TUI MOTU
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CELEBRATING 20 YEARS *1997–2017*

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The Common Good

JANE HIGGINS explores dialogue as a way of achieving the common good
MIKE RIDDELL asks if we have the will to commit to the common good
SIMON RANDALL reflects on what he learned in local politics

PLUS: PETER MATHESON introduces Erasmus

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Cover painting: *Das Mahl (The Meal)* by Seiger Köder. From MISEREROR Lenten veil "Hoffnung den Aus Gegrerentzen" © MVG Medienproduktion, 1996.

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EDITORIAL

Easter and the Common Good

The days, now negotiating their portion of light with night, are cooler and shorter than last month. They move us indoors earlier and surprise us with that crisp smell of early frost. Soon we'll welcome the Easter fire, already anticipated in the gold streaking the trees along the pathways.

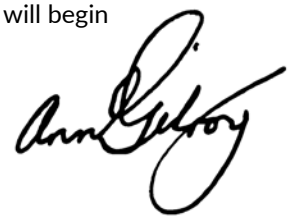
As we journey through Lent and Holy Week we relive the stations of the cross in the passion story accentuated by the suffering in our world. We can arrive at Calvary heavy-hearted and exhausted. Yet it's through punctuations of courage, like the women standing at the foot of Jesus' cross, mothers protesting their disappeared children, parents protecting their families in war zones, emergency services rushing to sites of terrorism, families relocating from rising seas and children with imprisoned parents supporting one another, that we're energised towards solidarity, re-furnished with hope in the common good and invited to recommit in discipleship. The Easter fire is our symbol of the potential for good that our participating with Christ in God's mission can realise around us.

This month we've focused the Easter light on the social justice principle of the common good — of putting our energy into what is good for all, rather than seeking solely self-interest or siphoning resources into a privileged group's desire. Sieger Köder's cover painting encourages us to imagine a neighbourhood and world where we all belong, are nourished and contribute. It is the kind of Eucharistic celebration that Mike Riddell recommends in which we're conscious of the community good rather than being absorbed in the crowd uncritical of where we are going — like geese being farmed for pâté. Joy Cowley gifts us with an imaginative story of a soul meeting Suzanne Aubert — showing two different attitudes towards a good life.

This is just a taste of the feast that is our Easter 214th issue. We thank all our contributors whose reflection, scholarship, spirituality, commitment and artistry has combined in producing this magazine.

And there's a bonus. As a celebration of our 20th year of *Tui Motu* publishing we are offering a month of daily emails, each containing a gem of inspiration mined from back copies of the magazine. If you and your friends would like to have the *Tui Motu Easter Inspiration* arriving in your inbox, sign up on the *Tui Motu* website or send us an email and we'll sign you up. The *Inspirations* will begin on 24th April.

As is our custom our last word is our blessing.



DEEPLY SHAMEFUL AND A MATTER OF HUGE REGRET

by Ann Gilroy

The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse will present its final report to the Australian Government in December 2017. It has spent four years "investigating how institutions like schools, churches, sports clubs and government organisations have responded to allegations and instances of child sexual abuse". During this time the commissioners have heard thousands of stories from men and women whose lives have been blighted by perpetrators of sexual abuse who had the responsibility of caring for them as children.

The Commission has had its final hearing of the Catholic Church's implication in child sexual abuse. Films such as *Oranges and Sunshine* and *Spotlight* have published the stories of wretchedness, cover-ups and the fractured lives in this matter, so there is no need to say more. The revelations have shocked, angered and saddened the Catholic community especially as the majority have positive experiences of good priests and religious in their lives. We join with the sorrow, shame and huge regret expressed by the contemporary Bishops, Leaders of Religious Congregations and Catholic people.

When the Commissioners questioned the Bishops and the Leaders of Religious Congregations about the findings published in the *February 2017 Analysis of Claims of Child Sexual Abuse Made with Respect to Catholic Church Institutions in Australia* (available on the Royal Commission website) it was obvious they were also looking at current practice. As well as asking how and why some Church members in ministry, particularly in the 1960s and 70s, became perpetrators of abuse, they also asked what is in place now to safeguard children.

Francis O'Sullivan, CEO of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council coordinating the Catholic Church's response to the Royal Commission, summed up the "why" from the evidence: "The most significant issues include compulsory celibacy, clericalism, inadequate training and formation, denial and secrecy and, very significantly, the Church's culture. Much of the dysfunction, crime and cover-up of child sexual abuse in the Church, in one way or another, can be linked back to one or more of these issues."

The Church leaders described the regulations and processes, in individual Congregations and Dioceses as well as together as Church, to safeguard children and for the accountability for those preparing for and engaged in ministry with people. As Francis Sullivan said: "Over the past two decades and certainly over the past four years the way the Church engages with children, is unrecognisable from the 1950s, 60s and 70s."

Following the Royal Commission it is expected that the work will continue in light of new research and recommendations.

"The institutional culture of the Church is where the real change is needed," Francis Sullivan said, acknowledging that culture is so hard to move. "I hear in the voice of many people in the Church, further abroad and which I share — it is the struggle to see concerted, consistent real change in the heart of the Church, from Rome to parishes in the most remote parts of the world.

"The Catholic community [is] calling for a Church that resembles what the Pope has called for — a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security."

Many who went before the Commission said that for cultural change it is essential to include women in Church governance.

Bishop Vincent Long said: "As a bishop, I need to lead the way in promoting the Church as a *communio*, a discipleship of equals, that emphasises relationships rather than power."

Professor Neil Ormerod told the Commission that he thought that one of the reasons the Archdiocese of Adelaide had a low number of child abuse claims (compared to other Dioceses) was because from the 1980s Archbishop Leonard Faulkner, instead of having an auxiliary bishop, introduced a pastoral team of four, including two women, to work with him. The 2017 Catholic Directory suggests that is continuing with four Chancellors, three of them women.

Professor Ormerod also said that "effective pastoral supervision [of priests and others engaged in ministry], in line with other professions who work with emotionally distressed people, was an effective way to mitigate abuse happening."

Regular supervision and spiritual direction is a requirement of the Bishops' protocol *Integrity in Ministry*.

Bishop Vincent Long spoke of the efforts made in his diocese to enculturate overseas trained priests. With the significant number now working in Australia and New Zealand parishes it is essential that they receive in-depth and on-going theological and cultural preparation for ministry here and understand the place of supervision.

Our Church leaders now need the combined wisdom of the whole Catholic community and in prayer and humility commit together to deep cultural changes in the Church. ■

Committing to the Common Good

JANE HIGGINS suggests that we will make better decisions for the common good when we engage in dialogue.

Common good, common ground, commonweal. "Common" from the Latin *communis*, meaning "public, shared by all, many" is a challenging, even a troubling word in our world these days, where the prevailing culture is preoccupied with building walls, closing borders and holding tight to what is "mine". And yet, Church documents are infused with the word. From Vatican II to Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium (EG)* and *Laudato Si' (LS)*, there it is: our common humanity, our common home, the common good.

Brophy, Johnson and Courtney families collaborating on a barn mural, North Canterbury. Photo by Dave Brophy.

How do we nurture a society in which people feel they belong and are therefore prepared to make that communal commitment towards the common good?

Common Good is Inclusive

The common good is almost the first thing to be discussed in *Gaudium et Spes, The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, a major document of Vatican II. Chapter Two of that document speaks of "the whole human race" being "involved with regard to the rights and obligations" relating to "the social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfillment." Moreover, "every group must take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group, and still more of the human family as a whole."

This was written over 50 years ago — but read now in the context of the refugee crisis, child poverty and climate change — it is a prophetic call to be profoundly countercultural.

What are the "needs and legitimate aspirations" to which the document refers? In its next paragraph, the Council sets out what is needed for a genuinely human life: food, clothing, housing, the right freely to choose a state of life and set up a family, the right to education, to work, to one's good name, to respect, to proper knowledge, the right to act according to the dictates of conscience, and to safeguard one's privacy, and rightful freedom, including in matters of religion.

Broaden Our Horizons

Perhaps this seems utopian. But Pope Francis in speaking of the common good in *Evangelii Gaudium*, *The Joy of the Gospel*, encourages us not to be overwhelmed. He suggests that we try to "broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all" and that we do this without uprooting ourselves, without getting lost in the global. In an exhortation towards that old appeal to "think global, act local" Francis urges us to "work on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood, but with a larger perspective" (*EG*, par 235).

Recognition of Diversity

An important part of that larger perspective is the recognition that our nations, our cities, even our neighbourhoods, have become immensely diverse places. How then, do we seek the common good within that diversity without suppressing our differences and without losing our identity?

In a 2015 speech in Paraguay, Francis picks up this theme: "The common good is sought by starting from our differences, constantly leaving room for new alternatives. In other words, look for something new. When dialogue is authentic, it ends up with ... a new agreement. Dialogue is not about negotiating. Dialogue is about seeking the common good."

Real Conversations Needed

This call to dialogue for the common good is a powerful challenge to our fractured and siloed world. We've had over 30 years of a global economic orthodoxy that champions

division between people through idolising winner-take-all forms of individual responsibility and independence. The dramatic inequality this has produced within nations is perceived by the cheerleaders of this orthodoxy as collateral damage, or even as desirable.

We've seen the rise of a populism in which fear of "the other", of people "not like us", has stoked the fires of racism and religious bigotry.

All this in the context of huge insecurity following the global financial crisis and a series of bitterly fought and long-drawn-out conflicts that have forcibly driven millions of people from their homes — an almost unimaginable 65.3 million, according to the latest estimate of the United Nations' Refugee Agency, the UNHCR.

It's no surprise, then, that Francis cautions in *Evangelii Gaudium*, that we are experiencing a "crisis of communal commitment". This crisis has not emerged out of nowhere; it has been decades in the making.

Commitment to the Community

What response can we offer in the face of this tremendous challenge? How can we embrace the common good and pursue it in earnest?

I recently came across the work of Cecelia Clegg and Joe Liechty on sectarianism in Northern Ireland and it put me in mind of the way people are building walls, literally and metaphorically, against one another. Sectarianism, Clegg and Liechty suggest, is "belonging gone bad". That led me to wonder if an important part of the crisis of communal commitment to which Francis refers is in fact a crisis of belonging. How difficult is it to feel a commitment to the wider good of a neighbourhood, a city or a nation if we don't feel that we truly belong to those places and those communities?

This crisis of belonging manifests itself in many ways, from the global financial elite refusing to pay tax in those countries where they make their millions, to the isolated individuals so alienated from their societies that they perpetrate terrible acts of violence against them — the people to whom Hannah Arendt refers in her classic text, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, when she observes that loneliness is "the common ground for terror".

Nurturing Local Belonging

If relationships of belonging constitute the ground on which the common good grows and flourishes, perhaps this is one important place to focus our efforts. How do we nurture a society in which people feel they belong and are therefore prepared to make that communal commitment towards the common good? How do we nurture authentic dialogue within diversity in order to explore and understand what the common good looks like in our own context?

Here in Aotearoa, it's election year. We have an opportunity to scrutinise party platforms for policies that enhance belonging and communal commitment and to challenge policies that promote inequality and exclusion, including those that exclude future generations from sharing in the beauty and bounty of our common home.

Painting project completed.
Photo by Lilly Warrenson.

How do we nurture authentic dialogue within diversity in order to explore and understand what the common good looks like in our own context?

These are complex issues without simple answers. Consider, for example, the NZ Super debate: to means test or not to means test? On one hand, means testing targets resources where they are most needed. On the other, universality brings people together in a scheme where everyone has a stake.

Consider the new Ministry for Vulnerable Children. Again, targeting vulnerable children may focus attention on those in need but, as the United Nations has pointed out, where is our government's policy commitment to wellbeing for all children and young people?

The targeting of government assistance in a context of significant inequality risks stigmatising those who receive it. And there may be a refusal of communal commitment from those who see themselves as paying for a system to which they don't belong. These complexities highlight the need for the kind of genuine dialogue to which Francis refers.

So, let's make this an election year in which we ask candidates and parties to address how their policies promote belonging, justice and dialogue within diversity, in pursuit of the common good. ■

Jane Higgins is a Christchurch-based community researcher and evaluator who writes fiction in her spare time.

THE GEESE ARE GETTING FAT

MIKE RIDDELL asks if we have the will and commitment to stand for the common good in this age of individualism and consumerism.

Foie gras is a luxury food; a high-end pâté. It is made by force-feeding ducks or geese with corn by means of a feeding tube. Their livers swell to such a size — ten times that of a normal bird — that breathing becomes difficult. When ready, the birds are slaughtered and their livers harvested.

They are not valued for their own worth as creatures — rather they have become organic production facilities for the farmers. These feathered friends have no consciousness of the fact that they are being fattened for the gastric delight of connoisseurs. They are only aware of their own suffering.

I think of them with both compassion and foreboding. They speak to us of our own helplessness as citizens of a utilitarian society. For many years now we in the West have been force-fed a steady diet of individualism and avarice. Some of us have become fat on this regime. Few understand that we are being farmed for the pleasure of an elite.

I see the effects of our fat livers in the casual cruelty of my peers; in the single focus on individual betterment; in the lack of connection to those around us; in the withdrawal of people from political life; in subservience to an exploitative economic system; in a lack of generosity, tolerance and simple kindness. We seem to have accepted Margaret Thatcher's dictum that "There is no such thing as society."

> *What we hunger for is, in the words of Francis again, "a community which sacrifices particular interests in order to share, in justice and peace, its goods, its interests, its social life."*

Common Good Under Siege

The common good is a bedrock of Catholic Social Teaching. In essence it is a very simple foundation on which all social theology rests — that we are in this whole human enterprise together. We neither possess our lives individually, nor are able to claim our full humanity without recognising our interdependence with those around us. The Trinitarian God has created us to share in communal life.

For much of history this has been unexceptional, in that survival was dependent on some sort of tribal structure. Necessity made us all participants in the common good. The great shift came with the combined shock of the Industrial Revolution and consequent urbanisation. These were both symptoms of a new economic system — capitalism.

Individualism Taking Over

But it is to the more recent Technological Revolution that we must turn to understand the routing of the common good in favour of aggressive individualism. With this upheaval we shifted from being consumers of goods to consumers of ideas. And with the feeding-tube embedded firmly in our gullets, our livers have swelled with selfishness and narcissism.

Somehow it has become normal to immerse ourselves compulsively in social media streams that pretend to represent community, but are engineered by hidden algorithms. We participate in life vicariously, through outrageously manufactured celebrities such as the Kardashians.

Too many of us begin to regard the poor as an unnecessary impediment to our own well-being.

Individualism is Society's Virus

It seems the vast majority of us have accepted the ridiculous notion that it is possible to live a life without dependence on others. This foul pestilence is the virus that has infected the whole of the Western world. It is an evil that undergirds the collapse of justice, the xenophobia of nations, the trivialisation of politics, the exploitation of indigenous peoples, and the explosion of addictive behaviours.

We have been sated and sedated into compliance, repeating learned mantras as if they were our own. Our surveillance societies are more intrusive than even George Orwell predicted. The genius of them is that rather than being imposed upon us, we have chosen them in the name of security. Any threat of opposition is quickly snuffed out.

Who does this ideology serve? The geese or the farmers? The real answer is neither. It serves the apparently blind market and its masters — a kind of unacknowledged Satan in the biblical sense of that word. All that is clear is that the purchasers of *foie gras* have a certain overlap with the beneficiaries of this system.

Resistance Needed

Here we are then, having conceded our humanity and dignity without so much as a scuffle. We are an occupied territory, and as such our only viable strategy is that of resistance. That demands some sense of what we are fighting for and what we have lost. As Pope Francis has said recently of Catholicism: "It is a scandal to say one thing, and do another."

The common good brings recognition that we are essentially communal in our existence. Both capitalism and communism are distortions of relationality. What we hunger for is, in the words of Francis again, "a community which sacrifices particular interests in order to share, in justice and peace, its goods, its interests, its social life".

Gather around Eucharistic Table

Our acts of resistance can be small in recognition that all expressions of difference are political when lived out. The Eucharist with its origins in the communal meal, is a challenge to the *status quo*. But it needs to return to its roots where food and wine are shared around the safe space of a table and where vigorous debate is grounded in joy and belonging.

Engage with Compassion

Compassion is the arterial blood of common life. This summons us to the memory that anything that happens to the least of us is borne by all of us. Giving to charity is a rather remote way of acknowledging that. A more engaging path is that of friendship, in which hands are held, tears shed and hearts warmed. It is more difficult to hate strangers when embracing them.

Protect Earth

The natural world, which is our common ground and shared gift, calls to us for protection. Exploitation of our mother, our *whenua*, is a form of rape that diminishes our prospects of life itself. In small ways we can stand together for our rivers and seas and mountains and air, delivering the reminder that they are not resources but treasures.

Talk Together

We can talk together, freeing ourselves from the toxic streams of propaganda that flood our screens daily. Only in such honest dialogue do we begin to regain the memory of what it means to be human. We may recall the truth that we only begin to know ourselves by engaging with the other. And conversations held in the absence of devices are conveniently most difficult to surveil.

Should we fail in our quest to retrieve our communal being, it may be that it will be forced upon us by suffering on an unprecedented scale. The consequences of a disordered society are almost always horrific — history is littered with the grotesque outcomes. When everything is taken away from us, it seems we finally begin to cling to each other.

Listen to Our Prophets

The task of prophets is to remember and declare. We are guardians of the common good and called to announce it. I'm minded of a parable by Kierkegaard (somewhat paraphrased):

"There is a town where only geese live. Every Sunday the geese waddle out of their houses and down the main street to their church. They waddle into the cathedral and squat in their pews. The goose choir sings and then the goose pastor comes and reads from the goose bible.

"He encourages them: 'Geese, God has given you wings! With these wings you can fly! With these wings you can rise up and soar like eagles! No walls can confine you, no fences can hold you. You have wings and you can fly like birds!'

"All the geese shout: 'Amen.' And then they waddle home, their livers uncomfortably swollen." ■

Mike Riddell writes novels, plays, films and apology notes. He cooks when he can and breathes intentionally on a daily basis.

A CALLING TO THE **COMMON GOOD**

SIMON RANDALL **reflects on what drew him to become involved in local politics.**

Lately I have been introducing myself as a recovering politician. That usually results in a smile or a comment about how I'll now be able to do something useful with my life. It's my personal statement about my current self-inflicted identity crisis as I've recently left the life of a local body politician. It also has me reflecting on the nature of being politically involved — what drove me to it and what might drive others, too.

I think it is a salient time to ponder such things. With such glaring issues as the ever-widening gaps between those who have and those who have not, instability in employment and the quickening pace of environmental destruction threatening the fundamentals of life, we are reaching a peak of public scepticism about politicians and political institutions.

I would suggest that the rise of Trump, Brexit and other recent events are a result of this scepticism and a feeling among the public of being estranged from wider society. However, especially in the face of these challenges, it is the most important time for us all to engage. From my perspective all political institutions are essentially social constructs and we all have a duty to own and nurture them. If the institutions we created initially no longer serve us, then I would argue we have a similar duty now to change and renew them.

Family Influences

I am a product of my upbringing. I grew up in the 80s as a middle child of four with two loving parents. The area we grew up in had seen generations of relatives born and raised in it and I had grandparents close at hand. Our family came from a strong Catholic tradition and the Church we attended had stood witness to many key moments in our family life — celebrations of the sacraments, births, comings of age, marriages and farewells.

My values, the foundation of my political understanding, were forged largely subconsciously by my experience of all of this. Being well connected into family and the wider community teaches the importance of service of others, the care for those who need it and self-sacrifice for a greater good. These attitudes hold family, community and even society together.

My family has always been keen on a good argument and this taught me to question the way things are and not to accept uncritically those things which are in conflict with my fundamental values. Although my family was not involved in politics in a formal sense, politics seemed a natural home for my desire to serve others and to initiate change.

Getting into Politics

This led me when I was 19 to stand for my local community. I missed out by a wide margin. I then finished university and started teaching and was elected finally when I was 25. After the reforms of governance in Auckland I was elected to a Local Board and ultimately became the Chair. It was a steep learning curve. It seemed that everything was presented as a discrete, stand-alone, short- or medium-term issue which didn't seem to relate to an overall picture. It was hard to make links between what I wanted for my community and the reality of how that worked. It took time and good mentors to help me see the connections between issues but also to change the way I engaged.

My Key Issues

I settled on a number of key issues which I saw as achieving a wider good rather than an isolated individualistic outcome. For example, youth employment benefits the individual and the benefits of employment flow to their families and community, their employers, the economy and the wider community.

Connected walking and cycling networks give individuals more options for moving around and help decongest roads for those who need to use them. At the same time they bring neighbourhoods together, changing the conversation about what living in a community looks like.

I think of housing as a human good rather than as a commodity. While being housed makes us protective of what we have, not having stable, appropriate housing wholly undermines our ability to participate in society. This sets up an inherent conflict between those trying to increase housing density to meet increasing needs and existing homeowners who perceive this as a threat. And we in New Zealand are less familiar with establishing communities in apartments and terraced houses than we are in streets lined with bungalows and villas.

> *No one group or individual is a "pure" advocate for the common good and decisions end up lopsided if based solely on those who understand how political processes work and have the time or ability to engage with them.*

Keeping the Big Picture in Mind

Several important insights have helped me to understand the cumulative effects of the choices we make — to see the big picture — rather than to see each decision in isolation.

All decisions are choices based on values. I wasn't always conscious of the values because we act from them automatically. I found some choices in my time particularly difficult and also found myself supporting different choices from my colleagues. When I was trying to understand if I was on the right track in my decision-making, I found that it helped to work out which values were the most important to me.

Hear All Perspectives

Not everyone is heard, or equally able to participate. This is a key message for politicians when making decisions — and one that is not universally accepted. No one group or individual is a "pure" advocate for the common good and decisions end up lopsided if based solely on those who understand how political processes work and have the time or ability to engage with them. It can be difficult to get other perspectives into the mix, but this is important.

Bring People on Board

So my next point is partner to the above — bringing people along for the journey is vital. It serves no one if a council chamber becomes an ivory tower. Politicians can make the best decision but it will have no impact if the community resists or doesn't offer support. I've found that collaboration is hard but essential.

Popular Not Always the Best

What is popular or easy isn't always the best. Politics can be a lonely life at times and the desire to go with the flow is a pretty fundamental instinct. However, I tried to place emphasis on what was the best decision I could make regardless of popularity. This was not easy and there are few direct incentives to make difficult decisions.

Procrastinating Is a Decision

Not making a decision is making a decision. We can think that doing nothing or making minimal change is having no impact. But society is a dynamic system and as it changes our approach also needs to change. So avoiding a decision can have a greater impact in many ways.

I am not sure I will ever have resolved my thoughts on the role of politics and politicians in serving the common good. I have figured out that for me it has a lot to do with the connectedness which exists between all of us. Acting to strengthen these connections and uplift all people is to place importance upon and work towards the common good. That is certainly what drew me to political involvement in the first place and what I strove for in my time in local government. I can't say that I achieved all I wanted to or always got it right. There is always more to be done. ■

Simon Randall is from Auckland and was elected to local government for nine years. His background is in science and education.

Hands Together, oil on canvas, 30x40 © by June Pauline Zent. www.etsy.com/people/artzent

Beneficial to Me and to Those Around

BRIDGET TAUMOEPEAU ponders some of the influences that have contributed to her understanding of working for the common good.

The common good is an overarching principle of Catholic Social Teaching which, like human dignity, permeates all that we do and think in applying the Gospel in our everyday lives.

One of the joys of old age is having the time and ability to reflect on my life and what have been significant influences that have determined the way things have turned out. I think that early in life, in quite minor ways, I became aware of the concept of the "other".

I grew up in Scotland in a non-Scottish family and realised that my mother felt that she never quite belonged in that society. When I went away to boarding school in England, many of the girls had never been to Scotland and my accent set me apart. It was no surprise that my greatest friends became, and remained, girls who were different either ethnically or religiously.

Later I chose to become a Catholic in a family whose roots were in Protestant Northern Ireland. And, as if that was not enough, I married into another culture. To continue the theme on a lighter note, I chose psychiatry as my medical speciality and was often looked down on by the medical fraternity as not being a "proper doctor"!

Through all these experiences I realised that I, too, could be the "other"— different, suffering prejudice or exclusion although in quite minor ways compared to the suffering of many today.

Belonging Is Essential

All people want to belong and be part of society even if they may be aware that they are in some way different from the majority. Those considered "other" may have an even stronger drive to integrate and to take on the responsibilities of a contributing person. The groups with whom they identify may assist them in understanding their own role in the common good and are worthy of our consideration. My own belonging within the Church led me to understand

the concepts of service and vocation. I realised that the choices I make must not just be beneficial to me but need also contribute to the common good of all people.

Contributing Is Essential

Living in another culture was also a challenge but opened my eyes to a very different view of our connectedness to family and community.

As doctors in Tonga we were considered wealthy (although we were dirt poor by Western standards) and as such expected to shoulder a lot of the expenses of the extended family. On the other hand the family made it very clear that I needed to work as a doctor because I had had the privilege of that training and so family members would share the load of caring for our children. In this way the common good of family and society was addressed.

As I reflect on those newer Tongan experiences, I think back to the influence of my parents and particularly my mother's devotion to the idea of fairness. She applied the principle mainly within the family but she extended the idea, also teaching us that the privileges of wealth and education brought responsibilities and needed to be shared.

I found a reassuring congruity between Scottish Presbyterianism and the values of the South Pacific. Several Church denominations were represented in my father's family. My Quaker aunt impressed me with her years of service after the war working with "displaced persons", endeavouring to reunite them with their families. She was addressing the common good of post-war Europe. And so slowly and surely the idea and practicalities of the common good emerged in my life.

Common Good Work of All

I do not agree that the common good is something that has to be tackled primarily at a high level in society, that it is something for which politicians are responsible. The principle of the common good applies at all levels in our lives.

It's first in our families. We make many, many decisions that impact on individual members as well as on the family as a whole. We do not choose our parents or siblings and it is in our family that we have the opportunity to negotiate relationships that address the common good of that little group.

As we grow up we learn about dealing with others and behaviours that have the potential to include or isolate. Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of family in learning these early lessons. His interest in team sports, particularly his beloved soccer, is around the idea of working together for the betterment of the team rather than the individual.

Choosing the Common Good

Considering the common good at any level — family, school, work, parish, community, or greater national or international causes — always creates tension between our own individual ambitions and putting those aside for the greater good. I find the principles of *See*, *Judge*, *Act* as a guide in this decision-making better understood as *See and Listen*, *Assess and Respond*. We face situations every day where a consideration

As we grow up we learn about dealing with others and behaviours that have the potential to include or isolate. Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of family in learning these early lessons.

of the common good is called for — in our own micro-worlds, in organisations where we work or volunteer, in our decisions about how to vote, where we will spend or invest our money, what cause we will fight for, how we will support the well-being of the planet and so on.

We need to be informed in order to make a decision. That information comes from seeing and listening — however, the assessment and response are driven by our world view, belief system and faith. I feel blessed that I have access to Scripture that informs, teaches and challenges me. Its timelessness means it is forever relevant. It lays out the principles that can permeate all our decisions — love of neighbour, being non-judgemental, stewardship, caring for the marginalised. I heard recently the recommendation that when it comes to voting for a political party we should measure the candidates against the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1–12; Lk 6:20–22) and Matthew 25.

Catholic Social Teaching developed from the fruits of reflection on the Gospels and society. Now we have a Pope who demonstrates *See*, *Judge*, *Act* in many ways — bringing the refugees to Rome; visiting areas of conflict to model harmonious relationships; condemning the arms trade; being generous and inclusive with the homeless; using his considerable international influence to promote peace and to write about our responsibilities of care for the planet and for each other. These examples demonstrate ways of putting the common good first.

Learning from Good Examples

As well as drawing on these sources, we see people around us who are responding to the challenges of everyday life here in New Zealand. For example, the groups who work with homeless and poor people; who open their homes and hearts to migrants and refugees; who give of their time and talent for the betterment of their parishes; who combat the selfish misuse of our planet's resources. All are contributing to the common good in one way or another.

All this requires and motivates me to respond to what I see around me. It is an ongoing challenge but not a burden. It is an opportunity to learn from others, to put myself in the world of the "other", to acknowledge that each and every one of us makes up the wholeness of society. But above all it is the chance to respond to the beauty of the Gospel message to follow Christ. ■

Bridget Taumoepeau has a love of psychiatry, theology, Ignatian spirituality, families (especially her own), her parish and all sorts of craft.

THE COMMON GOOD

— Muslim understanding and practice

NAJIBULLAH LAFRAIE explains that for Muslims working for the common good is a personal and community responsibility and a way of serving God.

Muslims consider Islam as a "*deen*", a comprehensive way of life. It regulates not only the relationship of the individual to their Creator but also to themselves, to their fellow human beings, to the environment and to the universe as a whole. As the Islamic history clearly demonstrates, the aim of Islam is not just to create righteous individuals but also righteous societies. This is based on the Quranic view which deems establishing justice as part of the mission of the Prophets sent by God: "We sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance, so that people could uphold justice" (51:25). So, promoting and achieving the "common good" is at the core of a Muslim's social activity.

Levels of Commonality

What is "common" and what is "good" from an Islamic viewpoint? First and foremost a Muslim is a member of *ummat-ul-Islamia*, the global Islamic community. The Holy *Quran* enjoins Islamic unity, and the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever."

But there are other levels above and below the level of *ummah*. Islam does not consider itself as a new religion. All the religions that came from the Almighty were Islam in the sense that they asked their followers to submit themselves to the Will of their Creator (and that is what the word "islam" means in Arabic). Muslims share a commonality with all the people of faith, particularly Jews and Christians, who are noted in the *Quran* and called "the People of the Book". Above that level we share a common humanity; or in the language of the *Quran*, we are all "children of Adam".

> *We can see that it is the duty of a Muslim first to inculcate in themselves the social values mentioned at the beginning of this article — values such as justice, equity and fairness, equality, fraternity, cooperation, decency, compassion, generosity and charity. Then they work with their families, neighbours and other groups in their cities and countries to promote and achieve the common good based on those values.*

Below the level of *ummah* we have Muslims living in certain countries. This is a fact of life in today's "nation-states". But even when we had caliphates and empires, except for a couple of centuries at the outset, there were always multiple Muslim-majority countries. These Muslims have a commonality with other compatriots. Below that we have the levels of the city, the suburb and neighbourhood and finally the family.

Understanding Goodness

As for the "good", for Muslims it is identified by the teachings of the Holy *Quran* and the *Sayings* and tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. Social justice, noted above, is a good. Other goods include equity and fairness, equality, fraternity, honesty, cooperation, modesty and decency, compassion and mercy, generosity and charity, safety and security.

Classical Muslim scholars have used the concept of "common good" in the contexts of Islamic law, *Sharia*. The word they use in Arabic is *Maslahah*, which has also been translated as "public interest". For them, "*maslahah* consists of considerations which secure a benefit or prevent a harm but which are, simultaneously, harmonious with the objectives (*maqasid*) of the *Shari'ah*. These objectives ... consist of protecting the five `essential values', namely religion, life, intellect, lineage and property. Any measure which secures these values falls within the scope of *maslahah*, and anything which violates them is *mafsadah* ('evil'), and preventing the latter is also *maslahah*."

Achieving the Common Good

Achieving the common good is not only an objective of the primary sources of the Islamic law (the *Quran* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet), it also serves as a secondary source of the law itself. Scholars have distinguished three types of *maslahah* (common good): 1) it is based on clear textual

evidence; 2) it is contradictory to an undisputed text; and 3) the original sources are silent about it, neither confirming nor rejecting.

The first type is called *mutabara* (accredited); its validity is definitive and not open to debate. The second type is called *mulgha* (discredited) and cannot be taken into account, despite our assumption that it may be a "common good" (an example given is legalising usury or interest because of its prevalence in modern transactions). A *maslahah* of the third type is called "*mursala* (undetermined), for it allows the [jurists] to use their own analysis and personal reasoning in order to formulate a legal decision in the light of the historical and geographical context, using their best efforts to remain faithful to the commandments and to the "spirit" of the Islamic legal corpus where no text, no 'letter' of the Law, is declared." In this way it becomes a secondary source of Islamic law.

Religion and Government Policy

Maslahah applies not only to the laws expounded by Islamic jurists but to public policies enacted by the government as well. The governments in Muslim majority countries are duty bound to protect the five "essential values" for their citizens. They are religion, life, intellect, lineage and property.

They should also pursue public policies that promote the common good as understood by the Muslim jurists.

As Islam is a comprehensive way of life there is no distinction between religion and politics. Islamic governance (originally called "caliphate") is not theocratic. According to the majority of Muslims (the Shiites have a different view on this), after the death of the Prophet his successors inherited only his political leadership, not his religious mandate. Nonetheless, throughout history until the colonial subjugation, Islamic scholars played an important role in shaping the public policies of Muslim majority countries. For example, the Grand Mufti had a prominent position in the Ottoman courts and the Sultans would rarely decide a significant domestic or foreign policy without consulting him first.

Islamic law and Muslim governments' public policies apply not only to the Muslims but to non-Muslims living in Muslim majority countries as well. Protection of their religion, life, intellect, lineage and property is guaranteed the same way as the Muslims.

The Second Righteous Caliph Omar is reported to have assigned a regular allowance for an old blind Jewish man from the government treasury by instructing the officials: "See to this man and his like, for we have not done right if we devour their youth and neglect their old age. The *zakat* (religious tax) is for the poor and needy, this man is one of the needy of the people of the Book."

Moreover, a *Saying* of the Prophet Muhammad that has been taken as a justification for *maslahah* (common good) is equally applicable to Muslims and non-Muslims: "*la darar wa la dirar fi'l-Islam*, in Islam, no harm shall be inflicted or reciprocated."

Individual Responsibility

Pursuit of the common good by Islamic law and Islamic governance does not absolve individual Muslims from doing so as well. In several instances the Holy *Quran* instructs Muslims to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, individually or in groups. For example: "Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right and forbids what is wrong: those who do this are the successful ones" (3:104).

This is part of the social responsibility Muslims have. Enjoining others to do or not do something implies that the individual has already implemented that themselves: "O ye who believe! Why say ye that which ye do not? Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do!" (*The Quran*, 61:2-3).

We can see that it is the duty of a Muslim first to inculcate in themselves the social values mentioned at the beginning of this article — values such as justice, equity and fairness, equality, fraternity, cooperation, decency, compassion, generosity and charity. Then they work with their families, neighbours and other groups in their cities and countries to promote and achieve the common good based on those values.

This is also a spiritual experience for a Muslim because while doing these things they remember God and they do it for the service of God and for earning God's good pleasure. ■

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Story of a Little Soul

BY JOY COWLEY

Sacred Mystery comes with feeling. We know this. We also know how hard it is to describe feeling. What Mystery needs is the garment of story to make it visible in words and, that no doubt, is why Jesus spoke in parables.

The Mystery of God's unconditional love calls for more stories and here is one that is close to Lent in our time and place.

Imagine, if you will, a neonatal clinic on the other side of what we call "death" — a place where newborn souls are gently tended by midwives before being sent home with God.

This welcoming centre is set halfway between incarnation and the spiritual realm and has elements of both: green floor tiles, white desk and chairs, and air filled with a dust of gold light that has a living, breathing quality. Several midwives work in shifts and today it's Suzanne Aubert who is at the desk. She has been called to give reassurance to a small soul that wants to return to its human body.

"A child?" Suzanne asks the midwife.

"Spiritually, yes," the midwife replies. "But in life-school years he is 78 and this was a major stroke. He's undeveloped, Suzanne, and he's brought much anger with him. This may be because his body is still on a life-support system in a hospital."

Suzanne Aubert notes a shiver in the midwife's light. "Did he vent his anger on you?"

The midwife bows her head and smiles. "He thinks a female soul has no authority. But there was worse to come. While we were talking, three larger souls passed through. Two were Muslim and one was an atheist. He was extremely upset."

Suzanne nods. "*Le pauvre petit enfant*. He needs love, Sister, much room for God's love. I will talk to him."

As the midwife leaves, the small soul rushes in, rippling the calm air and causing the white walls to shake. Yes, he is certainly damaged. His light is pale and fractured with anger. "It's a mistake! I demand to see the man in charge!"

Suzanne leans across the desk and holds out her hands. "What is your name, my dear?"

"Name?" His voice pierces like a red-hot needle. "You are asking me my name? If you don't know who I am, I'm certainly not going to tell you. Show me how to get out of here!"

"I have to call you something," she says.

He is too agitated to stand still. "My staff call me Sir," he snaps. "What is this crazy place? A bad dream? How do I wake up?"

"Dear Sir, you are in a house of welcome. Your body has just given birth to your soul and this is where all souls are received. Some bodies have long labours, allowing their souls time for preparation. Your birthing was sudden. You may still be a little confused."

He stops pacing. "You're telling me I'm dead?"

She smiles. "No, my dear Sir, there is no such thing as death, only transformation.

We all go through it and it's quite simple. You come into incarnation with a spark of God in you and that spark grows into a soul. When it is time for you to graduate from life school your body goes back to the earth and your soul comes to God who — "

"Cut the gobbledygook!" he shouts. "I'm dead. That's what you're saying, isn't it? But I'm not supposed to be dead. I've got a country to run. So help me, I'm not discussing this with office staff. Take me to your boss!"

Suzanne Aubert is not disturbed. She has seen many a child frightened, angry and her voice is soothing. "I know the suddenness has been a shock, dear Sir, but if you listen, I think I can help you understand."

"Help?" Instead of growing calm, the small soul projects

Illustration by Lily Warrenson

itself around the walls as a ball of yellow fire, trying to find a way out. "I know what this place is! Sheep and goats! Heaven and hell! It's the Judgement Zone, isn't it? Where the poor slobs wait in line to get a verdict? Well, I tell you this, old woman, I'm a godly man, not some idol-worshipping heathen. When it's my time I'll be going straight to heaven." He comes back to the floor beside her desk, stressing each word. "This — is — not — my — time!"

Suzanne remembers how she took children on her knee and calmed their fears. You can't do that with souls. You can only merge your love to be a part of them. This soul, however, is staying well out of her reach. She says, "There is no judgement place. That's the truth. God is pure love and love never judges us. We judge ourselves. As for heaven and hell, they are how we live on earth. Heaven is living in loving kindness to ourselves and others, and hell is living with hate that causes harm."

"Baloney!" he cries. "That kind of talk's a sure way to destroy civilisation! We've got to hate our enemies! There are bad guys coming after the good guys and if we don't destroy them, they'll overrun our country, killing us all. You want that should happen? We've got to drop those bombs to stop it!"

He pauses and says in a different voice. "Huh! You think I don't know about love? Believe me, I've been loved by the most beautiful women in the world — too many to count."

"Was it really love?" she asks, and when he doesn't reply, she says, "What about your parents?"

He vibrates so violently she thinks he may harm himself. "Don't try that old Freudian nonsense on me! I had the best parents anyone could wish for! They taught me the difference between good and evil and made me the man I am!" He gathers his light together. "I'm wasting time here. Where's the big guy?"

Suzanne smiles. "Everywhere. In this place, in you, in me. Every created thing is a manifestation of God." When she realises he hasn't understood, she goes on. "Dear Sir, it's very simple. Allow me to take you through it again. When we have our physical birth on earth, there is a spark of God inside us. We call it the seed of the soul. That spark of God will grow in the way we live for the common good. When the soul is ready, the body gives birth to it. Sir, you are in a place of celebration. Most souls are very pleased to be born."

His response is one of cold fury. "You are judging me!"

"Not at all!"

"You're saying there's something wrong with me because I don't want to be here!"

"No! Listen! There may be a reason for your reluctance. You haven't entirely left your body yet. It's in a hospital on life-support, which may be why you are still holding some body consciousness."

"So I'm not dead?"

Suzanne sighs. "Let's say your birthing is not quite complete. You are still attached."

The small soul comes closer. "So I can go back? Wake up from this crazy dream?"

She hesitates, then reaches out to him. "Yes, if you are sure that's what you want, it is possible. You can go back."

There is no opportunity to say more, for the soul flies like an arrow through the white wall which dissolves in the passing, then is firm again. The golden light in the room settles into stillness.

For a while, Suzanne Aubert sits with old earth memories of compassion and sadness for the pain of ignorance. She is wiping her eyes when the midwife returns.

"It was the right thing," says the midwife.

"He doesn't know how hard it will be," Suzanne says. "When he starts breathing on his own they'll switch off the machine. But he won't talk or walk again. He'll be like a puppet without strings."

The midwife drags a chair over and sets it next to Suzanne's. "He'll lose his toys, the wealth, power, ambition — all that will be useless! He will have a great emptiness."

They smile at each other and Suzanne says, "God so loves emptiness!"

"Yes," says the midwife. "The little soul will grow." ■

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

As Fledglings Dare

new feathery feats on wings
Sky-seeking, nest-returning,
so the springs
Of spring in us bring rising and return.
We yearn
For what we know not and for what we know.
We go

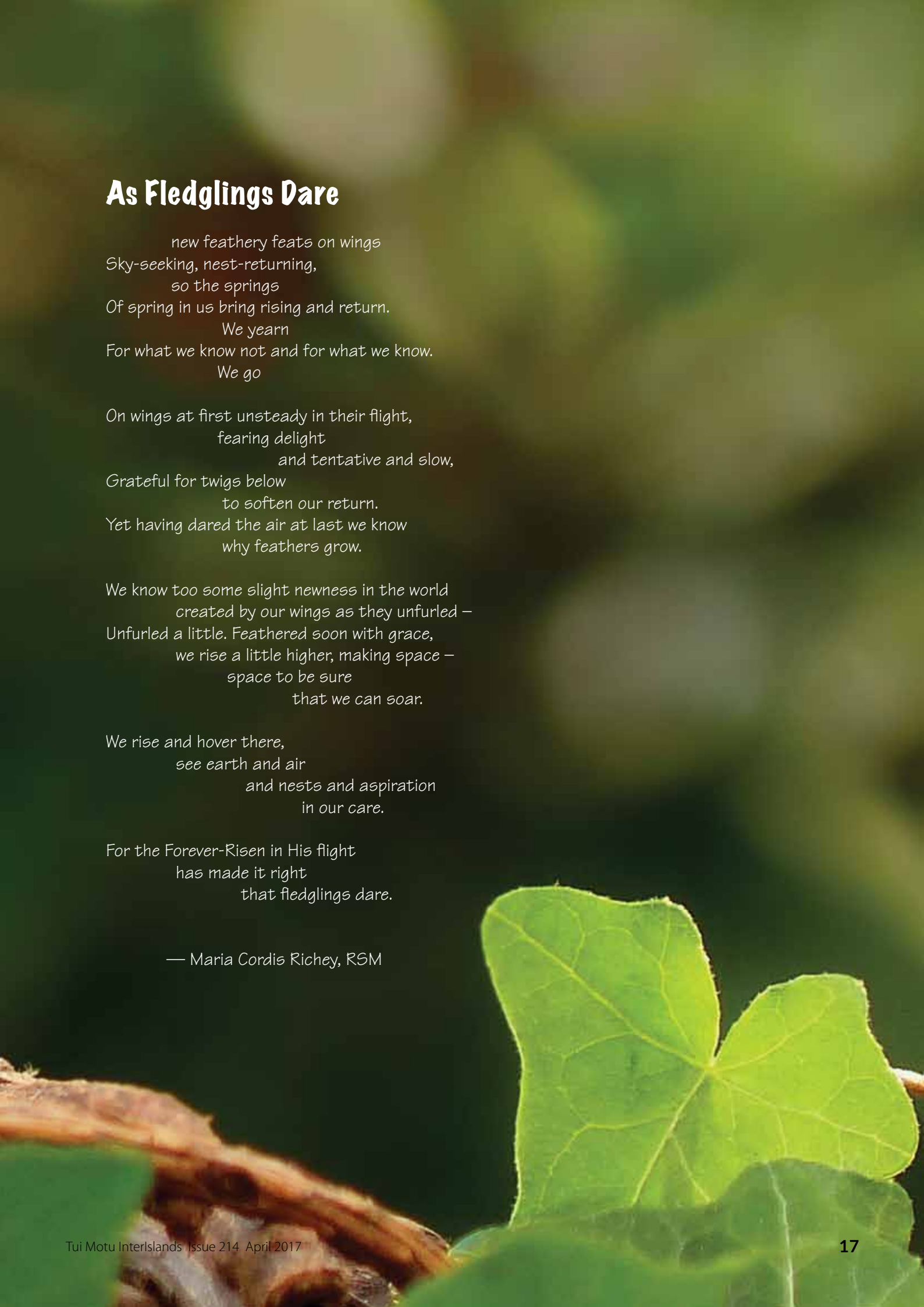
On wings at first unsteady in their flight,
fearing delight
and tentative and slow,
Grateful for twigs below
to soften our return.
Yet having dared the air at last we know
why feathers grow.

We know too some slight newness in the world
created by our wings as they unfurled –
Unfurled a little. Feathered soon with grace,
we rise a little higher, making space –
space to be sure
that we can soar.

We rise and hover there,
see earth and air
and nests and aspiration
in our care.

For the Forever-Risen in His flight
has made it right
that fledglings dare.

— Maria Cordis Richey, RSM



Erasmus

ICONIC FIGURE with **STAR ALLURE**

PETER MATHESON **introduces the Dutchman, Desiderius Erasmus as a visionary reformer and contemporary of Luther but who stayed with the Catholic Church.**

The spotlight will be on Martin Luther this year as it is 500 years since his 95 Theses about indulgences sparked off what we often call, rather carelessly, the Reformation. But movements for reform have always been part of the Church's history. The great monastic movement of the Early Church was launched in a desire for renewal of Christian life. Perhaps the best known of all reforming waves was that of the Franciscans and Dominicans reaching out to lay people in the 13th-century cities. We need to see the Augustinian friar, Martin Luther, in the context of these ongoing reforms. That's why historians these days speak of a multiplicity of 16th-century reformations — Catholic, humanist, communal, Lutheran, Reformed and Radical. In fact, the Church around 1500 throbbed with reform movements of many kinds — lay, monastic and clerical.

The culture of the 1500s was unbelievably different from ours today. At that time the influence of the Church permeated life in a way we cannot begin to imagine. Warm, personal piety was expressed in countless manifestations including pilgrimages, the celebration of saints' days and Marian festivals and above all, in the sacraments and devotions which accompanied every moment of individual and communal life from birth to death. Some felt the problem was not a lack of spirituality but a surfeit of it. Certainly that was the view of Catholic reformers such as John Colet, Dean of St Paul's London; Thomas More, famous for his fraught relationship with Henry VIII; and the superb classical scholar, Erasmus.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) stemmed from the Netherlands but his work had a truly European resonance. He was an iconic figure with star allure. To receive a letter from him — and his web of correspondents was huge — was a coveted distinction. Often his letters went straight into print. You won't go far wrong if you imagine enthusiastic teachers, lawyers, priests, monks and nuns from Spain to Hungary sporting a lapel badge: "I love Erasmus!" A superb Latin and Greek scholar, Erasmus symbolised for thousands of laymen and women, as well as clergy, the need to get back *ad fontes*, to the sources. By this he meant to study the writings of the Early Fathers and above all the Bible.

In many of the courts, cities and monasteries of Germany, Italy, France and elsewhere, little groups or sodalities gathered to discuss his writings — rather like today's book clubs. As Erasmus's writings were in Latin we might be tempted to dismiss these gatherings as élitist but their members were the opinion-makers of the age; advisers to princes, city clerks, merchants, teachers, students and poets.

One of Erasmus's greatest achievements was the brand new edition of the New Testament in 1516 — going back to the original Greek. Luther profited from it, as did biblical scholars throughout Christendom. Erasmus was alive to the potential of the new printing press to make available to the growing literate class, outside the universities, new editions of the works of Augustine, Jerome and the Cappadocian Fathers. He felt most at home in the printing press of friends such as John Froben, of Basel.

Erasmus was no mere scholar, though. He had a vision of a less cluttered Church and of a spirituality that gave worth and dignity to daily life, to the personal and communal work and relationships of ordinary people. He thought that the ploughman in the field should have direct access to the songs and prayers of the faith. He had a feel, too, for the folly of the Gospel. One of his most famous and witty books is *The Praise of Folly*. He wrote: "Christ seems to take his greatest delight in little children, women and fishermen."

In Erasmus sophistication was yoked to a yearning for simplicity, *innocentia*. Discipleship was not about a retreat from the world, about "being religious", but about following the way of Jesus in the world. Key words for him were harmony, moderation, peacemaking. He said that mercenary warfare and the pursuit of martial glory were a dreadful curse. He condemned them in memorable terms: "Princes display brawn rather than intelligence."

Today we could learn much from his passion for good communication. One of his intriguing insights is that conversation comes alive not through clever words on the lips of the speaker, or through the attentive ears of the listener, but in the space between. He had a profound awareness of the dynamics involved in a real meeting of minds. One mark of true humanity, he believed, was civility — patient listening to the viewpoint of those who differ from us — real dialogue. In the bitter controversies on everything from domestic to religious to political matters much could be achieved, he believed, if only those involved would agree to sit around a table in a respectful and prayerful manner.

Erasmus could wield an acidic pen. He had no patience with pomp and ceremony, a purely outward piety. He fiercely criticised Renaissance bishops and popes, such as Julius II, for their neglect of pastoral and theological matters and their participation in military campaigns. A savage satire, almost

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Portrait of Erasmus by Hans Holbein the Younger [Wikipedia]

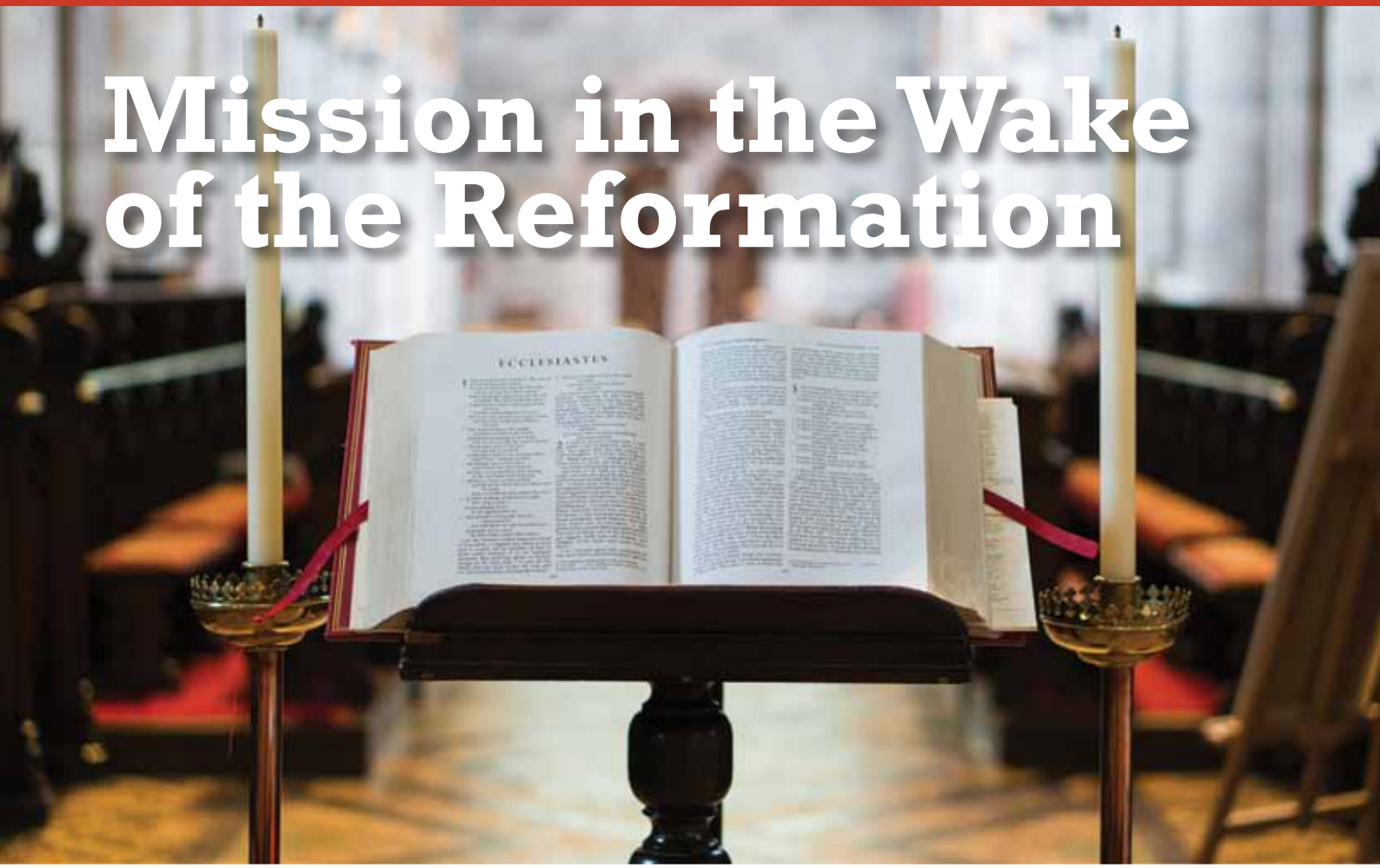
certainly written by him, portrayed Pope Julius being "excluded from heaven". Erasmus and his followers campaigned for a better educated clergy and lampooned the pluralism, absenteeism and other abuses of the upper clergy. They also believed that proportions and priorities had been lost in much popular and superstitious piety. He said: "You could rush off to Rome or Compostela and buy up a million indulgences, but in the last analysis there is no better way of reconciling yourself with God than reconciling yourself with your neighbour."

His concern for the unity of the Church distanced Erasmus from Luther — who described him, predictably, as a "slippery eel". However, the truth is that their aims and perspectives were rather different. Erasmus stood for a gradual reform of the Church which would be achieved by a better educated clergy and by nudging the laity towards a personal, inward faith. For him the worst evil was hardness of heart and the best remedy — self-knowledge.

Erasmus also had his faults. He could be vain and twitchy when criticised. Some would say that he had scant appreciation of the sacramental and mystical life of the Church and tended to reduce the Gospel to a moral code. But like his great model, the 4th-century Church Father, Jerome, his long-term influence was benign and lasting. The humanist spirit he personified has nothing in common with modern humanism. His concern was profoundly religious and his championing of tolerance and moderation come close to what we would see today as a humane and liberal outlook.

We can glimpse his understanding and hope in his words: "Christian mercy should not be of the ordinary kind. God is appeased by several forms of sacrifice, spiritual hymns, songs, prayers, watchings, fastings, poor clothing; but no sacrifice is more effective than mercy towards your neighbour. Since we continually need God's mercy in all things, we should always try to relieve each other with mutual mercy and to bear one another's burdens. With one heart and one mind we shall sing eternally that the mercy of the Lord surpasses all his works." ■

Mission in the Wake of the Reformation



JOHN ROXBOROGH explores how social influences and reading Scripture guided Protestant Churches to engage in mission beyond Europe.

There can be some surprises when we look at the Reformation and the focus and understanding of biblically-backed mission in the 500 years since.

The debates sparked by Martin Luther made it clear that, for those who believed that the Church of the day was fundamentally mistaken, the Bible was the only authority to which the Church should be accountable. Protestants believed that a true Church looked to the Scriptures for how they should worship and obey God. They soon discovered that the meaning of the Scriptures was not always clear. And while they fiercely affirmed the principle of private judgement, in practice, the new Churches, like the old, depended on their leaders to interpret what "Scripture alone" actually meant in their particular contexts.

Reading the Bible Essential

As the Reformation spread across Northern Europe ordinary Christians were profoundly affected by the Bible in understanding their relationship with God and their roles in the life and work of the Church. Christian discipline still mattered but Romans 1:16–17 was a key text underlining the belief that personal faith and trust rather than acquired merit was what was essential in the face of death and judgement. To understand what God wanted, each person should be able to hear, and if possible read, the Word of God in their own language. Trained preachers were needed but every role and station in life was thought of as a calling from God.

Mission Focus on Europe

Political and social circumstances also shaped their understanding. It is no accident that Presbyterian Churches adopted a system of governance rather like the Protestant cities of Geneva and Strasbourg. While some, like John Knox, highlighted the text of Mt 24:14 with its emphasis on preaching to all nations, most thought of the "nations" as referring to the nations of Europe.

Since Protestant rulers held sway over few places with non-Christian populations, it was easy to believe that the "Great Commission" of Mt 28:19–20 ceased with the Apostles. The fact that the Catholic Church was newly engaged in mission overseas did not help Protestants look beyond their own circumstances. Catholic orders like the Jesuits were active in mission in the areas of Spanish and Portuguese conquest in South America and parts of Asia, as

well as further afield in Japan and China. If Catholics were doing it — it must be suspect! Among Protestants only the Anabaptists and a few isolated Calvinists and Lutherans had a sense of missionary duty.

Mission Focus outside Europe

It was only when Protestant rulers expanded their realms through trade, colonialism and empire, that the missionary texts of the Bible seriously began to challenge Protestant thinking. As awareness of peoples in North America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific grew, Protestants become champions of overseas mission convinced that Jesus' charge to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel" applied to them.

In new political and social circumstances, new instruments of mission also had to be invented. The first Mission Societies had royal charters, but from the 1790s voluntary missionary societies, such as the Baptist Missionary Society, were modelled on commercial enterprises.

Mission Duty of All Christians

There was also a change in the understanding of what it meant to be a real Christian. In the 1600s, debates about theology and worship had become so intellectual that only the educated and scholarly could follow the logical reasoning they said was needed for true belief. Popular religious revivals for ordinary people grew up as a reaction and through the experiences of conversion and personal renewal many felt the sense of being "constrained by Jesus' love" (2 Cor 5:14). Methodism had a mission to the working classes of Britain and on the American frontiers and was soon taking its message to the world. A sense of collective guilt for involvement in the slave trade fuelled a sense of missionary obligation as part reparation for the harm done. News of what was happening in Africa, India — and New Zealand — spread through missionary journals, letters and Sunday Schools. To many the message sounded like a call straight from Scripture: "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (Acts 16:9).

The magnitude of human need in places like Africa and China led to the discovery of texts such as Luke 4:18–19 where Jesus applied the "social gospel" of Isaiah to himself. Others identified with the Pentecost narratives of Acts and the promise: "You will have power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). Others took to heart in the prayer of Jesus (Jn 17) when facing the lack of unity among sending Churches and their missions. As understanding of other religions grew past naïve first encounters, other Scriptures became relevant — Jesus came "not to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17); Paul called Philippians (Phil 4:8) to affirm what was true, honourable and just, without regard to where such qualities might be found.

Mission and Collaboration

Since Vatican II, the challenge to read the Bible as a missionary document has become an ecumenical venture and Catholics and Protestants have been learning from one another for longer than their history of conflict might suggest. The first Protestant missionaries in China studied the preceding Jesuit missions. Pioneer Catholic missiologists like Joseph Schmidlin SVD engaged with Protestant and Catholic mission history and built his thinking on John 20:21: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." In time, this text underscored the shared realisation that mission is always God's before it is ours; all we do is rooted in the *Missio Dei* — the mission of God.

It has taken us a while to understand the dynamic relationship between Scripture, tradition and circumstance in communities and to learn to engage with people and culture to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches in our time. Groups such as the International Association for Mission Studies bring together writers including Catholic Stephen Bevans SVD, and the late Protestant David Bosch (author of the classic text, *Transforming Mission)* showing the importance of cross-fertilisation of Catholic and Protestant learning in mission.

Political and social circumstances shape our understanding of God's will. In particular, an open engagement with cultural diversity helps us see that the Word of God is never exhausted by the often false alternatives generated by conflict. In times when the very idea of truth is challenged, experiences in mission across cultures can help us believe that new insights will continue to appear to refresh and lead God's people. ■

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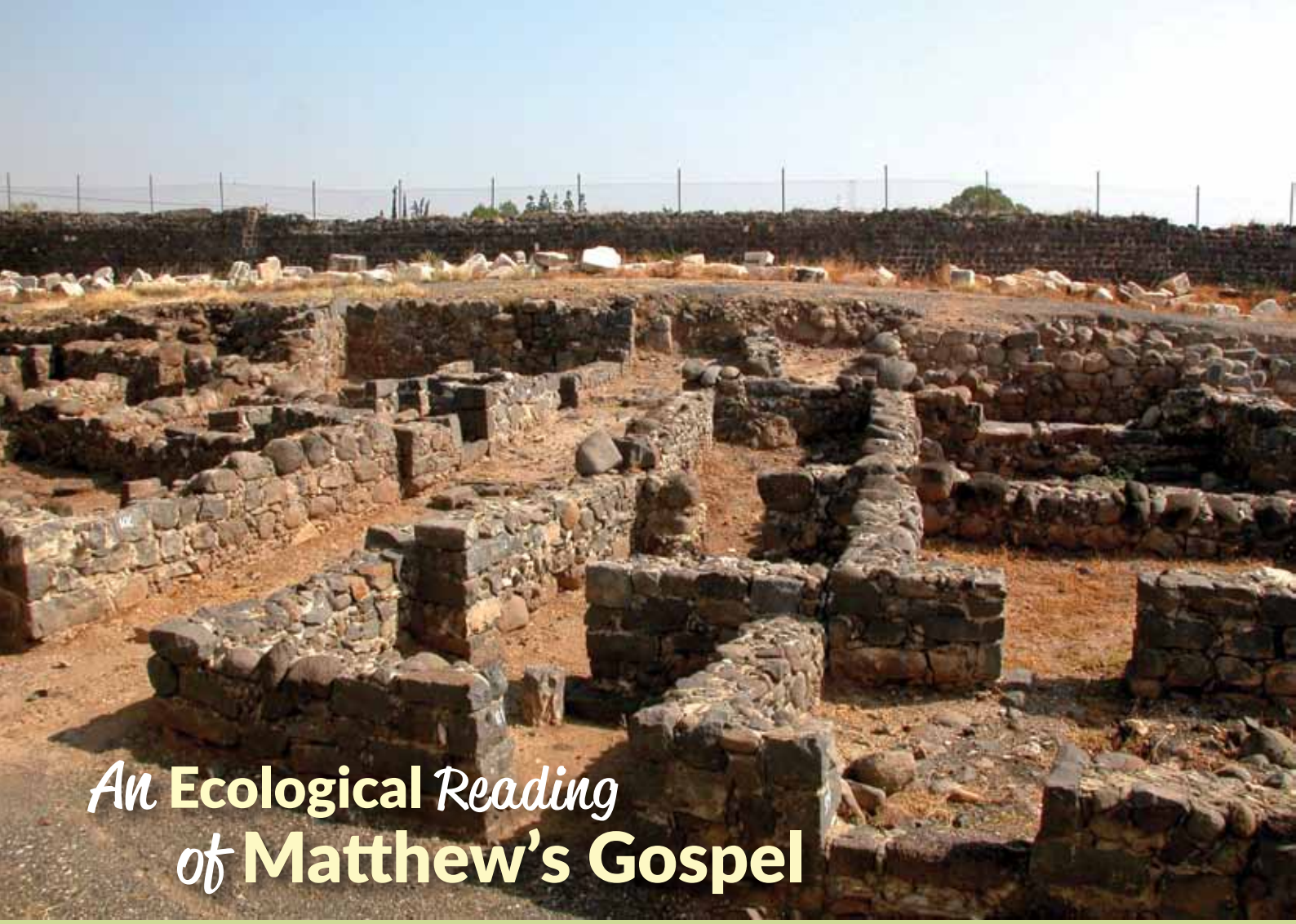

An Ecological Reading of Matthew's Gospel

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT pays particular attention to the interaction with the environment of Peter's house and his mother-in-law's place in it in her reading of Matthew 8:14-15.

8:14 When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; 15 he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him. ***NRSV***

The text I have chosen for an ecological reading this month is just two verses, Matthew 8:14–15. It is usually named the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and it belongs among a collection of healing stories in Mt 8–9, similar to that of Jesus' teachings in Mt 5–7. These chapters and collections of stories are framed by Mt 4:23 and Mt 9:35: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the *basileia*/kindom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people." Teaching and healing constitute the Galilean ministry of Jesus and both are rich in potential for ecological readings.

Healing Stories in Matthew

Before concentrating on the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, we can consider gospel healing from an ecological perspective. The healing stories invite readers into the profound materiality at play in the text — the materiality of bodies broken, bodies touched, bodies healed — and the stories take place in geographical, cultural and social habitats.

Another key aspect is how the senses function — seeing, hearing, touching — each giving access to the material. All of these elements interact in the text and invite our ecological engagement.

The Place and Houses

The story in Mt 8:14–15 locates Jesus in a very specific place. The narrative says he enters a house — Peter's house. Materially, the text evokes Capernaum's 1st-century basalt houses with their roofing constructed of branches and clay. These houses were the scene of the lives and economic activities of the families who lived in them. (In Mt 4:13 we read that Jesus makes his home in that town.)

The families' food production and other industries were carried out in either the rooms of the house

or in the courtyard. Hence, the ecological texture of the opening words of the text is constituted by a complex mix of basalt and branches, food, clothing, bedding and perhaps the multiple resources associated with the fishing industry for which Capernaum was famous.

Jesus Sees the Woman

Jesus enters Peter's house and sees Peter's mother-in-law. She is introduced in language that is descriptive of the violence of the illness on her human body — she is "cast down"/*beblēmenēn* as well as being feverish. That Jesus sees the woman functions as the initial stage in the healing process. Ecological readers will note that it is *seeing* which leads to healing. It is a seeing which recognises the dis-ease, the brokenness, the mal-functioning of bodies within socio-cultural and ecological systems, all of which are in need of healing.

Jesus Touches the Woman

Then with a shift in sensory activity *seeing* gives rise to *touching*. The text says that Jesus touches her hand, making explicit what is implicit in touch, namely that touching and being touched are reciprocal in the one act. Touch is a call and a response to a call. Jesus responds to the call from the tormented body of the woman and his touching calls for healing from within her.

I think that the intimacy of touch and being touched in the Matthean Gospel embodies a way in which God is with the Earth community as we saw in Mt 1:23. God is near in the intimacy of touch, in the meeting of flesh, in the restoring of material/fleshly brokenness. Touch is a key characteristic in the more-than-human world and its healing, a world which is home to multiple species and life-forms.

The final two phrases of our narrative describe the woman's bodily change. She was being raised up and she was doing *diakonia*. Healing is manifest in material or corporeal changes which are then interpreted to make meaning within the cultural sphere.

Not Just Healing — A Call

Another aspect Mt 8:14–15 is not always recognised but has significant ecological implications. We have just read this text as a healing narrative within the context of the healing collection of the gospel (Mt 8-9) and noted the importance of seeing and touching.

It is essential that we don't dismiss the woman's doing as the ordinary good deeds of a woman in the household. The significance of diakonia in Matthew's Gospel comes from Mt 20:28 when Jesus appropriates it to his own ministry — "he came not to be served but to serve".

However, when the form or structure of Mt 8:14–15 is compared with other healing narratives, we find a discrepancy in form. It becomes clear in the statement that Jesus *sees* the woman and takes the initiative to heal. Generally in healing narratives, the person requests healing or supplicants ask on their behalf. This shows that Mt 8:14–15 is much closer to the structure of a call story (see Mt 9:9) than a healing story (see Mt 8:2–4). Actually, it is exactly parallel to Mat 9:9 when Jesus calls Matthew, except for the phrase "the fever left her". This is the only call story of a woman to discipleship of Jesus that has been preserved in the New Testament.

Attending to Nuances of Story

It is important to recognise this call when reading ecologically as it makes us attentive to the manifestations of oppression and injustice in both the human and other-than-human worlds and their interrelationships. Women's participation in the Matthean Gospel story is minimal compared to the centrality of male characters and even with the other-than-human actants in the narrative.

However, my study indicates that there is a significant story-line of female characters in the text, beginning with the women in the genealogy (Mt 1:3, 5, 6, 16) and ending with the women commissioned to proclaim the resurrection (Mt 28:1-10). Therefore, it's not surprising that the Matthean community retained the story of a woman called to discipleship as seen in Mt 8:14-15.

On the other hand, it is also not surprising that this radical story might have morphed into a more acceptable one — the healing of a woman rather than the woman's call to discipleship. The attentive ecological reader will note this gendering of a text as much as to the materiality encoded within that text and their interrelationships.

Woman Called to Ministry

In the last phrase of Mt 8:15 the woman is said to be doing *diakonia* or *diakonia-ing*. It is essential that we don't dismiss the woman's *doing* as the ordinary good deeds of a woman in the household. Peter's mother-in-law is doing what the women did who followed Jesus to Jerusalem and right to the foot of the cross (Mt 27:55). Like them, she ministers to Jesus. The significance of *diakonia* in Matthew's Gospel comes from Mt 20:28 when Jesus appropriates it to his own ministry — "he came not to be served but to serve".

I hope this reading of the short story, Mt 8:14–15, will encourage you to explore the healing stories of Mt 8–9 further attending to the telling details of the relationships of the material, the habitats and all the characters in the stories. This is a challenging but focused invitation. ■

Photograph: *Basalt houses, Capernaum* © by Todd Bolen. www.BiblePlaces.com. Used with permission.

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Journeying to Emmaus

KATHLEEN RUSHTON **uses two artworks in her interpretation of the Emmaus Story in Luke 24:13-35.**

The painting and the icon, two interpretations of the Emmaus story, are separated by nearly 400 years and come from opposite positions around the globe. The painting is from early 17th-century Spain and the icon from 21st-century Aotearoa New Zealand. Each can take us on a different yet similar journey into the encounter between Jesus and two disciples who were slow to recognise that the One they were talking about and to was with them.

It is amazing what we find when we gaze at Diego Velazquez's painting, *Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus*. In the centre a young, black, kitchen maid is at her workbench surrounded by kitchen utensils. She has stopped working. Her full attention and concentration draw the viewer into the picture, into what absorbs her. She leads us to follow the tilt of her head and the direction of her eyes. What has she heard? What has she seen?

Planted in Present Reality

Framed within her picture is another painting, though incomplete, that of the supper at Emmaus. We see the faint figure of Jesus with his hands raised blessing the bread. On the right is a disciple leaning forward and on the left we see only the hand of the second disciple. In a 17th-century Seville kitchen the kitchenmaid looks back. Her scene is juxtaposed with the time and story of the Emmaus supper which we enter through her kitchen and her eyes.

This Emmaus scene captures the moment just before the shadowy figure in the background disappears for: "Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight" (Lk 24:31). The kitchen maid represents true faith for she does not see physically as the two disciples did. Yet, she hears the Word of God and believes. Anne Thurston said: "The kitchen maid becomes a symbol for the woman today who reads the scripture with her head inclined towards what was written, listening attentively for the wisdom there, but with her feet firmly and solidly planted in her present reality as she asks: 'What is the Good News for women now?'"

Planted Firmly and Solidly

An ever-new, reoccurring question arises for people with their "feet firmly and solidly planted in [their] present reality" in Aotearoa New Zealand: What is Good News for people today? Velazquez places a poor, marginalised, black, servant woman at the centre. Maybe she is a bonded labourer or slave. Her position is very different from the two disciples. We might ask ourselves who we would paint at the centre of this scene today and what story our character would tell.

Phil Dyer's 2002 icon, *Meeting Christ on the Way* also places a woman in the story by depicting a couple, a man and a woman on the road to Emmaus. This depiction is supported by an interesting convergence between John's tradition that Mary of Clopas, a relative of the mother of Jesus, was present at the cross (Jn 19:25) and Luke's tradition that Cleopas was a disciple who

3rd Sunday of Easter 30 April

was in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion (Lk 24:18). Clopas and Cleopas are forms of a rare name found only in these two gospels and in Hegesippus, a 2nd-century writer. Mary of Clopas, then, may well be the wife of Cleopas who accompanied him on the road to Emmaus. Among other husband and wife disciples in the early church are Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7) and Prisca and Aquila (I Cor 16:19). Again, we might wonder what story a couple today might tell of their meeting Jesus on the Way.

The icon's setting is a rural Canterbury landscape. In the background is the snow-capped Torlesse Range from which three rivers flow irrigating the plains. In his explanation of the icon, Phil Dyer points out that the travellers did not perceive the Risen One's presence but that creation responds with eager expectation (Rom 8:19) "as shown by the fern fronds — symbols of new life — which unfold along the path, and silently invite the viewer to also unfold the moments of hope and grace that are encountered in the course of daily life, sometimes being so close that they are missed in the business or mundaneness of living."

Now viewing the icon nearly 20 years later we know that creation is responding with eager expectation not silently but in loud lament inviting us to be attentive to the greatly diminished flow and quality of water in the braided rivers and also in the aquifers deep beneath the plains. A front-page article in the Christchurch newspaper The Press (24 Feb 2017) included a map sourced from the Ministry of Environment showing Canterbury rivers colour-coded according to their "swimability". While the rivers of the high country regions showed the blues and greens of excellent and good, those flowing through the plains showed the yellows and browns of fair, intermittent and poor.

Non-Violent Resistance

Jesus himself lived in violent times. Justin Taylor SM points out that in Roman occupied Palestine, for those first hearers of Luke's Gospel, "going to Emmaus" would mean going to join those who advocated a violent military option to overthrow the Romans. Usually Jews worked in peacefully with their foreign rulers because, from the time of Jeremiah, they believed that their various situations were part of God's plan to chastise and redeem Israel. This view changed from the time of Maccabees when some (but not all) Jews, began to support armed revolt. The Battle of Emmaus (166 BCE) against the occupying Greek forces was a significant victory for Judas Maccabeus (I Mac 3:40; II Mac 8:8–29).

The two disciples spoke "about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (Lk 24:19). With disappointment they recount how he was condemned and crucified. They had hoped he was going to be the one to set Israel free (Lk 24:20–21). "Going to Emmaus" suggests they were joining those taking the violent option because they were disillusioned with Jesus who, as Pope Francis reminds us in his World Day of Peace message, "marked out the path of nonviolence." After meeting, and later recognising Jesus, the two disciples returned to Jerusalem and found the 11 and their disciples (Lk 24:33).

So we journey reading scripture with our head inclined towards what was written, listening attentively for the wisdom there, but with our feet firmly and solidly planted in the present reality of Aotearoa New Zealand. We can ask: "What is the Good News for people now?" At times we might be like the two confused, puzzled disciples journeying away from Jerusalem and then meeting the Risen Jesus unknowingly (Lk 24:15), the same Jesus we meet so often unknowingly. In the Emmaus journey as in our journey, we traverse a range of emotions: sadness, disappointment, confusion, gloom, bewilderment, blindness and suspense, as well as discovery, hope, joy, dawning recognition, care, non-violence, empowerment and excitement. ■

Top left: *Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus*, Diego Velazquez. c.1618 (Beit Collection, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin. ©

This page: Icon *Meeting Christ on the Way*, written by Phil Dyer. 2002. © Copyright and used with permission.

Kathleen Rushton RSM is the Residential Scholar at Vaughan Park Centre, Auckland and is continuing her research and writing on John's Gospel.

Constructive Conversations about Politics

Election season is just around the corner. On 23rd September New Zealanders will turn out to have their say by casting their votes. Political parties are beginning to gear up for the campaign trail and are starting to declare policies and priorities. Already we have seen significant changes, such as the resignation of John Key and subsequent announcement of Bill English as Prime Minister, as well as Jacinda Ardern taking the place of Annette King as the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party.

The lead-up to the election offers increased opportunities for conversations about politics over the dinner table. Political discussions can have the effect of polarising people and causing tensions in friendships and family relationships. The way that we cast our vote is often deeply personal. The boxes that we tick on our election forms encompass the very things that we value and think are important to a fair and functioning society. And it's one of the few times that every voter has an equal say. In an election my vote has exactly the same weighting as the CEO of a multinational company. When it comes to complex issues such as the rates of child poverty in New Zealand and government action on climate change, it is little wonder that we find it difficult to reconcile different views.

Being able to talk about politics constructively is a desirable skill. The beauty of living in a representative democracy is that it allows us to vote for candidates who represent our views and, hopefully, our voices. So how do we have constructive conversations with people who see politics in very different ways from ourselves?

"Everyone you will ever meet knows something you don't." This very simple statement by Bill Nye provides one of the keys to listening well and understanding others' points of view. When we enter into political discussions, we are bringing our whole person with us — our culture, religion, upbringing, the sections of society that we have existed in, our educational background and so much more. So the political views in any conversation may well encompass a vast range of experiences and thoughts.

It helps to make a conscious effort not to see differing opinions as scary or wrong, but as ways to facilitate the growth of our own ideas and thought processes. If we approach every conversation we have about the upcoming election with openness — without assuming we know what other peoples' views will be, or whether they lean to the left or the right — we create an opportunity to deepen our own understanding and develop our thinking. By approaching each conversation as if we have something to learn from it, we are more likely to have constructive and non-judgemental conversations.

Learning to ask our conversation partners more questions than they ask us is another avenue for developing successful political conversational skills. It follows from the approach of treating each conversation as a learning opportunity. By asking open-ended, thoughtful questions and resisting the urge to jump in with our own ideas, we are more likely to get an in-depth understanding of the other person's opinion. Learning to ask questions well can also be a sophisticated tool for opening up the conversation so we can include our own views. Nobody enjoys being told they are wrong and changing someone's opinion is a mighty mountain to conquer. But by asking a thoughtful question there is the chance that it will stretch a person's thoughts on a subject in a positive way.

We can always find common ground. While we may have very different opinions on, say, climate change from the person we are debating with, it is very likely that they will share something — a love of our beautiful National Parks, or the accessibility of our coastline, or wanting to swim in our rivers. By focusing on this common ground we can engage in these crucial conversations in a non-confrontational and healthy way. ■

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

CALLING THE MEDIA TO ACCOUNT

I am a journalist, but I have an irreconcilable and fundamental disagreement with the media environment I work in. Journalism has been replaced, it seems to me, by "content creation" — a response to the incessant hunger and commercial need to fill 24 hours of airtime, airwaves and digital headlines with whatever is at hand. Harassed by this ever-refreshing daily news cycle, we forget ourselves and, in doing so, forget each other.

Donald Trump, the recently elected so-called "leader of the free world", is the very epitome of this disposable media phenomenon. So much publicity is given to Trump and his toxic 140-character tweets, that it is now impossible to open a newspaper — or an iPad application impersonating a newspaper — without encountering half a dozen references to him and his utterances. Meanwhile the world continues spinning — but all we can seem to talk about is a single man.

That's not to say that media tunnel vision is a new occurrence. For very plain and practical reasons the news cycle cannot be expected to cover the individual and collective plights of 200-odd sovereign nations. Traditionally, broadsheet newspapers, "the wireless" and the TV evening news followed roughly the same format: domestic current affairs first, then one or two stories from our allies, our neigbours and culturally familiar countries.

To some extent this tradition persists. Cultural proximity explains why a terror attack in France attracts days of coverage in New Zealand and Australia, while larger attacks in Kenya and Nigeria barely earn a headline. While both are tragic, one is deemed to be more interesting to audiences.

But as we became more interconnected technologically, there was a very reasonable assumption that our news and media would become broader and more diverse. I would argue that never eventuated. Digital news sites that sprang up with the meteoric rise of the Internet only led to the same stories being spread and amplified. We can now read 40 versions of the same puff-piece across a whole range of media: what we have is a more comprehensive view of the same news, not the smorgasbord of analysis we hoped for.

It is true that we now have access to an abundance of perspectives, but a cursory survey of the largest news sites leaves me with the feeling that the conversations generated aren't meaningful — rather, they are self-perpetuating, content produced for the sake of filling a commercial void for a struggling industry. A regrettable glance at the comment section usually only compounds this feeling.

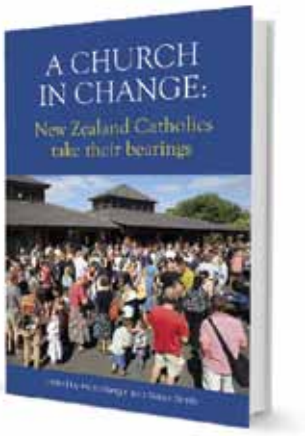
While we are bombarded with whatever hot air has just escaped the White House, we may remain blissfully unaware of what is happening elsewhere. Right now, for example, famine is sweeping South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen, threatening the lives of some 20 million people. So serious is this threat that 1.4 million children in those four countries alone are considered at imminent risk of death this year. I do not consider it a radical argument to say that the media would serve us all more valuably by covering this humanitarian disaster in-depth instead of the political posturing happening in the US right now.

I do not wish to take a cheap shot at journalists, nor do I want to discredit the media altogether. However, I do think our newswomen and newsmen would do well to reflect on what the media environment has become and at what expense.

Just like democracy, the media works only when we're all paying attention. It pains me to see that the most popular stories in national newspapers are those concerning celebrities or political froth, but I understand the media is a business like any other. I'm not saying it is wrong for us to be gripped by the breakup of Brangelina, only that we move on to click on a more pressing and significant news story when that moment has passed. ■

Jack Derwin is a journalist, freelance writer and pending graduate plotting his return to Latin America.

A Church in Change:
New Zealand Catholics Take Their Bearings



Edited by Helen Bergin and Susan Smith
Published by Accent Publications, 2016
Reviewed by Anne Tuohy

With *A Church in Change: New Zealand Catholics Take Their Bearings*, Helen Bergin and Susan Smith bring another local spiritual/theological anthology to the New Zealand scene. Like their previous publications, this book offers a wide range of reflections from a diverse group of people centred around a unifying theme; in this case that of being Church. Drawing on a variety of life experiences, the different chapters in this book vividly demonstrate that the time when the word "Church" suggested a universal picture of Catholic life has gone. The experience of Church for contemporary Catholics living in Aotearoa New Zealand is now one of diversity and change.

The book is divided into three sections with each of the 23 chapters generally reflecting on both the past and present realities of the authors' experiences of Church with an eye to future challenges and future possibilities. In diverse ways, each chapter contributes to the rich landscape that is New Zealand Catholicism. What emerges from these contributions is an appreciation of both the broad and the singular influences our religious voices have contributed to the shaping of our land, life and culture. From the long-held conversations around education and social justice, to the emergent ecological dialogues, it is clear that while the New Zealand Church may be numerically small it has certainly covered a lot of ground.

One thing that struck me when reading this book was the engagement with, or tension between, continuity and change. The Catholic Church has had a long history of — and much practise with — surviving in the face of change and adversity. I think this ability to affirm *unity* while navigating the changing currents of the contemporary experiences of *diversity* comes from the sacramental imagination that lies at the very heart of our tradition. It reflects a commitment to take the mission of the Church seriously while still acknowledging that "we are prophets of a future not our own" (Archbishop Oscar Romero Prayer).

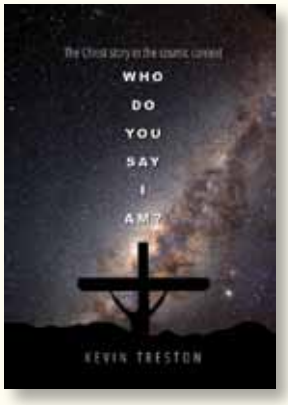
In presenting thematic perspectives into the rich and diverse reality that is our Church, this book offers something for readers across a range of ages and experiences. It caters to different levels of theological and religious literacy appealing particularly to the non-specialist reader. ■

Who Do You Say I Am?
The Christ Story in the Cosmic Context

by Kevin Treston

Published by Morning Star Publishing 2016

Reviewed by Colin MacLeod



Kevin Treston is an educator and writer committed to facilitating deep engagement with faith at personal and institutional levels. He has a record of taking on the complexity of being Church in the modern world with a critical but always hope-filled pragmatism. His latest work, *Who Do You Say I Am?* is exactly what readers of his previous books might expect — a challenge to look at the universe and the divine anew.

From being a teacher in a Catholic secondary school until recently, I know the claims which often leap from the mouths of teenagers blessed with the belief that they know more about the "real world" than their parents will ever know. Comments such as: "Science clearly shows that God doesn't exist"; "There is no heaven or hell"; "If there were no religions there would be no wars." Yet these statements need to be listened to because they are often made as a challenge, rather than *fait accompli*. And by others, too, not just young people. I recently heard Bishop Robert Barron say that we need to engage with these commenters because otherwise we let them assume there is no response.

Kevin's book is filled with questions. The book is designed for small group discussion in which people can engage deeply with contemporary scientific knowledge and then reflect on tradition, Scripture and faith. This book is not for the faint-hearted as there is an overt call for significant change in Church teaching and personal belief. However, the science is presented in a balanced and coherent manner and the author never loses sight of the deep reality of the divine. The challenge is not to get swamped by the detail of the book but to keep in mind the ultimate question: Today, here, surrounded by old and new knowledge, Jesus asks me: "Who do you say I am?" And I must answer. ■

Silence

Directed by Martin Scorcese
Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

Martin Scorcese's remarkable new film has been a long time gestating, but is well worth the wait. Although dealing with intimate and very painful encounters, it generates a sense of grandeur through its depiction of the clash of cultures and ancient religious traditions, as well as its meditative pace and powerful evocation of time and place. But while stories of heroic martyrdom and steadfastness under torture may have fuelled the faith of Catholics in earlier, more threatening times, how far is this kind of spirituality appropriate in today's world?

Based on Shusaku Endo's 1966 novel set in 17th-century Japan, the storyline of *Silence* is simple. Two young Portuguese Jesuits, Frs Sebastião Rodrigues and Francisco Garupe (Andrew Garfield and Adam Driver), set out to discover the fate of fellow Jesuit, Fr Cristóvão Ferreira, who is believed to have apostasised under torture. Making landfall in secret, they discover and minister to small Christian communities which are suffering brutal persecution from the *shogunate*. Scorcese generates tremendous dramatic tension as the mission proceeds: while the two priests bring the Gospel and sacraments to their scattered flock, in so doing they put them in terrible danger.

As the film slowly unfolds, the meaning of the "silence" of the title is explored. On one level, it is the silence of the Japanese Christians who must keep their faith secret. On a deeper level, it is, as Fr Rodrigues fears, the silence of a God who takes no action to save the people. There is also a brooding, meditative silence cast over the film, reflected in the numerous shots of water, damp forest and figures emerging from the mists. At their most despairing, the missionaries see Japan as a desolate swamp where the new faith cannot take root.

Scorcese's emphasis on silence means that negative images of faith prevail over positive ones. In this world, there is more doubt than certainty, darkness than light, sorrow than joy. The driving forces of the narrative are doubt, mistrust and fear. When we finally meet Fr Ferreira (Liam Neeson), he shuffles onstage, a subdued, defeated figure. Scorcese's depiction of Christian faith is deeply ambiguous: by the end of the film, has Fr Rodrigues finally surrendered the ideal of heroic martyrdom for a simple trust in the mercy of God?

Silence is an important contribution to world cinema. The sense of authenticity it elicits results from the years that Scorcese put into crafting it and the lengths to which the actors went to inhabit their roles. Garfield, for example, spent several months being led through Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* by a leading American Jesuit. However, at the end of the film, we ask: is God still silent, or is the "still, small voice" discernible to those with ears to hear? ■

A Parish Apart

DVD directed by Sinéad Donnelly
Reviewed by Tony & Ruth Spelman

The DVD, *A Parish Apart*, produced and directed by Sinéad Donnelly in 2015, offers an inspiring insight into Kiwi spirituality expressed with dignity, joy and humour. It is the story of Carterton parishioners who dreamed about the kind of parish they hoped for and what happened over the next 13 years. A pastoral team worked with parish priest Eddie Condra to lead and guide

the process. Their vision of parish life focused on simply loving. As young and old became engaged in liturgy and deepened their understanding of Scripture they began to notice sacramental moments in their lives, moments where they sensed God at work. These understandings were life-changing for those interviewed.

A delightful episode shows the parish celebrating Good Friday at the river using symbols of burden and water to let go of hurts and fears and trust more deeply in God.

The story communicates the courage of people supporting life-giving change in a parish followed by the painful loss of energy when things "revert to the norm". This would be useful for parishes committed to encouraging lay spirituality that goes beyond reading and music ministries.

The DVD can be viewed online https://vimeo.com/173566656

A hard copy can be requested from sinead.donnelly@hotmail.com ■

CROSSCURRENTS

Jim Elliston

Atheist Worship

For us God is revealed through creation as well as through Jesus. But we see "as through a glass, darkly" and many correctly reject our imperfect notion of God along with our faulty witness.

Human nature is full of apparent contradictions, but on digging a little deeper we find reality often belies appearances. An *AP* report recently highlighted one such anomaly. Utah atheist Gregory Arthur Clark said the local Sunday Assembly offers social and emotional connections for people without religion, to help them through life's trials and tragedies. Abandoning a religion can be "psychologically wrenching", Clark said. "People still want to feel connected to others, without the magic and, in some cases, without bigotry."

Education Woes

A good education system is a vital component of society and for some years successive governments have tinkered with the remnants of former Education Minister David Lange's 1988 reforms, *Tomorrow's Schools*.

Lange's scheme was devolutionary, rejecting the market model and recognising that equality of opportunity required a flexible approach. Its driving force was democratic participation in education.

It envisaged Boards of Trustees and a Parents' Advisory Council (long since abandoned) to help parents in making an appeal for assistance if the school was below par and community education forums (also a non-starter) to thrash out the issues and communicate local views to the government.

In the original scheme the Education Review Office was required to monitor the schools' performance and likewise the government's allocation of resources and the maintenance of the national infrastructure.

Lange lost the confidence of his Cabinet after he attempted to modify the neo-liberal push of then Finance Minister, Roger Douglas. He resigned as Prime Minister and from Cabinet. The democratic elements of the scheme were soon subverted. The Public Service had not been geared to respond appropriately to a devolved model of administration. A market model soon appeared.

The Ministry closed its small regional offices and schools lost contact with advisors who could reasonably be expected to know them and their special circumstances.

In 2014 Education Minister Hekia Parata introduced the *Investing in Educational Success (IES)* initiative to tackle under-achievement and to abandon the competitive model in favour of a collaborative one. The slow uptake of the initiative is blamed on insufficient consultation as well as suspicion and resistance from teachers.

Schools are encouraged to cluster together in Communities of Learning (COLs) in groups of about ten. Auckland's Point England School was a pioneer in this regard, beginning by working closely with a socially deprived community (See Elliston, *TM* Nov, 2009:30), developing imaginative programmes and spreading its philosophy to neighbouring schools, as Pat Snedden reported in *TM* May, 2012:14–15.

Not Reassuring

Volvo is launching its latest semi-autonomous vehicles equipped with a Skype productivity app. NZ general manager Coby Duggan announced: "Volvo's vision is to produce a seamless transition from the office to the car allowing us to spend less time behind a desk."

According to a *NZ Herald* report, Kiwi drivers will soon be able to make Skype calls from their dashboards. Duggan claimed current developments in driving technology will reduce the need for drivers to have their full attention on the road, allowing them to utilise their time better while travelling.

This is not a reassuring thought. Contemporary accident statistics suggest very many drivers would do well to devote more — not less — attention to the road. Life gets scarier and scarier.

And then there's President Donald Trump . . . ■

TUI MOTU InterIslands
The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited

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

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

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

We do not publish anonymous letters except in exceptional circumstances.

USING MY ART AN HONOUR

Thank you so much for using my art once again (*TM* March p14). I am always honored. I will keep you posted on new work in the months to come. Thanks for sending me a copy of the magazine.

Steven Cavallo, New Jersey, USA

TROUBLESOME MASS TRANSLATION

Many New Zealand Catholics are not pleased with the English translation of the liturgy in the Mass foisted on us by Rome. What I am most not in agreement with is the wording of the Our Father when it says: "Save us *from* the time of trial." I think the wording should be: "Save us *in* the time of trial." No one can avoid temptation. It is similar to death, taxation and change. Overcoming temptation makes us a better person.

Graeme Donaldson, Dunedin

SHARE OUR WORLD

On Sunday 12th March in church, we read a particular prayer during the "confession" which made much impression on me. I'd like to share it:

"When we build our comforts and pleasures on the sacrifice of others, instead of sacrificing our privileges to build a world that all can share: Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned."

I wonder why the Churches fail to proclaim this need to share from the rooftops.

Gerard van den Bemd, Auckland

PARALLEL INSPIRATION

I read the Gospel of the day "be merciful as God is merciful; do not judge" (Luke 6:36-38) and I sat with it for a time. Then I picked up my *Tui Motu* and read *Refugees* by Brian Bilston — first down, then up — and I am left absolutely stunned! This prose/poem is incredibly powerful, especially the lines,

"Should life have dealt a different hand
These haggard faces could belong to you or me."

I found that the day's Gospel and the poem ran parallel for me. Many thanks for printing this piece.

Pat Hick, Cambridge

Looking **OUT** *and* **IN**

In the past couple of months, I have felt a little overwhelmed by the enormity of evil and general chaos, environmental damage and social injustice that seems to prevail in every direction I look. Last month's column was a lament on India's glaring environmental damage. But there is much else that overwhelms me — the huge inequalities related to gender relations around me in India; the inertia and unresponsiveness of health bureaucrats in this land where children still die of hunger; and 70 per cent of people with epilepsy have no access to care; let alone the antics of demagogues across the world who claim: "I am not politically correct" as an excuse to enact racist immigration policy.

So how do I move from paralysis to poise and practice? I have been thinking about how two key biblical teachings on personal disciplines turn out to be very sound advice and are also endorsed by scientific studies. The first of these is in Philippians 4:8:

"Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise."

The idea of *fixing* my thoughts suggests a very intentional focus on changing my pattern of thinking, which is exactly the idea found in the psychological treatment of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. This approach suggests that we can choose to use a new lens on life at a time of persisting sadness and negative thoughts and seek to find the positive in the circumstances and events of our own lives.

The second biblical teaching related to personal self-discipline is the injunction to give thanks in all circumstances. There are many verses inviting us to be thankful — 1 Thessalonians 5:18 is one of them: *"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances."*

Being grateful is recognised as an important personal discipline for positive mental well-being by people like Martin Seligman (Mr Positive Thinking) and many others — and the Bible has been banging on about this for millennia!

Giving intentional focus to things that are good and noble and choosing to look for signs of resistance to the pervasive powers of injustice are what I am trying to do. At the moment I'm choosing not to read depressing or dystopic books and I am looking out for weekend movies that have more light than dark.

Last week the community mental health programme I am part of held a sports programme that focused on the participation of women with psycho-social disabilities. To the surprise of many of us, it was a great success. Older women joined in the egg-and-spoon race while the girls' resilience groups we've been running participated in the Indian wrestling game of *kabaddi* with the vigour and commitment of any rugby player.

On a deforested hillside last week, I also noticed there was a huge flowering blossom tree that somehow had remained standing. There is a resistance movement out there. I just need to look for it.

I've reflected on the importance of being grateful in this column before, but I need to keep practising it. Our Sunday night family gratefulness diary celebrated a 10-year anniversary recently. Practising these two disciplines won't turn me into Pollyanna or some kind of perpetual joy-germ-for-Jesus but at the moment, more importantly, they help me get out of bed and start on the work I need to do today. ■

Kaaren Mathias is a mother of four young people, is married to Jeph and has spent the last 11 years living and working in India.