach

Reviewer: Paul Sorrell

From the opening scene, *The Angels' Share* promises to deliver a gritty urban hard-luck story in the mould cinephiles have come to expect from veteran English director Ken Loach. Appearing in court to face sentence arising from a vicious assault, young Glaswegian tearaway Robbie is poised on the edge of destruction. His partner Leonie is pregnant and her family is out to get him. In the scenes that follow, Robbie is beaten up, followed, threatened and harassed. His best course seems to be to accept the £5000 Leonie's father has offered him to leave her and their new baby and shift to London.

But salvation is at hand, in the form of a single malt Scotch whisky. Narrowly avoiding jail, Robbie is put on a community service gang under the supervision of Harry, a firm but caring older man and lover of a fine dram. When Harry takes his charges on an educational tour of a local distillery, Robbie hatches a plot to capitalise on their newfound knowledge of spirituous liquors. He and a few of his fellow miscreants don kilts and travel to the Highlands, where they plan to pull off a heist that the whisky lovers of the world could only dream about.

The Angels' Share has a great deal going for it. From the opening frames, we are drawn into the world of the film and quickly come to care about the characters, especially the hapless Robbie. His associates (Rhino, Albert and Mo) are clearly drawn and all have individual, even endearing, personalities. Supervisor Harry is a warm delight, and some of the minor characters — such as whisky expert Rory McAllister and scheming connnoisseur and collector Thaddeus (played by Roger Allam, the only face I recognised) — are memorable.

My only misgiving is that, generically, two different films have been pushed together here. The sharp-edged documentary that dominates the first half gives way to the kind of feel-good comedy (*Brassed Off, Calendar Girls, The Full Monty, Billy Elliot*, etc., etc.) that has become a staple of British cinema. Whether the social realism and the Highland japes gell together is a question for the individual viewer.

But don't let me put you off. Apart from giving us an insight into life on struggle street, Glasgow-style, and exposing us to an unsentimentalised (if increasingly comic) story of personal redemption, *The Angels' Share* is simply a lot of fun to watch. ■

Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

benedict's dilemma

Many of the numerous problems facing the Church when Joseph Ratzinger became Pope fall into two main sets. One set arises from the polarisation which developed during the 26 years of John Paul's papacy. Vatican II had engendered expectations of change, along with growth in theological literacy among laity and members of religious orders. Paul VI appointed Vatican II-oriented bishops; JPII chose men noted primarily for their unquestioning obedience, an attitude they in turn demanded of their people. Many priests and bishops are caught in the middle.

The other set arises from disarray in the Vatican. Wojtyła's papacy had continued the development of papal power which began with Gregory VII (1073-1085). Gregory, trying to counter the encroachment on church affairs by various princedoms, began strengthening papal authority. Rome eventually became a princedom in its own right. Today there is a mismatch between a democratic mentality and a religious princedom; the Catholic Church appears as an absolute monarchy.

JPII's appointments to the Curia reflected his mentality. This, coupled with his managerial defects, exacerbated the already widespread culture of 'entitlement', both Curial and clerical in general. A historical tendency to protect the Church at the expense of individuals' rights was reinforced. Dubious financial dealings occurred within sections of the Vatican.

Benedict often speaks of the need for a culture change. The example must come from the top — the Vatican. Cardinal Ratzinger had often criticized the unwieldy proliferation of departments therein. The logical choice for changing this is the Secretary of State, whose role is rather like, but more than, that of a prime minister in a secular government. He must oversee everything: co-ordinate the various departments, monitor Vatican finances, supervise diplomats who deal with both local Bishops and foreign governments. But that's where the new pope was faced with a dilemma.

To ensure appropriate experience the Secretary is traditionally a man with Secretariat background. But the 'princedom' culture permeated the department; opposition to the then Cardinal Ratzinger's efforts to combat clerical paedophilia came from JPII's Secretary of State. So Benedict appointed a non-diplomat, Cardinal Bertone, sparking widespread resentment.

Benedict eschewed departmental reorganization, earning more disapproval. Instead, he attacked the roots of the dysfunctional culture. These roots are lack of accountability and its counterpart, transparency. Two significant signs of progress — and of foot dragging — have occurred in recent months.

First, via Bertone, he had invited *Moneyval*, the European Community watchdog for financial transparency, to report on the Vatican financial set-up. *Moneyval* members examined the entire legal system, studying the gendarmes, the tribunal system and the various financial entities. In July it gave a general pass, recognising the significant positive steps made within a relatively short period of time, but also underlining certain areas for improvement — and stating they had found no signs of corruption.

Second, in effect Benedict had given an ultimatum to national bishops' conferences, some of whom were in denial: "Submit to me your plan for dealing with the problem of clerical paedophilia. It will be tested against 'best practice' and you will be held accountable for future failures." About half complied by the deadline, May 2012. The rest have been given a hurry-up.

All of which raises the fundamental issue of papal accountability. Vatican II reaffirmed the notion of 'episcopal collegiality' — formally approved by Paul VI, but fiercely resisted by those with the 'princedom' mentality. Where does Benedict stand?

democracy us style

In 2010 the US Supreme Court declared that, in relation to freedom of speech, business corporations must be treated like human beings, or other associations of people. The ability of big business to dominate election advertising constitutes a threat, in that big business could well have an even greater influence on future US governments, and thus on US foreign policy.

In the current campaign several Republican presidential hopefuls have benefited from such contributions. In a report in *The Atlantic*, Harvard law professor Lawrence Lessig showed that the number of "citizens united" who combined to contribute 80% percent of these political contributions is statistically infinitesimal: 196 people. In other words, the primary vehicle of contemporary American campaigning is funded by about the same number of people that have been to the international space station.

how times change

Retired theologian Fr. Joseph A. Komonchak recently published some limericks composed by various bishops during the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Here is one example:

There were Ratzinger, Congar and Küng,
Whose praises by Liberals are süng,
But said Ottaviani
"You wait till domani;
I'll have all those clever guys hüng."

The first three were *periti* (expert advisors) at the Council. Cardinal Ottaviani was the leading upholder of the status quo. Ratzinger (a radical conservative?) later took on Ottaviani's job as Vatican watchdog of doctrinal purity. Congar, the great Dominican ecumenist and ecclesiologist, became a cardinal. The Vatican had forbidden him to publish in 1947, and, in 1954, to teach. John XXIII rehabilitated him in 1960. ■

the paradox of silencing

Robert Consedine

When the great theologian, Hans Küng, was 'silenced' (licence revoked to teach as a Catholic theologian) in 1979, he joined a distinguished assemblage of extraordinary, 'silenced' prophets whose influence on the Catholic Church of the 20th century will be measured in millennia.

Küng stands tall with the towering figures of Teilhard de Chardin, Yves Congar, John Courtney Murray, Thomas Merton and a distinguished host of others — men and women.

Their influence on the Church and the world can be explained only by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. They were all prophetic in their theological vision.

Because of their writing they were all 'silenced' by the Catholic Church — before Vatican II.

It started in the early 19th century with the rise of ultramontanism — supporting the doctrine of papal supremacy.

These theologians all suffered and were treated inexcusably by the Church — sacked, ignored, censored, barred from academic honours, presumed guilty with uncontextualized accusation and excluded.

Their love and faithfulness to the Church remained undiminished. They had various methods of being strictly obedient to the silencing while interpreting and circumventing the imposed strictures — monographs amongst friends, pseudonyms, private circulation.

Subsequently they were reinstated and vindicated, but not necessarily recognised or rehabilitated by the magisterium. Their thinking had a profound influence on Vatican II.

The paradox: in their silencing they were amongst the most influential theologians of the 20th century.

Teilhard de Chardin, the great priest-scientist, poet, palaeontologist and mystic, believed that "the universe is an evolution — toward spirit. The spirit fulfils itself in a personal God and that the supreme personality is the universal Christ." Teilhard believed he was a pilgrim of the future and that every human being had a 'dynamic purpose' coded in them.

De Chardin paid the price for his prophetic vision when he was banned in 1925. He could have been speaking for many Catholics in the Church of the 21st century when he said that "in a kind of way I no longer have confidence in the exterior manifestations of the Church … Some people feel happy in the visible Church; but for my own part I think I shall be happy to die in order to be free of it — and to find our Lord outside of it."

Yves Congar was a pioneer in ecumenism and the place of the laity in the Church. He was a prolific author. He was silenced in 1954.

At the time he confided in his diary what could be a description of Bishops today. "The Bishops have bent over backwards in passiveness and servility: they have an honest and childlike reverence for Rome; even a childish and infantile reverence … for them, Rome is 'the Church' …"

Eventually he was exonerated and became one of the most influential theologians at the second Vatican Council. He believed that "the most favourable times for planting and sowing were in times of trouble and storm." In 1994 he was made a Cardinal.

John Courtney Murray and Thomas Merton were similarly 'silenced'. Murray subsequently became one of the chief architects of the Council's *Declaration on Religious Freedom*. Merton was silenced in 1962 for speaking out against nuclear war. He was accused of "bringing monastic life into disrepute." Meanwhile, the world was on the brink of nuclear destruction.

Intense suffering was a crucial element to their 'silenced journeys', their insights and their impact on the Church, and the world. The silencing failed. Their vocation — dynamic purpose — was too strong to be stopped by human authorities. ■

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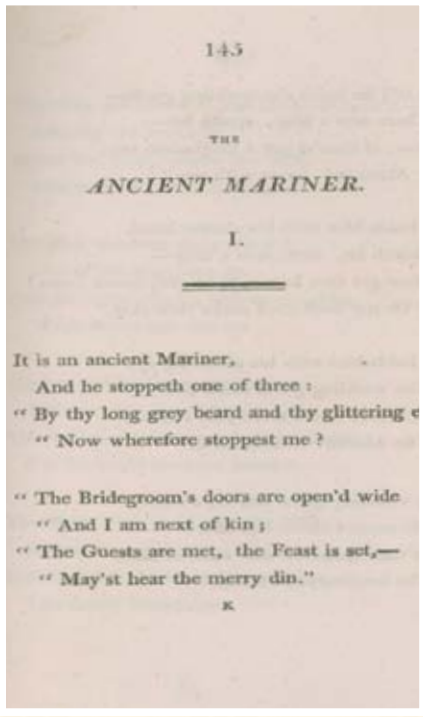
a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

"I want you to go back to the bank first thing tomorrow and take that ASB biro back. I don't want stolen property in my house." Grandpa Jack was tall, broad and straight-talking. Sheep farmer, church elder, gardener and sheep dog trainer, he was scrupulously honest about all aspects of life. His tax returns, his stewardship on two large Christian trusts, his opinions on me attending rehearsals for a school play on a Sunday were all integral parts of his faith. When selling a tractor he would go out of his way to tell potential buyers about all the dents, rust spots and the loose clutch.

One afternoon as we worked together harvesting potatoes in the veggie patch, I watched carefully as he pushed the digging fork through the dark Putaruru loam, and showed me how to avoid stabbing potatoes. Together we shook dirt off the sleep-and-soil fattened spuds. We rummaged in the loose earth, our fingers the perfect blunt rake and to find all the left-behind potato siblings. Papa



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THE

ANCIENT MARINER.

I.

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three :
" By thy long grey beard and thy glittering e
" Now wherefore stoppest me ?

" The Bridegroom's doors are open'd wide
" And I am next of kin ;
" The Guests are met, the Feast is set,—
" May'st hear the merry din."

K

started reciting *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and remembered every single stanza from his school days. I had already completed more years of schooling than Papa had but could only stagger through *The Jabberwocky*. How could he have carried this long poem through 60 yawning years?

Papa could do some amazing tricks. If we ever needed the weather forecast, Papa was nearly always more accurate than the weather lady at 6.55pm on TV One. He could whistle in a high-pitched funny way that seemed to get any sleeping dog leaping to its feet. When I was starting intermediate school in Putaruru, Papa presented me with a bicycle that he had fully refurbished. Freshly painted in red and white, my chief concern was that it didn't have a brand name, or the requisite Cruiser shape. I rode it for the next three years though. Now I'm very glad to think of Papa fixing, oiling, painting and recycling in his very ordered and tidy workshop, to make a bike for me.

Papa died in 1985 and left many great legacies. His unswerving integrity and earnest faith gave me glimpses of holiness, that hazy something that Frederick Buechner describes as "something we know apart from the earth but something we can only know as it wells up out of the earth, out of people as clay-footed as Jacob, the trickster and crook…." (*A Sacred Journey — a Memoir of Early Days*)

Last week I found a CDHB pen that must have been rattling around our house in India for several years. It started this reverie, and I immediately knew what Papa would've said. I guess I should post it back tomorrow. ■

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