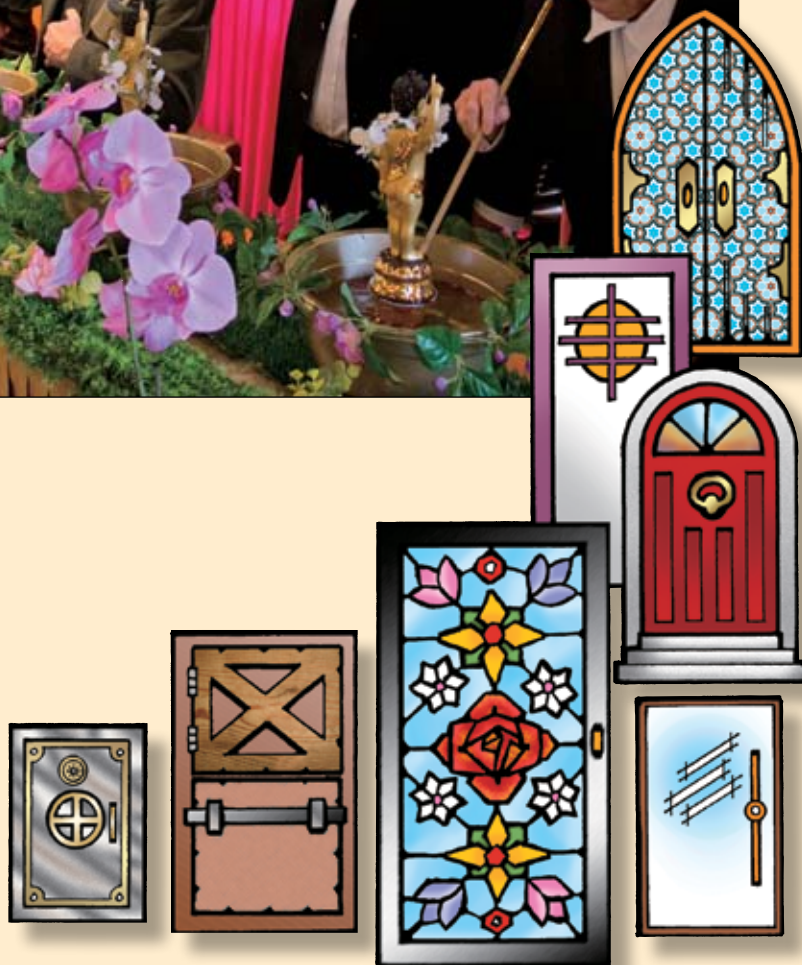


# Tui Motu

## InterIslands

monthly independent Catholic magazine

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*God's house has many doors*

# the lure of the dance

Some years ago I was present at the opening of a new Catholic Church near Multan in Pakistan. It was a fabulous occasion, remembered specially for the dance that the bishop joined in with the local people immediately after the Mass of blessing. The whole neighbourhood took part, irrespective of religious faith. The look of joy on people's faces as they twirled around in the dance (myself included) was unforgettable. This tiny celebration

symbolises magnificently the greatest gift of inter-religious dialogue: that when men and women of differing religious traditions and beliefs come to know, respect and befriend one another, they can celebrate that fact.

In this issue we explore four very different people's perspectives on what this path may mean and the gift that it has been for them.

When people of differing faiths do very normal things together, like looking after one another's children, sharing the burden of health problems and talking about education, joining in one another's family wedding ceremonies, or just living side by side, things change. Both Sister Bertha and Jean Jacques Pérennès speak eloquently of this.

Each of our writers speaks in a different way of how friendship overcomes fear. We come to realise that we are brothers and sisters first, and that shared common humanity that is suddenly found breaks down barriers

of fear. Pushpa Wood notes so clearly that understanding another's faith tradition doesn't mean losing your own. She makes a great point: "...tolerance is inactive; but understanding is active and inclusive."

Jean Jacques says so well that at the same time as recognising one another's commitment to the same God, we often tread long and differing paths to God. This is encouraging for us too. When we are able to develop friendship among people of different faiths, we will be open to talk more freely about our faith in God. And having recognised the one God common to all of us, then we can trust sufficiently to ask some tentative questions about another's belief.

It is easy to find clips on YouTube and in other media that demonise people who differ from us in faith. After 9/11 it was common to find such ideas. Learning about another's faith and recognising them



Fr Jean Jacques Pérennès with the Grand Imam of al-Azhar Dr Ahmed al Tayyeb.

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This month's cover photo shows (foreground, L to R) Reverend Peter Beck, Ron Wright JP and Sr Bertha Hurley taking part in the celebrations for the birthday of the Buddha in Christchurch earlier this year. [Photo courtesy of Buddha's Light International Association.]

as human beings is one fine way of cutting short this seductive process of demonisation.

As the Qur'an teaches, we were made "that we may know each other, not that we may despise each other." Truly friendship overcomes fear.

### a compliment

Recently *Tui Motu* received the cancellation of a subscription with these comments: "your magazine is far too 'left wing' and avoiding reality". We took this as a compliment. For we are unashamedly looking at the practicalities of our world and Aotearoa New Zealand from the lens of the gospel as refracted in the Catholic Church's social teaching. If this is considered left wing and avoiding reality, we plead guilty.

A good example of this would be the legislation currently before the NZ Parliament for the sale of State-owned assets. Catholic social teaching recognises both public-state ownership and the right to private property. However, when assessing such legislation, at least two gems from the Church's social teaching come into play. How does the proposed sale affect the poorest members of our society? And how will it affect the common good of the country?

For the poorer members of NZ society will the sale increase or minimize equality? We discount that argument that 'mums and

dads' will buy the partially privatized companies' shares. With many people already finding it difficult to cope with this year's increased power charges, let alone food, rent and transport, there will be little left over for our poorer sisters and brothers to buy shares. In fact, privatization of State-owned assets turns a public good into a private benefit, thereby increasing the inequality gap. Those who have become richer; those who have less become poorer.

We were impressed by the submission made by the new Director of Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, Julianne Hickey, to the Finance and Expenditure Select Committee in late April (see [www.caritas.org.nz/resources/submissions/2012](http://www.caritas.org.nz/resources/submissions/2012)) on the Mixed Ownership Model Bill. Talking from her experience in Britain, Ms Hickey was able to compare the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) to New Zealand's Electricity Complaints Ombudsman. The English authority has the power to consider whether the price charged for electricity is fair and reasonable. The NZ equivalent does not have these powers.

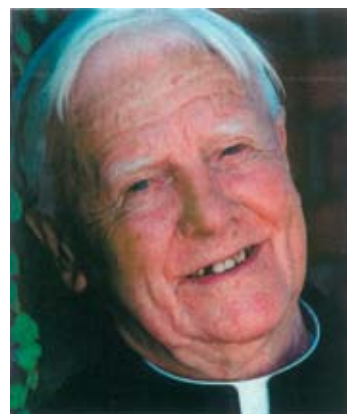
In fact, within NZ there is no similar over-arching policy body that "ensures good economic social and environmental outcomes"; whereas in England Ofgem has specific responsibility for these goals including protecting people who

suffer from fuel scarcity. Without such clarity from a regulatory body that considers broadly the fair price charged for electricity, it is debatable whether the sale of electricity companies under this Bill will promote the common good of our society. We believe it will not.

### salutations...

A lion of the Catholic press of the sixties and seventies, Father George Duggan SM celebrated his 100th birthday on July 3rd. Affectionately known to friend and foe alike as "Chalkie", he was a New Zealand household name for his defence of the truth of the Catholic faith as he knew it. Despite his often hard line stance on moral and doctrinal issues, Father George is a mild, gentle and pastoral man in person, an avid cricket watcher and much loved.

*Tui Motu* joins with our readers to salute Father "Chalkie" on this milestone. ■ KT



Fr George Duggan SM.  
[Photo courtesy of Marist Archives]



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

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

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## global suicide pact

With gratitude I have noted TM's reprint of the article by Richard W Miller 'Global Suicide Pact' (June 12). His grim prognosis of the death of our planet is redeemed by a glimmer of hope if we follow expert advice on what we can and must do to avert it.

Our world is on fire while our leaders debate the cost of water to douse it.

Yet his article is short of an answer to his question "Why don't we take climate change seriously?" My answer is that our Catholic Church has to take a large part of the blame for this situation which has developed unchallenged over centuries.

Ever since the thirteenth century Christian piety, contrary to our authentic sacramental theology, has focussed on the supernatural which it has alienated from the created world, our home. The respect for the natural world, inhabited by the Spirit, which is still deeply rooted in native communities has thus been lost by us.

Yet Christian thought's impact on the western world is undeniable. Did

not the Gospel message bring about a major revolution in society's development of a social conscience?

Conversely, a faith in which liturgies and sermons studiously avoid the celebration of all life in a meaningful way will allow our innate respect for life to weaken and die. Indifference to the scandalous exploitation of our planet which we experience today remains unchallenged.

Do our preachers really want us to believe that Jesus came to us for the single purpose of being slaughtered as a victim for the atonement of the world's sins? I like to believe that Jesus sharing in our human existence also entered into every single fibre of Creation. This is enough to make me approach all life with awe. At every Eucharistic celebration I am reminded that Jesus himself has not disdained the use of basic produce from our earth to represent his body.

For the sake of my grandchildren's future, I put my trust in the Church to seek and promote a fuller understanding of the Eucharist. This could well achieve the fundamental change in attitude that comes through faith

## letters to the editor

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

and grace. For we have seen that efforts arising from pragmatism alone, however well promoted, are seldom enduring. With God's grace another social revolution might get under way while there is still time.

**Frank Hoffmann, Papakura**

## a problem with mother church (continued from page 5)

they not hear the call of the poor, the alienated, the many searching for spiritual sustenance? Are they so afraid of women being their equals before God?

I cannot remember a time like this when people looked for spirituality in their lives. They see that materialism and individualism lead to alienation and despair. Somehow the institutional churches are unable to meet their need. They fail to see the change in understanding of the physical world today from an ordered rule-bound universe to a quantum state where everything is interconnected. This is the place of mysticism not doctrine.

But mysticism is not controllable. This God will not be doled out in limited parcels but illuminates every particle of the creation. Do church leaders really think that following the rules laid down by men is more important than ministering to the suffering? Are they really under the impression that ritual and pomp, birettas and fine music, reveal the presence of God to the poor and needy in the world? This is after all the God who comes not in the storm but in the gentle breeze. This God is with the women who are oppressed.

The problem with 'Mother Church' is that there are no mothers within its structure. Mothers and

those who take that role know that children often do not obey the rules, make mistakes and are messy and untidy. They need to be allowed space to explore and make their own journey with all the stops and starts life journeys bring. They always need to be forgiven and healed when they are suffering. With much love, children grow into loving and lovable human beings. That is surely the message of Jesus and needs to be rediscovered as the message of the church. I can see the banners:

**PUT WOMEN BACK INTO  
MOTHER CHURCH ■**

# a birthday reflection – the problem with ‘mother church’

Anna Holmes

As we age, birthdays become times of reflection on personal journeys, the world about us and the many beloved and stimulating people who have accompanied us. There is also a sense of where do I go from here?

Women who have accompanied me for more than 30 years — Margaret Farley, Elizabeth Johnson, Joan Chittister, Edwina Gateley, have all been under increasing attack from the Vatican for writing what they believe and know about the world we live in. That is the role of those called to be prophets or mystics.

I have been enabled and accompanied by so many extraordinary women and women religious in my life. I remember the love of the Carmelite sisters who arranged my first communion celebration in Sri Lanka. They had decorated the chapel exquisitely and made a feast for us. My biology teacher in the 50s who taught us about human sexuality and my headmistress at the time who gave me room to protest at injustice while enabling me to be accommodating.

The SMSM sisters I worked with on the Chatham Islands who in spite of habits that were totally inappropriate to the terrain refused to allow them to be humanly diminishing. I have wonderful memories of their veils blowing away in a fierce southerly and of two of the sisters in full habit and veils (and my husband) frantically digging out pipis on an incoming tide.

These women not only took care of the physical well being of the islanders, they also enabled their spiritual wellbeing as well as supporting the priest and doctor's family. I later worked with them in Bangladesh where they bore witness in a clinic

that took care of all in the community, even the most outcast. That clinic was later closed by the arbitrary decision of the Bishop and parish priest without any discussion with the sisters who worked there.

Then there were the Maryknoll sisters I worked with in Tanzania in the early 1970s who were supported by an amazing, saintly bishop. They were a most remarkable, courageous and spiritually seeking group of women working under difficult conditions. Together we read the documents of Vatican II in the light of the very poor country in which we lived.

There I first heard a woman say she thought she had a priestly vocation — she was the pastor of a huge area where a visiting priest occasionally came to say mass. Her main anguish was about the women whom she knew well, who told her of their pain and need for reconciliation and whom she then had to hand on to an unknown priest for absolution. It was there that I also heard of the large number of priests with ‘wives’ in the villages — wives who had children and were often abandoned if the priest was moved on.

The last Maryknoll friend working in Tanzania has just returned to the US at the age of 84. She worked in community development with women teaching them to garden and sew, with men teaching them how to build safe houses from local materials. Latterly she was also much involved with the AIDS orphans of whom there are so many.

For over 30 years in New Zealand I have been well supported by other women. These have been women of courage and strength working in areas that were neglected, maintaining parishes and giving wise counsel

to so many. They too have been criticized for daring to question the church hierarchy when they were being unjust or discriminatory.

I remember the outcry when the Mercy sisters went to work in Aranui in Christchurch and the amazing things that happened there as a result of that work. I remember the spontaneous response to the letter of Pope John Paul on the non-ordination of women and the formation of *Catholic Women Knowing Our Place*. For we did and do know our place as beloved of God called to proclaim freedom to those captured by the materialism and individualism of this age even within the church. The strength of this message is not in political posturing or alliances; it is in the truth within it.

The Catholic church is catholic in the wider meaning of the word. Many find comfort and shelter within it even if they do not agree with some official pronouncements. The social justice teaching of the Catholic church is founded on the essential truth that all are equal before God. This is the very thing that even those who walk away from the church keep — the passionate sense of God's love for all. They walk away from the institutional church because they see it living a lie — proclaiming justice and living oppression.

Who can blame them?

I almost despair at the actions of the Vatican, the active injustice, oppression and attempts to control and limit the contribution of women. Do they live in a hermetically sealed enclave, out of touch with the reality of the post-modern world? Can

Continued on opposite page (p4)

# prophetic dialogue

*Cathy Harrison interviews Sister Bertha Hurley on her journey with interfaith matters and how this has deepened her own faith, brought about many important friendships, and given her hope and energy for the future.*

Sinking comfortably into her chair in her St Alban's Christchurch home, Sister Bertha Hurley SMSM (Missionary Sister of the Society of Mary) wastes no time luring me into the joys of her 21 years in Fiji. They began in 1978 in a village on the island of Vanua Levu, after seven years secondary teaching in Samoa. That Fiji experience has resulted in a life-long commitment to interfaith dialogue and the building of many friendships. Bertha's ministry was warmly received by Catholic, Hindu and Muslim families. Subsequently her interfaith journey took her out of the village to gatherings, further education and around the globe. But mostly it has led her into the 'Oneness' of God.

## fiji experience

Bertha remembers the village where her journey began. "Those three years in Naleba, 12 miles from Labasa, gave me the happiest moments of my life. I'm talking of pre-coup days. If ever you could say that there was an interfaith village that was it. Everyone joined in everything — so if there was a birthday or a wedding or a funeral the family involved would always have prayer and everyone would be there. They would listen respectfully. As teachers, we were expected to be there. If not, we'd be sent for." Even chickens for Christian and Hindu celebrations were killed by Muslim men, Bertha explained.

Her most significant experiences in interfaith relationships were homely and personal. She tells how "one Christmas the Catholics decided that they were going to have a little float to go around the villages. We had a pickup covered with tar paper and lights



Sister Bertha Hurley

inside and cut-outs of Mary, the baby and the shepherds. Everybody wanted to help and when the light truck drove off there were also the crescent moon and star and the Hindu *diya* or lamp. While it was a Christian celebration, it was an incredible interfaith experience — Christians, Muslims and Hindus sharing together."

Bertha recalls another occasion, where the child of the only Catholic family in a village was to be baptised. Hindu and Muslim families helped prepare the meal and the shelter shed, then respectfully attended the ceremony, making it a wonderful interfaith experience.

## wcc symposium

Another significant experience for her occurred in 1997 when she travelled to the World Council of Churches' symposium in Varanasi, India. She was accompanied by Gendawati Prasad, a Hindu woman, who remarked, "When we began Interfaith Search Fiji in Suva we were like islands — suspicious of one another (it was after the

coup) — suspicious and afraid. Now when I come, I meet friends and I love our gatherings."

Bertha heralds the courage of interfaith people, like the Anglican Bishop Bryce in Fiji. He read a prayer in the Catholic cathedral in Suva along with the Interfaith Search president Hardayal Singh, a Sikh. The next day a newspaper photo caused some Anglicans to demonstrate against their Bishop. Bertha sympathised with him in this predicament. But he stood by his action, saying that people have to learn from and accept interfaith experiences.

## interfaith prayer

Bertha finds joy in interfaith relationships. Though she found Hindu prayer foreign to her, on one occasion it led her to her own prayer. She was travelling to Suva by bus, windows wide open. The bus stopped at the university bus stop where many students got on and off. It is also the place where a Hindu Temple is situated. "A group of women were going in procession to the Temple, carrying *diyas* and tambourines, singing and praying and I thought, here are women so committed to prayer and worship that they are able to ignore the student melee! While I was watching I was drawn into prayer and felt as if I were in God's presence. It was one of the most powerful experiences I've ever had. Only afterwards I realized that the bus had moved on and we were almost in Suva. It affected me throughout the whole day. As I reflect on the occasion now, I am reminded of the oneness of God."

"You've got to be grounded in your own faith before you can really be involved in interfaith," she



L to R: Sr Bertha, Tessa Mackenzie (Anglican), Ameen Sahu Khan (Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam), Hardayal Singh (Sikh) at an Interfaith Search Fiji gathering.

## significant figures

Significant religious figures from her time in Fiji are highlighted in Bertha's stories. She remembers in particular Master Hussein of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Fiji and M Pandaram, a Hindu gentleman, one of the founding members of Interfaith Search Fiji. He died from a heart attack while at the Temple praying on one of the main Hindu festivals.

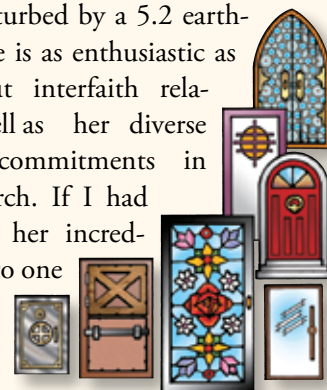
Turning to her present work in New Zealand, Bertha finds hope for the interfaith movement in the Christchurch Interfaith Society's Prayers for World Peace, the Assisi Day of Prayer, their discussion evenings and Interfaith Society's desire for participation in the Christchurch rebuild — a spiritual rebuilding.

The New Zealand National Interfaith Conference, held annually, invigorates her as well. "Hindus, Muslims, Jews and the wide variety of Christian participants sharing together fill me with hope, and enliven me to want to continue in interfaith dialogue and activities. The movement is growing around New Zealand and is getting more catholic media coverage but we need to get more into the general media."

## little candles burning

When Interfaith Search Fiji was making a submission to the Fiji Constitution Forum, Sir Paul Reeves said to her, "It's very small. It's not much more than a candlelight." She replied, "Yes, but there are lots of little candles beginning to burn."

Immersed in her memories Bertha was undisturbed by a 5.2 earthquake! She is as enthusiastic as ever about interfaith relations as well as her diverse pastoral commitments in Christchurch. If I had to reduce her incredible story to one word, it would be 'love'. ■



explains. "Otherwise, I think it can be threatening. It's certainly challenging. Yet I find it's a very humbling experience to listen to my Hindu, Muslim, and Jewish friends talking, and to see their commitment to God and their love of God."

Once she was challenged by a Christian minister who was not part of the interfaith movement. He asked, "How can you be a missionary and yet be involved in interfaith dialogue?" She thought about that and came to realize that "being involved there, sharing my faith in our interfaith discussions, is like ploughing the soil for the seed. Only God can give that seed. And so I felt quite comfortable being involved in interfaith matters."

## doors of the temple

She explains how the Sikh temple has four doors, one on each side: "Each side is open to you to come in. Sikhs are very much into hospitality. Sunday is their day of prayer and after worship they have a meal open to everyone. We have so much to learn from one another. Openness and readiness to listen are essential. It's easy to filter things and colour them through your own lens. We need to accept humanness."

"My interfaith experience has deepened my understanding of

God," she said, "and enriched and challenged my own faith." Bertha has learnt that God's love is present regardless of religion, and that people's love of God is dominant: "It is just expressed differently. We need to accept and respect the differences and also to allow them to inspire us."

**"Being involved there, sharing my faith in our interfaith discussions, is like ploughing the soil for the seed. Only God can give that seed."**

Bertha considers that "There's too much of 'me (or us) and them' and that if people can move out of their comfort zone barriers start to disappear." She is intent on recognising inner beauty in everyone and believing that differences are few. She quotes from the Acts of the Apostles (10: 34-35) where Peter says, "The truth I have now come to realise is that God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him." She smiles with an inner satisfaction.

# a life of encounter with muslims

*What is it like for a Christian to live in a country where the majority of the population is overwhelmingly of another religion? Here, a Dominican who has spent the best part of his life in a predominantly Muslim country gives us insight into how he deals with the differences, and the price he is willing to pay for such a full life.*

Jean-Jacques Pérennès

I have been privileged to spend almost 25 years of my life in contact with Muslims, specifically in Algeria where I lived for 10 years, in Egypt where I have been for the past 13 years and in other countries of the Maghreb and the Middle East which I have frequently visited: principally Morocco, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. As I look back I see this as an opportunity, especially when I observe the fear, which seems to be the dominant sentiment among Westerners when they are in contact with Muslims, whom they really do not know at all.

## encountering muslims rather than encountering islam

The first fruit of this long fellowship with Muslims is that it has allowed me to meet them as men and women, as families, and not as Islam in general, which is an abstraction. To meet people is first of all to live among them: to share joys, sorrows, family occasions, both happy and sad. This meeting on the human level makes a great difference in one's perspective. One discovers brothers and sisters of a common humanity, sharing all the same concerns: health, the children's future, greater social justice, etc. Religious matters are no longer the first element in this encounter, even if, as a Dominican, I always introduce myself to my Muslim friends as a religious.

You become aware that we are all in search of God, all seeking the meaning of life; that for both parties faith can be a real refuge in times of trial. The important thing is to meet persons; otherwise you



Fr Jean Jacques Pérennès with a Muslim friend at Al Ahzar university

can make the religion of the other into an ideology, something to be afraid of.

I have found also that friendship is possible even with very traditional Muslims. When friendship is present, disagreement is not a problem. For example, I have had the experience of going to spend weekends with a Muslim friend, whose father is Imam in the region of Egypt where the association of the Muslim Brotherhood is very much in the majority. Very quickly, our friendship has become much stronger than our differences and our areas of disagreement.

## assessing our differences

This desire to encounter the other should not at all lead to a type of blurred fusion or merging. A

genuine encounter presupposes that each remains clear in his or her own identity. Pierre Claverie, a bishop in Algeria, used to speak of "the abyss which separates us" when referring to his experience in the Muslim world. It is extremely difficult for a Christian to talk to Muslims about the Trinity or the Incarnation, even though these realities are at the heart of the Christian faith.

Similarly, it is very hard for a Muslim to undertake a critical reading of the text of the Qur'an, which he accepts as a direct gift from God and therefore to be received as such, without any human claim to analyzing it. Here two cultural universes come face to face: a Christianity, shaped by centuries of patristic writings and then by critical exegesis of the

Bible; on the other side, an Islam whose essence (the Qur'an and the *hadith* — sayings — of the prophet Mohammed) is seen as received from God and therefore not to be passed through the sieve of human reason. Dialogue does not mean a search for the smallest common denominator, where all differences are erased. To be oneself is essential for the truth of the encounter.

### **learning to receive from the other**

The Western mind is spontaneously controlling, probably because of the technical superiority of our culture and some unconscious residue of the colonial period. To be a guest in a lasting way in the home of the other has been for me an excellent place of learning. The Muslims whom I meet strike me, of course, by the place that prayer holds in their lives: five times a day, wherever they happen to be, in the office, at the hairdresser, in the street. This is a beautiful lesson for Christians, who often put prayer on the bottom rung of their priorities.

Muslims have also taught me that we are never abandoned: whatever happens, in good and in bad situations, we are in the hand of God. This is the meaning of the recurring theme *El hamdullah* (let us thank God), which is constantly repeated. What many Westerners deride and consider as fatalism is in reality a profound sense of God's presence to each creature.

Conversely, Muslims can be uncomfortable with the Christian insistence on human responsibility within creation, carried on through our efforts to care for the earth, educate people, work for greater justice. Two of my friends, a Catholic priest and a Muslim intellectual from Morocco, have written together a very lovely book entitled "We have so much to say to each other." The Muslim wrote the chapter on the Our Father, to explain how he understands it, and

the priest wrote the chapter on pilgrimage. There was no oversimplifying or false agreement.

### **living with the pain of our differences**

The nearer one comes to the other, the more one can realize that our paths towards God are very different. What this diversity in paths towards God means is a difficult question to which neither the theology of non-Christian religions nor the magisterium of the Catholic Church has yet provided a satisfactory response. We should probably accept this difference as a test designed to strengthen our faith and our hope. So often in the course of history these differences have led to violence. Today we have the great task of welcoming our differences and leaving the last word to God.

For many years Brother Christian de Chergé, prior of the Trappist monks of Tibhirine in Algeria, facilitated a series of meetings with Sufi Muslims. And he tells that one evening when he was praying in the monastery chapel, he heard rising behind him the prayer of one of his Muslim friends, who had come to pray also in his own words. They were praying, each to the same God, but with different words. This night prayer went on for hours. "Are we to say that we have stopped praying? It was past 11:00 pm! From 8:00 pm, there we were side by side ... all this time, a moment, can you believe. Incredible joy, each of us in his own way ... God might have laughed at this tricky moment, after centuries of insults between brothers who were each called to pray to Him".

Brother Christian was assassinated a few years later but the witness of his life has reached the whole world. There is no fruitfulness without paying the price. ■

*Jean-Jacques Pérennès is a Dominican friar and the director of IDEO, Cairo, Egypt.*

## **A Muslim Prayer for Peace**

*In the name of Allah,  
the beneficent, the merciful.*

*Praise be to the Lord of the Universe*

*who has created us*

*and made us into tribes and nations,*

*that we may know each other,*

*not that we may despise each other.*

*If the enemy incline towards peace,*

*do thou also incline towards peace,*

*and trust God,*

*for the Lord is the one that heareth and knoweth all things.*

*And the servants of God, Most Gracious are those*

*who walk on the Earth in humility,*

*and when we address them, we say*

**"PEACE."**



# god's house has many doors

*Michael Fitzsimons talks with Pushpa and Jack Wood about what an interfaith relationship looks like up close.*

Living with cultural and religious differences is something that Pushpa and Jack Wood know more about than most of us.

Pushpa is a Hindu, from the Brahman priestly caste and Jack a Roman Catholic raised and educated in the Hutt Valley. They met more than 30 years ago when they were both on Asia-Pacific Commonwealth Youth Development Fellowships in India.

When Jack first asked Pushpa to get married she turned him down, afraid of what it might mean for the future of her younger sister and her family.

## from differing traditions

"Coming from such different traditions was a huge deal for us," says Pushpa. "And it was not only the religious differences, which came later. The biggest hurdle was our highly different cultures. I think my family feared their idea of Westerners and Christians, an idea they'd received through media and films. Because my Dad was a union leader, he was a lot more understanding and tolerant of other cultures and faiths than my mother and grandmother. They feared not only that they would lose a daughter, but that their daughter would lose all she had been taught, that I would become a Christian."

Jack, for his part, was a man in love, ignorant of Indian culture and on the receiving end of misperceptions about Western culture.

"Pushpa's family got their ideas of Western culture from bad films, largely. For example, they believed that Western men drink a lot, smoke a lot, go out with other women a lot, that they have no regard for the stability of marriage.

"I don't drink, I don't smoke, and neither does Pushpa. And we've been married for 32 years.

"Basically they were ignorant, just as Pushpa found many New Zealanders were when we came here in 1980. Even in the young Indian community in New Zealand at that time, a mixed marriage was very unusual.

## contrary opinions

"One of the nuns who taught me, my music teacher, was very happy about the marriage, but another nun who was very traditional told me that she was very disappointed. And my priest wouldn't marry us. Those were the difficulties. But that is where the Church was at the time. Our marriage was a civil ceremony."

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**"At a very young age I was taught by my grandfather that God has not blessed this world with only one kind of flower."**

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As it turned out, Jack was a skilled and persistent letter-writer, and love triumphed over the obstacles. The journey since then has been one of mutual respect and openness, with both staying strong in their own religious traditions.

On this bleak Monday morning, temperatures plummeting, we meet in Pushpa's office at Massey University (Wellington campus) where she is the Director of the New Zealand Centre of Personal Financial Education. Jack works in a community and management business

consultancy, principally focused in Asia. They live nearby in the suburb of Mount Cook, which has always been their base. They have one daughter, Gayatri who has been exposed to all major faith traditions and doesn't see the need to establish a superiority of any one over another. She's a believer in "world religion", notes Jack. "She wants to take the best of everything she finds."

## jack's experience

Over the long span of their marriage, Jack has found Hinduism to be a very accepting religion.

"In my experience it has certain social and cultural drawbacks but I can go and pray in any temple. I can't go into a mosque in the same manner, for example. They accept Jesus Christ. In my ignorance, I thought that all Hindu statues represented different Gods, when in reality they are different channels to God, much like the Virgin Mary is a channel to God. It's a difference of language. I found it very easy to accept Hinduism, in this respect. I have always encouraged Pushpa to practise what she wanted to practise. I go to Pushpa's temple, and she comes to my church, relatively often."

## pushpa's experience

Pushpa has a PhD in Indian religions and has been a driving force in interfaith dialogue in New Zealand over many years. She believes the ultimate aim of religion is the same, whatever your tradition.

"I grew up alongside my Dad's union gatherings, with Muslim, Sikh and Christian uncles, uncles from all different faiths. Christ was another



Pushpa and Jack Wood [Photo courtesy of Michael Fitzsimons]

of the whole horde of gods and goddesses we prayed to.

“At a very young age I was taught by my grandfather that God has not blessed this world with only one kind of flower. The other thing I always remember is that God’s place has many doors for entry. Who am I to make judgment on another belief system? That is why I have trouble with people who tell me that the only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ.

“We go to a Jewish synagogue, too, and a Buddhist monastery. For us, irrespective of faith traditions, the ultimate aim is the same. We just have different paths to get there.”

### similarity and challenge

A major similarity between Christianity and Hinduism is the sanctity of life, says Pushpa.

“Life is sacred because there is an unbroken bond between the soul and the supreme soul. The ultimate aim is to be reunited with the supreme soul. The difference is that I as a Hindu believe you might need to take many forms before this

reunion, such as reincarnation.”

The challenge, says Pushpa, is not just to tolerate other religions but to seek greater understanding.

“I think tolerance is inactive, but understanding is active and inclusive. The person who really influenced my thinking on this was Father Bede Griffiths. He spent quite a lot of time with Hindus in India, and somebody told him that he was losing his Christianity. I remember him saying that the more he learnt about Hinduism, the better Christian he became. I think this is very true.”

### intra-faith challenges

Intra-faith relationships, rather than relationships between faiths, can present an even bigger challenge, says Pushpa.

“It is sometimes more difficult for me to connect with another Hindu than it is with a Christian. Within the same faith tradition, people can be so close-minded. Between faiths the differences are obvious, and you know where you stand. But within the same faith, where there are so

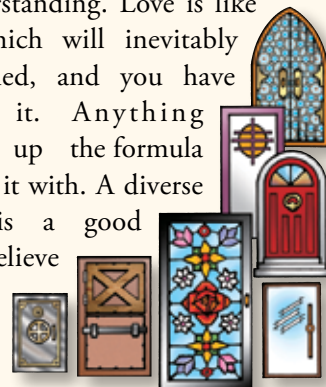
many similarities, things can be far less clear.

“My fundamental belief is that understanding another faith tradition doesn’t mean losing one’s own. In my experience this is people’s biggest fear, when entering an inter-faith relationship. But if you’re secure within your own skin — in your faith, your culture, your belief system — then I think you won’t be threatened by others.”

For Jack an inter-faith relationship is all about accepting your partner as a whole. Falling in love is only the beginning.

### a vase to polish

“An inter-faith relationship encourages understanding. Love is like a vase which will inevitably be tarnished, and you have to polish it. Anything can make up the formula you polish it with. A diverse formula is a good thing, I believe it helps.” ■



# building jerusalem

*One of New Zealand's most prominent hymn writers takes up a theme dear to his heart, New Zealand hymns on social issues, hymns that have been written in this country over the last few years because of issues which have perplexed and sometimes incensed New Zealand church-goers: to make these issues more accessible through the medium of singing a hopeful Christian faith.*

Colin Gibson

**M**y theme is the way a number of New Zealand religious poets (and composers) have created hymns that address national social issues. So many writers and so many hymns, indeed, that John Bell of the Iona Community in Scotland — himself a tireless writer of hymns on similar issues — asked why it was that New Zealand hymn writers were so productive in this area. What follows is an attempt to answer John's question.

## a year of change

The year was 1993. A new National government had come to power, committed to 'reforming' the public health system of New Zealand (code for reducing expenditure on those unable to pay for private hospital treatment). Budgets were slashed, new systems hastily introduced, staff were made redundant. In cathedrals and churches throughout New Zealand a solemn statement on Social Justice prepared by the leaders of all the major churches was read from the pulpits, without any obvious effect on those driving through the changes. (Does that sound familiar again today?)

## a hymn for the occasion

It so happened that the annual national conference of the Community Ministries of the Baptist Church was being held in Dunedin. It was a gathering of social workers, chaplains and others within the Public Health system as it went through this period of radical reform.

One of the hospital chaplains asked me if I would write a hymn for the occasion, and invited me to attend a meeting to get the feel of the group and to gather ideas for the text.

I still remember the tone and temper of that meeting. Everyone in the room was simply furious. Lay and ordained alike, they were enraged at the effect of the reforms on threatened, over-worked staff and worried, bewildered patients. Was this the public health system that had come into being after the Great Depression of the 1930s, set up by a radical Labour government with a strong social conscience, determined to improve the lot of the poor and the sick? These people felt that the soul was being ripped out of a service many of the most frail and fragile people in our society had come to rely on for generous and loving care.

## to record outrage at injustice

They didn't want piety and calm in a hymn text, a controlled and polite expression of Christian concern. They wanted a record of their own outrage at what they perceived as manifest injustice; these good Baptists had gone beyond compassion to the verge of taking revolutionary action. For myself as writer, if there had to be a biblical tie-in it must be with that unique episode in Christ's ministry when (surely from a similar sense of anger) he drove the traders from the Jerusalem Temple, 'overturning the tables of the money-changers and the seats of the sellers of doves' (Matthew 21: 12-13). The result was my hymn,

'May the anger of Christ be mine' (*Faith forever Singing*, 48)

Not surprisingly, there is an even more explicit Shirley Murray hymn written in 1992 to address the same situation, 'Wounded world that cries for healing' (it was published in 1996 in her American collection, *Every Day in your Spirit*).

Although both these hymns identified perceived injustices, and released the pent-up feelings of those affected by them, so far as I know they changed nothing: the reforms were ruthlessly pursued to their bitter, crippling end.

## reminiscent of the psalms

I see such texts now as contemporary expressions of a theme strongly present in a much older group of hymns, the 150 songs gathered in the Book of Psalms. Although the Psalms are not the earliest religious poems to deal with justice and divine will, what their writers had to say about the topic has become iconic, fixed in the collective memory of the faithful by sheer repetition, and often used as models for new writing.

One of the tones found in these texts is furious anger; open outrage at the injustices inflicted by the rich and the powerful on the poorest and weakest members of Jewish society. For some of the Psalm writers outrage turns into a ferocious thirst for vengeance. It's instructive to compare this bloodthirsty side of the Psalms with a modern New Zealand justice hymn by Shirley Murray, 'God weeps at love withheld' (*Faith forever*

*Singing*, 30). What stands out for me is its profoundly Christian concept of a God who is victimized alongside the human victims of injustice and abuse, who shares and feels the sorrows and the hurts, who — unlike the all-powerful, punitive God of some writers — waits patiently for us to understand the full implications of Christ's life and teachings.

### god: protector of the helpless

But much in the Book of Psalms also honours and affirms the ancient code of social justice laid down in Deuteronomy: 'I am the Lord your God and I demand equal justice, both for you Israelites and for the foreigners who may live among you ... If any of your people become poor and unable to support themselves, you must help them' (from chapters 24-6). In psalm after psalm God is praised as the protector of the poor, the hungry, the orphan, the widow, those helpless to improve their own lot, the homeless, the lonely, prisoners, the victims of cruel lawmakers and corrupt money lenders.

### code of social responsibility

This code of social responsibility, with its insistence on equality and fairness, was endorsed and hugely extended by Jesus, and has since become a fertile theme for modern makers of hymns about justice issues, many New Zealand hymn writers among them. Why? Simply because the evils these ancient texts speak of, are present and active in New Zealand society today.

I highlight two hymns which may stand for many others. The first is Shirley Murray's American Hymn Society 2007 prize-winning text, 'The Least of These'. It begins, 'Leftover people in leftover places' (*Hope is our Song*, 85) The second hymn is one I wrote in 1983, 'Let justice roll down like a river' (*Alleluia Aotearoa*, 85)

### to endorse a call to action

The thinking behind this hymn, with its call to personal action, may be usefully exposed. The refrain, of

### Let justice roll down like a river

*Let justice roll down like a river  
Let justice roll down like a sea  
Let justice roll down like the river  
Let justice begin with me.*

*Justice for all who go hungry,  
crying to God to be fed,  
left in a world of abundance  
to beg for a morsel of bread.*

*Justice for those who are homeless,  
victims of warfare or need,  
trapped on the borders of nowhere,  
lost in the canyons of greed.*

*Justice for all who are powerless,  
yearning for freedom in vain,  
plundered and robbed of their  
birthright,  
silently bearing their pain.*

Words and music © Colin Gibson  
Alleluia Aotearoa  
NZ Hymnbook Trust, 1993.

course is based on the famous passage in Amos 5: 21-4, [God says] 'I hate, I despise your festivals ... Take away from me the noise of your songs, I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.' But that leaves God telling us what to do. I wanted to challenge the singers of this hymn to take that directive themselves, personally to endorse the call to action. But what might 'acts of justice' mean to a New Zealand congregation? The word 'justice' itself could be a mere rhetorical flourish. So in the verses I name and identify what were then particular instances of injustice, starting with the plight of the hungry in a world of abundance (as usual, there was plenty of television coverage of starvation — even at that time in the Horn of Africa — interspersed with advertisements for every conceivable kind of western luxury food).

The second verse addressed two kinds of 'homelessness': the plight of Cambodians who had fled the Pol Pot

regime to be incarcerated in camps on the Thai border, and the plight of the homeless in the larger cities of this country: the urban poor, the street kids, the families crammed into sheds or a single room, wandering (so I have seen them) along streets where the skyscrapers of banks and fat-cat big businesses towered above them. In the final verse I had in mind the experience of our own Māori as well as many other indigenous peoples forcibly or cunningly dispossessed of the precious birthright of their land.

### still contemporary

Tragically, those verses have all remained relevant to contemporary experience, as fresh injustices and new bitter human experiences have succeeded the originals I had in mind in 1983.

### conclusion

New Zealand hymn writers continue to create new social justice hymns, believing that at the very least they may sensitize a congregation to the real social justice issues in the world around them. To sing them is to set a peg in the ground, to define a congregation's sense of values. They may open up debate and challenge fixed positions. They can attract the attention of idealistic young people, with their relevance or their passion; they may serve to focus the singers' minds on a topical theme developed by a preacher. They sometimes inspire people to go into action beyond the walls of the church. They may encourage faith and hope in a more just future. And, in this hope, New Zealanders continue to set forth a vision of justice exercised in this world as it is now; a vision that does not depend on some overwhelming end-of-time event, a decisive intervention from beyond to bring an incomprehensible conclusion to the age-old struggle between good and evil. ■

*Colin Gibson is emeritus professor of English at the University of Otago, and long time choir director and organist of the Mornington Methodist Church.*

# allegro ma non troppo

*A well known writer for Tui Motu begins to write in a new way from the island of Loga in the harbour of Gizo, capital of the Western Province in the Solomon Islands. We hope Peter will become a regular contributor in an occasional “Letter from Loga”.*

Peter Murnane

People who know music will instantly recognise this particular instruction in Italian by which the composer guides the player to recreate the music joyfully, but not too much (*troppo*). I use it here in a slightly different sense. At least since the Second World War, ‘troppo’ has come to mean “seriously affected in mind by living too long in the tropics”.

## a bit barmy

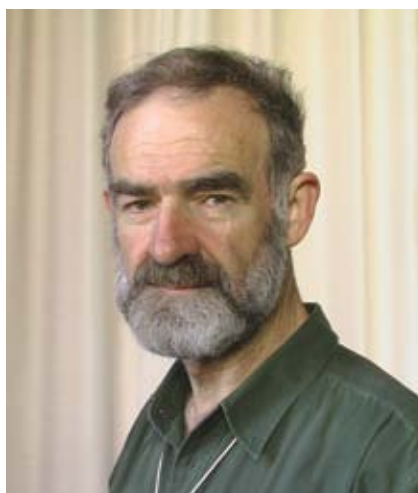
Some friends thought I was already a bit barmy when as an ageing Dominican friar I volunteered for a remote community in the Western Solomon Islands, to teach Melanesian novices. To my surprise, I find living here in the heart of the tropics, 8 degrees from the equator, a most joyful experience. In my amateur opinion, it has not (yet) sent me ‘troppo’.” But those wise friends may respond to that claim with, “Yeah, right!” and even remind me that no one is judge in his own case. They may be quite correct, but if I have ‘gone troppo’, I must say it is great fun.

I ask for some impartial judge other than myself — or those friends!

## my speech

Here is some of the evidence to present:

- I enjoy the climate, from 24 degrees C on cold nights to 34 degrees C on hot, still days.
- I almost never listen to a radio or watch TV. Once or twice a week I might see a copy of the daily *Solomon Star*. But I don’t miss any of these.



Peter Murnane

- I do confess to using the internet.
- I keep two — very small — pet pythons, Monti and Zuma. I find them beautiful creatures to watch, and am surprised to find they seem to enjoy their daily exercise of twining around my hands. Well, they do seem reluctant to leave. In the manner of cats, they even like to rub the side of their tiny head against you (or part of one finger!)
- Every week or so I feed them each a live gecko, the vocal, insect-catching lizards that frequent our walls and ceilings, for pythons dine only rarely, then

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I am finding that ‘God’, or ‘Them who made us’ is an Infinity of Love, which runs the universe.

---

sleep for several days to digest their large meal.

*Is the evidence mounting, Your Honour?*

I would like to plead that all this is in the context of trying to find The Meaning Of Life: ‘What is God?’ and ‘What’s it all about?’. On and off, I have sought this for most of 72 years.

I came here because a job needed to be done for which I have some experience, but it is also a kind of experiment in how much we can ‘let go’. So I said good-bye to life in inner city Auckland, lots of friends and some earthly goods. I came about 6,000km to live more simply and but soon began striving to acquire broadband, install pet pythons in my room, and talk to a large spider.

Your Honour, it must be a hopeful sign that I am finding great joy every day I am here, despite the physical inconveniences. Despite, too, being aware more than before of the enormous sufferings of people like the Tamils in Sri Lanka; Palestinians; Afghanis and Iraqis; the West Papuans and refugees anywhere, who seem to come before me in daily prayer and meditation.

Living among our small band of Dominican friar-novices and meeting sister-novices and postulants daily in class-room and chapel, I share their struggle to improve English as their third or fourth language. I find their mistakes in English and their occasional naïveté about our culture immensely funny, but refrain from laughing at them. I also enjoy — when I get over the embarrassment — my own naïve mistakes in my efforts to communicate with the locals.



The island of Loga, where Father Peter lives, looking to the volcano of Kolombangara

Pondering the overall experience, I am convinced that our reasons for joy are deeper than the ocean that I occasionally cross by outboard canoe. If it throws us around at times, the threatening waves rise and fall only a couple of metres, while there are 1,000 metres of still water in the rich blue depths beneath us. Perhaps this metaphor does not help much with marine safety, but applied to life it tells me that we have nothing to fear. I am finding that 'God', or 'Them who made us' is an Infinity of Love, which runs the universe.

So there is some of the evidence, Your Honour. I expect the jury won't be out for long. But before I rest my case, may I risk the following story, even though it will help the prosecution, especially if there are humourless Christians on the jury:

### ice-cream at calvary

Beginners in English can unknowingly cause chaos when reading from Scripture. On my first visit to Loga 27 years ago, a young sister reading during Mass, gave us a memorable interpretation of Genesis chapter 3. She proclaimed that God, walking in the garden of Eden during the cool of the day, called to Adam, "Where are you?" Adam replied, "I heard

the sound of you in the garden; I was afraid, because I was knackered, so I hid." "Who told you you were knackered?" I cannot recall how Adam replied.

In the same chapel these many years later, despite mosquitoes and humid heat, we 14 friars and sisters sit silently united in two daily sessions of silent meditation. We also chant the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church, and conclude with five decades of the Rosary.

One evening recently our leader was the novice who has had least opportunity to learn English. A delightful person, he good-humouredly accepts his struggles with English. He was introducing the five Sorrowful Mysteries, in which we ponder prayerfully a scene from Jesus' life while we recite the Lord's Prayer and ten times the

Hail Mary. The second Sorrowful Mystery is introduced succinctly as 'Jesus is Whipped', but our brave announcer gave it forth as 'Jesus is Whippied'. It may not look so funny in print, but anyone who has lived in Australian or New Zealand cities will instantly recall Mr Whippy, who all summer long drives his ice-cream van around the streets of suburbia, endlessly playing a crude electronic version of 'Greensleeves', to tell children that they can get ice-cream here, now.

As I sat in our chapel — sweltering, as usual — I did not even recall that we have no refrigerator or ice cream here. Instead I had a bizarre vision of that tragic day when Jesus was being dragged towards the unspeakable climax of his torture. Suddenly an ice-cream van appears at the edge of the crowd, jingling its familiar tune. Why hadn't the gospels mentioned it?

I tried to force my imagination from developing the scene as *The Life of Brian* might have done, but for the remaining minutes of that deep and ancient prayer I struggled, with only partial success, to stop myself from bursting out in a fit of giggling.

"Chairperson of the jury, how do you find?" ■



# Contemplating



Nothing in all creation  
is so like God  
as stillness

— Meister Eckhart

Photo: Patrick Fitzsimons

# *with the Mystics*

I, the fiery life of divine essence,  
blaze beyond the beauty of the fields,  
I gleam in the waters,  
and burn in the sun, moon and stars.  
With every breeze,  
as with an all-sustaining invisible force,  
I awaken all things to life.  
The air lives by turning green  
and being in bloom.  
The waters flow as if alive. . .

And thus I remain hidden in every kind  
of reality as a fiery power. . .

All of this lives in this essence,  
and there is no death in it.  
For I am life.

— *Hildegard of Bingen*

# quench their thirst

*The forthcoming Eucharistic Congress takes place in a country still in shock from the clerical child-abuse scandals. But the meeting in June has the potential to be a catalyst to begin the process of spiritual renewal for Church and people.*

Daniel O'Leary

Two bishops and I were in an Irish café last year. We were talking about the forthcoming fiftieth International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin. I was suggesting a presentation and celebration of beauty and power and new hope — something sublimely radical to lift Ireland, even temporarily, from the unprecedented confusion into which it has fallen.

There was no sparkle in the bishops' eyes. Only doubt. I spoke about preparing one Mass to remember: the appeal of a Celtic setting for it, the magic of Seán O Riada's sublime compositions, the elegance of Irish dance and the depth of our traditions. Could we not commission our best choreographers and dramatists, our poets and designers, to combine in the crafting of even one eucharistic evening of utter native authenticity, one sublime evening of memory and hope that would bring a small light to the darkness of recent decades?

There was still no sparkle in the bishops' eyes. They were thinking about what had happened to the Church in Ireland, about the destruction of the Irish soul, about the death of something more precious than the lost millions of euros of a dead Celtic Tiger. They spoke of the emotions of the innocent victims of clerical child abuse, of the anger of their families, of their own grief and helplessness.

Yet, here, I persisted, was an opportunity to fan a barely flickering flame, to touch what was deepest in the Irish psyche — a love of mystery and music, of myth and song, of heroes and heroines, and of a Mass,

that kept the dream alive, as it had even during the grim and empty Sundays of the penal laws. Before the eyes of the world, our faith would become an epiphany of divine and indestructible resilience, forged in the human smithy of feast and famine, of humiliation and courage, of despair and hope.

Now, nearly a year later, we await the unfolding of the imminent Eucharistic Congress in Dublin. Innumerable preparations nationwide are almost complete. Superb liturgies are promised. The Royal Dublin Society grounds and Croke Park will resound with worthy contributions from the best speakers in the land. The gathering will be ecumenical, youth-friendly and truly religious. There will be theological symposia, catechetical workshops and opportunities for personal witness. And yet ... will it capture our hearts? Will it take us deeply into the wonder of our own human mystery and the astonishing mystery of the cosmos? Will it fill Catholic Christians with a fierce desire to save the world because it is the body of God; to encounter injustice, poverty and violence, because attention to these sins is often sidelined in pursuit of liturgical purity and doctrinal orthodoxy?

Will the experience of the congress move us all from outer religious routine to an inner and truly human recognition of a divine beauty already within every person and family, every community, country and continent — within every moment of true love and reconciliation between people of any race and way of life and religious belonging? Will it restore the

universal gospel of compassion and equality clearly and definitively back to the heart of the Church where it surely belongs?

Beyond the pageantry and sacred music, the new translations and the old teachings, will the silenced song in Irish hearts, and in the persecuted souls of people everywhere, be given a new voice? In the midst of a predominantly clerical celebration, will someone be seen simply to kneel before the victims of heartbreak — children, women, sinners — betrayed by Church and society, and gently wash their feet?

"There is no consecration account, or passing of the bread or cup in John's gospel," wrote Richard Rohr OFM. "Instead we come upon the story of Jesus on his knees washing his disciples' feet. Really quite amazing that we never made foot-washing into a sacrament! John wanted to give a theology of the Eucharist that revealed the meaning behind the breaking of the bread, an active ritual of servanthood instead of the priestly cult that it has largely become."

People across the world are in sore need of hope and healing. Life is incredibly extreme and violent. Fierce emotions wage silent wars in the hidden places of a suffering world. Despotism and even "developed" governments are destroying their own children in different ways. Will the Eucharistic Congress, spotlighted on this world stage for a moment in a million, offer a counter-image of how life could be lived, one small but golden vignette of what a gospel community of mercy and acceptance looks like?

Will it be a gathering where sinners eat and drink before the saints do around the Lord's table, where women and men share equal power and authority in the inner circle of God's people, where institutional criteria will no longer blur the warm welcome of Jesus to all who have love in them? Christianity, not more "churchianity", is what God's people yearn for now. Worship is worthless, theologian Karl Rahner reminded us, if it does not engage with these raw realities of our precious and precarious lives.

The moment that liturgy ceases to be a sacrament of life, of what is happening in our world — human, non-human and cosmic — it ceases to be Christian. That intrinsic connection with life was hopefully what Pope Benedict meant when he said that we "need a new beauty in the liturgy today if the world is ever to be humanised and transformed".

Who will speak with passion in Dublin in a few weeks' time about Pope John Paul II's soul-stirring insights into the astonishing meaning of the Eucharist, intimately human and utterly universal? Whether it is celebrated in a family hut in Uganda, an infants' classroom in County Tipperary, or St Peter's in Rome, it is, he said, "always celebrated on the altar of the world".

"The Incarnation of God the Son", he wrote, "signifies the taking up into unity with God of everything that is flesh and that is cosmic ... the first-born of Creation unites himself with the entire reality of humanity, within the whole of Creation."

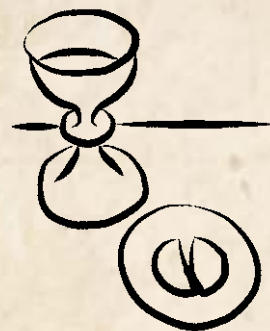
And all of this "is consummated in the Eucharist", as Sally Read reminded us in her recent "Homage to the body" reflection in *The Tablet* (7 April), "as we absorb God with our very gut, flesh and blood". ■

*Fr Daniel O'Leary's website is  
www.djoleary.com*

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## at the table

when you stretch out your hands  
you cast not shadow  
but light moving across  
the plains and curves  
of unspoken need  
and we wait for the balm  
of dewfall  
manna to troubled hearts  
questions and doubts grasp at yearning souls  
and are released to the surface where the vine is caressed by the sun  
your hands  
link dimensions  
in a light nearby  
faint but sure as a heartbeat  
if we lift our eyes when you raise him high  
he is here  
and we gaze on our love once more  
leaping on the mountains  
drinking forever at the wellsprings of your life moving through the sunrise  
rainbow refracted in the chalice  
candlelight glowing on the white raised surface  
time stands still as we drink in the beauty of our own eternity  
in which touch is possible the word heals  
and our love is lost  
we are lost  
in the tidal wave of blood  
flowing with water  
and change  
the breath rifling the wheat  
of a consciousness awakened by your call  
memory invoked and acted upon  
within the growth of grapes on a vine of endless proportions  
crushed poured out  
in the shape of a whisper  
carried across time  
reiterated on the page of longing  
lit anew down the centuries each Easter morning  
daybreak of substance altered  
promise renewed  
in uncompromising light  
speech of fire  
supper of fearless certainty of drinking and dying and living  
take  
this is real  
eat  
I am real  
drink  
you are real



—Joanie Roberson

# on the trinity

*Rublev's icon of the Trinity is the fulcrum from which Sister Mary begins a reflection on the nature of the Trinity. She takes a new term 'inter-be' and weaves a theology of creation and revelation from the gracious relationships which flow from the 'inter-being' of Abba God, Jesus and Holy Spirit.*

Mary Horn

For Eastern orthodox Christians, God is to be understood ('pictured') as a community of three persons. The icon of the Trinity depicts three persons, angels. There seems to be no gender. They could be male or female, around a table. On the table is a dish or cup at the centre. They are a community at home in the

world as the tree and the building in the background show.

## the icon's beauty

As the viewer I am drawn into the picture and become the fourth figure. The three faces are identical and all the figures wear a blue garment — the colour of the heavens. Blue in the fifteenth

century was the most expensive paint so used to depict divinity or holiness. But each wears something that speaks of their own identity.

On the right the Spirit figure wears a green robe representing new life. The Spirit touches the table — earthing the divine life of God and inclines to the centre, drawing our gaze to the figure representing Christ.

Besides the blue of divinity the Christ figure wears earthy brown, his humanity and a gold stripe of kingship. This Christ figure rests two fingers on the table — laying onto it his divine and human nature, pointing to the vessel. This figure in turn inclines towards the figure on the left — and we are drawn to gaze at a figure at rest with itself. The blue garment is nearly hidden by the shimmering ethereal robe.

Human creatures cannot see the one who is the creator. All the figures have a staff but this figure holds it with both hands. Here is depicted a community of 'inter-being' — a community 'inter-being' with one another and 'inter-being' with our world.

## a new word: 'inter-be'

While watching a video on the environment I heard an interesting term, one that I had not heard before. "A most important term for me", the speaker said, "is 'inter-be'". This term engaged my reflection for some time. It seems to me 'inter-be' might mean to be inter-related to the whole cosmos; that we are not only inter-related, but taking our very being from this earth. Our selves, our spirit, our nature come from this terrain



Icon of the Trinity by St. Andrei Rublev (XIVth century).  
Andronikov Monastery, Moscow

and forms who we are. I had already realised that who I am is not divorced from where I come from, and where my *tipuna* originated. People from different parts of New Zealand have different characteristics and these seem in some way related to the land and landforms. But this new term added a more profound dimension. My 'deepest being' was connected to the very soil that gave me nourishment — through the provision of water, food and beauty. Indeed I was not separate from, but part of the connecting link, that everything on the earth has with everything else, plant, animal, or mineral.

### animal, vegetable, mineral

We used to play a game when we were children guessing a word by the clue, using these divisions: 'animal, vegetable, mineral'. Remember that fond memory. 'Inter-be' suggests there are no divisions, and that the consequence of this is that there is an imperative — we are to care deeply about and for the planet, and increasingly as we probe the out-there, the whole universe. These, the land and water, plants and living things, are our *taonga*, our treasure, and make us who we are. So we care about the destruction of anything. That affects us too, affects our very selfhood, even if we do not realise it, because of this mystery of 'inter-be'. We are inter-related. It is impossible with this understanding to stand aside and do nothing when we see injustice being done to anyone, anything or to any part of the earth. Without this understanding and connectedness we will indeed destroy our planet and ourselves.

### difficult feast of the trinity

While I was pondering this, we were approaching what I call the difficult feast, that of the Trinity. I call it a difficult feast because the Trinity is a mystery beyond rational understanding. We make a big thing of Pentecost and Corpus Christi but often pass over Trinity Sunday. However, there

seems to be a connection between Trinity and 'inter-be'. In this mystery of Trinity each member has 'inter-being' with the other. Each is separate and not separate from the triune understanding. Each one of the Trinity gets their being from the other, while still being unique.

John grappled with the problem in his gospel. In chapter 16, he has Jesus say (vs 12-15),

"Just as I do not speak on my own initiative, neither does the Spirit. What you hear will be what the Spirit hears ... The Spirit will take what is mine and reveal it to you. Everything that Abba God has, belongs to me."

### the divine relationships

John wants us to understand that there is a relationship between each member of the Trinity that is unique but equal. Each has to listen, as we have to listen even to one another. Jesus does not speak on his own initiative but on the prompting of the other 'Abba God'. So as each member of the Trinity listens to the other they reveal what they hear to us. What they hear already belongs to all three. We in turn reveal what we have heard. Indeed mysterious, but more mysterious, we are privileged to have been drawn into this mystery of Trinitarian 'inter-be' by God, and with God, in the Son Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### conclusion

This is the depth of who and what we are, and the depth and blessedness of our whole cosmos, a gift beyond understanding. To treasure and care for the earth then is partaking in the inter-related mystery of God and God's creation, becoming human as Jesus came to show us, not in isolation from the rest of creation, but in loving relatedness. To have revelation from this creation is, in fact, to have revelation from the Trinity. ■

*Mary Horn is a Dominican sister and artist living at Teshemakers.*

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# time to end the hunger – food crisis in the sahel

*This article from Caritas Aotearoa NZ alerts us to the immense suffering which our sisters and brothers in the Sahel are undergoing right now, with little media attention or interest being given to them.*

Martin de Jong



Momoudou Bounti with two of his children in the camp at Niamey, Niger.  
[Photo: Nick Harrop/CAFOD]

Crisis struck Momoudou Bounti and his family because they didn't have enough food. They had to leave their village in Tahoua in rural Niger. Today, they live in a camp in Niger's capital Niamey, in a tiny shelter made from cardboard boxes and tarpaulin.

"A bad rainy season ... meant we didn't have food," says Momoudou. "I am a farmer and usually I grow millet. I planted my millet and it started growing, but then the rain stopped. When the rain stopped, we couldn't grow and couldn't harvest. Also some crickets came and ate the remaining crops ... This is the first time I have moved with my family.

This time, because the situation was so bad, we all had to go. For me, this is the worst ever season. In previous years, I could harvest something to help us keep going.

"Before we used to have enough rain to last the agricultural season. But the rains have become very scarce. Both rain and water belong to God. Are there ways to help the rural world to see how we can adapt to the changing climate?"

He says there are vegetable gardens on the edge of the camp. "If the owners do not want the vegetables because they are bad, the kids can take them ... People are very kind around here, and my family haven't

had any problems. People share what they have. There is a lot of solidarity."

When Momoudou and his wife try to find odd-jobs in the city, the children are left on their own. Momoudou says, "When we are back home, the older children are in school. Unfortunately, here none of them are in school. So when we're out working, the older ones look after the younger ones. Every day I cry from the bottom of my heart for my children because they are not in school."

Momoudou is just one of so many whom the 'lean season' has hit. This 'lean season' started early in the Sahel region of West Africa this year — months early. After poor harvests due to erratic weather, food has been in short supply and prices have gone up dramatically. It comes on the back of a series of drought and food crises over the last decade, made worse by regional conflicts. More than 19 million people across nine countries are at risk — many down to one meal a day and foraging for wild foods.

In February, Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the emerging crisis in the Sahel, saying "I urge the international community seriously to address the extreme poverty of these people whose living conditions are deteriorating."

A mid-June update from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said only 43 percent of a required US\$1.5 billion international appeal for the region had been filled.

## caritas response

Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is

part of the Caritas Internationalis network working in five of the worst affected countries: Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad.

Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is focused on Niger, where it is working with three Caritas partners. It is estimated that more than 6 million people will face food shortages in Niger.

“All the food reserves have gone, the cost of food has gone through the roof, and people have limited opportunity to earn money,” says Mark Mitchell, Humanitarian Programmes officer for Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand. “Continued strong intervention is needed to provide help until the next harvest in October.

“The people of the Sahel live on the edge of the desert. They’re used to droughts and food shortages, and usually make it through. But the droughts have become more frequent — the climate is changing.

“People don’t have the capacity just to keep going. They don’t have the capacity to buy the next meal, so they sell their goats, for example.

“And once you’ve sold your goat, you’ve got nothing else, and when you’ve got a whole community in that situation, you can’t just go to your neighbour, because your neighbour’s in the same situation as yourself.”

## hunger recurs

“Sadly, hunger is a recurring theme in this region,” says Philippe Mougin of CAFOD, “a slow-burning problem that rarely hits the headlines. But this year’s food crisis is the worst to have hit the region for many years. We need to act now to prevent this crisis becoming a catastrophe.”

Caritas is providing food to get people through: subsidised grain, nutrition centres for malnourished children, and food distributions to those most in need.

Even in ‘non-crisis’ years, life is hard in the Sahel: half the rural population constantly live on the edge of crisis, and 300,000 children die from malnutrition-related causes each year.

## food for the future

That is why Caritas is also providing longer term programmes to improve resilience; and advocating for policy measures to help the poorest.

In the area most at risk in Niger in the southwest, seed for planting is being distributed to 14,000 households across 110 villages. Local people are employed on projects to sustain their communities in the longer term, such as using small trenches on crop fields to keep water from draining away when it rains.

It has worked in the past. In 2008, Caritas members supported granary committees at village level to help manage grain harvests and look after community resources better. Other small-scale approaches such as better grain storage facilities mean less grain lost to insects, rodents and mildew; and farmers are not pressured to sell

### Causes of the Crisis

The present food crisis was principally caused by a disastrous harvest in areas across the Sahel in 2011. The harvest failed because of erratic weather patterns and — in some areas — pest infestations.

Other factors include:

- Grain shortages that triggered steep rises in food prices.
- A history of increasingly frequent, recurrent droughts that has made people more vulnerable.
- Armed conflict in Mali forced 320,000 people to leave their homes. At least 25,000 crossed into an area of Niger already facing severe food shortages.
- Wars in Libya and Cote d'Ivoire in 2011 that forced many migrant workers to return home, leading to a drop in remittances that used to sustain many Sahelian households.

Source: CAFOD, June 2012.

surplus immediately after harvest.

“We’ve learnt lessons from what’s happened before,” says Mr Mitchell, “here, and in the Horn of Africa last year. Working with the communities affected, we know what to do, we know how to help, we just need more resources.”

## structural change

In the face of ongoing and chronic hunger crises, Caritas is also calling for structural change and global action.

“Hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things, as on shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional,” said Pope Benedict XVI in his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*.

In a policy paper on the Sahel crisis, Caritas member CAFOD says national, regional and international approaches need to support better small farmer production. It also calls for better social protection measures such as old age pensions, child allowances and disability allowances.

Cardinal Rodriguez Maradiaga, President of Caritas Internationalis, has called on the world’s leaders: “We must be more human; we cannot be indifferent to the deaths of thousands and millions of people in the world where there is a possibility of giving them a better life by sharing the food, and not speculating with the prices.”

In line with its mandate, Caritas will always respond to immediate need, while also taking action to address the underlying causes of poverty and hunger.

In September it will focus on food issues at home and abroad during *Social Justice Week*, 9-15 September. ■

*Martin de Jong is the Communications & International Advocacy Coordinator for Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand.*

To contribute to the Caritas appeal for the Sahel, see details in the advertisement on page 29.

# the vatican state – how come?

*One of New Zealand's best known writers casts her critical eye over how the Vatican State came into being to answer another important question: what is the state of the Vatican? This is the first of two articles. In this part, Sister Pauline looks at the history of the development of the Vatican State.*

Pauline O'Regan

Recently I was asked by a younger person to explain, if I could, the existence of such an entity as a Vatican State. The tone was accusing. He'd just discovered that *it's the size of a large golf course, has no democratic government and sends diplomats all over the world.* I considered that for him to have any understanding of this strange phenomenon we needed to go back a little.

I began by reminding him that the nation of Italy is significantly younger than that of New Zealand. Before the year 1860, Italy as such did not exist. Until then, that peninsula that so resembles a large boot, was made up of many small states, quite independent of one another, each ruled by rulers with absolute power, all of them oppressive. They ranged from the occupation of the north by the Austrians to the hated French Bourbon dynasty in the south. All of central Italy, known as the Papal States, was ruled by the Pope.

## how italy came to be

The Middle East today, I told him, is the Europe of the 19th century. The people were no longer able to tolerate oppressive regimes and were ready to lay down their lives to overthrow them. In Italy, thanks to a clever statesman in the north, named Cavour and a charismatic soldier in the south named Garibaldi, the hated rulers were driven out and the nation of a united Italy came into being. One of those overthrown rulers was Pope Pius IX. The Papal States became part of the new Italy led from Piedmont in the north.

But Rome had been the capital of the Papal States and the new rulers did not dare to include the city of Rome in the new Italy. They feared that if they did, either Austria or France, mindful of the powerful Catholic vote in each country, might invade Italy once more to restore his capital city to the Pope. Even as it was, French troops were already stationed in Rome to protect the Pope.

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**Pius IX was distraught by the loss of his lands. He believed that the Catholic Church could not survive without the backing of its secular power.**

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## loss of the papal states

Pius IX was distraught by the loss of his lands, the Papal States. He believed that the Catholic Church could not survive without the backing of its secular power.

*So, he resigned?*

Hardly! No, he did two things, both profoundly affecting the church to this day.

He began systematically to centralise the universal church on Rome and secondly, to cement the spiritual power of the papacy to replace the temporal power it had lost.

*Now, how could he do that?*

Well, for one thing, he decreed that the authority of the Pope in certain circumstances be absolute. That was the beginning of an undermining

of the authority of bishops in their local areas. Consciously or not, he opened the way for the creation of the climate of fear that besets authority in the Church today. Each bishop has to toe the papal line no matter what his own conscience tells him is right or his knowledge of his particular region tells him is appropriate for him to do. The context of the church in Africa is different from that of Iceland for example, or of New Zealand for that matter. If a bishop doesn't conform to papal instruction, he runs the almost certain risk of being suspended.

## the syllabus of errors

To make sure that bishops knew what was expected of them, Pius IX wrote an encyclical letter *Quanta Cura* with an accompanying *Syllabus of Errors*. This Syllabus consisted of a long list of condemnations which effectively denounced every development in thought, political liberalism, science, and technology of that time. To give my friend an idea of the drift of this document, I limited myself to its condemnation of freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. I suggested he google the rest!

*Was that all?*

Not by a long shot.

## 1870: turning point

I confined myself to the most significant step in establishing papal power. There is more often than not, one year in every century, I told him, which proves, in retrospect, to have been a turning point. Events come together in that year, to change the course of history. 1870 was such a year, both for the world and for the Church.



Part of the Vatican State from the tower of St Peter's Basilica, overlooking the piazza and colonnade, leading down the Via Conciliazione.

In 1870, Pius IX convened an Ecumenical Council of the Church, to be known later as Vatican I. The bishops of the world were gathered in Rome. They had not fully covered the agenda when Prussia declared war on France. The French troops, urgently needed at home, were immediately withdrawn from Rome. This meant that the new Italian army would now seize the moment to take Rome. While they would never touch the person of the Pope, he felt himself to be dangerously exposed. With Europe at war, the bishops fled Rome overnight. Vatican I was adjourned and was never formally closed. That's how things remained until 1962, when Pope John XXIII convened Vatican II.

### infallibility

The main topic on the agenda of Vatican I was that of infallibility. There were those who supported the Pope in his contention that infallibility

was vested solely in the person of the Pope. Others contended with equal passion, that the tradition of the Church was never that the Pope alone was infallible, but rather the Pope, in union with the College of Bishops in an Ecumenical Council

of the Church. Before it could be fully discussed, the war precipitated events. There was a hurried vote and the majority of bishops voted with the Pope.

### and the catechism ...

After that, it remained only for an obscure English nun to compile a book to become known as *The Penny Catechism*, for the *Penny Catechism* to be disseminated throughout the English-speaking world, for virtually every Catholic child to learn the catechism off by heart. (Q. Is the Pope infallible? A. The Pope is infallible.) and the doctrine became cemented into the Catholic mindset, never to be questioned.

And that's how things stayed until 1962; but more of that in the next article. ■



Pope Pius IX [Vatican Print c.1870]

*Sister Pauline O'Regan is a member of the Aranui Mercy Sisters community.*

# intertwined mighty deeds stories

Mark: 5:21–43

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 1 July 2012

Kathleen Rushton



Fresco from the Catacomb of Saint Peter and Saint Marcellinus, in Rome dating from the end of the 3rd century.

In Chapter five, Mark presents Jesus as transforming different states considered ‘unclean’: demon possession, haemorrhaging and death. Jesus and the disciples came “to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes” where in that Gentile region he restored a demon-possessed man. Then, they ‘crossed again’ to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, returning to Jewish territory.

## an interruption

There Jairus, a synagogue leader, begs Jesus to go with him to heal his dying daughter. Then along comes a woman with a haemorrhage. This interruption serves two purposes. First, there is a delay

which seems to be fatal. Jesus becomes involved in more than a healing. Second, the older woman’s story sheds light on the meaning of the young girl’s story and vice versa. Their stories are intertwined. Twelve years old and twelve years suffering evoke the twelve tribes of Israel as do the Twelve, the inner circle of Jesus’ disciples.

The woman’s status is uncertain. She is not identified by male kinship. She may well have been a woman of means as she had spent her resources on physicians. Her condition of bleeding sets her outside the religious community of the Temple and the synagogue and most likely outside the honourable human community.

## a touch of faith story

Healing occurs at the woman’s initiative. Her *faith* made her well. She heard about Jesus. She came up behind him, touched him and ‘immediately’ her bleeding stopped. She feels healed in her body and made whole. Jesus also is aware that something in his body has changed and asks the crowds: “Who touched me?” Her faith-touch differs from that of the jostling crowds.

“Knowing what had happened to her,” the woman came to Jesus “in fear and trembling” (5:33). These words anticipate the description of the three women who are ‘trembling’ and ‘afraid’ before the empty tomb (16:8). This woman was ‘trembling’ because she has sensed the power that healed her body. She is in awe of that power, not frightened by it. In both cases, Mark has used the word ‘trembling’ to convey the holy state of being overwhelmed by God’s power.

Jesus affirms the woman, “*Daughter*, your faith has made you well”. Jesus becomes her kinsman. She is drawn into the new family of God based not on blood but on doing the will of God (3:31-35). Jesus restores her both to herself and to her religious community. In other words, through her faith he brings her back to life. Jesus gives her a traditional Jewish blessing: “Go [or walk] in peace ...”

## a resurrection story

The story of the young girl is a resurrection story which anticipates Jesus’ own resurrection. Translations tell us that Jesus said “Little girl,

get up!" Moreover, Mark uses the word 'rise' (*eigero*) — the same word he uses for the resurrection of Jesus (16:6). Previously, it was used in the healing of the mother-in-law of Simon and of the man who was paralysed.

Jesus says three things which point to this story's significance. To Jairus: "Do not fear, only believe." To the weeping crowd: "The child is not dead but sleeping." And to the child: "Rise up!" Thus commonly held attitudes to death are transformed. For Jairus, death held not only sadness but fear. Death was considered to leave the human body 'unclean' and left anyone who touched it unclean ritually. For the grieving crowd, death was final. For the child, life appeared to be over. Jesus offers faith in place of fear, gives assurance that death is temporary and reversible, and calls the girl back to life.

### **"overcome with amazement"**

"They were overcome with amazement (*ekstasis*)" is how Mark describes the experience of those who witness the raising up of the little girl. This anticipates the experience of the three women at the empty tomb who "were overcome with amazement." The Greek word *ekstasis* is the root of our English word 'ecstasy'.

In faith, do I really reach out and touch Jesus in the Sunday Eucharist or do I just bump into him like the crowd? When have I been 'trembling' because I have sensed the power of God? The little girl and other characters 'raised up' by Jesus are prototypes which lead us to faith in the face of death. How am I 'raised up' in the face of little deaths — such as loss of health, moving house — and in the face of death itself? Am I "overcome with amazement" that I, too, shall be 'raised up' from the little deaths and even from death itself? ■

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

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*"God is only beauty, mercy and total embrace, and nothing but beauty, mercy and total embrace."*

– Richard Rohr

*"We are always the same age inside."*

– Gertrude Stein

*"The unexamined life is not worth living."*

– Socrates

*"Only the shallow know themselves."*

– Oscar Wilde

*"He who cannot draw from 3,000 years of history is living from hand-to-mouth."*

– Goethe

*"Our life is what our thoughts make it."*

– Marcus Aurelius

*"Nothing will content those who are not content with a little."*

– Greek Proverb

*"Soul Meets Machine"*

– Advertisement for Toyota's new Lexus.

# a theologian looks back

## Hannah's Child: a Theologian's Memoir

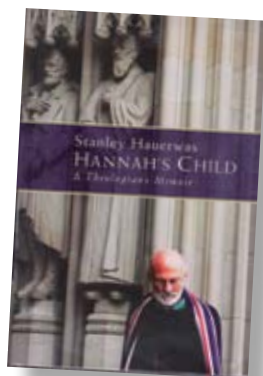
by Stanley Hauerwas

Published by Eerdmans, 2010

Hardback \$28.79;

Ppk \$24.31 (Fishpond)

Reviewer: Mike Crowl



**H**auerwas is an American theologian, well enough known to have earned a place on a *Time* cover, though this honour was eclipsed next day by 9/11. Hauerwas uses the memoir format to digress from autobiography and reflect on themes that run through his life.

He's the son and apprentice of a Texas bricklayer. In bricklaying he learned the rough language seldom associated with a theologian or academic, as well as the hard work ethic that translated into his prolific output as a writer and success as an academic. As a tradesman who has worked in Universities all his life he notes, "There is a 'no bullshit' quality to [Karl] Barth's thought that appealed to a bricklayer from Texas and that seemed to me the kind of straightforwardness Christian claims require."

After years as a Christian theologian he is still unsure what it means for him to be a Christian, and to have faith. Late in the book he writes, "Could it be that after all these years of writing and teaching about theology and the church, I have come to believe in God with sufficient intensity that others can now see in me a faith I did not even know I had?" Elsewhere he writes, "...there is no substitute for learning to be a Christian by being in the presence of significant lives made significant by being Christian." This relates to his years working at Notre Dame University, where he was one of the few Protestant members of staff amongst a host of Catholics.

Hauerwas somehow fits dozens of

friends into his extraordinarily busy life. "I discovered I had a gift for friendship. I love and trust people. My love and trust may at times be unwise, but I prefer the risk ... I love interesting, complex, and even difficult people. Thank God, they often love me." Hauerwas explains in detail how many of his friendships came about and what endeared him to these people.

He endured the difficulties of a first marriage to a woman who from day one showed signs of mental illness, blaming him for everything that was wrong in her life. They had one son, Adam, who survived the domestic tensions and has been one of Hauerwas's closest friends. Hauerwas's wife eventually divorced him, and in due course he came into a much happier second marriage. He sums up his first marriage this way: "My best advice for those who find that they must learn to live with someone who

is seriously mentally ill is that their first duty is to survive... You must strive to survive if you are to sustain any hope that life can go on."

The book is full of wit. Of one friend he says, he "left to explore what it might mean to become a monk at Taizé. He wrote to me, observing that there was not sufficient laughter at Taizé." Hauerwas's law is, "You always marry the wrong person ... which suggests that it is perfectly normal for partners in a marriage to discover, in time, that each person has some trait about which the other had not bargained." Or, "...they asked me to come to one of their retreats in California to discuss matters further. I do not believe in California." Or, "...death, in particular the fear of death, is at the heart of the American inability to sustain a less murderous presence in the world."

Hauerwas shows a humility throughout that is endearing, and the richness of an inquisitive intellect. "Writing is hard and difficult work because to write is to think. I do not have an idea and then find a way to express it. The expression is the idea. So I write because writing is the only way I know how to think. I write, moreover, because I have something to say ... I have something to say because I am a Christian." This book is a rewarding read. ■

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# companions of the road

## The Way

**Director:** Emilio Estevez

**Reviewer:** Paul Sorrell

I've often heard people expressing a desire to walk the Camino, the ancient pilgrim route that begins in the French Pyrenees and stretches 800km through northern Spain, finishing at Santiago de Compostela, traditional resting place of the bones of St James. Some want to do it for traditional religious reasons, mindful of the many thousands of pious folk who have walked the trail in a spirit of devotion and penance, but most want to take a few weeks out of their busy schedules to reflect on the meaning of their lives and where they may be headed. As one of the characters in the film remarks, the term 'road' has long been freighted with rich metaphorical meaning.

The heterogenous bunch who make up the cast of *The Way* are very much in the mould of these latter-day secular pilgrims. We follow their progress through the eyes of Tom Avery (Martin Sheen), an almost-retired ophthalmologist from California who is determined to complete the trail for the sake of his estranged son, Daniel, who died tragically on the first leg of the walk. On the way, Tom falls in with Joost, a happy-go-lucky



pot-smoking Dutchman, whose main aim in walking the Camino is to lose a few pounds; Sarah, a hard-bitten Canadian who is trying to give up smoking, but who is also nursing wounds inflicted by an abusive relationship and an abortion; and Jack, a garrulous, self-dramatising Irish author with writer's block.

At first, Tom, nursing his own grief, is wary of company and accepts his fellow pilgrims on sufferance. His moment of release comes halfway along the trail after his backpack — containing his son's ashes, which he is dispersing along the way — is stolen and then restored to him. This is the 'miracle' he could not foresee and was only too ready to dismiss. After this experience, he sees that his companions, too, are carrying deeper needs and truths, and he is able to embrace them as fellow pilgrims and become an integral member of the fledgling community they are creating together. Thus, at the end of the film, Tom is able to complete the journey, not only for his son but also for himself.

Irishman Jack, who is writing a guidebook for the trail, is full of questions about their venture. What is the meaning of the Camino? How does one become a true pilgrim? One thing is certain, he asserts — no-one does the Camino by accident. Despite — or perhaps because of — their lack of overt religious motivation, Tom and his companions discover that, in the end, the meaning they seek is to be found in the generous fellowship of the Way. ■

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# Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

## vatican turmoil

My main sources for the following remarks are Vatican observers John Allen (USA) and Andrea Tornielli (Italy). There appear to be three main factors contributing to the current public disclosure of turmoil.

The first is structural. According to Massimo Franco, recent melt-downs are symptoms of a crisis: signs of the end of an epoch in which the Vatican represented the religious and moral sentiments of Western civilization, and the dawn of a new era in which Catholicism has become a minority subculture. The Vatican has not worked out how to respond to this new world, he argues, citing the “profound confusion one detects among the pope’s men.” The day of reckoning was held at bay for a half-century by the Cold War and for a quarter-century by the towering charisma of Pope John Paul II, Franco says.

The second factor is proffered by Paolo Rodari and Andrea Tornielli. They suggest there is an effort afoot to damage Benedict’s moral authority. Recent revelations of leaks of sensitive documents tend to support that theory.

The third relates to the pope’s managerial style. There are a number of relevant aspects, some positive, some negative, but two themes form a backdrop: his departure from tradition in appointing a non-diplomat as Secretary of State, and his vigorous attempts to change the widespread ‘culture’ he inherited that put defence of the institution first. Both factors have ruffled a lot of feathers. As he has said on several occasions, “the real persecution facing the Church, comes not from external attacks but from the reality of sin within the church.”

In a comment to new cardinals last February, with most of the Vatican’s senior leadership looking

on, the pope issued a strong plea for a spirit of service. “Serving God and others, self-giving: this is the logic which authentic faith imparts and develops in our daily lives,” he said, “and which is not the type of power and glory that belongs to this world.” Benedict noted that from the very beginning not everyone in leadership positions among Christ’s followers has been up to that challenge.

## exemplary service

A spirit of service was highlighted in the recent celebrations marking the diamond jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

Regardless of how one views the monarchy, most would cringe at having to live life with such limited personal freedom, and always under the spotlight. While many people have experienced family problems, or even tragedy, they have not had to submit to such relentless scrutiny. But for the last 60 years Queen Elizabeth has faced the challenges of her role with dignity, serenity, dedication to duty, and commitment, and fulfilled the promise of her coronation pledge: “throughout all my life and with all my heart I shall strive to be worthy of your trust.” She continues to inspire within the context of her strong personal faith.

Within her lifetime the monarchy has had to make significant changes to adapt to a world that is evolving culturally, economically, and politically. Whether the monarchy will outlast Elizabeth in some form remains to be seen. But one thing is beyond argument — she has personally succeeded in maintaining some relevance in a world that differs greatly from that of her coronation 60 years ago. May she know peace and joy in the years that remain to her.

## of toothfish and theology

In a recent *NZ Herald* article, Gareth Morgan and Geoff Simmons pointed out that creating a Marine Protected Area in international waters is ultimately a diplomatic process that will eventually require some horse trading in order to reach consensus among nations. They produced figures to show that the claims of some environmentalists (‘green-necks’) were scientifically untenable and therefore counterproductive. One of the objectives of the Antarctic Ocean Alliance (a coalition of environmental NGOs) would make the catching of toothfish uneconomic. Morgan claims that this, along with other AOA proposals, would lead to fishing nations vetoing the official NZ draft proposal, leading to less protection.

Morgan and Simmons’ argument is that fact-based, clear rational discussion is the proper way to proceed — emotional posturing risks handing the moral high ground to the opposition.

Coincidentally, Austrian Robert Deinhammer SJ has published an article (in *Mirada Global*) dissecting the theological stance of some in the environmental movement. He wrote that the vital need to protect ecosystems in a comprehensible and sustainable manner is often undermined from within environmental movements themselves. This emanates from a pseudo-religion — ‘eco-religion’ — that “generates a massive deficiency in rationality, and entails profound changes in our traditional understanding of ourselves as well as of the world. ‘Nature’, or ‘Mother Earth’, are thus seen as good and even in some way ‘holy’, whereas human beings are evil, since they try to dominate nature and wish to exploit it ... However, the moral requirement to protect the environment would be meaningless, if we were incapable of entering into a distanced relationship to nature.” ■

# the pope and i

Robert Consedine

I'm sitting in the papal apartments with the Pope having a *caffè macchiato* and discussing with his Holiness pressing theological and geopolitical issues. A holy scent infused with lemon tree blossom and the smell of spring grass pervaded the room as I inhaled the Pope's exclusive fragrance.

I could tell the Pope was deeply troubled. He said "The Holy Spirit has become unmanageable. No matter how many encyclicals, papal bulletins, edicts, instructions, press releases, directions to Bishops I issue, she continues to have a mind of her own. I've tried re-activating the inquisition, silencing, excommunication, bullying, banning, theological investigation and nothing works anymore.

"Women and men everywhere are living the gospel and co-creating a new Church and I'm not in charge of it — and I do not understand it." He said to me, "As a youth you were formed in the YCW based on the Gospel. My formation was in the Hitler Youth which was mandatory and based on racial superiority and loyalty to the Nazi Party. This did not prepare me for the world of the 21st century.

"And I don't understand what has happened to women. They used to be so helpful. They were excellent housekeepers, they cleaned the church and raised

children. Our good Sisters ran schools, orphanages and hospitals. They never complained. They were obedient and knew their place.

"Now they quote Vatican II every time I confront their behaviour. They are claiming the authority conferred by their baptism. Vatican II is driving me crazy. They are actually quoting the *sensus fidelium* when challenged, and they use words like 'signs of the times' and 'the people of God'. What happened to papal infallibility?

"I thought my strategy of paying lip service to Vatican Two, simultaneously undermining the Council teachings and ignoring collegiality, was working brilliantly.

"I have tried to direct the Holy Spirit in support of my thinking but to no avail.

I am starting to realise that the current movement is unstoppable. They are taking the 'preferential option for the poor' seriously."

I explained to his Holiness that when the Bishops said 'we are the Church' we thought they meant it. The people of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, are not waiting for the Papacy to wake up. The good news is that women will be ordained, formulate policy, lead the Church and transform a world that desperately needs their

leadership. It is happening now.

I went on to say, "the question for you to consider is will the Papacy become an irrelevant postscript to this revolution, or walk alongside the people of God and become co-creators of a transformed world?"

"The women know that Jesus will wash their feet as he washed the feet of the marginalized everywhere. Historically, whatever women did or did not do in their contact with Jesus was influenced by the Jewish culture of the time — which Jesus constantly challenged. If the case for an ordained male priesthood is based on the twelve apostles, or 'imaging Jesus', then only Jewish men should be ordained. Absurd.

"John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* captured the way forward in 1963 when he said that, 'all human beings have the right ... to follow a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life.'"

After 2000 years the Church has failed to implant the message of Jesus into the world. The exclusion of women is central to this failure.

The Pope, a prisoner of his European mindset, was looking thoughtful as the butler surreptitiously slipped some documents into my briefcase and served me another *macchiato*. ■

Robert@waitangi.co.nz

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# a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

*"Mum, you will be OK without me for a few days. Remember that thing I told you? If you're missing me too much then just give a kiss on your hand and I will get it soon."*

Squatting to give my sage and precious three-year-old a farewell hug, she was full of reassurance.

"OK, Mum. I think I'll give you an eyebrow kiss goodbye."

Her little sticky fingers clasped each side of my temples. Tenderly Jalori bestowed a small kiss on each of my eyebrows. Later, waiting at the train station, I reflected on her attention, curiosity and imagination. Every day I need these reminders to look through a more playful lens.

Jalori lies talking herself to sleep, rehearsing the day's events.

"I'm sorry for biting you Tara" (They had a lot of time together this week).

"That's OK Jalori, I'm sorry I bit you too."

"That's OK Tara. Where's your doll's cooking stuff?"

The older kids roll their eyes as Jalori begs to say grace again. We are seated around the dining table, but she is also somewhere else altogether. "Dear God, thank you for this food. And for the dolphins swimming and the tiny ants and for my water pumper so I can water the plants, and then the dolphins went chasing after

the kittens. Amen."

Walking home from pre-school two days ago took over an hour to traverse paths that I usually cover in ten minutes. Tara and Jalori clambered and slipped over mossy banks. Stopped to collect the 'cubs and puppies' from their pozzie by the concrete ramp. (Where they watch TV while their mistresses are

jam-toast. Please, Mum?"

"I'm not Jalori. I am a tiger, mum, called Stripo. Call for Stripo then I'll come and put my shoes on!"

"If you walk all the day home with me on your shoulders then you'll get a treat, OK Mum!"

"Mum, would you like to have a sleepover with me tonight? There's lots of space in my bed."



at school). Played ring-a-ring-a-rosies at the Hugging Tree. Collected grimy handfuls of daisy heads to give out to older siblings at dinner. Ate a handful of peanuts and raisins stashed in my backpack in an impromptu picnic. Watched baby monkeys cavort and leap in a tree opposite. I worked hard to suppress thoughts of many tasks waiting at home. I didn't succeed. But enjoy the event in retrospect.

"What do they call ladybirds in Africa?"

"Mum, today I think I won't go to pre-school. I'm going to just play with you. OK?"

"I'm feeling quite hungry for Sour Worms. I'm not hungry for a

Questions and instructions that nearly erase memories of this week's tantrum at the front door, the every-single-night wails over lost blankets, the battle over hair brushing, the obsessive specifications of toast squares or triangles ... The ordered, efficient adult world I often gravitate towards is grey after an afternoon hanging out with this three year old. There is deep sense and wisdom tangled through with the nonsense and imaginings. I am so grateful for the insights, invitations and even the invective. Thank you Jalori! ■

*Kaaren and Jeph, with their four children, live in North India and work in health and community development.*



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