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Opening the Door to Mercy

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Cover illustration:
The Doorway by Mary Horn OP

EDITORIAL

Happy new year of mercy to you!

Pope Francis announced the Year of Mercy and threw open a formerly bricked-up door in St Peter's basilica. His symbolic action evokes John XXIII's cry for the second Vatican Council to open the windows and let the Spirit blow in—and out.

Opening the door to mercy is a personal as well as a community challenge. Just as a door is an entry and an exit, so the work of mercy is within and around us. It suggests opening our minds, rearranging the priorities of our hearts, softening our judgements, dropping our carefully cooked resentments, reassessing our certainties, chipping away at our rigidity, relieving suffering—and we have a year to practise. As the year goes on we can expect to feel lighter, more hospitable and comfortable, more involved and more joyful.

And the call for mercy is not just for personal practice. It's a year for the Church to relieve suffering more intentionally allowing healing and hope to well up within the community, in neighbourhoods and around the world. It's time to retire the clerical bouncers guarding the door, checking visas to the altar and measuring women's participation by the eye-dropper. It's time to get messy from the effort of feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, giving women equality, nurturing children, rehabilitating prisoners, relieving the oppressed, listening to the troubled. This year we need to wear the doorway down to bedrock going in and out as we "make our own the mercy of the good Samaritan"—as Pope Francis said.

Our contributors offer a magazineful of discussion and images to stir our imaginations, provoke our curiosity and invite us into conversation. Mike Riddell begs the church to learn from its oppression in history and to realise in this year the "burning divine love that is blind to a fault". Church historian, Eamon Duffy, explains the symbolism of opening the Holy Door in this year of mercy. It's where we lay our burdens before entering and from where we leave for mission. Greg Coyle's and Michael Fraser's personal reflections will resonate with many and confirm the need for new ways to express faith in practice now. Jack Derwin interviews a young man heading up a volunteer project in Nepal. Sandra Winton and Anne Powell, with their insights into the mystery of love, offer the opportunity to pause.

These are a few of the pleasures awaiting in this first issue for 2016—*Opening the Door to Mercy*. It is with appreciation and gratitude that we acknowledge the generosity, thought and artistry our contributors have shared. And, as is our custom—the last word is of blessing.

IT TAKES US ALL TO BRING UP OUR CHILDREN WELL

"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them," Jesus said in Matthew's gospel. I wonder how he would respond in our current social and economic climate when so many children are "hindered" by their experience of poverty and inadequate or unsatisfactory housing. And when abuse, neglect and health issues limit their lives in so many fundamental ways.

A series of reports over the last 12 months has highlighted children's poverty and the inadequacies of state care. In all of these reports (and others) there are critical questions for us to consider about responses to these difficulties. Parental care is obviously an important element. But it is both too simple and a denial of our substantial inequalities to see the issues as resulting only from poor parenting.

As a society we can do much better for all our children. For this to happen it is critical that we demand the best possible government support. While charities can do some things, they cannot replace the government's core role in ensuring that all children have the opportunity "to thrive, belong and achieve", to use the government's own words in the *Green Paper for Vulnerable Children*.

Children's needs

It is possible to gather core dimensions of children's needs under seven key headings:

- **Consistency**—of care, management and discipline
- **Cultural Identity**—knowing and being affirmed in a sense of cultural belonging
- **Stability**—having secure, lasting care
- **Love**—a sense of belonging and of being loved by a carer/s and by a wider family/whānau
- **Opportunity**—having the opportunities to develop fully, access to the resources to support that and encouragement to be creative and take appropriate risks
- **Protection**—being appropriately protected from harmful and dangerous experiences
- **Security**—a sense of belonging to a family/whānau that will always be available

These seven components come together under an admittedly clumsy acronym, CCSLOPS. They are all critical elements for ensuring that children get the best possible chance in life, irrespective of their own or their family's circumstances.

Children need our support

Children cannot achieve these seven items on their own—they are dependent on their immediate carers and extended family/whānau and on how we in the wider society support and prioritise their well-being. Currently our record as a nation is not very good—especially when we look at the child poverty and child abuse figures—to take two specific examples.

No second chance for children

Moreover, children do not get a second chance for these components to be met adequately. They are children only once.

We now have plenty of evidence showing that children's experiences across these components (good and bad) have a strong impact on their adult lives. For example, children whose health is affected by poor housing are shown to have poorer educational outcomes, worse health as adults and lower incomes.

Pope Francis asks in *Laudato Si'*: "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" (par 46). It is a fundamental question and suggests, among other things, that we each have a responsibility around this. It cannot be left to others or to the market.

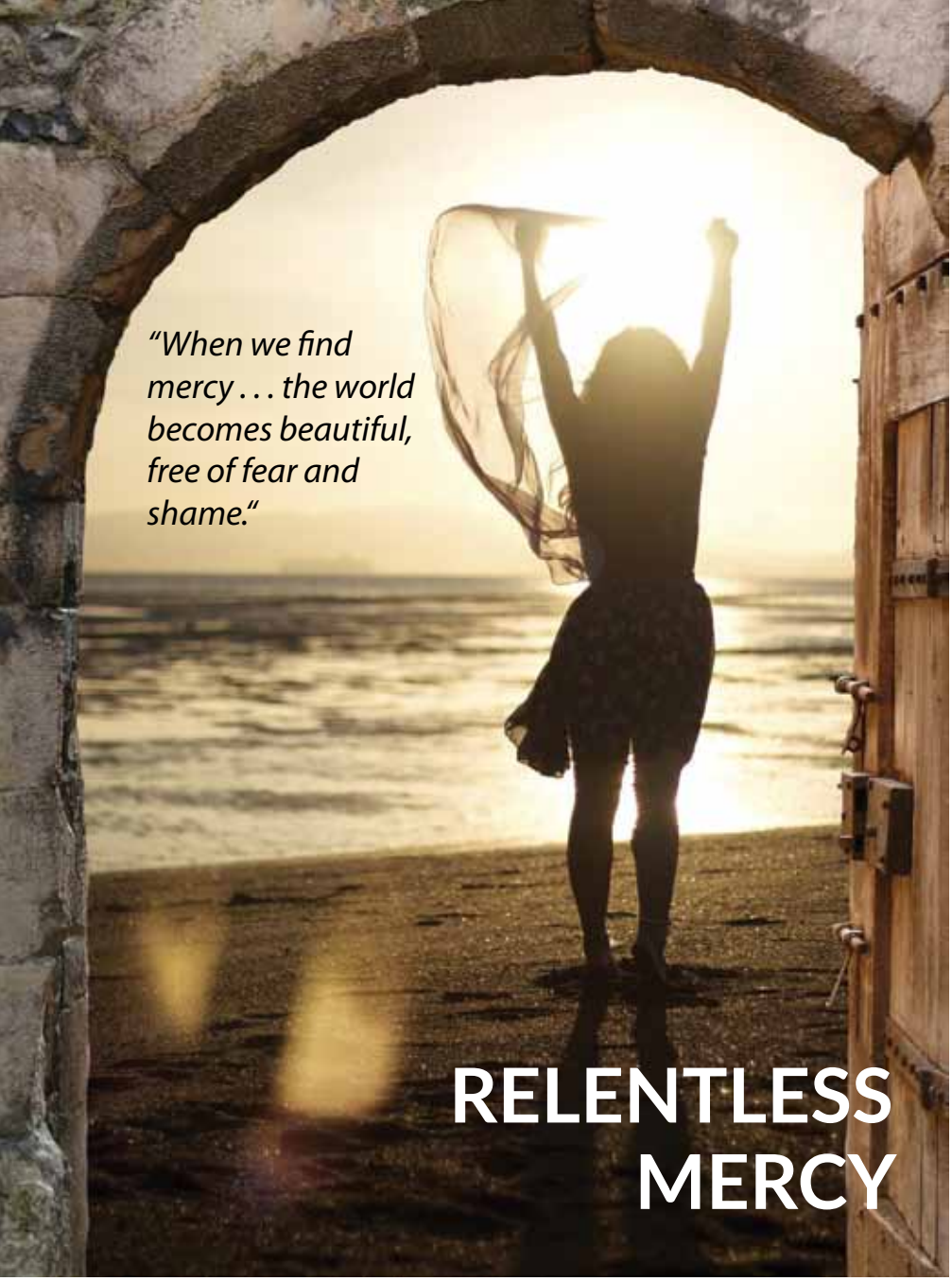
How the question is answered reflects on all of us. It challenges our commitment to "the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few" (*Evangelii Gaudium (EG)* par 149).

Pope Francis says: "We know that there is enough food for everyone and that hunger is the result of a poor distribution of goods and income" (*EG* 151) and that "the need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed" (*EG* 159).

These are powerful statements in the context of child poverty in New Zealand. We can resolve this problem if there is a will to do so. Politicians and other leaders have a major responsibility but we all need to press for change and for ensuring that all our children have the best possible opportunity to be the best they can be. ■

Photo by Zak Holland

Mike O'Brien is Associate Professor in social work at Auckland University and a member of the Child Poverty Action Group. He researches social welfare and poverty issues.



RELENTLESS MERCY

In his reflection on God's mercy, **Mike Riddell** recommends that we abandon our toxic comparisons and judgements and accept the woundedness around us and give ourselves into God's love.

In the film *Calvary*, a villager whose perspective is determined by the fact that a priest sexually abused him as a child, takes his revenge in shooting the current parish incumbent. The climax of the film is not the death, but that the murderer later receives a visit in prison from the slain priest's daughter. She comes not for retribution, but in brokenness and reconciliation.

Mercy is as rare as it is unexpected. James K. Baxter sees it as evidence of God: "God is present wherever mercy is present; wherever the poor continue to love one another. Mercy is God's manifestation." In this he presages Pope Francis, who proclaims: "Mercy is God's identity card. God of mercy, merciful God. For me, this really is the Lord's identity."

These claims are highly contested by the history and the conduct of the Church. It is undeniable that the common perception in the West is that Christianity is the purveyor of judgement, exclusion, condemnation, and punishment. Ask the question among women, the divorced, the LBGT community. Any doubts will be dispelled.

Jubilee Year of Mercy

Remarkable, then, that Francis should declare a Jubilee Year of Mercy. Remarkable, and risky. Defining the identity of God as mercy is controversial. Already the detractors of the Pope have suggested he is a reckless libertine and that the focus on mercy obscures church teachings that keep the faithful in order. They have a point.

Francis, ebullient leader that he is, remains unbowed. He dismisses such "angry mutterings", comparing them to Pharisaic opposition that Jesus received "from those who are only ever used to having things fit into their preconceived notions and ritual purity instead of letting themselves be surprised by reality, by a greater love or a higher standard." *(The Name of God is Mercy)*

Judgement shrivels us

The notion of mercy is an incisive scalpel that divides religion from faith, piety from pity, and judgement from compassion. Theologically it slices deeply into our notions of God. In the most simple terms of all, it asks the question whether God is for us or against us? Are we to live from love or fear? Do we celebrate or cower? Is it joy or shame that motivates us?

We live in an age where judgement shrivels our humanity. Popular opinion declares that we get what we deserve in life, and by that standard most of us seem to deserve little. The mirror hall of media reminds us that compared to our icons, we are clumsy, insignificant, dull, and ordinary. Our lives seem not so much beautiful as broken and disordered, unable to be fixed.

Contemporary culture is punitive and vindictive. One only needs to skim social media to see the vitriol unleashed on anyone regarded as fat, lazy, impaired, stupid, or ugly. A preponderance of television series demonstrate how the raw material of our bodies, lives, and finances can be "fixed"—presumably to make us fit to exist.

Every time a serious crime is committed, an enraged chorus of citizens demands harsher punishments, with some calling for the death penalty. The poor are reviled, considered to be authors of their own misfortune. Our elders are viewed as a "drain on society", and abused for getting in the way of the "movers and shakers".

Such a social environment is toxic, and carries a toll. We see it in suicides, addictions, psychiatric disorders, and low self-esteem. Even the apparent "stars" are not free of these ailments of the soul. When we use rigid measuring sticks against our own lives and those of our neighbours, it's not surprising we reap loneliness and misery in consequence.

In the timeless words of Shakespeare: "Though justice be thy plea, consider this: that in the course of justice, none of us should see salvation—we do pray for mercy". *(The Merchant of Venice)* The iron rod of consequence and retribution creates control, shame, and fear. For far too long this brittle philosophy has been the outer shell of every religion, including Catholicism.

Mercy is a fresh draft of healing

It is time, then, to relearn the word of mercy. Pope Francis is truly discerning the "signs of the times" in declaring his Jubilee. We have enough punishments in the tribunals of our own hearts without being lashed by canon law. Grant us instead a fresh draft of healing. As Leonard Cohen puts it with his diamond-sharp lyrics:

Behold the gates of mercy
In arbitrary space
And none of us deserving
The cruelty or the grace

It may be that we fear mercy as much as we fear freedom and love. Mercy seems to entail a giving up of both our rights to retribution, and the hope of reward for faithfulness. It shatters the universal law of consequence, leaving good prudent people like us on the same level as those who flout every pretence of decency.

Mercy is the divine face of God

Mercy is inherently anarchic. But then so is love. More to the point, we learn through the life and death of Jesus that mercy is the divine face of God presented to us all. The Pharisees guarantee order; Jesus invites the encounter with mercy. Mercy is the great leveller, before which all of us stand on equal ground.

To repeat a simple story that I've used in these pages previously, it seems that every person is connected to God with a string, from heart to heart. When we sin, that string gets broken, and God needs to tie a knot in it. Each knot makes the string shorter. Which is why, it seems, that those who sin greatly are much closer to God.

. . . those . . . who open their hearts to the mercy of God . . . let the crumbs of self-righteousness fall through their open fingers and find instead the burning divine love that is blind to fault.

Whether this little allegory brings you a smile or indignation may be an indicator of how you feel about mercy. Too many of us who inhabit the walls of faith are reluctant subscribers to the notion. Yet by denying mercy to those who transgress, we starve our own souls of it. We become spiritual anorexics, who see the sustenance of mercy as our enemy.

Mercy is acknowledging our brokenness

The deep truth of mercy is that it takes a certain brokenness to receive. Only those who relinquish their own resources for goodness are able to open their hearts to the mercy of God. In so doing, they let the crumbs of self-righteousness fall through their open fingers and find instead the burning divine love that is blind to fault.

Never has there been a more opportune time for Francis to call for a renewal of focus on mercy. "This is a time for mercy," he says,. "The Church is showing her maternal side, her motherly face, to a humanity that is wounded." In other words, the Church is called to show the face of God, rather than the face of displeasure.

Let us confess that the history of institutional Christianity has been punitive, exclusive, and demeaning, and that it continues to be so. We exclude those torn by the suffering of divorce from communion. We pry into sexual mechanics in order to regulate the diverse forms of human love. The boundaries of our communion are sealed rather than porous.

The Church is, to the outside world, a symbol of hypocrisy and prissy moralising. It lectures and chides rather than listening and embracing. If mercy be the heart of God, then the Church is the edifice of judgement. It is a scandal for the community of Christ to represent a way of life distant from that of our founder. We need mercy.

The answer to this, individually and communally, is to become aware of our own woundedness. We will never be dispensers of mercy unless we are first recipients of it. It is sometimes said that only the poor can see the face of God, and that is true in a significant way—only those who have given up on their own resources can receive the graceful healing of mercy.

Francis defines mercy in terms of *misericordi*, "opening one's heart to wretchedness". But it is not merely the wretchedness of others, but that of our own hearts. When we find mercy there, the world becomes beautiful, free of fear and shame.

Francis has sounded a call—a reminder of the salve so needed in our age. It is up to us to hear it, find it, and practise it. ■

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

ALL are WELCOME

The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales has announced that each of their cathedrals is to have a designated "Holy Door" for the forthcoming Jubilee Year of Mercy. At least one *Tablet* reader has been unimpressed, seeing the decision as a deplorable "flight into piety", avoiding "difficult questions about mercy" and likely to "bemuse" people with a symbol "that means little or nothing to them".

That judgement seems unduly severe. Of course the Holy Doors, which Pope Francis has asked every cathedral and great shrine to create, are symbolic. But Catholics live through and by symbols, and the symbolism of the Jubilee door is surely not so hard to read.

Opening the door and breaking barriers

The ceremony with which Popes inaugurate every Jubilee, taking a hammer and breaking open a bricked-up doorway into St Peter's and the other ancient basilicas, goes back at least to the fifteenth century. It is laden with meaning—the breaking down of barriers, flinging wide the gates of exclusion, an open invitation to all who wish to enter freely into the house of the Father.

We live in an age that has seen the fall of the Berlin Wall, but an age also of security guards and gated communities, and an age when the refugee and the displaced lie excluded at the immigration barriers of the West. In such circumstances, the symbolism of the open door surely needs little exegesis.

In his Jubilee letter, *Misericordiae Vultus*, or *The Face of Mercy*, Pope Francis spells it out: the Holy Door is "a Door of Mercy through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons and instils hope".

It is a welcoming door through which all in need may enter, but also a door from which the Church must go out to proclaim mercy to all: "May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! . . . together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!"

Tradition of Jubilee and indulgences

The Jubilee in ancient Israel was a time of mercy and liberation, proclaimed once every 50 years, when slaves were set free and land returned to its original owners.

In 1300, Pope Boniface VIII declared the first Christian Jubilee year, when a plenary indulgence was granted to everyone who came to Rome on pilgrimage.

The theology of indulgences is nowadays barely intelligible to most Catholics. Its root was the belief that even after sins were forgiven by repentance, confession and absolution, they left behind a kind of spiritual scar tissue, a burden of debt or "temporal punishment" that had to be discharged by acts of penance or good works. If the debt were not discharged in this life, it would have to be expiated painfully in Purgatory, a daunting prospect.

But the Pope was believed to have the power of the keys, not merely to dispense from the performance of specific penances, but actually to eradicate the debt itself. Such dispensations or "indulgences" might be partial, measured in days or years corresponding to a tariff of days or years of penance, or else total or "plenary", wiping away all spiritual debt.

The wholesale exercise of such a power of mercy might have undermined the entire medieval penitential system, even when stringent conditions such as going on Crusade or making the pilgrimage to Rome were attached to it. So at first, like a Queen's pardon nowadays, these much coveted indulgences were granted very sparingly. Boniface VIII intended the Jubilee indulgence to be granted only once a century. Pastoral pressure, however, led to the multiplication of indulgences, and of Jubilees, and the reduction of the necessary conditions to a few prayers or devotional acts.

Sharing in treasury of mercy

From the outset theologians puzzled to explain how indulgences actually worked. The most common theory—which moved away from the juridical imagery of punishment,

To mark the beginning of the Year of Mercy Pope Francis opened a bricked-up door in St Peter's basilica. **Eamon Duffy** explains the tradition and meaning of this symbolic action.

The Holy Door is both a sign of welcome to those who seek to lay down their burdens and come in, and a gateway to mission, from which we must take God's mercy out to a waiting world, "opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society", opening our eyes to see "the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity".

tariffs and legal remission—was that the Church possessed a great treasury of mercy and grace, in which the infinite merits of Christ, and those of the saints, more than made up for the deficiencies of the rest of us.

On this reading, the Church was like a cooperative bank, in which the better-off might lend without interest to those whose sins had left them in the red. Indulgences, therefore, were an expression of the ceaseless exchange of charity, the outpouring of God's love, which was the life of the Church. And that is how Pope Francis sees it. As he says in *Misericordiae Vultus*: "From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends."

It's not clear when the symbolism of the Holy Door first became integral to the Jubilee. It may have been borrowed from the symbolism of the thirteenth-century *Portiuncula* indulgence, one condition of which was passing through the doors of the tiny chapel in Assisi in which St Francis died. But the imagery of overflowing mercy quickly became part of the symbolism of the Holy Door.

Door opens to freedom and joy

The Pope striking the bricked-up doorway was thought of as Moses, smiting the rock to release streams of living water for the people. And the opened door gathered other scriptural resonances in the Jubilee liturgy.

It was the gate of the Lord through which the righteous of Psalm 118 were called to enter, as the Jubilee pilgrims did.

It was the joyful goal of the pilgrim of Psalm 121, "and now my feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem".

It was the door of comfort that the Son of Man in the Book of Revelation "who has the key of David" opened for the persecuted Church of Philadelphia: "Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut."

It was the gate of the underworld, which the risen Christ had burst open to declare liberty to the captives within.

Like Jacob's stone in Genesis 28, it was the door of the House of God, the gate of Heaven itself.

It was Isaiah's temple doorway on the mountain of God, "and all nations shall flow to it". And it was the Johannine Christ himself, the gate of the sheepfold, the way, the truth and the life.

Open door welcomes

For Pope Francis the opening of the Holy Door has lost none of these resonances and he has added some of his own.

He has linked it, like the Jubilee of Mercy it embodies, to the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, when "the Church entered a new phase in her history" and "the walls which for too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down, and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way".

For Francis, the Holy Door is both a sign of welcome to those who seek to lay down their burdens and come in, and a gateway to mission, from which we must take God's mercy out to a waiting world, "opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society", opening our eyes to see "the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity".

The open door is a call, in the words of Isaiah, "to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free . . . to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house". It embodies the central theme of this papacy: mercy to the poor, mercy to those at the margins, mercy to those locked out from the sacraments by broken marriages, mercy for "everyone, both believers and those far away . . . a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst". ■

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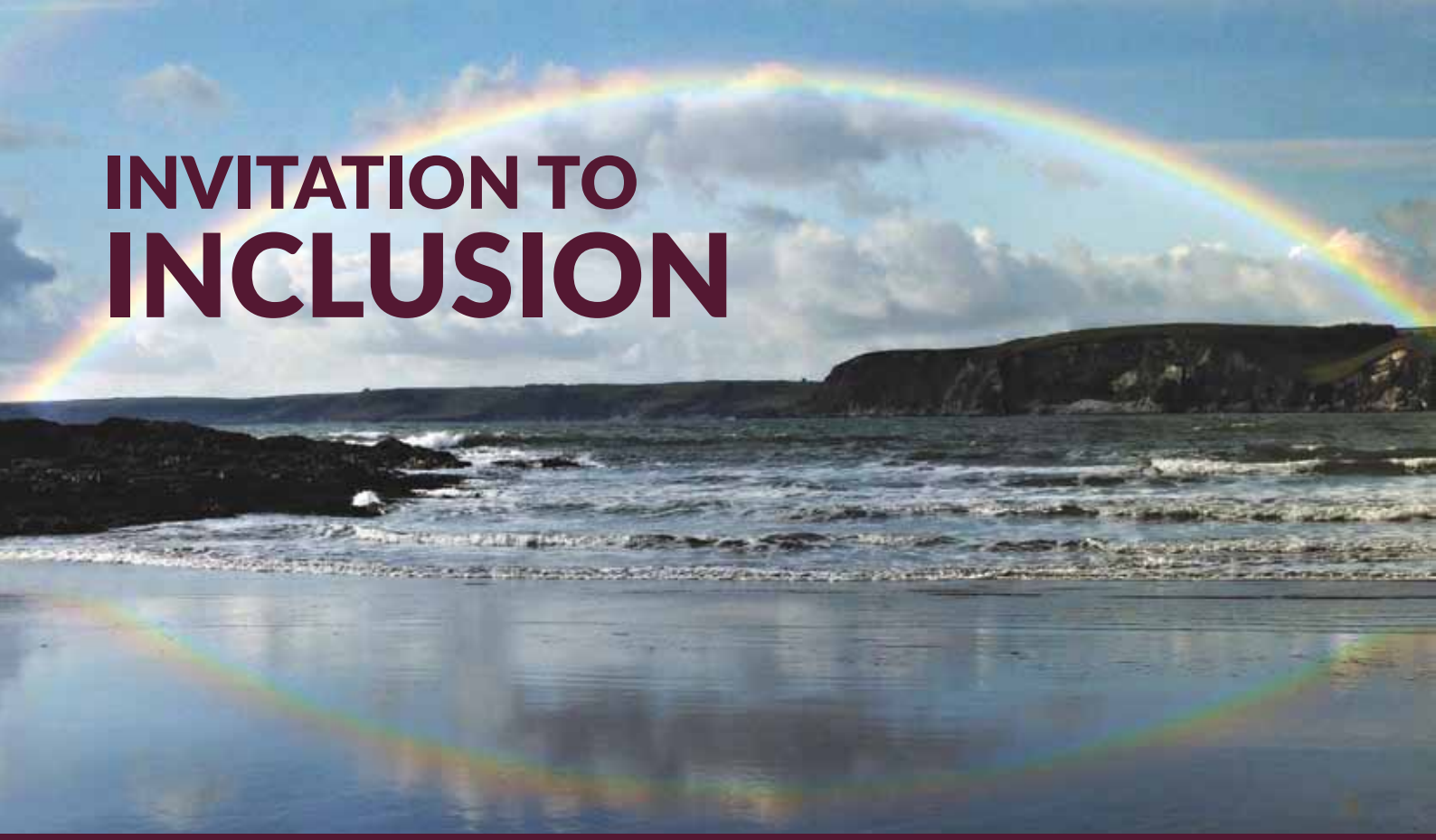
Eamon Duffy is emeritus professor of the history of Christianity at the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Magdalene College.



INVITATION TO INCLUSION

Being a Catholic gay person calls for courage and commitment in the Church. Michael Fraser shares his experience of the support he has had from his family, friends and priest and his hopes that in this Year of Mercy there will be changes in how the Church speaks of sexuality.

I told my parish priest I was gay over a cup of coffee at a local café. I was nervous, apprehensive and searching for something around acceptance from a Church, that with all its failings, I love and respect. Without a blink of an eye my pastor smiled at me and said: "You know you are always welcome in my church."

Last year the Bishops of the Catholic Church gathered in Rome for the second part of the Synod on Family Life and questions around remarried and same sex unions were expected to be debated.

In New Zealand generally we have accepted remarried Catholics in our community. The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference was willing to have conversations about welcoming remarried Catholics back to the Eucharist long before Pope Francis entered his papacy. However we seem to be silent on the issue of serving our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) community.

A quick google search of "Catholic Gay Support Groups NZ" brings up nothing. There are articles from TVNZ outlining that young Catholics under the age of 40 think the Church is out of touch with the community on the homosexual issue. There was a further article about the Bishop of Auckland advocating a programme asking the LGBT Catholic Community to enter into celibacy. Is this all the Church of Aotearoa is offering?

God's inclusive love

After talking with my pastor for a little longer, he asked: "Do you think God does not love you anymore?" I answered: "No!" He asked: "Do you hate yourself because you are attracted to men?" I said: "Father, I am proud of who I am." He replied: "And I am proud of you, too."

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* uses some very hard language about people who are attracted to people of the same sex. It outlines that members of the gay community must be pastorally cared for but refers to their gayness as a natural disorder. Previous popes have associated homosexuality with the abuse of children and as a root of evil. As a committed Catholic I find this is a hard thing for me to accept in Church teaching. I did not choose this sexual orientation for myself and I know sexual orientation is a natural thing. Our sexuality is also related to our spirituality, our relationships with others and God. A good friend who works for the church said: "We are all made in the image and likeness of God. I'm sure God is OK with who you are."

Mercy means a change of heart

In this Year of Mercy I don't want the Church just to "accept" me as a gay Catholic. I want the Church to

re-examine the contexts and sources that have led to labelling my sexuality as "distorted" in light of contemporary understandings of human sexuality and the evolving world. Not only am I challenged to live in the Gospel spirit this year but those who guard official teaching are likewise called into conversation and change.

As I continued to talk my priest asked me what I wanted. I told him I love my job and the gifts I have to offer the Church. I also want to meet a wonderful man and have a family. He smiled at me and said: "Well, I won't be able to marry you at the moment but I can baptise your children." I think the winds of change are moving in the Church when it comes to the LGBT community.

Finding acceptance

My own Irish Catholic family has found it challenging that I am in a relationship with a man, and at the same time they show great love and concern for me. My Mum said: "I'm just sorry life will be a little bit harder for you but you know this is always your home and I love you."

In society I don't think it's as tough as it used to be for the LGBT community but in the Church, yes, I think it is harder. I want to live with integrity and honesty but there are sectors of the Church who would not accept me because of who I am.

There are very good men and women within our parishes, schools and communities who need pastoral support and encouragement to grow in understanding of their sexual identity. Instead of casting a cross on their shoulders our communities could lift their burden by understanding and support. This could be an opportunity to serve others.

My time progressed with my local priest and our conversation moved past the initial issue I wanted to talk to him about. We moved on to sharing about the simplicity of a recent liturgy and the impact it had on me and the need for our Church to serve the poor and the marginalised. The reflection on the gospel narrative we shared was deep and meaningful. The fact I was gay was not an issue.

Prophet for this new time

Sometimes change is effected from the bottom up. A small group of New Zealanders in the 1980s believed that we did not need nuclear energy or warships in our part of the Pacific. Their passion converted us so that it became a government policy and national value. The experiences I have had with my priest, friend and mother—all card-carrying Catholics—remind me that whoever we are, we are made in the image and likeness of God.

Maybe in this Year of Mercy the research from the social and psychological sciences, as well as experience, will inform our discussions and imaginations about sexual orientation and gender. I think this is part of that bottom-up thing. Families and friends are calling us all to understand and change—not just to tolerate.

I am heartened by Pope Francis who will not judge homosexual persons trying to live good lives. I hope his local representatives will adopt the same position. I join in prayer that the "official" teaching of the Church is revised soon so that a person's sexuality ceases to be labelled as "unnatural or disordered".

As we walked back to our cars my priest called out and said: "Let's do this again—maybe over a beer or vino?"

I think sometimes we look for encounters with God in the big and spectacular. Rather, the love of God comes in the simplicity of a cup of coffee on a Friday afternoon. ■

Michael Fraser is a young professional working in education. He has been involved in parish and diocesan programmes. His passions include family, friends, rugby, cooking and social justice.

Legacies of Love

At Christmas I visited a cousin who suffers from memory loss. He was pleased to see me and I was reasonably confident that he remembered me. We chatted companionably and then he asked me: "How's Aunty May?" Now I saw that he did indeed know who I was. Aunty May was my mother. I explained that she died some years ago (over 20, in fact) and he nodded sadly. My parents were good to him as a child and I am reminded of the reality that we are family. If he loves me it is because I am my parents' child; the good they did, the love they gave, have come down to me.

We are often reminded of the importance of being loved for ourselves, for who we are. Such unconditional love is vastly important. To know that we are loved but not for anything we do or achieve, not for our looks, or our cleverness, is an important psychological building block, a social standing place and spiritual comfort.

To be loved *not* for who we are but because we inherit love is something else. It does not happen in all families but when it does it is extraordinarily freeing. Love is there before we are; we come into it. We come into it as we might come into an inheritance. We come into it as we might drive into the sun after rain. If there is something in us that evokes love, it is drawn out of us in the love, divine and human, that awaited our birth.

In my Christmas visit I was led to remember the love that passes to us and through us, that is greater than us, the sacredness of the human, the embodiment of the divine. ■

Sandra Winton is a Dominican Sister and practises as a psychotherapist in Dunedin.

DOING SOMETHING about a NEED

New Zealanders felt the generosity, drive and organisation of the student "army" that turned up in Christchurch after the earthquakes. **Jack Derwin** tells of Nick Abraham and other volunteers who are helping now to rebuild in Nepal after the earthquake last year.

The earthquake that struck Nepal on 25th April 2015 devastated the country, killing almost 9,000 people and leaving some two million Nepalese homeless. The nation went into mourning as it sifted through the rubble — the remains of its towns and villages.

On the ground the task of rebuilding all that was destroyed and damaged remains a monumental task. In the weeks and months following, the recovery effort began to take shape, with substantial humanitarian aid and foreign volunteers rushing to Nepal's side.

One person makes a difference

Among those volunteers was Nick Abraham, a 21-year-old carpenter who was working in Darwin, Australia. He was so moved by the sheer enormity and desperation of the country, he quit his job and moved to Nepal to help the rebuilding process.

"Originally I came over to work with an organisation that I had heard was rebuilding a local village," recalls Nick.

What he found, however, was a flailing unregistered project unable to support itself and many volunteers being forced to leave due to their own financial circumstances. In essence, he found himself in a small village completely alone.

"My first thought was, what the hell is this?" recounts Nick, faced with no support and surrounded by such tragedy.

"I found that most of the other volunteers from the village had gone their separate ways. A few were still keen to work together."

Getting started

Despite lacking a formal organisation, those remaining had the real desire to lend a hand in helping the local Nepalese rebuild. Rather than abandon the project entirely, Nick collaborated with those left in the village. They registered themselves as an official organisation and commenced the rebuilding process properly. The group became fittingly named, *From The Ground Up*.

Armed with Nick's tools and $10,000 he had helped fundraise in Darwin, the group began work in the small village of Ghumarichowk, an hour northeast of Kathmandu.

As few others were able to commit full-time, Nick commenced the construction work largely alone. Nepalese architects, already working full-time in Kathmandu, supplied him with designs they completed on their days off. Nick worked himself to physical exhaustion as he faced obstacle after obstacle in the destruction.

"It's a struggle most days," admits Nick. "I used to wake up at five every morning to fetch water and get food with the crew in a nearby village and then walk back up the hills that surround the village. I would work all day then get back home and help with preparing dinner, do the dishes then go to bed. I did this every day for three months. It all started to take its toll."

On top of this, he had to work with locals with whom he couldn't

communicate, a building standard far different from what he was used to, an imperial measurement system, and difficult access to the village surrounded by hills. With the price of petrol well over $8NZ per litre, he would often walk building materials up the four hills to the building site.

Every helper counts

Meanwhile word began to spread about the work he was doing and other foreigners began trickling in to give him a hand.

"Literally, I'd meet people in bars and start chatting about the work I was doing. After a few beers people would ask: 'When can I start?'"

These first volunteers were soon joined by others from around the world. Nick credited this largely to a friend's help.

"Jade, a girl I had met in Darwin, came over to help me and then she began recruiting people. She was a marketing and promotion genius. Within three weeks we had 13 people up here."

Nick recalls: "We've had Australians, New Zealanders, as well as French and Brazilians and British, to name but a few."

Joe Wehbe, explained why he decided to volunteer: "Back in my schooling days (St Ignatius College ,Riverview, Sydney) I was in MacKillop House... we used to come last in all the athletics and swimming carnivals etc. so it wasn't always fun. But the patron of my House, good old Mary MacKillop, had a saying that I think applies well to all aspects of life, whether you're religious or not: 'Never see a need without doing something about it.'"

In total, the project has received some 21 volunteers during Nick's tenure in the village. But while the help is much needed it is not without its challenges. A short-term volunteer usually stays only a few weeks. At present there is only one other full-time volunteer.

While they estimate that the school they wish to build would take approximately eight weeks to erect with a full-time seven-person team, this goal is wishful thinking when *From the Ground Up* struggles to have more than two volunteers at a time.

Building to resist earthquakes

The group's ultimate aim is to become a sustainable project capable of producing earthquake-resistant structures. This style of construction sets apart *From The Ground Up*'s work from other local efforts. Nick and others had surveyed the rebuilding in other parts of Nepal and were deflated to see that structures were being rebuilt in the same way as those that had been felled by the earthquake.

"They don't have the equipment to do the building processes properly and they don't have the money to afford the tools to do the job. For a seismic region like Nepal they need to do a high-quality job to withstand a future earthquake. There can be no shortcuts taken and walking around—that's all I see happening."

From The Ground Up's objective is even more important. Not only must schools and houses be re-erected but they must be done in a sustainable way.

> *"I have come to learn so much from the Nepalese and they have come to learn so much from me. Their knowledge of the natural material and my knowledge of the construction process and workmanship combined, make for very strong, earthquake-resistant buildings."*

Working together

The task ahead of Nick and the organisation is enormous. Of the 420 structures in Ghumarichowk, the earthquake damaged 80 per cent. Contrast this with the fact that four in five Nepalese are on a minimum wage equivalent to $99NZ. It is apparent that it would take them many years to afford to rebuild. It's obvious then that the *From the Ground Up* project has to be more than simply rebuilding one structure at a time.

"We want to promote a grassroots movement where we teach the

local people how to build extremely earthquake-resistant housing or buildings out of the very material that surrounds them," Nick explains. "The main plan is to do this while we're rebuilding schools in remote areas in a sustainable and affordable way."

The structures they have designed use earthbags and rammed earth, traditional Nepalese methods tweaked to resist future tremors.

"I have come to learn so much from the Nepalese and they have come to learn so much from me. Their knowledge of the natural material and my knowledge of the construction process and workmanship combined, make for very strong, earthquake-resistant buildings."

Having spent over four months there already, Nick and the group are under no illusions as to the task ahead.

"There is no time limit. We're just going to keep going to make sure the project can sustain itself. If some volunteers need to leave Nepal we will have processes set up for the locals to be able to do everything themselves. It's a tough journey but one I wouldn't change."

Nick and the other volunteers' passion and skills are making a difference in the lives of earthquake-traumatised Nepalese. *From the Ground Up* is financed by donations to their *gofundme* website. All the money goes towards rebuilding Nepal from the ground up. ■

Jack Derwin is a student, writer and journalist living in Mexico. As long as his finances allow, he has no interest in changing any of the aforementioned.

DIVORCE, ANNULMENT *and ANOTHER CHANCE*

Greg Coyle reflects on his experience of divorce, remarriage and the annulment process.

Last year Pope Francis called a synod of Bishops to discuss the role of family in the Church. Part of this discussion was about divorced and remarried Catholics.

The debate about whether divorced Catholics should receive the Eucharist can be summarised into two opposing camps.

Those who hold that Catholic marriage is indissolvable see that breaking the bond of marriage puts the persons in the position of not being able to receive Communion.

The other camp holds that despite the best efforts of those involved, some marriages do fail. In that situation the Church should show these people justice and mercy. This includes inviting them to engage with the healing power of the sacraments.

A way of looking at justice

In Indian Sanskrit there are two words for perfect justice: *niti* and *nyaya*. *Niti* refers to just rules and institutions. If they are implemented completely, they result in maximum public welfare and just outcomes respecting what people have good reason to value in their lives.

Nyaya on the other hand means the exercise of rules and regulations in which the requirement for justice is that all are seen to be treated by the law the same way, irrespective of the result.

The argument about divorced Catholics within the Church can be likened to a battle between a just outcomes approach (*niti*) and a rules based approach (*nyaya*).

Pope Francis seems to have placed himself on the *niti* side of fair and just outcomes for divorced Catholics, encouraging the Church to bring them into full participation, including the Eucharist.

However those holding either of these perspectives have become entrenched and a common position will not come about quickly.

Marriage annulment

The Church does have a *nyaya* way of dealing with the position of divorced Catholics—annulment. Individuals or couples can apply to a tribunal to have their case considered for annulment of previous marriages.

About 10 years ago my second wife and I entered into the process of annulment as we wanted to be married as Catholics. A year into the process we were granted the annulment. That decision meant that we were free to marry as Catholics and could continue full sacramental lives in the Church. We were advised that our first marriages "could not have expected to be enduring for life". I found that was an incredible statement demonstrating justice, grace and forgiveness.

We found the process had many other benefits. The deep self-examination and insights into why we did not recognise the incompatibility in our first partnerships was a highly valuable exercise. It caused us to listen to each other exposing the full glory of our previous failings, with high levels of honesty and openness. Everything was exposed. We deepened our acceptance and love for each other. I could not imagine a better preparation for a second (or even a first) marriage.

Reality of marriage

Catholic marriage is a covenant between two people and God. The covenant is indissoluble and meant to be for life. The factors which lead marriages to fail are multiple and complex and each divorce is underpinned by a particular set of circumstances. Mistakes have been made, human frailties are manifest, over time incompatibilities become evident and deceit and mistrust can also play a part.

Then there are physical disabilities, chronic ill-health, personality disorder, mental health issues and addictions which may become just too hard for one or both of the partners to bear.

Sometimes criminal behaviour is involved and one partner may be imprisoned for a very long time.

Sometimes a couple cannot face childlessness. Or they have been worn down by catastrophic events such as the death of a child, prolonged, high-level disability of a partner, extreme poverty or unemployment which create the perception of a hopeless future.

There may be economic circumstances where couples are living wide distances apart and loneliness burns the marriage out.

Divorce is also the road out of physical, emotional or sexual abuse by a sociopathic or narcissistic partner.

Without looking at blame, the fact is that no matter how hard people try to prevent it, marriages sometimes fail. And the two people concerned, often together with their families, go through an emotional and traumatic process before they can contemplate moving on with their lives.

A second chance

We know God as a God of sacred covenants and the covenant between God and the Church and between God and God's people cannot and never will be broken.

However as has been outlined, people do become broken through marriages, although this does not undermine the principle of life-long marriage. We know well that just because planes crash or ships sink, it does not undermine the principles of flight or flotation. It just means something went wrong in that particular flight or sailing.

Pope Francis is reminding us that now is the time to show mercy. He invites us to go out and search for the wounded rather than waiting for them to come to us.

Locally based annulment process

While I think that the process of the annulment of a marriage is a valuable process for the couple concerned, it is not perfect. The process does not need to be so arduous and could be simplified. It should remain focused on self-knowledge and reflection as to why a marriage could not be expected to be enduring for life.

It could be handled in New Zealand by an agency within the Church. Parish priests could lead divorced couples through that process just as they do for couples preparing for marriage. Some priests may feel they are already too busy with their current parish workload and might not engage with divorced people. Others would see this as a ministry of healing, compassion and forgiveness and well worth their effort. Lay-people also may be called for this work to encourage and assist couples hoping to live fully within the Church.

Dissolution rather than annulment

Finally I believe that the name "annulment" is the wrong term. It signifies that the marriage was a "nullity" — that in the eyes of the Church it did not take place and it was of no value. This could be especially wounding for the children of the marriage.

I think it is better to adopt a term such as "dissolution". This accepts that there was a marriage. It also accepts that it did not last. That it became broken to the point where there was no reasonable expectation it could endure for the partners' lives. In this case dissolving the covenant is just and merciful.

The time for change has come. ■

Greg Coyle is a member of St Mary of The Angels Parish in Wellington. He is Principal Advisor for The Salvation Army Social Programme.

THROUGH THE MISTS OF TIME

Mary Betz tells of her visit to the islands and people of Haida Gwaii.

Over two hundred million years ago, the Canadian islands of Haida Gwaii, "Islands of the People", were born from volcanic activity off the coast of Peru. With northward tectonic movement, these land fragments are now "docked" off the coast of North America, 50 km south of Alaska and 80 km off the north-western British Columbia mainland. The first people settled on Haida Gwaii about 12,500 years ago.

Living in harmony & connection

The Haida population grew and thrived on the abundant sea life—salmon, herring, seabirds and sea lions—and used the rich cedar, spruce and hemlock forests for implements, building materials and clothing. But their relationship with the life around them was deeper than mere use of resources for survival. *Yahguudang*, a respect for all living things, is part of the physical and spiritual connection between the Haida and the life of the forests, oceans and skies which surround them. For Haida, there is little separation between supernatural, human and animal worlds, in which at any time, one being might appear in another's form.

Contact with Europeans

Before European contact, about 20,000 people lived on Haida Gwaii, but introduced diseases like smallpox were devastating, and the population declined to fewer than 600 by the late 1800s. Surviving Haida gathered together, reluctantly leaving most of their 126 former villages to be reclaimed by the rainforests. Haida now number about 4,400 around the world: 2,400 of them live in Haida Gwaii alongside an equivalent number of Euro-Canadians.

I had long appreciated the beauty of Haida carving, heard about waters teeming with sea and bird life and seen photos of rainforests deep in sphagnum moss guarding sacred village sites. So I convinced three other family members to accompany me for a week in Haida Gwaii, including four days travelling by Zodiac within Gwaii Haanis National Park and the S'Gang Gwaay UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Learning the history & spirituality

We arrived to a welcome of mist hanging a few metres above the waters, shrouding the mountains, and accompanied by the deep-throated croaks of ravens and the higher pitched calls of bald eagles. Eagles and Ravens are the names of the two *moieties* (lineages) of Haida. A matrilineal society, Haida inherit lineage from their mothers, and traditionally marry someone of the opposite *moiety*. The Ravens are the older *moiety* and the Haida creation story tells of the supernatural, pre-existent Raven, who opened a clam shell from which the Haida people emerged. Raven is intelligent, but a greedy trickster, paradoxically teaching humans how to live a good life.

Each day we visited one of the long-abandoned villages, including the most sacred, *S'Gang Gwaay 'Llnagaay*. The name means Wailing Island Town, for it is here in a sheltered cove that smallpox survivors of the southern villages gathered until they were invited to join survivors further north.

At each village we were greeted by a Haida Watchman who graciously shared Haida history and mythology and explained the remains of houses and meanings of the carved poles. Some poles had been sold to dealers, archaeologists and museums in the years after the smallpox epidemic, others had been left in place.

The poles are not "totem" poles. They record the history and lineage of the chiefly families of each village. Mortuary poles were the final resting places of chiefs and were topped with a box containing the bones of the deceased. Memorial and

interior house poles were carved with clan crests and moiety figures. House frontal poles are the most detailed and tell family history with crests of salmon, killer whale, bear, wolf, frog, beaver, eagle, raven and others. The history and lineage of a family determined its rights to the use of salmon streams, cedar stands, trapping areas and coastlines. It was these rights by which families measured their wealth.

The knowledge of family history, lineage and rights was instilled in every child raised to be a chief. There were also clan historians who passed clan information orally—memorised word for word—from generation to generation. Many histories took hours, even days, to recite.

Some parts of the tradition were recorded on carved poles, canoes, cedar storage boxes and masks used for ceremonial celebrations. Some were ritualised in dance, song and stories used at celebrations like the *potlatch*.

Potlatch – a means of re-distributing wealth among families … so continuing the cycle of giving away and accumulating goods.

Celebrating milestones

The *potlatch* was a ceremonial feast held by important families to mark milestones like births, marriages and deaths. The *potlatch* host was accorded standing, based on the wealth he could give away in the form of food, carved items, blankets and even canoes.

The *potlatch* (practised by all Northwest Coast tribes) was outlawed by the Canadian Government from 1885 to 1951, because missionaries and government agents considered it wasteful and not in accord with the European value of wealth accumulation. In actuality, *potlatching* (which means "giving") was an alternative economic and social system, a means of re-distributing wealth among families. Each *potlatch* participant was given gifts, obliged to remember and talk about the event accurately, and would give a *potlatch* in return, so continuing the cycle of giving away and accumulating goods.

Spending hours on the water each day, we could imagine travelling by cedar canoe as the Haida did a hundred years ago. We discovered black bears scrounging along the intertidal zone, bald eagles perched in the highest trees and curious Stellar's sea lions and Pacific dolphins feeding and playing. Walking through the deserted villages was sobering. Here and there were cedar house beams, lying where they fell when the supports rotted, blanketed with 120 years of moss and conifer saplings. Old carved poles lay on the ground or at odd angles, many having recognisable carved crests of beaver, wolf, owl, bear, raven and eagle. Thousands of Haida ancestors are buried in these villages, their spirits witness to stories faithfully told by the Haida Watchmen.

The devastating epidemics robbed families of their full stories and lineage along with the people who carried them. European settlement and residential schools have nearly eradicated Haida languages. Only nine fluent speakers of the two Haida dialects survive today although 50 people are now enrolled in language programmes.

Recent years have seen a renaissance in the carving of new poles, ceremonial items and jewellery—for people, homes and community centres in the two main Haida centres of Old Masset and Skidegate, as well as for tourism. As of old, the new carved poles celebrate the diversity and complexity of *moiety*, clan and family relationships and are signs of hope for the continued recovery of the culture and identity of the Haida people. ■

Photos left 'Mist over Aliford Bay, Haida Gwaii' and right 'Contemporary Haida carved pole at Old Masset' by Mary Betz.

Mary Betz is an ecologist, theologian and spiritual director and also works in the Auckland Diocesan Justice and Peace office.

Meditation

Prepare with music
which holds in its power
all images
so that a single note
might bear you skywards on a flute
a falcon steady on the updrafts
all the long day.

Prepare with music
so that a chord major
is a banquet of forest-food
in a clearing
with space for everyone
and the poorest, first.

Prepare w
so that a mino
the case o
you've carried
breaking y

ith music
r key unlocks
f sorrows
to the banquet
our heart.

Welcome the new stillness
where the hum of the universe
sounds in the beat of your being.

Come with your hands empty now
for Christ, the Falcon,
longs to stand steady
upon your ungloved hand.

— Anne Powell

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS FACE CHALLENGES

In this first of two parts, **Ivan Snook** reflects on the foundation of our Catholic school system and the effects of Government policy on its Catholic values over the last 40 years.

It is widely known that for the first hundred years of our national school system, Catholic schools were built and funded by the Church without financial help from the state. This was made possible by the donations of the Catholic community (predominantly working class and not well off) and the dedication of Religious who worked for a subsistence stipend.

Schools struggle for survival

As the national system expanded, the Catholic schools expanded too so that by the middle of the 20th century a full Catholic education, primary and secondary, was available in most centres. As far as the system was concerned, this period might be characterised as "the struggle for survival." (This is not meant to undervalue the central role which the Religious played in Catholic emancipation, moral commitment and social justice. In particular, the role of Sisters in promoting the advancement of women was significant, if not as yet fully acknowledged.) However, as the bishops have said recently, "the schools severely strained the limited financial resources of the Catholic community." (*NZBC* 2014)

Schools integrated

The Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975) made it possible for Catholic (and other independent) schools to "integrate" into the state system, while preserving their "special character." All Catholic schools integrated and as a result the financial situation of the schools was greatly improved. Capital costs had still to be borne by the "Proprietor" (the local bishop, in the case of diocesan schools, the relevant religious congregation in the case of their schools). In recent years there have been some exceptions to this as successive governments have subsidised the building of new Catholic schools in growing areas. Despite this, the schools remain a substantial drain on Church resources.

Schools struggle for respectability

The Integration Act was negotiated on the basis of cooperation between schools. Unfortunately, this was not to last. The system had barely adjusted to Integration when the country underwent the New Right revolution which transformed New Zealand society and led to the "reforms" of *Tomorrow's Schools*. Sadly, the Catholic system embraced these changes too readily and failed to consider the effects of a "market" regime on state schools and society as a whole.

I would characterise this period as "the struggle for respectability". It is therefore sobering, if not surprising, that the bishops cite evidence from a recent study of ex-students of Catholic schools that "there appeared to be little difference from what one would realistically expect from non-religious young adult 'people of good will'" (*NZBC*, 2014 p 9). Respectability has its price!

Education demands renewal of heart

What, then, of the future? The new direction might be one suggested more than forty years ago but never heeded. A few years before the Integration Act was passed, the Synod of Bishops in Rome put it this way:

> *The method of education very frequently still in use today encourages narrow individualism. Part of the human family lives immersed in a mentality which exalts possessions. The school and the communications media are often at the service of the established order and allow only the kind of formation desired by order; that is to say, not new persons but only copies of what people are already like.*
>
> *But education demands a renewal of heart, a renewal based on the recognition of sin both in individuals and in society. It will also inculcate a truly and entirely human way of life, including justice, love and simplicity. It will likewise awaken a critical sense, which will lead us to reflect on the society in which we*

live and on its values; it will make people ready to renounce those values when they cease to promote justice for everyone. (Justice in the World 50, 51)

It is remarkable that this statement appeared some four years before the *Integration Act* and *Tomorrow's Schools*.

Did the schools realise that they were accepting a regime which "exalts possessions"?

Did they realise that they were supposed to "reflect on the society in which we live and on its values" and "renounce these values when they cease to promote justice for everyone?"

In fact, the Catholic system seemed rather to "buy into" the very values which they were supposed to *oppose*. It became an uncritical supporter of educational markets, competition between schools, increased local fundraising, and (worst of all) business dominance in education.

(Once again, this analysis is not intended to undervalue the dedication of thousands of principals and teachers, lay now in the main, who, like their state school colleagues, have worked hard to educate children in spite of the anti-educational policies of governments. In particular it is not meant to slight those principals, teachers and groups who have struggled to help young Catholics be aware of and concerned about the needs of others, in New Zealand and overseas. I think in particular of the activities related to Caritas and of the Young Vinnies.)

Schools struggle to be prophetic

A colleague and I have recently written of the major challenges ahead for education and called for important changes to schooling (O'Neill & Snook, *NZJES* Nov 2015). It may be difficult for the state system to make these dramatic changes but the Catholic system, freed from the need to survive and to be respectable, should be ready for the challenges because "Christians are called to perform a 'prophetic' role in modern-day culture.

"In both the Old Testament and New Testament prophets were expected to deliver important messages to their contemporaries. In addition to *speaking their messages* these prophets often *demonstrated them* to the culture in which they lived." The next stage for the system might be called "the struggle to be prophetic."

As a start, schools might look to implementing the recommendation of the bishops:

Because the Church's social teaching is so integral to the functioning of Catholic schools, individually and as a group, staff and Boards of Trustees members should receive regular training in the principles of Catholic social teaching and their application to their responsibilities. (NZBC, 2014)

To exercise a prophetic role, Catholic schools need to look beyond current demands from government and industry and identify the real challenges which lie ahead. John O'Neill and I have identified three major challenges for society and education in the next decades.

In Part Two I will elaborate on these challenges and how they relate to a prophetic role for Catholic schools. ■

Ivan Snook is emeritus professor of Education at Massey University. He attends the Quality Public Education Coalition and the Social Justice Group in Palmerston North.

A Spirituality of Resistance

Peter Matheson outlines a spirituality that will help us resist our market-driven culture and motivate us to act on behalf of vulnerable people.

Swimming against the cultural and political tide in contemporary New Zealand is hard work. Each of us would probably define that cultural tide differently. Politically it manifests itself in a populist neo-liberalism, economically in a focus on service industries and property investment, culturally in a complacent neo-paganism. The realities of personal suffering and radical evil tend to be side-stepped. In so many ways, from advertising to politics to TV, language is debased to cheap sound bites. I think that if we are to launch a robust alternative to all this we need to develop an explicit spirituality of resistance, to hone a new and more resilient language of prayer and worship and practice of contemplation as the prerequisite to effective action.

We need to focus our spirituality because the "powers that be" of the corporate as well as the political world are truly formidable. Behind the callow "humanism" which largely has replaced religious commitment can lurk a ruthless inhumanity. There is scant sympathy for the refugee, the fostered child, the lowly paid and the weak. Into the vacuum of values has rushed a totalitarianism of the market, impatient of dissent and with a growing throttle-hold on education, health and welfare.

As I reflect on such neglected issues in New Zealand as child poverty, climate change or faith education in schools, I am haunted by a poem of the German poet, Ingeborg Bachmann: "Brutally tough times lie ahead." What characterises us as humans, she suggests, is our consciousness of deep and largely hidden pain. When we find the courage to face it, though, when we confront its "glittering agony", our eyes will be opened. Last year the Dunedin oncologist, Dr David Perez, spoke of his experience of the extraordinary creativity of cancer patients in their end of life situations. They had faced reality and now felt liberated, free.

If—for the sake of all creation—we are to live with a spirituality of resistance, we will do well to open our eyes wider. God's friends, to use the old mystical term, turn up in unexpected places.

My hunch is that we need to give deeper attention to our prayer life, individually and corporately. Recently I was present when a well-meant prayer initiated a secular meeting. I felt embarrassed by the chasm between the world of the cleric and the difficult decisions to be made at the gathering. I often attend church meetings in which it is painfully obvious that the participants are unaware of how deeply embedded personal preferences are inhibiting perception of the real issues. In today's Church are we neglecting serious discernment and scrutiny of ourselves and world situations in light of the gospels? Is this impeding our decisions and action?

The sixteenth century mystic, Thomas Müntzer, who was the pastor of ordinary, semi-literate people, artisans and peasants, used down to earth images to train his people. Learn to dive down into the deep, dark water like a fish, he told them, dive into the "abyss of the soul". He warned that there is no royal road to salvation which evades suffering. If we focus on a " honey-sweet Christ we will eat ourselves sick with honey".

The poetry of Malcolm Guite or Les Murray or James K. Baxter may point the way ahead for us:

I cannot think unless I have been thought,
Nor can I speak unless I have been spoken.
I cannot teach except as I am taught,
Or break the bread except as I am broken.

— Malcolm Guite.

I am not suggesting a revival of Puritanism or Jansenism for a wallowing in the dark side. Without the graces of humour and imagination we are lost indeed. A Christian spirituality of resistance has always had, as with Francis of Assisi or Desmond Tutu, a lyrical quality to it. Poetry compresses, sharpens thought, weds it to image and emotion. The prayer of the Mertons, the Loyolas, the Bonhoeffers, not to mention the parables of Jesus, share that sinewy, transgressive quality which trumps the prosaic.

The dominant culture we are up against in Aotearoa today has both ideological and structural dimensions. It propagates a vision of social life that is predominantly functional, hedonistic and individualistic. Resistance to this suffocating culture seems to be confined to small groups — environmentalists, peace and justice activists, The Salvation Army. The traditional core-value organisations such as the churches, trade unions, voluntary organisations, have been marginalised. Their liberal language of a just, caring, egalitarian, democratic society cuts no ice. A recent list of 17 notable personalities in Dunedin's history, commissioned by the *Otago Daily Times*, was innocent of a single woman or church leader.

So my hunch is that we need to sharpen up, toughen up and deepen our spirituality. I like the poem Cilla McQueen wrote for a retreat on St Martin Island, linking poetry and prayer:

As free as water is my meditation,
Listening to the wind, loving and grieving,
In memory flow time and history.
Cause, effect
And relativity remind me, in this universal spectrum
I am a small and temporary dot.
A reverie: one way in poem, the other prayer.
Poetry the ordinary, prayer the sacred part,
Mysteries, no answer — miracles occur.

Miracles occur! In our reductionist culture we need to be reminded of that. Frequently I am humbled by people who have traversed the landscape of doubt and despair and emerge triumphant, waving the flag of defiance. God works in mysterious ways and far beyond the churchly perimeter.

If — for the sake of all creation — we are to live with a spirituality of resistance, we will do well to open our eyes wider. God's friends, to use the old mystical term, turn up in unexpected places. And in our church life let's create safe places, where we can open up to one another, challenge one another, plumb the abyss of the soul in word and image and silence so that when we move on to action we know what we are doing. In the Dominican mystical tradition a key term was "letting go". When we learn to let go the Holy Spirit breathes in and through us. ■

Peter Matheson is a peace activist, a Presbyterian minister, and author of books about Cardinal Contarini and Reformation women and radicals.

Reading Luke's Gospel with ecological eyes

In the first part of this new series Elaine Wainwright interprets the Lucan prologue Luke 1:1-4 together with the commissioning of Jesus in Luke 4:14-21.

As we read the Gospel of Luke, the gospel of divine compassion, we will attend to the images of mercy that this gospel constructs. We shall ask how mercy speaks to and within the human community and the whole Earth community.

Two significant documents will be our dialogue partners in our reading. The first is Pope Francis's *Misericordiae Vultus* (11 April 2015) promulgating the Jubilee of Mercy and the second, the encyclical, *Laudato Si', On Care for our Common Home* (24 May 2015). The dialogue between these documents and Luke's gospel will produce a new fabric of interpretation.

In this first part we will bring together Luke 1:1–4, the unique Lucan Prologue, and the commissioning of Jesus in Lk 4:14–21, also found only in Luke.

The Prologue takes readers immediately into the interconnection between the material and social worlds that characterise both the narrative and also its production and dissemination.

The reader meets the "many" who have undertaken to compile or to write a narrative of the Jesus stories that had been shaped through decades of oral traditioning. Storytellers in the Lucan communities would have been forming narratives from the different traditions about Jesus going back to eye-witnesses. They were shaping these into a new narrative—"an orderly account".

> *How does mercy speak to and within the human community and the whole Earth community?*

It is this "orderly account" in its written form that links the material and social worlds of its readers. It evokes the papyrus plant that was processed to form the sheets on which the orderly account of the Jesus story was written and which, in their turn, were sewn together to form the *biblos* or book. They can remind us as contemporary readers of the long history of "orderly accounts" written on different types of materials—beautifully illustrated leather-bound books, early printing press texts and today's texts read via electronic media—to name a few. Without these, we would have no "orderly account". The Jesus story reaches us in and through the unique interaction of the material and the social.

This is made specific in relation to the unfolding Lucan narrative. The narrator claims, at the outset, to have investigated the traditions around Jesus that have been circulating over decades. In this process, time, story and narrative skill come together in order to communicate the "truth" contained within this narrative tradition. And it is an element of "the natural environment" named by *Laudate Si'* (par 95) as the "collective good" of all humanity that is its carrier.

The "natural environment" and its elements will be the carrier of the Jesus story and will be woven into it. In Luke 4:14, the narrator says that Jesus goes to Galilee following his encounter with the tempter (Lk 4:1–13), "filled with the power of the Spirit". The work of this "filled" one can take place only in a natural environment. Similarly the built environment of the Galilean synagogues also becomes the context for his teaching and winning the praise of everyone (Lk 4:15). Without these environments and Jesus' interrelationship with them, there is no orderly account.

Luke 4:16–17 tells of a more specific material context for Jesus' unfolding mission. It is the village of Nazareth, where Jesus had been brought up, the text reveals. Jesus is grounded in this physical place—its people, its buildings, its food resources and more.

Place and time link Jesus even more to Nazareth. On a particular Sabbath he enters the synagogue "as was his custom" and takes up the task of reading from the scroll of the prophets. Here the text alerts readers to the "interrelationship between living space and human behaviour" (*Laudate Si'* par 150), elements of an integral ecology.

The human behaviour that unfolds in the Nazareth synagogue is like a slow motion film. Jesus stands up to read, to participate in his Jewish synagogal ritual. An attendant hands him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, the roll of papyrus, the material on which the text has been written as is the "orderly account" that is the Lucan gospel. Jesus then unrolls the scroll, respectfully handling this material that carries the prophetic words of the one named Isaiah. The narrator indicates that Jesus' choice of text is very deliberate: "He found the place".

According to the Lucan narrator the text Jesus reads is a segment of Isaiah 61:1–3—with minor alterations and additions. Here the prophet claims the outpouring of the Spirit as an anointing for a prophetic ministry—to bring about a change in the lives of those who are poor, captive, blind and oppressed. To such a mission we could attribute the words of Pope Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus*:

". . . the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which God reveals God's love as of that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a 'visceral' love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy" *MV* par 6.

Jesus claims the Isaian ministry of mercy and justice as his own, first with his body and then by his words. He rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant and sits—as he is participating in the liturgical ritual. He then proclaims that the scripture is fulfilled in their hearing, in the profound interrelationship of human bodies, human spirits and material contexts. However it is only as his mission unfolds that readers will encounter Jesus as he touches the eyes of the blind, releases those captive to evil and brings healing to the poor and afflicted.

Jesus' ministry of compassion and mercy that unfolds with and in the Lucan "orderly account" is one of active engagement with and in the "natural environment" or "living space" and with "human behaviour", terms used within *Laudato Si'*.

The contemporary ecological reader may then hear the anointing for a ministry of compassion and mercy as extending beyond the human community to the more-than-human community. Those who are "poor" could include not only those among the human community who are bereft of the most needed resources but also those other-than-human species that are bereft of habitat.

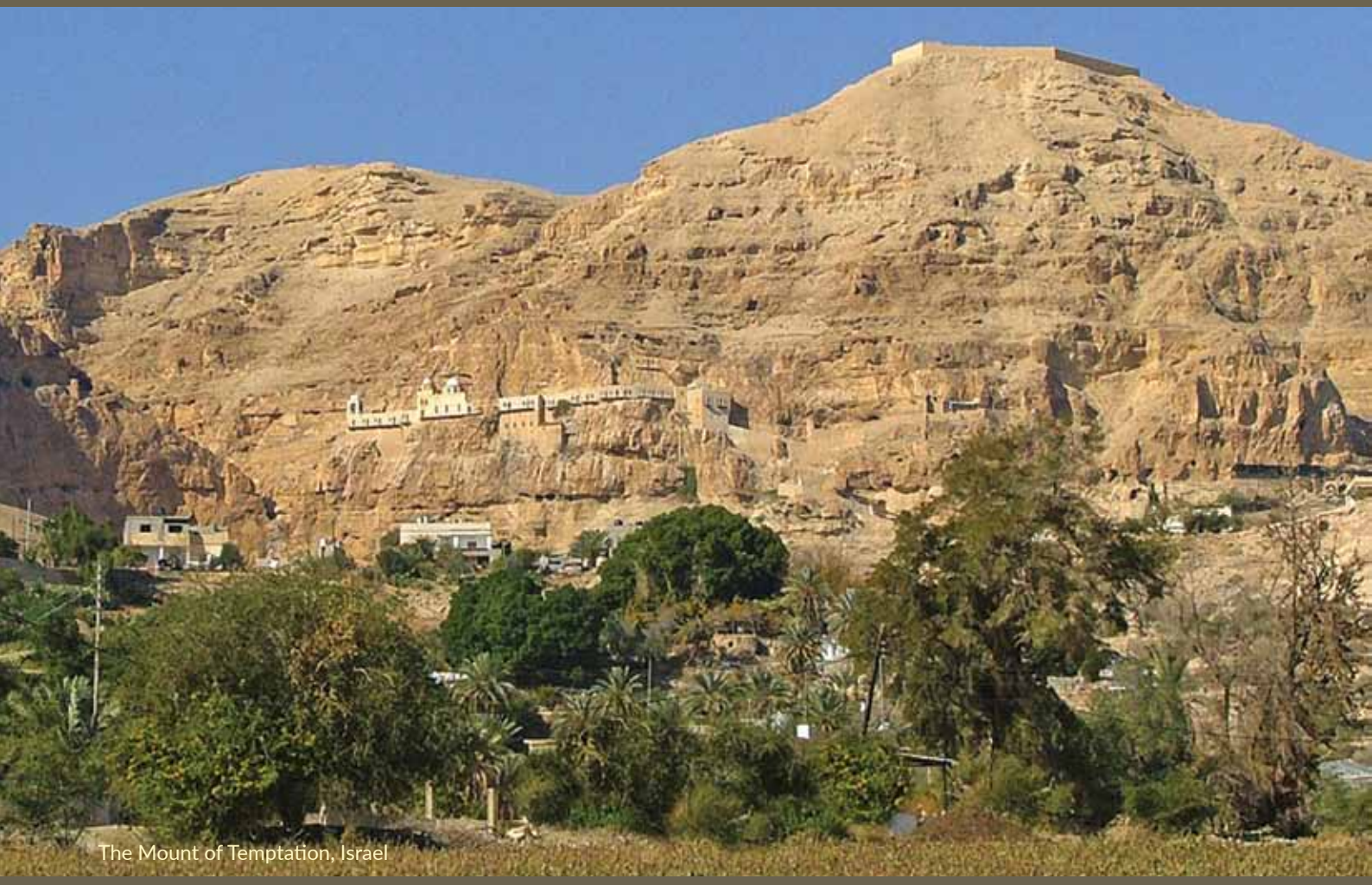
"Captives" may include those cut off from life-sustaining food supplies. The "blind", those species affected in myriad ways by the toxins that the human community pours into Earth's systems. Humans and many other-than-humans cry out from under the oppression resulting from so much "human behaviour".

In the prophetic proclamation of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis calls us, as does Jesus through the words of the prophet Isaiah, to engage in a year of God's favour. This will happen if like Jesus, we work to bring about justice and compassion for the human and the entire more-than-human community. ■

Painting: Jes*us unrolls the book in the synagogue*. James Tissot, 1894.

Elaine Wainwright RSM is a biblical scholar and the Executive Director of Mission and Ministry for the Mercy Sisters in Australia and Papua New Guinea. She lectures and writes in biblical studies.

USING AND ABUSING POWER



The Mount of Temptation, Israel

In her interpretation of Luke 4:1-13 **Kathleen Rushton** discusses the biblical character *diabolos* and the temptations Jesus faced to abuse power and derail his ministry.

In the temptations of Jesus in Luke's gospel (Lk 4:1-13) the character called "devil" (Greek *diabolos*; Hebrew *satan*) is one who tests loyalty to God. Usually loyalty testing is called "tempting" or "temptation."

In Job (1:6) we find that *diabolos* was thought of as a being who was part of the heavenly court and who tested the trustworthiness of God's faithful ones. By the time the gospels were written, people no longer thought of the *diabolos* as part of the heavenly court. The *diabolos* was understood to be an adversary or tempter who exposed the people to evil. The *diabolos* became the explanation for the evil impulse in the world.

The core of Jesus' temptations is the enticement to abuse relationships—*whakawhanaungatanga* (right relationship) with Earth, people and God. The biblical text of the temptations of Jesus assists us now to reflect on the use and abuse of power in relationship with Earth, people and God.

Literary Context

Luke frames the temptations on one side with Jesus' baptism when he is immersed in the waters, the womb of Earth (Lk 3:21), and his genealogy (Lk 3:23-38) and on the other, with the beginning of his teaching (Lk 4:14–30). According to the biblical scholar, John Pilch, the Mediterranean cultural world of Jesus held "a deeply rooted belief in spirits who exist in numbers too huge to count and whose major pastime is interfering capriciously in daily human life." People depended on an array of amulets, formulas and symbols to ward off attacks from spirits. Luke writes the gospel story against this cultural background.

The highest honour is given to Jesus at his baptism when "a voice came from heaven" declaring: "You are my Son, the Beloved" (Lk 3:22). The genealogy of Jesus echoes "son of" to stress this divine testimony and concludes by identifying Jesus as "son of Adam, son of God." Culturally such a declaration would have been

important for the social and public acknowledgement of paternity. It gave a child legitimacy, social standing and required the father to accept responsibility for the child.

The voice from heaven not only acknowledges Jesus as "my Son" but continues: "with you I am well pleased." Further, those hearing this story would know that all the spirits heard it too. Therefore a test should follow to see if it was true. Spirits would try to make Jesus do something displeasing to God.

The biblical context

Jesus is not protected by customary amulets. Instead he returned from the Jordan river "full of the Holy Spirit," which is how Luke describes prophetic figures. Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Spirit where for 40 days he was tempted by the *diabolos*.

Echoes of the symbolic biblical reality can be heard. The Greek word for "tested/tempted" is the same word used for the testing of the people by God in the wilderness of Zin for 40 years and for their testing of God (Exodus 16:4; 17:2; Deuteronomy 8:2).

Jesus engages in one-to-one dialogue with the *diabolos*. Both quote Scripture. Jesus replies to each temptation by quoting Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13; 6:16). The *diabolos* quotes from Psalm 91:11–12 (used as the responsorial psalm for the First Sunday of Lent). The *diabolos* is the chief opponent along with his helpers, demons and unclean spirits, of a counter-reign to God's *basiliea* (Lk 11:14–20).

Whakawhanaungatanga (right relationship) with creation

Jesus was probably in the Judean wilderness of Perea. Life was sustainable there for nomads and for settlements because food and water were available, though limited. The wilderness was also a place which enabled deeper encounter with the self and discovery of new purpose, when a person was freed from life in the "real world." God was felt to be close in the wilderness. The *diabolos* tests Jesus at the level of physical hunger as he had eaten nothing for

Reading for the 1st Sunday of Lent 14 February

40 days (Lk 4:2). The story begins and ends with references to "stone" (Lk 4:3, 11) which the *diabolos* tempts Jesus to use to prove his filial relationship with God. The challenge is direct: "If you are the Son of God ... change this stone into bread".

Jesus refuses to use his power to change the Earth element, stone, and mimic the power of God to give "bread in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:14-21). Earth is to be cared for and respected, not manipulated and exploited. Jesus does not have to prove he is "Son of God." He honours his genealogical connection as "son of Adam" so preserving the link in Genesis 2:7 between *ādām* from *hādāma* (from the earth/ground). In other words, he is an earthling from the earth, a groundling from the ground.

Whakawhanaungatanga (right relationship) with people

The location of the second temptation is unclear. The *diabolos* led Jesus "up" and showed him "all the kingdoms of the world (*oikoumenē*)." The word for "world" suggests the inhabited world, the whole household of Earth. "Up" may mean the traditionally known Mount of Temptation or Jebel Quruntul. You can see for miles from the top—the oasis city of Jericho, the oldest city on earth, with the Dead Sea to the south, then on the western skyline is the towering Mount of Olives and views of surrounding lands divided into kingdoms.

The *diabolos* promises that all this political and military control of humans, kingdoms and natural resources will be given to Jesus if he worships the *diabolos*. The word used for "worship" suggests the homage made to rulers in the East. Jesus refuses again.

Whakawhanaungatanga (right relationship) with God

The third temptation, which focuses on Jesus' ability to force God's protection, is at the Temple in Jerusalem—the place where Luke's gospel begins and ends. It is the symbolic meeting place of Heaven and Earth.

The *diabolos* placed Jesus on its pinnacle (*pterugion*). The word means "wing" and evokes the wings of the eagle, an image of God's care and protection (Deuteronomy 32:11). Above the entrance of the Temple were two symbolic eagle's wings. However, shadows surround the Temple for it was reconstructed by Herod, exercising his power and exploitation during his massive programme of rebuilding of the city. The third temptation begins also with: "If you are the Son of God . . ." The *diabolos* refers again to a stone when quoting Psalm 91 on the protection of God.

The *diabolos* then departs "for a time" (Lk 4:13). Later in the gospel we find the threefold betrayal by Peter (Lk 22:54–62) and the threefold taunting of Jesus on the cross (Lk 23:35; 37, 39). But John the Baptist spoke of the "more powerful one" than himself (Lk 3:16). Jesus will speak of himself and his actions using similar words: that only a "more powerful one" or "one stronger" may cast out the evils God's people face (Lk 11:22).

Reflecting on *Whaka-whanaungatanga* during Lent

The wilderness of the 40 days of Lent, a time of closeness to God, offers us space to reflect on Jesus' refusal to abuse power personally, structurally and ecologically. We might think about how we are tempted to exert control over the material world. How we are tempted to exert control over people. And how we are tempted to force God to protect us. ■

Kathleen Rushton RSM tends her vegetable garden, walks in the hope her feet will allow her to tramp again and delights in learning about Scripture.

Attuning to a Rhythm

Prayer is like listening for a rhythm and then becoming attuned to it. My experience of being in that rhythm is that it can produce hope and healing.

An Hasidic story tells of Jews in a small town in Russia who were awaiting the arrival of a rabbi. It was a rare event so they spent a lot of time preparing the questions they were going to ask the holy man. When he finally arrived and they met with him in the town hall, he could sense the tension in the atmosphere as they prepared to listen to his answers. He said nothing at first. He just gazed into their eyes and hummed a haunting melody. Soon everyone began to hum. He started to sing and they sang with him. He swayed and danced in solemn, measured steps. The congregation followed suit. Soon they became involved in the dance and so absorbed in its movements that they were lost to everything else. Every person in that crowd was made whole—was healed from inner fragmentation.

It was nearly an hour before the dance slowed and came to a halt. With the tension drained from their inner beings they sat in the silent peace pervading the room. Then the rabbi spoke the only words that evening: "I trust that I have answered your questions."

In his book *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*, Bruce Perry, a renowned child psychiatrist, marries his understandings of therapy, brain development, and a practical interdisciplinary openness to "what works" in helping traumatised children. He underlines the importance of the early stage of a child's life: touching, talking, rocking, singing, and—through all—loving, in order that the child's brain and personality may develop in a healthy and resilient way.

Perry writes: "It may seem odd, but rhythm is extraordinarily important. If our bodies cannot keep the most fundamental rhythm of life—the heartbeat—we cannot survive. Regulating this rhythm isn't a static, consistent task either: the heart and the brain are constantly signalling each other in order to adjust to life's changes." He continues: "We know that the maternal heart rate provides the patterned, repetitive signals—auditory, vibratory, and tactile—that are crucial to organising the brainstem and its important stress regulating neurotransmitter systems." When a parent holds and rocks a distressed baby to calm them, interestingly the rate of rocking is usually 80 beats per minute, the same as a normal resting adult heart rate. Perry concludes: "To soothe our children we reattune them physically to the beat of the master timekeeper of life [the heart]."

The most important thing about prayer is listening, not talking. It's about stilling the turbulent waters of the mind. Yet it is an active listening in the sense that we are trying to attune ourselves to a rhythm.

De Mello's *Temple Bells* tells of the pilgrim who goes to the seashore hoping to hear the legendary and beautiful sound of submerged temple bells. Like listening for hope, the young man pours his concentration into the task. But to no avail. Try as he might he can't hear hope. He tries to block out the sound of the sea so he can hear. But it is only when he gives himself over to the rhythm of the sea, allowing his heart to be attuned to that rhythm, that he experiences the wonder of the transcendent bells.

I think in this story God is in the rhythm of the sea and the pealing of the bells—both in the avenue of prayer and the hope it produces. Just as in the story of the Russian rabbi, God is in the song, the movement, what is happening within each person, as well as what's happening in the whole community— each is an avenue of prayer and hope.

When we're praying we are invited to listen to the noise and different rhythms within us.

We might also recognise the rhythm and energy of each person around us—each is a "face of God".

Music has the power to still us and transport us. It has the power to unite voices and bring together the rhythms of our lives. Music is a pathway into God.

So too are words. And it's not just the meaning of the words, but the way they are spoken, and the voices who speak them. Some words evoke memories, some concerns for people or situations, and some evoke new thoughts or combinations of thoughts.

When we pray there is— as in the rabbi story—a bringing together of the fragments of our lives. Ideally we feel more "whole" afterwards. We mightn't articulate it like that. It might just be a feeling of contentment, or even unease. Bringing together fragments can do both. ■

Glynn Cardy. "These days I drink coffee with rice milk, go to the gym and to St Luke's Church. Rituals like these are important. As are family dinners and saying grace. Grace is such an interesting word. I pray I will always be attentive when she whispers in my ear."

Creating our National Identity

The final of the Rugby World Cup in London was brilliant rugby. The discipline and generosity of individual All Blacks were outstanding. The All Blacks' success and the flag debate have prompted talk about our national identity.

We have more to make us proud as New Zealanders. I think this is in the way we are confronting our colonial history and trying to find a pathway to change radically the dishonourable manner in which Māori have been excluded from the national life of the country. And to redress the theft of Māori land by the Crown that has been uncovered by the Waitangi Tribunal since it received historical powers in 1985.

While *pākehā* always liked the exotic parts of Māori culture—*haka*, *waiata*—we failed singularly to honour the solemn commitments made at the time New Zealand became a nation state in 1840. It has taken over 140 years to start to draw those relationships back to the centre of our national life.

We are witnessing currently a stunning cultural comeback. The *tangata whenua* have re-captured the entrepreneurial spirit which drove Māori society before the Treaty of Waitangi was signed.

There have been some creative moves recently for the Crown to honour the relationships envisaged by *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*. It is important to note that nothing has been achieved that has not been driven by Māori struggle.

Māori Economy

Some of the changes have significant potential. The Māori economy (2013) has now reached nearly $42.6 billion—about 5.6 per cent of GDP.

According to the Business and Economic Research, (BERL), Māori control up to 37 per cent of New Zealand's domestic fishing quota; have a large ownership interest in forestry land, including around 36 per cent of pre-1990 forests, and currently own at least 14 per cent of the land underlying plantation forests.

Although only a fraction of their losses have been compensated, the historic settlements have begun to impact on the lives of many Māori—education scholarships, *Te Reo* (Maori language), first home ownership, healthcare, superannuation. Just over half (78) of the historic settlements have been completed. Just over $2 billion has been paid out in reparations. This is 58 per cent of all projected Deeds to be signed (based on current configurations of how groups will enter negotiations). The Crown has made over 9,000 new commitments within historical Treaty settlements through this process.

Ngai Tahu is the biggest commercial entity in the South Island—now worth $1.2 billion with $355 million having been put into education, cultural and environmental revitalisation.

Remembering the struggles

As we celebrate these changes we need to remember with honour the early prophetic struggles.

Matiu Rata changed the definition of a Māori from the 19th century racial definition to *whakapapa*/self identification, overturned the previous land confiscation policies and set up and initiated the first Treaty claims to the first Waitangi Tribunal in 1975. These ground-breaking claims led to a settlement of Māori fishing claims in 1992.

Who would forget the iconic picture of Dame Whina Cooper leading the Māori Land *hīkoi* of 1975, which started with the simple words: "not one acre more".

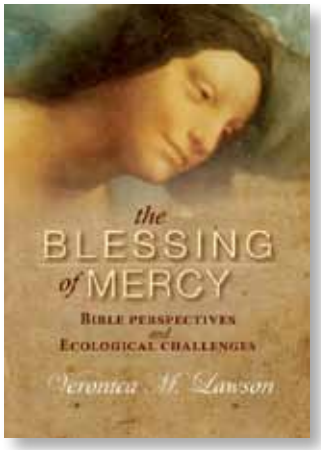
In 1978 Bastion Point became the focus of national attention. In the 1870s over 700 acres had been borrowed from *Ngāti Whātua* by the Crown for defence purposes and never returned.

The list of Māori struggles is long: Māori language, Raglan Golf Course, One Tree Hill, Moutoa Gardens, Foreshore and Seabed and water.

What does it mean for *Pākehā?*

The growth of *pakehā* support for these changes has enabled us all to make the proud claim that we are a country which honours the solemn commitments made to our indigenous peoples. This is what makes our national identity secure and unique. ■

Robert Consedine "My Irish revolutionary ancestors and my Catholic experience taught me justice. I have always been surrounded by love and wisdom and trust the invisible world." Robert@waitangi.co.nz



The Blessing of Mercy: Biblical Perspective and Ecological Challenges

By Veronica Mary Lawson
Published by Morning Star Publishing, 2015
Reviewed by Kathleen Rushton RSM

I once read that "mercy" is a one-word summary for God. After reading Veronica Lawson's book, *The Blessing of Mercy*, I am even more convinced this is so. Australian Sister of Mercy and biblical scholar, Veronica Lawson, takes her readers into the rich, multi-faceted seams of mercy in the Scriptures. Her insights have been distilled from over 50 years of receiving and living the blessing of mercy in her life and ministry and deepened by her enthusiasm and 40 years of biblical scholarship.

Veronica's timely book connects with two of Pope Francis's recent initiatives—*Misericordiae Vultus* (*MV*), the proclamation of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, December 2015 to November 2016, and his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. She assists readers to "gaze even more attentively on mercy" in response to the Year of Mercy. And she raises ecological perspectives on mercy in the biblical texts. Both help readers to hear the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

While Veronica makes clear that the notions of "mercy" in the Bible go beyond the vocabulary or language of mercy, she begins by surveying the use of the word "mercy". The first chapter explores the five main word groups used to express "mercy" in the Hebrew Scriptures. Special attention is given to mercy as "steadfast love" or "loving kindness" and as "womb-compassion".

Chapters two and three show how the language of mercy in the Hebrew Scriptures informs the mercy word-groups in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and in Acts.

This small book provides an accessible resource for individuals and for prayer and study groups in parishes, schools and dioceses. It is a particularly appropriate book for reading during the Year of Mercy. It's the kind of book you can dip into repeatedly for ongoing reflection and prayer. It could be an aid to hearing the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor.

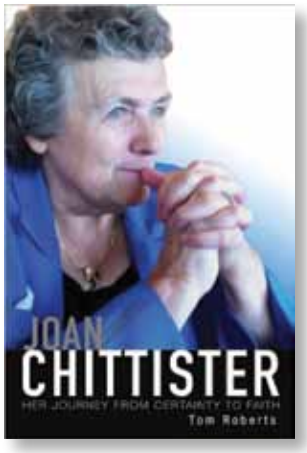
The book is also a resource for the future for, as Pope Francis says in the "many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today" readers will rediscover that "from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly" (*MV* par 15, 25). ■

Suffragette

Directed by Sarah Gavron
Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

The year is 1912, the place London under H. H. Asquith's Liberal government. After 50 years of unsuccessful peaceful agitation, the movement for women's suffrage embraces a campaign of civil disobedience under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst. Shop windows are broken, pillar boxes blown up, and activist cells set up in homes and workplaces.

One such place is the Glasshouse Laundry in Bethnal Green where Maud Watts (played by Carey Mulligan) works. Encouraged by a



Joan Chittister: Her Journey from Certainty to Faith

By Tom Roberts
Published by Orbis Books 2015
Reviewed by Ruth Miller

The story of the life of Sister Joan Chittister, a member of the Erie Benedictines and a renowned writer and lecturer, is compelling reading. She is prophetic and inspiring yet very human. She loves to cook, to play her accordion for sing-alongs, to go boating and fishing. From an early age she had wanted to be a writer and have a dog. She worked hard to get the education she craved.

Tom Roberts tells of the turbulent home in which the young Joan grew up. There she witnessed domestic violence and knew fear. At 16, after a struggle, she entered the safe haven of the Erie Benedictines. Six weeks later she developed the paralytic form of polio. Once again the deeply vulnerable teenager had to face uncertainty. With characteristic grit and determination she eventually got back on her feet and learned to walk again.

In this biography you glimpse the convent life of the Benedictines before Vatican II and witness the changes confronting religious communities in the years that followed. The questions of authority and the nature of obedience were a challenge Joan was called upon to explore and share with others. Early in life she was pressed into leadership roles and propelled into numerous speaking engagements. Between 1978 and 1998 she spoke in 15 countries, including New Zealand, and wrote 18 books.

In 1978 Joan was called to be prioress of her own Benedictine community. She immediately banished the title of "Mother" saying: "I can't be your mother. I can be your friend and I can be your sister in this community". She continued as prioress until 1990. Under her watch the scope of Benedictine ministries changed from being focused only on schools to numerous initiatives in the local community, the poorest and most underprivileged part of Erie. The Sisters opened a soup kitchen, after-school centre, an adult development centre, a Kid's Café and more. She was a tremendous support to her Sisters as they moved into these new ministries.

This biography will appeal to a wide range of readers. Older readers will be able to identify with historical aspects of the story and others will find support in seeking to understand controversies of the present age. The Bishop of Erie, Donald Trautman, said: "Sister Joan is a prophetic voice and the Church needs prophetic voices". As well as being a renowned public speaker, Joan is a great pastor. Every letter she has ever received she has answered. "She is in many ways pastor to a far-flung congregation." ■

Reviews continue on page 31 . . .

workmate, she gradually becomes radicalised and forms links with other suffragettes including pharmacist Edith Ellyn (Helena Bonham Carter). Early in the film, Maud testifies before a parliamentary select committee chaired by a sympathetic David Lloyd George, speaking candidly about the long hours, poor pay and dangerous conditions experienced by laundrywomen.

When her submission—and those of thousands like her—is rejected, the suffragettes turn increasingly to a campaign of disruption and violence against property. They are shunted in and out of prison, wearing their sentences as badges of honour. Many refuse food in prison and are subject to force feeding. For Maud, the cost of commitment is enormous—first she loses her job, then her home and family, and ends up living in a disused church.

By interweaving real events and people (although Mrs Pankhurst, played by a stately Meryl Streep, makes only a cameo appearance) with the story of fictitious East End battler Maud, director Sarah Gavron is able to make powerful connections between the notion of votes for women and their real-life concerns—such as better pay and control of their children's fate. Maud's story is filled out by subsidiary characters such as feisty pharmacist Ellyn, the predatory laundry foreman, and police detective Inspector Steed (Brendan Gleeson), who is assigned to keep Maud and her colleagues under surveillance. These are by no means cardboard cut-outs. Steed has some sympathy for the women he spies on; as an Irishman, he too is an outsider.

The film ends by connecting the suffragette story with a true event for which the movement is perhaps best known—the death of Emily Davison under the hooves of the King's horse at the Epsom Derby in 1913. Rather than carrying the action through into the First World War (when many suffragists supported the conflict), this incident (and the massive funeral that followed) provides a satisfying climax to an exceptional film, giving the movement the martyr that Asquith had been desperate to avoid. ■

CROSSCURRENTS

Jim Elliston

Jewish-Catholic Relations

In December, on the 50th anniversary of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican issued the document *The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable* (Rom 11:29—the most important New Testament text for Jewish-Christian relations). It was written collaboratively over two-and-a-half years with Jewish consultants invited at one point in the process. It uses the anniversary as an opportunity to address theological questions that have arisen in the process of implementing Vatican II's teaching about Jews and Judaism.

Its chapters cover: a brief history of the impact of *Nostra Aetate* over the last 50 years; the special theological status of Jewish-Catholic dialogue; revelation in history as "Word of God" in Judaism and Christianity; the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the Old and New Covenants; the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ and God's unrevoked covenant with Israel; the Church's mandate to evangelise in relation to Judaism (the Church won't try to convert Jews); and the goals of dialogue with Judaism.

Jesus and the apostles were faithful Jews. Through them we have inherited much from Judaism.

Summer, shepherds and Mary

During the night we had tramped about 25 kilometres along back roads to a Marian shrine. Now the scorching Mediterranean August sun was beating down on a dozen of us.

We took shelter amid small trees surrounding a water-hole. After a while we heard a rustling noise and some emaciated sheep appeared followed by a man with unkempt hair and shabby clothes. He sat down while the sheep drank. Then he made a strange honking sound and the animals stopped drinking. He repeated the noise and the sheep went off slowly with the shepherd in their midst.

He guided the sheep, accompanying rather than driving them. The sheep had learnt the way. "I know my sheep and they know me." That incident has remained vivid for me in the nearly 50 years since it happened.

It seems to me that it epitomises perfectly Pope Francis's frequent saying that pastors need to smell of their sheep. The Gospel message is spread by being with people not by trying to convert them. That is, by accompanying people to Christ, not driving them.

For some considerable time I wondered why the experience of visiting a Marian shrine had absolutely no impact on me whereas this incident with an unkempt, smelly, scruffy individual and his equally scrawny flock made such an impression.

One day I realised the theological significance of both experiences. Through visiting the Marian shrine we were led to the Christ-like experience.

Astronomy and the Synod

In December scientists at the atomic research centre in Switzerland announced they thought they had discovered a new sub-atomic particle. If this is verified it could well overturn the current theory concerning the structure of the universe. By coincidence, this year will see the centenary of American astronomer, Vespo Slyper's finding of aberrations in the light emanating from a number of stars. The significance of that discovery was it did not conform to the current theory of the time on the structure of the universe. Although initially dismissed, it eventually led to a radically new understanding—the Big Bang theory.

Advances in understanding in any discipline, Church teaching included, evolve in incremental steps.

While justified criticism has been levelled at the recent synodal process, it involved lay participation for the first time. Strong disagreements that occurred, especially during the second Synod, are a reflection of what occurred at the Second Vatican Council. But progress resulted despite many people's rejection of a new approach. The same will occur as a result of the two synods on the family. Turmoil is simply part of the process that occurs in all disciplines as people have new insights into beliefs previously held. Some are resisting any change of interpretation, others championing new and deeper understandings in the light of the Gospel message. ■

TUI MOTU InterIslands
Independent Catholic Magazine

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

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

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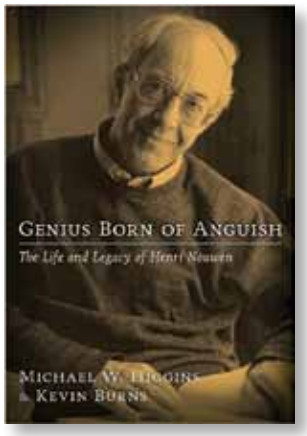

Genius Born of Anguish: the Life and Legacy of Henri Nouwen

By Michael W. Hughes and Kevin Burns
Co-published by Paulist Press and Novalis 2012
Reviewed by John McAlpine

I doubt whether there are many people serious about growing spiritually, who haven't read, or at least heard of, Catholic priest and spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen.

Before his death in 1996, Henri authored 39 books and thousands of lectures, articles and letters. I have 26 of his books in my library so I guess that makes me "serious", or at least a fan of Henri.

A decade after Henri's death, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation commissioned the two authors of this book to prepare a three-part radio-documentary on the life and legacy of Henri. They interviewed 23 people who either knew Henri personally or who had studied his work at depth. This book (143 pages, plus 17 pages of references and resources) is an off-shoot of that initial work. In it the authors endeavour to capture and describe what inspired and drove Henri to be the genius he undoubtedly was.

Obviously God's Spirit was at work in Henri but what was it in his unique human journey that provided the "grist for his writing-mill"? "Grist for the mill" means "all things are a potential source of profit or advantage". Accepting his sexual identity as a (celibate) gay man in a less-than-friendly-to-gays-Church and conceding that he was truly lovable was some of Henri's grist. Outgrowing notions of an over-stern God (notions inherited from his religious and familial heritage) was other grist.

It seems to me that similar grist is the lot of us all. Henri's contribution to our human family has been the passion and energy with which he embraced his own grist, his willingness to share with us that grappling in all its pathos and his conviction that we are all beloved of God. No wonder Henri has captured the hearts of so many.

The authors describe Henri as: "a person called to announce God's impartial and inclusive love, but who in his own life felt that love withheld; a person destined to address the wounds of others, but for a long period confounded by his own brokenness". Daniel O'Leary writes of Henri's eventual discovery: "We are treasured beyond measure by a mercy that does not depend on our worthiness—that carries no inspection for perfection."

This book moved me deeply. It is well-researched and well-crafted. It allowed me to see Henri, warts-and-all, facing into flesh-and-blood human struggles and hungering for the Love that calls each one of us. ■

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

We do not publish anonymous letters except in exceptional circumstances.

INSPIRING REFLECTION

As a longtime *The Tablet* reader and for several years a reader of *Tui Motu*, thanks to the generosity of my sister in Palmerston North, I would like to thank you very much for Richard Leonard's article, *Bonds from Birth* (*TM* Dec 2015). It was a most inspiring example of the way God brings good out of the most unpromising starts.

Katharine Davey, Ireland.

PHILO BEFORE JOHN

In the scripture article *The Word made Flesh* (December 2015), there was an error. It should have read: "Before this the **first century** writer Philo . . ." not second century. It does rather make a difference that Philo was talking about the *logos* **before** Jesus appeared rather than after.

David Green, Christchurch.

Editor's response: *Thank you for your careful reading. I have corrected this on our website.*

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

A run of quavers trilled up a stalk of flax silhouetted against the evening sky. While the younger leaves point straight up, the older leaves are all bent over gracefully in their central Auckland home. A few days later at Whangarei Heads my hands ran up the tight tendons of gnarly kahikatea feet. They feel leathery as if they might need moisturising . . . but how strong and tall the old one stands. Then it was cabbage trees peppered across the Waikato—adolescents with *kina* haircuts and their hopeful branches reaching high on tiptoe to see what's coming up next.

A few days later I am flying south to Christchurch. As we thread our way high over the green valleys, snow-rock peaks and tarns of Nelson Lakes National Park, I remember times of running, walking and limping in that wild terrain. The Travers-Sabine traverse through beech, tussock and snow, with the Auckland University Tramping Club. Scratching my way with crampons up the icy flanks of Mt Angelus by moonlight one bitter winter's night. An evening of brown trout, blackberries and scones shared with friends after we'd swum across Lake Rotoiti. Again there's the joy of being among long-lost friends.

Back in New Zealand for the summer, it's not just the faces of my human kin that are loved and familiar. I am filled with delight to meet again flora, fauna and geological friends in my Aotearoa home.

Another old friend re-discovered last week was the Hobbit journal in which I wrote episodically through my mid-teens. Lost for 25 years it had somehow washed up in a box in my Mum's bike shed. I feel pathos, laughter and warmth when I meet my teenage self. Despite cameos of exuberance, melodrama and fun, my 16-year-old self laments her short legs, freckles, brown hair and other imagined deficiencies in appearance.

I worried about my marks for chemistry, German and English. Then there was tension and confusion as I studied palaeontology in 7th form biology and tried to line it up with the biblical account of creation. Some months I felt lonely. Many months I felt different from my peers. It was a time of self-doubt, angst, identity.

The overwhelming message I glean is that this 16-year-old found armfuls of grace, love and forgiveness from others, herself and God on her journey through the next few decades to her mid-forties. I feel more accepting and welcoming of who I am and who I am made to be, while looking forward to the growing and learning ahead.

Time in this beautiful country reconnecting with old friends, human and inanimate, gives opportunity for looking back, looking in, looking out, looking up. They help me chart my path before and ahead. I'm not where I used to be. Looking back and around I have hope that with grace and patience through the coming years, I will slowly get to where I need to be. ■

Photo: Nelson Lakes National Park [Wikipedia]

Kaaren Mathias is a Kiwi living in India with her family and working in community mental health. She loves opportunities to be back home in New Zealand.

May our criticism *melt in the warmth of kindness*
Our judging *morph into encouraging caresses*
Our legalism *sink into pools of imagination*
Our certainty *waver in the allure of faith*
May our vulnerability *shine with the salve of your love*
Merciful God.

from the Tui Motu Team