Tui Motu

InterIslands

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the courage of pentecost

The feast of Pentecost and the 150th issue of *Tui Motu* InterIslands coincide this year. Fascinatingly at the magazine's inception, one media pundit predicted that it would last no longer than a couple of years. It sails into its fourteenth year happily, with new hands at the tiller, and the immediate prospect of calm seas. Future storms may come but can wait. A quiet confidence sustains us.

Thanks are to be given in abundance to so many — their praises rise to the heavens like strong incense. Rather than looking inwards, however, and congratulating ourselves on what has been achieved, it is timely to focus on other structures of hope which raise our oft flagging sights and help us to see a spirit of light.

In this issue the leading article is written by Andrew Bradstock, foundation professor at the Centre of Theology and Public Issues at Otago University. In last November's issue we ran interesting material from Professor Kevin Clements of the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. Another such treasure in our New Zealand firmament is the UNESCO chair at Victoria University of Wellington. Each of these spearheads a level of debate and discussion in New Zealand society which has been all but lost, as the economic and media demands of our global world largely control our tired ways of thinking. These centres push the boundaries.

It is as New Zealand becomes less religious statistically that these structures linking religion and the public space have sprung up. There is sadness in this recognition, because a wealth of tradition in each of our churches dealing with faith and justice seems dummed down and hard to resurrect. It is timely to revisit these traditions now, and draw deeply from these potent wells as we live out the Pentecost spirit of courage which seeks a new clarity in our rather chaotic world.

One of the great effects of the Pentecost event was to turn fearful people into people of courage. John Broadbent's article in this issue emphasizes that all his life Blessed John Paul II exhibited fearlessness and courage. Another person of leadership who has lived 'at the edges' rather than the centre of the Catholic church is Bishop Bill Morris of Toowoomba. His attempts to face structural ecclesial problems of an Australian diocese, small in numbers but vast in geographical extent, were full of this Pentecost courage. It is sad to think that Bishop Bill's voice is now snuffed out because a spirit of dialogue between the centre and the edge did not prevail. How do voices within the Catholic church, with pressing and real questions, get a hearing that is open to looking clearly at present need and flexible enough to encourage the development of new ecclesial structures?

Amy Armstrong's look at the death of Osama bin Laden and Father Peter Norris's revisiting of the questions of celibacy and re-marriage encourage us to think old questions anew.

This Pentecost may the Spirit gift each of us with the ability to explore some of our tireder, older ideas and to find a new clarity of thought, as we search out better solutions to practical human needs in this election year. ■

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front cover photo: View to Little Skellig island from the remains of St Michael's Church, Skellig Isles, Ireland (taken by Peter Hassan). See the centre-spread article on ps. 16-17 written by Peter's wife, Mary Betz.

an infinite horizon

Michael Fitzsimons

Autumn is giving way to winter but the seasons are all muddled up. Freakish downpours, southerly blasts, dumps of sunshine that steam the garden path. Then yesterday the most magical, silver stillness settled on the harbour. It's hard to get your bearings in tumultuous times.

On the big stage we have recently been hit with earthquakes, tsunamis, tornados, assassinations, depressions. Every day seems to have more than its fair share of anxiety. Chaos reigns, fear abounds. How unpredictable, uninsurable, un-controllable life is, despite our desperate attempts to tame it. All the insurance policies in the world are suddenly insufficient to cope with what is being meted out to us.

The nature of our lives is always to be in need of hope. The dispossessed victims of the Christchurch earthquake and the Japan tsunami are in desperate need of it but so are the rest of us. We are all bent low at times, our security blankets painfully inadequate.

The assaults come in many forms — disasters, disappointments, job losses, sicknesses, worries about children and parents, death of loved ones. Recently we buried a good friend of 40 years and a fine priest, Fr Paul Duncan, in the priests' plot in Christchurch. We buried him in the earthquake-stricken graveyard, amidst a tumble of headstones. Pastoral to his fingertips, this big-hearted, exuberant priest finally succumbed to cancer in his late 50s. The peacefulness with which he bore his illness showed just how well he understood the Easter promise. His life showed how fulfilling service to others can be.

Now he has gone and we go on living but we are not alone. Fifty days after Easter we arrive at Pentecost, the great feast of the Holy Spirit who is busy in our lives, consoling us in our grief, strengthening our timid hearts and shattering our indifference. The Holy Spirit is what makes a Church out of the ragtag mob of believers. The Spirit's presence in our hearts is the Church, even as the sky falls upon us and the earth shakes.

Pentecost is about new heart and a different perspective. It's the feast of newness, running streams in the desert. It's God at work in his people. It's security of a different kind, an incorruptible insurance policy.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the timid and confused apostles at Pentecost. Tongues of fire settled upon them and they spoke new languages. They were transformed, going forth and preaching with boldness and vigour. They were suddenly empowered and fearless. They were new men.

The Holy Spirit is still with us and now we are the vessels. We too can be empowered and transformed and alive to the day. We too can be awake and grateful and purposeful. This is the great promise and grace of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit brings a life that our faith tells us will last forever. The silver stillness is still upon the harbour as I write this. We are the living and the choice of how to live is ours.

Spiritual writer Daniel O'Leary puts it this way:

"Once again we are gifted with a whole day, 24 priceless hours for you to fill as you will. Free of charge, and offered once only, they can be lived in a cul-de-sac of fear or against an infinite horizon". ■

Tui Motu InterIslands

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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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mass destruction

Many thanks to the erudite Michael Hill for his courage to proclaim the Emperor naked, in his letter regarding the new Mass (TM, April). He gives voice to the deep unease felt by Catholic laity, as well as calling into question the legitimacy of some of the changes.

Unsurprisingly, all of us of a certain age find change difficult, and particularly when it affects something so close to the core of our being. However, I suspect that the resistance which is largely intuitive on the part of the people is well-founded. Many of the 'improvements' to the liturgy are not only dissonant and destructive of poetic rhythm, but theologically dodgy.

The response 'And with your spirit' is a drift in the gnostic direction, given that for most people in the West, the terms 'soul' and 'spirit' are understood to refer to the disembodied essence of a person. That inclination, to split body and spirit, is a Greek tainting of the Hebrew tradition, and one that has caused all sorts of trouble for Christianity over the years, not least in the realm of sexuality.

As Michael points out, the change to 'I believe' rather than 'We believe' in the Creed is an entire distortion of the faith we lay claim to; so much so that it might well be regarded as blasphemously unorthodox. If it is simply individuals who give assent to the faith, then the body of Christ has been fatally atomised. Rather than making a corporate affirmation of the river of tradition in which we are immersed, now we seem simply to be expressing our individual opinion.

Worst of all, from a personal point of view, my favourite response in the entire mass has been ruined. 'Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed' is a very helpful preparation for the reception of communion. The new version is both clumsy and misleading. Since when did reception of the sacraments equate to inviting Christ 'under my roof'? This is an ethereal rendering of the real presence, surely? And it is not 'my soul' that is in need of healing, but me in my entirety.

With the Western Church hemorrhaging both priests and communicants; with the open wound of clerical sexual abuse; with the dishonouring of women and their gifts among us — surely there are other things for our leaders to be thinking about?

For those confined to steerage, the ship in which we sail appears at times to be operated by captains who are both deaf and blind. The impending rocks may prove a mercy.

Mike Riddell, *Cambridge*

right to choose parenting

In the lead up to the budget Catholics need to champion against the on going victimization of beneficiaries. Beneficiary-bashing is a popular sport in New Zealand but criticism of beneficiaries is mostly inaccurate and unfair. The government's Welfare Working Group's recent recommendations on reducing long-term beneficiary assistance target the most vulnerable and suggest punitive measures that will only further add to the poverty and social exclusion that beneficiaries already suffer.

It is a national shame that our Minister for Social Development acknowledges that people living on a benefit are in poverty and the prescribed way out of this poverty is work. No child in New Zealand should be in poverty. Forcing their parents into low paying employment as a solution to poverty is no solution at all. This is especially true of sole parents. Forty six % of these parents are aged between 25 to 39 while only 20% are aged 18 to 24. This suggests that sole parents are, in the majority, parents who have been in committed relationships that have for whatever reason fallen apart.

Financial responsibility for these children is still the responsibility of both their parents. The families of a sole parent needs to receive adequate financial assistance in the first instance from the parent who does not have the lion's share of responsibility on a day-to-day basis; and then from government assistance if the other parent fails to provide this assistance.

Forcing sole parents of three-year-olds into work is a callous and punitive measure that we as Catholics should protest, if we indeed champion the cause of families. The work of parenting is under-valued in New Zealand. This is most noticeable in the public attitude to sole parents who are, in the main, women. Many sole parent's are plunged into poverty by separation and inadequate benefit assistance.

As a Church we need to ask what the priorities for these families should be: are they ones that help to stabilize the family or are they paid employment at any cost? Parenting is work and a worthy occupation. The worth of this work has not changed just because it has become popular that in a family both parents work in paid employment. We need to safeguard parents' right to choose parenting as their first priority. This role is not to be forcibly taken away by the State simply as a way of balancing the books or gaining a low paid work force.

Teresa Homan, *Upper Hutt*

papal teaching?

Maurice McGreal (TM, March) suggests that his quotation was from a pope. In fact it was from a satirical

☞ 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. Response articles (up to a page) are welcome — but please, by negotiation.

poem entitled *The Latest Decalogue* by the English poet A.H.Clough (1819-61). It actually reads: "Thou shalt not kill, but need'st not strive Officiously to keep alive." It has been adopted by Catholic moral theologians as the correct treatment of brain-dead patients kept alive by a respirator.

In February 2008 at age 73, I was in a 11-day coma after an aortic dissection operation in Auckland City Hospital. The neurologist in charge of my case called a family meeting and announced "We may have to pull the plug." To this, my daughter replied: "I've just seen my Dad and there's no plug to pull — he's off the respirator, breathing on his own and it looks like he will recover!" I was certainly not brain-dead and in spite of a left-brain stroke and pneumonia I did fully recover active life after a litre of fluid was drained from my lungs. My recovery was helped, of course, by care, medication and physiotherapy.

Derek Blackburn, ***Manukau***

church and excluded fathers

In the article *The Church and Excluded Fathers* (TM, April), the author, Darryl Ward, suggested that "men are just as likely as women to be victims of domestic violence."

As someone who works on a daily basis with the effects of domestic violence I found this statement incorrect, and ill-informed.

Certainly, both women and men are victims of abuse and violence, and abusers. However, my experience, and that of my colleagues, has been that women are more likely than men to be victims of domestic violence. Research supports this.

Studies show that men's violence causes greater damage, that men repeat their violence more often and their violence is more likely to cause serious injury. Women in violent relationships live in fear of their violent partners, whereas men are seldom afraid of their partners. Also, violence by men tends to follow a pattern of intimidation and fear. Women tend to use violence as an attempt to reduce abuse in their lives, and often in self defence. Both women and men in abusive relationships tend to minimise men's violence and remember women's violence.

As within the Church, violence and issues of power and control can often be hidden or minimised or written off as women being emotional. Let us not remain silent about the abuse and violence we see in our church and society. For further information look up the research of Janice Giles.

Ruth Mather, rndm, ***Mangere Bridge***

PENTECOST

Hayden Williams

You gave me a Pascal candle:
royal blue, studded with gold stars.
Hidden in a pulsing wax-cave,
the flame's flickering apex may,
during the hours of daylight's trial,
blur or lapse into the faint arc
of a monochrome rainbow.
Leaf of burning bush, bright spear tip;

I find in our separation
we have but merged a little more.
And after grief, when rains purged sheep
white on hills outlying our town,
our world was not deluged, consumed,
but rather illuminated,
with more love than the simple shape
of seven Sundays can contain.

do religion and politics mix?

Andrew Bradstock

What impact will churches have on the General Election this November? Not much, we might think — but then, so what? What connection is there between the issues we will be voting on and our concerns as churches and Christians? Surely politics and religion do not mix, especially in a proudly secular country like New Zealand.

One place where thinking like that is challenged is the Centre for Theology and Public Issues based at the University of Otago. Established in January 2009, it exists precisely to bring a 'faith perspective' to bear on issues of the day. And it will be encouraging churches to do just that as election day draws near.

As Director of the Centre, I enjoy the challenge of making theology engage in the 'public square', the place where debates on current issues occur. With an academic background in politics and theology, and experience of working with the UK churches on social justice issues, I find the way my current job brings these strands together exciting. Time spent at Westminster facilitating dialogue between churches and MPs, and at Cambridge co-directing the Von Hűgel Institute's Centre for Faith in Society, is also proving invaluable.

It is my belief that within the resources of our faith — Scripture, the social teaching of the church, the wisdom of Christian theologians and activists over the ages — are insights which can breathe fresh life into sometimes rather stale debates. While politicians often seem to look at issues through a very narrow lens, theology can suggest unexpected new angles on them — which might perhaps even lead to better policies.

Take one issue of our day, the economy — which will certainly feature in pre-election debates. Mainstream politicians and opinion formers always tell us how important it is that the economy keeps growing and that we keep on spending and consuming — which is of course true; but how often do we hear them discussing what the purpose of this growth is, or whether consuming more and more really is the key to a fulfilled life.

Theology does want to ask questions like these and test 'received wisdom'. Reflection on biblical motifs like Sabbath, fasting and Jubilee can suggest radical new priorities for our individual and corporate life. Like some of Jesus' parables, these challenge the language of 'shortage' and 'scarcity' we hear so much, and prompt us to ask whether we haven't really got more than enough and should look at how we can share more — something we powerfully symbolize when we join together in the Mass.

One particularly suggestive parable concerns the labourers hired at different times of the day but all paid the same wages (Matthew 20). The owner of the vineyard gets the work done and makes his profit, but instead of doing this by getting away with paying his workers as little as possible, ensures that all go home with what they and their families need to survive.

Examples like these only scratch the surface. How might a fresh understanding of the mandate in Genesis to steward God's earth deepen our commitment to tackling global warming? Or reflection on Jesus' teaching about who is first and last in 'the kingdom' challenge our perspectives on whom we value and reward — and despise — in society? It is often said that a society can be best judged by how it treats those with the fewest advantages — the young, the elderly, people with disabilities...

Or what about Jesus' encounter with the corrupt extortioner Zacchaeus? This story suggests that it is important, not only that the wrongdoers pay for their crimes, but that a way is found to make them useful and valued members of their community. How might a parable such as that inform policy thinking on crime and punishment?

The big challenge is how to use these resources so that 'theology' makes a constructive and workable contribution to contemporary debates. We not only need to do our homework on the issues we want to address, we need to show how what we say can make a practical and positive difference. We also need to do this in a spirit of humility and meekness: 'public theology' is not about the Church telling society 'how it's done' — rather offering what we have as 'gift', as something we believe can promote the 'life in all its fullness' that Jesus came to announce. In the beautiful words of the prophet Jeremiah, we seek the 'welfare of the city', not that of the Church.

I would argue that Christians should always be thinking about how their faith relates to everyday life — connecting what they do on Sunday with what they read in the papers, see on TV and hear on the radio. Elections are not the only opportunity we have to make our views known, but they do focus our minds particularly on the sort of society we have — what's good about it, but also what we'd like to see changed.

Think about some of the specific issues we shall be debating in the run-up to the election — like the proposal to privatize state-owned enterprises, or the reform of our welfare system. Clearly being a country 'in debt' is worrying, but is selling off public assets the best remedy we can find? How specifically will it help us get back on track, given that most of our debt is private rather than public? Is it 'right' for 'Kiwi mums and dads' to be invited to buy shares in enterprises which, by definition, they already 'own' as taxpayers? And how will the recommendations proposed by the Welfare Working Group help more people get back to work and out of the 'poverty trap' and lead to a more just society?

These are important questions about policies which will help to shape our society for the next generation. And there's another question that we ought to ask about every policy suggested by every political party: how will it help those who are most vulnerable and most in need in our society?

So, as we count down to the election, let us make our views known, and speak with conviction, integrity and confidence. Someone once said that if voting changed anything it would be abolished. That sounds like a challenge worth meeting! ■

University of Otago
CENTRE FOR THEOLOGY & PUBLIC ISSUES
Te Pokapū Whakaporo me Ngā Take ā-Iwi

New Zealand's first Centre for Theology and Public Issues is based in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Otago in Dunedin. Its Director, Andrew Bradstock, holds the Howard Paterson Chair in Theology and Public Issues, a post funded by the Paterson Trust, the Presbyterian Synod of Otago and Southland and Ian and Annette Tulloch. Andrew is the first holder of both posts, which he took up in January 2009.

Since its establishment the Centre has had input into current debates on such issues as the misuse of alcohol, funding the reconstruction of Christchurch, the gap between rich and poor and what we mean when we say New Zealand is a 'secular' society. Some of this work has resulted in very practical outcomes – a public forum on crime and punishment contributed to a branch of the Howard League for Penal Reform being established in Dunedin, for example – and its events attract ever-growing audiences.

As well as issues of relevance within New Zealand the Centre has made representations about funding for overseas development and hosted panels exploring the crisis in the Middle East and the implications of the death of Osama Bin Laden. Particularly popular have been its 'public conversations' with figures in public life, and occupants of the hot seat have included MPs Bill English and Jeanette Fitzsimons, Waihopai activist Fr Peter Murnane and business commentator Rod Oram. (Actually the seat is only slightly warm, as guests are not interrogated but gently drawn out!) Other distinguished guests of the Centre have included Jim Wallis and John Battle, whose visits were well covered in this journal.

The Centre's website is at www.otago.ac.nz/ctpi. To receive regular mailings about events and other activities e-mail: ctpinz@otago.ac.nz or call 03 479 8450.

blessed john paul II

On Sunday 1 May 2011 before a crowd of 1 million people Karol Wojtyla (better known as Pope John Paul II) was beatified in Rome by Pope Benedict XVI. Monsignor John Broadbent gives us a short historical reflection on the life of this man and the importance of his work.

John Broadbent

As Pope John Paul II was dying, someone said to me, "This pope will go down in history as one of the greatest popes we have ever had." My answer was, "Perhaps he will be one of the greatest popes who made history, insofar as he helped initiate the collapse of Communism — in Poland and in all Eastern Europe. Once these countries saw Poland rid itself of this political system, they quickly followed — Russia included!" Of his holiness we are left in no doubt, because each candidate for sainthood must have proved to probing examiners a life that is spiritually grounded and an example of the heroic living of the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.

Within the Church, Pope John Paul had many admirers and many critics. Some disliked his theology, the thrust of his many encyclicals, and his attitudes and use of power. The more liberal opposition saw him as dumbing down the effects of the Second Vatican Council, however much he praised it.

beginnings

Karol Wojtyla was born in Wadowice, Poland in 1920. Following centuries of repression, Poland had once again became a separate country, and a democratic republic. Patriotism was at a great height. Karol's family were of modest means. He did well at school. He was good at sport, enjoying skiing and tramping. At university he became interested in drama, writing and acting. Several of his plays were republished after he became Pope. Because Poland fell under the Nazis in 1939 he studied for the priesthood secretly, being ordained for the Cracow Archdiocese in 1946. He was sent to the Angelicum in Rome in 1948, writing his doctoral dissertation on St. John of the Cross, the great Spanish mystic. Importantly, he studied under the great Dominican theologian Father Garrigou-Lagrange, who gave him a life-long love for scholastic theology.

On return to Cracow, Karol became a parish priest, while doing further study at the Jagallonian University and teaching. By now Poland had become Communist under Russian influence. In 1956 he was appointed professor of ethics at Lublin University. Two years later, he was appointed auxiliary bishop of Cracow, becoming archbishop there in 1963, and a cardinal in 1967.

vatican II and beyond

Archbishop Wojtyla attended the Second Vatican Council (1962-5). Despite communist travel restrictions, he was able to visit Poles all over the world, including Australia and New Zealand. His 1976 Lenten sermons to the Papal household were later published as "Signs of Contradiction". He had already written a very popular book on human sexuality called *Love and Responsibility* in 1960. This background, combined with his interest in everyone, his kind hospitable manner, and ecclesiastical administrative ability had earned him a certain reputation before the conclave that elected him.

1978 conclave

When the cardinals met for a second conclave in 1978, after the untimely death of Pope John Paul I, it was assumed that the Pope, as Bishop of Rome, would be an Italian. However, the votes for the two Italian candidates were split after several ballots, and the electors looked around for a European who was a loyal servant of the Church, with a magnanimous personality. In the eighth ballot Cardinal Wojtyla, just 58, was elected, taking the name John Paul II. There was huge interest in the first non-Italian Pope since 1523, and the first Polish Pope ever. On his election day the Pope promised to promote "with prudent but encouraging action the reforms of the Second Vatican Council." At his installation, he followed the example of John Paul I who replaced the coronation tiara by being vested with the pallium, the woollen vestment which is the fullest symbol of papal pastoral authority.

deus providet

John Paul II viewed his election to the papacy as providential, a compensation for Polish suffering during the nineteenth century and under Nazis and Communists in the twentieth. Moreover he regarded the failed assassination attempt against him on 13 May 1981 (feast of Our Lady of Fatima) as another sign of

John Paul II at World Youth Day, Paris 1997

God's providential hand at work keeping him alive to accomplish his special two-fold mission — to bring the insights and values of the suffering Church of the East to the comfortable churches of the West; and to bring an end to the post-conciliar "drift" of the Church.

travelling pope

In January 1979, John Paul attended the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Puebla, Mexico. In his opening speeches, he cautioned against direct involvement in politics and in 'Liberation theology' by warning, "We must keep watch over the purity of doctrine... The notion of a political Jesus, a revolutionary from Nazareth, is not in harmony with the Church's teachings." Later, however, he spoke passionately on behalf of justice, using the word 'liberation' 12 times. This approach remained constant during his pontificate: socially liberal, theologically and doctrinally conservative, perhaps ultra-conservative. This tour of Mexico became a paradigm for all subsequent papal trips, establishing John Paul as a global superstar and reinforcing the spiritual authority of the Catholic Church in the person of the pope. In 27 years, he visited more than one hundred countries.

some encyclicals

In March 1979 he published his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* It emphasizes the dignity and worth of every human person, deploring "the exploitation of the earth, the destruction of the environment, consumerism," the accumulation and misuse of goods by privileged social classes and rich countries "to an excessive degree." It also condemned the arms race, especially for diverting essential resources from the poor and the violation of human rights around the globe.

Many other encyclicals followed. In *Laborem Exercens* he emphasized that human work was a form of collaboration in the creative work of God and, therefore, of infinite dignity. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* he emphasized the obligations of rich and developed nations and the "preferential option for the poor". And in *Centesimus Annus,* to mark the centennial of *Rerum Novarum,* Leo's XIII's groundbreaking social justice encyclical, he repeated the teaching about the dignity of the human person, and praised the democratic system of government.

'solidarity'

John Paul's significance lies very much in his trips to Poland. They reinforced the cracks appearing in the facade of Communism at the time of

the 'Solidarity' strikes in Gdansk and the courageous leadership of Lech Walesa. In 1979 he returned triumphantly to his native Poland. One in three Poles saw him during that 12 day visit. John Paul made another eight trips to Poland. In 1994, he scolded his fellow-citizens, now liberated from Communism, for their changing attitudes to the authority of the Church and its strict moral norms.

Liberal critics were quick to notice the conservative trait of his pontificate. He forbad Hans Kung to teach as a Catholic teacher, and came down heavily on Edward Schillebeeckx OP who had to make certain changes in his writings. Leonardo Boff OFM from Brazil, Tissa Balasuriya OMI from Sri Lanka, and the American Charles Curran, all came under the hammer.

code and catechism

In 1983 he promulgated the new *Code of Canon Law.* Before promulgation, and after a text had been agreed on by a majority of the world's canon lawyers, it is understood that the Pope changed the text in places. Similar deletions and alterations seem to have occurred before the publication of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. For a time he slowed down the process of priests leaving the priesthood by vetting each dispensation personally. This caused agonizing delays in granting of dispensations, without cutting down the numbers of priests applying. It seems he had hoped, by his personal intervention, to decrease the number of priests leaving.

models of church

John Paul was disappointed when the Poles and Eastern Europeans were sucked up into Western materialism after Communism fell. As he aged, his conservative attitude that only an unerringly strong Papacy could save and protect his beloved Catholic Church hardened further. However, in many ecumenical circles it was thought that the Catholic Church could have been the centre of a Church which included churches of varied theologies and rituals. The model for this would be the Eastern Catholic rites, as they have evolved to this day, basing themselves on the Church of the first millennium, while agreeing on the essentials of 2000 years of teaching and tradition. Which way these two contrasting ideas will develop is difficult to determine at this stage.

In *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* John Paul decreed that the Church is not authorized to ordain women as priests, ignoring many revisions of this attitude and alienating many women. Cardinal Ratzinger's commented that this teaching was so near to being infallible that it should be trusted as such. Moreover, it was decreed that all Church debate on this subject should cease. Debate continues.

conclave rules

The Pope's "Universi Dominici Gregis" made changes in the way Popes were to be elected in conclave. When after 33 ballots a two-thirds majority could not be attained, then a simple majority of votes would suffice. Many commentators saw this as a dangerous device — opening the possibility that a determined minority from left or right could hold out until 33 ballots were cast. Then they could impose their candidate by a simple majority.

ecumencial critique

Many were surprised and heartened by John Paul's 1995 statement "Ut unum sint" (That all may be one). This invited non-catholic Churches to evaluate the papacy and to critique its value and operations so as to improve the papal ministry. These evaluations have never been released. Some may have been too critical. Alternatively, it may have been deemed that disclosure would have been counter-productive.

interfaith ventures

John Paul also heartened many by his desire to dialogue with Jews and Muslims. Another surprising move was to convene in 1986 at Assisi an inter-faith conference to pray for world peace. Leaders of Christian and non-Christian faiths publicly prayed and exercised ritual together. Many cardinals, including Cardinal Ratzinger, felt this was inappropriate.

beatification

The Church has beatified a noble and impressive Pope who reigned for 27 years – the second longest pontificate in history. Those opposed to his beatification need a reminder of what was said at the beginning — a competent panel has adjudged John Paul to have lived a life of personal holiness containing those heroic proportions of Faith, Hope and Charity necessary for him to be proclaimed "Blessed". This calls for more heroic efforts on our part in pursuit of these three gifts from God. Perhaps, however, John Paul's 1976 Lenten sermons published as *Signs of Contradiction* may have been more telling than anticipated. Blessed John Paul II may himself prove to be such a sign. ■

Monsignor John Broadbent is a Church historian, writer of a number of books and formerly Rector of Holy Cross College, Mosgiel.

perspectives on a pope

Some New Zealanders give a short appraisal of the life and significance of the newly beatified Pope John Paul II

The scene in St Peter's Square on Saturday night, 2 April 2005, was sombre and prayerful, as tens of thousands gathered to pray for the pontiff whose death they knew was imminent. When news of his death was announced just before 9pm, there was resounding applause for many minutes — a strange reaction to my ears, but the Italians' way of acknowledging a life well lived.

On 16 October 1982 after this Polish pope's election was announced, he smilingly apologised for his halting Italian to the thousands below, "If I make a mistake, you will correct me". He disarmed and won the hearts of the surprised Romans.

I met Pope John Paul when he visited Auckland in 1986. He was tired at the end of a hectic day, but his charm and charisma was almost palpable. I will always treasure those moments in conversation with him.

Fifteen years later, I was present when he launched the report *Ecclesia in Oceania*. The contrast was overwhelming. Here was a feeble old man, unable to walk and barely to talk, showing extreme symptoms of Parkinson's Disease. I thought it a tragedy he had not resigned as it seemed clear that here was no leader of the Universal Church. Later, I understood and appreciated the witness of his suffering and disability given in the service of the Lord.

There will always be those who criticise every papacy, but one cannot deny that John Paul II, pastor, poet, philosopher, mystic and actor, was one of the greatest leaders, both spiritual and temporal, of the twentieth century.

Lyndsay Freer is the Director of Catholic Communications Auckland

Purgatory for a pope must be attempting to discern the enduring effects of his papacy. Canonization, however, should wait at least 40 years to give perspective to a papacy.

What will be the enduring effects of the papacy of Pope John Paul II? We are too close to give a clear answer to that question. Without a devil's advocate, abolished under Pope John Paul, to raise serious balancing issues, several matters have not been addressed: his terrible error of judgment regarding Father Maciel, founder of the Legionaries of Christ, despite warnings from Cardinal Ratzinger; and the centralisation of the Church at the expense of collegiality. Groups like the Federation of Asian Bishops, the Conference of Latin American Bishops, and our Oceania Bishops' Conference, have untapped competence and knowledge of issues at base level.

What do I admire about the pontificate? As a Marist, I deeply appreciate his challenge to the four Superiors of our congregations:

"It is up to you to show in an original and specific way the presence of Mary in the life of the Church and in the life of people."

I see Pope John Paul II as the most Marian pope for many centuries. Yet the words of Blessed John Henry Newman, spoken of Pius IX's 32 year papacy, linger: "It is not good for a pope to live 20 years. It is an anomaly and bears no good fruit; he becomes a god, has no one to contradict him, does not know facts and does cruel things without meaning it." Festina lente!

Kieran Fenn FMS has taught scripture in New Zealand and overseas for more than 30 years.

In a vigil prior to John Paul's beatification, Cardinal Vallini recalled the pope's huge concern for young people. Part of the pope's motivation for creating World Youth Day (WYD) was to make youth "into the protagonists of their own future, becoming builders of history." I resonate with those sentiments. Working with youth is the most rewarding, joyous, frustrating and vexatious job on planet earth.

John Paul never lost contact with his own youth. As a young priest lecturing at Lublin university, he quickly drew a family of about twenty students. He commented that he never pandered to them but challenged

them to fullness of faith and ability. When he finished there the family had grown to two hundred, bound together by prayer, philosophical discussion and service of the sick on one hand, and annual hiking and kayaking trips on the other. Pope at just 58, he was still marrying and baptizing their children.

It was not surprising then that in 1984 he proposed the idea of WYD though his staff and cardinals told him it would be a disaster. True to his Slavic stubbornness, he insisted. Millions of young people attended his 19 WYDs. His recipe never changed: strong catechesis, powerful role models, a call for deep commitment. He challenges us still to believe in the generosity and power of young people.

Neil Vaney SM is pastoral director of the Catholic Discipleship College in Auckland.

The official part of the Anointing of the Sick and the Elderly in Wellington had concluded. Pope John Paul II was preparing to depart. In an impromptu move, he turned back, blessed a two year old with cancer of the spine, then her little brother. "We all started crying," their parents said later. Then he gently held the cheeks of a woman in a wheelchair, his face saying: "I know you are suffering." Those who had struggled in pain as they waited patiently appeared comforted and reassured. Unexpectedly, the crowd formed two sides of an aisle, stretching forward, hands extended. Around me, journalists scrambled to touch his hand for a brief moment. Afterwards, tears streamed down the face of a daily newspaper reporter as she tried to describe her reaction.

Time will tell if Pope John Paul II was a pontiff who clamped down on Vatican II reform, or a leader who instilled clear strong direction in a divided church. Like each of us, he was a product of his formative years. The harshness he endured must surely have influenced his model of leadership.

To me, what millions of people worldwide responded to wasn't what he wrote in his encyclicals or directives. It was his humanity. Leading by example, he gave us a blueprint for reaching out to those who suffer, and re-affirming the value of each and every person. In those Wellington moments in 1986, he showed us how. Quite simply.

Kate Mahony, a Wellington writer, is a former Zealandia/New Zealandia journalist.

I saw Pope John Paul II in Rome in 1984, and at Athletic Park in 1986. He presented as an alluring personality, with the ability to engage people effectively and inspire a crowd.

As I developed a more radical perspective in the 1990s, I began to see him as belonging to the more conservative rather than the moderate end of the political and theological continuum. This was perhaps inevitable, given his Polish worldview. Of the many encyclicals he issued, he offered only two that contributed to Catholic social teaching on the development of societies. 'Laborem Exercens' in 1984 focused on the right to work as an essential part of human dignity; and 'Sollicitudo Rei Socialis' in 1987 progressed previous social teaching from individual and employer/employee relationships to improved relationships between rich and poor nations.

I also recall his conservative opinion about women. In a 1995 encyclical, he dignified traditional roles for women rather than focusing on inclusion, collaboration and equality. Likewise too his corrective approach to liberation theology where he focused on individual rather than on institutional sin. In all, from my point of view, he was a charismatic figure for his time rather than a facilitator of a new world order. ■

Jeff Drane is a Marist priest and Coordinator of the Newtown Budgeting and Advocacy Service.

a deeper communion

The practice of meditation is at the heart of Christian belief and yet somehow it has been lost in mainstream Christian practice. Cynthia Bourgeault, internationally known retreat leader and teacher, talks to Michael Fitzsimons about her mission to spread the recovery of the Christian contemplative path.

Karl Rahner, one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the 20th century, once said that in this century Christianity would either recover its mystical bent or die. In that context, there seems quite a lot on the line as a random little group gathers at Pa Maria retreat centre in Wellington one autumn Sunday for an intimate conversation with Dr Cynthia Bourgeault.

Cynthia divides her time between solitude in a New England hermitage and travelling globally to promote contemplative prayer practices. She is an academic, an Episcopalian priest, a highly respected author, a mother and grandmother and, as I learn in the course of the afternoon, a keen sailor even or especially in the fog.

setting

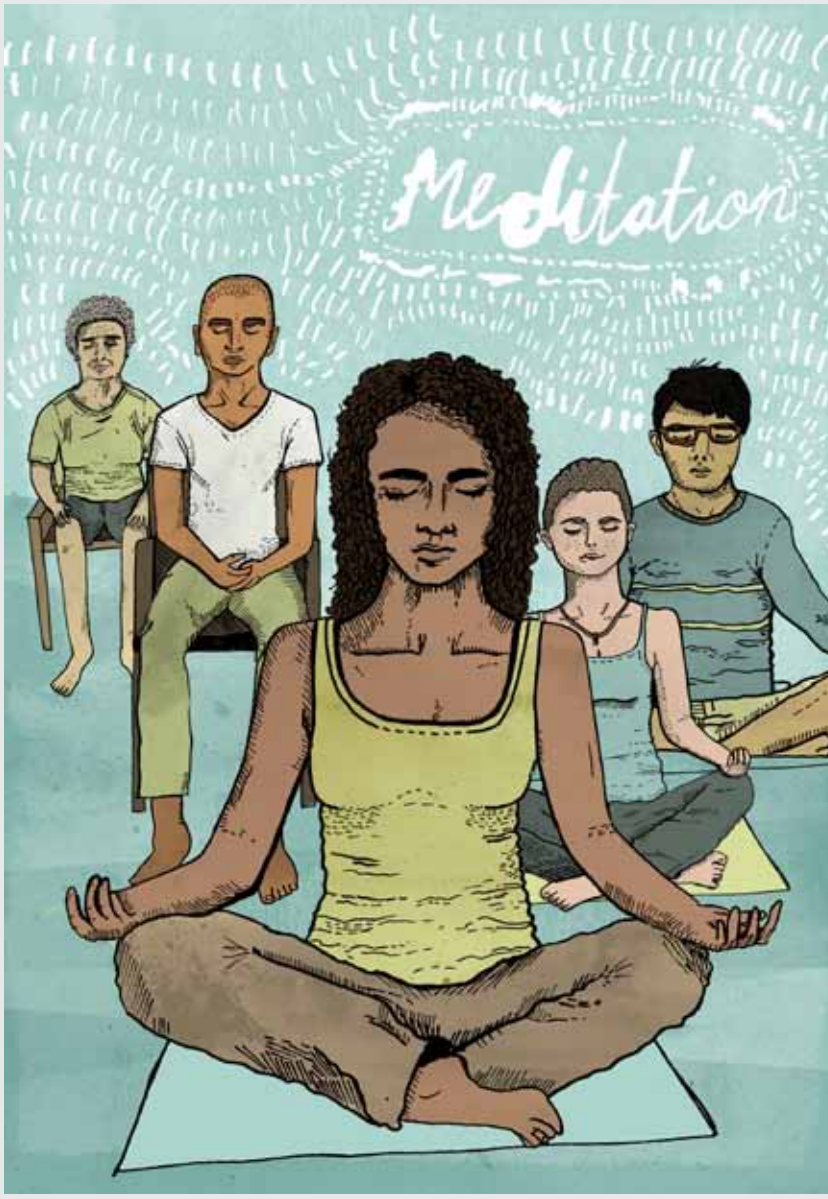
Right now, she is an alert presence in the room, small, bird-like, very engaging. She is delighted to be among fellow travelers on the meditation road, some more seasoned than others. She herself has been practicing centering prayer for more than 25 years.

Her wish is to have a conversation rather than give an address but in reality she is the one we are here to listen to. And in that recognisably American way she can talk very well indeed in long flowing sentences, without a scrap of paper to rely on. She is steeped in her topic, relishing any questions that come her way.

Cynthia Bourgeault is a champion of meditation — not as an ephemeral and esoteric activity for the chosen but as the incomparable source of life for us all. According to Cynthia, meditation is "the real formative ground of Christian orthodoxy" with the capacity to "reconnect us to those wellsprings of grace, clear vision and compassionate love so needed in the Church and in the world."

for ordinary people

Crucially, she says, it is a practice for ordinary and busy people living in the world today. The pressing challenge is to recover this vital mystical tradition that has been kept alive over the centuries by monasticism but has somehow been lost in mainstream Christian practice.



What is at stake is nothing less than transforming union with God, life as it is meant to be lived, the fullness of life as described and exemplified by Jesus.

"It [the contemplative path] was there in abundance in the early Church but even from the beginning, with the Greek and the scholastic models, trying to format religious experience in philosophical modes has never really captured the whole thing. Particularly from the Renaissance on, with more and more emphasis on

rationality and science and objective reason, there is less and less of a place for that other wide span of awareness that comes from mysticism, from beauty, from poetry."

a brief vacation from yourself

So what is meditation and contemplation all about?

"I would describe it, as my teacher Thomas Keating likes to say, as a way to take a brief vacation from yourself. It's the capacity to position yourself in a whole different system of perception.

"For me it's very much like seeing in the dark. At first when you go out at night you don't see anything. You think it's completely dark but as you sit quietly for a while you begin to notice that you can see. There's shape and coherence and pattern that you would have missed if you had put on a torch. In that way it gives us a space to make contact with a deeper way of knowing which lies within us and is a kind of dynamic knowing that's shared between us and the infinite. It's a relational channel."

who or what is god?

And let's try the big question, who or what is God?

" It's a pity that when we start talking about God, the only kind of language and image system turns God into an 'other' — a being, an invisible other, an old man in the sky. I became aware of what I would call 'the divine' as a relational field of a characteristic energy and intensity such that I knew I was in God. I sensed even as a child that putting language on it didn't work, that what you had to do was just go deeper into finding that place where the universe takes on a coherence that's palpable and just dwell there. You name it God if you want. I would prefer not to turn it into a philosophical model of the author of everything, but just to understand, as TS Eliot says in one place, 'we must be still and still moving into another intensity for a further union, a deeper communion.'

"God is really the experience of moving into that other intensity for the further union and the deeper communion. It's not like going into an altered state of consciousness, it's just being able to live in a vibrational field that is so much more alive and engaging and vibrant than when you are living out of your mind."

deeper presence within

So for Cynthia Bourgeault the key to living, and the key to a compassionate life, is the awakening to this deeper presence within. One of the methods for doing this is the practice of centering prayer, which she has passionately promoted for many years.

"Beneath the surface of each of us there is a deeper and vastly more authentic self but its presence is usually veiled by the clamour of the smaller 'I' with its insatiable needs and demands."

The business of centering prayer is to get to the real self, to get beyond the upheaval and flood of distraction that passes for living. It involves letting go of thoughts, restraining the wandering of the mind, and allowing an interior re-arrangement that is rooted in the heart and opens the heart.

jesus' transformation

According to Cynthia, what Jesus was bringing to the world was not a new moral system but a radically new way of seeing the world. He was the master of "unitive consciousness, off the charts at the time". His constant reference to the kingdom of heaven was his pet phrase for describing a transformed consciousness, she says.

"The kingdom of heaven is here now. It's not a reference to a pie-in-the-sky gated community in the next world. Jesus saw without separation – there was no separation between himself and God or between himself and his neighbour. The vine and the branch are inseparable."

"To really understand, as it says in Ephesians, how broad and high and long and deep is the love of Christ and so be filled with the very nature of God is the invitation to really take a deep breath and live."

This view of the world, of course, got Jesus into a lot of trouble but it was the heart of his message. This radically different way of seeing was the key to his life of courage, compassion and radical service. It did not just involve the mind but also the heart — the organ of spiritual perception.

And so it is with us, says Cynthia. Meditation is not an exercise in self-absorption but the very heartbeat of living as a fully integrated human being and a Christian. Among other things, the fruit of meditation is the bringing of a heightened awareness to everyday living and an appreciation of the nobility of doing any job well. Meditation wakes us up to life and it drives out fear.

"I can really say it has given me my life. I didn't have a life before, I had a personal history in time that I was always anxious about. To really understand, as it says in Ephesians, how broad and high and long and deep is the love of Christ and so be filled with the very nature of God is the invitation to really take a deep breath and live."

evolutionary tipping point

"I sense very strongly that human beings are a kind of evolutionary tipping point, between the divine and finite. We are very much called to mediate between those two worlds in a compassionate and accountable way and the failure to do so has caused so much of the blight and real danger for our planet."

And what does she make of the upsurge of interest in meditation which is a feature of our time?

"It's very significant. I think what causes people to be interested in it is the same thing that caused me to be interested — that the church that I'd experienced was overly preachy, wordy, verbose, authoritarian and structured. In meditation I had my first taste of the pure intimacy that lives inside me and all things as a relational field. And to learn some practices that would allow me to be responsive to life rather than reactive, to begin to experience the witnessing power within me — these things are extremely powerful and I think people hunger for them."

"I hungered for real practice that actually changes something and I think many people do and leave the church because they don't find it. They find words describing something but not the reality itself."

"I hungered for real practice that actually changes something. I think many people do hunger and leave the church because they don't find it. They find words describing something but not the

critique of church practice

If Cynthia Bourgeault has her criticisms of church practice, she is not about to give up on it just yet.

"I don't have too much investment in maintaining dinosaurs. But I am convinced that the life the church has carried within it will continue to live and it will seek its form. I think a lot of the old models, particularly the ones with the liturgical traditions that I have loved so much, have been so tied to colonial and patriarchal models that it's going to be extraordinarily difficult for them to get untied. I'd be happy to see them do it though and it's not so far a stretch.

"I am old enough at this moment to remember the hope that came flooding through Roman Catholicism when John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council and in a few years he could pull together and articulate a new vision of humanity, and excitement coursed through that. So it's not like you have to have long tedious Church Councils forever to get one inch of gain."

mystics without church?

The church, she says, is always in dialogue with its time and "what the early fathers of the church brought us was a sustainable animal. And it has been a noble viaduct of continued transmission. While it has been more honoured in the breach than the observance, it's been at least a stable force from which the great visionaries could launch themselves. Imagine Meister Eckhart or Julian of Norwich or Saint Teresa of Avila or Francis if they didn't have that baseline of the church to improvise against?

"So I would want to speak with loving respect for what we have received but I would also say that in each generation there is a dynamism between the eternal and the historical and the now. Now we have to find our own dynamism in a way which is both respectful but free and bold."

finding our dynamism now

Finding our own dynamism in the here and now is the challenge that excites Cynthia Bourgeault.

"I can't think of a better generation to be born into unless it's the next one! With the return of meditational practices and the discovery of a new way of working with ancient texts, I think we are going to see a different Christian story that holds water, not radically different but different enough so it's not the old wineskin anymore. And I think we are going to see a rebirth of vitality within that, a recovery of vision and of joy." ■

Cynthia Bourgeault

Skellig — Island

Traditions of religious life change. Mary Betz reminds us of the innovative ways of monks in opening themselves to the immensity of God.

One of the best-known desert monks is St Anthony. A holy but illiterate man, he was once sought out by a philosopher who asked him how he could be so happy without the consolation of books. According to Thomas Merton, Anthony replied: "My book, O philosopher, is the nature of created things, and any time I want to read the words of God, the book is before me." Anthony and many other ascetics sought the harshness and beauty of the desert as a place where they could pray and grow closer to God.

In the sixth century, monks with similar aspirations found wonder and solitude in a far different place — a remote storm-ridden island fourteen kilometres off the southwestern coast of Ireland. Legend has it that St Fionan brought the first monks to this wild and inhospitable rock. For six hundred years, successive 'generations' of monks — about twelve at a time — made *Sceilig Mhichíl* (Michael's Rock) their home.

Skellig Michael and its companion Little Skellig were thrust out of the sea a few hundred million years ago, and have long provided nesting places for tens of thousands of gannets, along with fumars, kittiwakes, razorbills, guillemots, puffins, petrels and shearwaters. Skellig Michael rises up 230m above the Atlantic swells, giving these seabirds — as it gave the monks — the splendid isolation they require.

Peter and I travelled to the island on a glorious June day. A short distance from the boat landing, we stared open-mouthed at a vertical expanse of slate and sandstone — broken only by stubborn clumps of grass — and the steep stone stairway we were expected to climb. The guide at the base congratulated us on coming for one of the few fine days each year. More often, frigid Atlantic gales whip up frenzied waves and blow horizontal rain over the island. Even on sunny days, the winds are often such that visitors are forced to their knees for the climb.

Lower monastery walls on Skellig Michael, looking to Little Skel

Stone crosses in graveyard and oratory, Skellig Michael.

With some trepidation we ascended the 670 steps leading to the monastery. These same steps were built and then traversed daily by very hardy monks to fish, gather plentiful seabird eggs and take an occasional seal. Passing boats called in occasionally, allowing the monks to trade bird eggs, feathers and seal meat for flour, tools and animal skins. The skins provided them with vellum for copying manuscripts.

From the ridge known as Christ's Saddle, a narrow staircase leads through upright stone slabs to the monastery enclosure — a walled cluster of six dry-stone beehive huts and two oratories — all intact. Here the monks prayed, studied, chanted, and copied the Scriptures. They also gardened and built huts, walls,

lig with its 50,000 birds and the coast of Kerry.

and the steps back down to the sea. Two of the huts are corbelled — fitted with projecting stones which would have held turf or thatch to keep out the chill winds which whistled through every gap in the other dry-stone dwellings. The insides of the huts are dim, windowless and bare, with small nooks and ledges in the walls which may have held seal-oil lamps, food or writing materials. Mortared free-standing walls are the remains of St Michael's Church — built in the twelfth century and originally covered with a timber roof. Stone crosses in the graveyard stand witness to the radical life and faith of men who lived and died here long ago.

In the ninth century the monastery lost an unknown number of monks fighting off periodic Viking raids.

By the thirteenth century, weather conditions became so much colder and stormier that living on the island became impossible. The ecclesiastical climate was changing too, and the monks of Skellig Michael were compelled to join the Augustinian Abbey at Ballinskelligs — now in ruins — on the nearby Kerry coast. By the sixteenth century, the island monastery became a pilgrimage destination, and in 1996, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

From nearly every point in the monastery, Little Skellig Island appears a glistening white jewel in its sea-blue blanket, the mainland a backdrop of hazy green. True heirs of St Anthony, the monks opened themselves to the book of God's creation all around them, sensing God in the irresistibility of the sea, and allowing their island sanctuary to work its transformation in their souls. ■

Mary Betz is on the Pastoral Team and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Auckland Diocese

Large communal cell has corbels jutting out to help hold on thatch or sod for insulation.

Steps from Christ's Saddle to the monastery on north peak.

‘they shall be comforted’

Daniel O’Leary

Where is God when people suffer the terrible pangs of loneliness? The pain when we lose someone close to us or generally feel forgotten by the rest of the world is intense but it may be a divine invitation to a deeper intimacy

We have just left behind us one of the bleakest months of the year. Whatever chinks there are in the armour of our self-sufficiency, the cold fingers of February mornings and nights will find them. It is one of the times, over the years, when Tablet readers have asked for reflections on loneliness.

In the seminary we were often warned that of all the losses entailed in a compulsory celibate life, what would get us in the end would be loneliness. With hindsight, many of us would agree. Even 50 years ago in my first parish I sometimes felt as though I was pressing my nose against the window pane of other people’s lives; as though a huge, holy and necessary dimension of humanity was missing from my own.

I once asked a very old monk at Pluscarden Abbey what he missed most during the decades of his faithful service. Expecting a profoundly mystical insight, his response surprised me. “Coming home in the evening through the autumn fields”, he said, “and watching the lights go on in the family houses and the blinds being drawn. I never got used to that lonely hole in the soul.”

‘One may have a blazing hearth in one’s soul,’ wrote Vincent van Gogh, ‘and yet no one ever comes to sit by it’

Most priests are familiar with that strange moment when, after an evening of parish visitation, they return to their big, empty presbyteries. “Loneliness waits”, wrote J.G. Farrell, “between unlocking your door and taking off your coat.” Mother Teresa, who felt the absence of God all through her life, wrote that “loneliness ... is the most terrible poverty”.

There are many faces to loss and loneliness. One face is about the precariousness of our human condition. The heart still twists in me, for instance, when visiting residential homes I see the dull glaze in the lonely eyes that once shone with delight – a delight that fills the happy, faded, family photographs hanging on the wall behind them. One such person admitted to finding the sound of overheard laughter unbearably poignant.

There is an intensity of longing in those wistful faces peering out from behind the curtains of small nursing-home windows. Are they waiting for the return of a lost love, real or imaginary? Julia Copus writes about an elderly woman. There is an ache in the image in the last lines of “Miss Havisham’s Letter”:

Pray God that you will be here soon; the
furniture
is weary, my darling, of the name I am
forever
fingering into its dust.

Such lovely people, often fighting against the destructive edge of bitterness, still keep their parental hearts as full of love as ever – and no one visits. “One may have a blazing hearth in one’s soul,” wrote Vincent van Gogh, “and yet no one ever comes to sit by it.”

Because the human heart is wonderfully and fearfully created with a divine compulsion to be given away and to be received, there is an existential dread in us of the keen pain of loneliness or rejection. Thomas Wolfe is convinced that “loneliness is the central and inevitable fact of human existence”.

There are many ways to break a heart. Ask those who, suddenly bereft, weep for what they had taken for granted. Is there a soul on earth that cannot identify, in one way or another, with Mary Jean Irion’s cry:

One day I shall dig my fingers
into the earth,
or bury my face in the pillow,
or stretch myself taut,
or raise my hands to the sky,
and want more than all the world:
your return.

In words of unforgettable pathos, Andrew Motion’s poem “In the Attic” takes us into the terrible pain of loneliness and grief. He tells of the times he spent in the attic with the locked trunk of clothes of someone very loved and very young:

... a green holiday; a red christening;
all your unfinished lives

fading through dark summers
entering my head as dust.

Another face of loneliness emerges from the state of alienation in which we now find ourselves, being disconnected from our own bodies, our environment, our universe and therefore God. The psychic damage we suffer from such separation is all too clear because there is a loving unity that holds all Creation together. Whenever that is fractured, something dies within us. And the hidden loneliness deepens.

The Christian mystics have beautiful ways of describing the mystery of the intimacy of all Creation. Hildegard of Bingen wrote that "God has built the human form into the cosmic structure; all things are arranged in consideration of everything else."

Something intuitive within us senses this delicate dependence. The contemplative heart grieves at the greed that hacks across these fragile lifelines of universal wholeness. When this circle of life is broken the loss is great; the life-giving dance of the Blessed Trinity within us loses its rhythm. Nothing remains untouched by such deliberate destruction. An unconscious, existential loneliness is one of its deadly symptoms.

The idea is everywhere present in Jewish and Christian spirituality that the only antidote to human loneliness is to contemplate the face of God, to surrender to what is greater than ourselves — to recognise the beautiful love at the heart of everything. We must learn to adore incarnate wonder. To look at the sea and feel God's beating heart. Under the moving clouds to sense the brooding presence of the Holy Ghost. To gaze at the night sky above a lonely planet and sense a secret birthing. To lose heart before the tears of things and yet to experience the sublime comfort of divine arms. "Man's loneliness", wrote Eugene O'Neill, "is but his fear of life."

Divine Mystery has become utterly identified with the human condition. All our longing is ultimately a longing for God, and all longing is the longing of an incarnate God for us. "God possesses the heavens," wrote W.B. Yeats, "but he covets the earth ... oh, he covets the earth."

Beyond theological definitions, there is a fierce emptiness in God that only our freely given loving presence can fill. In the end, when fully felt and accepted, maybe human loneliness is the divine invitation to the most intense intimacy of all. ■

Daniel O'Leary is a priest of the Leeds Diocese. He can be contacted at 12A Weston Court, Burbo Bank Road South, Blundellsands, Liverpool, Merseyside L23 6SR.

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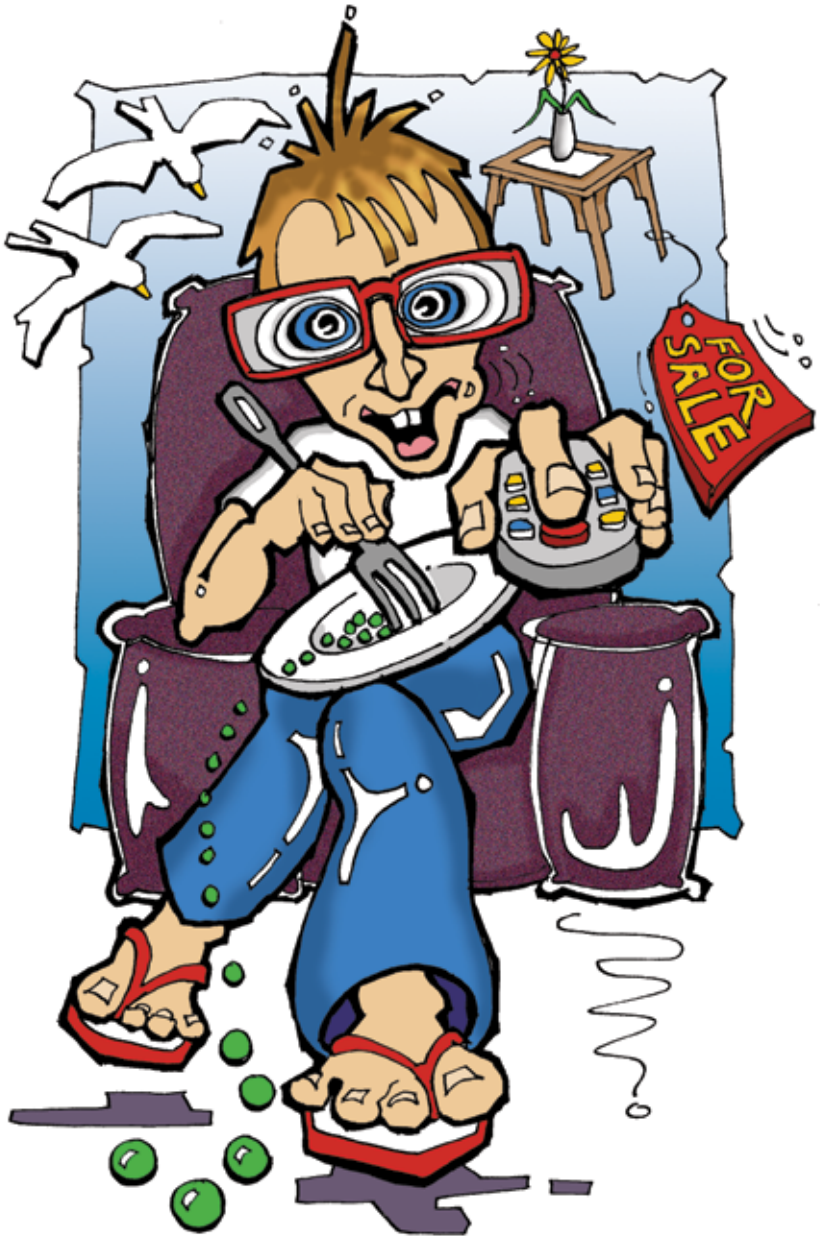
round the table

Glynn Cardy



We were sipping coffee, chatting, round the table, as you do. It was a casual conversation when he mentioned in passing that he had sold the table. Their kitchen table. His family apparently no longer needed it.

He was a father of two teenagers who preferred to eat either in their rooms in front of their screens or in the living room in front of a much larger screen. Rarely did they eat all at the same time.

The kitchen table he told me had just become a repository for junk, and cramped the space in their dining/living area. So, after consultation with his brood, he sold it. He didn't get a good price. Evidently there are a lot of kitchen tables for sale.

In the late 70s I was a Rotary exchange student to Seattle. The first family I lived with ate with the news. We would serve ourselves in the kitchen then make our way into an amphitheatre of La-Z-Boy chairs. There Walter Cronkite would relay what CBS thought we should know. I didn't pay attention — I was too busy learning how to hold my plate with one hand and eat with the fork in the other.

The father of the family was the local Presbyterian minister. He thought it was quaint that I was used to eating at a table and talking with my siblings and parents. I wondered if he had been raised with a 'no talking at the dinner table' rule and watching TV was an improvement.

Mind you, a communal examination of what passes for news is probably an advance on eating in separate rooms. The latter is not that abnormal according to my sources in the teenage world. So, dining room tables are on their way out, and eating in the lounge Seattle-style is the new in. Having someone you don't know talk at you is preferable to having someone you know talk with you.

Since the 1970s the Anglican Church in New Zealand has seen Holy Communion more like a communal meal than a private devotion.

Although the high church name 'altar' is more prevalent than the low church name 'table', the metaphor of the common meal has prevailed. As Jesus' first disciples gathered together in an upper room around a common table so we re-enact this event at each and every Eucharist. Together we remember, we experience, we pray, and we believe that Jesus in a way is still amongst us.

Of course people will believe all sorts of things and relate to this sacred historical ritual in all sorts of ways. Most choose, for example, to bend the knees at the altar rail rather than meet the eyes of those fellow disciples who distribute the sacraments. After all that's how us boomers were brought up.

Food is sustenance, as are relationships. Breaking bread together underlines a basic equality and a shared humanity.

The metaphor of a common table though pervades a lot of NZ Anglican thought. We were reticent to deny a child communion, and now have the theology to support such reticence. We are reticent, despite what head office might stipulate, to deny any visitor of any faith or none the opportunity to join our meal. Hospitality is a cornerstone of kiwi Christianity.

I suppose hospitality is still possible if you don't have a kitchen table. Your unexpected guest would just sit on the couch, learn to eat with one hand, and watch Hillary Barry. Or you could dine out.

I fear though if this absence of a common table becomes our cultural norm we will have lost something important. We might lose the art of listening to one much younger or older and engaging with their ideas. We might lose the art of a common catch up, hearing what others have been doing or will do. We might lose the art of eating with a utensil in both hands, and other table manners.

I think spirituality, eating, and eating together are interwoven. I don't think it's accidental that the more memorable rites of religion concern food. Food and its preparation are a gift, just like those we live with. Food is sustenance, as are relationships. Breaking bread together underlines a basic equality and a shared humanity.

If eating together around a common table is on its way out then saying grace is really far out. It's a counter-cultural religious custom. Some folk hold hands. Some don't. Some bow their heads. Some don't. Some remember the needs of others. Some don't. It's a purposeful pause between the demand of appetite and feeding it, in a society that seldom pauses.

Grace is simply and powerfully an affirmation of gratitude as our primary response to life. Our existence, one another, what we earn and learn, what we eat and share, are essentially gifts. This affirmation is not said ignoring all the hard and difficult things. Rather it is said in spite of all that is hard and difficult.

My favourite grace is:

Thank you for the world so sweet
[even when it's not]
Thank you for the food we eat
[even the cabbage left on the plate]
Thank you for the birds that sing
[all the beautiful things]
Thank you God for everything
[and all that is not so beautiful] ■

Archdeacon Glynn Cardy is the pastor of St Matthew-in-the-City, Auckland, and a well-known spiritual writer

Ponderables

"We human beings don't naturally see. We have to be taught how to see. That's what religion is for."
– Richard Rohr

"The way we are living, timorous or bold, will have been our life."
– Seamus Heaney

"We were put on earth to make things."
– W.H. Auden

"No fear, no envy, no meanness".
– Advice from singer Liam Clancey to Bob Dylan

"The glorification of chefs is the sign of a culture in decline."
– Roman historian, Livy.

"Happiness depends on ourselves."
– Aristotle

"Because philosophy arises from awe, a philosopher is bound in his way to be a lover of myths and poetic fables. Poets and philosophers are alike in being big with wonder."
– St Thomas Aquinas

"The hyperactivity of the West is an escape from self."
– Lawrence Freeman OSB

"Friendship is the best medicine in life. It is a bridge between us and the perfect love of God."
– Aelred of Rievaulx

First keep the peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others.
– Thomas à Kempis

In the beginning was Mercy…
God who is Mercy
The Word of Mercy lives on…

This month the Sisters of Mercy celebrate 150 years in the dioceses of Wellington and Palmerston North. Time to remember, to ponder, to dream. The Word continues to speak her voice of Mercy, rooted in the tradition, immersed and responding to an ever-new context.

Mercy

Mercy is a rich and beautiful expression of God's own being. The scriptures remind us that Mercy is unfailing and steadfast love, grace, covenant fidelity, and truth. Mercy is the womb love of a tender, compassionate God. I love the Latin and Spanish word misericordia, with its overtones of heart, forgiveness, misery and compassion. To live Mercy is to connect heart with suffering, to be in relationship with all that is. God calls, and Wellington Mercy women have listened to that call for 150 years.

Sisters of Mercy

Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters in Dublin in 1831, where her experience guided her to serve the most needy — the poor, sick, and uneducated, especially women and children. The Sisters came to Wellington (from Auckland) in 1861, to fill an urgent need for teachers in Catholic schools. We remember their loving way of being and living, their sense of the holy and of community, and how they helped develop young women of faith, fully alive in their innate goodness and giftedness. For over 100 years, this identification with education and music gave the Wellington Mercies their meaning. The Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975) changed that, and many Sisters were 'freed' to move into other ways of living Mercy.

For example, after 17 years teaching, I lived with the fledgling Mercy community in Honduras. It was a 'founding' community, as each day we reflected together on the scripture readings and Catherine McAuley, to discern how God wanted us to be with beautiful Honduran people struggling with oppression and poverty. And there are so many local examples of ways our sisters are fully engaged. Sisters teach literacy and life skills to new settlers. Sisters provide education for teenage parents, and teach literacy and accompany prisoners journeying to new life. They use music and art as therapeutic tools with the sick and dying. Sisters advocate for women and children. They run a health centre for women in Chile. Sisters educate lay ministers and support them. They work for ecological development, and sponsor the ministries of others in the name of Mercy. And recently they are seeking ways to address needs of homeless women.

Southern Madonna, hanging in Chapel at Southern Star Abbey, Kopua.

Same… and different

Is the concept of Mercy the same as 150 years ago? Indeed yes. Are the Sisters of Mercy the same? Yes and no. We continue to live, with passion, the charism of Mercy. As society continues to change, so the context for our ministry opens us up to needs ever new.

We act from our heightened awareness of the interconnectedness of all that is, the urgent need for a non-violent way of living, the longing for community and spirituality, and the needs of those on the margins of society today. We live into questions about our unfolding universe, right relationships, the increasing inequity in society, our justice system, growing old in grace, and living simply.

The Mercy of God grows in us as we live awake to all that we encounter, and rest in the Mercy of God's own being. It is about the dream of God living through us, how God has enjoyed gifting us and calling us for 150 years. The call of Mercy grows in the hearts of so many. As Sisters of Mercy looking back and forward and alive now, our lived word is **THANK YOU**! ■

Sister Mary Hepburn RSM lives in the Dominican Family Community in Dunedin

the good shepherd and earthly shepherds

Father Frank Brennan SJ reflects on the situation of bishops facing the structural problem of a lack of priests, and especially on the removal of Bishop Bill Morris, as bishop of the Diocese of Toowoomba, Queensland. It was part of a homily for the fourth Sunday of Easter.

As Catholics, we count ourselves blessed that we are part of the flock which has those especially commissioned to act as gatekeepers and shepherds in their roles as pope, bishop and priest. But none of these is any substitute for Jesus — the gate, gatekeeper and shepherd.

We Australian Catholics have just come through a very difficult couple of weeks as our bishops reflected on the forced retirement of one of their number, Bill Morris, the bishop of Toowoomba. Due to a lack of transparency in the Roman processes, we don't know the full truth about his removal from office. We probably never will. I have known Bill as priest and bishop for thirty years. He is a good man — no flash academic but the most down to earth pastoral guy you could meet.

His forced departure from Toowoomba has been some years in the coming. On Thursday, our bishops told us: "The decision came at the end of a complex process which began 13 years ago and which ended in deadlock." You would think someone in the Church could have done something to resolve the deadlock in that time. Every social institution is of course fallible; so too is the Catholic Church. Our Church is not a democracy, and it does not pretend to be. Neither is it egalitarian. It is very hierarchical. And it usually does its dirty washing behind closed doors.

The Church is made up of members many of whom come from nations like ours where there are laws and processes which ensure transparency and natural justice. If someone is to be sacked, they expect to get a fair hearing. If a complaint against a citizen is to be upheld by someone in authority, the citizen has a right to know the case against them and a right to be heard. These expectations don't always translate readily to an ancient institution like the Catholic Church.

Bill Morris was a popular bishop, but he nonetheless upset a minority of parishioners and a handful of priests, some of whom sent regular complaints to Rome. United States bishop Charles Chaput visited the diocese and submitted a report to Vatican authorities who then alleged that Morris's 18 years of pastoral leadership was flawed and defective. That may have been Chaput's assessment. But we just don't know. Nor do we know the basis or evidence on which the assessment was made. Morris has never seen the report. Morris rightly claims to have been denied natural justice.

Bishop Bill Morris

After Chaput's visit, all but three priests of the diocese wrote to Rome in support of Bill Morris's pastoral leadership. So too did all the Pastoral Leaders and all members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council. Bill was told that he could not see the report and that he could meet with Pope Benedict only if he were first to submit his resignation. That surely put Benedict as well as Bill in an invidious position.

Overseeing a Queensland country diocese stretching from the Great Divide to the Northern Territory border, Bill knew he needed to provide

for the day when there would not be enough priests to celebrate mass. He wrote to the diocese in 2006 indicating that several responses "have been discussed internationally, nationally and locally" including the ordination of women and the recognition of other churches' orders. He invited discussion while remaining "committed to actively promoting vocations to the current celibate male priesthood and open to inviting priests from overseas."

When quizzed by the media, he said he "would ordain single or married women and married men if church policy changed". So he was sacked, not for ordaining a woman or a married man – but for inviting a conversation about it! On the day of his sacking, his consultors, the most senior priests of the diocese, said, "In our view, Bishop Morris has not been treated fairly or respectfully. We find his removal profoundly disheartening. This judgment on his pastoral leadership stands in stark contrast to our lived experience of his ministry."

This is a tragedy for anyone committed to the Church except for those like the chap who wrote on my Facebook: "The guy was a cowboy, not a shepherd". It's that sort of chap who probably started it all with complaints to Rome, behind closed doors. We need more shepherds in the light and fewer cowboys in the dark. Morris was a good shepherd even to those who acted as cowboys.

The bishops have told us that "Bishop Morris's human qualities were never in question; nor is there any doubt about the contribution he has made to the life of the Church in Toowoomba and beyond." They say, "The Pope's decision was not a denial of the personal and pastoral gifts that Bishop Morris has brought to the episcopal ministry. Rather, it was judged that there were problems of doctrine and discipline, and we regret that these could not be resolved." They intend to raise questions with the Roman authorities when they make their ad limina visit to the Vatican in October this year. After 13 years, most of our bishops are still in the dark about key details of the Vatican's treatment of Bishop Morris.

Father Frank Brennan SJ

The Executive of the Catholic Religious of Australia attended the recent meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops. They have put the following questions to assist the bishops in their ongoing inquiries in Rome during their forthcoming ad limina visit. They have asked:

1. How can all in our Church be heard and empowered by our ecclesiastical leaders and processes when private and confidential opinions are given such importance?

2. How is the decreasing availability of Eucharist, 'the source and summit' of our lives' to be addressed into the future?

3. What do we say to the people who have lost an inspirational shepherd and pastor in a time of great need?

Having heard from their members working in the Toowoomba diocese, they have said, "The majority of the Diocese saw Bishop Morris as outstanding in encouraging lay people to take up appropriate leadership in the local Church and vigorous in promoting prayer and ecumenical dialogue. He has been tireless in moving our church and society forward in the difficult and sensitive area of professional standards in ministry.

"At a time when many good people in our country are feeling disengaged from the Church we so need Bishops who are first and foremost Pastors who like the Good Shepherd care for their people."

Today let's pray for the flock of Toowoomba and for their erstwhile shepherd Bill Morris. Let's pray for the gatekeepers in the Vatican and for our ultimate earthly shepherd Pope Benedict. Let's pray that the gate is kept open and that cowboys can be intercepted before they do further harm to the flock. Let's pray for ourselves that we can maintain hope that our Church is the privileged place where we can expect to find gate, gatekeeper and shepherd working together in truth for our freedom, love and life to the full. ■

Father Frank Brennan SJ is Professor of Law at the Australian National University, Canberra ACT, and a prolific writer on social justice issues

the cost of courage

Amy Armstrong

Something happened to me the other day when I heard of the assassination of Osama bin Laden. Something deep within me was moved. I felt instantly and instinctively sick to my stomach and that this was truly wrong.

I am an American citizen who has lived in New Zealand for over ten years now. I love my adopted New Zealand home, but I also love America. It has been a journey for me over the years to embrace the American in me. When I first arrived here I perceived a lot of animosity toward my birth country. I largely understood this. The Bush administration was in charge and was making decisions with resulting actions that angered a lot of people in this world, including myself. But over the years I learned to separate the politics from the people and to appreciate the beauty of the land and the people. I made my peace with the nation that I was born into, and with my self-description as an American.

But as I heard of the news of Osama bin Laden's death and watched my fellow citizens celebrating the execution of another human being, something inside of me felt disturbed, and I was reminded of my former shame. And now I feel disappointed as I hear Obama, who I still think has done much good during his leadership, claiming bin Laden's assassination as a victory.

You see, deep down I am a true pacifist. I know all the arguments about why people such as Hitler, Saddam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden, need to be killed at all costs. But as I contemplate my instinctive reaction to this news, I realize the teachings of Jesus have taken a deeper root in me than I ever imagined. I don't know if I have the courage to be a martyr, to lay down my life as Jesus and many of his followers since have done. But I do believe that it is the right and courageous thing to do; to lose your life at all costs for peace. But if this is true, it cannot be right to kill another at all costs for retribution. There is no courage in revenge.

I do not believe that the death of Osama bin Laden has made the world a safer place. No matter what atrocities he has committed, by killing him, the hatred and bitterness of his followers will only increase. Our world is less safe now than it ever has been as we brace for retaliation from al-Quaida. The only way to stop violence is to respond with love. It is perhaps the hardest thing we are called to do, to love our enemies. But with the courage to do this, to act against the culture of revenge and retribution, our planet would be a different place. There is a cost, there is always a cost, but the world would transform in miraculous ways if we had the courage to follow this prophetic teaching of choosing love at all costs.

The words of the prophet Martin Luther King, Jr. ring in my ears:

"I mourn the loss of thousands of precious lives, but I will not rejoice in the death of one, not even an enemy. Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." ■

Amy Armstrong is a member of the Chaplaincy team at the University of Otago.

wisdom old and new

Kathleen Rushton

Gospel for the Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time: Matthew 11:25-30

In Chartres Cathedral are four stained glass windows of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel as giants. Sitting on the shoulders of each prophet an evangelist depicted as a dwarf. Thus seated the four evangelists though dwarfs can see further than the prophets but only because they are sitting on the shoulders of those giants. The glorious windows of medieval cathedrals were the people's Bible. Here visually is relationship between the two testaments which St Augustine summed up as: "The New is concealed in the Old Testament, the Old is revealed in the New."

More and more, it is being discovered, or rather recovered, that the evangelists also sit on the shoulders of the writers of the Wisdom Literature. This body of writing which includes the Books of Proverbs, Sirach and Wisdom emerged throughout the three centuries before Jesus. Let us explore how the much loved words of Jesus: "Come to me all you who are weary and overburden and I will give you rest … Take my yoke upon you …" (Matthew 11:25-30, read on the Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time) sit on the shoulders of the Wisdom writers.

In these writings is the female figure of Wisdom/Sophia (Greek). At the time the gospels were written it was held that Wisdom resided in the Torah — the first five books of the Bible which were especially sacred to Jewish belief. However, for the evangelists, Wisdom is found in Jesus, the human face of Divine Wisdom. Unlike us today, the earliest Christians would have recognised many of the words and actions of Jesus in the gospels as quoting or evoking Wisdom.

Wisdom is known by her works. Matthew tells that when John the Baptist heard in prison "what the Messiah was doing" he sent his disciples to ask if Jesus was the one promised by God. Jesus sent a reply back quoting Isaiah 35: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."

Jesus performs the functions of Wisdom. He shares a close relationship with God. He thanks God, "lord of heaven and earth", a term evoking all of creation; reveals divine mysteries and invites the receptive marginal "infants" (v.27) into God's presence. "Infants" or "the simple" is a metaphor in the Psalms for the lowly and teachable, those receptive to God. These are the small group of Jesus' disciples, not the elites, who have responded to God's call. Jesus' works transform a suffering world into a world of wholeness and light. Jesus' role and identity is found in his "works."

More and more, it is being discovered, or rather recovered, that the evangelists also sit on the shoulders of the writers of the

The invitation of Jesus "Come to me…" echoes Wisdom's call (Proverbs 9:4-5, Sirach 51:23-27) and extends to "all." Everyone not yet a disciple and who is wearied and burdened by human existence is invited to find salvation.

The term "heavy laden" used by Matthew is a rare one. It describes the "heavy yoke" of daily life. According to the book of Sirach, "A hard lot has been created for human beings, a heavy yoke lies on the children of Adam." (40:1).

In the Greek Old Testament, the word translated as "wearied" or "beaten" is used for beatings, physical tiredness or weariness from work, heat or battle. It is applied to affliction, trouble, oppressive sorrow and labour — all of which comprise the human lot from which God can save us. It is important to note that this term does not mean those oppressed by the Law, but those who are burdened from life under the Roman Empire with its unjust political and socio-economic structure. These result in hard labour, taxes, debts and disease. Jesus establishes God's rule in the present and will bring it about fully, at his return.

Jesus promises: "I will give you rest." Sirach assures us that in the end you will find rest in Wisdom (6:28) and again promises rest to those who live in God's presence (51:27). Rest, too, is part of the creative vision of Genesis. For God, after creating, rests with all creation in just relationship with God, creation and people.

"Take my yoke upon you … For my yoke is easy…" A yoke is a frame used to control animals. The yoke

of Egypt or Assyria or Babylon or Rome was a way of speaking about oppressive rulers and nations. In contrast, God's people take on the yoke of obeying the Torah (Jeremiah 5:5). Sirach instructs: "Put your necks under her [Wisdom's] yoke, let your whole being receive instruction, she is near, within your reach" (51:26). We are to take on the yoke of God's reign, God's mercy, justice and compassion in liberating those from weary toil.

The charred cross from the ruins of the WWII bombed Coventry Cathedral.

Earlier today I visited Coventry Cathedral. I walked through the poignant still-standing sacred area of the ruined walls and tower of the Word War II bombed cathedral, the area evoking suffering and death. I was drawn to the charred wooden cross near which are the words: "Father forgive" and beneath which is a copy of the Litany of Reconciliation recited every Friday. Then I walked down the steps into the adjoining new Cathedral which evokes life, resurrection and reconciliation.

How our world needs the people's Bible of this cathedral. The inspiration behind every stone, stained glass window and art work immersed me into the mystery, challenge and hope of taking Jesus' yoke, to learn from his actions and words. Ringing in my ears is the choice of: "Take my yoke upon you… learn from me …" or "Take upon you the yoke of revenge, hatred, violence and war … learn from oppressive rulers and peoples …" ■

Kathleen Rushton RSM of Christchurch is currently Cardinal Hume Visiting Scholar at Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge, UK.

Nightfall at Aspiring

Silence curls up in a confetti of yellow
beech leaves crackling underfoot
as a warm autumn day furls round
undressing us one star at a time as we climb
back into the womb of night.

In such silence the fabric of life stretches out
within us and it is said one can hear God.
Six days the I AM spoke fertile fecund words,
each charged with new life, the universe expanding and
    expounding
exponentially rolling up total satisfaction

into one simple phrase: it is good. And that was all
that was said, leaving the world hanging
like a pupa: caterpillar deconstructing, butterfly birthing,
suspended in silence. We waited
all day and late into the night, a night that would not end

though the earth kept turning and the tears
kept flowing. She was just two,
two weeks old, when we turned off the machine
and waited for her to die. The seventh day, sabbath day,
when the tomb is full with grief and sadness –

more than you or I could ever imagine –
a day to remember death, the eternal amen
to everything; evening shadows drawing in,
the dark surface of life's well full with our tears
a mirror for soul and grave;

the womb empties, the sun nestles
into the mountains, a child at her mother's breast,
Matukituki carving its way through
as a new day begins
saying good-bye to the old.

David Griffin

at one with the rhythms of life and love

Another Year

Director: Mike Leigh

Reviewer Paul Sorrell

I've reviewed a couple of Mike Leigh movies in this column over the years — *Vera Drake*, *Happy-Go-Lucky* — and the appearance of another film by this British master is always greatly anticipated by the film-going public. What gives Leigh's films their special edge of reality is the humanity of his characters and themes and the fact that his actors workshop their parts, rather than repeating learned lines for the camera. A warm family drama with a brimming, compassionate heart, *Another Year* delivers on all these counts.

Yet there are some aspects to Leigh's films that function as strengths and potential weaknesses at the same time. After you've seen a few, you begin to play the game of spotting the parallels and oppositions between the various characters and groups. At the centre of the film's world are Tom (Jim Broadbent) and Gerri (Ruth Sheen), a loving middle-aged couple living in inner suburban London, whose contentedness with their own lives allows them to create an oasis of acceptance and stability for their emotionally needy friends and relations. Tom is set against his recently widowed brother, Ronnie, who has failed to come to terms with a loveless marriage and an angry, rebellious son. Tom and Gerri's son, Joe, by contrast, is loving and grounded, like his parents, and has chosen the warm-hearted and childlike Katie against the emotionally volatile, self-absorbed and childish Mary (Lesley Manville), one of the key figures in the film.

The natural world is present throughout the action in a powerful yet understated way. The year of the title is divided into four seasons, where we see Tom and Gerri working quietly on their garden allotment, growing a profusion of fruit and vegetables. Their rootedness, fecundity and attunement to the cyclic rhythms of nature sets them apart from Mary and their Yorkshire friend Ken, for whom time is a sterile repetition of addictions and unhappiness. Their garden becomes a piece of suburban Eden, which they bring home with them along with dirty boots and big bunches of glasshouse tomatoes.

The final season is winter, drawn in sombre pastel tones of blue and grey. At the end of the film, we are left sitting alone with a desperate and despondent Mary, at last reflecting on the need to make some radical changes to her life. Tom and Gerri's love for their friends is a tough love; they listen and support, but are also firm and challenging. In the end, we are all responsible for our own lives. This is a very positive message, but one wonders whether Leigh needs to be so relentlessly bleak in the way he delivers it. ■

reading the bible with a green lens

An Inconvenient Text: is a green reading of the Bible possible?

Norman Habel ATF Press, Adelaide 2009. 136 pp Price: A$29-00

Reviewer: Michael Hill ic

Norman Habel is a Lutheran scholar and retired pastor living in Adelaide, Australia. He is also a passionate environmentalist and was the leading spirit in publishing the *Earth Bible* series, first launched some 12 years ago. He has composed many liturgies from an ecological standpoint. His writings have often appeared in *Tui Motu*.

This slim volume summarises his research and that of many others in an attempt to 'green' the Bible. It would be no exaggeration to claim that the ecological crisis is the gravest challenge to humanity today. Therefore to seek to understand what the Word of God is saying to us about the care of the earth and its species is highly relevant to all of us. Habel states bluntly: "We are Earth beings, born of Earth, nurtured by Earth, and celebrated by Earth. We need to identify with Earth and the domains and creatures of Earth…" (p.63) This is his starting point. It is an incarnational statement. We belong here. We meet God here. Therefore we would expect the Word of God, the basis of our Christian faith, to be our fundamental guide to how we live on earth – how we treat Earth.

However, we find many Biblical texts conflict seriously with this incarnational statement. In Genesis 1:28 we find God saying to Adam and Eve: "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it." Throughout the Old Testament there are similar statements which imply that the Earth and its creatures are there for human beings to use (and abuse?) Habel calls these 'grey' texts. He also notes that the actual call of the Chosen People

learning to live better with cancer

To Rakiura and Beyond

by Sandra Turner

Published 2011 by Sandra Turner, 99 pages, $25-00.

Reviewer Sandra Winton

Last Sunday I spoke with three people, very dear to me, who have all been diagnosed with cancer quite recently. Two were older, in their 80's and 90's; the other was in his 60's. There can be weeks when cancer seems all around — the thing we dread.

Sandra Turner, a Dunedin psychotherapist and group worker, was diagnosed with cancer ten and a half years ago ' the half is important and worth counting' she says. At the time she was happily married, her children were 11 and 13, and she was conducting a busy, thriving psychotherapy practice. This book is written out of her experience of the past ten years.

It is not a story of 'an heroic battle', of a miraculous cure nor of a tragedy. It is a story of a human life. It is the story of a person living with cancer, with diagnosis, treatments, relationships, professional decisions, facing death and asking the meaning of religious faith.

In the first part of her book, Sandra Turner talks about just these experiences. The writing is honest, thoughtful, raw. Part Two is centred on her experience of keeping on being a psychotherapist. The desire to work, to keep doing what she loves and is skilled and trained to do, is strong and decisions are complex. It is about the desire to remain in life while having cancer. In Part Three, 'Facing Jerusalem', she addresses the challenges to her belief and how this has been for her. She wonders how she will use the time gifted to her, to live well now or to prepare for death — or maybe do both.

The edginess that comes with facing Jerusalem, of walking consciously towards one's death, means that all previously held beliefs must be measured against this new position to see if they stand or are found wanting. To face death requires an integrated spirituality and very good companions. Both of these do not happen along by chance and inevitably are a work in progress.

The final section brings together Sandra Turner's thoughts on living well. Again it is practical, real and built on human experience. She questions the commonly expressed view that one should face cancer braced for battle and thinking positively. A positive attitude to life, that embraces 'human helplessness in the face of overwhelming events' and the inevitability of death is quite different from 'positive thinking' which may be more like whistling in the wind. Our nation and our planet have faced many overwhelming events recently; learning to live better through these may be of value to us all.

I can see this book being very helpful indeed to cancer sufferers, their families, friends and helpers. It is very readable and useful for anyone. ■

This book is available from The Cancer Society of NZ, Otago Southland Division Inc, 283 Great King Street, PO Box 6258, Dunedin 9059 and from the University Bookshop, Dunedin.

is suffused with violence against the earth and its inhabitants. The plagues which precipitate the Exodus are works of violence against the natural world. When Joshua arrives in the Promised Land, God bids him conquer it and drive out or subdue the inhabitants. The Biblical Exodus has been used as a paradigm for conquest and exploitation.

Habel rejects the notion that we must censor or 'bowdlerise' these inconvenient texts. They are there, and represent the anthropocentric, non-inclusive stance of those who wrote and received those writings. However, he also lists many 'green texts' which teach that human beings should reverence the home they have been given. For instance Genesis 2:15 states: "Yahweh God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it." The ultimate criterion for preferring the green texts over the grey is to be found in the Gospel of Jesus. "This choice is clear to me," says Habel, "because the way of Jesus Christ is explicitly to serve and not to rule, a serving which leads Jesus to give his life as a ransom…" (p.119).

This book is not the easiest to read. The text tends to be somewhat repetitive. Habel's case is made by being hammered home without compromise. The reader could become punch drunk! Nevertheless, it is an invaluable book of reference. Most of the crucial texts are listed and given a clear exegesis.

There are brief and crisp summaries of his argument on almost every page. And Habel's basic thesis is clear and absolutely persuasive. The Christian churches have tended to drag their feet in matters ecological. The Vatican particularly has been a very late convert. The attitude of right wing Christians in the United States continues to be lamentable and destructive. So Habel and his colleagues are to be commended and supported.

One good way of doing this is to buy this book, study it and spread its message. ■

Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

Brash Act.

It transpired that what initially appeared to be an act of self-delusion was actually a well-planned coup. Dr Brash aims to become Finance Minister. That would mean a return to Rogernomics, a system that brought about some positive reforms. It also effected widespread deregulation in favour of market power, saw many of our assets sold off cheaply, and formed the matrix out of which our current social inequality rapidly grew. An ideology that equates justice with what is strictly legal is corrosive of society. Dr Brash has the backing of business leaders who are worried about the government deficit, and see reduced spending as the answer.

Foreign Investment benefits?

There has been an enormous transfer of wealth-creating NZ businesses to foreign ownership over the past twenty-five years. Arguments made in favour of investment in local firms by strong foreign companies include better management practices and superior marketing skills leading to enhanced market penetration and greater profit. True, much of the profit leaves the country, but consumers benefit from a better product and sometimes more jobs are created. But this outcome doesn't always eventuate.

An *Economist* report recently described an example. Western tobacco firms have bought controlling stakes in firms in several East Asian Countries with weak regulation; through sophisticated advertising they are greatly expanding sales to women, and to children as young as 13. One can confidently expect future demand for workers in the health sector. As we are constantly reminded, 'the business of business is business', so if something is legal there is 'a moral obligation to exploit it for the benefit of the shareholders.'

Whither Public Broadcasting?

There are three issues to consider: is a broadcasting entity that is independent from private financial or political interests desirable, is it possible, and must it be freely accessible? The health of society requires easy access to reliable information, in news and other forms. There must be some kind of independent funding and editorial control. Easy access includes low cost and nationwide availability.

There is a demand for quality material and provision of real choice. Some saw the establishment of digital channels TV6 and 7 as the basis for future public broadcasting. There has been high praise for the quality of programmes screened, including children's; being so early in the era of digital TV there was scant opportunity to build a large audience, especially given the difficulties in getting programming schedules published. Now that the government has turned TV1 into a cash cow, TVNZ's commercial channels could have subsidized any shortfall, eliminating the excuse for abandoning TV6 and 7's potential.

Government policy appears to be following the 'let the market decide' ideology that regards competition as the regulator for broadcasting. But in the quest for ratings 'competing' means providing for mass audiences oriented primarily towards entertainment. If the only criterion is profit, news value becomes measured in terms of entertainment – witness the deterioration of TV1.

Some disturbing matters are the refusal to consider regulations to limit Sky's growing monopoly; the loan of taxpayer money to assist TV3's foreign owners to retain its broadcasting licence, and an apparent attempt to emasculate Radio NZ.

Of Popes and Saints. . .

John Paul II was the first truly global pope. One cannot fault his dedicated service under the most adverse circumstances. He exercised enormous influence ecumenically and politically. He was a holy man and a flawed pope. For years there were criticisms that he didn't pay enough attention to administrative matters, leaving too much to his Secretary of State, Cardinal Sodano. Delegation of responsibility requires adequate monitoring. John Paul's missionary focus left many issues for Benedict XVI to deal with, including the clerical sex abuse crisis. As Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster remarked, beatification "is not a prize for good management. It's an acclamation that this person was close to God in his life."

An outstanding Pope, Leo XIII, was not beatified. Aged 68, he set about re-invigorating the Church. He foreswore denunciations, instead adopting a very positive approach. He initiated reforms in philosophical, theological and Biblical studies, re-established good relations with a number of countries and proclaimed a wide-ranging programme aimed at the reform of society, including the first comprehensive statement on social doctrine, *Rerum Novarum*, in May 1891.

Leo's progressive stance contributed to the election of the very conservative Pius X as his successor. Pius X was later declared a saint. His suspicion of modern academic endeavours cast a pall over the Church that lasted until Pius XII.

The modern equivalent of Leo of course was Pope John XXIII – a man with the faith, vision and courage necessary to lead the Church to re-examine its mission and confront its failings. As a general rule I think popes should not be declared saints; it is difficult to filter out political motives, although I think Blessed John XXIII's case is an exception. ■

courage to look

Peter Norris

Some months ago I was thrilled to see a "former" priest and his family in Holy Name Church. When I was a much younger and fitter version of myself I heard a lot about his good work so it was lovely to see him at church and later have lunch with his family. Last week I also heard of the visit of the youngest daughter of Fr Graham, the founder of St Bede's College, to Christchurch, with her own children. No one seemed to know what had happened to him, and Fr Graham's family, when they grew up, had no idea that he was a priest, a Catholic, or what he had achieved in New Zealand in founding one of our finest Catholic schools.

We teach that once a priest always a priest but we have often shunned people who leave active ministry. This may have been why Fr Graham went to another country, changed his name, and did not associate with the Catholic Church. We will never know! At our worst we are guilty of being as un-Christian as some of the most exclusive sects. At our best individuals in the church can be kind and understanding. Most people I know who have "left the priesthood" have experienced both.

Divorced and remarried Catholics experience the same range of responses. At its worst the institutional response is the unforgiving one. At its best, individuals in that institution are kind and understanding. I was moved some years ago by hearing the story of a "former" priest who personally knew the pope of the time. The Pope was understanding and was happy to sign any papers as soon as the priest felt right.

Both priests who have married, and divorced people who have remarried, feel caught in the middle between what purports to be an unforgiving institution and some very kind people in the institution.

The institution says that ordination and marriage are for life and it is scared of a chink in the armour. I saw a copy of an icon of St Peter and his wife recently and I am certain that he would support married clergy. As well, there is greater understanding nowadays of how hard marriage is, particularly without the support of extended families.

Optional celibacy is something we should look at. The Eastern Catholic Church has had this for years as long as people are married before ordination. There are many dedicated married clergy in other Christian Churches who are great examples to others. The Orthodox Church also allows divorce but does not class the second marriage as a sacrament. Other Christian churches recognise divorce and remarriage and we could do well to learn from them.

To avoid creating large family dynasties, rulers, such as Charlemagne, gave large tracts of land to the church. As long as the ruler controlled church appointments the system worked. Land was not left to heirs but still remained in the orbit of the ruler's authority. At its worst celibacy is a carry-over from this old feudal system and currently provides a low cost option for administering property. At its best it should mean hospitality and openness. With marriage dowries the idea of divorce was also unthinkable. At its worst marriage is the final part of an economic union. At its best marriage is a communion of love.

It would take considerable courage for the Catholic Church to relook at celibacy and re-marriage. However, not doing so is the same as declaring that we do not take seriously the good work done by other Christian groups. ■

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a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

"There's the Gladstone Rd clocktower. And your favourite icecream shop by the beach…. Kaiti hill looks so tiny from an aeroplane. Isn't Gisborne looking so green and beautiful…. You're home again!"

It has been a bizarre couple of weeks back in New Zealand. I have been in Gisborne to set up a new living arrangement for Jeph's Mum, our beloved Grandma Pamela. It has been a time simultaneously frantic and full of grace.

Terry and Alan from the Parish Men's Group spent a morning with trailers helping us move things into the new apartment. The needs assessment team, health providers and bank bent over backwards to support us and work out how to make Grandma Pamela secure. My sixteen year-old nephew got busy and set up internet, computer, and Skype and voice activated software so Pamela can stay in touch with family members who are spread around four continents. Coralie dropped in with freshly-baked chocolate brownies and cakes. Joan, no spring chicken herself, is only too happy to give Pamela a ride to Mass on Sunday mornings. Joan brought in a big bag of feijoas and a vase of flowers for the new little flat. The women in the library welcomed us back warmly and Neetu at the post office remembered to ask about Pamela's different grandchildren.

In the midst of the pain of the worries and transitions that come with aging, there was welcome and community. We feel humbled by the support of friends of many years.

Tomorrow I get back in a plane to wave goodbye to the green, green, green of Aotearoa in early winter to return to my precious children and husband in the hotting-up summer of North India. Friends and family in Mussoorie have also been swinging in with meals, child care and sitting to share a cup of *chai* with Jeph in his solo parenting stint. I am grateful again.

God walks on earth — She is here among us. ■

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