

Tui Motu

InterIslands

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moments of grace

Wonder and special delight always accompany the birth of a new cousin, or the child of a close friend. Often in seeing the new-born in the ward soon after birth, I have experienced a special aura surrounding the child. It bespeaks something that says, "Hold me, bond with me, be with me, love me, I am wanting so much to love you and be loved by you." These are special moments of grace — and if this is so for someone like me, how much more for a mother or father! The photo on this month's cover captures with great clarity another 'moment-of-grace', the love between mother and child — figure of the Madonna and Christ-child.

We chuckle considering what delights of grace took place at the inn in Bethlehem when the shepherds came to see a child to whom they had been led by angels? I wonder what happened for the wise men as well? The simple story in the Gospel portrays their visits as transformative moments — to be recalled again and again as good news.

Shepherds were disreputable nobodies; the wise men sufficiently important for King Herod to want to talk with them about an infant rival King. What were both groups waiting for? Did they expect the same things? What did they see?

Each Christmas similar questions are raised up as we delve into the mystery of God's becoming one with us. What wells up inside of us? How will we be graced this year? Along with the frantic shopping, will we have time to think constructively about our Filipino sisters and brothers in Tacloban and surrounds, post-Haiyan? Will we put something aside for the St. Vincent de Paul Society — or another charity that works with the disadvantaged in our society? All goodness is still to be seen against a world of war and economic exclusion strongly in need of redemption through the love of God made visible in the Bethlehem child.

These ideas are expressed in a

fine series of articles in this issue. Joy Cowley leads us forward through Advent neediness to God's favour on Christmas Day. Robin Kearns' call to simplicity in place of consumerism enriches us as we approach this Christmas feast; and may Jenny Te Paa's gentle narrative about her father confirms us in this. Mary Caygill sees the aftermath of Christchurch earthquakes as a rude shock to dumbed down ideas of Christmas, and asks for their 'transgressive' renewal. Vincent O'Sullivan's centerspread poem reminds us that the incarnation is universal — all are included, no one is left out. Here is an amazing reminder of a deep theology of Christian community, of being together despite everything. Finally Mike Riddell evocatively contrasts the paradoxes of the 21st century world with the potential for life revealed in a manger. A feast of reading indeed! **KT**



In our summer celebration of the Christmas feast, the board and staff of Tui Motu wish you the peace and joy of the Christ child, and the blessing of good reading in 2014.

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Front cover photograph: *Baby Weighing, Darfur.*
[Courtesy of Catholic Missions, Australia]

Correction: On page 15 of the October *Tui Motu*, in referring to the first English Prayer Book, the date is incorrect. It should have read 1549. We apologise to Tony Starbuck for this mistake.

the great human adventure

Timothy Radcliffe

On Christmas Day, Mary begins one of the greatest human adventures, which is to raise a child. God shares with us the exciting challenge of growing up. What does this mean for the Church today? I am probably not the best person to think about this since I have never had any children, but let me share a thought.

In 1890, Van Gogh painted *First Steps (after Millet)*. It shows a mother holding up a child, whose arms are outstretched towards her father, who beckons her onwards. He has been working in the field, but he has put down his tools, ready to play. Are the parents teaching the child to play or is it the other way around? No matter! This is the ultimate human vocation, to play, *homo ludens*. At Christmas, we may pause from all the serious and important things we do and remember for what we are made, to have leisure with God.

The parents are also encouraging the child to stand on its own feet and walk. The ground is rough. It will probably fall over, cry and learn to stand up and walk again. Raising a child must involve giving it courage, stretching it beyond what is easy and comfortable. When I was eight, I had a teacher who used to reward us when we were good, by reading out Charles



First Steps (after Millet). Vincent Van Gogh.

Dickens to us. We could not understand much, but knew that because it was a treat, it must be wonderful. We adventured into a world of words way beyond our capacity.

In this Christmas time, may the Church become ever more a place in which our young are raised to be brave and adventurous. They should be prepared for a world which we cannot imagine. My parents could never have imagined a world of tweets and twitter, of IVF and gay marriage. Who knows what our young will one day face?

We should give courage to the young. We must trust them. They

must one day do what we cannot do. When St Dominic sent out his youngest friars to preach, the Cistercians warned him that he would lose them. Dominic replied, "I know for certain that my young men will go out and come back, will be sent out and will return; but your young men will be kept locked up and will still escape." ■

Timothy Radcliffe is a former Master of the Dominican Order, and a member of the English Province, living in their Oxford Priory. fr Timothy was in New Zealand this year to facilitate the National Priests' Assembly in Rotorua.



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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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appointment of bishops

Our bishops are appointed by Rome. *Sede Vacante*, the term used for the interim period while waiting for a new bishop, is sometimes stretched for as long as two years. This is hardly fair or just to all concerned. Time was when every annulment of a marriage also had to come from Rome. Some couples had to wait forty years for it! (It was quite scandalous — those who could shell out \$20,000 for an annulment received it in a matter of weeks. The poor couples had to join the 40-year queue).

Must bishops be appointed by Rome? Given the unique relationship of mutual trust between bishop and priests, could the priests of a diocese elect their own bishop? Priests are responsible people who can be trusted to do the right thing.

For centuries, the Catholic priests of Switzerland have elected their own bishops, and still do. All religious orders elect their own major superiors. Could the appointment of bishops be changed like this? Decentralisation, a part of Vatican II, is close to the heart of Pope Francis.

Max Palmer OSCO, *Kopua*

the new translation

May God abundantly bless Father Peter Murnane, OP! At last I have read in print some of the frustrations that I — and so many others — have felt with the current 'mandatory' translation of our greatest prayer, the Eucharist. Father Murnane's words will ring true for so many — and who among our bishops will have the courage to act? A few priests have quietly continued to use the 'old' translation, but sadly the majority of our Catholic laity still believe that their role is to be passive, obedient subjects of Rome — a travesty of the teachings of Jesus the Christ.

Thank you, Father Murnane, for sharing with us the fruits of your own contemplative, prayerful reflection and experience.

And thank you, *Tui Motu*, for

yet another splendid edition of your truly Catholic magazine.

Adrienne Dunlop rmdm, *Auckland*

the silent desire of love

Phil Evans' courageous letter in your October issue reminded me of the teaching of St Ignatius of Loyola that God plants his will for us deep within our deepest desires. I am certain that very deep within every human being is the desire to love and be loved.

Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas est* does not hesitate to apply the word eros to the passionate love of God for each individual human being. Our passionate love for another, imperfect though that love will always be, is a reflection of God's all-embracing love and at some level a response to it. No power on earth can deny or stifle that capacity.

Evans comments on his bishop's silence in response to Evans' expressed concerns and need. We should, I think, interpret that silence positively, reverently.

Silence may be, among other things, a sign that the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are waiting for us to surprise them.

Jim Howley, *Auckland*

ethical response to haiyan

I was proud of New Zealand's moral and ethical leadership over nuclear testing beginning with Norman Kirk's sending a ship with the foreign minister aboard to protest French Pacific nuclear testing and our active non-violent protest against nuclear ships. I was proud of our creating a nuclear free zone in New Zealand and supporting a nuclear free zone in the Southern Hemisphere. And I was proud of the opposition by many Kiwis to apartheid, and to sporting ties with South Africa.

Now I am deeply ashamed of New Zealand. We are morally and ethically responsible to the people of the Philippines over our government's lack of serious action over climate change mitigation and any effort

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.

to cut carbon emissions in line with avoiding catastrophic climate change.

We have ignored our scientific prophets with their clear and now clearly accurate predictions on the seriousness of climate change and we have ignored the promptings of "Creation/God" to signs such as melting ice caps in the Arctic and Greenland.

Typhoon Haiyan fits into the typical pattern of systematic climate change as predicted by climate scientists. By our nation's lack of serious action on climate change we are not only condemning future generations, but people now as shown by the impact of Typhoon Haiyan.

Why have we not protested strongly over our government's lack of action on the mitigation of climate change? Perhaps because climate change is so immensely challenging to our way of life, to our concepts of economic growth and because until today it did not seem relevant to our life. The people suffering from Typhoon Haiyan are our brothers and sisters.

I pray for forgiveness from the Filipino people and from God. I pray also for our repentance: to turn around and engage in unequivocally demonstrating to our government that the people of New Zealand are prepared to address the challenges of climate change mitigation.

Marvin Hubbard, *Dunedin*
(abridged)

a pope for our time

Jim Elliston

Look, up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! No! It's SuperPope! Well, not really, although his reported avoidance of personal publicity in his prior life is reminiscent of Superman's alter ego, Clark Kent. Francis has proved that he is both a conservative and a radical; these attributes are evidenced by his teaching and his manner of acting.

They are profoundly Gospel-based. He has spoken to many different groups — prisoners, bishops, slum-dwellers, youth, politicians, people with disabilities. His words are always accompanied by actions manifesting a truly compassionate, prayerful human being. He expresses serious ideas in terms the most unlettered can understand. He is preparing for a differently structured church.

For many there is a sense of relief that at last the Catholic Church is demonstrating it is relevant to the lives of the masses. For many others there is anxiety, a fear that the rules which provide a safe haven from dangers to their faith are being tossed aside. Francis' constant reference to God's infinite mercy is particularly disturbing for some. If God is so forgiving, why bother? But Francis is not wishy-washy. He talks about the difference between sin and scandal: "... those who sin, repent and seek forgiveness, they feel weak, they feel themselves to be God's children and so humble themselves and seek salvation from Jesus. But those others who cause scandal? They do not repent. They continue to sin, but pretend to be Christian: A double life ... And this deserves — Jesus says, not me — that a millstone be put around their neck and they be thrown into the sea. There is nothing about forgiveness, here."

There is no indication that Francis is trying to change basic doctrine, but he has emphasised that there is

a hierarchy of importance in Church teachings; moreover, he portrays a different perspective on the relationship between the Church and the world. Some pointers as to this perspective emerge from the consistency between his words and actions. To my mind, they flow from his management style.

Like any good CEO Francis is working to implement a vision.

- "God manifests himself in time and is present in the processes of history. This gives priority to actions that give birth to new historical dynamics... Do we fight the temptation simply to react to complex problems as they arise? Are we creating a proactive mindset?"
- "The Mission calls for creating a sense of a Church which is organized to serve all the baptized, and men and women of goodwill. Christ's followers are not individuals caught up in a privatized spirituality, but persons in community, devoting themselves to others." This attitude of service permeates his every action.
- Regarding the enormous exodus from the Church: instead of blaming the leavers for weakness or lack of faith, Francis asks: "Why have so many perhaps experienced feeling abandoned by the Church? Perhaps the church appeared too weak, perhaps too distant from their needs, or too cold, caught up with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas, perhaps the world seems to have made the church a relic of the past, unfit for new questions; perhaps the church could speak to people in their infancy but not in their adulthood." We must all examine our consciences.
- He teaches by example. He has the rare ability to communicate in a manner accessible to all, especially by allowing his humanity to shine

forth in all situations.

- From his various comments and actions it is clear that in implementing his vision he plans carefully, consults widely, and moves cautiously but decisively.

His strictly non-imperialist and non-judgemental approach has resulted in a warming of relations with some important religious bodies such as Orthodox, Jews, some Muslims and Evangelical Protestants. Even some prominent atheists have expressed appreciation of his attitudes. In the international sphere there are some signs of a more explicit independence from European and Western blocs. Time will tell.

He constantly exhorts bishops and priests to be primarily pastoral, rather than administrators. Francis has described a number of common attitudes among 'practising' Catholics that are inimical to spreading the Good News of Salvation, ranging from clericalism, demanding perfection among those seeking to enter the Church, demanding a return to bygone practices, etc. And: "Let us promote women's active role in the ecclesial community. By losing women, the church risks becoming sterile ... Women are called to service, not servitude."

"We presume ourselves as being just, and judging others ... instead of forgiving. Then we risk being like that older brother of the parable, who instead of being happy that his brother returned, was angered with his father who welcomed and celebrated him. If in our heart there isn't mercy, the joy of forgiving, we are not in communion with God, even if we observe all the precepts, because it's love that saves us, not the bare practice of precepts." ■

Jim Elliston is our regular columnist for 'Crosscurrents', living in Orewa.

ADVENT AS

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

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

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

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



First there comes the greeting, something like an inner nudge. This is the tug of love at the heart, so

gentle that we wonder if we are imagining it. Perhaps it happens through words or a companion or a moment of beauty. Whatever, the greeting opens a closed door in us, and we can feel vulnerable and confused. What does this mean?

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



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

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most High will overshadow you..."

Our yes has been taken and turned into a Presence that is beyond

our limited sensate system. It is both within us and outside us, filling and guiding, and always it is love. But our celebration is tinged with timidity. When we feel love moving us in a particular direction, we go back to self-doubt. "How can I? I'm not qualified to do this? People will laugh or criticise. I'm afraid I will make a fool of myself." But the power of inner love is patient, saying to us, "Trust me and see," and before long we find ourselves growing into that trust. Our self-consciousness eases as we realise that the work is done for us. We simply have to make ourselves available.

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

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

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

PARABLE

Joy Cowley



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

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



The call is about being real, and being real is 'humility' or knowing who we are. The birthing of Christ

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

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

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

Joy Cowley is one of New Zealand's most loved literary figures, in the first place because of her prolific work as a writer of children's literature. She lives in Featherston with her husband, Terry Coles.

Magnificat

– Mary's Gift to Us

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

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

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

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

– Joy Cowley

a simple story

The paradoxes of our twenty-first century world are stripped away as we open ourselves once more to the full potential of life seen in the baby in a manger.

Mike Riddell

I feel a little daunted. The 'meaning of Christmas' is a well-cleaned carcass, and I'm one of the vultures. Every year writers gather round the birth of Jesus as if there were some new morsel to find. And two millennia on, we rediscover that every aspect of the story has been chewed, savoured, digested and excreted. The prospect of tearing away one more scintilla of inspiration from the cage of bones is unappealing.

The task seems at times like dissecting a chicken to find out how it works. The end result is a bloody mess and an ex-chicken. Pulling things apart in the search for understanding has become our default methodology. As if the sum of the parts could explain the whole. It may be a commentary on our Western approach to the world that knowledge has taken priority over awe.

What we have at the heart of our Christmas celebrations is a story. Those who ask whether the story is true or not have no understanding of the way stories work. All stories are true and none are true. This confusing paradox is because the telling of a tale is not something intended to increase the intellect but to move the heart.

In a world of sorrows, the story at the heart of Christmas remains awe-inspiring. In the context of our shopping mall temples, it is blasphemy. A gift without cost and beyond price. In times of violence and exclusion, this simple tale of a place of quiet refuge speaks to us. A stable, a manger, a small sanctuary from the turmoil that tangles our

lives. In uncertainty and vulnerability, the legend of a baby who carries the hopes of the world tempts us to trust our own small lives.

"Without the grammar of simplicity, the church loses the very conditions which make it possible to fish for God in the deep waters of his mystery"
– Pope Francis

There are two things to say about Christmas as celebrated in third millennium Aotearoa-New Zealand. The first is that the story has been

"... seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell ..."

in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins (*God's Grandeur*). Subsumed under an avalanche of sentiment and commerce, Christmas is less a sacrament of joy than a conclave of capitalists.

Somehow the majestic coherence of the nativity has become trapped and lost among the detritus of a libertine culture in decline. Advertising slogans drown out the whisper of annunciation; plastic Santas jostle aside poor shepherds; flashing LED lights illumine our emptiness rather than a guiding star. It seems too late to sift through the wreckage in search of some item

of real value to cling to.

And all of us who stumble after the Way of Christ, with one foot on the road to love and the other mired in the bog of convention, we too find ourselves confused and tentative as we light the advent candles. Caught between the insubstantial dream of the realm of God and the compelling certainty of everyday life, we are more likely to be thinking of turkeys and trinkets than of Gabriel and God among us.

The second observation is that within the Church, the story at the heart of Christmas still resounds with some clarity. In our recycled nativity sets, in our readings from the gospels, in our singing of carols, in our lighting of candles; in all of these there is the attempt to strip away the vainglory of consumption and tell again the narrative of the baby Jesus in all its deceptive candour. At the heart of the advent season and the Christ Mass, there is a conscious endeavour to observe, to hear again, to engage.

Pope Francis has begun his papacy with an emphasis on simplicity. "Without the grammar of simplicity, the church loses the very conditions which make it possible to fish for God in the deep waters of his mystery," he has suggested. It seems to me a timely message. Nowhere is his plea more incisive than in relation to the Christmas story.

There is no need to explain what the story 'means' to a disbelieving public. Let us instead concentrate on hearing it for ourselves in such a way that it becomes the inspiring narrative out of which we live.

The truth of Christmas doesn't depend on whether Mary really was a virgin or how a star moved across the heavens; it depends on whether the people of faith treat it as inspirational for being present in the world.

Can we live out the preposterous story that God has become present amongst us in physical form? Is it a story not just to believe, but to inhabit? Or should we push it into the realm of tooth fairies and Easter bunnies and 'invisible hands' in the marketplace? Will Christmas make any difference to the way we live on Boxing Day and each day thereafter?

The simple story we profess to be at the heart of our living is that God is among us. Not 'was once' among us, not 'maybe some day' will be among us, but really, substantially, and eternally among us. Divinity and humanity together, now and always. The 'how' has kept theologians employed, and distracted Church Councils for centuries.

But it seems to me the central question is not 'how', but 'if'. And the story we retell each December is the way of rehearsing why we believe that question to have been answered once and for all. It's our communal way of saying God is here with us, through Jesus. A very simple message, at heart. It's a glorious story, in the telling. It has angels and shepherds and travelling

astrologers; innkeepers and refugees; animals and a manger. There's threat, danger, exclusion, uncertainty, vulnerability – and above all, awe. It's why we're drawn back time and again to the wonder on a child's face as the child sings a carol, so that we can rekindle the magic ourselves.



Painting: *Adoration of the Magi*, by Fra Angelico

Simplicity need not be naiveté. It may be the distillation of truth. The constant demand to understand and explain can be a sign of evasiveness — a desire to control a story rather than to live it. I welcome the retelling of the nativity, because it calls me back to finding a space within my apparently complex life to digest the gospel.

To live as if God is among us, everywhere and at all times. To "practice the presence of God", as Brother Lawrence had it. To see the face of the Creator in not just one baby, but in them all. To hollow out a space in our routines, where weary pilgrims might rest. To stand

alongside the world and its peoples, rather than regarding them from a distance. To trust that life is good and purposeful and blessed, even when the evidence seems to contradict this.

These are the tests of whether we believe in Christmas. It's in the fabric of our lives that we reveal our faith, not in the doctrines we proclaim. Each year Advent and Christmas call us to listen once more with all our hearts to the news that God has come among us, and stayed. It is both invitation and blessing.

Henceforth nothing shall be ordinary, because this world and all it contains has become the dwelling place of God. No despair shall be final, because all tragedy and suffering have been gathered up and rinsed with hope. No life shall be insignificant, because all life carries the gentle potential of that baby in the manger.

Perhaps the best response to Christmas is to do what we have always done. To persist stubbornly in reliving the story that undergirds it, with neither embarrassment nor shame. At its heart, this is a story that will bring down empires and redeem slaves. Once in royal David's city ... ■

Mike Riddell is well-known to readers of Tui Motu, and for his work as a film-maker and script-writer. He lives in Cambridge.

from the ground on which I stand

The writer situates the question of Christmas so clearly within the situation of her congregation and city — to understand the force of the Christchurch earthquakes and their aftermath in the light of the advent and christmas gospels.

Mary Caygill

Currently I am in my third year as the minister at Durham St Methodist Church — the first stone church in Christchurch, opened on Christmas Day 1864, now its building has been demolished following the recent earthquakes and with its accompanying site partner, the Christchurch Methodist Mission. The site is now completely bare and the congregation is learning how to be church without the confines of a physical building, but with all the grief that comes from the actual loss of a sacred building which symbolised so much for so many people in the heart of a city equally moving through massive transition and a refocusing of identity for present and future. We have certainly become more intimately acquainted with the characteristics of being more like a nomadic community of faith. Never could I or we have imagined equally such raw challenges and paradoxical blessings that have erupted, have been ‘incarnated’ in the midst.

thinking about endings

Preaching this past Sunday I am reminded afresh that we’re only three Sundays away from the end of the church year and once again we turn the corner and come face to face with lectionary passages which challenge us to think about endings and how we might face into and live with the consequences. These readings belong in the apocalyptic tradition — that tradition commonly understood as

being about the end times — more often than not destructive times with calamitous natural events where God is portrayed as the central actor bringing punishment for collective wrongdoing. This city knows well the inscription in its very flesh of such destructive events and the long-term futility of ascribing such groaning of the created earth to an outdated interventionist deity.

I prefer to draw on the richer biblical sense of apocalypse as being about ... a coming to see afresh the revealing of truths about human life.

I prefer to draw on the richer biblical sense of apocalypse as being about a threshold time, a time to face the uncovering of illusions and a coming to see afresh the revealing of truths about human life. A time, a season to hear and grapple with the songs of restoration and renewal in their most transformative and transgressive tones. Certainly there is no shortage of such ‘songs’ in our midst here in this Southern city where the very nature and future of being church is now called into question — the exposed dusty church site where the grand neo-gothic Methodist ‘temple’ site awaiting its replacement in a future time to come or maybe not to come.

preface to advent

This past Sunday it was the prophet Haggai, the week before Habakkuk, the Festival of all Saints Daniel, and prior to this was Joel. Dramatic, indeed, but how entirely appropriate that these last Sundays of the Christian year rather than just being a stirring postlude at the end of another Christian year, become an appropriately dramatic preface to the threshold of the season of Advent where we come face to face afresh with the event of incarnation.

“This will be the sign for you, you will find a babe wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:12). The manger, in fact, nothing more than a dirty, smelly, animal feeding trough. This sign, of earth shattering proportions, topping the levels of the Richter scale will shake the very foundations of the ground on which Israel is standing. This sign, will render asunder the human consciousness of those who yearly await the revelation of the Emmanuel event — the eruption of the God in the midst — the living, fleshly God — the God with skin on; ‘Word of the Creator — now in flesh appearing.’

seismic shock of gospel

As David Moore, one of my inner city ecumenical colleagues, has reflected on this event in an earthquake-shattered city, still so visible to the naked eye three years on, “the announcement by the four evangelists that the long and expected Messiah had arrived was to be called an *evangelion*, good news. The seismic shock of this gospel

birthing blood and received into the uncertain arms of his child/mother, who declares salvation for all.”

a cataclysmic seismic event

To understand incarnation in this way gives me the possibility truly to embrace and be embraced by incarnation as a cataclysmic seismic event rather than the neat sanitised predictability of the Advent season and Christmas year upon year. Further, taking incarnation in this manner helps me immensely to see in the earth-shattering Jesus narrative my own evolving personal and collective narrative — my, our messy overwhelming fleshly material of my own embodiment, my own incarnational reality — the incarnational reality of Christchurch, as being nothing less than transgressive and creative sites of revelation.

In this way the flesh is enabled and yes even liberated as it must be again and again, to become Word — to recreate ‘church’, to be fully human, in whatever liberating and healing manner is most required after the earth shattering manner of the ‘Word becomes flesh’ which must be nothing less than an Incarnate Christ without metaphysics.

Shortly after the second major earthquake event of 22 February, 2011 here in Christchurch one of the important strands of hope that many held on to was found in the words of Leonard Cohen’s *Anthem*, particularly the words of the refrain. I turn to them often and find myself humming the familiar refrain. They speak to me of the incarnation event in its most transgressive and revelatory manner. I close this all too brief pondering with them:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in
everything
That’s how the light gets in. ■

*Mary Caygill is the minister of the
Durham St Methodist Church
in Christchurch.*



Top: Durham St Methodist Church in ruins [Photo: Nathanael Boehm] and Left: prior to demolition [Photo: Cafe Cecil]

announcement has toppled religious, political and economic structures, many now in ruins. Monumental forces from within Creation were unleashed, so great indeed as to rearrange the very ground upon which humans stand. The Messiah was found in an animal feeding trough — alarming not only Herod, but also the religious leaders who reckoned they knew what a Messiah looks like ... This seismic event leveled all that was previously considered the ‘normal’ structure of the Divine.”

To be truly confronted by the earth shattering seismic shock of

this event of incarnation is to see the event for what it is: not a once-off event to be romanticized about in its yearly popular commercial form of the all so beautifully swaddled, clean and tidy new born white babe, in a carefully constructed manger replica, but in its most messy, transgressive earth-shattering form.

As two feminist theologians suggest, “There can be no sanitization here ... it is not the genetically modified, metaphysical Son of God that declares the divine-human conjunction, but the screaming baby amidst the cow shit and the fleas, covered in

be not afraid (to lighten our load)

Robin Kearns



Pohutukawa photo: Wikipedia Commons

I was too young to feel embarrassed. It was simply part of the early Christmas routine. After a preparatory clean-up of the garage through Advent, on Christmas Day my father would load up a trailer and ask “who’s on for a trip to the dump”? I went on a number of occasions. The recollection is sharpened by the pungent smell of rubbish and cries of scavenging gulls. Given the day, few others were there on a pilgrimage at the city tip.

My father had a knowing grin as he drove home each time. I always thought it was the joy of feeling different. Later I figured it was because we had no extended family in town to gather with. But, with hindsight, I suspect there was more to it than that. I think he knew deep in that place that precedes words that he was onto something. Now, almost fifty years later, I am finally beginning to understand.

think advertising

It’s because with the advent of serious spring weather, the imperatives have begun sailing into my in-box. They shout at me: “must-have Christmas picks”, “stock up for the festive season”, “Get in quick and fill your stocking”.

At the very time the world urges us to fill shopping bags, stockings, and stomachs, another vision of Christmas involves lightening our load. This vision asks, “Can we make space for new beginnings: a spiritual spring clean, a dumping of what weighs us down?” What better time than the approach of Christmas to question the excesses of consumption in our lives and society? For the quest for commodities surely threatens to obscure the fact that Jesus was born into simplicity.

a trinity of words

In Luke’s gospel, the coming of the saviour is announced with a simple trinity of words, “Be not afraid”. What would this exhortation refer to had the gospel been written explicitly for our age? “Be not afraid of the simplicity into which Jesus was born”, perhaps? And, “Be very afraid of excess acquisition — of lingering in shopping malls, car dealerships, and real estate agencies”? Of course, avoiding acquisition is easier said than done. We need to live, surround ourselves with necessities, attain some level of comfort ... but with how much stuff? And how comfortable do we need to be?

It’s a brave thing to question consumption, and especially at the approach of Christmas. For it’s a small step from saying enough’s enough to being branded a Dickensian Scrooge, one who declares Christmas a fraud, uttering, “Bah! Humbug”. But let’s be honest, is not most of the contemporary culture of Christmas a fraud? Was it not Coca-Cola that dressed up Santa in red? (I’m glad I stumbled on a flaccid Santa suit in a closet at home at a tender age. My father’s carelessness was my Christmas gift that year: the truth as to who rode in the vintage car at the school gala!).

At Christmas, let us focus on pohutukawa blossom not Santa suits. For in the blood-red glory of its stamens, we can see the full meaning of the incarnation: blood spilled at birth is but a prefiguring of blood spilled on earth. As glorious as the pohutukawa are, it is not long before the pavements are awash with red, a visceral reminder that birth and death are implicated in each other. To live in denial of this is to frame our vision with tinsel and delude ourselves that “she’ll be right”. It won’t always be the case. As poet Riemke Ensing writes,

“Climbing North Head
we sight Pohutukawa...
The painter thinks of Calvary”.

Everything contains within it the immanence of its own dissolution and transformation. A grim thought, one might say. But it's a wise thought if we are to be followers.

following the star

The wise Magi were followers. With resolute belief in their journey, they followed the Star. If we are to be followers, perhaps we should consider our gifts. Be wise in what we buy and take time to consider the journeys that material goods have made. Geographer Ian Cook challenges us to be followers of things. Not relentless materialists, but rather appreciators of the journeys things have made to arrive in our shopping basket or on our dinner table.

Cook takes the example of a mango, a possible treat for a Christmas fruit bowl. What is its life before appearing in Countdown or the local fruit store? Who are the people who are (probably unknowingly) linked together through the global trade in fresh fruit? What is the web of economic, political, cultural, horticultural and other processes that shapes these connections and relations?

To do this for each of a full trolley of products would have us reaching for a packet of panadol! So perhaps the challenge is to start small. Take one item this Christmas: a fruit, a spice, a gift from a wise aunt from the East Coast and ask: where did it really come from? How did this object come to be? Let it be dinner table conversation. Use Wikipedia. Ring your cousin the social studies teacher. Examine the small print on the label. Ask questions.

The answers will be worth it. There will be powerful, and crucial connections — disturbing even — between us Western consumers and distant strangers who contribute to our lives in

otherwise hidden, unnoticed, and under-valued ways.

the forces of consumerism

As journalist Archie Bland asks of the 390 million pounds that will be spent in Britain on retail advertising in the last quarter of 2013, “When did we cede so much cultural capital to the forces of consumerism?” We might sharpen the question to our own ends and prick our consciences by saying: “When did we cede so much Christianity to the relentless pursuit of commodities?” As the late John Francis Kavanaugh asks in *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, “What are we to make of the fact that Jesus is the son of poor people?” and “What does this reveal about the God we say we believe in?”

To be a critic of consumption is to exercise cultural resistance. We live in a world in which things are treated like persons (why else would people polish cars and give them personalised license plates?) and persons treated like things (why else would young men treat drunken girls as objects of pleasure?). Christmas challenges us to move away from the ultimacy

of the commodity and embrace the intimacy of community. Jesus is the ultimate advocate of community. He confounds our expectations by having been born into simplicity.

called to simplicity

We are not necessarily called to be poor. Poverty can be a relentless disease that can breed disease. Rather, at Christmas, we are called to simplicity: to re-appreciate what we have, to cast aside yearning for what we have not, and to dispose of what we don't need.

I still don't know exactly why my father took a trailer-load of junk away on Christmas Day. When parents leave us they take answers to questions we forgot to ask. But the memory has left me guessing. Of course, not everyone need go to the tip at Christmas! But pausing to reflect on the origins of things (as well as making space within us, and around us, for Christ at Christmas) is a good substitute for that pilgrimage. ■

Robin Kearns is Professor of Geography at the University of Auckland, and a board member of Tui Motu Interislands.



prepare the way of the lord

The writer takes a long look at the dilemmas which come when comparing the mad gift-giving of Christmas with anti-consumerist responsibilities as a human being and a grandmother.

She takes a leaf out of the book of her father, Pop Pop.

Jenny Te Paa Daniel

As I sit to write about Christmas, it is not yet Advent but already I find myself reflecting anew upon the always-extraordinary sense of anticipation, which *re-mem-bering* the birth of Christ so naturally evokes.

birth of a granddaughter

Just two months ago my precious fourth granddaughter Maile was born. In the weeks and months prior I experienced a similar sense of anticipation as our whanau prepared to welcome a new babe into our midst. Was this babe a boy or a girl? Who would the babe look like, behave like, cry like? Who will this babe grow up to become?

As I watched my daughter so methodically and so gently prepare for the birth of this precious new life I could not help but draw a parallel to the preparations which God so carefully, so painstakingly made in order that we might also be ready to welcome and to nurture the incredible new life we are each blessed to receive through our faith in Jesus Christ.

I have always marvelled at how patient God was and continues to be in yearning quite simply for all of humanity to *prepare the way of the Lord*.

As each of my *mokopuna* has been born I have thought very seriously about my responsibility to stand alongside their parents in nurturing in each one of them a deep and abiding sense of faith.

Each Christmas I consider anew how best I ought help my *mokopuna* to understand just what Christmas really is all about even as I also want them to delight with all their childish

innocence in the sublimely magical things of Christmas, in the spirit of happiness and public festivity, which is still so very much alive here in summertime Aotearoa New Zealand — from local Santa Parades, to Carols in the Park, from Christmas parties at school and at daycare, helping Mummy and Daddy to decorate the family Christmas tree, to visiting Santa Claus in the bustling, insanely busy and crowded shopping malls.

kindness vs consumerism

Although the anti-consumerist in me struggles mightily to achieve a balance between my grandmotherly instincts and my political activist Christian responsibilities I realise too that there is indeed a very practical and very Christian way of reconciling the two equally compelling forces at work. In order to understand this way I have only to think of my beloved father from whom I learned so much about simple acts of human kindness and human decency.

This year 2013 will be our second Christmas without Daddy at our family gatherings. This will be therefore the second Christmas when we will remember again with gratitude all that our father blessed us with during his life and we will certainly recall with shared hilarity his more recent and now infamous ho, ho, ho, wheelbarrow deliveries!

Daddy was a hardworking public servant all his professional life. He always used his entire income to provide for his family. How he made his very modest earnings so consistently stretch so far I was never able to understand until I was myself a

working professional. I then realized that the way my father made sure his family's needs were always met was more often than not by first sacrificing so much of his own needs or wants.

In his retirement my father lived independently in a small unit on a rural lifestyle block alongside my younger sister in Queensland, Australia.

small gifts

Over the years and not unexpectedly he slowly but surely became increasingly dependent upon community based support workers for various home help needs. All of Daddy's 'girls' as he affectionately referred to them, loved him dearly. Every year during Advent he would cajole/bribe these support workers into taking him shopping in order that he could either purchase small Christmas gifts or indeed purchase the materials needed so he could handmade a small gift for every single member of his family. His definition of family extended to include all those whose lives touched his in special ways, particularly those who assisted him in any way, those whom he referred to as part of his family regardless.

As the numbers of his great grandchildren grew so too did the hours he needed to go shopping — he needed time to make his pension, his only source of income, stretch sufficiently to ensure all in the family fold were included.

Although he often well exceeded his allocated support worker hours, those who took him shopping were always more than happy to extend their time with him because, as I now realise, they too were caught up in the excitement and joy of his

spirit of generosity, the extent of his pastoral care and concern and thus of his deep love for all in his family. He provided especially abundantly for his great grandchildren but he made sure always to include all within the family fold, even those somewhat prodigal!

eucharist - and a wheelbarrow

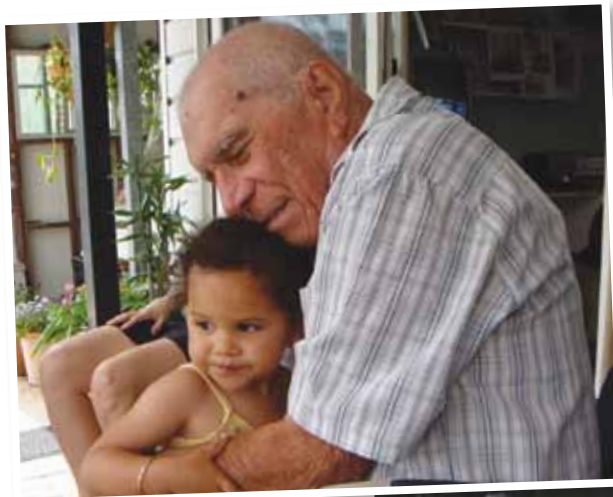
My siblings and I together with our children, grandchildren and extended *whanau* would make an annual trek from Aotearoa to Queensland for Christmas. When Daddy was well enough I would take him to Christmas Mass at the local parish and oh how he delighted in receiving his precious Eucharist. Afterward back at home he would gather us all and then disappear momentarily only to reappear replete in his Santa hat, calling out a cheery ho, ho, ho, while pushing his beautifully decorated gardening wheelbarrow laden with gifts for every single one of his loved ones!

It was always such a joyous time as the little ones teased their beloved Pop Pop about his crazy wheelbarrow 'sleigh', even as they squealed with sheer delight at the little gifts they received. Afterward they would all clamber up on to his knobbly knees to hug him tightly and to thank him for providing exactly what they needed!

My father would delight so much in just seeing his family gathered from all across Australia and New Zealand. He was so proud of all of us regardless of whether or not we were outstanding or ordinary or flawed or a measure of all three! And he made it clear always that what mattered to him above all else was that we were kind, decent caring human beings who *said what we meant and meant what we said*.

Over the days of Christmas a parade of support workers, church friends and other acquaintances would appear to trade gifts with my father — pot plants, fresh vegetables,

home made goodies of every description. My father's reach was extraordinary, such was his generosity of spirit, his immeasurable kindness and his unconditional love and concern for all whose lives were in any way joined with his.



dad's legacy

And so it is that as I struggle to reconcile my lofty intellectual thoughts about the evils of consumerism with my heartfelt desire to spoil like crazy the precious little ones I am so blessed to have in my life, I am very quickly reminded of the legacy my dearly loved Daddy has established.

I think then that what I need now to do is slowly to start emptying the weeds out of my own wheelbarrow, and begin cleaning it up in preparation for the modest little gifts I will still buy together with the home made plum jam. I had also better start preparing for all those whose lives touch mine in small and yet always special ways.

And so as I think of my father in the approach to Advent I thank God for blessing my life with such a fine role model, such a good and kind man who remains so dearly loved and so greatly missed.

And as I think of my God in the approach to Advent, I give humble thanks for the gift of the baby Jesus,

the gift of being able to appreciate anew the one who came as a babe among us, innocent and trusting, lowly and vulnerable and asking only that we respond with love, with mercy and with kindness.

Jane Williams shares, in her beautiful little book on *Approaching Christmas*, the following meditation by Austin Farrer. It captures so magnificently the enduring dilemma between wordly powers, including consumerism, and the utterly dependable activity of God:

"Yet Mary holds her finger out, and a divine hand closes on it. The maker of the world is born a begging child; he begs for milk, and does not know



that it is milk for which he begs. We will not lift our hands to pull the love of God down to us, but he lifts his hands to pull human compassion down upon his cradle. So the weakness of God proves stronger than men, and the folly of God proves wiser than men. Love is the strongest instrument of omnipotence, for accomplishing those tasks he cares most deeply to perform; and this is how he brings his love to bear on human pride; by weakness not by strength, by need and not by bounty." ■

Dr Jenny Te Paa Daniel is the former principal of St John the Evangelist Theological College Auckland, and 2013 visiting fellow at the National Peace and Conflict Studies Centre, University of Otago.

ONE WAY TO TELL IT

It's the kind of crib I'm inclined to fancy,
A white rhino nudges aside the cows,
A Congo monkey whose total congregation
Wouldn't fill a chapel, joins the sheep, while crow
Clack on the roof to give the dove a breather –
Christmas in other words where political bother

Riles the Armani kings and the well
Gunning in with their Herod-subsid
Where some old lag scrounging the
Is the first at midnight to holler out,
While the child (miracles being in o
Says as his first words, "Cobber, yo

"There's hordes of us
"Losers galore, too m
"Taihoa," says the bo
We'll feed them toge
From the start?" (Tim
Cutting less ice now

The pl
The ox
with th
Near o
A differ
No on





s
l-heeled cockies
ised ute,
e price of a drink
,"You beaut!"
order round a Xmas Tree)
u'll do me!"

s out there, mind," the codger says,
many for you to feed."
oy, "can you, while I hammer it home,
ther, isn't that what I've said
ne present and time past
that we're talking Christ.)

ace is starting to buzz if you give it a while,
ken moving aside, the dogs share their spot
ne jobless, the kids with just mums, the pretty
down and destroyed having heard the boy's got
rent story to tell from the ones they've heard,
e seeming to mind when his mother says, "Good Lord!

Aren't these the ones you travelled this distance for,
Son, to open their doors? As well as the rest,"
She adds, "the toggged up dudes and the glitzy folk
Who've picked up too on the talk, want their slice of *The Feast*
To end them All, as those on the margins know,
like wolves in old time pictures gate-crashing the show.

"The good or the bad, the chosen or the lost,
Are names we'd rather not use – try sister, brother."
'Blessed' a word that takes off as the crowd shoves in,
"We're chocker in here but we've always room for another."
What's that phrase you used to hear – "That is heaven's part?"
It may very well be. But the crib will do for a start.

Vincent O'Sullivan is one of New Zealand's most significant literary figures,
and New Zealand Poet Laureate 2013-15

kavanagh's christmas

The Irish poet and farmer Patrick Kavanagh had an instinctive awareness of the meaning of Incarnation. Even in his descriptions of the most common things, his homespun words and wisdom carry in them hints of Heaven, enabling his readers to be open to them too.

Daniel O'Leary

My father played the melodeon
Outside at our gate;
There were stars in the morning east
And they danced to his music.

In "A Christmas Childhood" Patrick Kavanagh remembers a Christmas morning when he was six years old. His father left the "half-door" open and made music near the gate. The boy's memories of what he saw and heard filled him with excitement. "One side of the potato-pit was white with frost — how wonderful that was, how wonderful!" And later, when he put his ear to the fence's paling post near the front window, "the music that came out was magical."

There can be few poets who have

captured something of the mystery of Incarnation better than the Irish farmer Patrick Kavanagh through his homespun words and wisdom. Everything he wrote about the most common things carried hints of Heaven. A man of the soul — and of the soil — he was a poet of the ordinary, "smelting into passion the common-places of life." Surrounded by his beloved fields, hills and pathways, his spirit was not confined by them — only liberated into the eternal. Through simple and familiar things, he came to understand the universe. Ploughing, spraying the potatoes, milking, feeding sheep, a horse called Polly, a farmer called Maguire, and "three whin bushes" called the "Three Wise Men"

approaching Iniskeen — such were Kavanagh's earthly windows into an incarnate Heaven.

*Across the wild bogs his melodeon called
To Lennons and Callans.*

As I pulled on my trousers in a hurry

I knew some strange thing had happened.

For Kavanagh, childhood, poetry and theology were all of a piece. His farm was his Bible, County Monaghan his Bethlehem, his poetry was his prayer, and along the Iniskeen Road he experienced his daily Emmaus revelations. Even his new long pants were woven into the mystery. A natural contemplative, he read God's signature in every face of nature; he expected angels to appear "round the bends of old roads".

In Kavanagh's novel *Tarry Flynn*, the son returns from a day's work on the farm and tells his ageing mother, "The Holy Ghost is in the fields." Confused, his mother asks him, "Is it something to do with the Catholic religion you mean?" Her son assures her that "It is something to do with every religion."

Outside in the cow-house my mother

Made the music of milking;

The light of her stable-lamp was a star

And the frost of Bethlehem made it twinkle.

Though reared in a grim climate of poverty and survival, Kavanagh's imagination flourished. He had no fear of a punishing God. For him, the Maker of an astonishing Creation could only be a beautiful and loving



Patrick Kavanagh (1904–1967)



God, a tender Mother who “caresses the daily and nightly earth”. The miracle of continuing Creation, of the renewal of the world each day and each season, filled him with a child’s wonder. “And in the green meadows,” he wrote, “the maiden of spring is with child through the Holy Ghost.”

Kavanagh believed in a God of healing more than in a God of unlimited power, a God whose beauty was reflected more purely in the soft shape of a bluebell than in the hard face of the Catholic Church of his time. Though often described as a rough and rustic neighbour, he had an exquisitely childlike understanding of God’s unconditional love. He felt this profoundly when recovering from lung-cancer surgery in 1954. While walking alongside Dublin’s Grand Canal, he experienced, in ordinary sights and sounds, the renewal of his spiritual and bodily health. “The green waters of the canal were pouring redemption on me,” he wrote.

From the beginning, an intuitive awareness of the deeper meaning of Incarnation filled Kavanagh’s soul. Everything spoke to him of the mystery and holiness of our lives. His most quoted lines are:

*God is in the bits and pieces of Everyday
A kiss here, a laugh again, and sometimes
tears,
A pearl necklace round the neck of poverty.*
(From “The Great Hunger”.)

*I nicked six nicks on the door-post
With my penknife’s big blade –
There was a little one for cutting tobacco,
And I was six Christmases of age.*
(From “A Christmas Childhood”)

Dominican Br Tom Casey, a farmer and a bit of a poet himself, is a great fan of Patrick Kavanagh. “Like all great poets,” Br Tom said to me, “Kavanagh invites us to look at the world and to see beauty in the things we take for granted. But he does more

than that: he goes beneath the beauty and shows us the inner meaning.” Until, one day, we will finally recognise the face of our incarnate God of surprises and disguises everywhere.

When Kavanagh writes of his little bedroom only “10 by 12”, with its sloping roof so low he cannot stand, he knows it’s nothing more than a dusty attic. “But its little window lets in the stars” (from “My Room”). Here we have the sacramental imagination at its best. We find it again in “The One”, where he tells the local farmers, “That beautiful, beautiful, beautiful God was breathing his love by a cut-away bog.”

*My father played the melodeon,
My mother milked the cows,
And I had a prayer like a white rose
pinned
On the Virgin Mary’s blouse.*

Kavanagh’s sacramentalising imagination around Incarnation heard “the cry of things young and elemental” everywhere. As a child, each visit to the patch of wild weeds behind his house “where sows root and hens scratch” was like “dipping his fingers in the pockets of God”. Those pockets were his five senses. And they were never empty. He reminds us, in his poem “Advent”, that when the Christmas carols are over, the incarnate melody of the daily psalm begins – the music of what happens.

*We’ll hear it in the whispered argument of
a churning
Or in the streets where the village boys are
lurching.
And we’ll hear it among decent men too
Who barrow dung in gardens under trees,
Wherever life pours ordinary plenty. ... ■*

*Fr Daniel O’Leary’s website is
www.djoleary.com
This article is published by kind
permission of the London Tablet.*

Christmas

At Christmas lunch she asked
Grandma where is God
and around me
watchful eyes searched
for their own answers;
and I struggled to give birth
to anything memorable
for a three year old.

How foolish to flunk it when
the warm breath on my cheek
and this soft body already
gave the answer.
So I told her God is everywhere,
and she asked is God in me too
and when I said yes, she
sighed, nodding with her own
wisdom

—Jenny Blood

marc's story

This article was written as the result of a chance encounter between the writer's wife and a stranger at a bus terminal in Southern France. It has been a life-changing event for the author.

Shaun Davison

It was something in his eyes that said, "You are welcome to talk with me," that attracted my wife Carmel to the bearded man while we waited for the bus to Taizé. When I joined the conversation I didn't realise that my ideas about the homeless would be changed forever.

This is Marc's story.

previous life

"For many years I worked as a steward for a Belgian airline company. It was the high life with lots of money and parties. We used to fly to Africa and I became a little disturbed when I walked out of my

hotel and saw all the poverty that surrounded us. When I finished my job the thought came back to me always — what can I do about this poverty? I am a good man. How can I be a good brother to these I know are in need?

"I read about the political systems, about the way that our wealth in the West is reliant on their poverty. It is the system that keeps them poor so that we can be rich. I was troubled by these things for some time.

Then I read the gospels and I found my answer in the story of the rich young man (Matt 16:19-24). Jesus liked him, so he spoke to him directly. 'You need to give away your wealth and come and follow me. You must give away your possessions to find true wealth.'

a decision made

"So I decided that I needed to do the same. I gave away all my things and I now live without money. For half the year I do volunteer work in Belgium for an organisation that works for the homeless. They give me food and shelter. Then for the other half of the year I simply walk — without money. I sleep in shelters and I rely on the goodness of people for food and water.

"And I find a freedom in that. I get to enjoy the comfort of sitting in a warm station like this and talking with good people. And if there is a chance for me to help anyone — I am able to do that. When I see that need I think this is Jesus calling me to be a good brother.

"When I woke this morning I had no goals to do. I felt free. I felt happy. It is the simple joy of being the child with no worries. Each day comes as a gift. There are no projects, just great to be in the day that is given.

learning to be free again

"When we give children too many things and expect them to be taking responsibilities and learnings from school — they forget these things. So it has taken me some years to bring back this confidence



Marc [Photo: Shaun Davison]

— to be free again.

“I have been doing this for more than ten years now. When I present myself at a place of shelter, I think of the story St Francis told about perfect joy. In this St Francis tells his companion that the perfect joy is to be found when you present yourself at a place of your brothers and instead of welcoming you they cast you out and beat you with sticks — and this you accept — happily. Then you have found the perfect joy. This is the thing that I aspire towards.

“So when I ask for food or shelter or water I accept with gladness whatever the person gives. I try to ask in a way that will cause no fear or trouble because I too want to be a good brother to this person that I am asking.

planting the seed of Christ

“Today we need Christ more than ever. The seed is planted in the thistles and those thistles are the worries about all the things we think we need everyday. And when we have those things, the worry to protect them from others whom we fear will take them from us. When I see people caught in all their riches I think it is only the radical demands of Christ that will make us free.

“It frees us from the demands of the world to have this new thing or look this particular way. And it frees us from our Western arrogance, our feelings of superiority towards the poor, the homeless, and the others. Jesus puts before us the goal of love — this is the truth that will bring us true freedom.”

learnings

Marc smiles and asks us about our lives and helps us on to the bus to Taizé. A day later he arrives there too — having walked the 40 kilometres. Over the next two days we share stories, laughter and friendship. Since he has no home address it is unlikely that we will ever meet again. But whenever I see a person of the street I now try and stop to chat and share something with them. This is partly because I hear the call to act as a good brother. But it is mostly in the hope of looking into their eyes and being reminded of the truth that will set me free. ■

Shaun Davison is the Director of Religious Studies at Pompallier College, Whangarei. He is the author of the recently published book, On a Mission: Men of St Mary's tell their stories

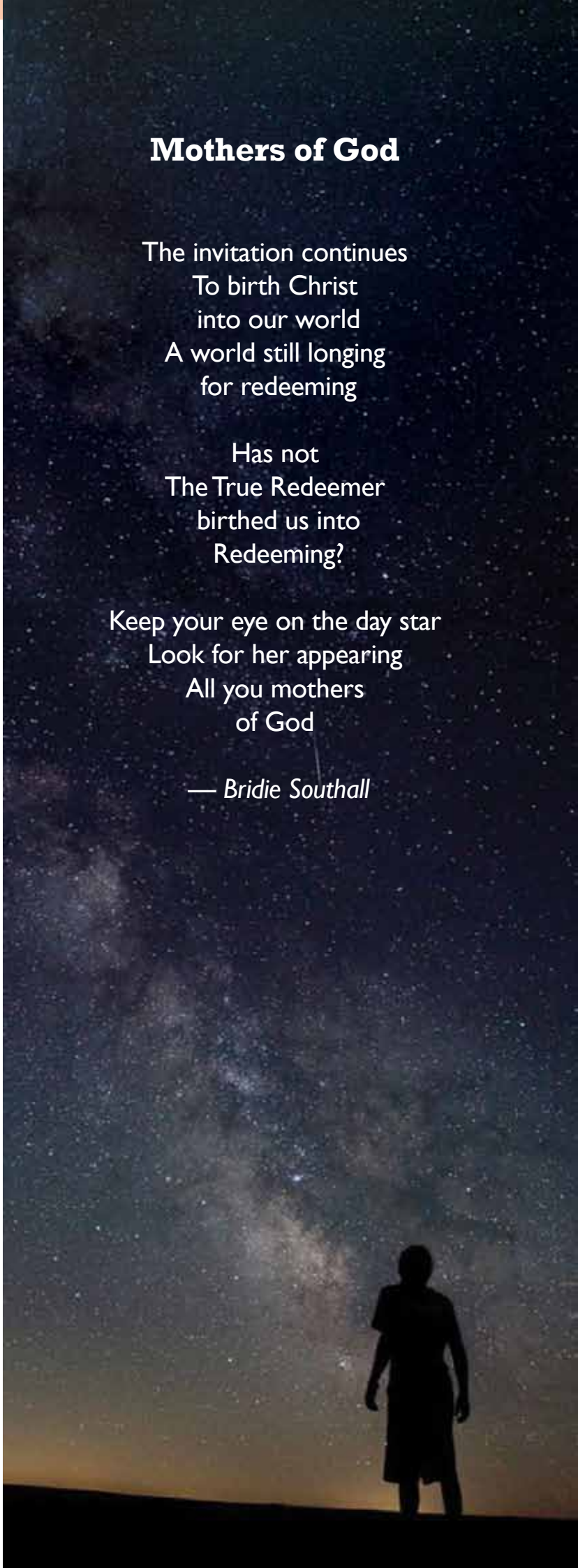
Mothers of God

The invitation continues
To birth Christ
into our world
A world still longing
for redeeming

Has not
The True Redeemer
birthed us into
Redeeming?

Keep your eye on the day star
Look for her appearing
All you mothers
of God

— *Bridie Southall*



in praise of zumba

A self confessed 'wrinkly' writes about the fun and life-giving benefits of being part of a group which follows the BE ACTIVE programme.

It brings a lot more than just exercise.

Jim Consedine

If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution (*Emma Goldman*)

About five years ago, I had a stroke affecting my right side. It wasn't a huge stroke. More, what I describe as a 'two out of ten' stroke, a 'ten' meaning you died. Largely it has left me unaffected except for a wonky leg which affects my balance. This can be precarious at times, as I could no longer stand up on my toes and keep a reasonable balance.

Recently, I was talked into doing a *Be Active* programme, part of a Ministry of Health Green Prescription offering at the local community centre in New Brighton. There, at minimal cost over an eight week period, a couple of very fit and cheerful young women coerced and encouraged a group of about 15 of us to perform a variety of get-fit activities for an hour each week. Shyness held a few back but soon we got into the swing of things.

What I discovered anew is that it is much more fun doing things in a group than trying to develop and maintain fitness alone. Among the various activities I engaged in was badminton, tai chi, gymnasium workouts and Zumba.

For the uninitiated, Zumba is a Latin American dance that has its origins in Brazil. It has developed into something of a Western craze these past few years as maintaining fitness has become so central to healthy living. Craze it may be. But Zumba suits me right down to the ground.

I am now a Zumba convert. It is not the Zumba one sees in the



gyms throughout New Zealand, with young 20s and 30s something professionals working out in evenings or Saturday mornings. At these, everyone dances at high speed in unison to fast paced Latino music like North Korean soldiers at a May Day parade, arms and legs working like pistons, muscles glistening, sweat barely leaking from lean tanned bodies, water bottles at the ready.

No. Our Zumba is more relaxed. It is more at the slow pace of the saner middle-aged and even elderly folk who set aside their walkers and props and join in the swing. Enjoyment is the key.

It is all very sociable. As the group has got to know one another, friendships have formed. There is plenty of laughter and helpful banter. When possible, we even sing along to the music. Many are there for the health benefits. One woman recently said that she was there because of her weight problems, another because of arthritis. Most would have some reason like that. Some come simply for the company.

Dancing in unison is supposed to be a key part. Yet no one seems to mind that, when I am just getting the hang of one style of dance step, most of the group have moved

onto another. Imagine, if you will, an old fashioned dance in a church hall. While a few participants glide by as if they are on wheels, others are much more steady and deliberate. But they all head in the right direction. Then there are those who seem to be moving to a different rhythm altogether, not quite in time with the music and not quite in time with the others. That is me doing Zumba.

But I love it. Sometimes, as the field moves to the right, I am just getting into the swing going left. Then I correct, do a small back step, only to find that the others have all moved in yet another direction. We use our arms a lot — swinging them up and down, sometimes rotating like an old fashioned clothesline, bending our bodies as we go, swaying this way and that. Or in my case, that way and this. Whatever.

Nobody notices. Least of all our wonderful 'caller' Mele Paoese, up the front, throwing all her energy into the actions as if her life depended on it. Her instructions are explicit. "Go at your own pace. Sit down if you want. Have a breather. Do whatever suits you."

So we do. Our twice weekly gatherings, while a little difficult to get to on the coldest days, have made the winter a more pleasant experience. So far they have helped keep some of the worst ailments at bay. Long may they continue. ■

Jim Consedine is a priest of the Diocese of Christchurch, and a member of the Catholic Worker movement.

a time for decision



Film: Inch'Allah

Director: Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette

Reviewer: Paul Sorrell

Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette's powerful exploration of the Israel–Palestine conflict doesn't preach about politics, but rather shows us the rawness of the situation on the ground. We experience the checkpoints and body searches, the poverty and deprivation, the refugee camp where bands of cheeky urchins pick through mountains of rubbish, walled off from the Israeli settlement on the heights above. We also see something — but much less — of contemporary Israel, with its vibrant street life, white-sand beaches and trendy nightclubs.

This is the story of Chloé, a young French-Canadian woman who moves between her home in Jerusalem and the West Bank where she works as a doctor in an overcrowded women's health clinic in Ramallah. With her comfortable liberal attitudes, but also possessed of a basic humanity, she acts as a surrogate for the Western audience of the film. As the story unfolds, Chloé becomes progressively radicalised, first when a young boy from the camp is run down by an army truck, and then when one of her patients, Rand, whose family she

has become involved with, loses her baby when forced to give birth at an army roadblock.

At every turn, the film underlines the choice that Chloé must make. She comes to see more and more clearly that she cannot continue to flit between her two worlds — her comfortable life in Israel and the institutionalised violence of life in Palestine — but must take a stand. Failure to do so is to side with the forces of occupation and oppression.

Barbeau-Lavalette's depiction of the anarchic, unsettled character of life in the occupied West Bank is leavened by flashes of ironic humour. Chloé playfully uses the same tube of expensive lipstick to beautify both Rand and her Israeli border guard friend, Ava. However, in the final, tragic image of Rand, there is not a trace of this Western-style adornment to be seen. Often things are suggested, rather than spelled out, leaving something for the imagination to work on. So, at the end of the film, we are left guessing whether Chloé's newfound commitment has led to her becoming involved in its culminating act of violence.

In the very last scene of *Inch'Allah*, a tiny ray of hope emerges as one of the camp urchins picks a hole through the separation wall and, to his astonishment, sees a "big tree" with a smaller one growing in its shade. ■

Joy, Justice and Ginger

Advent

Arrival

We wait for the flavours and focus
of Christ-coming ~
peacefulness and joy
justice-making, love
and red-wrapped boxes of ginger.

Advent

Arrival

We wait for the silent feet
of camels
and the clatter of Kaimanawa horses
startled on the Desert Road
of summer holidays.

Advent

Arrival

We wait for the gate to open
urging us
to step into the story
and the mystery
that calms and troubles the world.

– Anne Powell

a woman of courage and love

*“When you become who you are meant to be, you will set the world on fire.”
– St Catherine of Siena.*

Karyn Sadler



Statue of St Catherine in Rome.

Imagine that being the youngest of 24 children would be difficult at the best of times. Add to that being born in 1347, having parents who were trying to marry you off and being prone to seeing visions of Christ and I'd say things may have been pretty rough.

Born Caterina di Benincasa at Siena in Western Italy, Saint Catherine's early life was difficult and turbulent. Her twin sister died shortly after birth and when she was barely a year old the Black Death swept through Siena claiming the lives of several of her remaining siblings and a great many of Catherine's relatives. It has been suggested that it was this early exposure to sickness, death and grief that would eventually lead Catherine to devote much of her life to caring for the sick.

marriage then

However, the hard times were not over for Catherine. It was around the age of six that she had her first vision of Christ; this vision changed the course of her life. During the 1300s women would usually marry before the age of 20. It was not uncommon for marriages to be arranged when a girl was merely ten years old and weddings to take place as soon as a girl reached puberty. Marriages were often arranged to maintain wealth within families and to make alliances with other, more powerful families. Catherine's parents had great hopes for Catherine marrying 'up'. She certainly did this, but not in the way they had intended.

In an era when women were usually seen and not heard, Catherine . . . fought for what she believed in.

not for catherine

Encouraged by her vision of Christ, Catherine decided to dedicate herself completely to God. She had always been fascinated by the Dominican friars who preached in Siena and in time she would become a Dominican. Catherine's family had much difficulty in accepting her decision. In an act of self-sacrifice and as a sign of her resolve, Catherine cut off all her hair. She was adamant that she would not marry. Her family found this very difficult to accept and thus she retreated into an "interior cell" in the family home. Her early teen years were marked with much suffering, most of which was self-inflicted.

Lengthy periods of self-denial followed with Catherine taking the discipline and fasting for very long periods of time. Surely Catherine must have experienced many doubts during this time. After all, three years is a long time to be isolated from one's family. However, Catherine was inspired by further visions of Christ and in 1366 she underwent another mystical experience where Christ promised to be her heavenly spouse. She emerged



St Catherine of Siena.

from her isolation to care for the sick and poor.

foray into politics

It was during this time that Catherine's foray into politics began. In an era when women were usually seen and not heard, Catherine again fought for what she believed in. She began to write letters to Pope Gregory XI urging him to return to Rome. The fact that Popes since 1307 had been residing in Avignon, Southern France, was creating problems for the church. The authority of each Pope rested on the claim that he was the successor of St Peter as Bishop of Rome. Not only was Italian pride at stake, but the Roman economy was feeling the impact of the Pope's absence from Rome. Catherine outlined in her heartfelt and impassioned letters the need for the Pope to return to Rome, to put an end to papal corruption and to work for peace. She visited him in Avignon and was there to accompany Gregory back to Rome. It is said that she told the Pope that his place was "beside the bones of the martyrs." Her pleas may well have played a part in Gregory's return to Rome. The year was 1377. It was only a year later that Pope Gregory XI died.

What followed was a period of religious and political upheaval. Catherine found herself in the middle

of that. Urban VI, a power-driven tyrant, was elected pope, seemingly 'under duress'. The cardinals, realising their mistake promptly, elected a second Pope in Avignon, Clement VII. Refusing to abdicate, Pope Urban VI held on to power and now the church was stuck with two rival popes, and two rival papal courts, one in Rome and one in Avignon. This situation came to be known as the 'Great Schism'.

with prayer and fasting

Despite all his faults, Catherine believed that Pope Urban VI had a right to the Papacy as he had been duly consecrated. Out came her trusty parchment and quill and she wrote countless letters to rulers urging them to support Pope Urban VI and letters to the Pope himself urging moderation on his part. Despite her best efforts, the Catholic Church remained divided over this issue. It was then that Catherine took even more drastic measures. In 1378 she moved to Rome and began fasting even more than before, trusting Jesus' words that

some things could be moved only by prayer and fasting. Catherine truly believed that she had to intervene in the deadlock situation that was dividing the church. Sadly, this incredibly motivated woman's actions did not reunite the church as she so desperately wished, and in April 1380, she died.

It would be 1417 before the Great Schism ended.

Saint Catherine was a woman who 'bucked the trends'. She stood up for what she believed in and despite numerous set-backs and disappointments her resolve never seemed to waver. What can we learn from

this woman? Courage, determination, integrity, absolute spiritual belief and a passion for doing what she believed was right. Saint Catherine is a great example of a woman who, even though it would have been easier to do nothing, was moved to act. ■

Karyn Sadler is the Head of Curriculum, Social Sciences, teaching at Campion College, Gisborne.



Kiwi Christmas

by Joy Cowley



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emmanuel – god is with us . . .

4th Sunday of Advent – Mt 1:18-25 and Vigil of Christmas – Mt 1:1-25

Kathleen Rushton

A detour on my way to work led to an oasis of stillness, beauty and questions in a crowded week. In Sacred Heart Church, Addington, ribbons of sunlight streamed into its shaded peacefulness as I worked my way around The Heart of Sacred Art — An Icon Exhibition of Michael Galovic of Australia and Gaylene Barnes of Christchurch.

I moved on, having strayed from the guide sheet titles. What is this? As though cut out of a traditional painting is a baby in a manger in the midst of I cannot work out what. The gold surrounding the baby, which is not straw, draws me to the baby and yet away to the gold bands on some of the shadowy figures. Or do those gold bands, in fact, guide me to the gold in the centre and hence to the baby?

Here, Michael Galovic presents tradition alongside artistic innovation. And incarnation ... it dawns on me that this is a visual interpretation of a name given

to Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. I invite the reader, too, to pause and then to consider the words we shall hear proclaimed in Advent and at the Christmas vigil "... and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means God- with-us." (Mt 1:23).

framework of god-with-us

The promise of God with us frames Matthew's gospel — at the beginning (1:23) and in its very last sentence the risen Jesus says: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (28:20) Within the gospel itself, two ways Jesus is God with us are specified.

While Matthew affirms the special place of Peter and the twelve (ch 16), it is in the community of the church which gathers (ekklesia 16:18 from a word meaning to assemble) that Jesus declares he is God with us: "For where two or three are gathered in my



Nativity / September 11 Series – Michael Galovic (used with permission)
[Photo: Peter Fleming]

name, I am there among them.” (18:20).

Later, Jesus identifies that he is God with us in the needy and the least ones whom he calls his brothers and sisters: “Truly, I tell you, just as you did (or did not do) to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did (or did not do) to me” (25:40, 45). This was his response to the question: “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or in prison, and did not minister to you?”

context of the name emmanuel

This name God with us is given following the crisis when Joseph discovered that Mary to whom he was betrothed was found to be with child. Fear and death loom in the very next incident when King Herod seeks the new-born Jesus. Babies are slaughtered. Jesus’ family is forced to “escape” (2:1-16). The verb “to escape” or “withdraw” is repeated in vv 12, 13, 14 and again after returning from Egypt when the family “escape/withdraw” to Galilee (v 22). God with us becomes a refugee who is displaced twice over.

Immediately before the name God with us is given is the genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17). A look at a sample of his ancestors uncovers stories of leaving traditional lands, escape, wandering, being uprooted and displaced. This foreshadows what will happen to Jesus. In the very first sentence Jesus is “son of Abraham.” Abraham, Sarah and family are called to leave their land, set out on a nomadic journey, experiencing danger from rulers and people, severe famine and being displaced in Egypt (Gn 12-13).

Isaac, son of Abraham, and Jacob, son of Isaac, as well as other ancestors like Moses, evoke forced homelessness, exodus, exile and being displaced. The “deportation to Babylon” is mentioned (Mt 1:11, 12, 17 twice). This refers to when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and took Jesus’ ancestors into a long exile. The word “deportation” used by Matthew to describe this movement means “to transfer to another place of habitation” and echoes its use in the Greek Bible in passages about the exile to Babylon.

god with us today

The birth of God with us was announced by angels to those going about their ordinary daily work in the fields minding sheep. The Magi, the wise ones, recognised him through their study of the stars and their awareness of the natural world. The figures surrounding God with us in the painting are not shepherds or Magi but people at work wearing protective masks and with shovels in their hands. The artist depicts them in the devastation of 9/11. They risk their lives by serving their sisters and brothers. They discover and give birth to hope. God with us is born.

Advent and Christmas remind us that like the

shepherd, the lowly ones, we are to discover God with us in our work and in the situations of our daily lives in order to be for others God with us. Like the Magi, we are to learn to be in touch with the signs of the times; to recognise cosmic realities; to follow the star which points the way to new discoveries of God with us and to bring to birth God with us.

And who and where is God with us? God with us is a baby with all the vulnerability and dependence that entails. God with us is the one saying to you and me: “Truly, I tell you, just as you did (or did not do) to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did (or did not do) to me” (25:40, 45) — the refugee, one fleeing from a tyrant, one who is displaced from his or her ancestral land, the one seeking a living wage, the one who will have “nowhere to lay his head” (8:20), the one suffering from inequality in Aotearoa New Zealand when the \$1.9 million allocated by the Government per year to put towards food in schools matches the salary of the chief executive of Mighty River Power (*Press* 26/10/13). And in all this we have yet another assurance of God with us to empower us to recognise and commit ourselves to the birthing of hope, a gift that Christmas brings in the worship and prayer of the Christian community: “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (18:20). ■

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



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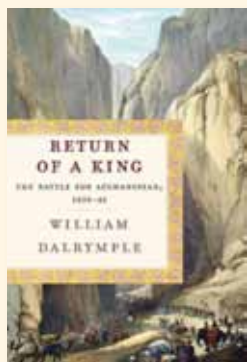
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books of 2013

There are some years when one has to struggle to find books to suggest to others as rewarding reads — but not this year. In fact it has been hard to whittle down the possibilities to a manageable number, and harder still to apologise to the gems that fell by the wayside.

There is always a sense of a journey of discovery in the offing when opening a new work by William Dalrymple, and *Return of a King* subtitled *The Battle for Afghanistan 1839–42* (Bloomsbury) is an absorbing and most rewarding journey. In seven previous books of history, travel and biography, William Dalrymple has established himself as a master storyteller, whose fluent writing is witness to meticulous research and a deep understanding of his subject. In his acknowledgement of the part played by his wife and children in his latest work he pays tribute to their tolerance “as their increasingly obsessed husband and father roved the Hindu Kush only to sit banging away on his laptop ... mentally removed from family life and dwelling instead amid the troubles and traumas of 1840s Afghanistan.”



The result of this obsession is an account of the British invasion of Afghanistan in 1839, arguably Britain's greatest-ever disaster in the East. Nearly 20,000 British and East India Company troops funnelled through the mountain passes from India to Afghanistan to re-establish

their own candidate as king, but after a two year occupation the Afghans rose in answer to the call for a holy war. After a two-month siege of Kabul, 18,500 British troops left the city, in the dead of winter, to make their way through the passes to Jalalabad. One by one they were shot down by poorly equipped but determined Afghans. Only one man made it through.

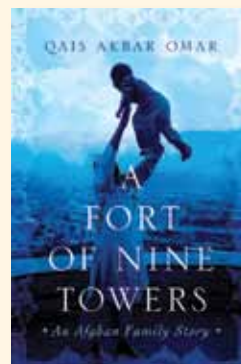
Dalrymple's account is vivid and immediate and makes for compulsive reading. In addition to material in British, Russian, Urdu and Persian archives he had access to previously untranslated contemporary Afghan accounts of the conflict, including the autobiography of Shah Shuja, the king favoured by the British.

One disturbing element is the obvious parallels between the current situation and that of the 1840s. Blindness to culture, the story of promises not kept, the belief that might will conquer the passion of men fighting to hold on to their country — it makes for sober conclusions. Dalrymple quotes a tribal elder met during one of his trips to research this book: “In truth, all the Americans here know their game is over. It is just their politicians who deny this.”

At the end of his memoir of life in war-torn Afghanistan, *A Fort of Nine Towers* (Picador), Qais Akbar Omar speaks directly to the reader in a poignant dedication: “I have long carried this load of griefs in the cage of my heart. Now I have given them to you. I hope that you are strong enough to hold them.”

There were times while reading this book that I felt barely strong enough to continue. The author has lived through horrendous times. He was only nine when the Russians invaded Afghanistan. After their withdrawal came civil war, the

Mujahedin, the Taliban, and finally, the intervention of western troops. Kabul, the author's home city, was “like a huge garden” he writes, but after the invasions it became a place of terror and constant danger. His childhood was irrevocably changed as his family fought for survival, living in tents, in ruined buildings, for a time in the caves near the Bamyán Buddhas.



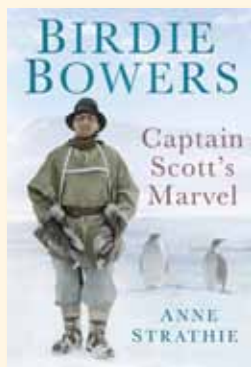
Through all the terrible disruption the family stayed together, in spite of periods of separation when various members were lifted out for imprisonment and torture. There is a heartbreaking account of the death of the author's favourite cousin in a sniper attack — suddenly the general danger is intensely personal.

It has to be kept in mind that this is a memoir, not a history. There are very few dates, very few names, very little that could be verified.

In a final note the author gives warning that this is a young person's account seen through older eyes. “Many things happened to my family and me, and for the first years of the fighting I cannot say exactly when they occurred — only that they did.” His family no longer has photos or any personal records, they were all destroyed in an attempt to become anonymous, invisible. He writes that every Afghan family has a similar tale to tell, and that Afghans will understand why his family's name is little used in the account.

Omar's current life as a carpet seller gives him an analogy which explains his family's astonishing resilience as they now work to rebuild their country: "I know it will take a long time. I am a carpet weaver. I know how, slowly, one knot follows another until a pattern appears."

More than a hundred years after the event, the death of Scott and his companions on their failed attempt to be first to the South Pole still engages people with even a marginal interest in Antarctica. After the deaths of Evans and Oates on the dispirited trek back, Captain Scott and the two men he was closest to, Wilson and Bowers, died together in their tent, to be found eight months later.



In *Birdie Bowers: Captain Scott's Marvel* (The History Press), Anne Strathie has given a highly readable account of the life of the young Scottish naval officer, four months short of his 29th birthday when he died, whose thirst for travel and adventure led him to his ultimate fate.

Birdie Bowers (the nickname came early in his life because of his prominent nose — to his family he was always Henry, his given name) went to sea when he was only 14, and until he was 26 travelled the world — Asia, America, Australia, the Persian Gulf. His letters reveal that there was much more to Birdie Bowers than his brief though significant appearance in the polar story.

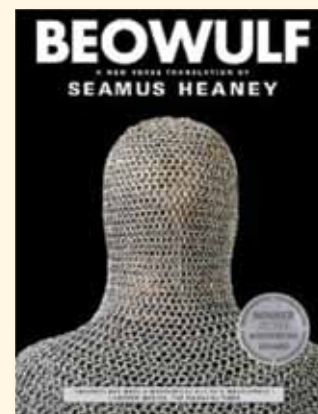
When Scott put out the call for men to join him on his second Antarctic expedition, Bowers was the only one of the 8000 applicants to be taken on without an interview. To many he was an unlikely choice, stocky, short (only 5ft 4in) and with no polar experience, but within weeks he was Captain Scott's "treasure", "positive wonder", "indispensible assistant", the one man on the expedition who was "unrelentingly cheerful".

Bowers was in charge of rations and stores, a job he undertook with the tireless energy and enthusiasm which marked everything he did. He was an intensely religious man, with a childlike faith which stayed with him through all his time at sea and which surfaced in virtually every letter to his family. In his last letter, written to his mother as he lay in the tent with Scott and Wilson and with a blizzard raging outside, he wrote that he left his family in God's keeping, and only wished that he could come through the ordeal for their sake but "... you will know that for me the end was peaceful as it is only sleep in the cold." Such courage and serenity from a man who was terrified of spiders!

My final offering is less of a book and more of an experience, the result of serendipity, as are so many experiences.

When the acclaimed and much loved Irish poet Seamus Heaney died in August this year I went hunting the internet for his reading of *The Given Note*, the only one of his poems read at his funeral. YouTube delivered, one thing led to another, as it tends to on YouTube, and I came across Seamus Heaney reading his translation of the great Anglo Saxon poem, *Beowulf*, in two parts, each of over an hour. This is such a joy to listen to

— the combination of a great poem translated by a great poet and read in his comfortable voice, so right for story telling is a winning one and a rewarding use of two hours.



In his introduction to the translation, completed in 1999, Seamus Heaney writes that for too long *Beowulf*, the earliest known poem in Old English (Anglo-Saxon), dating from between the 8th and 10th centuries, was regarded as an exercise in grammar and vocabulary, a hurdle for many students as they embarked on an English degree. It was the Oxford scholar J.R.R. Tolkien who instigated a new appreciation of the poem as a work of art, an appreciation which can only be increased by Seamus Heaney's translation.

It is wonderfully lively and powerful, a joy to read, and an even greater joy to listen to, with hints of Gerard Manley Hopkins and the speech of Heaney's native Ulster breaking through. Listen to it with a copy of the translation at hand for an indulgent gift to yourself. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* by Seamus Heaney is available in faber and faber and W.W. Norton and Co editions. ■

Kathleen Doherty, our Christmas book reviewer and avid reader, lives in Dunedin.

Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

sacred liturgy 'constitution'

This month sees the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the first major document of Vatican II. Its fundamental effect was to cleanse official worship of the myriad accretions, acquired through the ages, that obscured its purpose. The faithful were once again able to exercise their right to active participation, rather than be mere spectators at a performance.

A second aspect, sketched out in the 14 introductory paragraphs and fleshed out in subsequent Council documents, places Liturgy within the context of the Church's overall role. The fundamental task of the Church, which is made up of the baptised, is to proclaim the Gospel to those who haven't heard of Christ. Allied with this is the duty to help members understand and know how to be missionaries in their local communities. As Paul VI expressed it: "The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity. These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable." (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1975)

unintended consequence

The Liturgy Document indirectly led to the resolve of the 2013 conclave to bring the Curia under control; hence the election of Francis. Consequent upon Vatican II, language groupings of bishops were left to monitor suitable liturgical translations so the faithful could more readily exercise their right to active participation. A reactionary movement gathered strength during the following decades, culminating in Rome countermanding Vatican II rules on translations, effectively sidelining the world's bishops. Even before the rule change there were complaints from Episcopal bodies; for example at the East Asian Bishops' Synod in

1998 Stephen Hamao, President of the Japanese Episcopal Conference pointed out the absurdity of having to submit Japanese translations to Rome for approval.

Earlier this year the German speaking bishops rejected the new translations because they are 'not the language of the people', and expressed their opposition to the literalism demanded by Rome. There has been widespread discontent within the English speaking world for the same reasons, exacerbated by the discovery that even after bishops reluctantly approved the translation foisted upon them, some curial officials made further changes.

This Roman imposition brought to a head decades of frustration over curial usurpation of episcopal rights, contributing to clamour for change. Years ago Cardinal Hume publicly complained about being "treated like an altar boy by minor Curial officials." Francis has not yet confirmed the Prefect of the Liturgy Department in his role and has removed five officials noted for their desire to control translations.

Even more impressive is the alacrity with which the Pope has accepted the recommendations of his eight specially appointed Cardinal advisors to address pastoral problems concerning marriage and family. In preparation for the two Synods on the matter Diocesan bishops have been asked to consult with clergy — and laity (horror of horrors!) — on a number of questions that have hitherto been off the official agendas for such meetings.

st. joseph in the mass

Pope Francis recently directed that St Joseph's name be added to the other three Eucharistic prayers. The saint's name was introduced into the first Canon by Pope John XXIII. At the discussion of the schema on the liturgy at the first session of Vatican II, at least three bishops proposed this

change. For about 150 years petitions had been sent to Rome for this action, the most recent of which, presented in six volumes to the Pope in March 1962, appears to have persuaded John XXIII to intervene.

Joseph Komonchak, who worked as an expert advisor at the Council, reports that reactions to this move by the Pope were varied. Congar, for instance, wrote: "The problem is that, while the Council is in session, and when that Council is discussing the liturgy, the Pope, on his own authority, decides something (the appropriateness of which is at least questionable). Good Pope John keeps on combining some lovely gestures with others that are regrettable or retrograde."

Karl Barth had fewer difficulties, however, saying that he himself preferred to compare the Church to St Joseph rather than to the Blessed Virgin. "Joseph, in my opinion, in his relation to Christ, played the same role as the Church should exercise. The Roman Church, I know, prefers to compare her role to that of Mary, which was more glorious. She brings the Gospel message to the world in the same way that Mary gave us the Christ. But the comparison is fallacious. The Church cannot give birth to the Redeemer, but she can and must serve Him with discreet and humble zeal. This was specifically the role of Joseph, who always remained in the background, leaving all the glory to Jesus. This must also be the role of the Church if we want the world to rediscover the splendour of the Word of God."

a quantum of solace (by a bishop at Vatican II)

We are two thousand *Patres* in Session
Who feel a great weight of oppression
What with Cardinals talking
And lesser lights squawking,
Thank goodness, the bar's so refreshing. ■

do we need an ordained priesthood?

Priests have been an integral part of my entire life. I grew up in an Irish Catholic parish in a supportive and rich working-class Catholic environment on the edge of Protestant Christchurch. I have had the privilege of knowing and being mentored by some wonderful priests — many now deceased. Others, in dwindling numbers, continue to spread the gospel and serve the people.

As we witness the dwindling number of priests, the refusal by the Church to ordain women or reinstate married priests (there are 19 in the Christchurch Diocese alone), the paedophilia/sexual abuse crisis and the hypocrisy of those who claim to be celibate, many Catholics are wondering if the Church would be better off without an ordained ministry.

The current solution is to plunder the clerical resources of the “third world.” They are all pastorally skilled, generous men but not necessarily suitable for 21st century New Zealand culture. Are they, like other immigrants, coming for economic reasons? More importantly, should we be robbing the “third world” where the priest shortage is extreme; Africa 1:4786; Caribbean 1:8347; Latin America 1:7081; South East Asia 1:5382; New Zealand 1:534.

In three Christchurch parishes alone we witness the people of God still being told by recent clerical arrivals that it is a mortal sin not to attend Sunday Mass; being denied communion for coming late; and having the sale of *Tui Motu* banned. Another parish priest is anti-ecumenical. This is clericalism, strongly condemned by Pope Francis.

The people of God are not being well served and are voting with their feet. A dedicated colleague of mine, passionately

committed to the gospel, told me that she has decided to stop going to Mass. “I am no longer prepared to be insulted each Sunday. I go home angry. The behavior of the celebrant is appalling. My Sunday Mass experience is destroying my relationship with God.”

It has been painful for me actively to suggest to fellow Catholics they consider discontinuing attendance at Mass or find an alternative community which nurtures their spiritual lives. This goes to the core of our Catholic faith. The days of attending ‘any old Mass’ simply won’t do. Part of the problem is that many of the post Vatican II priests have left the priesthood, or retired, leaving the pre-Vatican II priests to manage the Church.

Traditionally priests have no requirement to retrain, stay up to date theologically, no supervision, no job contracts. No matter how ignorant, lazy or incompetent they can’t be sacked.

The Churches of Europe and North America are emptying. New Zealand numbers are only being artificially maintained by immigration.

There is a growing global discourse focused on whether we need the ordained ministry at all. The early Church was egalitarian — not authoritarian — and functioned without ordained priests. Women and married men held priestly roles. The current global dialogue asserts that women priests, the Anglican Priest married with children who become Catholic and imported priests are not the answer to the priest shortage. This is short term thinking and, at worst, insulting to the people of God.

All change is being blocked by a clerical culture which will protect itself at all costs.

The Church needs an entirely new form of ministry in which men and women can participate equally at every level.

We need to trust the Holy Spirit and take a bold step forward in faith.

Hans Küng challenges us not to fall into resignation: “If Pope Francis tackles reforms, he will find he has wide approval from far beyond the Catholic Church.”

The people of God are ready. ■

Robert Consedine
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a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

Instead of going out to a dinner as part of a conference in our town this weekend (where there'll be plenty of people and no one will notice particularly if I'm there or not), how would it be to stay home and just hang out?

We ate leftover rice and vegetables — yummy and so quick to get on to the table.

One of my teenagers decided to wash the dinner dishes though she'd already done another couple of jobs already. And then sat and read a story to five-year-old little sister, and played hide and seek in a relatively patient way given that the five-year-old was trailing a quilt around the house and hiding under it every single time.

So with 14 and five-year-old occupied, I headed to the piano — and Shar got out her flute and we played some duets. We decided we could play a few carols — maybe we could play one together at the family Lessons and Carols in early December? Definite progress by the flautist and regress by the pianist.

I scooped up Jalori and we sat down for our next chapter of *Charlotte's Web*.

"Charlotte is really just a very nice kind of friend for Wilbur, Mum. Do you think Mr Zuckerman would really eat him up?"

Rohan bounced in the door after an afternoon of indoor soccer and basket

ball. Famished. About to die of hunger. Sat himself at the table with a big plate of rice and beans.

Jalori trotted off for Beak and Bush (from a long ago story about baby pukekos... beak and bush aka Teeth and Toilet). Next she was tucked into bed with a prayer and a song. I headed up the rickety stairs to the attic where the big kids sleep. Shanti gives me a poem she had written, folded up into a paper crane. Each snuggles under a quilt for a goodnight prayer and song.

(We're still singing the same "Go To Sleep" songs that Auntie Adee composed when each was a newborn ... Even the teenagers complain when they don't get "My Goodnight Song" and when we're on trains I sing them very quietly as we snuggle up for sleep. This Goodnight Song co-dependence thing hopefully means none of our kids will want to leave home until they hit 25 years old at least).

Turn out the lights in the attic and back downstairs to the sitting room

— both of us were slightly disheveled at the close of the day. Never mind about finishing tidying — messy things seem good at waiting. Felt vesperish.

What's done is done. What's not done is not done.

How good it was that I had the sense to stay at home this evening. Perhaps nearly every day I could cancel thoughts of high activity and efficiency and just pootle about. Read Shanti's poem — a psalm really. Too lovely.

I remember for the thousandth time that here in this family, I am wanted, I am teased, I get given cups of tea, I am sought for homework help, I am massaged, I am needed, I am asked to sing songs and play games and magic food onto plates and I am loved. I get a little idea of why God wanted *whanau*. I am deeply grateful to belong to this family. ■

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



From L to R: Kaaren, Shar, Rohan, Jeph, and Shanti. In front: Jalori.



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