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Peace and Goodwill He wā o te manaaki

ANTON SPELMAN, JANE HIGGINS and OTHERS
on Christmas this year

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI, BRENDAN DALY and MORE
on taking part in Church reform

BRIAN BILSTON's read from top and bottom poem

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EDITORIAL

Tuning Our Love this Christmas

I think that last year was our dress rehearsal for neighbourly love and that this year we're on stage.

In 2020 our mantra for dealing with COVID-19 was "be kind" and "we're a team of five million". By Christmas 2020 I felt a sense of pride (tinged with complacency) that our working together had turned the virus from our shores and that 2021 would be a more normal year.

But then, mid-year, Delta arrived, along with a tide of misinformation. We resurrected our mantra – adding a new verse: "get vaccinated" – and the team stepped up again. Well, nearly all the team. It seems harder this time. Our mantra has out-of-tune voices contradicting the health advice and opposing vaccine mandates. Our cohesion has cracks – reaching into our whānau, schools, churches and across society. We're faced with those we love holding views we can't countenance. We are dividing into the vaccinated and the unvaccinated. And this is why loving our neighbour is a real test this year. Can love keep us together?

The test is personal. How do I keep the relationship with a nephew, who in a "heroic" act for freedom, has given up his teaching job rather than get vaccinated, when I think that vaccination is desirable to protect everyone from the virus?

And the test is societal. How will we act when by being vaccinated we will have more freedom of movement than those who choose not to be? We are faced with this challenge to love our neighbour and keep our integrity.

We can do this. We have the lyrics – "peace on Earth and goodwill to all" – even though we do not have all the notes for the score. We'll discover the tune as we are practising the lyrics – by our thoughtful and faithful acts of love. This is our challenge and our blessing this Christmas.

We thank all of our contributors to this December issue. We are grateful to them for their generosity in sharing their faith, reflection, scholarship, art and craft with us. We especially thank Mary Betz, who after a year of thoughtful contributions, has written her final *Cross Currents* column.

This issue is the last for 2021. Our next issue will be in February 2022.

Christmas Gift Promotion

We have a super Christmas gift promotion this year – two subscriptions for the price of one! The Christmas card with the information is in the envelope with your December magazine. The last two years have been hard for us and we hope with your help in this promotion we will recover.

And as is our custom, our last word is of blessing and encouragement. Happy Christmas!

Learning from & Gratitude for 2021

When we consume bad news on a regular basis, it is easy to forget that the world isn't ending. After all, it's negative press that usually feeds the news cycle. Stories of pandemics and political unrest are inherently more interesting to a general audience than peace, love and understanding.

As a reporter, I appreciate the mechanics of this kind of media. We should be informed about dangers: if there's a threat to the quality of the drinking water or to the state of our democracy, it's right that we hear about it before pouring a glass or casting a ballot.

But I can also see the risks of overconsumption. Like food, bad news habits can leave us feeling depressed, apathetic and lethargic. I know at least a dozen journalists who packed in the profession this year — or at least collapsed into a sabbatical — due to burnout. The onslaught of bad news took too great a toll.

As we limp towards the end of the year and to a well-deserved break, it's good to reflect on how we consume information and why. In the spirit of progress, I'd add that it's worth considering how we might live happier and more fulfilling lives in 2022.

Rather than propose some kind of Thoreauvian escape to the woods — although be my guest if you have the means and the log cabin — I think there are simpler ways to “live deliberately”, or at least be deliberately informed.

Diagnose the Problem

When we review our media consumption, I'd suggest the first place to start is the frequency of it. If we're being bombarded with a news story every time we glance at our phones, we may be over-indulging. Much like emails, there are very few stories that won't wait for you.

While news outlets have turned “live blogs” and live updates into a daily feature of the news, there is almost no one on Earth who needs minute-to-minute updates or blow-by-blow accounts of a developing story.

Rather than make us more informed, being constantly updated has a tendency to make us miss the wood from the trees. We can lose sight of the larger story and instead get distracted by every minor detail, obfuscation, action and reaction until we're

more confused than before. Listening to an Australian politician pontificate tends to induce a similar malaise.

Smell the Roses

In my experience, longer and more considered writing has the opposite effect. While focusing on the minutiae risks myopia, there's room in long-form reporting for a thorough interrogation of the facts, for hope and even inspiration.

There's a responsibility therein not only to identify a problem but to broach the subject of a solution. If there isn't one at hand, there are almost always people who are happy to either suggest one or be working on it themselves. Being informed doesn't demand being inert.

Long-form journalism also provides greater context. For many topics, the longer the timeline, the more positive the overall trend. While there are certainly missteps along the way, when we take a long view we can see that the story of humanity is one of progress.

None of this is to downplay the challenges we face today or to advocate for inaction. Quite the opposite. If the news is overwhelming, if it creates unnecessary stress and if it paralyses rather than empowers, then it is doing us more harm than good.

But if we pause, reflect and give ourselves the ability to truly think, I believe we're in a much better place to do something positive. To paraphrase the Serenity Prayer — may we be wise enough to know the difference between those things we can change and those we must simply accept.

As we hurtle towards Christmas, we can look beyond the headline to see that there is much for which to be grateful, and plenty we can do for those around us. 🌲

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





GOD WITH US IN COVID TIMES

ANTON SPELMAN reflects on how we might celebrate Christmas differently this year when COVID is lurking in our country.

While there may be a few who believe that Christmas is fundamentally about a baby being born, many to most of us now see Christmas as a celebration of the goodwill and hope that becomes present in communities when we open ourselves more fully to an acceptance of Christ dwelling within and among us.

The significance of Christmas can be understood best in the reality of situations that we all find ourselves in, not in the theology that might flow from them. This makes it a down-to-earth feast and one where its connection to the day-by-day realities of our lives becomes very important.

In recent years, I have worried

that we may have exhausted all there is to say about Christmas even when applied to daily living. But with Spring and its surprises having come around again, maybe Christmas can open for us a similar freshness of revelation referred to in the phrase "God with us". This will depend on whether we dare to set aside our own needs and expectations of the feast and let God speak.

Commerce Co-opting Christmas

Our preparations for Christmas are carried out in community, and it is here that we have to deal with the seasonal upswing in commercial activity which complicates matters for all of us. Predictably, the commercial dimension will be overwhelming for

many, but the most serious issue here is the way commercial interests have taken ownership of the feast. The capitalist financial system has no right to behave in this way. Yet year after year, we incorporate more commercial views into our religious practice. These get in the way of God's relationship with us.

We Can Respond Differently

The institutional Church doesn't seriously challenge the commercial interests controlling the feast and, therefore, in effect, it colludes with commerce.

As with faith and conscience, each of us has our own reality that we alone must engage and respond to. Our rangatiratanga is at stake here as



well as the beliefs we have about the primacy of conscience.

It is not enough to rail against the juggernaut of neocolonial consumerism or the mostly well-meaning, but trite, exhortations of religious leaders over the Christmas period. We have to look beyond these things to discover how best we can take responsibility for ourselves.

First Steps in Reclaiming Christmas

The first key step in taking responsibility is to deconstruct the roles that we have come to regard as normal and to disengage from any distracting or disempowering practices that may be attached to those roles. This is what I believe Francis of Assisi did in his time when he introduced the crib into the life of the Church.

But this year I am going to retire my crib because the imagery associated with it has become

moribund — it is too far removed from the vision of relational connectedness that I think was in Francis's mind when he introduced the idea.

It also bears no relationship to the culture of this land with its distinctive mana, providing the backbone for a set of images that would enable me to engage the revelation of "God with us" via a Christmas story in which we can see familiar landscapes, shapes and colours and where I can participate and not just observe.

So, the crib as we know it needs to be retired so that we can more fully open ourselves to seeing, hearing and feeling the presence of God in our actual reality in Aotearoa.

If we find other barriers to this process, eg, in particular ways that we might engage friends and whānau over this period, we might need to consider deconstructing and/or retiring them as well.

At this point we should be in a position to receive God's revelation on God's terms and to interpret that revelation into our concrete living situations — a discernment process best described as mahara mōhio katoa.

Then we act on it.

We Watch

In order for this high-level process to work in the context of COVID-19, we can break it down into three types of action. This is how I'm going to do it this year:

Firstly, I am going to WATCH — the life around me. I will not be a disinterested observer — I will be working hard to make sure I'm not imposing my own spin on what is in front of me. As I probably won't be moving around so widely, I am going to take some of that gift of time to notice the people, the sky, the wind, the flowers and trees, the laughter and the pain and the way my family and others who may be in my bubble interact. Then I will consider how I can give a little more of my time and my interest to these people and things, not for my own purpose but for theirs.

We Wait

Secondly, I am going to WAIT — during which time I will practise acceptance with gracefulness. If this is

all about the place I call home, my flat, my house, my apartment, I will reflect on what it means to be "at home". It may be hard work at present, to replace any negative feelings about "my home" with gratitude and other positive, alternative options that come from my reflections. But that is the direction of travel. It may also take time for this kind of change to move from the head to the heart.

We Wonder

Thirdly, I will take the time to WONDER — for me this will be an opportunity to explore the many relationships that I am a part of currently, and what they might look and feel like in the future from God's perspective, not mine. I don't need a lesson in how to do this. I will just take time to sit and allow God a free run during this Advent season of waiting and preparing.

For me, the capacity to be open enough to wonder consists of three things: stating my intention; sitting quietly; and then getting out of the way so that I am not competing with God or God's action in my life or in the world.

What we do this Christmas will depend on the decisions we are prepared to make about all of this.

In 12 months' time, we may look back to this unique time with an appreciation that "God with us in COVID times at Christmas" turned out to be an opportunity, a gift, that like the kotuku, may come our way but once. Maybe staying at home, in our place, is an opportunity not to be missed.

Ngā mihi o te wā o te Kirihimete ki a koe, ki a koutou katoa — Happy Christmas. 🌲

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I WILL JOIN YOU

JANE HIGGINS writes that with faith, hope and determination
together in solidarity we can face the crises in our world.

“**T**he days are coming,” says Yahweh, “when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel...”

So Jeremiah tells us on the first Sunday of Advent this year. Days of promise, rejoicing and celebration, the peace of justice, mercy and kindness,

the friendship of Yahweh — the Advent readings are steeped in joy. Jeremiah, Baruch, Zephaniah, Micah and the Psalmists all rejoice in God and exhort us to be among the people — the sinners, the humble of heart — who follow the paths of kindness and faithfulness which are the paths of

Yahweh, for there we will find joy. Frankly, it's a big ask.

I'm sure I don't need to set down the litany of reasons why I think this. Life is a huge struggle for many, many people across the globe right now and it's not going to get easier, especially for those who have little

to come and go on. Beautiful as the Advent readings are, how can they help us with the crises of climate change, the pandemic, racism, inequality and injustice that are blighting people's lives?

False Expectations No Help

Recently I've been reading Adam Roberts, a British writer of a philosophical frame of mind. One of the terms he ponders is "eucatastrophe". The word (coined by JRR Tolkien) is a combination of "eu" meaning "good", and "catastrophe" in its original Greek sense of "overturn". In early English usage, the word catastrophe had none of its current connotation of disaster. It meant, rather, a sudden, final transformation. In essence, then, eucatastrophe means "saved in the nick of time".

Roberts observes that eucatastrophe has long been a mainstay of storytelling. We see it often in books, theatre and film. You know the idea: things are darkest before the dawn, the hero seems to have lost everything, there's no coming back from such profound disaster, and then, the moment of "but wait, what's this?" It is a very satisfying shape for a story, hence its popularity and longevity.

The problem, as Roberts points out, is that reality doesn't work like this, and we are not well served by believing that it should or will.

Eucatastrophic expectations are particularly prevalent in climate change conversations. Surely a technological breakthrough will come to our rescue at the last minute? Well, we are at the last minute, and such thinking is hampering rather than helping the work that's needed to prevent disastrous heating of the planet. Frustratingly, no sudden, magical transformation is going to save us or the many species of flora and fauna currently undergoing a mass extinction event.

Dealing with Reality

How do we face this and grapple with it? How do we prevent ourselves from sliding into despair? And in this Advent season, how can we possibly celebrate?

For answers to these questions, I look to people who have given their lives to addressing deep injustice and working to change structures that seemed set in stone.

There's Václav Havel, for example, the Czech playwright and statesman at one time imprisoned by a totalitarian regime, who redefined hope into something much tougher than simple optimism: "[Hope is] an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. ... [It's] the ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed."

There's Martin Luther King Jr, facing the enormity of the civil rights struggle and arguing that the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice, but that it needs us to make that happen. "Take the first step in faith," he said. "You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."

And there's Dorothy Day, confronting a consumerist, capitalist, deeply unequal society with a life lived in determined simplicity: "People say, 'What is the sense of our small effort?' They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time."

Hope, faith, determination: these answers, lived by Havel, King and Day, are also lived by countless others who continue to give themselves to the struggle for justice. This is about endurance. It's about refusing the temptation of despair.

This Advent, for all that they are proclaiming joy, the prophets also recognise the distress and despair of their people and they counsel against it. Zephaniah tells us: "Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!" And Baruch: "Up, Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights."

Not a Saviour — a Companion

So we pick ourselves up and go on. Because here, in the season of Advent and Christmas, is God's reply to our cry of distress, to our despair. And that reply is not the great rescue from on high that perhaps the prophets and some of Jesus's disciples were hoping for.

It is instead a most unexpected, a most vulnerable, reply. It is an infant child, lying in swaddling clothes in the

cold dark of a stable, far from home. A newborn refugee in a family of refugees fleeing violence. A worker. A storyteller. A prophet. But also, it is the son of God.

And so, God's reply to our cry of distress is not, as we might wish, to rescue us with might and miracle, with the wave of a divine hand. No. God's reply to our cry of distress is: "I will join you."

This is how we can endure.

Sustaining Solidarity

We all have our own understandings of the incarnation, of course. Advent is a time to pause and reflect and pray about what this means: God's radical act of solidarity with us.

For me, it means that if we are to move towards the vision of God's holy mountain where there is no more training for war, where there is no hurt, no harm in our relationship with creation, where the eyes of the blind are opened and the ears of the deaf unsealed — if we are to move towards this, then we are enabled to do so through this act of solidarity, through God's joining with us in this most extraordinary way.

Come on — We're Not Alone

In many ways this is uncomfortable and difficult to sit with. It means that God is not waiting in the wings to intervene with might. God has intervened. God is here now, with us.

This act of solidarity and vulnerability means that God has no hands but ours. But God-with-us also means that we are enabled, empowered, inspired to work for justice, for peace, for right relationships, for healing in and of our world. 🌲

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CHANGING THE WORLD

WITH

GOODWILL



ALEISHA KEATING recommends that we focus personally and in our communities on spreading the Christmas message of peace in Earth and goodwill to all.

Death, sickness, isolation, separation from families and friends, unemployment and financial insecurity, boredom and loss of freedom are synonymous with COVID-19. Amid the uncertainty, disruption and loss of the pandemic, communities worldwide have united to face new and evolving challenges. We often think of community in terms of our immediate whānau (family), friends, our physical neighbours, and those who share our interests. These communities have been vital during COVID-19 — they have been the means by which we have banded together and adapted to change.

The support has taken all kinds of shapes — Europeans singing to their

neighbours from their apartment balconies; others cooking meals and delivering groceries to the vulnerable; some translating health messages into languages for migrants and refugees to understand; health workers caring for the sick; and for most of us the simple act of mask wearing — showing that community is real.

This Christmas, in the face of continuing global challenges like COVID-19 and sustainability issues such as the crisis of climate change, Luke's Gospel message of "Peace on Earth" and goodwill to all people will cause us to reflect on what that might mean for us.

What do peace and goodwill mean when we're navigating a

turbulent time, when many urgent environmental, social, economic and public health crises are swirling around us?

How can we come together as communities responding to this Christmas message and create positive change now and into the future?

Supporting Healthy Communities

Healthy communities are dependent upon healthy members. During the pandemic restrictions we prioritised people's physical health which is good. But also, we need to attend to the effect of restrictions on people's mental well-being. Where fear, anxiety and panic developed in the

community, we found increasing signs of depression and anxiety.

Attending to Mental Health

Fortunately, we are learning to recognise the importance of mental health, and its impact on other aspects of our health. We see that it is vital we support mental health in the community alongside physical health.

Conversations about mental well-being are more commonplace and many people have taken on the practice of checking in with one another more regularly.

Giving mental health attention is one way we can increase peace on Earth and goodwill among all people.

At an individual level, peace can mean tranquillity of our mind and soul.

Collectively, peace may encompass harmony among different groups. We can express goodwill in kindness – to ourselves and particularly to others. Kindness nourishes our mental and spiritual well-being. And by consciously tending our own needs, we become better able to function in the community more effectively and lovingly.

The way we develop goodwill will vary. It can be through exercising, or by taking time for hobbies. It may involve regular spiritual practices – times of quiet, prayer, meditation, reflection, stillness – inside or outside in nature.

And as we care for ourselves we extend goodwill to others – to the community. This might involve forming community networks for checking on one another, or introducing regular events where members can come for support and are able to share their emotions and stresses without feeling judged.

This is one positive crystallised by this pandemic: the prioritisation of mental well-being in both ourselves and in our communities, so that we can embody peace and goodwill in our lives.

Challenge to Spread Goodwill Globally

The current global issues highlight our interconnectedness in Earth and also our disparateness. COVID-19 has spread rapidly and affected every part of the world. The climate crisis affects

life in Earth. Despite these crises affecting us all, global cooperation is not always forthcoming.

Our recent experience of the rapid production of vaccines against COVID-19 bears witness to the worldwide cooperation of scientists and other experts working for the protection of the Earth community.

But we've also seen where local political and economic interests, national protectionism, scapegoating and competition, have allowed some countries or states within countries, to put their own interests before the common good.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has.”

Similarly, COP26 called for countries to work together to stop Earth's climate from overheating. Although the conference achieved promises from countries, some of the richest countries did not give the most affected countries assurance that they heard their pleas for restraint and will take necessary steps to reduce their emissions. The global community needs effective global action.

Our Efforts Help Peace and Goodwill

Now, with so many urgent crises around us, we are called to extend goodwill further, to the global community. We must be aware of our place in global society and our ability to forge change at a local level, which can have broader impact beyond our immediate community.

What might this look like and how might we spread goodwill further, for instance to our Pacific neighbours whose lands are drowning because of sea level rise?

We can't always see or experience the impact our actions, such as practising social distancing and mask wearing to stop the virus spreading or taking one fewer car journey a week to reduce global carbon emissions.

It is easy to feel powerless or despondent in the face of global challenges where there is an apparent gulf between the urgency of the action needed and the rate of

governmental action.

But collective actions can bring change. At the local level, there are many actions that we as individuals within communities can instigate that could have far reaching implications. For example, actions like driving or flying less, reducing food waste and changing our diets are effective ways of reducing carbon emissions. Websites like Get Greener (www.get-greener.com) can be helpful.

How could our community make it easier for people to drive less? Perhaps we could share transport more frequently, opt for car-free alternatives

such as cycling or walking to local destinations, or help address safety issues which prohibit active and/or sustainable transport options?

We now know that food wastage – happening often in our households – produces more carbon emissions than flying, plastic production or oil extraction. So reducing food waste in our homes is an easy way to lessen carbon emissions and community members of all ages can participate. How can our community support others to reduce food waste?

Uniting as local communities to address global problems can help strengthen relationships within communities and spread goodwill to others around the world, particularly those more vulnerable. Through imbibing Luke's gospel message in our hearts and actions we can strive towards common goals in both our local community and the global community. As the American anthropologist Margaret Mead said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has.” 🌱

Photo by Sma1050/Shutterstock.com

Aleisha Keating is an environmental scientist and nature lover who enjoys riding bikes, cooking, yoga and writing about sustainability issues.





God Comes to Us in the Ordinary

"From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the Incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy. The creatures of this world no longer appear to us merely under their natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to Godself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds, which human eyes contemplated and admired, are now imbued with God's radiant presence"

(Laudato Si' par 99-100).

This is such beautiful language of disclosure, of revealed depth, of Incarnation. The Pope's words unlock our neglected imagination and open the eyes of our souls to the treasure house of surprises lavished on us by the Divine Heart of Life. The invisible God is now visible in every step of our every journey, every day of our lives. Revelation is about how to see everything in a delightfully renewed way, using the most divine gift of God's imagination now incarnate in all of us. According to Victorian poet Christina Rossetti it is grace that teaches our hearts to see and to recognise.

Lord, purge our eyes to see
 Within the seed a tree,
 Within the glowing egg a bird,
 Within the shroud a butterfly.
 Till taught by such, we see
 Beyond all creatures Thee.

Theologian Noel Dermot O'Donoghue, in *The Mountain Behind the Mountain*, writes of a Celtic and Catholic sensitivity to the reality of this invisible "radiant presence" referred to by the Pope. This graced sensitivity to the invisible shimmering of divine beauty in "the very flowers and birds" of nature is another papal reference to the Catholic mystical belief in the "sacramental imagination" when the invisible world of a divine presence breaks through into our tangible and visible world of the senses and daily experiences. "The angelic world opens up at the margins of this world where a kind of imagination reveals tentatively and faintly, never obviously, a world of light so delicate and tenuous that it is blown away by religious dogmatism and scepticism." The expression of this most special awareness of, sensitivity to, and glimpse of what the Pope is trying to convey to us, most often needs new words. Beautiful words transform the soul, they warm the heart, they set the imagination on fire. We live and move and have our being when we carry beautiful words inside us.

The Pope knows this. That is why he reaches for his own inner poet, and relies on the artistic expressions and gifts of others.

Poets of nature such as William Wordsworth and Gerard Manley Hopkins know that the hidden beauty they sense (what we would call the "catholic vision" of Incarnation) must first be experienced in their own hearts before they attempt to shape and open it up for others. Wordsworth looks behind the phenomena or "appearances" of nature, and discovers within himself "a sense of something deeply interfused", which has its dwelling "in the light of setting suns and the round ocean and the living air". Hopkins celebrates the unique "inscape" of "dappled things" (including "a brindled

cow") and delightedly weaves magic around the subtle light that emanates from the invisible presence within them. He writes of that "dearest freshness deep down things" that he touches in everything, everywhere. Nor is it always about things bright and beautiful. The imaginative revelation within Incarnation must always be true to the vicissitudes and realities of life. T S Eliot, for instance, finds in an urban wilderness the presence of "an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing". Mary Oliver finds heaven in "a few weeds in a vacant lot". Patrick Kavanagh sees "that beautiful, beautiful, beautiful God" taking fleshy shape and "breathing his love by a cutaway bog" in Ireland.

The Pope cherishes the notion of "presence" — that divine indwelling within creation and humanity — to convey a glimpse of his understanding of the implications of Incarnation. Noel Dermot O'Donoghue quotes from "The Wilderness" by Kathleen Raine, the wonderful poet of Celtic tradition — about an abiding unending presence:

I came too late to the hills. They were
 swept bare
 Winters before I was born of song
 and story ...
 A child I ran in the wind on a withered
 moor
 Crying out after those great
 presences who were not there,
 Long lost in the forgetfulness of the
 forgotten ...
 Yet I have glimpsed the bright
 mountain behind the mountain,
 Knowledge under the leaves, tasted
 the bitter berries red,
 Drunk cold water and clear from an
 inexhaustible fountain.

Another reminder that artists and mystics (like ourselves) believe there are three ways of perceiving something. First, we may simply *look* at things quickly for information: Is it raining outside? Second, people may look at something so as to see it deeply, to be drawn into it, to delight in it, and then they may want to paint it, photograph it, write a poem about it, move beyond first appearances.

And, finally, the observer may take a further step into what is before her, what is happening around her, and begin to *recognise* a sublime Presence in what is being observed. This is often described as an *epiphany* (a revelation of God), a sacramental moment of recognition for the true Christian, a glimpse of divine light coming through the familiar. The observer is no longer an observer; her presence now shines with the light itself.

A Further Word

There are no limits to the implications and experiences of Incarnation. For the friend who sent in the following account, the incarnate God was local and personal.

"It was dark and I was taking the washing off the line. The lights streamed into the darkness from the kitchen where my three girls were sitting around the table, cups of tea in hand, chatting about their day. Through the window I watched the interaction between them, saw their animated faces, and suddenly knew that right there, in the heart of my own home, God's beauty-filled Spirit was present. A beautiful presence that set the place into radiance."

Paula had first *looked* casually at her surroundings as she re-entered her home. Then she had paused to see more deeply into its framed beauty. And then, remembering the meaning of Incarnation, she had *recognised* the divine presence in that moment of epiphany. 🌲

From: *An Astonishing Secret* (pp 125-129) by Daniel O'Leary. Used with permission of Columba Press and Garratt Publishing. Book available from Pleromoa.

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Daniel O'Leary died
 21 January 2019. His
 book *Horizons of Hope:
 Unpublished Fragments
 of Love* has been
 published posthumously
 this year.



"It is necessary to make more explicit the key concepts of Vatican Council II, the foundations of its arguments, its theological and pastoral horizon, the arguments and the method it used," Francis writes in the preface of *Fraternità segni dei tempi*, a new book co-written by Cardinal Michael Czerny, one of his fellow Jesuits and a top Vatican official, and Christian Barone, an Italian priest and theologian. The English translation is called, *Siblings All, Sign of the Times: The Social Teaching of Pope Francis*. It will be published in 2022 by Orbis Books.

Why is the pope's statement on Vatican II so newsworthy? The organised opposition to Francis did not react as usual by alleging that the Jesuit pope had said something unorthodox or had yielded to the liberal and secularist spirit of the time. That's not because it would be very conspicuous for Catholic leaders — cardinals and bishops especially — to distance themselves from the Church's 21st ecumenical council. Just the opposite.

Francis vs the Anti-Vatican II Crowd

They didn't need to react. It is enough to do a search online in conservative and traditionalist circles, as well as their publications and theological self-help websites, to get an idea of the magnitude of the problem. These groups simply identify Vatican II with selling out Catholic identity and weakening the sense of the tradition. Other times, they use Vatican II as a synonym for relativism, neo-paganism and heresy. Pope Francis has done — and is doing — much to change this situation. It is impossible to ignore how much impact this pontificate's words and deeds have had in restoring the place and reputation that Vatican Council II deserves in the discourse in the Church, but also in the discourse on the Church in mainstream media.

Uphill Battle for the Coming Generation

Most recently, his "*motu proprio*" *Traditionis custodes* — which reversed Benedict XVI's decision in 2007 to



RECONNECTING WITH VATICAN II

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI discusses Pope Francis's struggle to reestablish the central place of Vatican II in the life of the Church.

universalise use of the "extraordinary form" (pre-Vatican II) of Mass in the Roman Rite — is one of the most important acts in the post-conciliar Church to reinforce the binding value of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. But it's an uphill battle that at least another generation of Catholics will have to fight.

It suffices to look at the curricula in the seminaries and the formation programmes in many Catholic institutions to see that Pope Francis's language about and references to Vatican II are the exception, not the norm. The problem here is not really the absence of the term "Vatican II". It is the absence of that theological depth in favour of a mix of glossy apologetics, saccharine devotionism and motivational confessionism.

In other cases, even in supposedly liberal Catholic schools of theology, Vatican II is no longer part of the

curriculum. It has been pushed aside in favour of more fashionable trends.

Francis's Predecessors and Vatican II

John Paul II had a complex relationship with the Second Vatican Council. His pontificate made a point in making theology more dependent than before on the papal magisterium, in a way that undermined the legitimacy of theological interpretation of Vatican II. But John Paul II was never acquiescent to the direct undermining of the legitimacy of the Council.

Then there was Benedict XVI's speech in 2005 on the "hermeneutics of continuity and reform" versus "discontinuity and rupture". The now-retired pope's intention was to target all forms of dismissal of the texts of Vatican II and not just the Lefebvrists (SSPX). But the speech ended up bolstering the anti-conciliar



that have marginalised religion, when the Council was actually the magisterial tradition's best possible attempt up till now to engage secular modernity.

Meanwhile, those on the left rage against anything that sounds institutional. This rage has led, not to liberation, but to diaspora. And it only plays into the hands of those who work for a more exclusionary and sectarian Church.

As we approach next year's 60th anniversary of the beginning of Vatican Council II, there is an urgent need to address some shortcomings of the conciliar documents on several issues, especially the role of women in the Church. But that certainly cannot be done with a return to the pre-Vatican II period. If the neo-traditionalist, anti-Vatican II movement gained momentum in the last generation, it's also because of the reluctance of Vatican II Catholic leaders, both among the hierarchy and intellectuals, to take the challenge seriously.

What message does the Church send with its dismissal of the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate* at a time when anti-Semitism is again rearing its ugly head?

And what does it say about a Church that has forgotten *Dignitatis Humanae* in an age when challenges to religious freedom are mounting?

Furthermore, how can the Church neglect *Dei Verbum* at a moment when the very idea of knowledge as a way to inhabit a tradition is in crisis?

These are but a few examples. At stake is the viability of the Catholic intellectual tradition — even before the magisterial one. 🌲

Full article published in *International La Croix* 5 October 2021 <https://international.la-croix.com/news/signs-of-the-times/a-catholic-battle-not-for-the-faint-of-heart/14998>

Photo: *Second Vatican Council in Action in St Peter's Basilica, Rome* by Dave582, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

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tendencies of the neo-traditionalists.

These apologists for the restoration of the pre-Vatican II Church took Benedict's reflections to very scary places that I don't think Joseph Ratzinger, one of the most important theological periti at Vatican II, could imagine.

but it is often mixed with conspiracy theories. It is also ignorant of history, although quite effective in turning the emphasis on the social and the political back against progressives.

Some of these theories are even cited by bishops in support, for example, of their policies in favour of

"It is necessary to make more explicit the key concepts of Vatican Council II, the foundations of its arguments, its theological and pastoral horizon, the arguments and the method it used".

Confused Narrative of Neo-traditionalists

They decided that the Council not only allowed the sociological crisis of the Church, but that it actually caused the collapse of Catholicism, as if the sociological crisis had not started decades before. Therefore, according to them, Vatican II needs to be abrogated in some form.

But that is impossible according to the norms that govern the way the Catholic theological tradition works. The neo-traditionalists' narrative sometimes tries to keep appearances of scholarly seriousness,

the return of the celebration of the pre-Vatican II Mass in Latin.

Intellectual Crisis of Catholicism

Now, more than five decades after the council concluded its work, Pope Francis is insisting that "it is necessary to make more explicit the key concepts of Vatican Council II, the foundations of its arguments, its theological and pastoral horizon, the arguments and the method it used".

Those on the right side of the ideological spectrum blame Vatican II for the social and cultural changes

TO WALK BREATHING TOGETHER



BRENDAN DALY explains how the synod of bishops developed as a governance structure from Vatican II and that now Pope Francis is asking the whole Church to come together to discern what needs to change.

Recently Pope Francis opened the synod of bishops on synodality, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”. The Catholic Church is a big institution with 1.3 billion Catholics in the world. Today, a quarter of the world’s population under the age of 25 years is Catholic. There are over 60 million children in Catholic schools around the world with two thirds of students not being Catholic. There are 4,500 bishops in the Catholic Church and almost half a million priests.

Ecumenical Council

An ecumenical council in the Church happens when the Pope calls together all the bishops of the world to meet with him and together they exercise power over the whole Church. Altogether there have been 21 ecumenical councils in the history of the Church. Council planning must deal with practical problems: the size of the meeting venue; housing the participants; feeding them and the cost.

When the Second Vatican Council

began in 1962 there were 2,500 bishops in the world. The previous Council was Vatican I in 1870 which had one document about the infallibility of the Pope. This Council stopped when Garibaldi’s army reached Rome.

The last complete ecumenical council before Vatican II was the Council of Trent (1545-63), 400 years earlier. Those at Vatican Council II recognised that when councils were held so far apart, any change in the Church seemed too great.

So Vatican II established smaller meetings of bishops called the Synod of Bishops. A group of bishops, chosen from the different regions of the world, would meet together with the Pope about every two years to discuss major issues in the Church and make practical suggestions to address them.

Synod of Bishops

The Synod of Bishops is meant to represent the bishops and dioceses throughout the world. Because it is a Synod of Bishops it is mostly made up of bishops.

Pope Paul VI made the membership for the first synod of bishops: the Cardinals in charge of the Congregations at the Vatican; one delegate for a bishops' conference of 1-25 bishops (as in New Zealand); two delegates for a conference of 26-50 bishops (as in Australia); three delegates for conferences of 51-100 bishops (as in Canada); four delegates for conferences that have more than 100 bishops (as in the United States). As well there are experts invited.

Since the first meeting of the Synod of Bishops in 1967, more experts and more lay people have been invited to participate in the synod.

Increased Participation

More recently, Pope Francis has made changes in the way that synods meet with the involvement of people in dioceses around the world.

In 2015 the 14th Synod on the Family took place in stages and there was a lot of consultation and participation by Catholics in every diocese around the world.

The 15th Synod on Young People and Vocational Discernment took place in 2018 with large participation by young people.

The apostolic exhortation published after the Synod on Young People was called "Christ Lives". This was the theme of the Pope's message to young people and in fact the whole Church.

Pope Francis wants us to participate actively in the Church; to participate actively in the Synod process; to share our vision of the Church and work to make it happen.

Problems We See in the World

What is unusual about our time is that so many of our problems are shared across the globe. Coronavirus and climate crisis, for instance, are not issues facing some people in some countries, but issues facing the whole planet.

For all our shared problems, though, we remain divided enduring inequalities and injustices: massification, fragmentation, the conditions faced by migrants, divisions across the family of humanity.

This is the cry of the poor and the cry of Earth: we are all in the same boat, one human family living in our common home.

POPE FRANCIS WANTS US TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN THE CHURCH; TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN THE SYNOD PROCESS; TO SHARE OUR VISION OF THE CHURCH AND WORK TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

Problems We See in the Church

We have all been appalled by the revelations of sexual abuse throughout the Catholic Church. Sexual abuse is one issue, and the handling of victims and abusers is another. I think if the victims' mothers were making the decisions about abusive clergy, religious and laity, different decisions would have been made.

Clericalism is undoubtedly at the heart of the sexual abuse crisis. Pope Francis proposes the medicine of synodality: "Synodality is the way of being the Church today according to the will of God, in a dynamic of discerning and listening together to the voice of the Holy Spirit."

Francis says communion, participation and mission are the pillars of a synodal Church. "Within this context, synodality represents the main road for the Church, called to renew herself under the action of the Spirit and by listening to the Word."

We are to imagine a different future for the Church and be a prophetic witness to the human family, which needs to be united around a common goal.

Church Leadership

This requires a new style of leadership because in the synodal Church, the pastor blends with the community in which he walks and of which he is the servant. He is this close shepherd, immersed in the midst of his flock, who smells the sheep.

Pope Francis says "Shepherds walk with their people: we shepherds walk with our people, at times in front, at times in the middle, at times behind. A good shepherd should move that way: in front to lead, in the middle to encourage and preserve the smell of the flock, and behind, since the people too have their own 'sense of smell'. The shepherd and the flock breathe together."

Conspiratio was translated by theologian Henry Newman as a "common breathing of the faithful and the pastors".

It is a serious failure when parishes have no parish pastoral council, no parish finance committee, or when a diocese has no diocesan pastoral council, or if these councils rarely meet.

Pope Francis refers to Mark 10 when Jesus set out on a journey and met the rich young man: "Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together. Let us look at Jesus. First, he encounters the rich man on the road; he then listens to his questions, and finally he helps him discern what he must do to inherit eternal life.

"Encounter, listen and discern. I would like to reflect on these three verbs that characterise the Synod." 🌲

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EVERY DAY THE PLANET BURNS A LITTLE MORE

We only have a short while
So quick, let me tell you
We're too far gone to turn this around
I can't believe
We have it in us to put this world right
It is all too late, too late
How can you say
But do not give up hope
Every day the planet burns a little more
And hot air rises
While governments pump out empty promises
We are powerless
Don't be so foolish to imagine that
Together we have a voice
Big enough to change the world
The decisions we make each day are
Unimportant
The food we eat, the things we buy, how we get around
How naïve to think
The destruction of centuries could be undone
In a few decades
If we could just find reverse

(now read this poem from bottom to top)

— BRIAN BILSTON



THE BRISTOL TEXT

ROOT & BRANCH produced The Bristol Text, “a document that embodies some of the discoveries we have made in our journey to discernment”, from their lay-led synod “walking the way together listening deeply to one another”.

1. Moral Theology

1.1 Historical consciousness

The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself. The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word. Appeals to unchanging laws and unchallengeable authorities stifle this creative freedom in the Spirit. We should “appear as joyful messengers of challenging proposals, guardians of goodness and beauty which shine forth in a life of fidelity to the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium* par 22, 168). This calls for faith that continually evolves to embrace encounters with different contexts and cultures, journeying together in every age as the people of God, forming our consciences, maturing in faith and character.

1.2 Ways of thinking

Rather than asserting authoritative moral rules to be obeyed, church teaching should be concerned with ways of thinking, helping us to understand our lives as a process of continuous Christian formation along the path “of wisdom, self-fulfilment and enrichment” (EG par 168). This moral vision is not defined by fear but by dialogue with all seekers after truth. The Good News is “marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness ... readiness for dialogue, patience, warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental” (EG par 165).

1.3 A holistic vision

We call for a holistic vision of the good life that is not dominated by issues of sexuality, but seeks the flourishing and dignity of the entire person, encouraging each individual to discover their personal vocation to holiness. The moral vision we seek has been manifest

throughout history in the lives of all who have incarnated the hope and love of Christ; seeing God in others, welcoming the stranger, loving their neighbours as themselves, rejecting all forms of exploitation, abuse and violence, and living in harmony with the rest of creation. It is a vision that is rooted in biblical values of love, forgiveness, healing and acceptance, of “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). It is our living response to the prophetic vocation to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

2. Church Authority

2.1 Equality and justice for all

Jesus preached the Good News of the historical advent of the Kingdom of God, which brings justice and peace to all human beings, and liberation to the oppressed. For the Catholic Church to cooperate with God’s Kingdom, it needs to model its organizational structure, and its Canon Law, on those principles of equality and justice for all.

The Church’s Canon Law urgently requires renewing both wholly and frequently, transforming it into a useful and accessible template, using the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights as its benchmark.

2.2 Agreed by all

“What touches all must be discussed and approved by all” (*Decretum Gratiani*, foundation of Canon Law from the 12th century). By virtue of their common baptism as followers of Jesus, all adult Catholics have the fundamental right to participate and vote in all decisions concerning the common good of their community. Unity is not through fear but love.

to Reform

There is no teaching church or learning church but one, shared magisterium. “The whole church, laity and hierarchy alike, bears responsibility for, and mediates in history, the revelation which is contained in the scriptures and in the apostolic tradition” (International Theological Commission, 2014). Discernment belongs to all. It cannot be confined to the few. It follows that, at every level of church communion, representative councils should serve as the principal decision-making bodies, with the inalienable right and responsibility to determine what decisions and actions fall within their competence.

2.3 Elected by all

“The one who is to preside over all should be elected by all” (Pope Leo I, 5th century, and many others since). Legitimate authorities in the church must be based on the consent of the people. It follows that the church community has the right to evaluate, approve, and commission all those putting themselves forward for a ministry. It also follows that every adult Catholic, whatever their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, marital or social status, has the right to offer themselves as a candidate for election to any church ministry. And that all Catholics also have the right to have their leaders render an account to them.



3. Redefining and Reclaiming Liturgical Ministry

3.1 Every baptised person is clothed in Christ (Gal 3:27)

There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or gender, because “there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*Lumen Gentium* par 32). We should add, “people of all abilities and genders”. We must learn to be open to all, and especially the destabilising influence of people not like us. “Whoever wants to be first must be the last of all” (Mk 9:35).

3.2 The Church is the community of God

“For when two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Mt 18:20). It is not an individual, but the community of saints, living and dead, who celebrate the act of thanksgiving to God, which is the Eucharist. Jesus has made it easy to celebrate his presence with us, since the ritual of simple eating and drinking together is inscribed within us as human beings. It does not require a separated priesthood. St Peter states clearly of all the baptised, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter: 9).

3.3 The Holy Spirit’s call to ministry may be heard by all people

We need a clearer understanding of vocations. All the baptised are eligible to answer God’s call to every ministry. That call is discerned within and by the community of God, which is a companionship of empowerment. Current research makes it clear that in the earliest Christian gatherings, women and men, single and married, led communities in worship, exercising their baptismal calling.

4. Embracing Diversity

4.1 Hierarchy distorts the beauty of diversity

Affirming diversity is imperative for attesting the dignity and sanctity of every form of life, valuing the uniqueness and contribution of each person. This calls for a radical re-imagination of the way of being Church, jettisoning inessential hierarchy, and any authority based on all-male leadership.

4.2 Engage with the complexity of sex/gender

Male-female gender binaries are in practice institutionalised through the historical understandings of “family life” and “natural law”. Transgender individuals challenge sex/gender binary norms, but scientifically we now know that sex/gender is complex and that we also establish our identities

through the stories we tell. The Church’s teaching and ideology on sex/gender is confused, out of date and contradictory, leaving the faithful with little useful guidance. It urgently requires renewing, both wholly and frequently, becoming a pastoral response to diverse family forms.

4.3 Redefining “we”

For Catholics who are other than male/female and heterosexual, evangelization under current Catholic dogma implies being truth tellers in one sphere and liars in another, preaching an “objective” Gospel that does not touch the real person. Our bodies and our spirits long for truthfulness, and come alive when we allow them to bear witness to it. All the faithful must see themselves in their differently-aged, differently-abled, differently-gendered, differently-bodied, differently-sexually-oriented, differently-coloured, differently-tongued neighbour. Then we can create affirming, equality-expressing theologies where no one is excluded from the “we” that is the Christian community.

4.4 Accountability and apology

Accountability means taking responsibility for the ways in which our beliefs, theology and practices have contributed to the dehumanization and persecution of many people who are seen as “other”. “What have you done? Listen. Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground” (Gen 4:10). The words spoken to Cain after killing his brother Abel point to the critical need for accountability, restitution and transformation, restoring the dignity and rights of all as equal before God. Then the harm done by the Church can be acknowledged in ways that include the participation of those who have been harmed. 🌿



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RIGHTS and RESPONSIBILITIES in the Era of COVID-19

MARGARET BEDGGOOD explores human rights questions raised by the Government's move to mandate vaccinations in some circumstances.

In this era of COVID-19 there is much debate about our rights and freedoms, rather less about duties and responsibilities. The discussion may be legal — what does the law say? Or moral — what is right and just? Or social — what would maintain social cohesion? Or political — what would be “acceptable”? It also raises theological questions.

A human rights perspective provides a tool for Christians today as they address the problems of COVID-19.

First, a clarification: when human rights advocates speak of “human rights” they are using shorthand for “human rights and duties in a web of

community and concern”. “Human rights” as such would not make much sense or have little effect otherwise.

I will focus on two issues: the right to assembly/peaceful protest and “rights queries” raised by the Government’s move to mandate vaccination in certain circumstances.

Everyone Has Rights and Obligations

In legal terms what distinguishes a right from a mere claim or need is that some other person or entity is then charged with a duty/obligation to address that right. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) itself, the foundational document of the human rights system, states that:

ARTICLE 29 (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

The “community” may be large or small. In our context, it is the people and state of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The very fact that everyone has rights means that **we all** have obligations to take account of other people’s rights.

Otherwise, in the international human rights system, and here at home, obligations to promote and protect human rights rest with the state.

New Zealand, in agreeing to be bound by the two International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights

(ICCPR) and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which give legal force to the UDHR, has thereby assumed obligations to respect (not breach these rights itself); protect (not allow breaches by third parties) and fulfil (act itself where necessary) these rights. They can be rights of individuals or of groups which are disadvantaged or marginalised.

Need to Balance Rights

With very few exceptions, rights are not absolute; there will almost always be a need to balance rights against each other; and in the UDHR itself and subsequent documents there is also a limitation clause whereby almost all rights may be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

In New Zealand such a clause is included in the Bill of Rights Act 1990 (NZBORA) which incorporates into New Zealand law almost all of the rights from the ICCPR. Section 5 states:

JUSTIFIED LIMITATIONS Subject to section 4, the rights and freedoms contained in this Bill of Rights may be subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Section 16 protects the right to peaceful assembly and thus to protest. But in the current emergency, in light of section 5 and a balancing of competing rights, with lockdown rules lawfully imposed that right can clearly be constrained when weighed against the rights of others to life and health.

Section 11 protects the right to refuse medical treatment, arguably including vaccination. Again section 5 and balancing can be applied here, but, given the frightening history of violations of this right by the state here and elsewhere, care is needed in decisions to override this section.

And the Government is being careful: no one is being forced to be vaccinated but, in certain circumstances, a refusal will have consequences. We are all familiar with circumstances where freedom is curtailed for the common good, such as driving on one side of the road.

The other statute possibly applicable is the Human Rights Act 1993 which outlaws discrimination

on certain grounds in particular circumstances. Freedom from discrimination, particularly on the grounds of race or sex, is a very “strong” right, although again subject to limitations as above and to balancing against the right to life.

But, in any case, it does not seem that lockdown protesters or vaccine objectors are raising this argument, both being composed of groups offering varying justifications.

Government Has Authority and Duty of Care

The Government has thus the legal authority to control protesters and to issue vaccine mandates. But law is never the only consideration, even if a necessary one.

The Government’s “duty of care” to its people goes further.

Other factors, social, political and even moral, need to be weighed in any decision-making, at least in a democracy — and Aotearoa New Zealand is a well-functioning democracy. One factor is maintaining social consensus, that “social cohesion” which was very evident in our 2020 lockdowns. The “team of 5 million” may be a cliché but it has been crucial in New Zealand’s response so far and is needed in the present situation, with vaccination versus the Delta variant and restriction fatigue.

Common Good Protects Marginalised

The “community of care and concern” is focused rightly on the “common good”. But care must always be taken to see that that is not equated with the will of the majority, which is always a danger in a democracy. The protection of marginalised groups must always be a priority.

And of course political will is always influenced by an electoral calculus!

Sometimes decisions are made because it is the right thing to do. In Aotearoa New Zealand we have chosen until now to prioritise people’s lives over economic considerations and even livelihoods and social freedoms. The balance here may need some reconsideration as lives are endangered from other illnesses and restrictions.

Aligning with the Gospel

How do religious groups approach these difficult questions? Does a human rights analysis have anything to contribute here? The “human rights project” is not only a legal and “social” system: it is also a “values” system, incorporating a commitment to equal dignity for all, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalised and, increasingly, application in the fields of sustainable development, peace-making and climate change.

The Christian Gospel has always supported the dignity and worth of all, especially the poor and marginalised, the importance of the common good and the struggle to love our neighbour as ourselves — which in this context is all the other people here. Human rights analysis is closely aligned with these teachings, a working out of equality in all its various contemporary social manifestations.

And Christians, including Pope Francis and other religious leaders, have increasingly been willing to use this tool. The Franciscan action framework, “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation”, is indistinguishable from the values and work of human rights.

Christians might thus with confidence support the government’s approach.

But no one should imagine that this is an easy path. There are deeper societal issues here and other obligations which may lie heavy upon us. The state desires an outcome where no one is left behind. And the Church desires an outcome where there can **never** be a question of anyone being turned away at the door. 🌳

Painting: *The Hospital at 4am* by Douglas Manry©
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Margaret Bedggood is a member of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis and a human rights teacher and advocate.





Today a Child is Born ...

"Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born today in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Lk. 2:10-11).

Luke's Infancy Narrative (1:5–2:52) constitutes a sort of overture, introducing themes and motifs that will be taken up repeatedly in the Gospel that follows. It exudes a spirit of peaceful calm and joy. The principal characters, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon and Anna are all depicted as devout and pious, faithful to the Covenant, giving praise and thanks to God. The guiding presence of the Holy Spirit runs through the narrative. Even the shepherds, who by the nature of their work might be thought to be less observant, respond promptly to the news that the Christ has been born. They return "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen."



Damian Wynn-Williams is a priest of the Diocese of Dunedin where he served in parishes until his retirement. Previously he taught Scripture at the seminary.

The stories about Jesus's conception and birth represent the latest stage in the formation of the gospel tradition. At the first oral stage, the focus was on Jesus's death and resurrection. Later, memories of Jesus's deeds and sayings from his public ministry were gradually gathered together and written down.

Later still, in response to the desire to know more of Jesus's origins, traditions about his birth were preserved. If the resurrection showed Jesus to be the "Son of God" (see Romans 1:4), intuitively later disciples asked whether this had been apparent during his public ministry (eg, at his Baptism, as in Mark 1:11). Both Luke and Matthew look further back, seeing Jesus to be "Son of God" from the very moment of his conception (Lk 1:30; Mt 1:20). So it is that Luke's narrative of Jesus's infancy and the various titles given him ("Messiah", "Son of David", "Lord", "King", "Saviour"...) reflect the post-resurrection faith of the early Church.

Sources of Gospel Infancy Stories

Little can be said for sure regarding the sources of Luke's Infancy Narrative. The fact that it contains

several important elements found also in Matthew indicates that these belong to a tradition that existed prior to the composition of both Gospels: in this early tradition, Mary, a virgin, is betrothed to Joseph; Jesus's birth and name are announced by an angel; he is conceived before Mary and Joseph come to live together; Joseph is not involved with his conception, which is through the Holy Spirit; Jesus is of the House of David and is born in Bethlehem; the family made their home in Nazareth.

Different Details in Stories

However, there are many other details which differ significantly. In Luke we hear nothing of Joseph being troubled by his betrothed's pregnancy. There is no mention of Herod's murderous attempt to destroy the newborn child, or of a fleeing to Egypt.

According to Matthew, Joseph and Mary lived in Bethlehem (Mt 2:11) and went to Nazareth only after leaving Egypt.

The fact that these differences cannot be harmonised would indicate that they were derived from different sources. The extent to which Luke and Matthew contributed themselves as authors in the elaboration of this material is uncertain.

Composition of Luke's Narrative

Clearly, Luke's narrative has been constructed with care and artifice. For example, the birth announcements of John the Baptist and of Jesus parallel each other closely, both following the pattern of birth announcements in the Old Testament (to Abraham regarding Isaac, Gen 17:1ff; to the mother of Samson, Judges 13:3ff). There are dozens of other scriptural echoes, most evident in the prayer-like oracles pronounced by Mary, by Zechariah and by Simeon.

Mary's Magnificat is virtually a mosaic of Old Testament phrases (cf Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam 2:2-10). It may be that here Luke included prayers already in use in Jewish-Christian circles.

All this would indicate that Luke's narrative was not intended to be "biographical history" in the modern sense of the term nor was it meant to provide psychological information about the protagonists. Rather, he tells of the significance of this birth at Bethlehem.

Significance of Jesus's Birth

The primary focus is on Jesus and his identity. As the fulfilment of the promises to Israel, his birth represents God's decisive breaking into human history. The narrative begins and ends in the Temple in Jerusalem. By his circumcision Jesus is incorporated into Israel, the people of the Covenant, showing the continuity between Israel and the Church. The latter brings to fulfilment rather than replaces the former. But this fulfilment of God's promise is now extended to all peoples: Jesus's birth means salvation also for the nations, "a light of revelation for the Gentiles" (Lk 2:31ff).

But the salvation that Jesus brings has to be accepted. In the words of Simeon, this child is "destined to be a sign that will be opposed" (Lk 2:34).

In this regard Mary plays an exemplary role. Through her humble and obedient response to Gabriel's message Mary is depicted as the first and truest of disciples. According to the criteria mentioned later in the Gospel she is truly blessed as one of those who "hear the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:21; cf Lk 11:28). Her

faith does not mean that she would not be tested (Lk 2:34), nor that she necessarily understood fully her son's relationship to his Father and its demands (Lk 2:50). But, as Luke emphasises, Mary "treasured these things and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19, 52).

Significance in Our World

As adults we enjoy watching children perform in Christmas pageants at the end of the school year. (Typically these blend Luke and Matthew's different narratives together, bringing the Magi to the "stable" along with the shepherds — rather than to the "house" where according to Matthew Joseph and Mary lived!)

There is a risk that unconsciously we can end up regarding the Christmas story as something just for children, rather like fairy tales in which things just happen and people magically appear and disappear.

But for Luke the birth of Jesus was not merely something that happened "once upon a time, a long time ago". It is an event that addresses us today! In the person of Jesus God has broken into our world, our history. This is something that can be appreciated only in terms of faith and demands our response.

To the shepherds at Bethlehem the angel proclaimed: "Today ... a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

This "today" will recur prominently in the rest of the Gospel: most notably when Jesus speaks in the synagogue in Nazareth ("Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" Lk 4:21), to Zachaeus in Jericho ("Today salvation has come to this house because he, too, is a son of Abraham" Lk 19:9) and again to the dying thief at Calvary ("Today you will be with me in Paradise" Lk 23:43).

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas this year, at a time when our human family is so stressed and divided by the threats of climate change, disease and the enormous disparities between rich and poor, may we take to heart the words of the Psalmist: "O that today you would listen to God's voice" (Ps 95:7). 🌲

Photo by Ververidis Vasilis/Shutterstock.com

A Book of Blessings

by Glynn Cardy
Published by Coventry Press,
2021 (Pleroma \$24.99)
Reviewed by Alofa Lale

I'm delighted to have discovered *A Book of Blessings* by Glynn Cardy, a New Zealander and minister of the Community of St Luke in Auckland.

There is something about saying blessings over others that is truly enriching and spirit-filled. That's why this book resonated with me and brought a smile to my face.

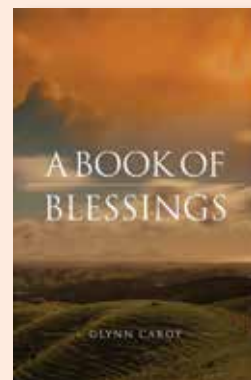
Cardy has captured the sense of the extraordinary in the everyday. Who knew that an unruly dog, our socks, latecomers, foolishness, the forgetful and we crazies could be seen as blessings or blessed?

It's not a long book. Each of the blessings fits on a page and opens the reader to seeing the possibility in impossibility, the potential in the obscure and the blessing in the moment.

At a recent function I used one of the blessings — "May you be blessed with a bridge" — and because the language was "ordinary" rather than "churchy" it was perfect for the occasion.

I'll certainly be using these gems for my own reflection and to share with others.

A Book of Blessings could be a good Christmas gift for a friend (if you're not already giving a subscription to *Tui Motu* magazine). 🌲





Commitment to the Journey

KATHLEEN RUSHTON draws attention to how many of the characters set out on a journey in response to news they hear in the birth stories of Jesus in Matthew 2:1-12 and Luke 1:39-44; 2:1-52.

Because the Christmas stories in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels have been romanticised, we can easily miss their radical implications.

A way to come to a fresh understanding of the story is by using the Ignatian practice of inserting ourselves into the gospel stories. Ignatius of Loyola suggests that we contemplate the text "to see the persons, to observe, consider what they are saying, to behold and consider what they are doing" along the way. Both Luke and Matthew thread journeys into their stories about Jesus's birth. In our own way we can find in these stories strength and hope for our own journeying in the Christmas season and beyond.

Mary Goes from Nazareth into the Hill Country

We're told that "Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country" (Lk 1:39). The pregnant Mary either chose to leave town or was sent to visit Elizabeth, her kinswoman who was also pregnant. At the time Mary was betrothed but not yet married to Joseph. Maybe, despite the assurances of the angel that nothing was impossible for God (Lk 1:37), she left to escape the neighbours' reactions.

Mary and Joseph Go from Nazareth to Bethlehem

Then when Mary was well on in her pregnancy, an imperial decree by Caesar Augustus in Rome announces that everyone in the empire is to be taxed. To bring this about, everyone, regardless of their circumstances, must return to their place of origin in order to register. We can imagine the movement of people criss-crossing the empire. We

read that "Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem ... to be registered with Mary" (Lk 2:4-5).

Shepherds Journey from the Hills to Bethlehem

Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Throughout Luke's Gospel there is an emphasis on God's good news for the poor. It is not surprising, then, that the first to hear of Jesus's birth are shepherds "living in the fields". Shepherds were marginalised in society and were probably minding someone else's sheep. Nevertheless they respond to the news with alacrity: "Let us go now to Bethlehem" (Lk 2:15).

They are the first to announce Jesus's birth publicly: "They made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them" (Lk 2:17-18). God, Creator of the universe, chose not only to become human but to be among the poor and ignored.

Family Travel from Nazareth to Jerusalem

Jerusalem as a destination features in many gospel journeys. According to Luke's infancy narrative, Mary and Joseph take Jesus there to fulfil the requirements of purification. They "brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord" (Lk 2:22).

Luke ends the infancy story with a second journey to Jerusalem when Jesus is 12 years old. The family went "up as usual for the [Passover] festival" in Jerusalem (Lk 2:41-42).

Later in the Gospel the adult Jesus and his disciples journey through the regions finally ending in Jerusalem where Jesus is killed (Lk 9:51-19:28). And the Gospel ends with two disciples meeting the risen Jesus as they journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus — then quickly back.

Magi Travel to Bethlehem from the East

Journeying flows, too, through Matthew's Christmas story. The magi, a high-ranking priestly class of political-religious



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

advisors to the rulers of Media, “from the East came to Jerusalem” (Mt 2:1). They were regarded as being able to recognise the signs of the times. Being Gentiles they did not get their knowledge from the Scriptures but from other ways of knowing: from following a star they came to Jesus, and by interpreting dreams they foiled Herod’s attempt to use them (Mt 2:12). Matthew’s text highlights that people come to Jesus by many ways — God uses diverse and unexpected means.

Family Flee Bethlehem for Egypt

Matthew tells how the family of Jesus arrive in Egypt as refugees (Mt 2:13-15). They flee the tyrannical regime of Herod, who though Jewish, acted as a vassal of Rome (Mt 2:13). Joseph fled to save his family from the terror of the coloniser. The family stayed in Egypt until they heard that Herod was dead and could no longer harm them.

Journeying Today

In these COVID times we’re being asked to limit our travelling and the size of our gatherings for the common good. This brake on our usual freedom of movement is one of the tools being used to stop the virus spreading, especially to those most vulnerable. So while we may not be undertaking long journeys, we can turn our short trips — to the supermarket, school or dairy — with the requirement to track these visits, from a chore into a practice of mindfulness of our solidarity with our neighbours.

The Christmas story invites us, once again, into the story of Jesus beginning with his birth. We can attend to

his journeying through cities and villages, alongside the marginalised, the crowds and the critiquing elites, with attention to the heavens and Earth, into suffering and resurrection. His journeying is deliberately border-crossing and border-enlarging as he walks in solidarity with those on the outside drawing them into the kinship of God.

This can challenge us. For example, thousands of people from Afghanistan, Myanmar, from Eastern Europe and African countries embark on perilous journeys to find safe places where they can live. They arrive as refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants. Their deepest hope is that they will encounter peace and safety — the good news of the Christmas story. Our moral, social and political solidarity with them can help bring this about.

Last month, representatives from around the world journeyed to Glasgow for the COP26. They are arriving back among us with goals for the global journey towards climate justice. We need to participate in this journey.

And Pope Francis is asking us to participate in synodality, to walk together as a Church, listening to and responding to the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor. As Vatican II highlighted for us, we are to be a Church in the world — pilgrim people journeying together in kinship in Earth. 🌲

19 December 4th Sunday of Advent: Luke 1:39-44

24-26 December: Luke 2:1-20; 41-52

2 January Epiphany: Matthew 2:1-12

Painting: *Bikes* by Christian Nicolson © Used with permission www.christiannicolson.co.nz



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Our offerings to God have changed hugely over the course of history. Back in biblical times, often an offering to God was a sacrificial animal. Now we tend to think of our offerings as a tithe of income to Church or charities. There's something a lot less visceral about donating to something with an online transaction compared to the bloody, complicated mess of bringing an animal to a temple.

However, I reckon God is expansive in all sorts of ways, and certainly in what an offering can look like. Offerings can take many forms. They can be in using time for friends, families, or boring admin that someone else doesn't have to do. They can be in the form of commitment to a challenging relationship or tricky situation. They can be in the gift of creativity, using our particular insights and talents for someone else.

One offering I love but is particularly underrated is the offering of enthusiasm. It's hard to say whether being loath to show enthusiasm is

a peculiar tenet of Kiwi culture, or a general human thing. It can somehow seem cool not to be too keen. Either way, I find myself drawn to people who have joy, eagerness, gusto or passion. Joy is truly a fruit of the Spirit, and it is sometimes too easy to be caught up in the solemnity and holiness of recognising the kingdom in Earth instead of just finding it fun.

Enthusiasm can transform ministries. In the volunteer work I do with young people, we have the best experiences when everyone — youth and volunteers — wants to be there, and has fun. It's this joy that keeps me volunteering on days when our work is exhausting and hard. I

remember being profoundly inspired on a camp once by a new friend who was singing while cleaning the toilet. She transformed a grotty chore into something that was fun.


Enthusiasm can transform relationships as well. I love having friends who I know want to see me and do things with me. It makes me excited to spend time with them and reminds me how loved I am. When I heard a friend was getting ordained, I squealed and hugged him. "That's the best reaction I've had," he told me.


Throughout history we can see that God's people are able to do amazing and difficult things not because of their sombre, pious stoicism but because they love it. Paul's letters in the New Testament, for example, are infused with encouragement and excitement for God's people throughout the world, as well as advice and warnings. It was Mother Teresa's immense energy for her work that kept her going even when we now know that, personally, she herself felt an emptiness and a silence from God. Enthusiasm is an offering we can use for what God calls us to. It is also a gift from God for us that gives us joy and energy and direction to where we may want to be.

Joy is the third advent candle, and as we look toward Christmas we know it is holy and miraculous and transforming. But remembering Jesus's coming is not only sombre, it is joyful. My role in God's kingdom is exciting, and I look forward to all my life will hold in faith and anticipation. 🕯️



Shar Mathias enjoys reading, running, tramping, music and a lot of other things. She studies ecology and lives in Dunedin.





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Agency of Hope: The Story of the Auckland City Mission 1920-2020

by Peter Lineham

Published by Massey University Press, 2020

Reviewed by Celia Costelloe

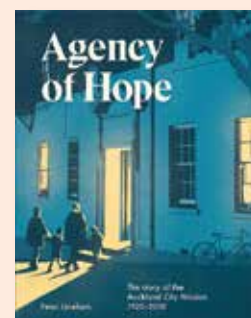
This fascinating history documents a century of the Auckland City Mission. Author Peter Lineham has pored over abundant source material to tell the complex and colourful story of this iconic social agency and its response to the socio-economic inequalities of those 100 years.

My interest was caught by the chapter on the 1990s, a period of social crisis and a competitive government funding. In this decade food banks became a “phenomenon”, the Christmas dinner began, and the Mission opened Herne

Bay House, a respite centre for HIV/AIDS patients. Lineham says: “It was most unusual for a Christian organisation to run a hostel for gay men with HIV or AIDS and to do so in an affirming and encouraging way.”

There were challenges involved but the Mission bravely continued this work in an unsupportive environment, encouraging new blood to serve the Mission. This decade was pivotal for the Mission to evolve into a contemporary social agency.

This is not a light read, but it is incredibly engaging. The stories of the people involved, and the struggles and challenges faced over the years, are fascinating. Anyone who is interested in New Zealand social history should definitely look at this remarkable chronicle. 🌲



This is an important, affecting and emotional book. I found it confronting and saddening to learn how life was for gay men only 40 years ago. Their struggle was real and they paved the way for us now to live open and proud lives.

The men offer rich, varied insights into their lives —



their struggles with identity, religion or family values and with feeling like who they were was wrong. It was compelling to read how they overcame those feelings and stood up for who they were. Many came from religious backgrounds and faced being a disappointment to their families or

of not living up to the expectations of a son. Some describe low points of their lives and how friendships helped replace their negative feelings with acceptance of who they were

A Queer Existence: the Lives of Young Gay Men in Aotearoa New Zealand

by Mark Beehre

Published by Massey University Press, 2021

Reviewed by Zak Holland

and where they belonged.

I recommend this book, especially if you're connected with someone in the queer community or if you're interested in the history of Aotearoa. Stories like these create a better understanding of the diversity of our society — which is a good thing. *A Queer Existence* did that for me — a young man who identifies with the queer community. 🌲

The Farewelling of a Home: a Liturgy

by Jane Simpson

Published by Poiema Liturgies, 2021

Reviewed by Jo Ayers

This valuable publication was originally written “to farewell homes damaged or completely destroyed on 22 February 2011 in Christchurch.” It is enlarged here to include the many other reasons for farewelling our loved dwellings.

The liturgy follows a simple sequence of gathering, lamenting, recalling and giving thanks for the past, the taking leave and blessing and sending forth. For its formal prayers it draws largely on *A New Zealand Prayer Book of the Anglican Church* — another very valuable

prayer resource.

I recommend beginning this book towards the end. At the bottom of page 17 and on page 18 are suggestions for the symbols and actions that will help tailor your unique ritual farewell. It will help you imagine what will suit your needs. Then go back to the beginning and consider the suggested sequence and prayers.

This book assumes that the “minister/s” are the householders, and the inclusive language makes no assumption about gender. In other words, this is a lay-led liturgy — people making prayer from their own lives. For Catholics we all need to be skilled in making prayer in words and symbols that speak of our lives as we rebuild our broken Church. Have a copy on your shelf. 🌲





THE POWER OF THE DOG

Directed by Jane Campion
Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

Many readers will be drawn, as I was, to the prospect of seeing a Western set in New Zealand, here among the tussocklands and folded hills of the Ida Valley in Central Otago, and directed by our own Dame Jane Campion.

Indeed, the location plays a major role in *The Power of the Dog*, where the characters play out their passions almost overwhelmed by a vast, enveloping landscape that nevertheless holds something of the beauty and consolation that nature offers to troubled humanity. The warm browns and golds of the South Island high country are mirrored in the film's domestic interiors — mostly the Burbank family's imposing ranch house — all glowing wood and flickering lamplight.

This is the story of two wealthy brothers and the life choices they make. Right from the outset, as they ride side by side on a cattle drive, the contrasts are stark — Phil (Benedict Cumberbatch), the arrogant, tough-talking cowboy, and George (Jesse Plemons), reticent and uncomfortable in his city clothes. The tensions ramp up when George brings local hotel-keeper and widow Rose (Kirsten Dunst) home as his wife, along with her epicene son, Peter. This arrangement outrages the callous and

domineering Phil, whose suppressed homosexuality smoulders throughout the film. Inevitably, he is drawn to Peter at the same time as he continues to humiliate Rose, who feels out of place in her new social setting.

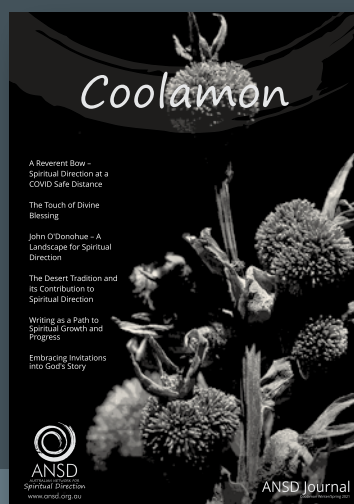
Based on the 1967 novel by Thomas Savage, and set in Montana in 1925, Campion's film explores the theme of mismatched sexuality, focusing on constructions of masculinity that manifest in the characters in various ways — spanning the divide from Rose's ineffectual husband George to Phil, whose repressed desires and sexualised adulation of his cowboy mentor, Bronco Henry, make him a ticking time bomb. The "effeminate" Peter shows an unexpected attunement

to his surroundings — and an unsentimental approach to animals — that draws Phil to him.

Alongside the omnipresent landscape, Campion draws on multivalent symbols such as the rawhide rope that Phil weaves as a gift for Peter. In contrast to *The Piano*, where the symbolism tended to be free-floating, here such images are successfully tethered to theme and character.

Troubled, conflicted, overbearing, angry and resentful, the apparent epitome of macho rectitude, the figure of Phil occupies the heart of Campion's beautifully crafted film. Cumberbatch's stellar performance raises it to another level. Do take the time to see this powerful, nuanced, multi-layered film on a big screen near you. 🌲

Coolamon the ANSD Journal is now for sale on ansd.org.au



We welcome you to the 5th edition of the *Coolamon Journal*, in this current context where the world is swirling with Covid and reeling from its impact in so many ways. Sydney-based spiritual director and Marist Fr Michael Whelan has a saying, "Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived." Perhaps this is a helpful stance for us as spiritual directors, and I think you will discover this posture underlying the contributions to this edition.

Dr. Sally Longley
Journal Editor

Find out more about publishing with Coolamon at our free Webinar: 17th January 2022 – 5pm AEST: Register here: <https://bit.ly/3mc6uNA>
See also www.ansd.org.au for publication guidelines and information on submitting articles, poetry, prayers, artwork, and book reviews on spiritual direction and spirituality.





by Mary Betz

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FROM COP26

At the COP26 half-way point, 160 countries (including Aotearoa) have pledged to phase out coal burning, although not for 10-20 more years. The biggest coal polluters – China, USA and India – declined to sign. That may change as many international banks end finance for coal plants at the close of 2021.

One hundred countries (including New Zealand), representing 85 per cent of the world's forests, have committed to halting and reversing deforestation and land degradation by 2030.

Over 100 countries also agreed to the Global Methane Pledge to cut methane emissions by 30 per cent by 2030. Inexplicably, it seems New Zealand signed – although our goal is only a 10 per cent cut – apparently because the pledge is non-binding.

Based on (non-binding) pledges so far, COP26 has *potentially* reduced Earth's warming from a projected rise of over 2° to 1.8°. But Aotearoa has committed to far lower emissions reductions than our contributions to climate change would ethically suggest we make. And the government plans to *purchase* credits overseas for two-thirds of our 2030 actual commitments rather than “inconveniencing” us by making emissions cuts ourselves.

INTERFAITH CLIMATE ENDEAVOURS

After eight months of collaboration with scientists and diplomats, the Vatican hosted an unprecedented gathering on the feast of St Francis. Forty leaders of major world religions – some often opposed to one another, including Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Orthodox and other Christians – signed “Faith and Science: An

Appeal for COP26”. It called on COP26 to change the “narrative of development” with a new economic model that prioritises human dignity, inclusivity and ecology over endless growth, exploitation and excess. It also pledged faith leaders to work for change amongst their own faithful.

Mid-COP26, an Aotearoa-based webinar “COP26: Faith and Inclusivity”, brought together interfaith panellists with overseas COP26 and diplomatic staff. Speakers emphasised the unity, collaboration and “weaving together” needed in struggles against climate change. As Sikh Verpal Singh put it, we are “as pearls in a necklace, all connected together, and we must rise together and act”.

When asked about the most effective way to change Aotearoa's poor response to cutting carbon emissions, UK envoy to the Holy See,

Chris Trott, and COP26 Director of Community Engagement, Nick Baker, agreed that the only way governments will respond is for people to put pressure on them. So, Aotearoa, we have our instructions.

LEARNING TO WALK TOGETHER

As Catholics in Aotearoa and around the world take part in parish and community synod groups, our aim is to better continue God's mission. We are learning to listen and discern as we look at who is included and excluded; how we listen, speak up and live the Gospel; whether prayer gatherings meet people's needs; how we collaborate with other Christians and wider society; how to share responsibility for ministry, leadership and decision-making; and how to be open to change.

Gratifyingly, these aims coalesce with those of COP26 and the interfaith movement – listening and working together for the good of Earth and its people. As some church leaders have reminded us, it will be a messy journey, but a long overdue one to breathe life into our Church.

As we finish 2021, I also complete a year of writing *Cross Currents*, grateful for the opportunity, looking on to other adventures and excited to encourage our next columnist! 🌲



TUI MOTU InterIslands

The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited

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

The magazine invites contributions from writers of Catholic and other Christian traditions or faith backgrounds, who can offer our readers insights which resonate with the Gospel as it affects us today. We value diversity and seek contributions which are representative of our church and our society: Māori, Pākehā Pasifika, other cultures, a range of ages and genders, lay and ordained. We offer feature articles, interviews, reviews, poetry, comment and opinion on theology, spirituality and history, as well as on social justice and ecology.

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FUNERAL NEEDS TO POINT BEYOND LIFE

Being both new to the Catholic Church and new to *Tui Motu* I devoured the recent edition and found much to extend me — thank you. I was particularly taken with Peter Matheson's article "Death is not the End" (TM Nov 2021). Referring to funeral services he says: "These days the profusion of photos and word tributes tends to make everything one directional." I am currently on a journey with the Gospel of Thomas using the commentary *In Trouble and Wonder* by Lynn C Bauman. One huge learning for me has been the recognition of the horizontal time-space direction of life and the vertical spiritual direction. That these directions intersect and make a cross is far from coincidental. Yes, it is nice to have some photos at funeral services and, yes, some tributes to acknowledge the time-space direction. But failing to significantly point beyond the life of this particular person has for a long time felt hollow to me. Thank you Peter, your words make things fall into place.

Marilyn Wilkinson, Paraparaumu

The Farewelling of a Home

by award-winning poet, Jane Simpson



Cover image: Gretchen Albrecht, Golden Vapour Cloud, 1973

'This liturgy is very fine indeed. It will find its way into many places on a variety of occasions. It fills a large gap in the feminine half of creation. The writing is beautiful.' — Joy Cowley, ONZ, DCNZM

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Aunty Kay was my grandad's sister. She had dairy farmed on rough Northland paddocks for decades, with her husband Fred and their six children. She loved farming. When I was a first-year university student, I had hitch-hiked through Northland and turned up at Aunty Kay and Uncle Fred's place in Kerikeri. They welcomed me and my med school friend to stay for a couple of nights. This was marvellous because being students we made it a point of honour to never pay for accommodation — or pay for anything at all — if we could avoid it.

Aunty Kay cooked us standard Kiwi tucker: mashed potatoes, boiled carrots and corned beef. Even then I was vegetarian which was unfathomable to a Northland farmer, but she poached me an egg and we chatted away. Aunty Kay told tales of her years as a leader of Every Girls Rally (a more Christian version of Girl Guides). She talked about how she'd loved farming and how she and Uncle Fred loved to cook for the camps at Coopers Beach every summer.

Uncle Fred wasn't much of a talker but he took us out to his workshop where he had a ferocious armoury of knives. He collected them blunt and rusty from op shops and then sharpened the blades on his lathe until they were wafer thin, sharp-eyed and glittering. He gave me one to take home and for years I kept "Uncle Fred's knife" to cut pumpkin. It was unbeatable.

A couple of years later in early October, when university exams were looming, Aunty Kay rang: "I'm in Auckland visiting my grandchildren and daughters. Are you home? I thought it would be nice to drop in and have a cup of tea. Shall I come over now?"

My Mum and sisters were out but



Looking OUT and IN

of course I said "Yes!" Aunty Kay was a little wider and slower than the last time we had met, but smiling and full of funny stories. She settled on the sofa and I made us a cuppa (tea with milk, no sugar). I felt antsy. Sipping tea with an older relative had not been my plan for that sunny spring afternoon. I thought of all the things I had hoped to complete: exam study, a run and visiting the library. And so the heartlessness of this story was that instead of rejigging my plans to talk to my kindly relative like any ordinary person would have done, I explained to Aunty Kay that I urgently needed to drop books at the library. Perhaps I could talk more when I got back. It was exam month after all, and she might have all the time in the world, but I had things to do.

Aunty Kay was terribly good about this. "Of course, Kaaren, that's fine, you have your things to do, you young ones. Off you go, and I'll just wait for Lilian to pick me up."

As soon as I dropped my books at the library, I knew my decision was selfish and absurd. I cycled straight home to sit and talk properly. But by that time, Aunty Kay had been picked up. Just a few months later my Mum rang to tell me that Aunty Kay had

died. My first thought was of that spring afternoon when I hadn't made space for my great aunt who had wanted to connect.

I missed what would have been my last ever opportunity to sit with a wise and funny aunt. Prioritising the person in front of me and listening to my heart rather than my plan for productivity, is a lesson I have unlearned and relearned many times since. Maybe I am a little more patient, less rigid in my plans now. It wouldn't be much, but I hope so.

Advent has similar lessons for me. Mary and Joseph chose to go through with the invitation of an unplanned baby, even out of wedlock, even knowing that the baby's due date fell in the middle of a national census. My take-home this Advent is that each unexpected guest and perhaps even each unexpected COVID announcement, carries wispy promises of God with us. 🌲

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Most days **Kaaren Mathias** rides a bicycle, teaches university students, parents her children and goes walking with Tussock the dog.



May the carefree clatter of children
and celebrations with our family
our relief from full lockdown
and gatherings with our friends
our enjoyment of being out-of-doors
and our concern for those still sick
lift our hearts, fuel our gratitude and draw us closer
this Christmas season.

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From the *Tui Motu* team